

Policy Working Group Meeting Notes

Wednesday, February 9
Via Zoom



<p>1:00 – 1:05 pm</p>	<p>Welcome and Introductions – Eliana Brown, University of Illinois Extension</p> <p>This meeting is in response to concerns expressed about phosphorus loads and livestock contributions to nutrient loads. Thanks for sharing concerns and contributing to the discussion.</p> <p>Eliana provided an update on staffing changes. Kate Gardiner left her position at Extension in the early fall. Interviews have been conducted for her replacement and we hope to have a new person on board by the end of February. Jennifer Jones, watershed coordinator in Effingham, has also left Extension. The search process is underway to rehire that position.</p>
<p>1:05 – 2:05 pm</p>	<p>Legacy Phosphorus – Dr. Andrew Margenot, University of Illinois</p> <p>Dr. Margenot discussed lags and gaps in our understand of phosphorous loads in Illinois waterways. His research has focused on the contributions of legacy phosphorous and streambank erosion. Measurements indicate that Illinois’ phosphorus use on ag crops is very efficient and that the legacy phosphorus in the soil is the primary contributor to P loads from farm fields. Studies indicate that it will take a very long time, perhaps a century in some cases, to remove legacy P at the current rate of release.</p> <p>Dr. Margenot’s research on stream bank and stream bed erosion with Dr. Shengnan Zhou shows that relatively minor erosion from stream bank/stream bed can contribute significant P loads to waterways. Studies in Iowa indicate that combating stream bank erosion has significant potential to reduce phosphorus loss that is beyond mitigation measures available through agricultural practices.</p> <p>Q: Are the researcher capturing current manure application in their calculations? A: At the county level, the researchers are looking at manure applications. Federal data only looking at fertilizer sales. Current manure application, however, is not a significant P source compared to other sources discussed.</p> <p>Q: What are typical management practices in P hot spots around the state? A: It depends on the source of P in those hotspots. It might be a soil conservation challenge in sloped areas. If the source is DRP lost from tiles or wrong timing of fertilizer, we would need to look at fertilizer placement. It is also worth looking at erosion risk.</p> <p>Q: Is there concern about phosphorous leaching from fertilizer application in agricultural edge of field areas? A. They may have some. But there is so much P in native soils that is likely to be a bigger contributor. Farmers need to manage erosion itself as well as focusing on the P application challenge.</p>

	<p>Q: The original strategy simplified things by stating that all nonpoint source was agriculture, when in fact ag is a part of nonpoint source, but that there are other nonpoint sources that should be included in the nonpoint source loads, such as streambank/streambed erosion. Do we need to be accounting for point source as part of the legacy?</p> <p>A: It is not possible to equate calculations for non-point to ag because of the way values are attained, but quantifying stream bank erosion is an important piece to understand the whole picture.</p> <p>Q: Please talk more about stream bank BMPs that might mitigate P release.</p> <p>A: Margenot noted he is not a hydrologist, but stabilization efforts seem very effective. They are however expensive. Another approach could be changes in hydrology that affect more than just the stream bank. Channelization can prevent erosion in some cases. It is complex. In some cases, meandering streams can erode more than channelized streams. But Margenot defers to hydrology experts.</p>
<p>2:05 – 2:35 pm</p>	<p>Influence of Livestock on statewide nutrient loads – Dr. Ted Funk, P.E., University of Illinois Extension (retired)</p> <p>Dr. Funk discussed the impact of livestock on non-point source phosphorus loads. Virtually all manure in Illinois is recycled onto crop lands and routinely analyzed. CAFOS are required to regularly test the nutrient content in the manure as well. Illinois doesn't have counties with excess P coming from manure.</p> <p>Changes in animal feed has reduced P in manure. Growth of custom manure hauler industry also allows for timelier pick up and applications. Farmers don't have to consider the farm schedule and hauling distance. Timing of manure application has also been shown to be more flexible than previously thought, so farmers have more options. Rotational grazing of beef and dairy cattle also helps distribute manure.</p> <p>Q. Do we know what percent of operations are using the various new technological improvements?</p> <p>A. For some things, virtually all producers have moved to these practices (like feed change) in the swine industry. As far as commercial hauler, an estimated 70-80% of manure is being applied by custom haulers. There is good adoption of these practices.</p>
<p>2:35 – 2:45 pm</p>	<p>Biennial Report Production Review – Eliana Brown, University of Illinois Extension</p> <p>Eliana provided an overview of how the biennial report has evolved in length and noted that the current report structure is not sustainable given staff, data availability, and budgets. The current report is 2.5 times longer than the first. The 2015 report was 83 pages long. The 2021 report was 210 pages.</p> <p>Comment: Consider evaluating the most impactful pieces of the report and focus there. Perhaps don't repeat information on things like practices and partners that doesn't significantly change from report to report.</p> <p>Comment: Could the report be done every 3 years? That said, we probably need a report in advance of the 2025 benchmarks.</p> <p>Comment: Certain parts and data are used for decision making. That is the most important piece. The recommendations are also important, and the ag data is important. Could the parts about the work that is being done be housed on a website, so it doesn't have to be redescribing in every report?</p>

	<p>Comment: While it is nice to see trends, the speaker is not sure the state is getting much value from tracking a particular number. There is more usefulness and importance of good analysis. It would be useful to incorporate those things into the report. The speaker could accept a less frequent tallying of the basic numbers in exchange for more interpretation of the data.</p> <p>Comment: If we keep the current timeline, the degree of copy-editing may have to decrease. Alternatively, we could also change the timeline so that the report is published later. The hardest part is waiting for the previous year's data. Another option is to only report on 1 year, so that we have more time to synthesize data. We could also report on data that is 2 years old so that there is time to analyze.</p> <p>Comments: The speaker is a big fan of the report. It is a challenge to explain what we have all been doing and it is important to remember why we decided to do this. The memo from EPA outlined the need for reporting. But we have some flexibility. The original timing was geared around opportunities to talk to public. Maybe that is not as important now that people know about the work. We want to prioritize quality over quantity in terms of the information. Let's do a well-done robust analysis. Please keep the space for the stakeholder participation. It could be in an appendix. People are doing things because they are going to be in the document. Important that we continue.</p>
2:45 – 2:55 pm	<p>Iowa Nutrient Strategy Dashboard – Trevor Sample, Illinois EPA</p> <p>Iowa has moved away from annual updates or progress reports. They are time consuming and strain resources. Instead, Iowa is in the process of designing a nutrient loss reduction dashboard. The dashboard has graphs and displays data in a visual format. It is not complete, but some components are available. https://nrstracking.cals.iastate.edu/tracking-iowa-nutrient-reduction-strategy</p> <p>The dashboards will be updated as data becomes available. Some narratives will be included but they will be much less extensive. Should Illinois consider this format?</p> <p>Comment: Iowa's message gets out well. It seems like this is a flexible approach to help people get our message out.</p> <p>Comment: What would the savings of time and money be? (We don't have the answer.) If we go this route, finding a way to display a short narrative periodically when the data is significant would be important.</p>
3:05 – 3:30 pm	<p>Partners for Conservation Funding Bill – Max Webster, American Farmland Trust</p> <p>Max Webster provided an overview of SB 3471 Partners for Nutrient Loss Reduction Act. This is the third time a version of this bill has been introduced. The goal is to get long term, increased funding for implementation of NLRs goals. The bill won't likely pass as is. More discussion is needed to make sure this legislation provides what is needed.</p> <p>Key components of the bill as written include 1) healthy soils and watershed initiative, 2) updated nonpoint source management program, 3) state-owned and leased ag</p>

	<p>lands integration and potential for demonstration, 4) require NLRS reporting and tracking, 5) update and extends partners for conservation.</p> <p>Q. is there anything that can be done to increase controls on stream bank erosion A. Stream bank erosion grant program is one of the programs that could be funded through Partners for Conservation. It would be about allocating resources. 319 programs can also be used for those purposes.</p> <p>Q. American Rescue Plan Act funds can be used for water infrastructure. Is there any opportunity to get our state legislators to allocate funds to NLRS goal? A. Yes could use those funds to implement practices, but the Governor’s office would have to support, and the legislature would have to provide guidance. This isn’t a long-term solution.</p> <p>Comment: Counties and towns also received ARP funds. Participants should check with County Boards to discuss possibilities. This is more promising and more locally impactful than trying to allocate state funds.</p>
3:30 – 3:50 pm	<p>Illinois Climate Smart Ag Initiative – Dr. Michael Woods, Illinois Dept. of Agriculture</p> <p>Illinois Climate Smart Ag Partnerships is an Illinois Department of Ag initiative to expanding financial and education assistance to producers by building on and expanding existing programs and partnerships. This is not an effort to replace the NLRS but is designed to augment efforts.</p> <p>A working group has been convened to give advice on program design and components. The working group has proposed eight initial recommendations. Those recommendations have been compiled in a white paper that is currently out for review. If anyone wants to review the white paper or provide comment, email Max Webster. mwebster@farmland.org.</p>
3:50 – 3:55 pm	<p>Gulf Hypoxia Program – Trevor Sample, Illinois EPA</p> <p>In 2019-2020 USEPA provided \$200K for nutrient strategy purposes. Funds went to 4 projects related to NLRS goals and research needs.</p> <p>The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law was signed in November 2021 and provides additional funds to the 12 Hypoxia Task Force states to implement nutrient strategies. This new grant program will provide approximately \$1 million per year for five years to each state. Guidelines are being written now. Once released, states will have 60 days to develop a workplan.</p> <p>Illinois is considering using funds for continuing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ U of I Extension: NLRS meeting facilitation and reporting ■ U of I Extension: Watershed coordinators and science team ■ USGS continuous nutrient monitoring network and annual nutrient loads reporting ■ Additional funding: Support additional metrics tracking, reporting, monitoring, and studies needed to fill data gaps <p>Comment: This could solve some of the heartburn about need for additional resources. Bipartisan. Very positive.</p>

3:55 – 4:15 pm	<p>Open discussion – Lisa Merrifield, University of Illinois Extension</p> <p>Albert Ettinger – This meeting was interesting and did address some of my question. I suggest the scientists meet and identify sources we haven't addressed and then present that. We heard about legacy P issue today, so maybe we need to be thinking about what streams need to be dredged. Can we get a group together to identify what needs to be done? Should we be directing funds to streambank erosion?</p> <p>Rick Manner – I'd be curious on the sequence on when did the work presented today get started/when contracts awarded? It would be helpful for news to get to the group when the research projects with significance to the NLRS gets started. This is the first I heard I heard of these projects. It would be better to know beforehand and to direct some of it. It is obvious that our simplified model was overly simplistic. We overlooked a significant source. I will endorse Albert's suggestion regarding a meeting of science group to identify sources we haven't addressed.</p> <p>Lauren Lurkins – I think one of the places I'm thinking about is that Rick needs to come to NREC discussions. NREC puts out their RFP. There is a call out to scientists. We've tried to simplify to get action. The other part I want to highlight is how it all connects to the Science Team. We've had major investments. It's crucial to educate. Climate impact needs to be acknowledged.</p> <p>Dick Lyons – I've been using soil health practices, and this will change things. We are opening up new things with these soil health practices.</p> <p>Albert Cox – I want to add to Lauren's last point. It is the Policy Benchmark Committee's responsibility to look at this at more detail. It's time to reconvene to see if we need to revise how we track data. We need to be putting focus on the 80% nitrogen from the agriculture sector.</p> <p>Mark Schleusener – NASS will once again be conducting the NLRS survey. The first and second mailings will go out February 25 and March 28, respectively. If you have an email blast going out, publicity will be helpful. A news release is coming soon.</p> <p>Catie Gregg – 1. The phosphorous information we heard today is new info; where is this research in terms of adding practices? Is there sufficient information to add it? 2. Climate change; I question the assumption that it will take us longer to get to our goal. It may mean that conventional practices are less well adapted to climate change.</p> <p>Trevor Sample – There is a process for adding practices. See link: https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/water-quality/watershed-management/excess-nutrients/Documents/NLRS-Practice-Approval Process Updated 202104.pdf</p> <p>Cindy Skrukrud – I want to be the squeaky wheel on funding and remind us to work to secure some of the American Recovery Act Plan. The \$8B is separate from the funds Trevor talked about.</p> <p>Alec Davis – I want to share that I found today really informative and a reset. Wish we had the insight before to know that we need Adaptive Management. But the importance of this is really proven to be a very worthwhile endeavor. We have a big</p>

	<p>problem, limited resources, but we keep learning more. Today was a reaffirmation that we're doing the best we can. It is good to plan but we need to course correct sometimes.</p>
4:15 – 4:20 pm	<p>Wrap up – Trevor Sample and Michael Woods</p> <p>Thanks to everyone who attended. We are looking to policy workgroup members for feedback on the process and concerns. Traditionally we have met twice a year, but we are considering another meeting this summer to continue the conversation. We look forward to continued discussion.</p> <p>Our next AWQPF meeting is scheduled for Feb 16 and will build on efforts from today.</p>