

URBANWATERS

A Partnership Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership Meeting Notes

Thursday, July 11, 2019, 10:45 AM -12:00 PM Central
Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN 46368

- Welcome and introductions

In attendance: Geof Benson, Dunes Learning Center; Drew Hart, US Forest Service (USFS); Maggie Byrne, DNR- Lake Michigan Coastal Program; George Topoll, Union Township; Dan Plath, National Park Service (NPS); Mitch Barloga, Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC); Joe Exl, NIRPC; Christine Livingston, Indiana Dunes Tourism; Kevin Corrigan, NIRPC; Lisa Harris, The Savory Muse and League of Women Voters; Susan MiHalo, The Nature Conservancy; Ashley Hodges, Calumet Collaborative; Sarah Coulter, Calumet Collaborative; Sherryl Doer, City of Hobart; Tim Kingsland, City of Hobart; Michael Spinar, IDEM; Michelle Caldwell, IDEM; Ariel Dreyfus, Student Conservation Association (SCA); CM Tena, SCA; Leslie Dorworth, Purdue Northwest/Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant; Doreen Carey, resident; Deb Backhus, citizen, Access Miller; Zully JF Alvarado, Causes for Change, VOCART; Eric Bird, Shirley Heinze Land Trust; Cherie Fisher, USFS; Lynda Lancaster, NPS; Joe Gryzalski, NPS; Kim Swift, NPS; Elizabeth McCloskey, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Phil Graf, Urban Forestry Consultant; Jennifer Johnson, Audubon Great Lakes; Deb Chubb; Olivia Hubble, Michigan City Sanitary District; Steven Stanford, Michigan City Sanitary District; Jared O'Brien, Porter County Soil and Water Conservation District; Stan Shepard, Northwest Indiana Paddling Association

Via AdobeConnect and phone: Lynne Westphal, USFS; Shany Viars, American Rivers

- Urban Waters updates

-Jen Birchfield, NWI Urban Waters Coordinator

Jen provided updates on recent Urban Waters projects, including the IDNR Tree Steward training and Paddling Safety Certification, as well as current grant opportunities. Leslie Dorworth provided an update on the Master Watershed Steward program pilot. Calumet Collaborative provided an update on the Calumet Heritage Area Event calendar. Lisa Harris provided an update on the Green Infrastructure Planning and Maintenance certification training she attended with a scholarship from Urban Waters.

- Discussion on public access to waterways and natural areas in Northwest Indiana

Zully Alvarado gave a presentation on recent and ongoing accessibility initiatives led by Miller Access (Slides attached as .pdf).

Discussion notes:

- Funding needed for Barrier Free Beach 2020.
- Access Miller wants to start a blind cycling program.
- Outdoor Adaptive Escapade continues as part of NPS Outdoor Adventure Fest, which includes vendor displays, equipment expos.
- IUN and IU Bloomington are partners.
- Beware of ADA labels. Something is not ADA-compliant unless tested by the end user. For example, the blue beach mats don't work on sand. Testing equipment is critical to ensuring it meets needs. For bikes, they had to test many to find one that worked.
- Eric Bird asked if there is a recommended alternative to the blue beach mats. Zully said yes, and mentioned a modular system that creates a smooth surface like the system in use at the Douglas Center.
- Access Miller submitted a \$25,000 grant proposal for a trail at Miller beach.
- National Center on Accessibility at Indiana University Bloomington is a partner.
- Jen asked if Urban Waters could support NPS in providing adaptive equipment expos and testing. They would love to have more vendors and visitors at the Adventure Fest
- Need funding to purchase needed equipment for lending and training for staff in proper use and maintenance of equipment. Would like to be able to test new generations of equipment and bigger equipment, including cars and other vehicles.
- Need space to store and warehouse equipment.
- Deb- Could we bring out different types of surfaces and let people try them all out. As part of Outdoor Adventure Fest or separately working with IUN. Bring community of users to test.
- Fluctuating lake and water levels have a big impact on the accessibility of launches.
- Stan- We need to be cognizant of safety concerns. We need to be able to get people out if they fall in. There are only a handful of trainers in the country, we need to get on the list and bring a trainer here.
- It is not enough if the launches are accessible, consider parking, trails, and bathrooms
- Park bathrooms need adult changing tables.
- Mitch- NIRPC is always working with municipalities and works with NWIPA. Lowell is entertaining opening waterways, it is low hanging fruit- water is already there. It depends on the administration.
- We need access for all, as the population ages, there will be more need for accessibility.

- Joe- High Lake levels are an issue. The NPS pier and jetty going out are supposed to be accessible, it is not even close now. It is so crowded up there. Anglers are forced to fish on top of the existing pier.
- East Chicago/Hammond has lower effects to get to.
- Portage Lakefront is a huge challenge, losing huge sections of sidewalk, was accessible, but lake levels are up.
- Jen asked would it be useful to have a web-based interactive map showing accessible features and referred to the existing Openlands tool that could be populated or modified.
- Geof- REI has Co-op Guide to the National Parks app (<https://www.hikingproject.com/nationalparks>). IDNP trails are on it, Rafi has populated it. We could add ADA lunches.
- We should do some google searching on paddling and accessibility and see what comes up.
- Christine- Indiana Dunes Tourism has an outdoor adventure guide, they could enhance it if needed. <http://www.indianadunes.com/travel-blog/accessible-adventures-in-the-indiana-dunes/>.
- The Calumet Collaborative has a wayfinding project.

Needs and discussion items submitted via paper:

- Help remove trees at Lagoon Launch and replace those once removed
- Funding leads for an accessible walkway to beach at Marquette Park (\$25K)
- Funding for an I-paddle Port at Marquette Park.
- Help with invasive species removal at the Lagoon.
- Funding to purchase adaptive equipment (hoist, hand/wrist aids, light paddles)
- Hub?

Partner updates and announcements

- Geof- Dunes Learning Center summer camps are sold out. They did a teen camp with NWIPA and NPS, getting kids out on the water. Also partnering with Erita II. On Saturdays an NPS ranger goes out at 11, Joe does it for NPS and can explain more.
- Drew- Communitree planted throughout NWI this spring. Trees liked the cool rainy spring. CommuniTree will be having a work planning session July 26, all welcome.
- Susan Mihalo – Monarch Festival September 21st. There will be demos, exhibits, a Wild Ones pop-up workshop, giveaways. They got a NIPSCO Environmental Challenge grant, sponsorship opportunities are available.
- Cherie- Chicago Wilderness Executive Council will meet at Portage Lakefront Park Pavillion on July 17th.
- Trail Creek Fun Float is July 28th - East Branch Celebration is August 17th
- **Next UW Meeting: October 3, 2019, 9:30 AM -noon Central at NIRPC, Portage, IN**