

Watershed Assessment Group Minutes  
Zoom and in person at Story County Administration Building, Public Meeting Room  
Wednesday, February 17, 2021

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Committee members present: Margaret Jaynes, Amelia Schoeneman, Linda Murken, Scott Wall, Leanne Harter, Keith Morgan, Matt Boeck, Darren Moon, and Mike Cox.

Others present: Daniel Haug and Penny Brown Huber

Harter called to order at 9:05 am

Jaynes moved, Wall seconded to approve the agenda. Motion carried unanimously.

No learning moment.

Morgan moved, Boeck seconded to approve the minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

Old Business

A. Water Quality Monitoring Working Group Update

1. Water Quality Monitoring Plan

Jaynes introduced Dan Haug and Penny Brown Huber, Prairie Rivers of Iowa, who were present to present the proposed Story County Water Monitoring and Interpretation Plan.

Haug thanked the participants on the planning team and reviewed the planning team's purpose statement and four goals. Haug also discussed the 2020 accomplishments including grants, strengthened jurisdiction and NGO partnerships, and a volunteer monitoring program.

The plan's framework includes goals and supporting materials and a set of questions that serve as the basis of each chapter. Haug went through each chapter.

Haug stated that for Chapter 1, "Why Do We Want Data?" the needs that motivated the plan included a need for local involvement, a need for more data, and a need to reuse existing data.

Chapter 2, "Where Do We Want Data?" found inconsistencies in existing maps. A custom online tool was used to delineate HUC12 watersheds to better show the watersheds with monitoring sites. A monitoring site was selected in each priority watershed and assigned to volunteers. The impaired waters list was also referenced, however, just because a waterway isn't on the impaired list doesn't mean it's clean, Haug stated. Haug gave a brief overview of the Clean Water Act, its standards, and designated uses of selected streams in Story County. Haug went over that a common-sense alternative to designated uses to inform monitoring was that monitoring should occur where people contact water.

Chapter 3, "What Data Is Available?" found existing data that was scattered across different sources. Haug was able to analyze this data in R. Haug went through the various sources of data.

Chapter 4, "How Do We Interpret Data Once We Have It?" addresses the issue of collecting data and hoping another agency will analyze it. Haug stated that data from monitoring sites was compared as well as the long-term trends. Some trends are impacted by different weather conditions on the day of the month selected for monitoring.

Chapter 5, "How Can We Collect New Data?" Haug stated that 15 sites were monitored in 2020. Volunteer testing has ramped up and there nine volunteers. Prairie Rivers has also had two socially-distanced snapshot monitoring events. For E. Coli, optical brighteners were used.

Chapter 6, "Goals and Strategies, 2021-2030" includes goals and strategies and action steps for each.

Jaynes thanked Brown Huber and Haug for their work, especially digging through the existing data. Jaynes asked if the data would be shared with universities. Brown Huber stated that the planning team is looking at making the plan public in late March or early April and encouraged Jaynes to bring that up with the planning team. Haug echoed Brown Huber's comments.

Jaynes also noted that the plan is a living plan and that if problems arise with the monitoring sites, they can be moved or added. However, funding is very important for expansion. Brown Huber noted that the City of Ames lab has been doing the heavy lifting analyzing the data and expansion would have to account for their workload. Jaynes noted that the State Hygienic Lab may also be an option.

Brown Huber stated that they are happy to come back to the group and go through the plan.

Murken noted that it may be good for the entire Board of Supervisors to hear the presentation. Harter noted that the presentation could be a work session. Murken asked Harter to look into the Board's and Haug's schedules.

Cox stated that there is a presentation scheduled for March 8 with the Conservation Board, and presentations after that with the Board of Supervisors, but that could be changed. Jaynes noted they would also be presenting to cities. Huber Brown noted that Nevada and the Story County Community Board have presentations scheduled. They are still working on Gilbert and Huxley.

Cox asked if there was a list of the cities that participated. Haug noted that Nevada, Huxley, Ames, and Gilbert had participated on the planning team. Cox stated that it was impressive involvement.

## B. Budget Discussions

### 1. Watershed Coordinator

Cox spoke on the item and noted that the group has discussed this position in the past and made a recommendation to support the request as a full-time employee, which has been tentatively approved by the Board of Supervisors. Final approval would be later this spring, after final budget approval. Cox noted that the job description stated the Watershed Management Group would assign the tasks to the position, and he would be the supervisor of record. Cox stated that this was important because the position is a resource for everyone in the group.

Murken noted that the position was also to focus on outreach to private landowners and connect them with funding sources for practices to implement on their land. Murken also stated that she understands that if we are serious about water quality in Story County, we need a dedicated position.

Cox thanked Murken for her support and leadership.

Jaynes asked if they had identified an office for the position. Cox stated that there was space at the Engineer's Office. Jaynes noted that there also may be room at Planning and Development and Environmental Health. Schoeneman echoed that there may be space as the interns each have a separate

office and workstation. Murken stated that it made sense to have the position in Nevada to help the position make necessary connections.

### C. Headwaters WMA

Murken stated that Haug completed the 28E agreement in 2018 and they started last year to try to bring people together. Murken stated that Cox and Harter did a lot of work on the bylaws and working with the DNR on funding. There is funding for an assessment every two years. The big addition to the assessment is Hamilton County, which will build on the Story County assessment as Hamilton County has not been assessed before. Murken wants to look at what we can do with landowners to improve water quality. There is a meeting Friday to revise the 28E to include new partners. Murken hopes this summer there can be an in-person meeting to discuss the why of all the legal work that has been occurring. Cox echoed Murken's summary. Murken also stated that the technical team was very useful in putting together the request for proposals. Harter noted that the agenda and minutes are now on the website.

### V. New Business

#### A. Update on Dotson Wetland

Cox shared his screen of a conceptual wetland. Cox noted that there was a 40-acre field in the floodplain, abutting loway Creek. The property also borders an open drainage ditch. Early on, they were curious about providing water treatment alternatives on the site. The question has gotten more traction. Cox reached out to Ames and Ames reached out to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. There is now conceptual work being done to develop a wetland on the 40-acre piece to take flow from the open ditch into the wetland for quality treatment and then outlet into loway Creek. IDALS has contracted with the Ducks Unlimited Engineering office to work on the concept. Once we receive the concept back, they would like to have an information meeting with the trustees in both counties. Murken asked what drainage districts were involved. Cox confirmed that Drainage District #8, shared with Boone, and Drainage District #67, were involved. Jaynes asked if all flow would go into the wetland. Cox stated that the goal was not to impede flow and not to raise drainage district rates. Murken asked about funding. Iowa Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and water quality initiative funding were being looked at. Cox also noted that the property owners to the south were very supportive and have a wetland on their property that may be part of the project. At least we wouldn't want to impact the flow of water into their wetland. Murken asked about how we can get information out early so that people understand that there won't be a drainage assessment. Cox also asked about the implications of taking all the flow on the district boundaries and if they would need to be redrawn. Wall stated that the drainage district engineer said it may depend on where it drains. Murken stated that she was concerned about having any engineering fees go back on landowners. Wall stated that the county owned the land. Cox noted that if we move forward, there will be a 28E with Ames and IDALS and that it will include information on funding. Currently, the understanding is that the county will not be providing funding, just the land. Murken wants to ensure that no landowners end up with costs if the drainage districts are restructured. Moon stated at some point, the drainage district will want their engineer to review the proposal, which will create fees. Moon also noted that Boone County was skeptical. Morgan asked about the amount of water that may be retained during flood periods. Cox noted that he hadn't done any calculations but that it would be a significant amount. Murken asked if Cox could look into if IDALS would also cover any engineering fees incurred by the draining district as

well. Wall suggested that the wetland engineer could also look at any impacts to the district. Wall stated that he didn't see any reason it would change drainage district lines but that he isn't the final authority on that. Murken suggested talking to Ethan Anderson on it and asked if the trustees would need to make any final approvals. Wall stated that they would need to look at the diversion of water, at which point they could also see that the project would not be impacting the district negatively.

#### B. Oxbow Analysis

Cox stated that there are two properties Story County Conservation has recently acquired along the Skunk River that have historic river meanders and oxbows. They are looking at what can be done for water quality on the sites. Brown Huber has been involved and Ames is also interested in partnering. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has provided oxbow designs for a property south of Story City on Hillcrest Drive and 130<sup>th</sup> Street. The plan is looking really good but they want to make sure they fully understand all the potential impacts prior to excavation, including on sensitive plant communities in the area. Cox showed that there would be several vegetative shelves in the oxbows to stop silt from entering the river. Additional funding may also be needed. Harter asked Morgan if this project may qualify for a flood mitigation grant. Harter will send Cox any opportunities that she sees.

Murken asked Brown Huber if the Soybean Association had been in touch and Brown Huber stated they had and the most funding they had to offer was \$5,000.

The second property is on Timberland Drive and the US Fish and Wildlife Service has completed designs. There are similar issues with where to place the spoils, and this site also has a drainage facility. Haug and Cox asked if the tile could be terminated on the site and how the drainage district would be involved. Cox will be in touch with Wall on the property.

#### C. Saturated Buffer Program

Cox stated that Polk County employs a Watershed Coordinator and they reached out to Cox to discuss their saturated buffer program, which has seen a lot of success thanks to its funding model. They have a fiscal agent serve as the contracting authority with the various funding sources and then the landowner has one contract with them. There is interest in bringing the model to Story County and a meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> at 9 am with different stakeholders to determine if there is interest in moving forward with it.

Harter noted that Story County is part of the Four Mile Creek WMA and pays a small part of the Polk County Watershed Coordinator's salary.

#### VI. Staff Updates and Assignments

This item was skipped.

#### VII. Other Items Not on the Agenda

This item was skipped.

#### VIII. Next Meeting Time and Date

Harter proposed March 3 at 9 am to focus on staff updates and assignments. Murken and Morgan had conflicts. Harter will send out a few dates and times via email.

IX. Adjournment

10:41 am