



CARE Meeting Summary – August 25, 2022

Thursday, August 25, 2022, 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM CDT
MS Teams Meeting, Held Remotely

In Attendance: John Fekete (CARE); Jim Bailey, Michelle Caldwell, Cathy Csatari, Pat Daniel, Rahim Evans, Halee Griffey, Robert Lugar, Paul McMurray, Anne Remek, Michael Spinar, Carl Wodrich (IDEM); Fernando Treviño (ECWMD); Jennifer Birchfield (NIRPC); Susan MiHalo (TNC); Kay Nelson (NWI Forum); Muralee Byapanahali (USGS); Leslie Dorworth (IL-IN Sea Grant); Jenny Orsburn, Lynn Riddle, Ashley Sharkey, Emily Stork (IDNR); Victoria Wittig (NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership); Brenda Scott Henry (City of Gary); Caitie Nigrelli, Amber Sample (U.S. EPA)

Public Attendees: 5

1. Introductions

John Fekete opened the meeting at approximately 9:04 am. Michael Spinar took roll of those in attendance.

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

a. Lake George Branch Middle & East

Mr. Spinar described how the East Portion is located near the Confined Disposal Facility in East Chicago. The U.S. Army Corps has received funding to complete design work for the Phase II dredging of Lake George Canal East. Design work is expected to be completed in 2023, with dredging conducted in 2024. The Army Corps recently developed a draft sampling plan as part of the design and is working to respond to stakeholder feedback.

In the meantime, Mr. Spinar stated that ARCO/BP is shortly expected to finalize the 90 percent design for construction of a sheet pile wall along the northern boundary of the ECI South Tank Farm property. He also stated that the project fact sheet, presentation, and draft design have been posted to the ECWMD website (<https://www.in.gov/ecwmd/>), and the link was pasted into the chat. The sheet pile work, along with the habitat restoration work is expected to be completed in 2024.

Mr. Spinar then provided an update on the Lake George Middle Project. Construction on the project, which is overseen by the U.S. Army Corps, began in March 2022 and will continue through 2023. The project consists of placement of an engineered cap within the canal, pipeline decommissioning and placement of active mats at the ECI West Tank Farm property, ecosystem restoration along the northern bank and the wetland shelf along the southern bank near Lake Mary, and repair of a tide gate structure at the BP land bridge. As previously reported, BP has completed the pipeline



decommissioning and tide gate work. The Army Corps' contractor is nearing completion of the West Tank Farm bank stabilization work, which consists of placement of active mats to adsorb contaminants, bank regrading, and revegetation with native plants. At last report, the contractor was placing the sand stabilization layer in the canal, which is required to support the cap.

b. Junction Reaches

Mr. Spinar reminded CARE members that the Junction Reaches project is divided into four sections: the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal south of Columbus Drive (otherwise known as Junction North), the West Branch of the Grand Calumet River between Indianapolis Boulevard and the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal (known as Junction West), the East Branch of the Grand Calumet River between the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal and Kennedy Avenue (known as Junction East), and the GCR Junction Marsh south of the confluence of the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal and Grand Calumet River.

Mr. Spinar described how Phase 1 of the project is currently scheduled to be constructed in 2023 and will consist of dredging and capping the Junction West branch and dredging select portions of the Junction North branch. The GCR Junction Marsh will be contracted as an option to the Phase 1 project and will be constructed during the winter 2023 into spring 2024, contingent on negotiations with the property owners. Phase 2, which will likely consist of capping the Junction North and Junction East areas, is expected to commence following the Phase 1 work.

Mr. Spinar stated that the East Chicago Waterway Management District's contractor, TetraTech, continues work to finalize the design, based on stakeholder input. The contractor is also working to finalize permit applications and legal agreements with various property owners for access and plans to have those in place prior to the start of construction. U.S. EPA and the District are currently negotiating a project agreement necessary to proceed into implementation.

c. Lake George Branch West

Mr. Spinar stated that the Lake George Branch West project area extends from the BP land bridge to Calumet Avenue in Hammond. BP has developed an initial investigation report for the area that is under review by the project team. BP's goal is to complete feasibility study work by the end of this year and begin implementation in 2024.

d. East Branch Phase II

Mr. Spinar described that the East Branch Phase II includes the dredging and capping of the East Branch of the Grand Calumet River in the vicinity of the Gary Airport, as well as closure of the Ralston Street Lagoon.



EPA staff continue to work with the Gary Sanitary District to identify potential nonfederal Great Lakes Legacy Act cost share required to complete the project. The goal remains to implement the project in 2024.

e. Orphan Areas Site Characterization

Finally, Mr. Spinar updated CARE members on the status of the Orphan Areas Site Characterization. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is conducting this site characterization of areas which lie outside, but adjacent to, Reaches 8 and 9 of the Congressionally authorized channel of the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal. This area is between Canal Steet and Dickey Road in East Chicago. These areas have not been well studied, nor have sediment remediation activities occurred. The site characterization seeks to evaluate the risk of recontamination these so-called “Orphan Areas” might pose to the federal channel.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is currently working to revise a draft scope of work and sampling plan for the site characterization that was submitted to the project team in late March. In response to a question from a CARE member, Mr. Spinar stated that data collection was planned for 2023.

3. Habitat Management Actions (BUI #3 & BUI #14) Report

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

Due to technical issues, no IDNR representative was able to provide a project update. Susan MiHalo (TNC) updated CARE members that IDNR was able to post positions for the intermittent stewardship positions. In addition, she noted that field crews have been working to address purple loosestrife that has been very prolific this growing season. Mr. Fekete suggested that IDNR might be able to provide its report out in an addendum to the meeting summary. See the meeting summary addendum for this report.

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

Mr. Spinar reported that USFWS staff overseeing this project were not available to provide a report out but offered a brief update. He stated that the project ends December 31, 2022, and that no burns will be implemented until the fall burn season. A burn ban remains in place for the City of Gary.

Brenda Scott-Henry reported that the City of Gary is hiring contractors to develop burn management plans. These will provide recommendations on alternatives to prescribed burns and ways to coordinate burns to ensure that as many parties as possible can accomplish needed burns. This effort has been driven by the [ozone] nonattainment area and concern over respiratory illnesses, such as Covid.



Ms. MiHalo added that TNC staff stand ready to prepare burn breaks when the current growing season ends.

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

Lynn Riddle reported that IDNR had awarded a contract for invasives control in the Pine Station Ponds project area and has worked out access agreements with NIPSCO. Contractors are currently expected to begin work in the area next week. In addition, IDNR has responded to comments from U.S. EPA on the supplemental grant request and are awaiting a response.

4. Eutrophication BUI Report

Mr. Spinar reported that USGS continues to conduct additional monitoring in 2022 to assist in developing a path forward for addressing the *Eutrophication and Undesirable Algae* BUI. Specifically, this consists of the collection of continuous water-quality data at six sites, regular visual inspections of site conditions, collection and analysis of monthly and storm event water quality samples for various nutrient-related parameters, and analysis work.

The monitoring equipment is operational at six sites (shown below) and USGS collected water quality samples from three of the sites for analysis on five occasions (May 17, June 14, July 6, July 13, and August 3). Monthly sampling is planned to continue through October. The agency also collected samples during one storm event during the August 7-9 period. The monthly and storm analyses include ammonia, nitrite, nitrite plus nitrate, total nitrogen, orthophosphate, phosphorus, chemical oxygen demand, and biochemical oxygen demand as well as nitrogen isotope samples.

CARE members and the public can find the data at the following USGS website:

https://www.usgs.gov/centers/ohio-kentucky-indiana-water-science-center/science/water-quality-monitoring-and-algal?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects.

5. Beach Closings BUI Discussion

Mr. Spinar provided a presentation to CARE members that contained a review of work completed to date to address the Beach Closings BUI and updated sample exceedance results. In light of recent sampling results, RAP Program staff requested advice from the CARE Committee on whether a change to the Beach Closings BUI removal target is warranted.

Kay Nelson expressed that messaging the issues, such as differentiating human and animal sources, would be a challenge. She suggested providing educational materials to schoolteachers as part of a grant. This would help educate community members about best practices, such as avoiding handfeeding of wildlife. Ms. Scott-Henry added that it would be good to incorporate long-term educational activities as part of the removal process. She also suggested the use of flyers or mailings to inform people about the issues.



Mr. Fekete suggested that CARE members would likely appreciate additional time to digest the information prior to making recommendations. Mr. Spinar said he would provide CARE members with the PowerPoint slides for their review and put the topic on the agenda for consideration at the September meeting.

6. Table Talk

Ms. MiHalo provided comments during the public comment section that have been recorded in table talk for clarity. She noted that Michelle Caldwell manages the BEACH Act program. Ashley Belle from IL-IN Sea Grant would like to restart the Grand Calumet River Stewardship Day events.

7. Public Comment

Mr. Spinar read through the comments and questions posted in the meeting chat. These items included:

- A request for a list of all places scheduled for burns in the fall and spring. Mr. Spinar stated that this may not be known this far in advance but that he would refer the question to USFWS staff.
- A request for clarification on Carl Wodrich's new position with IDEM. Mr. Wodrich responded that he is now the Deputy Assistant Commissioner for IDEM's Office of Program Support and will continue to work with the AOC, LAMP, and Beach programs in Northwest Indiana.
- A request from IDEM staff for the USGS and Michigan State University studies referenced. Mr. Spinar said he would get those documents sent.
- A question regarding communication with Whiting and Hammond in the absence of CARE membership. Mr. Spinar responded that there is interaction with those communities on individual projects and sites.
- A comment that IDEM had failed to reach out to anyone from Hammond even though the George Lake project was in Hammond. Mr. Spinar responded verbally that this was not an IDEM-led project but is being implemented by U.S. EPA, the project nonfederal sponsors, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and that the East Chicago Waterway Management District had conducted an outreach campaign for the project previously.
- A member of the public inquired whether a 401 Water Quality Certification has been issued for the project; Mr. Spinar he would need to check to confirm.

Several verbal comments were then received by a member of the public. These mostly related to concerns about outreach to the project on efforts occurring through the RAP framework, including through local municipal boards, but included questions as to who is responsible for conducting long-term maintenance for the area previously restored through the Lake George Great Lakes Restoration Initiative project.

8. Meeting Adjournment

John Fekete adjourned the meeting at approximately 10:23 am.



Next Workgroup Meeting: Thursday, September 22, 2022 at 9:00 AM Central Time Via
Microsoft Teams



Dune and Swale IDNR Report-out (Addendum)

Emily Stork provided the following update as an addendum to the meeting:

Susan MiHalo did a great job with updates on the Dune and Swale Phase 2 project. Short staffing at IDNR, TNC, and Lake County Parks (LCP) have made this this year difficult. Because the IDNR chief steward vacancy has not been filled and all TNC field personnel are either new or new to their positions as of this year, IDNR and TNC have only been able to operate a single crew all growing season long which is down from three. This has limited flexibility for addressing multiple sites simultaneously and is causing crews to only be able to get a single pass in across most management units. In addition, LCP is currently without seasonal employees which has slowed progress as well. In several cases, managers have been required to fill crew positions in the absence of seasonal employees to allow for work to be completed.

Priorities in the near term include growing season passes at the Pine Station, Gibson Woods, and Tolleston Ridges nature preserves. In addition, if TNC or LCP can get an agreement with Canadian National Railroad executed in time, crews will attempt to execute passes at Lakeshore Railroad Prairie and USX Prairie.

IDNR recently approved a posting for the Grand Calumet River Region intermittent Nature Preserves Steward. IDNR is receiving applicants and scheduling interviews for the position. This should help relieve some of the shortfalls; however, recent and pending vacancies at IDNR, TNC, and LCP will likely strain staff resources. One unfortunate result of the shortages is that project monitoring will not occur this year.