

Indiana Lakes Management Work Group Update

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The two subgroups of the Indiana Lake Management Workgroup met in late September at the Natural Resources Education Center (NREC) at Benjamin Harrison State Park near Indianapolis to continue discussions on major topics for the 2009-2010 year.

On September 23, The Recreation/Structures subgroup selected Pete Hippensteel to replace Ralph Taylor as chair. The subgroup also discussed the need to identify other potential members to fill current vacancies and the need to obtain re-authorization of the LMWG in the upcoming legislative session.

Following other comments regarding Lake and River Enhancement funding and staff needs, the subgroup focused on individual pier proliferation, lake lowering, and lake level control structures.

Rather than immersing themselves into details of potential pier regulations at the present time, the subgroup will first consider the implications of the concept of "grandfathering" and how it may affect pier limitations. The subgroup intends to contact appropriate individuals within the Department of Natural Resources, the Natural Resources Commission, and attorneys to examine legal aspects of the issue.

The subgroup expressed continued interest in pursuing legislation to bring lakes larger than 5 acres under protection of the state's lake lowering law (IC 14-26-5). The current standard is 10 acres. An emerging issue related to lake lowering is a need to examine questions of ownership and maintenance costs of water level control structures, the legal process of establishing and maintaining levels, and a need to provide more education to lake users about water level problems and solutions.

On September 28, the Biology/Chemistry/Watersheds subgroup, under the leadership of chair Bill Jones, opened initial discussions on its four primary topics: palustrine wetland protection, Soil and Water Conservation District effectiveness, invasive species/toxic algae, and lake education.

Palustrine wetlands (cattail marshes) within and adjacent to lakes provide a variety of ecological benefits, although various programs designed to protect and maintain them are not adequate. The subgroup intends to identify possible regulations, financial cost incentives, and educational means to address the issue.

The initial focus will be to examine current status of the National Wetlands Inventory maps and various state rules that currently help to protect palustrine wetlands, look into the local property tax assessment process as a means to enhance protection, and potential application of buffer strip programs to lake shores and wetlands.

Concern was expressed that creation of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) has left holes in programs dealing with local watershed management problems related to lakes. Most pressing is an apparent lack of technical assistance for project development and implementation within local SWCDs. Potential solutions could involve seeking a permanent funding source for the Clean Water Indiana program, some changes in policies and organizational structure within agencies dealing with watershed management, and better coordination. The subgroup also suggested that a representative from the ISDA be added as a member of the LMWG.

The need for an “emergency response” funding mechanism to deal with the ever-present challenge, and immediate needs, of invasive species management was discussed. Of concern as well is a lack of a state policy that establishes authority and guidelines for monitoring blue-green algae levels and algae toxins. The subgroup intends to contact various representatives from the Department of Health, Department of Environmental Management, Board of Animal Health, and other agencies to have an open dialogue on how best to address algae toxin problems. An associated issue involves a need to identify nutrient standards/criteria in Indiana lakes as part of the national EPA program to provide funds to address water quality problems.

Although no specific action items were identified, members of the subgroup discussed the need to update, expand, coordinate, and standardize educational programs that reach lake residents and users. Developing possible suggestions for improvements will be part of the subgroup’s future agenda.

The next meeting of both subgroup, as well as the full LMWG, is set for Wednesday, October 21, at the NREC at Harrison State Park and will get underway at 10:00 am.