



RIVER ALLIANCE of Wisconsin

The Politics of Phosphorus Citizens' Summit – speaker notes

UWSP, 11/14/09

Buzz Sorge, WI DNR – “Phosphorus 101” (see PowerPoint at <http://wisconsinrivers.org/index.php?page=content&mode=view&id=209>)

Elisabeth Harrahy, UW-Whitewater – “The health effects of blue-green algae” (see PowerPoint at <http://wisconsinrivers.org/index.php?page=content&mode=view&id=209>)

The Politics of Phosphorus

Pete Nowak – “The Culture and Politics of Agriculture”

- Agriculture IS the problem – mismanagement of manure/nutrients
- “The tail wags the watershed” – Only a few fields are causing the problem
- Science gives us solutions – SNAP-Plus tells us what fields are the problem; digesters can turn waste into energy

Jen Giegerich – “Politics of Agriculture—Being effective at the Capitol”

- Build relationships
- WE are Wisconsin and need to tell our stories
- Give them (legislators) the tour...Show them the toxic algae
- Have a united message

Betsy Lawton – “The Politics of Factory and City Phosphorus”

- Help pass criteria on phosphorus standards, numeric standard regardless of source
- Industrial and municipal contributors are a problem as well, but it is hard to make regulations on them more stringent and not address agricultural contributions at same time.

Phosphorus and Me – Citizen stories

Rick Georgeson, Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards (www.pacrs.org) -

- PACRS have built a coalition of citizens, businesses, counties, and technical advisors to advocate for water quality on Petenwell/Castle Rock
- Took legislators on a boat cruise—“Pontoons and Politics”—in August '08, during peak of algae blooms, to show them the problem first-hand
 - In 2009, WI State Legislature appropriated money to study water quality on Wisconsin River
- Worked with power company to delay drawdown of impoundments, allowing for establishment of aquatic vegetation and greater uptake of nutrients

Rick Carlson, Carlson's Rustic Ridge Resort (www.carlsonsrusticridge.com) –

- His waterfront business has been affected by the toxic algae blooms.

- Sees families arriving to go to the beach, stopping dead in their tracks and leaving as they see and smell the algae.
 - Out-of-state people are not aware of the problem
- Robyn Morin**, Tainter-Menomin Lake Improvement Association (www.tmlia.org)
- Brought Sen. Feingold to tour Tainter-Menomin in August of '09. In October '09, Feingold co-sponsors federal legislation to research harmful algae blooms and hypoxia.
- Russ Tooley**, Centerville CARES (<http://centervillecares.com/>) -
- Citizen monitoring has been essential in progress his group has made.
 - More information on PowerPoint at:
<http://wisconsinrivers.org/index.php?page=content&mode=view&id=209>

Agriculture & Phosphorus: On-the-ground realities

Joe Van Berkel, Sauk County Land Conservation –

- “Sell” the farmers on the concept of soil erosion, not on phosphorus loss (“nobody talks about phosphorus—we talk about soil erosion.”)
- We need hard science to back up where the source is to win over skeptics.

Kelly Jacobs, Vernon County Land & Water Conservation –

- One step to solution-regulate timing of manure use and control sediment loss
- Her county does not “see” a problem, because it goes through the system and flows to other areas where it can cause a problem. Hard to get county members on board without having a visual representation of the problem.
- More information on PowerPoint at:
<http://wisconsinrivers.org/index.php?page=content&mode=view&id=209>

Sue Jones, Dane County Office of Lakes & Watersheds –

- Urban areas contribute to the problem also
- Fertilizer on lawns was a problem, ordinance banning it was big success
- Dane County is installing manure digesters, which will help improve water quality

Brainstorming: Solutions on the local level

- Tailor your message to address public health issues of toxic algae (say “toxic algae,” not “phosphorus”)
- Document the economic impact of toxic algae (gather data)
- Know your local ordinances—what is NOT being enforced? Where are the holes in ordinances?
- Create local group alliances to discuss shared issues
 - Work WITH agricultural interests
- Be willing to help out the local officials who do the enforcement work
 - If County Conservationists can’t help you, go “higher up” and talk to your county board. There are elected officials that need your vote...use that power.
- If “playing defense,” ask allies to speak on your behalf
- Report and document problems (keep an eye on soil/sediment coming from urban areas, construction sites)
 - Educate group members/citizens to report problems to the proper authorities

- Become politically active. Run for office! Vote!
- Discuss the economic of local business loss due to bad water
- Educate kids

Brainstorming: Solutions on the state level

- Show up at public hearings for NR 151 (WI DNR's Agricultural Nonpoint Runoff standards) in the coming months.
- Create alliances with fellow groups to facilitate shared information, data, events, etc.
 - Include old bureaucrats, legislators, journalists in your group
 - Work WITH agricultural interests
- Be politically active. Write letters to legislators (their secretaries, too), and CC them on your group's correspondences.
 - Find your legislators here:
<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/waml/waml.aspx>
- Form statewide alliance around phosphorus, in preparation for the next legislative session (include today's crowd, plus targeted others)
- KNOW THE FACTS! Educate yourself/be prepared prior to showing up to meetings/hearings. Find people/experts/talk about what you know.
 - Make sure to tell your story about how you and those you know are affected by the issue.
- Support federal conservation programs
- Go to www.MEA.org and www.conservationvoters.org for more resources