

Performance Benchmark

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, May 30, 2023

1:00 – 3:00 pm

Via Zoom



ILLINOIS
NUTRIENT LOSS
REDUCTION STRATEGY

Improving our
water resources
with collaboration
and innovation

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

Joan Cox, University of Illinois Extension

Joan welcomed the group and mentioned a few Extension team members on the call today. Amanda Christenson is taking notes, Rachel Curry is helping with the chat, and Emily Steel is helping with biennial report production. The goal of this meeting is to discuss and note your feedback on content in chapter 8: Adaptive Management and Measuring Progress.

Chapter 8: Overview

Joan Cox, University of Illinois Extension

Joan reminded the group that this chapter is still in draft. Ch 3,4,5,7,8, and Partners Appendix will be sent to the Policy Working Group for review 6/8-21, please save these dates to review those chapters and send us your feedback. She also briefly mentioned the new Key Points section of Ch. 8, which summarizes findings and any calls to action in the chapter. We had a request to provide the percent adoption for Maximum Return to Nitrogen to this section if we choose to call out the percents of other practices implementation.

Chapter 8: Future Strategy Considerations & Potential Future Resource Needs

Joan took the group through the sections.

- We started with Future Strategy Considerations and discussion around the Partners for Planning and Conservation Funding. The group suggested that we add a table demonstrating the funding levels of Partners for Conservation fund over time. State only what passed in the recent legislature, not what was proposed then cut.
- Joan went on to the section on aligning goals and partnerships at a larger scale. The advice was to relate this section to the recent EPA Nutrient Loss Memo instead of focusing on the UN Sustainability Goals alone.
- We moved on to the section entitled Financial Markets. The feedback on this section was that the term “financial markets” is problematic because it evokes ideas around private markets, and those outcomes are privately driven. It was suggested that focusing on more of the state or federal funds would be more appropriate than those private market pieces.
- The Other Potential Future Resource Needs section included many subsections and Joan asked if the group thought anything was missing. The committee suggested highlighting the Fall Covers for Spring Saving program here in hopes of expanding that program.
- Next, we looked at the Future Strategy Considerations: Tracking Methods and Data Sources section. It was suggested that we add explanation in this section about the Ag Retailer Survey, detailing some of the preparations for that survey that happened in 2022.
- Moving on to the Future Strategy Considerations: Nutrient Loss Research section, we received comment that under the climate research section we should focus on the predicted precipitation and nutrient

loading. It was also suggested that we mention the total number of dollars invested in research from our partner NGOs. It was specified that they only want to see a total and not a list with individual amounts.

- We ended with the Human and Financial Resources for Implementation in agriculture, point source and stormwater sectors. No significant changes suggested.

Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Megan Baskerville, The Nature Conservancy; Aubrey Basso, American Bottoms Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility; Michelle Bennet, IDNR; Amanda Christenson, Illinois Extension; Dylan Cook, American Farmland Trust; Albert Cox, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago; Joan Cox, Illinois Extension; Rachel Curry, Illinois Extension; Chris Davis, IEPA; Nicole Haverback, Illinois Extension; Robert Hirschfeld, Prairie Rivers Network; KJ Johnson, Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association; Corey Lacey, Illinois Soybean Association; Adrienne Marino, The Nature Conservancy; Raelynn Parmely, Illinois Farm Bureau; Kris Reynolds, American Farmland Trust; Trevor Sample, IEPA; Cindy Skrukud, Fox River Study Work Group; Jason Solberg, Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association; Emily Steele, Illinois Extension; Michael Woods, Illinois Department of Agriculture; K. Ruehl, unknown

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- Joan briefly went over the new key points section of Ch 8. The key points are:
 - Statewide nutrient level remains elevated above interim targets, especially for phosphorus.
 - Both nitrate-nitrogen and total phosphorus five-year average statewide loads increased compared to the 2011 baseline.
 - Nutrient loads in sub watersheds vary widely across Illinois compared to the 2011 baseline measurements. More research is needed to understand contributing factors besides streamflow including nutrient management, changes in population, hydrology, and legacy nutrients.
 - Practices known to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus loads have been implemented widely and tracking methods have improved across the agricultural, point source, and stormwater sectors since 2011.
 - The point source sector achieved reductions beyond the interim goal of 25% total phosphorus reduction by 2025. In 2021 total phosphorus from point sources had reduced by 31% statewide and 34% by 2022. Reductions were primarily due to compliance with]National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for facilities.
 - In the agriculture sector, nutrient management progress has been good. As of 2021, MRTN use is beyond interim targets according to NASS. Soil Test Phosphorus and Fall-Spring split nitrogen applications are 50% and 60% of interim targets. Nitrogen-inhibitor use is at 82% of the interim target.

- To meet the NLRS water quality goals, support must continue for research, education and outreach, technical assistance, implementation of best management practices, and tracking methods. Integrating climate research into nutrient loss planning will be increasing important.
 - Cindy Skrukud asked whether we could provide a % adoption for MRTN if we are providing it for other practices?

Chapter 8: Future Strategy Considerations & Potential Future Resource Needs

Joan took the group through the draft sections of Ch 8. The following highlight the sections and feedback from the group.

- Future Resource Needs
 - Partners for Planning and Conservation Funding
 - Joan read through the Partners for Planning and Conservation Funding section and ask for feedback. The group discussed the recent amendments and the final bill that passed in the Illinois Legislature very recently.
 - Discussion:
 - Megan Baskerville: Suggests a chart or table to better convey the story of this PFC funding legislation.
 - Albert Cox: Suggests we simply generate a summary from the website. He thought Megan's suggestion might also be helpful.
 - Cindy Skrukud: Folks at IEC, ISA will know the details which will include the amount of dollars in the budget. She agreed with Megan's suggestion. She said it might also be useful to mention the amount of money that the midwestern states are investing. She fears that we continue to lag behind other states in what our legislature is doing to indicate how important they think the problem is.
 - Trevor Sample: If we do include a graph of past PFC funding, how far back do you want to go? We could talk about comparison with other states, but which programs from other states would we include? You could start lumping in a lot of different State programs that other states have. How would we go about getting all that information?
 - Cindy: I realize this could be a can of worms. But perhaps we can document funding from the baseline numbers. I think kind of look at the numbers and then very broadly state something about this is way behind what we're seeing from other states.
 - KJ Johnson: When you were looking for funding levels, was most coming from everyone's general revenue? How were they coming up with those dollars?
 - Cindy: It varies.
 - Corey Lacey: We want to be careful here because if you look at the funding fluctuation is a highly political topic. Instead of saying others are doing more, say we are funding this, and we could use more. Every year we will have to fight for this funding. How we couch that message is important. I think it's really important to keep in the context of where we need to keep working on this and not so much how everybody's doing better than us.
 - Joan read comments from Michael Woods, IL Dept of Ag: Important to note that while \$18 million is being appropriated to the PFC Fund, it isn't entirely clear

whether this allocation is specifically related to supporting new initiatives as outlined in SB1701. (This amount reflects an increase in funding sourced from the General Revenue Fund (up from \$14.4 Million), but over the past two fiscal years that we have received additional funding to direct to SWCDs, there were supplemental transfers from other State funds included in the BIMP that added \$4.1 Million (FY22) and \$5.9 Million (FY23). As for SB1701 itself, this is indeed the iteration that has now passed both chambers and is heading to the Governor's desk. It will be assigned a Public Act number upon being signed into law. The Fall Cover/Spring Savings program is still being funded through GRF, the appropriation is for \$660,000 as it is in FY23.

- Michael Woods: This is a very fluid process. We should stay vague and optimistic. I don't know that we want to get into the weeds of it and rather celebrate our wins. I agree other states may have more funds invested. There are various other reasons why that's happening. For example, Minnesota, is the land of a thousand lakes and they have recreational taxes that contributes to their funding levels. I don't know that we want to get down into the weeds of pinpointing how we compare to other states rather celebrate that we are chipping away in the state of Illinois.
 - Chris Davis: The majority of the report is focusing on what has happened and this is focusing on the future. Do we need to mention this? And are we going too far into the future on things that haven't necessarily happened yet?
 - Michael: That's a great question, Chris. I know earlier today we had a similar conversation that. This section tiptoes into future reports. Trevor, did we come to that conclusion or is that what we're looking for guidance?
 - Trevor: This is where we start to look into the future and talk about what is happening in 2023 since the biennial report will come out this year and talk about what is needed in the next few years.
 - Albert Cox: This focuses on adaptive management, looking at what we have done in the past and how we chart out the future, so I think this is very relevant.
 - Joan asks: Do we want to remove any of this content? Ex. Do we say that NLRS language was removed from the bill?
 - Trevor: We need to summarize the final bill.
 - Dylan Cook: It is my understanding that the NLRS language was removed. I think it makes sense to remove the discussion of structuring cost share assistance to encourage the adoption of soil health and nutrient loss reduction conservation practices. That didn't make it through the final bill when that NLRS language was pulled out. From my perspective I'd say we should talk about what actually happened as opposed to what was proposed.
 - Michael: That is my understanding as well.
 - Corey: The final language is complete, but the funding level is tied to allocation not the bill. That is maybe a level of complication.
 - Joan: We'll try to draft it the best we can, based on the feedback today.
- Alignment with UN's Sustainable Development Goals
 - Joan displayed this section and asked for additions or corrections

- Discussion:
 - Megan: It will be great to see this draft. Are we saying we need communications assistance to be able to translate to our local need and how that all fits together?
 - Raylynn Parmely: I appreciate the larger scale. I almost wonder if the 2022 US EPA nutrient reduction memo might be a better fit than the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
 - Cindy: I like that this section calls for concerted action on a much larger scale.

- Financial Markets
 - Joan goes over the rough outline, issue, and solution and asked for additions or corrections.
 - Discussion:
 - Michael: There's an unprecedented amount of funding coming out of DC that we need to leverage and access. We know that much of that funding is coming around conservation and or climate initiatives and if we could frame a messaging that gives us an impetus or a foundation by which we can start securing some of those funds. To me, it'd be nice to see some of those calls and actions in this chapter so that those out writing applications to bring funds to the state to address both climate conservation and the co-benefits that directly impact in NLRS efforts. I like the idea of being able to put that here because then it's a call to action to say, the NLRS report found these findings and here is one example that should be pursued to secure additional resources to continue to chip away with our set goals.
 - Raelynn: My fear is when we see financial markets as a subheading, I think of private markets and those outcomes are privately driven. I think that focusing on more of the state or federal funds would be a little more appropriate than those private market pieces.
 - Michael: Great point, Raelynn. I appreciate you sharing that.

- Other Potential Future Resource Needs
 - Joan went over the following chapters giving a broad overview of each reiterating that participants will get a chance to see this and make comments later. There were no comments on the following sections.
 - Gulf Hypoxia Funding
 - Soil and Water Conservation Districts
 - Wastewater Treatment Facilities Upgrades
 - Stormwater Best Management Practice Adoption
 - Climate Change and Impacts on Nutrient Management Practice
 - Focus on Disadvantaged Communities

- Any other Potential Future Resource Needs sectors or partnerships that could drive Illinois NLRS forward?
 - Discussion:
 - Corey: I think we should highlight the Fall Covers for Spring Saving program somewhere in this chapter.
 - Joan: Do you think this should be under its own section?

- Corey: I think it makes sense for it to be its own section. I'd invite others to comment on that though.
 - Trevor: This will be talked about in Ch 4 and in the Gulf Hypoxia program funding section.
 - Corey: I feel like it has a place in this section. The Fall Covers for Spring Savings is also a very successful program and a key tool for our growers. We should be advocating for its expansion. .
 - Cindy: Won't we capture the programs that have grown in recent years in the funding graphs we have talked about? I don't disagree that we should say that these programs need to continue to expand.
 - Trevor: Yes, I think we can have a stand-alone section on Fall Covers for Spring Saving program. We can talk to Michael about that since it is an IDOA program. We could just highlight that in the past the demand for acres has outstripped what's made available each year. That's why we are putting some Gulf Hypoxia Program funds towards it, but we could bring that up what the demand has been in the past and show that there's a continue need for funding.
 - Cindy: It might be nice to see a graph showing how the program has grown and the showing the demand vs the supply of cost share availability.
- Tracking Methods and Data Sources under Future Strategy Considerations
 - Ag Nutrient Management Tracking
 - Discussion:
 - KJ: We will release the Illinois Ag Retailer Survey data at the end of August and we could do a short write up on it for this section. I'm open to adding more information about it.
 - Raelynn: I do think that the Ag Retailer Survey warrants additional explanation in this section. Could you detail some of the preparations for that survey that happened in 2022.
 - Trevor: I believe this is included in the Ch 4 write up. We do include the 4R survey from last year and moving forward we will include the results.
 - Agriculture's individual practice Nutrient load reductions could expand tracking
 - Urban Stormwater- Green Infrastructure Inventory could continue
 - Joan solicited additions or corrections. There were no further comments.
 - Nutrient Loss Research under Future Strategy Considerations
 - Legacy Phosphorus
 - Illinois River Basin
 - Climate Research
 - Discussion:
 - Megan: Maybe point to the Illinois Climate Assessment. I think the biggest thing here would be to talk about predicted precipitation and nutrient loading.
 - NREC Studies
 - Joan solicited additions or corrections.
 - Discussion:

- Corey: I see NREC research highlighted here. But should we highlight nutrient loss research being funded by other state organizations? Should we just ask the appropriate contacts to submit a quick paragraph on their funding, projects and money spent?
 - Raelynn: You may be able to add a general bulleted list of NGO funded research. I fear if we listed every NGO funded research study, then you'd be opening quite the can of worms. You wouldn't have neat bullets like you have right now.
 - Corey: I think it would be beneficial to see the total dollars spent on nutrient loss funding spent annually outside of IDOA or IEPA. Could you reach out to the partners in this group and just get numbers spent on research? I think is a really important statement that we need to be making because it says there are a lot of farmer organizations and environmental organizations really working hard on this and putting money behind it. That's an important fact that I think that people would find useful to have in an official report. Could you go back and say the total for every year for the last 5 years? or at least in the last year? Or perhaps report what is anticipated to be spent in the upcoming year. I could get a number from ISA on how many millions of dollars we're spending on research funding related to nutrient loss reduction. If you listed every project, it could turn into a massive list. However, a total number of projects and funding coming from NGOs seems like a valuable piece of information.
 - Joan: This number could be mined from partner's submitted resource and outreach spreadsheets.
- Human and Financial Resources for Implementation in Ag, Point Source and Stormwater sectors
 - Human capital building discusses 80 new staff coming on but training takes time.
 - Inflation Reduction Act discusses conservation funding and the National Debt Ceiling talks
 - Coordinated Messaging needs
 - Financial Incentives for Ag
 - Point Source considerations for maintenance
 - Stormwater technical assistance, maintenance, and tracking needs.
 - Joan solicited additions or corrections. There were no further comments.
 - Joan asked if there were any other topics to discuss in this chapter. There were no further comments.