

TTK Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

Tuesday, July 22nd, 2014



Attendees

Josh Brosmer, IDEM, Charles Haney, Hoosier Energy, Trey Clark, WLRM, Cody Brenneman, Indiana American Water, Paul Gettinger, Stakeholder, Darin Cox, Stakeholder, Ray McCammon, Sullivan County Commissioner, Bill Coulson, Sullivan County SWCD Board Chairman, and Laura Demarest, WCIWA Watershed Coordinator

Introduction

Eight attendees were present for this meeting, including one new individual – Cody Brenneman, representing Indiana American Water. Refreshments (courtesy of Hoosier Energy) were enjoyed prior to the meeting while brief status updates were given regarding the scope of the TTK 319 grant project.

TTK Activities

At this stage of the TTK 319 grant, discussions will start to focus on narrowing down resource concerns and determining critical areas. Critical areas will determine where cost share funds will be prioritized. Several methods for gathering information about the condition of the streams can be used to help the Advisory Committee determine critical areas. These aspects include (but aren't limited to) water monitoring data (current and historic, if available), windshield survey observations, and landowners' general knowledge when it comes to resource concerns throughout the watershed.

Water monitoring has been completed for April, May, and June and data was compiled for the Advisory Committee to review (see attachment). (Note: The Nature Conservancy is sponsoring monthly testing at a site in the Kelley Bayou oxbow, making a total of 30 sites being tested currently in the TTK watershed.) Tentative water quality targets were determined by the watershed coordinator based on state limits for drinking water, adjacent TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) studies in other watersheds, and EPA recommended minimums for impairments (specific information will be available in the final draft of the Watershed Management Plan). These targets were used on the recently obtained TTK data to determine which monitoring sites reflected 'failing' results for various parameters. Notable failures included E.coli for all sites at least once (higher than 200 cfu/100ml), high turbidity and Total Suspended Solids on most sites, and at least 50% of sites failing Total Phosphorus levels.

Some Advisory Committee members were especially concerned about the high E.coli levels and discussion carried on as to whether or not it was possible to determine contributing sources (human or animal), how harmful E.coli was to the population, and if there are ways to utilize 319 fund to reduce these loads. At this time, funding for further testing is not available and tests to determine origin of E.coli (human or animal) are very expensive. Possible sources for E.coli loads in streams could be attributed to livestock, manure being spread on crop fields for fertilizer, pets and wildlife, and/or improperly functioning septic systems, though there is no way to determine the exact causes and to what degree any of these factors may be responsible. Josh Brosmer, IDEM, also pointed out that nearly all watersheds in Indiana garner failing scores for E.coli, so while this is a definite concern, it is not necessarily unusual. Test results are also expected to vary seasonally. Continued monitoring will produce more data that can give the Advisory Committee the opportunity to 'play detective' and determine which areas are most in need of conservation practices.

Questions were asked in regards to existing data that could be used for decision-making purposes. Little to no testing has been conducted in the TTK watershed, though IDEM cites several stream segments along Turman Creek as impaired for E.coli and biotic communities. These tests were associated with random monitoring conducted by IDEM. Extensive studies have not been conducted in this region, to date. The original Turtle and Little Turtle Creek WMP was mentioned as a possibility for reference; the watershed coordinator did not believe that substantial testing was done as a part of that grant, but promised to check for specifics. [Update: The Turtle/Little Turtle Creek WMP can be found here <http://www.in.gov/idem/nps/3191.htm> ; aside from extensive bathymetric studies of the reservoir funded by Hoosier Energy, little monitoring was done in these watersheds. Visual observations of resource concerns were noted as a primary means to collect information about the watershed. A one-time testing event for E.coli was conducted at 12 stream outlets into the reservoir in the dry month of August; out of 12 samples taken, five showed no evidence for E.coli and 7 samples were 'inconclusive'. It is unclear how samples were collected or how agar plates were maintained so this data is perceived to be of little use to the current TTK water monitoring program.]

Other topics discussed included:

- Ongoing windshield surveys and how volunteers would be most helpful to hasten their completion. Observations from windshield surveys will provide further insight that will help the Advisory Committee make decisions about critical areas. Windshield surveys for the entire TTK are estimated to be about 25% complete at this time.
- The application for a 319 grant to follow our current TTK 319 grant (this new grant, if awarded, would focus primarily on cost-share implementation); the watershed coordinator is currently working on compiling information for the grant application and seeking letters of support from partners.
- Encouragement for folks to add projects to the “TTK Cost-Share Interest List” which is currently growing. Projects that require engineering will need to be planned well in advance. Paul Gettinger suggested a prospective wetland cell in an area on Old 54, which actually lies on Hoosier Energy property. A project like this would need engineering, but would make a great site for a demonstration. This idea will be pursued further soon. Other landowners are encouraged to contact the watershed coordinator with similar project ideas.

Watershed Planning

The Advisory Committee was encouraged to review the data and map provided alongside the list of resource concerns that has been compiled over the past several meetings. Firm goals for the outcome of this 319 project need to be outlined.

The first major goal would focus on meeting state standards for pollutant loads. As described previously, water quality targets for the TTK watershed management plan must be developed, either based on state/federal standards or studies conducted in adjacent watershed areas. The goal statements listed in the old Turtle and Little Turtle Creek WMP can be consulted and updated for our current purposes. Once water quality targets are determined, the Advisory Committee can decide how much improvement they would like to achieve and how to measure these load reductions.

The second goal would center on continuing to promote conservation practices in a way that will encourage adoption in the future. Promotion of 319 cost-share implementation as well as other programs (EQIP, CRP, CREP, Classified Forest, etc.) to help assist landowners will be a priority. When evaluating the success of a particular practice, one Advisory Committee member expressed his belief that ‘any conservation helps...if the practice was not applied, it could have been worse.’ With watershed planning, it is important to consider the success of small projects along with the larger, more expensive projects and realize that even small projects can help encourage producers to adopt the practice, even after funds are no longer available. Other considerations include cost vs number of acres treated (Ex. Cover crops treat many acres at a lower cost), and conversely, amount of time a practice delivers benefits (Ex. Cover crops only last for a season while a WASCOP is designed to exist for at least a decade).

In terms of prioritizing resource concerns, the list was reviewed and numerous options were crossed off for various reasons. Some list items were removed due to the fact that 319 funds cannot be utilized to address them (i.e. log jams, nuisance wildlife, septic tank maintenance, tax breaks/political lobbying, funding permit fees or land acquisition, water quantity issues/flooding, dredging). Some items were not specifically geared toward water quality or were marginally applicable, so they were moved to a different area of the list (Education/Outreach). See the updated resource concerns list (attached). These items will be prioritized further at the next meeting.

In addition, Ray McCammon, Sullivan County Commissioner provided some very helpful insight about how the Sullivan County Highway Department maintains ditches throughout the county and what sorts of challenges they encounter, including a constantly heavy demand for maintenance, accumulated corn stalk debris near culverts, and overloading of ditches from the growing number of tile drain outlets.

Critical area determination will be discussed in depth at the next meeting. Advisory Committee members were encouraged to consider data that was presented at this meeting and expect more to review in August. Any questions or comments are welcome at any time outside of meetings and can be used to further assess resource concerns within the watershed and the best ways to help address them.

The next meeting for the TTK Advisory Committee has been determined. The frequency of recent meetings is due to upcoming deadlines for our grant application and the final WMP draft. Advisory Committee input is crucial at this stage! Please consider attending the next important meeting!

***Tuesday August 19th 6:30
(Same time, same place: 6:30 pm at the Hoosier Energy Environmental Education Center)***

*The meeting was adjourned at 8:15pm
Summary prepared by Laura Demarest, WCIWA Coordinator*