

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Lansing, Michigan
Thursday, August 19, 2010, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Members in attendance: Jon Allan, Sandra Batie, Jeremy Emmi, Brad Garmon, Chuck Hersey, Larry Merritt, Pat Norris, Del Rector, David Rinard, and Ray Scott.

DNRE Staff in attendance: Frank Ruswick, Ron Olson, Lynne Boyd, Vince Hellwig, Hal Fitch, Liane Shekter-Smith, Sharon Schaefer, Bill Creal, Bryce Feighner, Russ Mason, and Jim Kasprzak.

OPENING:

Frank welcomed everyone. EAC members and DNRE staff introduced themselves.

Frank shared that Director Humphries was unable to attend due to a meeting of Fish and Wildlife agency directors.

HABITAT PROTECTION AND RESTORATION WORK GROUP

Frank reminded the EAC of a project that had been introduced last month. Before the Department of Natural Resource and Environment was formed, then Department of Natural Resources Director Becky Humphries created the Habitat Protection and Restoration Work Group. That group was charged with developing a new vision of conservation for the state. That group has had a series of discussions over the past 16 months that were very similar to what is embodied in the EAC's Roadmap. As a result it was appropriate to bring together some members for the EAC and the Habitat Work Group for discussions to see how we might further our efforts.

Emily Finnell provided an overview of charge to the Habitat Work Group. She passed out a draft document titled "A new vision for conservation in Michigan." (Attachment 1.) This group contains about 30 people. Emily summarized the draft document and pointed out common interests between the Habitat Work Group and the EAC. The joint meeting was very productive and the group is planning to meet again, possibly in late September or early October. Emily identified the members who met recently from both groups.

PROPOSED PRIORITY PROGRAM AREAS

Jon Allan presented a proposal prepared by the EAC Planning Committee on proposed priority program areas for the development of outcomes. (Attachment 2.)

The Director's charge to the EAC in 2010 is to accomplish three things – catalogue existing outcome-based activities; recommend priority areas for development of outcomes within the department; and design and propose a process to develop the outcomes.

The scale and focus for outcomes can vary, for example by region, department, program area, or division scale. Outcomes are in fact nested at all scales. The Planning Committee is recommending that the EAC propose that, in the near term, the DNRE should focus on developing outcomes at the program scale. This will be tangible for program managers and partners and will also foster integration across the organization.

The decision criteria for which program areas should be selected include programs that together reflect the department's scope, that are use-based and non-used based; that are regulatory and non-regulatory; that range from narrow in scope to complex and broad; and include resource extraction and assimilative (managing discharges to the environment) programs.

The Planning Committee recommended nine program areas: environmental remediation; sewer bond funding; wildlife division strategic plan; recreation; biodiversity conservation planning; wetlands; critical dunes program; wet weather-related programs; and cumulative impacts (air toxics, environmental justice).

DISCUSSION

Chuck Hersey began the discussion by sharing a report issued by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments demonstrating the magnitude of issues raised by infrastructure improvement.

A member asked why it was decided to focus on current programs instead of developing agreed upon outcomes at a broader scale. Frank explained that the Planning Committee thought that narrowing the scale somewhat would be appropriate because it could use the concept of outcomes in addressing some policy issues currently before the DNRE. Working at the policy level is more tangible for participants and can provide near term benefits. In addition, given uncertainties surrounding the change in the Administration, it would be easier for the DNRE to be the party initiating the effort.

Members generally indicated that the list of proposed priority program areas looked like a good starting point. A member indicated that the topic of invasive species should be added to the list and members agreed.

Vince Helwig noted that the term "cumulative impacts" does not have a widely-accepted meaning and therefore is not frequently used. Several comments agreed that this program area needed to be better defined.

A member asked how working on these proposed areas would help us further the concepts in the Roadmap. Frank indicated that the list is a starting point and should only be viewed as a guide. These are among the issues that are currently important for the DNRE to address, but there may be others to add to the list. Working on these issues will provide a near term benefit for improving environmental policy and will also provide insights into how to develop agreed upon outcomes with interested parties.

Members commented that working on this list would allow us to test hypotheses on how to develop outcomes. Another member agreed that it will be beneficial to focus on improving specific policies and not the whole system.

Ron Olson discussed how outside groups had spent two and half years discussing how to fund the State Parks and developed the concept of the Recreation Passport. Solid strategic plans have been developed for the State Parks. He suggested we should focus on those program areas that have not done strategic planning.

Frank clarified that the Planning Committee is not suggesting any past or current efforts should be revisited. Rather, we should consider how the concepts of developing outcomes can be used in the context of the issues faced in each of the program areas. With respect to recreation, for example, new revenue streams will create an interest in developing a long term vision for both state and local recreation in Michigan. This is a topic area ripe for developing agreed-upon outcomes.

A member commented that some of the policies are narrower and further along in development than others. As a result, the time frames for developing outcomes and seeing results will vary.

A member of senior management commented that there is a danger in looking at this effort through individual program areas rather than the agency as a whole. We need to look at context as a whole and not just individual pieces, then break it down to the program level. Resource needs to be kept in mind. There should be a department strategic plan before looking at program strategic plans.

Frank recognized the value of developing an over-arching strategic plan in this process. However, there are costs associated with that approach that detract from current program efforts. The Planning Committee believes that if we “learn by doing” we can further the concept of outcome management as well as continue to make progress in current program areas.

A member of senior management suggested that agreement on government-wide outcomes for environmental and natural resources management is necessary to establish an improved funding model for the DNRE. The DNRE is currently funded by over 80 restricted funds, which is very constraining and inefficient. It will be difficult to have a funding conversation with the legislature until we have a sustainable outcome-based plan.

A member asked why sewer bond funding is listed outside wet weather-related programs.

There was a discussion about the need to address larger issues related to environmental justice, although using the term “cumulative impacts” might not be appropriate and “air toxics” should also be eliminated.

A member of senior management explained that air toxics and environmental justice are only listed as examples of “cumulative impacts.” No one program would have ownership of that category but many programs would contribute to the outcomes.

Frank suggested we need to rephrase the term cumulative impacts.

There was a suggestion to add funding of drinking water systems to the sewer bond funding item.

A member noted the connection between invasive species and biodiversity conservation planning. The ensuing discussion recognized that issues related to invasive species will overlap several programs on the list.

Chuck asked the group to frame the larger outcomes and add to the outline today. This would create a starting point. A member suggested “Sustainable Resource Management.”

A member asked how economic conditions fall into this. Members then discussed the value of the outcomes and how they will differ and recognized that the landscape will have a different use.

Chuck suggested the planning committee take this list and come back next month with something more concrete.

A member suggested taking the two months of visioning and blend the work into what is going on now. Also, the Roadmap needs to be looked at.

Frank explained the planning committee will reconvene and create something more concrete. He heard today that most like the list but want to see something more solid.

Frank will be working on creating a similar proposal which will be more process-related for next month’s meeting.

Chuck closed the discussion by commenting on the importance of all EAC members to take on this initiative for the future and become advocates for adoption. This is a change that cannot be driven by the DNRE; other groups and individuals must be the force for change.

CLOSING

Frank thanked meeting participants and said he was looking forward to further discussions in September.