*Itasca County Water Plan Implementation Committee*

*Regular Meeting Minutes:* **June 12, 2018**

SWCD Conference Room, Grand Rapids, MN

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

**WPIC members present:** Dick Lacher, Norley Hansen, Don Klandee, Mike Oja, Lester Kachinske, Tom Nelson, Dan Butterfield, Cal Saari (SWCD Board), and new member Bob Lindahl; also present *ex officio* were SWCD Manager Andy Arens and Water Resource Specialist Kim Yankowiak, and guest Dan Steward (BWSR Special Projects).

**1) Agenda**. The agenda had two additions: discussion of the Border to Border Touring trail (Tom), and Swan Lake Curly Leaf Pondweed update (Mike). **Motion** made to approve the agenda with additions by Lester with second by Norley; **Approved**.

**2)** **Minutes.** **Motion** to approve the minutes from the April 10, 2018 meeting by Dan, second by Mike; **Approved**.

**3) Introduction of New Member.** Andy introduced new member Bob Lindahl, who fills the At Large position. Bob has had a career with Minnesota Power, and now works for US Water Services, an industry supply company for clean water and wastewater treatment.

**4) Water Plan Update.**  Work continues on the draft revision of the Itasca County Water Plan in conjunction with both the Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS) and One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P). BWSR Special Projects manager was on hand to explain some of the crucial findings and updates. Chad Severts, Mitch Brinks, Dan and Andy have had meetings for this project and will continue. The August WPIC meeting will include a more in-depth discussion of the Plan, WRAPS and 1W1P.

 Points of discussion at this meeting included:

 a) The importance of the glacial context (shown in map) that distinguishes the difference between lakes in out-wash areas with sandy soils which provide better groundwater infiltration, and those with till providing more phosphorous loading potential.

 b) Lake Quality Trend analysis looks very promising for Itasca county, with the vast majority of waters either stable (no trend) or improving. This indicates a predominantly protective strategy among the WRAPS.

 c) Primary reason why Itasca County is in relatively good shape is because it is further north into the forested region, with a large amount of public and industrial ownership, and more distant from over-development. The importance of healthy forests for both ground and surface waters cannot be overstated.

 d) Importance of developing a Shallow Lake Standard for phosphorus loading standard (now being negotiated by DNR and PCA), which can provide a better base line for protection. Furthermore, much surface water began as shallow lakes that were later impounded with dams and weirs. All three categories, deep lakes, shallow lakes and reservoirs, have different characteristics and thus different protective strategies. Presently it is unknown how many “lakes” in the county are actually impoundments.

 e) Dan Steward displayed a poster, “Lakes and Forest Priorities for Watersheds in the Mississippi Headwaters Counties,” that showed a cycle leading to a goal of keeping or restoring 75% area for forest protection via conservation easements and other means; this would contain 89,000 acres and cost $43,000,000. Much of this will depend on the role of private landowners

 f) Our next meeting will focus explicitly on the Water Plan Update; members are urged to study the document before that meeting, August 14.

**5) SWCD/County Activity and Updates.**

 a) Wetland Specialist Paul Butler has moved on to a new job elsewhere, and a search to fill this position has begun.

 b) A new Buffer Law Ordinance has been approved by the County Board which will provide greater enforcement of the Statewide Buffer Standards. The Ordinance text appears to be provided by the State, and is a mandate that does come with funding, both to assist the landowners and provide enforcement via misdemeanor with fine. Presently there is only a handful of non-compliant situations, with due-date July 1. An agreement delegating enforcement administration to the SWCD has been drafted and will be presented to the County Board at the Work Session 6/19/18; pending approval the 19th, the agreement is expected to be added to the 6/26/18 regular meeting consent agenda.

**6) Water Quality Monitoring Program.** Kim provided a report on recent activity regarding the Surface Water Assessment Grant (SWAG) and the Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network Grant (WPLMN). The Big Fork Watershed in Itasca County is the focus presently, plus one more site in neighboring Koochiching County, all according to the WRAPS cycles. All the May samples have been registered, the June cycle has begun. The Upper Mississippi Headwaters WRAPS is now open for public comment; a public meeting on the Mississippi-Grand Rapids WRAPS is scheduled for June 26 at the Long Lake Conservation Center near Palisade.

**7) Septic System Update.**

 a) The septic system loan grant proposal (submitted by Dan Swenson, Andy Arens, John Connolly and John Davis) has been tabled for now for needed additional coordination with the County Attorney and County Auditor.

 b) WPIC has long sought to have the remaining loophole for triggering a compliance test removed. This is regarding *interfamilial* transfers of property which do not require the filing of a Certificate of Real Estate Value, as described in Minn. Stat. 272.115 subd. 1. A **Motion** was made by Dan B., second by Tom, to request that the Planning Commission hold hearings to develop a recommendation for County Board approval of a text amendment regarding the compliance triggers found at Section 2.5 in the Itasca County SSTS Ordinance; **Motion Approved**. This strategy came on prior advice from Environmental Services Director Dan Swenson.

*c) 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.*

**8) Wild Rice Sulfate Standard and Bonding Bill Update.**  Norm provided the Committee with information on the Bonding Bill Passed by the Legislature, but with the Wild Rice Sulfate Standard line-item vetoed by Governor Dayton. The MPCA will continue to develop a standard, but the science concerning this issue is very complex with no consensus among the many diverse stakeholders, ranging from Native American gathering rights, to septic treatment costs, to sulfate mining risks. Until this is resolved, there is no standard and no enforcement of this pollution source.

**9) Salt Applicator Certification Program.** The bills meant to help reduce the over-salting of our roads and walkways as a voluntary certification program focused on reducing the liability to “slip and fall” law-suits, did not pass into law. This will be considered further during the next session.

**10) Contribution to the FFA Wildlife Team.** The local Wildlife Team of Future Farmers of America (FFA) has won the State Championship, and will participate in a National Championship in October. They have request a donation to help with expenses. **Motion** by Dick, second by Norley, to provide $250 from the River Watch Fund; **Motion Approved**.

**11) Border to Border Touring Route.** Tom requested further information regarding the “B2B” route now being planned by the DNR across the northern portion of Itasca County. This is a trail meant for four-wheel-drive, licensed vehicles such as jeeps (not ATVs). Concern was with the impact on soil and water, and thus to what extent the SWCD should be involved as safeguard for the environment. It appears that no EAW or EIS has been required. More information and maps of the Itasca portion can be found here: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/touring/index.html>

**12) Swan Lake Curly Leaf Pondweed Problems.** Mike brought the failed attempt to manage the CLP in a bay on Swan Lake. More studies and attempts to control are in the future.

**13. Next Meetings.**

There is a WRAPS Ambassador meeting on June 26 at the Long Lake Conservation Center, Palisade.

WIPC will meet on August 14, October 9 and December 11.

**14) Motion to Adjourn.** By Dick and Butter; **Approved** at 11:08am.

Minutes compiled by WPIC Secretary, Tom Nelson