*Itasca County Water Plan Implementation Committee*

*Regular Meeting Minutes:* **August 14, 2018**

SWCD Conference Room, Grand Rapids, MN

Chair Norman Miranda opened the meeting at 9:30 AM.

**WPIC members present:** Norman Miranda, Dick Lacher, Norley Hansen, Don Klandee, Mike Oja, Lester Kachinske, Tom Nelson, Dan Butterfield, Harold Goetzman, Cal Saari (SWCD Board), and Bob Lindahl; also present *ex officio* were SWCD Manager Andy Arens, and Water Resource Specialist Kim Yankowiak.

**1) Agenda**. **Motion** made to approve the agenda by Dan with second by Norley; **Approved**.

**2)** **Minutes.** **Motion** to approve the minutes, with additions after-the-meeting (in italics) from the June 12, 2018 meeting by Lester, **Second** by Mike; **Approved**.

**3) Water Plan Update.**  Andy and Norm have met recently to go over the plan with Chad Severts; the general content and direction were verified as adequate. While the flow of the text could be improved, with several gaps still to be filled in, the writing (mostly by Mitch Brinks) was deemed excellent.

 The Committee discussion was far-ranging regarding the opening pages of the draft, mostly involving description, with much of this covered in previous meetings (especially the emphasis on forestation). Comments included:

a) new state buffer law needs to be better covered, explained, and distinguished from our local intentions and strategies for buffers;

b) several technical terms, especially “TSI” and “TMDL,” need better explanation on what is involved in their determination and how they apply;

c) an appendix of acronyms should be included;

d) a section on AIS has a place-holder in the early part of the plan and needs to be fleshed out;

e) rivers need additional emphasis, as the plan seems oriented chiefly toward lakes;

f) section *Lake and Water Connection* has two lakes mentioned with one chart from RMB with incorrect reference;

g) in the Phosphorus/Nutrient Loading Risk section there is a list of 11 lakes listed by the MPCA. However, the Itasca County ESD has developed a new lake class (see Public Waters Classification List, 2008) regarding phosphorus sensitive lakes which should be referenced and integrated into the plan. There are 44 such lakes listed in the Itasca classification; <http://www.co.itasca.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/2875/Public-Water-Classification-List>

h) climate change remains controversial, with the term perhaps best avoided. The committee reviewed a document from Isanti County “Addressing Ecological Resilience within Isanti County.” The polemical phrase “climate change, or warming, etc.” is avoided therein, addressing only steps that could be taken as resilience to “emerging issues” associated with “change in weather patterns,” including “education of climate issues…and up-to-date climate issues.” Several problems are listed and several ways to address problems are provided. This seems like a very sensible and discrete way to deal with a sensitive, politicized issue;

i) an Executive Summary, preferably of a single page or two, should be included in the Plan, and available as a separate document.

The committee then focused on the *Priority Concerns and Objectives* section toward the end of the plan, working from several documents: the 2012 Plan now in effect with six categories; a revision provided by Andy; and the presently empty outline of four “Tiers” of Priority Concerns found at the end of the Update draft. It was thought that the six categories in the present Plan were approved by SWCD/BWSR and should remain, while the four tiers in the update draft may have been authorized from above as we transition into One Watershed/One Plan. It was also suggested that we might not need to do a revision of the County Plan at all, and rather move directly into the 1W/1P. However, the County Plan can still be of help as an interim step toward the transition; it will remain as a county document with some revision based on the six categories.

The committee commenced to tweak the Priorities:

a) change the six-category mandate by removing the Septic Systems section and moving it into Groundwater as a single item: encourage compliance and education on septic systems;

b) add an AIS bullet as appropriate to Surface Water, Land Use, Education, and Habitat (where it can be found presently);

c) Surface Water should include Andy’s list of highest priorities, while either removal or further tweak of some bullets now present,

\*e.g. delete reference to 1000 Lakes and Rivers Fund with seek grants both state and federal;

\*take out support Lake Sensitivity Project since it is done;

\*Andy’s list for this section will need further clarification;

d) Land Activities/Use will emphasize the Storm Water issues, shoreland stabilization, forest stewardship, and buffers (both state law and local erosion strategies appropriate to Itasca), as listed by Andy, with some of the present bullets condensed, clarified or deleted;

\*e.g. reference to Alternative Shoreland Practices should be updated to DNR Shoreland Rules draft from 2010;

\*enforcement of ZO and discourage variances could be moved to Education (although these are appropriate to this section);

\*reference to support for Lake Sensitivity Project now finished can be deleted;

e) Groundwater category will have Septics included; present bullets should be compared and integrated with Andy’s list, with some moved to education;

f) Habitat should be retained (among the four “tiers” from BWSR) with changes:

\*e.g. wordsmith bullet A: “Promote the importance and value of fish and wildlife habitat (including wild rice areas) for the economic viability of such habitat to residents and recreational users.” This concept is important regarding property values/taxes, recreational businesses, tourism, and grant acquisition;

\*remove bullets B, C, E

\*retain D regarding AIS monitoring and prevention

g) Education will receive several bullets from above, including

\*e.g. AIS issues

\*1W/1P and WRAPS promotion

\*importance of communication and coordination with lake associations;

The Timeline for completion of the Water Plan Update is the end of 2018, with a final document ready for a 30-day comment period for various natural resource partners, the County Board, SWCD/BWSR boards, and perhaps the Public, by mid-October. Thus, we will need a special meeting scheduled for September 4 to review the suggested changes to draft as established by the present meeting.

**4) SWCD Updates**

A) Interviews for the Wetland Specialist position at SWCD have been completed and the job offered to a qualified candidate. Paperwork needs to be completed.

 B) The grant initiated by the Deer Lake President John Davis was turned down mostly because it involved only a single lake. The grant application has been modified and resubmitted to include the entire portion of the Upper Mississippi Headwaters Watershed in Itasca County. It includes funds for buffers, storm-water, shore stabilization (not including rip-rap), and other related projects to be determined.

**5) Water Quality Monitoring**

Kim provided an overview of monitoring in both the Big Fork and Little Fork Watersheds, with sampling including color, chlorides, and hardness. Occurrences of the poisonous blue-green algae has been reported recently. There is a “jar and stick” test for this dangerous alga. https://www.itascaswcd.org/images/Algae-Jar-Test.pdf

**6) Septic Compliance Triggers**

As reported in the addendum to the June Minutes, the quest to remove the loophole for interfamilial transfers of land that do not require a Certificate of Real Estate Value has bogged down with many unexpected problems and unintended consequences. Nevertheless, there are counties that have succeeded in requiring a more rigorous and comprehensive compliance for septic systems. Both Cass County and Cook County could provide guidance on how this can be done.

 The following provides some details on the negotiations that followed the June Meeting, as taken form the June minutes:

*Immediately following the WPIC meeting inquiries were made by Dan and Mike to find out how many such trigger free transfers have taken place in recent years. A meeting with Dan Swenson determined how the text amendment could read, with comparison of the Cass County SSTS Ordinance. In the Itasca County Ordinance, as required by a model ordinance from the MPCA Minn. Rules, Chapts. 7080 and 7081, there is text about the Certificate of Real Estate Value (which is not required for an interfamilial transfer); this reference would be struck and the words “sale” and “transfer” replaced with “conveyance.”*

*However, there was some confusion as to the best manner to get the process of text amendments before the Planning Commission for public hearings. Dan S. suggested starting at the top with a County Board member initiate the process. There is some question whether it is appropriate to have a single CB member initiate or have it as a resolution by the entire CB. It is also possible that it could be initiated from below by an ordinary citizen, as done in the recent past. Moreover, as an Advisory Board on water matters for the County, it would also seem possible that the Resolution just passed by WPIC could be sent directly to the Planning Commission in its present form. While it would be best if initiated from on high, we have seen in the past a reluctance by the CB to act as a whole on this matter. Further discussions with Dan Swenson will be scheduled, perhaps leading to revised letter with a more explicit request to hold hearings.*

**7) WPIC Membership**

 The “At-Large Recreational Business” position remains vacant. For some reason, the county has posted a Notice of Vacancy for District 2 and 5, neither of which will expire at the end of this year. The actual expiring positions at the end of 2018 are for District 1 and ICOLA. (Harold Goetzman has recently joined WPIC in the ICOLA position in the middle of the staggered term, and hopefully will re-up for another term). Notices from the County should be therefore revised.

**8) Adjournment**

**Moved** by Dan, **Second** by Harold; **Approved** at 11:35am.

Minutes compiled and submitted by Tom Nelson, WPIC Secretary

**Up-coming Meetings:**

Special WPIC meeting on Water Plan: September 4, 9:30 and SWCD

Mississippi-Grand Rapids WRAPS: September 25th, 1pm at Blandin

Regular WPIC Meetings: October 9 and December 11