

MINUTES

Western Lake Erie Basin Partnership - Leadership Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 3, 2008 ♦ 10:00 AM – 3:15 PM

North Cape Yacht Club
11840 Toledo Beach Rd
LaSalle Michigan 48145

Coffee /Visitation

9:45 – 10:00

1. Opening Remarks

10:00 – 10:05

(LTC Hurley, Cosby)

- Agency and state representatives introduced themselves. Cathryn Loucas has replaced Vicki Deisner as the representative for the Gov of Ohio. Those in attendance were given the chance to introduce themselves – see attachments for sign-in sheet. LTC Hurley announced that this is his last meeting as he will be leaving LRB in June 2008. LTC Hurley thanked Steve Shine and Ginger Bardenhagen of Michigan Department of Agriculture for setting up our lunch today. Everyone was reminded to give Ginger \$8 for lunch if they have not already done so.

2. Minutes and Old Business

10:05 – 10:10 (Forget/Davis)

Minutes (Tab 23)

Davis, Forget

Review of action items by Craig Forget – all action items completed except 2 (strategic plan tracking, annual progress meeting) – covered in more detail later in the agenda.

Motion – by Rep of Gov of Michigan, and second by Rep of USGS – approved by all.
All past meeting minutes are posted online at www.wleb.org

3. Signing of the Blanchard River Flood Damage Reduction Study Feasibility Cost-Share Agreement

10:10 – 10:20 (LTC Hurley)

Findlay OH FCSA Signing LTC Hurley Comments

Today we have the opportunity to celebrate one of the many successes of the **Western Lake Erie Basin** partnership. Blanchard was the first watershed the Corps began to look at, and was identified as an area in need of Flood Damage Reduction projects prior to the floods in Dec 2006, Jan 2007 and Aug 2007. We began working with the City of Findlay and Former Mayor Tony Iriti who sent us a letter of request to help with this project in April 2007. Unfortunately, the Corps was unable to help before the floods, but the floods have served to solidify support and funding for this project.

As part of the efforts of the Western Lake Erie Basin feasibility study, the need for a localized flood damage reduction project for the City of Findlay, OH was identified.

History of floods: 1913, 1959 (2), 1981, 1997, 2007 (multiple)

The total estimated cost for this study is **\$800,000** which includes a local commitment of over \$350,000. This is a two to three year study that will identify and evaluate alternatives to reduce the impacts of flooding in the City of Findlay of Hancock County, Ohio. Key contributors to get to this point are numerous.

4. Presentation – St Joe Watershed CPPI Update

10:20-10:50 (Davis)

Update on NRCS funding and implementation in St. Joseph's watershed.

Update on St. Joe Watershed Project

Joe Draper, TNC, Ed Crawford and John Kessler, ODNR, Others

- Ed Crawford – In 2006 this rapid assessment process was started to develop a resources assessment tool.
- Joe Draper, TNC - introduction of Pete Hippensteel – Pete is a retired biology professor from Tri-State University in Indiana. He will talk today about the project thus far. The next step in the project will be to do work on the ground, using the tool.
- Presentation by Pete Hippensteel
 - Project aims to create a quick and simple technique for the prioritization of buffer placement. Data is divided into thirds (3 worst – 1 best) to help make general splits that make watershed level decisions easier to make. Data was compiled for the 9 HUC-11 watersheds – percent cropland, percent natural vegetation, percent cropland in buffer zone, water quality (bacteria, atrazine, and TSS), and species occurrences. Only significant differences between data scores were considered useful, due to nature of data. HUC-11s were ranked first, and then the HUC-14s were ranked within each HUC-11. This allows prioritization of efforts to the HUC-11s, then down to the HUC-14 within those priority watersheds. The use of aerial photos allows the conservation districts to then move to the site level, based on the issues they are addressing. The ranking can be implemented on a county level within about one week's time if the GIS data is available.

NEW ARRIVALS

New arrivals to the meeting were introduced

- Gary Lee – State Conservationist – Michigan and Katie Bibish from Marcy Kaptur's office.

5. Committee Reports and Administrative Items

10:50-11:30 (Friona/Davis)

Outreach Committee – Robert McCall

- Thanks for Ohio Lake Erie Commission's office staff for their involvement in the committee – we appreciate their efforts.
- Strategy for Watershed Groups – let Robert know if you want to get involved in the development of this strategy– an outlined has been drafted
- Plan for Public Relations – plan for building on the theme of 'watershed mentality'. Pairing of news releases with seasonal events and WLEB partnership events.

Website and Newsletter - Chris Riddle

- See handout for details – discussed website, web calendar, and best local land use practices video project. Asked for agencies to volunteer for the Agency Focus section in the newsletter.

Projects Committee – Ed Crawford (Project Data Base)

- Projects Database – they are still working on testing to work out a few minor problems they are facing with it. Hope to have it worked out by May or June. – web address was distributed with handout to leadership group. Requested that agencies have their staff add their projects. Steve provided a handout (see attachments) reminding WLEB partners of the procedure to access and use the data base. There is a tutorial at the end of the user's manual which can be accessed and printed once you receive your user id and password and login into the data base.

Research Committee – Jim Morris, (Ohio Water Withdrawal Atlas)

- Water Atlas – water withdrawal information is categorized by county and by HUC-8 watersheds, in Ohio and entire WLEB. Any facility that has the ability to withdrawal 100,000 gpd must register with the state and provide an annual report. Includes actual use, return flows, type of use, source, etc. Power uses are nearly 75% of total draw in Ohio. A website has been created to display the data by county and by HUC-8 watershed. WLEB data sheet is on the web to view – you can link to the atlas from the WLEB site.
- Question from the Rep for ODNR – how does this stack up to total use, based on private home withdrawals, etc?
 - Answer: We are not sure how this stacks up. This is only major facility use.
- USGS is also doing an investigation report of the data networks and monitoring in the project area – it asks the question - is the data out there good enough? Report will help show where flow and water quality data is available. This data is shown based on what is collected, who collects it, and when. This project should be complete by summer. It will help identify the gaps in the data.

Operations Committee Update – Steve Davis & Tony Friona

- Maumee Valley RC&D Funding – A reminder – it is time to renew your participation agreement for your stipend if you have one.
 - There are several potential projects that the Committee would like to ask Leadership to consider. First is an effort to help with carrying out local watershed group strategic plans with \$50,000 in challenge grants, much like the LEPF small grants are handled. A second opportunity – MRBPLG is looking to educate local elected officials on storm water management with a focus on why storm water management is necessary. Another \$50,000 would be put up to match additional funding already secured for this project. Finally, \$5,000 in funding would be made available to help with the Best Local Land Use Practices video that the OLEC is doing. This would include funding the distribution of the video to every community government in Ohio's portion of the WLEB project area.

Funding Committee – Kristy Meyer

- Craig Forget – introduction of Kristy – welcoming her back from maternity leave. Copy of *The Lorax* was given to her for her new baby daughter Jocelyn.

- Kristy – thanked everyone for their welcome back. She is glad to be involved with the WLEB again.

Other WLEB Business – All

- LTC Hurley – Asked that everyone please be sure to help all these committees out – they are doing the heavy lifting – they need the help of the full group to complete the follow through on their projects – such as populating the database.

6. MI WLEB Cooperative Partnership Agreement

11:30-11:40 (Davis)

- Announcement by Michigan Partners – NRCS related (Davis)
- Jim Johnson & Herb Smith (MI Tech Committee Representative) -
 - Jim – Welcomed everyone to a great day in Michigan. He announced their formal entry into the project on behalf of the State of Michigan's Department of Agriculture. He said that Lake Erie is a world class resource– it is important both nationally and internationally. Through this partnership Michigan will be advancing its water quality efforts in Southeast Michigan. This effort adds 3 additional people in 6 counties in SE Michigan addressing water quality issues. He introduced Nate and Sarah – 2 of the 3 that will be doing the work. Through collaboration with Environmental Defense Fund and other partners, this project has been possible – it is the only way a project this large and an issue this important can get the attention it needs. He closed by saying that in the end, the land benefits, the water benefits, and our quality of life benefits. He feels these are bold and noble goals.
 - Herb – Spoke of the importance of buffer strips and the importance of our water.
- Plaque from Environmental Defense for Margaret O'Dell who brought over \$5M to the WLEB and is leaving the Joyce Foundation
 - presented by LTC & Terry. **(LTC Hurley/Cosby)**
 - Presented a thank you to Margaret O'Dell for her help with obtaining the Joyce Foundation funding – it has been a critical part of this project. She received a plaque recognizing her as a “Friend of the Western Basin”.

Margaret – Thanked everyone for this very touching act – she is leaving to pursue many of these same issues abroad.

7. Special Presentation #1

11:45-12:10 (Davis)

Beneficial Reuse of Animal Waste for energy production and soil amendments

Terry Cosby introduced Debbie Reed. She is here to talk about an exciting initiative that she is working on.

The Ohio Biochar Demonstration Project

Debbie Reed, IBI Coordinator
International Biochar Initiative

Debbie apologized that Joe Logan of Ohio Farmers Union was not able to attend today.

- This project is not about energy – it is about environmental benefit, even though it includes the combustion of manure.

- Biochar is a fine, porous charcoal substance formed via controlled, thermal conversion of biomass in the partial or complete absence of oxygen.
- Biochar is resistant to decomposition, and it absorbs and holds onto nutrients during its development – nutrient leaching is inhibited, but they are bioavailable to crops.
- Increases total N and P, increases cation exchange capacity, hosts beneficial fungi and microbes, and improves soil fertility and crop productivity, reduces soil erosion.
- This project is relevant to global climate change – if atmospheric CO₂ levels are to be leveled over the next 50 years, ways to reduce CO₂ already in the air will have to be explored as a part of this effort.
- Biochar halts the decay of biomass carbon in a virtually permanent carbon sink, preventing atmospheric re-release. Pyrolysis of biomass can capture up to 50% of C from biomass in the stable biochar structure.
- Biochar demo project – our project will be using dairy cow manure.
- Waste goes into Pyrolysis system, 50% of C in char is captured, 50% becomes energy – which will be used to dry the manure to 10% moisture content, which is optimal for this project. The Biochar product will be a valuable product of the process.
- Future goal – to include this in carbon trading systems.
- We are currently in the planning phase through January 2009, when on ground work will begin.
- Would like to license technology and have it built in Ohio – to optimize for Biochar, not for energy, which is what other similar projects across the country have done.
- This project should have Biochar for 500-1300 acres from 300-500 head farm.
- Also potential for use in greenhouse application.
- Hope to implement 5 plots (ideally in 5 soil types) - these will include control (1), biochar (2), and biochar plus compost (2).
- International Biochar Initiative – www.biochar-international.org
- Questions:
 - o Is demo site chosen? No.
 - o What is application schedule/volume? There is debate on this. Likely a toxicity level due to bio-oil content. Seems 2-5 tons/acre is the best range – still working this out.
 - o Looking at ways to pelletize it, and no-til drill it, as currently it is plowed in.
 - o What funding is need, where are you asking? Asking state, fed, local, and national sources. Joyce Foundation has provided some funding. Additional funding needed to build the system.
 - o Also considering a bench top trial system to create an activated carbon that effluent would be run through – to capture the nutrients.
 - o How does this compare with cost of current fertilizer costs? Currently, Biochar is not cost effective versus most fertilizers, but the Biochar costs are a bit in the dark as of yet. Still working on what the true cost is – but expect it to become feasible in the future.
 - o How does this work with P in the ground? There are a few good research questions about bioavailability P with this amendment in the ground.
 - o Impact of pelletization on surface area? Not sure how it will impact – depends on binding agent.

8. Lunch – 12:10 – 1:00

9. Special Presentation #2

1:00-1:55 (Davis)

Using plant science to create efficiencies in agricultural markets

Green Lands – Blue Waters Initiative

Don Wyse,
Professor, Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics
University of Minnesota

Steve introduced Don Wyse, who talked on the topic of how do we create landscape systems that create ecosystem services for soil and water conservation, with an economic pull and income stream for the landowner or landuser.

Nutrient cycling, wildlife management, carbon sequestration are all things (ecosystem services) we want and to be successful we need to create these benefits within the economic landscape farmers face today in their farm operations.

It is difficult if not impossible to fix problems in the context of a strict, annual cropping rotation system. The Green Lands – Blue Waters group is looking at the opportunities to use perennial plants that provide higher levels of conservation benefits, and at the same time serve economic purposes similar to today's current row crop systems. Many of these projects are enterprise projects – they are early in their research and development – their economic benefit is down the road.

The past 20 years has been about describing the problem – monitoring our rivers and streams and things most of us care about – water, landscape, and the future (kids). Agriculture focuses on yield – not on energy inputs or environmental impacts. A Multifunctional Agricultural Food System produces ecosystem services. Current agricultural systems do not produce ecosystem services. They are high input – simplified production systems.

In the 60's, the multi function farm left the area with loss of the livestock as a part of the farm system. Change at the landscape level has been going on for over 200 years, including removal of bison from the Prairies, dust bowl, movement to cities, erosion, confined feeding operations, impacts to lakes and Gulf of Mexico, impacts to human health through food. This begins to frame the full context of the environmental and human health perspective that needs considered. Corn and soybeans now dominate the landscape. This is to produce feed for feed lots and add the production of ethanol from corn to this. CO2 levels are outside of anything we have seen in 400,000 years. Systems are leaky – there is a lack of active growing plants on many fields in many areas for many months. There is a difference between 40 lbs of Nitrate leaving a tile system with corn on BMPs vs 2 lbs pounds leaving a system with perennial plants.

Today's landscape is dominated by monoculture of row crops. Don showed a series of slides that documented the change in one agricultural landscape over time, from a landscape of many small fields with sparse amounts of perennial vegetation, to one few large fields with a scarcity of perennial vegetation.

What are the drivers for landscape change back to one of perennial vegetation with increased ecosystem services? They are based on potential end use products from perennial cropping systems – grain, fruit, vegetables, fiber, biomass, meat, milk, glucose, fatty acids, liquid fuels, industrial solvents, paints, antioxidants, proteins, essential oils, etc. For example the 3M Company asked Don's group– what happens if we make an overnight switch from oil based to organic based economy. Are we ready with plant products to provide the needed raw materials to make glue for example? The answer was no, which prompted this initiative.

Don asked, "What will draw the next generation of scientists into agriculture and natural resources?" He then presented several examples of perennial cropping systems that could in future provide sustainable provide economic returns and ecosystem conservation services....Organic Crops,

Energy Crops (Biorefinery Concept), Oil crops (ie Lilac – scent/biomass for energy), Perennial Crops for Biomass Energy, Agroforestry Systems, and Perennial Oil Seed Crops for industrial uses.

His list also included Wetland Restoration (for production of high value plant materials), Cover crops for high N use efficiency, and drought tolerance for crops and cover crops to conserve water.

The goal of Green Lands – Blue Waters is to build capacity of stakeholders, develop economically viable enterprises, and support policy changes. Their strategy to do this is working through a coalition of land grant institutions, other universities, and other partners to increase research, development and adoption/utilization of perennial crop production systems.

The group seeks broad-based support from nontraditional groups to focus and leverage existing resources and tap into new funding sources to drive change. Ohio institutions are and can become involved in the initiative. Don encouraged the WLEB partners to become involved and support their effort. Additional information may be obtained from their website at: www.greenlandsbluwaters.org

10. USACE WLEB Study Update Update from USACE

1:55- 2:50 (Forget/Friona)

Craig Forget and Tony Friona

Tony Friona - It is important to remember that this project is split into two parts, NRCS is involved with implementation on the ground while USACE is working on feasibility reports to Congress (Maumee, Portage, Ottawa). On top of these federal efforts, the partnership of volunteers and other groups involved in the effort are making strides across the basin. It is also important to consider scale, as we are dealing with a large area, half the size of the Everglades. Finally, you need to keep in mind the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration. This entire project will be nested within this framework.

Reminder on the upcoming Portage River Basin Meeting – a notice will be going out soon.

USACE – Feasibility Study the 50% review is posted. This is the “In Progress Review”

- The goal of the in progress review is to get the leadership organizations to review the project reports thus far and look for major themes, major projects from projects database, and to provide photos and graphics that can be added to the report.
- A secure website has been set up – please go there, review the documents – provide comments, needs, etc as necessary. This is also the place to upload documents, photos, etc. If you have problems, contact Tom Denbow directly.

LTC Hurley – This is an internal WLEB leadership review, then there will be a USACE review, then a full partnership review, then a final document. This is only the first step in the process, and only with a limited audience at this point. The question is, what does “right” look like? There are 3 bullets – major themes missing, projects missing, and pictures or graphics that help tell the story. These are things we need considered now. There are timelines – Contributions begin to be due on April 24th – 3 weeks from now (see timeline below). Addressing these bullets during this timeframe is the key. Deadlines: April 24 – Blanchard, Lower Maumee, Tiffin; May 19 – Ottawa, Auglaize, Saint Marys, Maumee Bay; May 27 – Upper Maumee, Portage, St Joseph.

A question was asked regarding the types of projects that should be included in this effort. USACE would like not just Federal level project, but all good projects – federal, state, local, NGO, for all 5 categories – navigation, flood risk management, water quality, recreation, fish and wildlife habitat.

Tony Friona & Steve Davis

Question – An attendee asked about the relationship between the two sets of reports from the two lead agencies.

Answer: There is an important connection between the reports (USACE and NRCS):
NRCS – looks at existing conditions and discussion of Best Management Practices (BMPs), along with habitat and soils. USACE – has more of a focus on structural issues and flooding. There will be a lot of overlap in info on resource conditions and solutions, but they will come at it from different sides – i.e. USDA document includes a tie in to Farm Bill Programs. This is due to in-house expertise that is different between the agencies, due to the core mission of each agency. For the sake of the project's success, this is necessary as it takes both sides to get at this issue. The USACE report goes to Congress in 1 year – so there is 1 year of review at this point, which begins with the Leadership Review that was just discussed.

Question: A question was asked about the Findlay/Ottawa area feasibility study – how does it fit in?

Answer: This was part of an immediate need that was able to be addressed through a more thorough, on the ground effort. This is an example of a spinoff of the original feasibility study – USACE considers this a successful outcome of the initial effort, in that a more focused, locally supported effort has been undertaken.

Terry Cosby – It is important to remember that the USDA reports help determine where USDA dollars should be focused in the various watersheds.

Craig Forget – There are two Section 205 Flood Damage Reduction projects on the Blanchard (City of Findlay, City of Ottawa). The Section 441 authority allows for a Blanchard watershed wide effort in partnership with NW Ohio Flood Reduction Inc, to look at Flood Damage Reduction, ecosystem restoration, and wetland creation for the rest of the watershed – including other smaller cities in the Basin. The Section 441 authority only allows for study, there is no authority for implementation and construction. Section 205 allows for study, design, and implementation of Flood Damage Reduction projects. .

Question: Will these reports include a request for funding to go along with the projects?

Answer: The USACE cannot lobby for funds, they can just provide a report on what the list of projects would be and what the costs are associated with those projects. It is up to Congress to make a decision on implementation of the projects within the report. Any request for funding or lobbying for projects would be up to other groups. As an example, the states could go to Congress to request funds, or they could fund projects themselves. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can also pick up and fund pieces from these projects.

11. Open Discussion/Unfinished Business**2:50-3:00**

Discussion on Process for Compiling Strategic Plan Progress (Davis/Friona)

Davis – Strategic Plan Progress – operations group will have a face-to-face meeting to deal with this within the next 4-6 weeks. They will go through the document and develop a checklist mechanism. Friona– There is a need to make sure there is a bridge between the assessments and the strategic plan.

Representative of USFWS – Provided a handout on USFWS Great Lakes Coastal Program. The Coastal Program was brought to the Great Lakes and Alaska in 2000.

12. Adjourn**3:00 (LTC Hurley/Cosby)**

Closing Remarks

Cosby – Thank you to Joe, who is sitting in the back. He is a member of the yacht club that had to be here with us so we could use this facility. Prior to the next meeting the leadership team will to gather an hour or so early to discuss a few items of importance in relation to discussions with Congresswoman Kaptur.

LTC Hurley is here for his last meeting. He is headed to Washington for a new assignment. Cosby presented him with a set of new binoculars in appreciation of his hard work.

Hurley – Commented that he is taking on the opportunity to work in the Pentagon on civil projects for the USACE. Prior to coming here he thought partnerships were the way to go – now he feels full well it is the only way to go. The federal government needs to leverage the abilities and authorities of others to complete projects. He gave a thank you to everyone for their hard work and enthusiasm on this project. There is still a lot of work to be done, we are not there yet.

Friona – Next meeting date will be set electronically to work around field season.

#	Action items	Person Responsible	Deadline	Status
1	Strategic Plan – Add one sentence on the primary focus of document to the cover page.	Davis	1 Sep 07	Complete
2	In addition to the Strategic Plan, create a Strategic Plan Assessment/Evaluation document that also includes a “Progress” Column as a tool to track progress	Davis	31 Jan 07	Ongoing
3	At annual progress meeting in the spring or fall, review Strategic Plan action items that have been completed within the past year.	Operations Committee	15 Mar 07	Ongoing
4	Prepare Executive Summary of strategic plan	Operations Committee	31 Aug 07	Complete
5	Provide any final comments on Strategic Plan for minor tweaks (not major changes) to Steve Davis	Leadership Committee	24 Aug 07	Complete
6	Revise Strategic Plan and post to WLEB.ORG	Operations Committee	31 Aug 07	Complete
7	Do press release for release of Strategic Plan	Outreach Committee	7 Sep 07	Complete

8	Submit project ideas to the Projects Database.	Projects Committee		Ongoing
9	Submit events to the web calendar.	Outreach Committee		Ongoing
10	Submit articles and events for the October newsletter.	Outreach Committee	1 Aug 2008	Ongoing
11	Development of Strategic Plan tracking form.	Operations Committee	31 Aug 08	Ongoing
12	Submit comments on the USACE Blanchard, Lower Maumee, and Tiffin watershed assessments.	ALL	24 April 08	Ongoing
13	Submit comments on the USACE Ottawa, Auglaize, Saint Mary's, and Maumee Bay watershed assessments	ALL	19 May 2008	Ongoing
14	Submit comments on the USACE Upper Maumee, Portage, and St. Joseph watershed assessments	ALL	27 May 2008	Ongoing