

**Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative Meeting**  
**Wednesday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, Auburn Parks Conference Room**

Present: Bill Lambert – NRCS – DeKalb County, Tom Traxler – SWCD Williams Co Ohio, Sherm Liechty – NRCS – Allen County, Pete Hippensteel – Project Coordinator, Allen Hayes – SWCD DeKalb County, Jim Lake – ISDA, Jeff Finn – USFWS NW Ohio, Dee Waters – USDA-NRCS Williams County Ohio, Forest Clark – USFWS Indiana, Scott Gibson – IPFW, Jane Loomis – St. Joseph River Watershed Initiative, Greg Lake – Allen County SWCD, Beth Warner – The Nature Conservancy and Joe Draper – The Nature Conservancy

Introductions were given beginning with Joe Draper of The Nature Conservancy (TNC). An overview of the project with deliverables was presented. The goals of the project involve identifying top restoration sites for wetlands and riparian buffers within the St. Joseph River Watershed through the development of a management plan. A website for public use will also be maintained with the data collected. This could be a tool for incorporation into local county planning. It was explained that although much of the information this group will be collecting has been assimilated previously by different partners, new information has since been collected and bears review. Also, this information can drive funding for future projects.

Pete Hippensteel will be the coordinator for the project. He asked the group to help identify data already available. This will be used to identify and evaluate sites for wetland and riparian buffers restoration which would fit NRCS program guidelines for funding.

Scott Gibson from IPFW will be coordinating GIS mapping information based on a ranking criteria the committee develops. The resulting map(s) will help to identify top priority sites for restoration work in the watershed. Scott showed a sample GIS map and discussed the need to first identify the top 5 – 10 stressors and coordinated data layers already available. Scott noted stressors selected need to be measurable with backup data or acceptable surrogate information. The group will need to identify intensity and frequency of stressors for ranking. It was suggested that perhaps the second level of sorting after top sites selected, would be by willing landowners.

The group discussed the pros and cons of looking at smaller sub-watersheds data Vs. the whole watershed. Also discussed was whether to start at headwaters and tributaries or the main stem. It was also noted that some of the data such as the landuse GIS data layer is from 1992. Also the compatibility of data from three states will be a concern. The state of Indiana is performing a Rapid Assessment for current landuse cover, and ag info but will probably not be ready in time to be used for this project. The data the group develops however may be of help for the state project.

It was noted that local county assessors offices often have the most current land use broken down specifically into woodlands, ag land, etc. Tillage transects also offer information on land use.

Local GIS coordinators for the counties should be kept apprised of the work on this project. The NE Regional Coordinating Council should be contacted for new road/bridge

development. Other sources for information mentioned were NWI – national wetland inventory, FWS Ohio and Indiana, NRCS/FSA – current land practices, USDA – species data and water quality.

Funding for restoration work can come from NRCS programs as well as FWS – Partners for Wildlife Program, and Ohio DNR. Part of this project will identify future funding.

Available Data Layers ?	Top Stressors
<a href="#">Landuse</a>	<a href="#">Landuse</a>
Urban Areas	Development
NE Transportation corridors	<a href="#">Potential Development</a>
CRP/Conservation practices – FSA	Sign up dates for CRP
Transects	<a href="#">Lack of conservation practices</a>
Legal Drains/tiles – County Surveyor/GIS	Legal Drains, proximity to legal drain
Public Lands	Lack of wildlife habitat
Livestock layers by county	Intensity of livestock operations(nutrient loading)
<a href="#">National Wetland Inventory (NWI)</a>	
	Management of land around a <a href="#">restoration</a> potential site
Hydric soil layer	Watershed draining into a wetland site – may be a higher priority than a field
% of natural vegetation	<a href="#">Lack of Wildlife Habitat</a>
Sewer/Septic layer	Homes on septic systems (nutrient loading)
Heritage database for specific species	Lack of connectivity
	Timeline – restoration needed today or 10 years from now
<a href="#">Water Quality Data</a>	<a href="#">Lack of Wildlife Habitat</a>

A possible surrogate layer for restorable wetlands could be a hydric soils and crop layer (land use).

It was suggested after stressors are identified, they could be presented to stakeholders to help develop ranking. After discussion it was agreed to wait for a stakeholder meeting until after the scoring mechanism was in place. Jane Loomis and the St. Joseph River Watershed Initiative will coordinate stakeholder meetings and has funding available for meals to be included.

[Some](#) main species of concern for aquatics were identified as mussels [and Copperbelly Water Snake](#) .

Joe Draper noted ODNR has funding available for travel time and meetings connected with this project and passed out a reimbursement form.

The committee agreed to meet again after initial mapping of several layers has been developed.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.