**Wetland Workgroup Meeting Minutes**

Chesapeake Bay Program Office

Thursday, March 17th, 2016

1:00-3:00PM

**Participants:**

Amy Jacobs, TNC

Erin McLaughlin, MD DNR

Kyle Runion, CRC

Melissa Yearick, USC

Jeremy Hanson, VT

Denise Clearwater, MDE

Jill Whitcomb, PADEP

Anne Wakeford, WV DNR

Alana Hartman, WV DEP

Steve Strano, NRCS

Greg Noe, USGS

Eileen Shader, AR

Dave Byrd, USFWS

**Actions:**

Action: Runion distributed the STAC comments on 3/17 and asked for assistance with crafting responses by 3/22. All comments must have a response as to how we incorporated it into the workplan or why we are not doing so. Apologies for the short timeline and thanks for your help. **Completed**

Action: McLaughlin will share strawman list of Maryland wetland programs for others to add to and develop for their state.

**Welcome and Update**, Amy Jacobs

Wetlands goal update. Have not received 2015 numbers from the Bay Program yet – hopefully available soon. Will share once available.

**Input from Wetland Workgroup – At least one cool wetland update from your state or organization.**

* Yearick: Earliest start of salamander migration we’ve seen in 12 years.
* Whitcomb: Wetland program working with EPA, USACE to adapt watershed resource registry, watershed based priority setting. Working with USC for wetland mapping project. Set to be done September, aim to have a full report in the fall/winter
* Hartman: Volunteer planting of red spruce at Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge on April 16th.
* Clearwater: Soon be submitting our wetland program plan for EPA, will help with obtaining grants. We just received the NWI+ layer for primarily coastal plan, which we will use to update our baseline. We will share once available.
* Jacobs: 1800 acre wetland site restored by NRCS, pine plantation converted to native mixed cypress stand, largely.

**Delaware Wetland Conference Social Marketing Overview and Recommendations**, Jacobs

* OpinionWorks with Steve Raabe. We are awaiting final report which was due at the start of the year and will share the report when complete. If possible, Steve will present the findings. The workshop provided an overview of the stakeholder survey that was completed by TNC and DU as well as Steve’s take on the social marketing framework.
* There was an acknowledgement that there are lots of groups doing these programs and not all are well versed in other programs. Cross-training could help provide a balanced knowledge to practitioners of the many wetland restoration programs, which could then be provided to landowners, who often showed a lack of awareness of these programs. Certainly a regional issue.
  + McLaughlin: At DNR, we have list of programs in MD so we can give landowners other options if we cannot fully fund. Action: Will share strawman list for others to add to and develop for their state.
    - Yearick: Would be great to have a version for NY.
    - Jacobs: Next step would be to develop a draft template or idea of how to do it. Could do in house or seek funding for.

**STAC Enhancing Capacity Workshop Overview and Recommendations**, Erin McLaughlin

* In mid-January, we held a Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) workshop to discuss the workplan. This led to comments, distributed by Runion to the workgroup on 3/17/2016. Comments included tweaking goals to look at function rather than acreage. They were unaware that the burden is currently on agricultural lands. They understand that this is generally an unfunded mandate.

Summary of STAC comments (MA = Management Approach)

* MA1 – Agree that mapping is a priority but suggest that it is not the number 1 priority. Suggest we incorporate the new USGS landuse data, would like to see a trends analysis, and want all inventories to be ground verified.
* MA2 – This is an unfunded mandate. They want us to explore how to increase landowner willingness. Agree that work towards refining marketing and outreach is important, suggest we use existing projects as case studies.
* MA3 – increasing technical understanding of factors that influence restoration success. STAC wanted us to remove this from our workplan and use wetland function as assessment; measuring would be difficult.
* MA4 – Link prioritization of wetland restoration with the Black Duck workgroup on a subwatershed basis. Pointing toward stream rest and floodplain reconnection as other restoration opportunities. Conducting inventory on degraded wetlands, potentially using remote sensing.
* MA5 – They now understand that the burden for wetland restoration is currently on farmers. Talk about focus on peer to peer outreach or wetland outreach coordinator to help this process. Consider incentives & use demonstration projects.
* Public comments were sparse. Mainly consisted of “remove actions already completed” or “please add my organization name to the list of interested parties.” STAC comments were most substantial; we have to provide written response as to how we are incorporating or why we are not.
* Whitcomb: MA1, comment D stating that all inventories should be ground verified. Hard to provide this as it is very expensive and often prohibitive.

Action: Jacobs: Asking for assistance on responses. Runion sent around a spreadsheet with the comments asking for responses. Apologies for short timeline. Asking comments back by Tuesday the 22nd, and we will circulate our responses.

* Noe: Are there existing databases on degraded wetlands? Would take huge effort but would be very helpful
  + Jacobs: There is some info from NWI+ and the updates Ralph Tiner did in Delaware, indicating wetlands that are ditched.
  + Clearwater: NRCS has something on ditches?
    - Strano: We have the PDA ditches mapped out and are working on LiDAR tool to help give start of all ditches in watershed. Would take time to go through and QA/QC.
* Clearwater: MA3, comment C, suggestion that we change the way we assign credit. I like the notion of giving credit to what is already existing based on function rather
  + McLaughlin: Comment pertains to variance in projects rather than crediting for existing natural wetlands. Some projects have been proposing designs in order to maximize theWIP credit return, driven by the TMDL and WIP goals. These projects are mainly coming from watershed groups.

**Wetland Expert Panel Update**, Jeremy Hanson

* The panel is piecing together report and will be meeting on 3/23 to put reduction numbers to creation, restoration, and enhancement for nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment. Based on the restricted timeline, enhancement may not be completed, but that is the goal of the panel.
* Earlier in our panel process, we were looking at getting SPARROW analysis done, but given the USGS and Bay Program workloads, the analysis will not be able to be completed in a timely fashion. The panel will continue to work towards reduction efficiencies from the literature. SPARROW may still be run, but by that time the report should be complete.
* Ideal timeline is having the report done and released in late April/early May. It would then go through the partnership for a review process. A webinar will start off a 30 day comment period, which the WWG will be invited to. Needs review from Wetland workgroup, Watershed Technical workgroup, Agricultural workgroup, Habitat GIT, and the Water Quality GIT.
  + Willing to send report to workgroup before May meeting in order for the Wetland workgroup to have the first opportunity within the partnership to comment. The review process is very condensed and many groups need to review.
    - McLaughlin: Should distribute to WWG as soon as the WEP is comfortable with a draft as it must be approved from the Wetland workgroup first. Then one round of review and comments from all other workgroups.

**Guest Presentation: *“Floodplain Restoration along Channelized Streams on the Coastal Plain,”***Steve Strano, NRCS Maryland State Biologist

Pocomoke River Floodplain Restoration. Partnership with TNC, DNR, and USFWS.

* The Pocomoke River is in a cypress swamp region. The river was altered through channelization and conversion to agriculture. The project is in Wicomico and Worchester County.
* History
  + Early 1900s – channel modification using dynamite
  + 1940s – Civilian Conservation corps channel straightening and dredging
    - 17 miles of stream shortened to 14 miles
  + 1950s-1980s – Public drainage ditches constructed on tributaries
* Spoil levees cause an extreme disconnection to the floodplain at most flows, and can cause flooding in very high flows as water is stuck behind levee. Most of the levees are 6-8 feet. Pipes placed in some PDA sections underneath the levee were not adequate to reconnect the floodplain. The floodplain experienced some major subsidence.
  + A report in 1982 from the Department of Agriculture identified this issue, but practices continued.
  + Higher storm flows, higher velocity, more channel erosion, loss of floodplain functions, loss of wildlife resources, among other issues.
* In 2011, a new generation of high resolution LiDAR flown for the Pocomoke watershed with 1 ft contour lines was developed. It is very easy to see the straightened channel, as well as natural, former stream channels in the watershed.
  + LiDAR data can be used for engineering designs. AutoCAD and GIS can do volume computations to determine the amount of fill to add or remove anywhere.
* Identified project area at lower half of the channelized river. Breaches were installed in the spoil levee to increase frequency and volume of flows from the channel into the floodplain. The spoil from breach excavation is placed where it will not significantly affect existing floodplain function. This system has a lot of organics underlain with sands.
  + 20 target areas consist of 39 parcels of privately owned lands.
    - 1,133 acres are currently in WRP or WRE
    - 397 acres in TNC floodplain restoration program
    - 245 acres agreeable to restoration, but not enrolling
    - 36 additional acres targeted for participation
    - 691 acres not interested or can’t participate
  + 1,267 acres have been restored
* Clearwater: What storm event will get over breach?
  + 2-10 year event, which is what we want. Multiple events a year, given the outdated definition of the year storm event.
* Money comes from WRP and farm bill programs. Putting the acreage into a permanent easement can help to get money for the landowner as an incentive.
* Byrd: This work in the area reminds me of the Dismal swamp and its ditching in the peat soils. They use berms as roads, so water can’t get into the ditches and can’t flood into adjacent wetlands. There are different challenges with mineral soils vs peat. Interesting to keep pre and post flooding data.
* Clearwater: Nothing in the PDA rules that prevented this change.

**Closing**

Next meeting in May. Look forward to the Wetland Expert Panel report near that time.