

Indiana Lakes Management Work Group Update

By Nate Long

The Indiana Lakes Management Workgroup (ILMWG) was established by the General Assembly to take public comments and develop solutions for problems affecting Indiana lakes. ILMWG members represent a broad base of lake and reservoir organizations, users, and researchers from across the state. The group held its initial meeting for the 2009-2010 fiscal year on August 6 at the Natural Resources Educational Center at Fort Benjamin Harrison State Park on the east side of Indianapolis.

Prior to meeting as the full group, the Biology/Chemistry/Watershed sub-group met to discuss a variety of new topics and the need to broaden the focus of the sub-group to include more watershed issues. Of the 28 items under review, four were considered high priority for the coming year:

Palustrine wetlands: Cattail marshes are the most natural, scenic, diverse, beneficial habitat, sensitive, and threatened areas associated with lakes. Although DNR has authority over fill and construction activities, their authority stops landward of the shoreline. Army Corps of Engineer authority and IDEM authority is also limited when activities involve less than 0.1 acre. As a result, palustrine wetlands continue to be lost or converted to residential development and other uses.

SWCD Effectiveness: Indiana Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are the key entity delivering direct technical services to local landowners on watershed issues. SWCDs also have the capacity to pull in funding resources to address environmental impacts to lakes through programs such as the Farm Bill, NRCS, EPA 319, LARE Program, and IDEM Rule 5. Although SWCDs are widespread and effective, they lack a permanent operational fund.

Invasive species and toxic algae: Aquatic nuisance species (ANS) threaten the ecological and economic value of lakes. Although DNR has developed a comprehensive ANS plan to gain some control, many challenges remain. Likewise, certain species of blue-green algae naturally produce toxins, some of which attack the liver and nervous system of mammals. Swimming in water containing algal toxins commonly causes irritated eyes and skin. Up to 50% of blue-green algae blooms may contain toxins.

Lake education: Lakes provide a myriad of environmental and recreational benefits to Hoosiers and bring tourist dollars to the state. Specific estimates of lake values in Indiana could be used to seek and prioritize funds for lake management and inform the public about the rationale for investing in preservation and conservation. Effective management of lakefront property also requires knowledge of regulations and activities associated with lake management. Residents have expressed frustration with the complexity of resource management agencies and regulations governing shoreline and lake activities.

Other important topics highlighted in the afternoon session included an update on the Midwest Glacial Lake Fish Habitat Partnership and how their priorities could be linked to priorities of the ILMWG, a review of LARE weed control and boating enforcement allocations, the Division of Water permit application process, and the legally-complex and contentious nature of individual piers, group piers, and easement rights.

The next ILMWG meeting is scheduled for October 21, 2009. All meetings are open to the public. Contact Nate Long or Jed Pearson with questions.