



December 2020 CARE Workgroup Meeting Summary

Thursday, December 17, 2020, 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM CST
MS Teams Meeting, Held Remotely

In Attendance: Michael Spinar, Anne Remek (IDEM); John Fekete (CARE); Emily Stork, Carl Wodrich (IDNR); Dan Sparks (USFWS); Caitie Nigrelli (USEPA); Fernando Treviño (ECWMD); Paul Labus (TNC)

Public Attendees: 1

1. CARE Introductions:

John Fekete opened the meeting at approximately 1:02 pm and took roll of those in attendance.

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

a. Lake George Branch Middle & East

Michael Spinar stated that the East Portion extends from Indianapolis Boulevard in East Chicago to the CSX railroad bridge. Approximately 40 percent of the Lake George East project area is within the federal navigation channel. The Middle Portion extends from the CSX bridge to the BP land bridge.

The contractor for the US Army Corps conducted the first phase of the dredging of the East Project portion between December 4 and December 11, with dredged materials placed in the Indiana Harbor Confined Disposal Facility in East Chicago. The second phase of the dredging, along the south bank of the IHSC, is currently expected to be conducted during most of 2023 and 2024. This phase of the dredging will likely utilize offsite disposal of the dredged materials in a permitted landfill.

The US Army Corps has completed a 65 percent design for the Lake George Middle Project portion and is currently working to complete the 90 percent project design. The project is currently projected to begin in early-to-mid 2021 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 mid-2021 through 2023.

Fernando Treviño added that 33,000 cubic yards was expected to be dredged in the Lake George East, Phase I dredging, but initial estimates are closer to 20,000 cubic yards. USACE will be following up to review the post dredging surveys.

b. East Branch, Phase II



Michael reminded CARE members that the East Branch Phase II includes the dredging and capping of 2.5 miles 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.

EPA staff continue to work with the Gary Sanitary District to determine whether additional work may be credited as non-federal match. It is therefore currently unknown whether sufficient nonfederal match will be available to proceed into the project phase.

c. Junction Reach

Michael stated that the Junction Reach includes approximately 1.5 miles of the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal south of Columbus Drive and approximately 1.4 miles of the Grand Calumet River between Indianapolis Boulevard and Kennedy Avenue. It is currently anticipated that only containment will be utilized for the portion of the Grand Calumet River from the Junction to Kennedy Avenue. Both removal and containment are anticipated for the remainder of the project area.

A 70% design of the Junction Reach was completed in 2015, with the report being released in early 2016. EPA, IDEM, and the East Chicago Waterway Management District are still working to identify additional non-federal cost share needed to complete the Grand Calumet River and Indiana Harbor Ship Canal project areas concurrently. If all goes according to plan, the project design would be completed in 2021 and the project itself would be conducted during most of 2022 and into early 2023.

d. Sediment Working Group

Michael discussed that the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, or GLRI, funds most of the management actions necessary to delist the AOC, including providing the federal portion of the funding to Great Lakes Legacy Act sediment remediation projects.

GLRI funding priorities are described in a five-year action plan. The Grand Cal AOC is one of 10 AOCs listed in GLRI Action Plan III at which completion of management actions could conceivably be achieved by September 30, 2024. EPA's goal is to complete all management actions at five of those AOCs by that date. Because Legacy Act sediment remediation projects can take several years to complete, 2021 will be a critical year for identifying required nonfederal cost share if management actions at the Grand Cal AOC are to be completed by the end of 2024.

For that reason, IDEM is working with U.S. EPA and a variety of partners to launch a new working group in January 2021 aimed specifically at accelerating sediment cleanup progress and the evaluation of pending or potential cost share proposals.



Michael stated that he would be providing CARE members with updates on the group's work throughout 2021.

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

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

Emily Stork reported that four to five people from IDNR and TNC are conducting work on most of the sites, in addition to several Lake County Parks and Recreation staff. Field crews have been rendered shorthanded due to COVID-19 related restrictions on travel from Chicago, where some staff live, to Indiana; nonetheless, there are experienced staff on the crews that have worked effectively on the project. Crews have observed that recent dry weather has led to some lowering of water levels in the swales, which has allowed improved access to some of those areas.

Carl Wodrich related that IDNR is currently working on a grant application for Phase II of this project work, which would continue it to 2024. The agency is targeting April 1 for the application submittal to U.S. EPA.

b. Management Action #3 – Lake George Branch Wetlands Restoration

Carl Wodrich stated that IDNR's contractor, Davey Resource Group, is essentially done with the project work, concluding with some native vegetation seeding of some small upland areas. IDNR is working to secure funding for follow-up maintenance in 2021.

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

Emily Stork stated that IDNR was able to perform one prescribed burn at Roxana Marsh in early November and has three burn units prepared for the upcoming spring burn season. No other fall season burns were implemented.

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

Carl discussed that IDNR continues to work with its contractor, Tetra Tech, to complete the draft design for this project. That draft is currently expected to be completed in early 2021.

e. BUI #14 Removal Target

Michael informed CARE members that IDEM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, IDNR, and The Nature Conservancy continue work to revise BUI #14 Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat. Currently separate fish and wildlife habitat workgroups have convened to draft proposed revisions. An initial meeting to discuss the draft removal



target was held with U.S. EPA and the Technical Review Lead for this BUI on December 10. The removal target currently has the following elements or requirements:

- A requirement to develop site conservation plans for restored sites and set forth a framework to manage the sites long term.
- A requirement for BUI removal to be based on more than one assessment of the sites.
- Evaluation of various metrics for upland, swale, and riverine wetland units using the protocol developed by Orbis Environmental Consulting for IDNR and TNC.
- A measure of instream habitat quality within the Grand Calumet River and IHSC.

It is currently anticipated that the revisions will be vetted before the full CARE Committee in the first quarter of 2021.

f. Pending Management Action List Revision

Michael discussed how Lake Michigan and the Grand Calumet River have been at or near record water levels for the last several years and many of the original riverine wetland project areas have been underwater for an extended period. For this reason, Habitat Management Action #2 – The Riverine Corridor Project is considered not feasible. Therefore, IDEM and several CARE Members have been investigating projects that would serve a similar support role in the removal of BUI #3 and BUI #14. Two such AOC needs that have been discussed have been providing increased instream cover for aquatic life habitat within the AOC waterways and addressing specific areas of degradation within the greater Clark and Pine Complex in Gary. IDEM RAP staff and partners will work to refine these concepts for presentation to the CARE Committee in early 2021.

4. Cline Ave Ditch Project Update

Michael informed CARE members that completion of the Cline Ave Ditch remediation project is being delayed until mid-March 2021. This is because of issues with the required time for the concrete junctures to set and the difficulties in operating a water bypass system during the winter months. However, some project work will still occur during this time. For instance, the contractor plans to build the laydown area and receive most of the piping. Boom maintenance activities will continue over the winter.

5. Outreach/Education

- **AOC Beach Videos**



Michael explained that IDEM completed final edits to a two-chapter video in late November that discusses the AOC-specific problems with beach water quality and potential solutions that can be implemented by local entities and the public. Those videos have now been posted to IDEM's YouTube channel at:

- Problems - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96j1oAxSiqE&t=9s>
- Solutions - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4O8p-VcrFw&t=5s>.

IDEM RAP staff also developed and recorded a short PSA to specifically encourage members of the public to adopt best management practices to reduce *E. coli* levels. The link is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE19quZ8MEM>.

Michael then played the three videos for CARE Members.

- **AOC Beach Signage**

Michael described how these signs are specifically designed to discourage handfeeding of birds at the beach, which contributes to *E. coli* contamination and is unhealthy for the birds themselves. He reminded CARE Members that he showcased the artwork for that signage last month. IDEM has identified a vendor for the signs and is working with the vendor to obtain final pricing for signs and posts/mounting hardware.

- **AOC Nuisance Bird Management Poster**

Michael shared with CARE members that this poster, which describes the rationale behind measures taken to manage ring billed gulls, geese, and cormorants through the AOC Nearshore Bird Management Project, is designed to be presented to a wide variety of audiences at public outreach events and conferences. The design, which CARE members viewed at the October CARE Workgroup Meeting, has now been finalized and sent to the vendor to be printed.

6. Federal-State AOC Meeting Check-in

Michael explained that each year, joint meetings occur between the state and federal agencies directly involved in addressing AOCs. These Federal-State AOC meetings focus on key project updates and obstacles to implementing management actions and are designed to set the AOC up for success over the upcoming year. The next Indiana Federal-State AOC meeting is scheduled to take place on Thursday, January 21, 2021. Michael then requested any questions or concerns from CARE Members that they would like brought up during the meeting. No responses were received.

7. Table Talk

- No items were recorded for table talk.

8. Public Comment



- Ms. Carolyn Marsh made several comments regarding the AOC beaches, expressing concerns about how they were maintained and inquiring as to how many beaches in the Great Lakes allow dogs. She also questioned whether the reflective Eagle Eye deterrents were responsible for a decrease in local owl populations she has observed in areas inland from the beach front in the Hammond and Whiting area.

9. Meeting Adjournment

John Fekete adjourned the meeting at approximately 1:59 pm.

Next Workgroup Meeting: Thursday, January 28, 2021, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
Tentatively a Microsoft Teams Meeting