

**UMRBA Water Quality Executive Committee Meeting  
November 19, 2008  
Davenport, Iowa**

**Highlights and Action Items**

**1. Meeting Highlights**

**Attendees**

Marcia Willhite	Illinois EPA
Marc Miller	Illinois, Office of the Lieutenant Governor
Chuck Corell	Iowa DNR
Rob Morrison	Missouri DNR
Bryan Hopkins	Missouri DNR
Todd Ambs	Wisconsin DNR
Tim Henry	U.S. EPA Region 5
Art Spratlin	U.S. EPA Region 7
Tom Saul	Quad Cities Times
Dave Hokanson	UMRBA
Barb Naramore	UMRBA

**Interagency Personnel Agreement (IPA) with US EPA**

*Status of IPA*

- Hokanson provided an update on the status of the IPA, indicating that a candidate had been identified in US EPA Region 5. Subsequent to interviews and reference checks, UMRBA notified US EPA of its interest in having this individual fill the position. Hokanson added that he was in the process of working with Office of Water staff in EPA Headquarters to complete the necessary paperwork.

*Workplan*

- Henry stressed the importance of having a workplan in place for the individual working under the IPA. All concurred and requested that the Water Quality Task Force (WQTF) have a draft IPA workplan in place by the January meeting of the WQTF.

**Biological Indicators and Water Quality Standards for the UMR**

*Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) for the UMR*

- Willhite asked whether, if an IBI could be developed/identified for the UMR, the members of the Water Quality Executive Committee (WQEC) were committed to pursuing its adoption in their states. All indicated a commitment to do so.
- Corell suggested that identifying an appropriate IBI for different areas of the river may actually help in making distinctions in designated uses.
- Willhite suggested that, in addition to the Ohio River and the Chesapeake Bay, the Delaware River may be a place to look for an example of applying biological criteria to a large river.

*Biological Criteria and Independent Applicability*

- Henry indicated a need for both biological and chemical criteria to be in place for the UMR. Morrison concurred that both are needed, but cautioned that having both chemical and biological criteria raises the question of independent applicability — i.e., whether both sets of criteria would need to be met for a waterbody to be considered as supporting a use. Ambs and Willhite concurred that this is an important consideration in the implementation of criteria.

### *Criteria, Uses, and Standards*

- Hokanson asked whether, given the preceding discussion, the WQTF should consider its current efforts to be a comprehensive look at water quality standards for the UMR, or whether it should still consider its primary task to be an investigation of “designated uses.” All indicated that the WQTF’s work should still proceed primarily as a designated uses effort.

### **Clean Water Act (CWA)/Ecosystem Restoration Report and Next Steps**

#### *Cross-Program Interest and Support*

- Corell asked whether there appeared to be interest and motivation in the ecosystem restoration sector regarding continued collaboration. Henry and Morrison said there seems to be considerable interest in this sector. Henry added that there also appears to be interest in potentially expanding coordination to include efforts on tributaries and collaboration with the agricultural sector.

#### *Discussion of Priorities for Action*

- In light of the apparent cross-program interest in continued collaboration, Corell asked the WQEC to identify its priorities and recommendations for WQTF action.
- Willhite indicated that the involvement of CWA program staff in the restoration programs’ objective-setting process (*Item 1a*) should be a priority. Henry concurred and suggested that the Corps should be asked for its objective-setting schedule. Hokanson asked whether the WQEC would like to make this request formally via a letter. Morrison replied that this would be appropriate and all concurred that correspondence should be sent to the Corps to request more information about the objective-setting process and to urge inclusion of CWA staff in the effort. Hokanson suggested that the WQEC’s letter identify contact points within the states and US EPA, to facilitate the Corps’ coordination with the CWA programs. Henry further suggested that the Corps may be able to help support CWA staff attendance, and that Bill Franz may have further information on this possibility.
- Henry noted that continued work on water quality standards (*Item 1b*) was already being addressed via the designated uses project and other efforts of the WQTF. Hokanson asked whether a related idea, the inclusion of USGS staff on a more formal basis in the activities of the WQTF, should be considered, particularly in light of Mike Jawson (USGS Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center Director) offering to join the discussion of the WQEC. All agreed that USGS representation would work best at the WQTF level at this time and asked UMRBA staff to work on identifying the best fit for representation.
- All were in agreement that formation of a standing committee to continue CWA-ecosystem restoration discussions (*Item 1d*) was not a priority and that additional committees were not needed at this time.
- Ambs suggested that the table of potential followup activities be updated to include activities ongoing or initiated (e.g. WQTF work on designated uses, biological indicators work). He added that the lead agencies should be updated as that information becomes clearer.
- Henry suggested that coordination of monitoring schedules (*Item 3b*) might present some near-term opportunities. He added that this might be one way to address the apparent mismatch between the amount of data being generated by a variety of river programs and the extent to which that data is being used within CWA programs. Morrison cautioned that it is important to have a standards framework in place before focusing too much on monitoring, though he added that monitoring data could potentially be used in standards development. Spratlin suggested that there was value in having a discussion now with USGS and others regarding monitoring, even if changes were ultimately to occur at some point in the more distant future.
- Corell suggested that both a review of data requirements to enhance data sharing (*Item 3a*) and coordination of monitoring schedules (*Item 3b*) could be priorities in the near term.

- Hopkins asked about the WQEC's approach to dealing with nonpoint source issues (as suggested in *Item 4a* and *Item 4b*). Willhite replied that the WQEC's approach has been to operate sequentially, first working on the standards framework and setting the goals for the UMR, then adding in other components. Henry concurred with the sequential approach, but indicated there may be benefit to bringing in nonpoint considerations and programs earlier in the process. Spratlin concurred, noting that it was important to have concurrent efforts while building up the UMR standards framework. Morrison observed that CWA-Ecosystem Restoration workshop participants noted that absence of agriculture agencies from the discussion.
- Henry and Spratlin indicated that efforts are underway to try to improve collaboration between US EPA and USDA, adding that USDA's structure does not parallel the regional structure of US EPA. Spratlin noted that it is also important to engage commodity groups, the Farm Bureau, and other agricultural NGOs in the discussion.
- Corell and Willhite suggested that Theme 4: Watersheds, Tributaries, and TMDLs (including *Item 4a* and *Item 4b*) are areas for the WQEC, rather than the WQTF, to focus on.
- In regard to CWA staff inclusion in restoration project teams, Naramore suggested that UMRBA staff coordinate with restoration programs managers in the Corps (Marvin Hubbell and Ken Barr) and then report back to the WQEC.

#### *Summary of Priorities for Water Quality Task Force Action*

- Corell led the WQEC through a summary of its priorities for action as follows:
  - **First Priority:** Theme 2: Biological Indicators (all work in theme).
  - **Second Priority:** Theme 1: Ecosystem Restoration , specifically:
    - *Item 1a:* Inclusion of CWA staff in restoration objective-setting.
    - *Item 1b:* Continued work on water quality standards with participation of restoration staff (a longer term project than 1a or 1c).
    - *Item 1c:* Inclusion of CWA staff in work on UMRCC Fisheries Plan.
  - **Third Priority:** Theme 3: Water Quality Monitoring, specifically:
    - *Item 3a:* Examination of monitoring and data requirements to find opportunities for greater data sharing.
    - *Item 3b:* Coordination of monitoring schedules.
    - *Item 3e:* Formation of a UMR Water Quality Monitoring Council (a longer term project than 3a or 3b).

### **UMR Water Quality Goals, Strategies, and Priorities in Moving Forward**

#### *US EPA Strategic Planning Process*

- Morrison suggested that the UMRBA could perhaps recommend that US EPA develop a Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) goal for the UMR. Spratlin added that measurable results are important.
- Henry and Spratlin reported that Marcus Peacock (EPA Deputy Administrator) and Ben Grumbles (Assistant Administrator for Water) have recently indicated that the Upper Mississippi River should be included by EPA as an "(extremely) large aquatic ecosystem."
- In regard to the 2009-2014 EPA Strategic Plan Change Document and the need for measurable outcomes, Henry indicated that it is has been difficult to identify specific outcomes for the UMR that could be incorporated into the Strategic Plan. He added that, in other aquatic ecosystems, these type of outcome goals were developed via a stakeholder process. Given the short timeframe (until November 30, 2008) to develop comments on the Strategic Plan Change Document, Henry asked whether it might be possible to suggest some outcomes for the next five years, even if they were more process- than outcome-oriented.
- After some discussion of possible approaches to recommending outcome goals, Henry and Hokanson suggested that currently ongoing efforts (e.g., designated uses, biological indicators,

collaboration with ecosystem restoration programs, and intergovernmental personnel agreement) could help frame UMRBA's recommendations for UMR outcome goals. Henry recommended that any suggestions regarding potential text for the Strategic Plan be separated out and attached to a more general comment letter.

- Naramore proposed that UMRBA staff develop a comment letter and specific suggested Strategic Plan text, then circulate this for simultaneous review and approval by the UMRBA Board and Water Quality Executive Committee. This simultaneous review process is necessary in order to meet the November 30<sup>th</sup> comment deadline for the Strategic Plan Change Document. All were in agreement on this approach.

#### *National Research Council (NRC) Report on the Mississippi River*

- Hokanson and Naramore indicated that the NRC report from the project "The Mississippi River and the Clean Water Act: Scientific, Modeling, and Technical Aspects of Nutrient Pollutant Load Allocation and Implementation" is expected to be released shortly. They suggested that a plan for responding to the report should be considered.
- The WQEC was in agreement that once the report was released, it should be reviewed by UMRBA staff and comments developed as appropriate for approval by the UMRBA Board and the WQEC.

#### *Articulation of Credible and Compelling Goals for the UMR*

- Corell proposed that a review of metrics currently being collected by the states – including both natural resource and economic data – could aid in developing goals for the UMR.
- Ambs suggested that the success in collaboration supporting ecosystem restoration on the UMR should be referenced in messages regarding UMR water quality collaboration, and that potential for similar and complementary success in water quality coordination should be highlighted in such messages. He also noted the importance of linking water quality improvements to the status of fisheries and recreation opportunities. Hopkins and Henry concurred on the importance of making a connection to recreational opportunities.
- Willhite suggested working with the UMR's water suppliers to determine the importance of raw (river) water quality on their operations to determine if this could be important for goal-setting/message development. Henry concurred, citing the impact of raw water quality on disinfection byproduct creation.
- Overall, two theme areas for goal development emerged from the WQEC's discussions: 1) impact of water quality on recreational activities, and 2) impact of water quality on drinking water treatment operations.

#### *Collaboration with NGOs*

- Ambs and Willhite urged meeting with representatives of the McKnight Foundation-sponsored Mississippi River Water Quality Collaborative in the near future. WQEC members were in concurrence regarding such a meeting. Hokanson asked whether this should be tied in with other UMRBA/WQEC meetings. WQEC members indicated that it should be a separate meeting. Ambs offered to speak with Collaborative members to assess the possibilities for a meeting in the near future.

#### *Congressional and US EPA Outreach Strategies*

- The WQEC suggested the following elements for a short term outreach strategy:
  - Send comments on 2009-2014 Strategic Plan to US EPA.
  - Strongly consider a visit to Washington, DC in early March (to co-occur with ASIWPCA's meeting on March 2-4, 2009).
  - Further assess options once a new Administration is in place.

#### **Administrative Items**

##### *Next Conference Call*

- The WQEC agreed to hold a conference call Thursday, December 18, 2008 at 3:30 p.m.

### *WQEC Chair*

- Marcia Willhite was selected as the next Chair of the WQEC, beginning her term of service effective at the conclusion of this meeting. The WQEC members expressed their thanks to Chuck Corell for his service as the first WQEC Chair.

## **2. Action Items**

- UMRBA staff will draft a comment letter on the EPA 2009-2014 Strategic Plan Change Document, which will include suggested Strategic Plan text. This letter will be sent out for review and approval by the UMRBA Board and WQEC.
- UMRBA staff will work with the Water Quality Task Force to develop a work plan for the individual serving on the IPA with US EPA.
- UMRBA staff will draft a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding inclusion of CWA staff in restoration objective-setting processes, and will confer with restoration program managers regarding the inclusion of CWA staff on project teams.
- UMRBA staff will consider options for the incorporating USGS staff into the discussions of the Water Quality Task Force.
- UMRBA staff will update the CWA-Ecosystem Restoration follow-up actions table to reflect activities that have been initiated or are ongoing.
- Ambs will communicate with members of the McKnight Mississippi River Water Quality Collaborative regarding a potential meeting with the WQEC.
- WQEC members will communicate with their agency's Water Quality Task Force members regarding the discussion at this meeting and effect on the Task Force's work and their individual workloads.
- Willhite will draft a public participation plan regarding UMR water quality goals.
- UMRBA staff will arrange a WQEC conference call for December 18, 2008 at 3:30 p.m. (Note: This call has subsequently been rescheduled to 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, December 23, 2008.)