Muskegon River Watershed Assembly
Resource Committee Meeting Minutes
October 7, 2013
MDEQ Cadillac District Office
*****These minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting*****

Committee Chair Kadelsik convened the meeting at 4:45 p.m. Introductions were given. The following were present:

Larry Copley, Cadillac Area Land Conservancy
Wayne Groesbeck, MRWA Board Member
Ken Johnson, MRWA Treasurer
Greg Mund, MRWA Chair
Rich O'Neal, DNR-Fisheries Division
Greg Goudy, MDEQ-Cadillac
Brian Jankowski, MDEQ-Cadillac
Ron Kadelsik, MRWA Resource Comm. Chair
Gary Noble, MRWA Executive Director
Mark Tonello, DNR-Fisheries Division

Review Agenda

- Noble added "AIS Boat Washing / Education Program" under New Business (New Projects). Committee accepted the revised agenda.

Approval of Minutes

- Motion by Mund, support by Groesbeck to approve the March 13, 2013 Resource Committee meeting minutes, as submitted. **Motion passed**.

Committee Purpose & Meeting Format

- Noble reviewed the committee's job description (as written at the bottom of the meeting agenda) for the newer committee members.
- Kadelsik & Noble indicated the MRWA Board's desire & committee concurrence (at the previous 3/13/13 committee meeting) for this committee to meet 3 times annually, face to face during spring & fall & via conference call in the winter.

Old Business
(Committee priorities)

- Noble distributed & reviewed a handout summarizing committee priorities & projects.
  1. Protection & Restoration of Natural Hydrologic Function (priority)
     a. *Cedar Creek Ecosystem (Hydrology) Protection & Restoration Initiative*
        i. Initiative Goal – protect & restore the natural hydrologic functions of Cedar Creek & establish / help implement stormwater (runoff) standards & control practices that will retain natural habitat in all areas of the watershed.
        ii. 6 critical elements:
           1. Collect & analyze hydrologic & limnological information on Cedar Creek & test / calibrate hydrologic computer models **(completed)**
              a. FTCH Final Report (March, 2011)
           2. Develop stream protection criteria & recommendations for stormwater retention/detention by sub-basin (regional detention) in order to establish baseline data & procedures for remaining elements (phases) **(completed)**
              a. FTCH Final Report (March, 2011)
           3. Establish appropriate BMPs for protection of hydrology in Cedar Creek **(completed)**
              a. FTCH Final Report (March, 2011)
              b. FTCH Revised Engineering Scope of Work w/estimated construction cost (May, 2013) for
                i. Regional wetland/detention (phase 1)
                ii. Install riparian buffers in 3 sub-basins (phase 1)
                iii. Education & outreach (phase 1)

4. Evaluate existing stormwater regulations by state & local gov'ts affecting Cedar Creek **(started but need funding to continue)**
5. Implement BMPs in the field & establish working relationships with / providing assistance to local gov'ts affecting Cedar Creek to establish appropriate storm water plans & ordinances **(currently seeking funds)**
6. Provide community education opportunities for public involvement thru meetings & volunteer efforts **(currently seeking funds)**

- Goudy inquired about how "stream protection criteria" was developed.
- O'Neal replied that fish data, flow data, and groundwater modeling was used in part to help develop "stream protection criteria", but that "fish target" information is still evolving within MDNR Fisheries.
- Noble indicated that the FTCH Revised Engineering Scope of Work estimated construction costs (& engineering costs) between $500K-$800K, <u>not</u> including land acquisition costs.

b. *Dam Workshop*

i. Targeting fall 2013 or early winter 2014
ii. Intended to engage small dam owners (provide information & gauge interest in dam removal)

- Kadelsik reported the MRWA did a mass mailing to all small dam owners in our watershed (100+) & received responses (after follow up phone calls) from 11 small dam owners who expressed an interest in attending a workshop. All of the responses came from the Mecosta / Osceola county area.

c. *Higgins Lake Hydrologic Evaluation Study*

i. In response to local interest / concern by HLPOA regarding excessive erosion due to unnaturally high water levels
ii. Evaluating probable effects of removing the control structure on Higgins Lake & Cut River system
iii. Goal – provide information to stakeholders regarding the influence of the hydrologic connection between Higgins Lake & Cut River on lake / stream water levels, seasonal level fluctuations, beach areas, bank erosion, boating & boat dockage, aquatic plant distributions, areas of gravel bottom, & other fish-relevant habitat & characteristics
iv. MSU & UofM research partners conducting evaluation with Huron Pines doing stakeholder survey **(study targeted for 2014 completion)**

- O'Neal commented that prior to this study, MDNR had written to the Roscommon County Board of Commissioners (who operates the lake level control structure) notifying them that the prevalent high lake levels are illegal (exceed legal lake limits established by the courts).
- O'Neal also explained the negative impact of maintaining artificially high lake levels on the Cut River system (downstream of the lake level structure). O'Neal briefly explained the history of trying to maintain a "minimum flow" for the Cut River.

2. <u>Road / Stream Crossing & Culvert Improvements (priority)</u>

a. *GIS Barrier Inventory 2012 Project*

i. Completed July 2013
ii. Nearly 600 sites inventoried in Newaygo County & about 55 sites in Muskegon County
iii. Project cost = $55,200 (half from DNR/HIA & half from MRWA)

- O'Neal reported the site inventory process is using RoadSoft software enhanced by MI Tech. Univ. for these types of sites & the collected information goes into a statewide database that multiple organizations & entities can access to address priority sites.
- O'Neal commented that it's up to us to request an "improvement project" (for a completed inventory site) & that the state / feds would determine its priority against other sites in the state database.

b. *GIS Barrier Inventory 2013 Project*
   i. **Started July 2013**
   ii. Continuing site inventories in Muskegon County with limited funds
   iii. Funds available = $25,162 (from DNR/HIA), half of what's needed
   iv. Parallel proposal to USFWS for $25,162 was <u>not</u> funded
   v. **Anticipate field inventory work to stop by Nov. 2013 (funds exhausted)**

3. <u>Reforestation in High-Priority Sub-basins (priority)</u>
   a. *(Large-scale) Restoration of High-Priority Riparian Areas (GLRI project)*
      i. Will reforest 440 acres of riparian land, conserve another 100 acres of existing forest, restore 28,000 lineal ft. (150 acres) of streambank using native vegetation, & put 150 acres of re-vegetated or natural riparian land into conservation easements
      ii. Targeting work in at least 3 (up to 12) high-priority sub-basins identified from Mega-model research
      iii. **To date, about 26 acres have been reforested with another 140 acres planned during fall 2013**
      iv. Estimated <u>annual</u> pollutant load reductions (for entire project) are 100 tons sediment, 1,100 lbs. phosphorus, & 6,200 lbs. nitrogen
      v. Project runs 10/1/12 – 9/30/14
   b. *(Small-scale) Tree Plantings in High-Priority Areas (sub-basins) include:*
      i. Big Rapids tributaries / Mitchell Creek sub-basin (Mecosta County)
      ii. Cedar Creek sub-basin (Muskegon County)
      iii. Hersey River sub-basin (Osceola County)
      iv. Penoyer Creek sub-basin (Newaygo County)
      v. Tamarack Creek sub-basin (Montcalm County)

(MDEQ Priorities – Cadillac District)

- Goudy reviewed a MDEQ (Cadillac District) priority & discussed a significant MRWA project summarized in Noble's handout.
  1. <u>Protection & Restoration of Upper Muskegon River Watershed (MDEQ priority)</u>
     a. *Houghton Lake E. coli Reduction (319) Project*
        i. Project runs 12/1/11 – 11/30/14
        ii. Main tasks
           1. Information & education efforts
              a. presentations at public mtgs. in upper MRW
              b. articles in River View newsletter & in upper MRW news media & local organization newsletters
              c. project page on website & linked to other websites
              d. educational signage about E. coli at park locations
              e. workshops for local gov't officials for ordinance recommendations
              f. shoreline workshop for landowners & landscapers
           2. Retention area at Houghton Lake road end
              a. rain garden installed at Trestle Park (Denton Twp.)
              b. targeting Devonshire Road end BMP (Denton Twp.)
           3. Prepare Upper MRW Management Plan
              a. includes social monitoring / survey of constituent attitudes
              b. includes environmental monitoring / sampling for E. coli
           4. Develop evaluation process / conduct project evaluation
     - Goudy reported that MDEQ used MI Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) information as a reason to prioritize the Upper MRW & MDEQ also took into account recommendations made for the Upper MRW in the approved Muskegon River Watershed (319) Mgt. Plan.
     - Goudy indicated that E. coli (bacteria) sampling at several locations around Houghton Lake, including tributaries feeding into the lake, detected the presence of E. coli but no

patterns were evident. The project employed use of a trained dog to sniff for human E. coli at specific sites & the dog detected human E. coli at 4 of 6 sites.
    - Goudy stated that discussions are on-going with the local sewer authority to fix suspected leaky locations.

<u>New Business</u>
(Issues / New Initiatives / New Projects)

- Noble reviewed **/** summarized some new issues, new initiatives, & new projects from his handout.

1. *Houghton Lake Level Situation / Outflow Concerns*
    a. Concern expressed at MRWA Mtg. At Large (8/22/13) over:
        i. Very low flows stemming from the lake control structure & also from the Reedsburg Dam, contributing to very low river levels downstream from both structures (only flow from lake is seepage thru stop log boards at control structure)
        ii. Operation of lake control structure produces widely fluctuating flows that have contributed to significant streambank erosion & tree falls over a roughly 13 mile stretch of the MR downstream of the control structure
    b. Above concerns triggered post (at large) meeting discussion to explore minimum flow requirements & how the lake control structure is operated, as well as what can be done to restore minimum flows into Dead Stream & below Reedsburg Dam
        i. Suggested we (concerned group) could contact Roscommon County Board of Commissioners to register a complaint that it appears the lake control structure is not being operated according to the court order (lake levels are higher than legal limits)
        ii. Need to recognize that Reedsburg Dam backs up water to the lake control structure, making it difficult to see channel effects
        iii. Any actions taken concerning the lake control structure &/or Reedsburg Dam will likely require some type of (hydrologic) study
        iv. Possibly form a group to discuss all of the issues & develop a plan on how to address the problems
            1. should this effort be led by MRWA or other group?
    c. DNR / MRWA arranged for / conducted site inventory of both the lake control structure & Reedsburg Dam on 8/29/13 to measure / collect discharge information
        i. Inventory of both sites done as part of existing GIS Barrier Inventory Project (2013) thru DNR/HIA grant to MRWA
    d. HLLA reported on 9/6/13 or thereabouts that all of the gates at the lake control structure were now open (HLLA estimated the gates were opened on 9/3 or 9/4)
        - O'Neal indicated he intends to pursue a hydrologic study of this situation working with the Muskegon Watershed Research Partnership (MWRP). Specifically, he wants to talk with Mike Wiley (UofM) & Dave Hyndman (MSU) to get their impressions. O'Neal feels it would be best to hold off pushing for any actions/corrections until we get research input.
        - O'Neal also felt we have enough on our plate working to complete a related hydrologic study on Higgins Lake. O'Neal commented that the court is waiting to hear on the results of the Higgins Lake hydrologic evaluation study in order to help the court deal with Higgins Lake levels.
        - Mund commented that the MRWA should at least stay on top of the Houghton Lake flow issue.

2. *AIS Boat Washing / Education Program (New)*
    a. Program runs for 5-years in partnership with USFS (Dec. 2012 – Nov. 2017)
    b. USFS funding comes from GLRI program (~$45K for this 2013 project)
    c. Initial focus on <u>Upper MRW</u> to educate public on risks of aquatic invasive species (2013)
        i. Purchased new portable (high pressure/heated water) boat washing equipment
        ii. Hired local staff (contractor) to recruit / train / coordinate volunteers on operating boat washing equipment & interviewing boaters at public boat launch sites
        iii. Installed signs at boat access sites in Houghton Lake area

iv. MRWA experienced delay in receiving DEQ permit (for discharging collected wash water) & incurred difficulties in operating boat washing equipment (faulty parts), causing delays with field implementation during 2013
v. Plan is to continue efforts into 2014 for Upper MRW (pending available funds)

d. Considering similar project in Lower MRW in 2014 (pending available funds)

3. *Newaygo Sturgeon Rearing Initiative (New)*
   a. DNR Fisheries lead overall with MRWA assisting on education / outreach / volunteers
   b. DNR/HIA funding requested (pending) for construction of facility (trailer) during 2014 & for major portion of staff / operations during 2015-2019 (5-years)
      i. Need to raise $18K/year (over 5 years) to meet staffing / operation budget
      ii. DNR & MRWA considering additional funding options
   c. MRWA facilitated public meeting in Newaygo on 3/25/13 to gauge volunteer interest & hear from DNR Fisheries on merits of initiative – strong volunteer interest received
      - Noble reported that MRWA staff is targeting the Fremont Area Community Foundation (FACF) & Great Lakes Fishery Trust (GLFT) for additional funds to cover the $18K annual shortfall.
      - Kadelsik suggested MRWA staff consider the Ice Mt. Environmental Stewardship Fund (IMESF) as a source for additional funding.
      - Someone commented that Marty Holgren (LRBOI Biologist) could be a good resource.
      - O'Neal commented that the state has a Sturgeon Rehabilitation Plan in place & that certain criteria have to be met in order to establish a rearing facility.

4. *Hersey River Habitat Improvement Project (New)*
   a. DNR/HIA funding approved for $25K for 2014
      i. Need to raise $4,700 to meet project budget
         1. MRWA intends to apply to other source(s) to cover shortfall
   b. Goal is to increase fish habitat to improve brown trout densities & number of large trout in the lower river (in proximity of former Hersey Dam site)
      i. Will install wood cover from the river mouth at the Muskegon River upstream 2,058 ft., within the Village of Hersey adjacent to their campground & park

(Project Ideas)

- Noble reiterated a previous committee idea to pursue a road/stream crossing improvement project(s) at a "priority" site in Newaygo County now that inventory work has been completed for Newaygo County. The committee could look at inventory data & see how Newaygo County sites compare.
- Mund suggested continuing reforestation & restoration in high-priority sub-basins (from research), including education of local government officials, along with establishing conservation easements. Perhaps develop a strategy &/or prioritize "high-priority" sub-basins to further focus efforts.
- Goudy indicated that MDEQ (Cadillac District) has road/stream crossing data collected in 22 northern Michigan counties & they need help to go through the data & help write a report. Perhaps MRWA staff could help.
  - Noble responded MRWA staff doesn't have the time either, but he suggested having student interns help with sorting through the data & writing a report. Noble suggested UofM, MSU, & FSU students could possibly help.
  - **Goudy to check if he can obtain permission to send the MDEQ road/stream crossing data to someone else for review.**
  - O"Neal suggested Goudy send the MDEQ road/stream crossing data to Chris Freiburger (MDNR)-Lansing) who's one of the team leaders managing the statewide inventory database.
    - **Goudy to contact Chris Freiburger (MDNR) to see if Chris has any interest in helping.**

Other

(Cadillac Area Land Conservancy - CALC)

- Copley reported on an "Upper MRW Critical Lands Mapping Project" proposal that would, if funded, prioritize potential conservation areas (PCA's) to target conservation easements on private land in Osceola, Missaukee, & Wexford Counties (within the MRW).
    - CALC has applied to the Ice Mt. Environmental Stewardship Fund in partnership with GVSU's Annis Water Resources Institute.
    - Copley indicated that he & other partners on this proposal worked with Noble who advised them of previous (similar) work conducted in the Lower MRW (Muskegon & Newaygo Counties) for the Land Conservancy of West MI.

On-Going Projects / Opportunities / Activities Report

- Noble re-distributed copies of a handout from the last committee meeting (to those wanting one) that updates "on-going MRWA projects & activities".
- By request, **Noble will resend (to meeting attendees) a digital map of the MR Watershed depicting MRWA project locations/costs since July 2001, when staff began working.** The map also lists MRWA education activities/costs that are not located on the map.

The next Resource Committee meeting will be a conference call, likely in January. Noble will email committee members to determine the date/time.

The meeting adjourned at 7:05pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Gary Noble
Executive Director