



## **CARE Meeting Summary – April 22, 2021**

**Thursday, April 22, 2021, 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM CDT**  
**MS Teams Meeting, Held Remotely**

**In Attendance:** John Fekete (CARE); Jim Bailey, Michelle Caldwell, Anne Remek (IDEM); Joel Perez-Castaneda (TNC); Peg Donnelly, Caitie Nigrelli (USEPA); Jenny Orsburn, Lynn Riddle, Ashley Sharkey, Emily Stork, Carl Wodrich (IDNR); Dan Sparks, Will Tucker (USFWS); Maureen Turman (NiSource); Paul Buszka (USGS); Fernando Treviño (ECWMD); Kay Nelson (NWI Forum)

**Public Attendees:** Becca Nixon (IL-IN SeaGrant observer)

### **1. Introductions**

John Fekete opened the meeting at approximately 9:03 am. Michael Spinar went through the list of those in attendance and provided Joel Perez, Lynn Riddle, Ashley Sharkey, and Becca Nixon with an opportunity to introduce themselves to CARE members.

### **2. Management Action List Update**

#### **a. Beach Closings**

Michael updated CARE members on the status of the Beach Closings Management Action List letter. IDEM and USEPA staff met on April 13 to discuss the Beach Closings Management Action List and IDEM has made some additional tweaks to the letter in response to comments. Michael will be releasing the proposed Management Action letter for review to CARE Members in the next week. CARE members will then have the next month to review the draft and provide feedback prior to, and during, the May 27 CARE Workgroup meeting.

#### **b. Degradation of Aesthetics**

Michael informed CARE members that IDEM and USEPA staff met on April 21 to provide an overview of work done to date with respect to the Degradation of Aesthetics BUI. A follow-up meeting to discuss the draft Management Assistance Letter is scheduled for May 5. The agency is still on track to provide a fully developed draft for CARE Committee review in the first half of 2021.

### **3. High Lake Level Impact Reports Update**

Michael recalled the email he sent to CARE members following the March 25 CARE Meeting, requesting impacts of the high Lake Michigan water levels on the AOC. To date, Michael has received one submission listing out 10 impacts. He also discussed this request with Paul Buszka of USGS. USGS staff are currently evaluating what additional information the agency might be able to provide to assist with cataloging impacts.



Michael encouraged CARE Members to continue to provide AOC impacts of which they are aware. Because IDEM is not conducting this project under its authorities – RAP Program Staff are collecting the information from third parties at the request of several members of the CARE Committee – Michael will be working to carefully document the source and the evidence for the impact to the extent practicable.

Paul Buszka stated that several USGS stream gages and near-stream groundwater wells have data that could help to catalog impacts from 2016 or 2017 forward. Paul remarked that the Hohman Avenue stream gage was discontinued in 2019 and replaced with a gage at Columbia Avenue. He stated that this discussion was timely as USGS is having a discussion with USACE on the recent history of stream-restoration related flow controls and how use of the historical water level (stage) data collected at Hohman Avenue may be limited. Dan Sparks offered to send Paul information on how the AOC dredging projects impacted the West Branch flow. Paul will provide a list of stream gages and wells with potentially relevant data to Michael to catalog.

Emily Stork offered that the water levels in the AOC swales rise and fall with lake levels. Areas of the managed lands that have been isolated using wetland fill or in other ways are most impacted. The high water levels exacerbated the isolation and historical abuse, resulting in loss of mature oaks and other species. Also, she mentioned that at Gary Lagoons contaminants upwelling through the cap. Finally, the resulting high water levels in the Grand Calumet River appear to have killed off nearly all of the emergent marsh vegetation at both the Roxana and East Branch locations.

Kay Nelson was able to join and reminded members of the Great Lakes Commission’s Climate Resiliency Project and her suggestion that AOCs could be polled to determine impacts. The GLC is in the early stages of developing a resiliency plan and Kay has made the suggestion that AOCs be surveyed to gather bulleted lists of impacts. CARE members began providing updates of this report out given previously, but Michael stated that he believed the input would be captured in the meeting summary for Kay and others to review.

#### **4. Sediment Management Actions (BUIs #1-2, #4-7) Update**

##### **a. Lake George Branch Middle & East**

Michael provided an update that 23,804 cubic yards of sediment was removed during the Phase I dredging in the East Project area. That area extends from Indianapolis Boulevard to the CSX railroad bridge in East Chicago. The Phase II dredging along the south bank of the IHSC is still expected to be conducted during most of 2023 and 2024 and will likely utilize offsite disposal of the dredged materials in a permitted landfill.

Michael also stated that the US Army Corps is now working to complete the design for the Middle Portion, from the CSX railroad bridge west to the BP Land Bridge and just released new plans and specs to the stakeholder group during the past week. Construction is still projected to begin this year and continue through the first half of



2022. In the meantime, ARCO/BP continues its source control work on the South and West Tank Farm parcels at the former ECI refinery site. That work is expected to extend from the middle of this year through 2023.

**b. East Branch, Phase II**

East Branch Phase II includes the dredging and capping of the East Branch of the Grand Calumet River between Cline Avenue and the US Steel Reach in Gary, as well as closure of the Ralston Street Lagoon in Gary.

Michael stated that there are no major updates on this project area; USEPA staff continues to work with the Gary Sanitary District to identify potential nonfederal Great Lakes Legacy Act cost share. He stated that he would be sure to update CARE members when any new developments occurred.

**c. Junction Reach**

The Junction Reach includes the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal south of Columbus Drive and the Grand Calumet River between Indianapolis Boulevard and Kennedy Avenue.

Michael shared that EPA, IDEM, and the East Chicago Waterway Management District continue to work to complete the identification of additional non-federal cost share needed to complete the Grand Calumet River and Indiana Harbor Ship Canal project areas concurrently. The ECMWD continues work to amend the existing Great Lakes Legacy Act Project Agreement or develop a new one to allow for completion of the design and project implementation. As part of this effort, the key stakeholders have begun meeting to discuss the project design. If all goes according to plan, that design would be completed in 2021 and the project itself would be conducted during most of 2022 and into early 2023.

Fernando Treviño then updated the members that the remedial design, including permitting will be part of the fourth modification to the existing Legacy Act Project Agreement (PA) under which the original feasibility study and design work for the East Chicago waterways was included and which includes the Lake George Middle and East remedial action. The ECWMD anticipates that the remedial design will be ready in spring of 2022. Implementation will likely occur under a separate PA. The ECWMD is currently developing the scope for the final remedial design of the junction reaches.

**d. Orphan Areas Site Characterization**

Michael shared that GLNPO continues work to begin the planning process needed to conduct a site characterization of areas between Canal Street and Dickey Road in East Chicago which lie outside, but adjacent to, Reaches 8 and 9 of the Congressionally



authorized channel of the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal. This work is still expected to be conducted this calendar year.

## **5. Habitat Management Actions (BUI #3 & BUI #14) Update**

### **a. Management Action #1 – Dune, Swale, and Riverine Restoration**

Carl Wodrich shared that IDNR did get the draft of the workplan for the Dune and Swale, Phase II project to USEPA for pre-review. The project scope will include establishment work at 394 acres at a total project cost of \$2 million. The proposed project would take place between October 1, 2021 and December 31, 2024.

Emily shared an update on the on-the-ground work for the current Dune and Swale project. With the growing season just beginning, TNC, IDNR, and Lake County Parks have begun treating invasive plants. These include reed canary grass, garlic mustard, and other early season targets. The crews are wrapping up the dormant season work, such as brush cutting. TNC has selected its new hires for field crew positions and IDNR is awaiting the hiring of the chief steward position. Joel shared that the TNC staff will start in May.

### **b. Management Action #4 – Prescribed Fire Plan/Contractual Burns**

Will Tucker shared that there are no changes to the planned burn work. On April 6, there was a wildfire on one of the Ivanhoe West units. Approximately 10 acres burned before it was contained. There were no noted adverse impacts to the prescribed fire project.

### **c. Management Action #5 – Pine Station Ponds and Oxbow**

Carl reminded CARE members that TetraTech is IDNR's contractor for this project. IDNR recently provided a cost estimate for the project to USEPA. The base cost would likely be approximately \$10 million. The project work could potentially be phased, which would allow the project to be incrementally funded, but would cost an additional \$1 million. The final project design is anticipated to be completed later this year and would include the permits required for the project. IDNR anticipates applying for implementation funding in the fall.

### **d. BUI #14 Removal Target**

Michael informed CARE members that IDEM RAP Program staff met with USEPA on March 29 to discuss the draft removal target for BUI #14: Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat. IDEM is working with key BUI stakeholders to discuss, and potentially address, the feedback received prior to the final draft being presented to the full CARE



Committee. Michael anticipated that the draft of the BUI removal target would be provided to members for review in advance of the May 27 CARE Workgroup Meeting.

## 6. Table Talk

- John discussed the award he had produced for Paul Labus on behalf of the CARE Committee, while Michael shared photos of the award. Michael and Kay shared personal remembrances about Paul's history working on AOC habitat matters.
- Michael announced that Hala will be departing the agency for a position at USEPA. Her last day will be April 23. Several CARE members shared personal notes about Hala's impact in her position as NWRO director.

## 7. Public Comment

- No public comments were received.

## 8. Meeting Adjournment

Michael Spinar announced the date and time of the next meeting and expressed that reviewing the Beach Closings Management Action Letter would be on the agenda. John Fekete then adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:56 am.

**Next Workgroup Meeting:** Thursday, May 27, 2021, 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM CDT  
Via Microsoft Teams