

MICHIGAN AGRICULTURE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCE PROGRAM ADVISORY COUNCIL

Michigan United Conservation Clubs
2101 Wood Street
Lansing, MI 48912

MEETING NOTES AUGUST 30, 2011

Present:

Elaine Brown, James Clift, Tom Coon, Keith Creagh, Bill Creal, Lauri Elbing, Melissa Higbee, Sam Hines, Allen Krizek, Lori Phalen, Scott Piggott, Jim Scott, Gary Trimner, Jan Wilford, Dan Wyant, and Paul Zugger

Resource Staff:

Josh Appleby, Jennifer Eyde (scribe), Joe Kelpinski, Emily Ries, Heather Throne, Natalie Rector, and Tom Young

WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APPROVAL OF PAST MEETING NOTES

Erin McDonough, MUCC Executive Director, welcomed everyone to the meeting and Council members re-introduced themselves. The notes from the July 25, MAEAP AC Meeting were reviewed and approved.

FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE COUNCIL

Dan Wyant recognized the work and commitment of the AC in getting the standards ready for adoption at the September Commission meeting. Keith Creagh also praised the work of the AC in preparing the standards for adoption by September. The next important goal in fulfilling the Governor's initiative is to achieve 1,000 MAEAP verifications by September 2011 and ultimately 5,000 verifications by 2015. He added three more goals for which he would value AC recommendations and assistance:

- Water quality monitoring that will help to address the question "do the standards work?"
- Funding – how can we make the case for funding more than 3 verifiers and what sources are available?
- Regional teams – what can be accomplished with regional teams and how should they be structured and charged?

Keith asked for further guidance from the Council on achieving the legislative charge as set forth by the Governor.

- develop a robust communication plan to promote MAEAP
- engage leadership and partners
- water quality and environmental monitoring - continue to review standards; validate water quality benefits with science and data
- build funding capacity – look at the funding mechanisms in the Farm Bill
- define relationship between AC and partnership
- develop regional teams for technical assistance

As the AC is charged with providing recommendations on water quality monitoring, Paul Zugger inquired on the status of an MOU between MDARD and MDEQ. Jim Johnson reported that the departments have made a first draft but that an assessment of work being done in other departments is also necessary to determine who is doing what – surface water monitoring as well as groundwater monitoring – and to see if it can be done more efficiently.

Water quality monitoring will be fundamental to the success of MAEAP. Jim suggested naming a subcommittee to look at water quality monitoring to study MAEAP verifications on sub-watersheds. The studies would show before and after MAEAP verification to determine how the program has made a difference and validate if the standards are working.

The Council agreed that a better understanding of water quality monitoring is needed. The Council would like to see a presentation at their next meeting on water quality monitoring to include its purpose and intention, regulations versus needs, NPDES permit and point source.

Funding for MAEAP will be critical to reach 5,000 verifications by 2015. One possible solution would be to establish a specific source of revenue that affects all of Michigan. Tom Coon shared the concept of the Missouri Conservation Tax designed to strengthen their conservation programs. Missouri passed a constitutional amendment that provided for a sales/use tax for soil and water conservation and state parks and historic sites. This type of initiative would require a strong partnership and support from the Governor.

Natalie Rector asked about the development of regional teams. Director Creagh advised that the Council should look to the Farm Bill and the funding mechanisms set forth to begin thinking of how MAEAP can be delivered on a regional basis.

Josh Appleby spoke of the current challenges of the technical delivery of MAEAP with only three verifiers and one manager. He advised that conservation districts will be crucial for the delivery of technical assistance to producers. Conservation districts make producers aware of the programs available in the Farm Bill and provide the technical assistance needed for implementation.

Paul Z. suggested re-visiting a proposal for U.S. EPA Great Lakes Program funding, given that MAEAP is very important to the Great Lakes issues.

Lauri Elbing stated that in order to continue a discussion on funding for MAEAP that the Council first needed to understand/define the specific roles and responsibilities of the partnership, the AC, and the MDARD and their relationship with each other. MAEAP has become successful due to its partners and it is imperative to keep the stakeholders engaged.

The Council also needs a better understanding of where technical assistance is currently available. MDARD is partnering with The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and NRCS for a Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Proposal. The purpose of the proposal is to deliver the “on-farm network” in southwest Michigan, providing more technical assistance in that area. MDARD can also show where technical assistance is currently available and project where more assistance is needed.

Action: Topics to address at the next AC meeting will include:

- Water Quality Monitoring – an understanding of its purpose, assessment of work being done in departments
- role of partnership, role of AC, role of MDARD and the separate charges for each
- development of regional teams

COMMITTEE/WORKGROUP REPORTS

Livestock System Committee – The Livestock System Committee is scheduled to meet on September 20 at Michigan Pork Producers Association at GreenStone.

Farmstead System Committee – The Farmstead System Committee is tentatively scheduled to meet in October to begin addressing parking lot issues.

Cropping System Committee – The Cropping System Committee is working with ANR to insert standards in the bulletins, upon Commission adoption. New assessment standards will be delivered in early October.

Action: Scott and Tom will send a note to the AC reporting on the outcome of the September 14 Commission Meeting.

Communications Workgroup Report – Heather Throne reviewed the MAEAP Communications Plan which focuses on the goal of reaching 5,000 MAEAP verifications by January 2015. Part of the plan includes conducting a focus group consisting of specialty crop marketing groups from within the partnership to help identify the best way to market MAEAP for specific groups. Once these means have been identified, the workgroup has suggested creating a test pilot for a Regional Environmental Assurance Team, local action team, to raise awareness with farmers and the general public about MAEAP at the local level. The plan also includes providing MAEAP promotion toolkits to partners in an effort to spread a consistent message about MAEAP.

Josh Appleby shared some of the creative ways that MAEAP verified farmers advertise for themselves and suggested presenting other MAEAP farmers with suggestions on creative advertising.

It was also suggested that the front page of the MAEAP website needs to be more user friendly.

At the end of every fiscal year, the Communications Committee reports to the partnership on the outcomes of their plan. It was suggested to add an evaluation of the marketing tactics to the report.

The Council moved on to discuss the budget for the MAEAP Communications Committee. Currently, the Committee has \$11,000 in this fiscal year's budget. The workgroup asked how the Council would like to see this money used and how to plan for funding in the future.

Re-verifications are important and money needs to be allocated toward reaching these farmers to remind them of their re-verification date and the steps necessary to prepare for re-verification. MDARD sends out a letter to the farmer six months prior to the re-verification date and also sends copies to the resident's conservation district (CD), the CD board chair and the technician in that CD.

Action: Natalie Rector agreed to prepare a postcard to be sent to farmers for re-verification, listing the steps necessary to prepare for re-verification. Natalie will send a draft to Heather for approval. MDARD will send out the postcards using money from the MAEAP Communications Committee budget.

The Council discussed roles and relationships of the Communications Workgroup, the partnership, the Council, and the MDARD Director. The Communications Workgroup will research and evaluate the regions to implement the Regional Action Teams and will recommend to the Council, who will then recommend to the MDARD Director. The MDARD Director will name the region, as dictated in the law.

Further, the Communications Workgroup will report to the Council and the Council will make recommendations. The Partnership will determine how to raise funding for the workgroup and how the funding will be used. This will help to ensure partnership interest and engagement.

The Council has agreed to the majority of the MAEAP Communication Plan but would like to have further discussion on the regional teams before committing to that part of the plan.

The MAEAP Partnership last met in January 2011 and the Council felt that there was a definite need to call another meeting to re-engage all of the partners, provide an update, and provide opportunity to discuss the needs of the partners.

Action: The MDARD Director will call for a meeting of the partners to occur in October or November 2011.

Verification Workgroup Report – Jan Wilford reported that the Verification Workgroup met on August 5 and via conference call on August 16. Jan reviewed the “MAEAP Verification Protocol” that the workgroup prepared for presentation and action at the September 14 Commission Meeting.

Action: Revisions agreed to for the “MAEAP Verification Protocol” document included:

MAEAP Verification Requirements:

- Add, as second bullet, “Perform applicable risk assessment(s)”.
- Change “appropriate” to “applicable” in the second bullet of verification requirements and make it the third bullet. “Assessments” should also read as “assessment(s)” and “MAEAP” will be added in front of “conservation plan”.
- Remove “to determine if MAEAP standards have been met” from the third bullet and move to the fourth bullet to begin sentence as “If MAEAP standards have been met...”

MAEAP Re-verification Requirements:

- Add “MAEAP” in front of “conservation plan” in second bullet.
- Remove “to determine if MAEAP standards have been met” from the third bullet and move to the fourth bullet to begin the sentence as “If MAEAP standards have been met...”

MAEAP Revocation:

- Remove the word “repeated” from the fourth bullet under revocation.

Action: MDARD will incorporate changes discussed at this meeting and refer the document to the Attorney General’s (AG) Office for review and to determine if it falls under the Administrative Procedures Act when a verifier cannot get to a re-verification by its expiration date and also to determine if a hearing will be necessary for revocations.

Action: MDARD will incorporate AG’s recommendations and redistribute the document to the Council.

OLD BUSINESS

Governing Principles Document Review – The Governing Principles Document was provided and will be discussed at the next meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT/NEW BUSINESS

Meeting Schedule for 2012 – The Council agreed to strive for meetings on the second Monday of each month in 2012.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for October 24, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. The location has not yet been determined.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Eyde
September 19, 2011