

**Minutes of the 171th Quarterly Meeting  
of the  
Upper Mississippi River Basin Association**

**August 6, 2024  
Edina, Minnesota**

Grant Wilson called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Participants were as follows:

UMRBA Representatives and Alternates:

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Rick Pohlman     | Illinois Department of Natural Resources            |
| Tim Hall         | Iowa Department of Natural Resources                |
| Jake Hansen      | Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship |
| Grant Wilson     | Minnesota Department of Natural Resources           |
| Dana Vanderbosch | Minnesota Pollution Control Agency                  |
| Patrick Phenow   | Minnesota Department of Transportation              |
| Chris Wieberg    | Missouri Department of Natural Resources            |
| Chris Klenklen   | Missouri Department of Agriculture                  |
| Matt Vitello     | Missouri Department of Conservation                 |
| Wade Strickland  | Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources           |

Federal UMRBA Liaisons:

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| JC Nelson        | U.S. Geological Survey, Midcontinent Region |
| Sabrina Chandler | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service              |

Others in Attendance:

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Kirk Hansen      | Iowa Department of Natural Resources                            |
| Dave Glover      | Illinois Department of Natural Resources                        |
| John Seitz       | Illinois Department of Natural Resources                        |
| Erin Fanning     | Missouri Department of Natural Resources                        |
| Vanessa Perry    | Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources                       |
| Karl Jansen      | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District                 |
| Angela Deen      | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District                 |
| Matt Coffelt     | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District              |
| Marshall Plumley | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District              |
| Davi Michl       | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District              |
| John Peukert     | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District                |
| Jonathon Sobiech | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, RPEDN                             |
| Brian Johnson    | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, RPEDN                             |
| Christian Myers  | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System |
| Mike Welvaert    | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NWS            |
| Charlie Hammond  | Congresswoman Betty McCollum                                    |
| Rebecca Taylor   | Congresswoman Betty McCollum                                    |
| Lindsay Brice    | Audubon   |

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Alex Keilty     | Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance                |
| Doug Blodgett   | The Nature Conservancy                    |
| Liz Crow        | The Nature Conservancy                    |
| Bryan Hopkins   | The Nature Conservancy                    |
| Kirsten Wallace | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |
| Brian Stenquist | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |
| Mark Ellis      | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |
| Sam Hund        | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |
| Natalie Lenzen  | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |
| Sadie Neuman    | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |
| Ken Petersen    | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |
| Lauren Salvato  | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |
| Laura Talbert   | Upper Mississippi River Basin Association |

Note: Due to technical difficulties, this list of participants does not include the individuals who joined the meeting remotely.

### **Minutes**

Rick Pohlman moved and Wade Strickland seconded a motion to approve the draft minutes of the May 21, 2024 UMRBA quarterly meeting as provided in the agenda packet. The motion was approved unanimously.

### **Executive Director's Report**

Kirsten Wallace pointed to the Executive Director's report in the agenda packet for a summary of the Association's work efforts since the May 2024 meeting.

Wallace announced that UMRBA hired Laura Talbert to serve as the Ecosystem Program Coordinator and Sadie Neuman as the Public Participation and Communications Project Specialist, starting July 1, 2024 and August 5, 2024, respectively. Andrew Stephenson departed the Association. Stephenson had served as Ecosystem and Navigation Program Leader since 2018.

Wallace provided background context on the UMRBA Board's evaluation of options for the state dues and water quality assessment levels in FYs 2026 and 2027. With that context, Rick Pohlman moved and Tim Hall seconded a motion to set UMRBA dues for FYs 2026 and 2027 at \$70,350 annually per state and to set the water quality assessment for FYs 2026 and 2027 at \$22,680 annually per state.

Wallace pointed to the UMRBA financial statements for April 2024 through June 2024 as provided on pages B-7 to B-15. Wade Strickland moved and Tim Hall seconded the motion to accept the Association's budget report and balance sheet as included in the agenda packet. The motion was approved unanimously.

### **Upper Mississippi River System Partnership**

Brian Stenquist broadly described the strength and value of the regional partnership among states, federal agencies, and many organizations and individuals. Stenquist pointed to the strong commitment to

collaboration among agencies and nongovernmental interests as integral to the partnership functioning well. Stenquist acknowledged UMRBA's role of fostering interstate collaboration in support of multi-purpose management, particularly in the areas of navigation, ecosystem, water quality, emergency management, and resilience.

Stenquist characterized and distinguished among several emerging collaborations, including the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership coordinated by America's Watershed Initiative and the Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative.

Stenquist offered the following questions to center discussion about the emerging collaborations:

- How might these emerging collaborations support your work?
- How might your insights help support these emerging collaborations?

### **Mississippi River Basin Partnership Meeting**

Kim Lutz explained the shared interest of America's Watershed Initiative and The Nature Conservancy to initiate the creation of a Mississippi River Watershed Partnership. The intent is to explore how a broad cross-sector partnership can improve the environmental and economic health of the watershed, including through the development of consensus on a set of shared goals spanning water quality, floods and droughts, inland navigation, fish and wildlife resources, and recreation.

Lutz expressed optimism that the partnership would lead to:

- An ability to assess and achieve multiple benefits from programs and projects.
- More efficient and effective spending.
- Better data informed decision making through filling data gaps, increasing accessibility of this information and improved continuity across data sets.

Lutz provided an overview of the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership Workshop held jointly by America's Watershed Initiative and The Nature Conservancy on June 25-27, 2024 in St. Louis, Missouri. The workshop employed facilitated discussions focused on defining leadership issues facing the watershed, exploring goal areas, and illuminating options for moving forward a Mississippi River Watershed Partnership.

Lutz reported that America's Watershed Initiative and The Nature Conservancy are preparing to publish a synthesis report, continuing collaboration to identify a focused set of goals and actions, and co-creating partnership models with watershed leaders and the broader community. Lutz previewed the major discussion themes as follows:

- Power of collaboration at all scales was evident
- There is tremendous knowledge and power in existing institutions
- A desire to move forward now, but with specifics

Wade Strickland mentioned interest in also evaluating capacity to advance the various goal areas.

## Upper Mississippi River Nutrient Management Collaborations

Lauren Salvato reported on UMRBA's two-part workshop series focused on multi-benefit conservation practices as means for reducing nutrient runoff. The first workshop, held in fall 2022, focused on best management practices, communications (social science), and financial tools and incentives. It provided foundational aspects for collaborative discussions in the second workshop, held in fall 2023, on the "leverage points of change" – i.e., points within a complex system where a small change in one thing can produce big changes in everything.

Workshop participants concluded that those leverage points include improved and coordinated conservation technical assistance, innovative and streamlined funding mechanisms, peer-to-peer networks, and new partnerships.

Salvato shared the following insights gained from the discussions:

- Multi-benefit conservation practices are important
- UMRBA workshops drew a wide range of participants
- Workshops allowed for sharing innovative ideas
- There may be leverage points to accelerate adoption of multi-benefit conservation practices
- UMRBA will continue to support interstate nutrient reduction

Dana Vanderbosch underscored the value of these two workshops, and collaboration of this type, to support the states in their work. In response to a question from Brian Stenquist, Chris Wieberg said staffing and other resources to support the implementation and dissemination of financial resources is a significant issue. Missouri DNR is building a network collaboration to assist in the delivery of conservation practices. Wieberg added a statement of appreciation for UMRBA's leadership in securing the financial support from USEPA and designing and organizing the workshops.

## Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative

Rebecca Taylor provided a briefing of Congresswomen Betty McCollum's proposed legislation to create a Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative (MRRRI). The purpose of the legislation is to develop a program office that would protect and restore the Mississippi River Corridor. Specifically, the measure would:

- Support, expand, and coordinate efforts at a federal level to restore America's River and build community resilience
- Deliver sustained federal investments in local communities
- Coordinate strategy among federal, state, tribal, and local partners
- Establish a network of river research centers

The legislation is modeled on the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which is broadly supported and creates nonregulatory opportunities and supports local priorities through grants. In addition, Rep. McCollum is also proposing to add new USGS research centers to advance the science informing work in the goal areas.

Taylor emphasized that the new authority would be non-regulatory, focused on providing new opportunities and resources. MRRRI would have four focus areas: flood and storm resiliency, water quality, wildlife habitat, and aquatic invasive species. The authority would include dedicated funding to support low-income communities, communities of color, and tribal nations and tribal organizations.

Taylor underscored Rep. McCollum's sincere interest in receiving direct feedback on the legislation, prompting discussion with the following questions:

- Which aspects of MRRRI would be particularly important to your work?
- What provisions within the MRRRI legislation might support your work? Any that might cause difficulties?
- What questions or concerns do you have about the MRRRI framework and how it might impact your work or the work of others?
- What suggestions would you offer for improving the MRRRI legislation or for further engagement and outreach on MRRRI?

In response to a question from Mark Gaikowski, Taylor explained that Rep. McCollum's office has participated in conversations about coordinating a related effort, namely the Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together (SMRT) Act. Taylor recognized that, while the two measures are on parallel tracks in pursuing legislation, the two measures are proposing inherently different purposes and structures.

In response to a question from Sabrina Chandler, Taylor confirmed that the geographic extent is the Mississippi River floodplain corridor and would not extend into the tributaries. In response to a question from Karl Jansen, Taylor said Rep. McCollum's office views the MRRRI legislation as compatible with the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program and Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program. Rep. McCollum recognizes that there are greater investment needs and opportunities beyond the two programs, and that can work in conjunction with the Corps' restoration investments.

Alex Kielty put forward Mississippi River Network's support for the MRRRI legislation, particularly the focus on public engagement.

Chris Wieberg acknowledged the binding collaboration through the Hypoxia Task Force, pointing the new funding stream through the Gulf Hypoxia Program. The program is the only collaboration that pulls together among federal agencies, states, and conservation, agricultural, and other interests across the Mississippi River. With that context, Wieberg respectfully requested support from Rep. McCollum for that program.

Citing experience in working with the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Wade Strickland advised that the legislation include a provision allowing states to be eligible for non-compete grants to reduce burden of funding transfers.

Sabrina Chandler acknowledged the significant existing federal and state investment in the Mississippi River basin. Chandler suggested creating a visual illustrating the various programs and projects working in concert to advance the major goals and how MRRRI would align with those efforts.

## **Other Business**

### *Future Meeting Schedule*

November 2024 in St. Louis, Missouri

- UMRBA Quarterly Meeting – November 19
- UMRB Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – November 20

February 2025 to be held virtually

- UMRBA Quarterly Meeting – February 25
- UMRB Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – February 26

May 2024 in La Crosse, Wisconsin

- UMRBA Quarterly Meeting – May 20
- UMRB Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting – May 21

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.