

SPAC Habitat Monitoring and Long-Term Maintenance Subcommittee

March 22, 2023

Meeting Minutes

Via Microsoft Teams 11AM-12

In Attendance:

Bill Craig, Chair – Rouge River AOC

Dan Ballnik, Rouge River AOC

Robert Burns, Detroit AOC

Eric Diesing, St. Clair AOC

Melanie Foose, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)

Richard Hobrla, EGLE

Noel Mullett, Rouge River AOC

John O'Meara – Detroit/Rouge River AOCs

Kimberly Passick, EGLE

Opening – Bill Craig

Bill started the meeting and shared that he met with Eric on his last day at the watershed council to ask some questions and it gave him some information that helped him get some clarity on the direction and purpose of the committee. Eric shared that he hoped to serve as a resource for the subcommittee. He is happy to answer questions on monitoring and maintenance, resources and how to leverage them, or anything else he can answer.

Michigan volunteer monitoring – Bill

Bill shared that [MiCorps](#) is a great resource for habitat for monitoring efforts by citizen scientists. They do water quality monitoring, clean ups, and have some equipment that can potentially be loaned out for use by other organizations. MiCorps has some grant funding from EGLE, and they have several of their own grant programs that the AOCs may find useful. Through discussion it was noted that there is monitoring occurring and funding available, they just need to find sources these sources and learn about their programs.

Bill also mentioned that as he read through the previous minutes, it seems that the comments and questions seem to fall within certain categories, and in his view are similar to the “buckets” used in the AOC Action Plans. These would be: monitoring, maintenance, funding, and stewardship. He plans to start organizing these questions and comments by category so the subcommittee can begin addressing them.

Watershed Hub Stakeholders Webinar, March 1 - Bill

This was for professional USGS monitoring for sanitary stormwater. And applied more to *E. coli* issues. There were lots of research folks on the webinar and Bill said it was very technical. The main issues they discussed were trying to get a hold on discharges associated with *E. coli* to determine where problems are and working toward the development and use of technology. This webinar was explaining some of their plans to improve water quality. Noel shared that the Great Lakes Water Authority is the administrator for the Regional Master Plan. CSOs are a priority but they want to expand to regional water quality and bridge the gap between MS4s and

CSOs.

Restoration plan targets Saginaw River and Bay – Bill

Bill shared that he had had been doing some reading about the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) program, which has similar structures to the AOC program but a private party is responsible to fund cleanup and restorations. Specifically he was reading the [Tittabawassee River – Saginaw River & Bay Natural Resource Trustee Councils Draft Supplemental Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment](#) document. Two pages of the document that he wanted to highlight were 18 and 19 which can be found at the end of these minutes. There is a figure on page 18 that shows a model that connects the stages from start to long-term stewardship, Good talking points for the group would be to identify where the gaps are. One gap is concern for projects once contractor leaves the site, what happens then? What need for monitoring is there at that early point? One to five years is more short term – 10+ long term. John said Bill was on the right track with the transition to stewardship, EGLE has five years of required monitoring for wetlands because once the site is established it allows it to fight off invasives better. In the gap years from three to five or six how is that managed? Some feel that the land owner should do it but trying to get people to focus on this period instead of a long-term commitment is less scary once it's established. The may only have to do actual tasks every two or three 3 years. In talking with EPA, could there be maintenance funding that may be able to help bridge that gap or make it less daunting for land owners? Giving folks a guide to navigate sites may help. After 10 years or so projects are basically absorbed into the environment so the mid-term is the more critical timeframe by making sure it stays healthy.

General Discussion - All

There was discussion about SEMCOG's (Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) [Lake St. Clair Watershed Implementation Priorities Plan](#) and the CISMA program (.Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas). All AOCs are in SISMA areas and could be another resource. Rick added that there are CISMA's that cover the entire state but some are more active than others. The Michigan's Invasive Species Grant Program provides grant funding for CISMAs so they could be yet another resource for PACs.

Bill asked how folks would like to proceed in discussion for future meetings and Eric offered to answer questions that come up for the group in regard to projects, monitoring, and some of the organizations and funding sources that he has come across.

Bill extended an invitation for everyone to send in questions to him and he will organize them into categories to see what stimulates conversation. There was mention of having some guests come to speak to the group such as a CISMA coordinator. Melanie asked if the group would be interested in having Tamara Lipsey join as she works with MiCorps. There was also interest in inviting someone from one of the delisted AOCs to see how their habitat projects are doing?

Some other questions that bubbled up over the course of discussion were:

- How do you get a plan for maintenance after the project is done?
- What needs to be done, when, by whom, etc.?
- Who will do that work?
- Relationship between landowner and organizations to accomplish goals. What could this

process look like? High profile projects could be easier to navigate. Some are more isolated (orphan sites) that may not have strong community support.

- How do you share knowledge of how to maintain a site with property owners as most people wouldn't have that knowledge?
- What about orphan sites? How do you interest/involve the community in supporting these sites?

At the end of the meeting, Rick Hobrla said this was his last and thanked everyone for the great work they've done and to keep it up. He wished them all well in the future. Bill congratulated him on his retirement and thanked him for his long service to improving Michigan's environment.

Follow-up items

- Bill will receive and categorize questions and comments from the members of the committee for future discussion.
- Bill will add discussion of the NRDAR model to the next agenda.
- Melanie will reach out to Tamara Lipsey and invite her to come and discuss MiCorps.
- Eric will reach out to see if a CISMA representative will come speak.

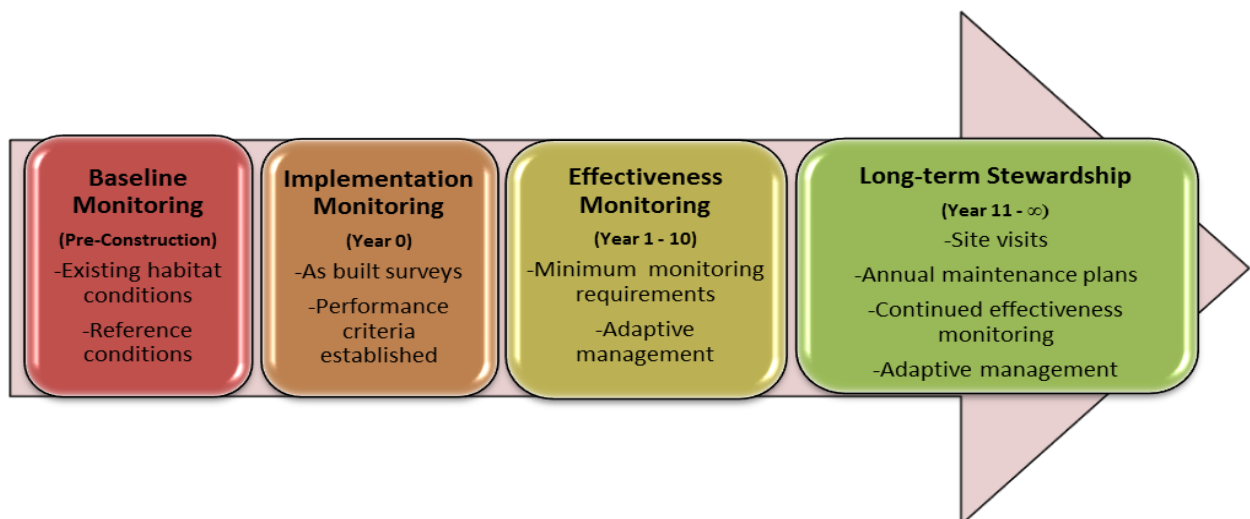
Meeting ended at Noon.

Next meeting is set for Wednesday, May 3, at 11 am.

2.2.4 Monitoring and Stewardship

Monitoring, project maintenance, and long-term stewardship are intended to ensure that restoration projects provide long-term benefits to injured resources. The Trustees envision that project monitoring will consist of three primary components: baseline monitoring, implementation monitoring, and effectiveness monitoring (Figure 2-1). Baseline monitoring is used to assess the current condition of a project area prior to the initiation of implementation. Implementation monitoring tracks and documents the individual components of project implementation to ensure that a project is implemented as proposed. Effectiveness monitoring is intended to evaluate the degree to which the expected outcomes, in parameters related to ecological restoration and ecological services, are achieved.

Figure 2-1. Restoration Project Site Stewardship Model.



Planning and provision for long-term stewardship within the design of each restoration project whenever practicable increases the probability that each restoration project will continue to benefit injured resources long after initial project implementation. Ideally, long-term project stewardship would continue beyond 10 years following implementation, and more preferably would include mechanisms to ensure maintenance of ecological condition in perpetuity. In evaluating proposed restoration projects, the Trustees consider the likelihood that project proponents will be able to provide appropriate stewardship of proposed projects. Wherever possible, the Trustees advocate that projects be protected through legal mechanisms such as fee title transfers, conservation easements, deed restrictions, or other means to permanently ensure that restoration project areas are maintained so as to provide their intended ecological values and services.

2.2.5 Future Restoration Planning and Monitoring by the Trustees

Future monitoring by the Trustees is likely to include the monitoring of implementation of funded restoration projects and the monitoring of the ecological outcomes of those

restoration projects financially supported by the Trustees. The Trustees have also made provision to support, as needed and as funding allows, the maintenance of restoration actions funded under the restoration plans previously published by the two Trustee Councils. Maintenance actions would be supported to ensure that the desired condition and ecological benefit of ecological restoration is maintained into the future.

If the Trustees of the two NRDA cases in the Saginaw Bay watershed determine that there is sufficient funding to support additional restoration actions beyond those described here or within previously published restoration plans, the Trustees would initiate a new restoration planning effort. Any new restoration planning cycle would commence with outreach to Saginaw River and Bay watershed stakeholders to solicit their ideas and priorities for restoration. Restoration proposals would be evaluated using criteria such as those described here, a supplemental restoration plan would be produced, and stakeholders would be given the opportunity to provide review and feedback on the draft of any such plan.