

UMRBA Water Quality Executive Committee (WQEC) Meeting and Joint UMRBA Board/WQEC Meeting

Highlights and Action Items

November 27-28, 2012

St. Paul, Minnesota

The UMRBA Water Quality Executive Committee (WQEC) met on the afternoon of November 27 and early morning of November 28. UMRBA's Board and the WQEC met in a joint session later in the morning of November 28. This summary captures the actionable outcomes of the WQEC's discussions, including modifications and additions resulting from the joint meeting with the Board.

1) Participants

WQEC Participants (11/27 and 11/28)

Marcia Willhite	Illinois EPA
Shelli Grapp	Iowa DNR
Rebecca Flood	Minnesota PCA
John Madras	Missouri DNR
Bryan Hopkins	Missouri DNR
Russ Rasmussen	Wisconsin DNR
Tim Henry	US EPA Region 5

UMRBA Board Participants (11/28 only)

Arlan Juhl	Illinois DNR
Dan Stephenson	Illinois DNR
Diane Ford	Iowa DNR
Dave Frederickson	Minnesota Dept. of Ag.
Robert Stout	Missouri DNR
Dan Baumann	Wisconsin DNR
Jim Fischer	Wisconsin DNR

2) River and Basin Initiatives

There is value in engaging with America's Great Watershed Initiative (AGWI). From a water quality perspective, AGWI's indicators effort is of particular interest. The Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) also appears promising and may be especially valuable in the WQEC's constituency building efforts.

Action Items: 1) UMRBA staff will inform the WQEC when the recent AGWI summit proceedings are released.
2) Marcia Willhite and Barb Naramore are attending The Big River Works meeting in St. Louis on 12/6.
3) UMRBA staff will foster ongoing communications with MRCTI, with particular attention to the mayors' potential as influential advocates for water quality.

3) Regional Nutrient Efforts

WQEC and Water Quality Task Force (WQTF) Role

UMRBA should continue to support coordination and discussion of nutrient issues within the WQEC and WQTF (i.e., "keep doing what we are doing").

Action Item: UMRBA will continue to support nutrient discussions within these work groups.

Information Compilation and Sharing

UMRBA should attempt to consolidate information about the states' UMR-related nutrient efforts, including state nutrient reduction strategies and other major elements of states' nutrient work. This should include specific information, such as TMDLs being implemented and efforts on major tributaries. Information should be presented in a matrix format, with links to further details.

Action Item: UMRBA staff will develop a template document to support nutrient information sharing among the UMR states.

Comment on National Policies

UMRBA should identify and articulate the states' joint perspectives on national nutrient policies. An example is the recently proposed revisions to Clean Water Act Section 319 program guidelines. While there is not adequate time to develop joint comments on the 319 revisions, the WQEC agreed that members should be alert for future issues that are candidates for coordinated state comment via UMRBA. This includes not only nutrient issues, but also other national water quality proposals relevant to the UMR where the states wish to express a shared viewpoint.

Action Item: WQEC members will identify and communicate to each other and UMRBA staff regarding comment opportunities on national nutrient-related policies, as well as other national water quality proposals relevant to the UMR.

Funding for Nutrient Efforts

The WQEC will explore opportunities to increase funding in support of states' nutrient-related efforts. One possibility is to examine the availability funds resulting from the Deepwater Horizon spill via the Gulf of Mexico Regional Ecosystem Restoration Strategy.

Action Item: UMRBA staff will look into funding possibilities associated with the Gulf Restoration Strategy.

UMRBA Role in Hypoxia Task Force

UMRBA is not seeking a more formal role related to the Hypoxia Task Force at this time.

Action Item: No immediate action, though UMRBA staff and the WQEC will communicate UMRBA's nutrient-related efforts to the Hypoxia Task Force and its Coordinating Committee as needed.

Meeting with State Members of the Hypoxia Task Force

Such a meeting is a possibility for the future, but it is not an immediate action item, given that there is not an identified "ask" or compelling need to consult. This may still be an option for the Fall 2013 Hypoxia Task Force meeting, particularly if that meeting is held in Minnesota.

Action Item: No immediate action, may reconsider closer to the Fall 2013 Hypoxia Task Force meeting.

4) Organizational Options

Interstate Compact

The WQEC does not view an interstate compact as a viable option at present, in part due to the current political climate and the lack of an immediate, compelling need for a compact structure. States will continue their UMR water quality collaboration through UMRBA in the near term, though a compact and/or other options may be revisited once priorities and desired outcomes are further defined (see below). Also, ORSANCO's structure and function will be further examined (see OSRSANCO meeting discussion).

Action Item: No further action at this time; states will continue to use the existing structure of water quality collaboration via UMRBA.

Defining the States' Water Quality Goals and Priorities and Related Organizational Options Questions

The states should better define the goals and priorities of their interstate collaboration, together with the capabilities needed to support those goals and priorities. Then, the states can reexamine whether changes are needed in the organizational framework that supports this work. These changes might be substantial, or perhaps might represent more modest adjustments to the current framework. Achieving the states' goals is, of course, more important than the particular organizational model employed. Of note, better articulating the substantial economic benefits of high water quality is key to building support for these priorities.

Action Items: 1) The WQEC will better define water quality goals and priorities. This is central to both pursuing those goals and to the organizational options question. It is also essential in the WQEC's

constituency building efforts. 2) Following the completion of Item 1, the WQEC will consider whether alternative institutional structures and/or adjustments to the current framework are needed. 3) UMRBA staff will examine ways to quantify/express economic benefits associated with water quality protection.

Modifications to UMRBA's Existing Water Quality Program

Related to the organizational options questions described above, there are also likely ways to work more effectively within the current framework (e.g., tapping a broader range of state expertise as needed on particular topics).

Action Item: The WQEC and UMRBA staff will seek to identify any modifications to UMRBA's water quality program that may improve its effectiveness in working with the states.

Increasing Funding Support for UMR Water Quality Work

Increased and stable funding for UMR water quality work continues to be a primary WQEC goal and will be pursued within the current organizational structure. UMRBA's strategic plan will be clear in stating that a consistent, *well-funded* water quality program is a leading UMR water quality goal.

Action Item: Staff will confirm that this goal is expressed clearly in UMRBA's strategic plan.

5) Constituency Building Efforts

Understanding Constituents' Needs

In broadening the constituency for UMR water quality, it is critical to understand what stakeholders see as important and what needs they want to see addressed. This aids both in understanding their perspectives and in evaluating how well the states' water quality goals mesh with other players' interests. It is important to both listen and to effectively communicate what the states want to accomplish.

Action Item: In structuring constituency outreach, the WQEC and UMRBA staff will emphasize the importance of listening to constituents' priorities and needs.

Key Partner Groups for Constituency-Building

Key partner groups for outreach in the near term are:

- Mississippi River Mayors (via MRCTI)
- Recreational Interests (includes both recreationists and recreation-dependent businesses)
- Chambers of Commerce
- Water Suppliers (building on ongoing conversations)

Action Items: 1) UMRBA staff will further identify/define recreationists and recreation-dependent businesses. 2) As an initial outreach step, UMRBA staff will identify upcoming opportunities to participate in meetings of the above groups.

6) Water Quality Priorities/Implementing Recommendations

The following priorities are related to implementing recent report recommendations and were identified *in addition* to priorities named in preceding discussions – i.e., constituency building, sharing information regarding the states' nutrient reduction efforts, and securing stable, ongoing funding support for UMR water quality work.

UMR Clean Water Act (CWA) Monitoring Strategy

The UMR CWA monitoring strategy is the WQEC's highest priority for continued work in the near term. The WQEC wants to discuss the monitoring strategy with the Water Quality Task Force (WQTF) during their joint meeting in June 2012, which will require the WQTF to have a draft *Recommended Monitoring Plan* available for WQEC review in advance of that meeting. Of note, the WQEC places a high priority on a strategy that

supports assessing *all four* major designated uses. The WQEC also stresses the importance of identifying the gaps between existing monitoring and the Recommended Plan – as this is the increment which will justify a request for additional funding.

Action Items: 1) UMRBA staff will communicate the WQEC's priorities and preferences to the WQTF. 2) Staff will continue to work with the WQTF and project contractor on timely completion of monitoring strategy products.

Assessment Methodology

The WQEC supports the WQTF's conclusion that development of an assessment methodology alongside the monitoring strategy is important, as this helps inform choices reflected in the Recommended Monitoring Plan and will be needed once data is collected under the monitoring strategy.

Action Item: UMRBA staff and the WQTF will continue initial work on the UMR CWA assessment methodology.

Data Management

The WQEC would like the WQTF and UMRBA staff to begin considering options for UMR water quality data management, both in terms of data generated under the new monitoring strategy and existing UMR water quality data.

Action Items: 1) UMRBA staff will begin to investigate and document data management options. 2) The WQTF will consider this information and report back to the WQEC with its recommendations for further action.

Aquatic Life Designated Use (ALDU) Project/Report

The WQEC would like to see the states advance efforts to integrate the ALDU report's recommendations into their water quality standards.

Action Item: WQEC members will consult with their staffs regarding how to proceed forward with the integration of these recommendations.

7) June 2013 Joint Meeting with ORSANCO/Water Quality Topics

The following were identified as water quality topics of interest for the June 2013 joint meeting with ORSANCO:

- Description of ORSANCO's structure and function.
- ORSANCO's monitoring and assessment approach, including lessons learned.
- Coalition-building (potentially including AGWI and the Ohio River Basin Alliance)
- Hypoxia and nutrient issues.
- Climate change/wet-weather planning (particularly as related to infrastructure)

Action Item: UMRBA staff and members of the planning team will advance these topics as the meeting agenda is developed.

8) WQEC Chair Transition

Marcia Willhite completed her term as WQEC Chair at the end of the November 2012 meeting series. Rebecca Flood has now begun a two-year term as WQEC chair.

Action Item: Staff will update the UMRBA website and other documentation as necessary.