

UMRBA Water Quality Executive Committee Meeting

May 3, 2007
Rock Island, IL

Meeting Summary

Participants

Toby Frevert	Illinois EPA
Chuck Corell	Iowa DNR
Marvin Hora	Minnesota PCA
Gaylen Reetz	Minnesota PCA
Rob Morrison	Missouri DNR
Todd Ambs	Wisconsin DNR
Art Spratlin	U.S. EPA Region 7
Holly Stoerker	UMRBA
Dave Hokanson	UMRBA

Status of Outreach Efforts

Governors' Statement on UMR Water Quality

Holly Stoerker reported that the Governors of Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin have committed to signing the statement. Gaylen Reetz added that the statement is moving forward in Minnesota and Chuck Corell commented that movement was now more likely in Iowa with the completion of the legislative session. Reetz and Corell both noted that they hope to see progress on the statement within the next week in their States.

Stoerker highlighted a potential signature issue for Missouri, as it does not have a Governor's office in Washington, DC. However, she did not anticipate that this would be a significant obstacle, simply something to be address when the point of signature is reached.

Followup with U.S. EPA-Headquarters

Stoerker asked the Water Quality Executive Committee (WQEC) how they wanted to communicate with U.S. EPA-Headquarters, as a follow-up to the March 2007 meeting held with Office of Water Assistant Administrator Ben Grumbles. Art Spratlin indicated that he would contact Grumbles' office regarding the UMR Water Quality Proposal presented at the March 2007 meeting. He added that he would communicate the results of the conversation to Stoerker. Corell also agreed to follow up with Grumbles' office. Reetz suggested the August 26-28, 2007 ASIWPCA Annual Meeting may offer another opportunity to communicate with Grumbles and other U.S. EPA-Headquarters staff.

Congressional Communication & Message

Rob Morrison asked about the development of a consistent message to be communicated to Congressional delegations. Stoerker replied by highlighting the need to be specific in

any request made to Congressional delegations. Ambs agreed, reporting that his interactions with Congressional staff indicated a need to identify a specific location within the EPA budget where UMR funding could be placed. He also emphasized that it is important to convey both what has been accomplished to date by the UMRBA and what remains to be completed.

Stoerker suggested the “Congressional Priorities” section of the EPA appropriation could be used as a vehicle for funding UMR efforts. She further suggested that the following could be elements of a communication to Congressional delegations: 1) the Governors’ statement (if signed in a timely manner), 2) the UMR Water Quality Proposal, and 3) specific language suggesting that funding be included under “Congressional Priorities”. Stoerker offered to develop this language for use by the WQEC.

Water Quality Work Plan

Relative Priorities of Current Water Quality Work Items

Toby Frevert noted the inherent value of continuing consultation within the Water Quality Task Force (WQTF) regarding the States’ CWA approaches on the UMR. He also asked why fish consumption advisories were broken out as a work item separate from the ongoing assessment & listing consultation. Dave Hokanson replied that this was due to: 1) the fact that this effort had previously been specifically funded from an EPA grant, and 2) the effort involves different and additional parties beyond the WQTF itself.

Reetz commented that it would be important to continue work on fish consumption advisories, particularly in light of emerging issues such as PFCs. However, he added that the priority associated with this work could be reduced to “medium” (from “high”).

Corell commented that fish consumption advisories and assessment/listing consultations should be assigned similar priority levels, with continued work on sediment-related water quality criteria having a lower priority level.

Communication Effort/Strategy

Reetz emphasized the importance of developing a communication strategy regarding efforts taking place on the UMR, noting that it is important to include mention of progress being made, not just areas where there are discrepancies/unresolved issues. He further suggested that a grant to support such a communication effort could be pursued. Reetz identified potential audiences as including the general public, state legislators, conservation groups, and chambers of commerce.

Designated Uses Effort

Stoerker noted that it may be possible to modify the planned Clean Water Act/Ecosystem Restoration workshops to introduce/address the effort to develop tiered aquatic life uses for the UMR.

Reetz suggested that the effort be called “Tiered Uses for the Upper Mississippi River System”, and that Ephraim King (Director of the Office of Science & Technology within U.S. EPA’s Office of Water) could be contacted regarding this project.

Stoerker suggested that one option for advancing the project would be to have a U.S. EPA staff person assigned to UMRBA (or a UMRBA member agency) through an Intergovernmental Personnel Assignment (IPA). Spratlin responded that it would be important to come up with a scope of work and proposal for funding the position, noting that shared funding with the host agency was desirable. He indicated that he would be willing to investigate this possibility, but would need a proposal in hand by the week of June 11-15. Reetz noted that it might be possible for an individual assigned under an IPA to be housed at MPCA, and perhaps also aid their statewide effort regarding tiered aquatic life uses.

Hokanson agreed to draft a summary of the designated use effort that would be reviewed by the WQEC, and then provide the summary to Spratlin no later than June 11.

Water Quality Budget

Stoerker reviewed two options for the UMRBA's water quality budget as follows:

- "Status Quo" with .8 FTE and total budget of 89,800
- "Ramp Up" with 1.8 FTE and total budget of 186,900.

Ambs cautioned that the UMRBA Board may be reluctant to pursue a "ramp-up" budget in the absence of federal funding being secured.

Corell suggested that the UMRBA should proceed in assessing the States \$17,000 each in FY 08 to support ongoing water quality work. Ambs indicated that, if federal funding could be secured, State assessments might be ended or the source of funding within the State changed.

Upcoming Meetings & Calls

Next Conference Call

The WQEC scheduled its next conference call for Friday, June 8 at 2:30 pm (central).

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the WQEC will be held in the Twin Cities on November 13-14, 2007. The WQEC will meet jointly with the UMRBA Board on the 13th and then on its own the 14th. (Note: The specific location of the meeting has subsequently been identified as the Crowne Plaza Hotel in St. Paul, Minnesota.)