Indiana Habitat and Species Workshop
January 29, 2009
State Conference Center, Indianapolis, Indiana

Summary Notes

John Davis, the Deputy Director of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) welcomed the group to the workshop.

Roger Gauthier of the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) reviewed the agenda. He indicated that presenters would be starting out at from a "40,000-foot" perspective and adding more detail through the day until a few site-specific case studies were discussed. Time had been factored into the agenda to promote dialogue between participants.

Jan Miller of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Great Lakes and Ohio River Division, provided an overview of the USACE Great Lakes Habitat Initiative (GLHI), which provided the impetus for the 2007 state habitat workshop series and development of the regional databases of potential habitat restoration and protection projects and funding/technical assistance programs that could support them. The GHLI produced an implementation plan that the USACE has used to inform its resource allocation decisions, which is also available for consideration by other agencies. These products are available online at: http://www.glhi.org/. Miller noted that the GLHI was a two-year project which was completed in 2008. Stakeholders involved in the GLHI have continued to work together and are now part of the Habitat/Species Subcommittee of the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force which is supporting implementation of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) Strategy for Protecting and Restoring the Great Lakes. Miller completed this overview with a brief description of recent updates underway to improve and link the habitat and projects databases.

Roger Gauthier made a brief presentation on the current status of the web-based habitat restoration tools funded under the Corps' GLHI project, which are now branded as part of the GLRC Habitat/Species Subcommittee's activities. The web tools can be found at: gis.glin.net/habitat/. The web tools are all browser-based (e.g., accessible with common browsers such as Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox). The project repository now has over 230 projects included which showcase the current phase of the projects (proposed, planned, in design, preparations completed, under implementation/construction and post construction monitoring). The project repository includes detailed information on current stressors affecting the project area, benefits anticipated, costs by phase and other salient characteristics. The tool has been designed to utilize the characteristics of the project to help users search for appropriate funding/technical assistance programs to advance the project. The funding/technical assistance database currently has over 130 programs identified.

A question was asked about whether the web tools were linked to other regional information resources, in particular to those developed under the Western Lake Erie restoration planning effort. The development of the project repository needs to work toward interoperability and consistency with these sub-regional restoration objectives.

Scott Nally of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) made a presentation on how IN state agencies are using enterprise web-based databases to work together toward common goals. Part of this effort has been to schedule quarterly meetings to allow for an IDEM, IDNR and IN Department of Transportation core group to openly discuss environmental objectives. IDEM has developed a web application to provide GIS mapping that helps match private and public projects to help mitigate environmental issues. The system uses standard ArcGIS server tools, to view datasets and overlay themes. A major thrust is the development of the Regulatory Services Portal (RSP) (see: www.in.gov/idem/5964.htm). This website allows the public to fill out permit requests, submit them and get them certified by state regulators. They are also producing a new Indiana Wetlands Virtual Tour which can be accessed at: www.in.gov/idem/files/5861.htm. The objective behind this site is for IDEM and the other IN state agencies to create "virtual file cabinets" which would allow the public to access permit files, inspection reports and correspondence.

Gauthier asked a question about whether Indiana was embracing making its geospatial datasets accessible using new web service protocols, to support integration of information resources. Nally indicated that IDEM is exploring these rapidly emerging new technologies. It was also noted that Indiana is focusing on creating its GIS resources to identify watershed characteristics at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs) fourteen digit level (very high detail).

Mike Molnar of the IDNR, Coastal Program provided an overview of the IN Coastal Zone Management Program, including its structure, staffing and grant budgets for the last seven years. In 2007-08 over 30 coastal grants were funded totaling about $1.3M. Metrics have been established to assess the acreage for habitat restored and protected. Molnar provided more details on several projects including:

- Indiana Dunes State Park – restoration of a natural stream dynamics; Coastal Conservation Planning (CELCP) – threat assessment and priority areas and local technical assistance;
- Coastal Nonpoint (6217 Program) – including vegetated treatment systems, hydromodification such as streambank protection, instream improvements and fish passages;
- Public Access (309 projects) – including updating inventories, identifying public needs and defining how to fill gaps; emphasis is placed on defining locations where public access needs to consider population densities.

More information on the IN CZM program can be found at: www.in.gov/dnr/lakemich. Molnar also summarized the current state of the Marquette Plan in Lake and Porter counties in Indiana, particularly to improve public reaction opportunities. The Marquette Plan includes improved transportation strategies, greenspace planning. **Gene Fleming** of the USACE indicated that the Corps has a program to implement the Marquette Plan called the Lake Michigan Waterfront Program, which has not been fully funded yet. Molnar also highlighted a handout for participants on the Northwest Indiana Greenways and Blueways Regional Plan.

During the open discussion a comment was made that transportation improvements can lead to a need for compensatory mitigation. These requirements frequently need to be sorted out between competing state agency program objectives.

Dave Stratman of the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provided a comprehensive overview of nine U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs that affect restoration/protection/conservation of critical habitat in Indiana. All of these programs involve voluntary contributions from land owners. Several of these programs have undergone substantial changes under the recent Farm Bill; currently the USDA has imposed a hold any new rulemaking accordingly to accommodate comments received from a Federal Register announcement. He provided a summary on the nine USDA programs, breaking them into two groups: "Primary" for programs that were created for habitat management; and "Secondary" for those programs which provided tangible habitat protection/conservation benefits. Highlights of these programs follows:

Primary

- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) – Indiana applications within the Great Lakes drainage basin over the last six years were funded at $335K including 40 contracts covering 600 acres to implement 18 different land management practices, including intensive invasive plant control program;
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – including work under the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to reduce sediment, nutrient, pesticide and herbicide loadings for 7,000 targeted acres in the Pigeon-Highland, Tippecanoe and Upper White River watersheds and work under the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Program to enhance wildlife habitat for the Indiana Bat, Northern Bobwhite, Henslow's Sparrow and Sedge Wren/Grasshopper Sparrow;
- Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) – Provides habitat for migratory birds and wetland dependent species, reduce flooding and improve water quality; since 1994, over 53,000 acres have been enrolled in Indiana over 47 counties totaling $112M;
- Floodplain Easement Program (FEP) – currently there are six landowners involved on the Mackey Bend-Island project in Indiana, totaling 1,684 acres at a cost of $4M;

Secondary

- Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) – Indiana has received $625K in 2009 for work in the St. Joseph River Watershed including portions of Allen, DeKalb, Noble and Steuben counties to protect 250 acres to benefit threatened and endangered species, specifically the Indiana Bat and the Copperbelly Water Snake;
- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) – no examples provided;
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP) – no examples provided;
- Conservation Security Program (CSP) – no examples provided; and
- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) – no examples provided.

Stratman entertained a number of questions about these programs, including whether the biofuel industry would increase pressures. He indicated that the biofuels industry was already pushing corn and soybean prices higher, causing some acreage to be taken out of reserve status and put back into active agriculture.

Marylou Renshaw of the Watershed Planning Branch of IDEM made a presentation on efforts to improve internal state coordination of ecological restoration activities. Her presentation was focused on a concept of "silo smashing". Efforts by many Indiana stakeholders for ecological restoration and protection are too often conducted within "silos" that have rather narrow perspectives on complex problems and all too frequently invest in incompatible databases. The first step in improving coordination is to clarify common mission objectives, establish

communication channels between organizations at respective management/technical levels, and establish cross-functional teams to define project goals and priorities. The Watershed Planning Branch has been developing cross-functional teams to support wetlands and stormwater projects, 305(b)/303(d), TMDL and NPS grant programs and Section 319 projects totaling over $2M since 1996. She highlighted two significant initiatives including:

- The Galena Project – for a tributary watershed to Lake Michigan; and
- The Salt Creek Integrated Watershed Pilot Project – a preliminary planning project to integrate TMDL, wetland, stormwater, low impact development and Section 319 NPS controls.

Reshaw provided comments on salient issues that the GLRC "Call for Action" publication for habitat restoration should carefully consider with respect to projects in Indiana. In particular, she identified that there was a need for:

- An accurate picture of wetlands protection and restoration across the region;
- New tools that are easier to use with broad and sustained application;
- Tools to track the performance of completed projects;
- Discussion forums for GLRC partners to collaborate on overcoming obstacles, to develop improved methods for achieving objectives; and to establish necessary protocols to objectively assess restoration progress.

Several participants asked questions, including "Is there any opportunity to take down silos across state boundaries to accomplish more integrated watershed management?" Renshaw commented that IDEM is trying to reach across border with Ohio state agencies to implement TMDL and WMP strategies in a more holistic way. An observation was made that resource-starved state agencies are forced to focus on specific goals which promote the silo mentality. This mindset is effective in the short-term, but works counter-productively to maximize usage of limited resources toward common goals.

During an **open dialogue** session, Miller indicated that one of constraints that regional stakeholders are not well practiced with an opportunistic mindset. Stimulus funding currently being implemented is opening opportunities. Fleming pointed out that the sources of funding for cost share of federal funding needs to "think outside the box" in particular using: the value of the land contributed to the project; in-kind services; and potential NGO contributions. He also indicated that there was a large amount of internal USACE debate about how cost-share would be accomplished under the Economic Stimulus package, with several options being considered.

Renshaw stated that there are few projects in Indiana that are "shovel ready" and more funding is needed to move projects from early stages to readiness for implementation. A comment was provided that most local stakeholders do not have adequate knowledge about funding opportunities as they occur and that these stakeholders need more education and outreach originating from the state and federal agencies. **Jamie Robb** stated that there was a significant impediment to broad-scale ecological restoration since there is no comprehensive Indiana state habitat plan; most work is conducted on an ad-hoc basis. **Angie Brown** stated that watershed groups don't typically see the bigger picture and it is hard to sort through confusing perspectives affecting regional goals.

Gildo Tori of Ducks Unlimited made a brief presentation on the structure and activities of the Healing Our Waters (HOW) Coalition and described ways HOW can help advance state priorities related to habitat restoration and protection. He reviewed HOW's priorities for Congressional authorization and appropriations for the next few years. He encouraged that those non-governmental participants who can join HOW to do so.

Tori also made a brief presentation on a Joint Venture (JV) concept that several NGOs were promoting to advance GLRC objectives. A JV method has been developed to successfully implementing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. In some states, such as Michigan and Wisconsin, a JV-like model is being considered to step down implementation of the GLRC Strategy. In Michigan, action frameworks were developed for each of the eight strategy areas. Tori queried participants on whether the infrastructure is in place to make a similar JV work in Indiana.

Several comments from participants indicated that implementation of a JC-like model would be challenging in Indiana, since the geographic drainage basin to the Great Lakes was limited relative to other states drainage areas and the number of state agency staff dedicated to Great Lakes issues was very small. Renshaw indicated that Indiana needs to investigate how it can mobilize state agencies to implement the GLRV goals in a step-downed process. Molnar stated that it would be useful for Indiana to summarize what the state could contribute to the overall GLRC goals for wetlands restoration in terms of acreage.

Next, two projects/programs were discussed as examples of fostering collaboration within Indiana to advance ecological restoration progress.

The first presentation was made by **Larry Clemens** of the Indiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy on the Fish Creek – Upper St. Joseph Watershed project. The Upper St. Joseph River includes headwater areas in Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. TNC's strategies include targeting critical habitat areas, particularly headwater habitats, reforestation and wetland restoration, building local capacities and promotion of traditional Best Management Practices. In the Fish Creek watershed, TNC has been employing various conservation practices including conservation tillage, reforestation, risk protection, critical area treatments, acquisitions and fencing.

TNC is working to scale up terrestrial and aquatic restoration activities throughout the watershed by developing cooperative agreements with the NRCS to fund staffing, by participating in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) Healthy Forest Reserve Program, by participating in the Western Lake Erie Basin Partnership program to improve water quality in the Maumee River watershed, and by implementing a prototype 2-stage ditch design project on the Fish Creek. Clemens indicated that agronomic or engineering practices may be more practical in some areas than modifying agricultural practices.

The second program highlight was provided by **Carl Wodrich**, the Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) Director in the IDNR, who described activities underway and planned for the Grand Calumet River and Indiana Harbor Canal Restoration in Lake County. Indiana's Natural Resources Trustee includes federal representatives from the USF&WS and state representatives from IDEM and IDNR. The overall goal of the NRDA in Indiana is to restore

natural resources and services lost. For the Indiana Harbor Canal as much as 93% of flows are industrial and municipal discharges. Wodrich highlighted at least six major restoration projects that are underway under various Consent Decrees. He also provided details on the West Branch project that is currently being funded at more than $7M from NRDA and over $33M from the Legacy Act so far. A number of projects have been identified under Phase 2 of these programs that could cost over $42M. Upland habitat acquisition is underway to protect and conserve over 700 acres within adjacent to the Grand Calumet River. The Natural Resources Trustees have partnered with a wide variety of local interests and NGOs. He highlighted collaborative work that has occurred in the Gibson Woods Invasive Woody Plant Restoration Project, the Pine Station Nature Preserve Restoration Project and the DuPont Dune and Swale Protection Project. Wodrich's take home messages included:

- NRDA settlement funds will not do the job of restoring the Grand Calumet River system alone; and
- The trustees have been using NRDA funds to leverage as much federal funding as possible to do as much restoration as can be accomplished using all of the conservation partners.

Gauthier noted that the Grand Calumet NRDA program activities include an extensive number of project components that may not be well represented in the GLHI project repository.

Federal agency representatives from the USACE, NRCS, the USF&WS, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), and from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) provided brief overviews of their habitat restoration funding and/or technical assistance programs. Several of these presentations were augmented by handouts summarizing program details and/or pointed participants to relevant web sites.

Molnar and Gauthier, with input from other participants, then provided summary points and next steps that they gathered from the workshop, including:

<u>Restoration Challenges:</u>

- There were a lot of commonalities and institutional issues in projects discussed, plus a common vision of what lies ahead;
- Funding for restoration activities is highly unstable;
- There is a lack of a comprehensive long-range restoration/protection/ conservation planning for the Indiana drainage to the Great Lakes;
- A big challenge is sharing information – getting organizations at all levels to talk to each other; the community needs to find better ways to do this;
- Stakeholders need to be able to be opportunistic; particularly if funding becomes available under stimulus or Great Lakes restoration plans;
- Stimulus funding needs to reduce needs for local cost shares;
- The local cost share for federal projects should allow for the value of land provide; for in-kind services and for necessary NGO participation;
- Competing interests can complicate advancement and impede progress (e.g., legal drains, biofuels, conservation practices);
- Aquatic habitat is not getting the same attention as coastal wetlands and upland habitat;
- A lot of work has gone into developing visions and objectives; we want to be able to apply this to day-to-day work; like taking advantage of new funding opportunities; and

- A habitat restoration implementation strategy needs to work for IN interests, which can feed upward to regional action.

Web Tools:

- The GLRC databases can provide critical value to help identify projects for expected stimulus funding in early 2009;
- The GLRC databases could be a useful mechanism of bringing disparate stakeholder input to better communicate project benefits and help develop key partnership opportunities;
- Data silos inhibit information exchange (federal to state to local);
- The GLRC project repository currently does not adequately represent the complexity of several major restoration/protection program (e.g., the Grand Calumet NRDA projects);
- The IN projects identified in the project repository within the Lake Erie watershed need to be checked to insure that they are part of the Western Lake Erie Restoration Plan;
- To maximize benefits from the project repository, it would be very advantageous for Indiana to promote access to their geospatial datasets through web services;
- The GLRC web tools should include some synopsis of identified NRCS/USDA projects, if possible; and
- To the extent possible, the GLRC project repository needs to connect to higher resolution local planning products that are available on the web.

Gauthier asked is this type of forum should be repeated and if this is something that the Indiana participants would welcome. Over half of the attendees saw some merit in conducting this type of dialogue on an annual basis. Several participants indicated that follow-on coordination activities should be focused on a narrower agenda. In addition, several participants indicated that there was a lot of value in hearing about federal funding opportunities and how Indiana state programs could be more engaged in these processes. Gauthier indicated that federal funding program updates can be done via webinars, using the web tools.