**SOUTHERN AREA ASSOCIATION**

Wisconsin Land + Water Conservation Association

**Southern Area Counties:**

Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Grant, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Richland, Rock & Sauk

**President:** Lisa Derr, Dodge County

**Vice President:** Kurt Calkins, Columbia County

**Secretary/Treasurer:** Annette Lolwing, Grant County

**Area Coordinator:** Lynda Schweikert, Grant County

**August SAA Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, October 28, 2021**

**Via Zoom Meeting**

 1. Introductions & Business

* Meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Lisa Derr.
* Pledge of Allegiance.
* Roll Call of Counties – Columbia 0 staff 1 LCC, Dane 2 staff 0 LCC, Dodge 1 staff 1 LCC, Grant 2 staff 1 LCC, Green 1 staff 1 LCC, Iowa 1 staff 0 LCC, Lafayette 2 staff 0 LCC, Richland 1 staff 0 LCC, Rock 1 staff 1 LCC and Sauk 2 staff 0 LCC, Jefferson 1 staff 0 LCC. Others: Kelly Neitzel, Patricia Alexander, Chris Newberry, Erin Moran, Bart Chapman, Dale Gasser, and Penny Pohle
* Approval of Agenda – Motion by Rock/2nd by Richland to approve the agenda. Motion carried.
* Approval of May 27, 2021 Minutes – Motion by Dane/2nd by Lafayette. Motion Carried.
* Treasurer’s Report – Motion by Dodge/2nd by Sauk. Motion Carried.

 2. Partner Updates:

* 1. DATCP – Kelly Neitzel reported that they are dealing with some new streambank standards. Streambank standards were released by NRCS within the last month and will be offering some training. They are at the end of their PDH (Professional Development Hours) cycle. DATCP has requested the PDH records for the last 3 years, they have until the end of the year to complete the PDH’s. A couple of documents came out of the farm center; herd-based diagnostics and the basic general services that the farm center offers.

b. DATCP – Bart Chapman mentioned that they are currently recruiting for the Southeast

 DATCP Engineering position that is vacant. The plan is to have a new engineer hired by

 mid to late January.

c. WI DNR – Dale Gasser reported that the joint allocation plan was approved at the

 Land + Water Conservation Board and was signed off by DATCP and WI DNR secretary.

 The central office will be sending out the runoff management grant award letters within the

 next few weeks. The Nitrate Targeted Performance Standard work is still in progress.

d. NRCS – No Report.

 3. Legislative/Administrative Update – Curt Calkins

 The dialog from the summer leg/admin meeting referenced that Paul Daigle brought a proposal to them from Marathon County. A local legislature contacted them because they are looking for resources to do some creative things in a watershed specific area. Paul was looking at the leg/admin committee for support.

 The leg/admin committee did vote to support Paul’s Marathon County initiative. Marathon county has unique things happening with the motivation of landowners to compliance and getting good things done on the land.

 The leg/admin October meeting discussed the use of SEG funds towards soft practices. You are eligible to use 50% of the SEG funding to put toward soft practices, such as Cover Crops if you have a Nutrient Management Plan. Shawn Pfaff, their lobbyist, spoke that they are in the post budget situation and are facing elections at the state level. We are not to expect great things to happen, keep pushing on some of the agenda items. The Farmland Preservation legislation was brought up, and it does have support and would increase the tax credits for the program. There is a package of water quality bills. These are from the Southwest area, the ground water quality task force, SWIGG Study (Southwest Wisconsin Groundwater Geology) that have been active in the legislative process. Melissa Luck, Kurt Calkins, Matt Krueger, and Christina Schlutt are going to be part of small task force committee taking a look at the by-law changes and resolutions of the WI Land + Water Association. They are wondering what to do with all the old resolutions. Christina is going back to categorize all the past conversations that the association has had. The goal is to have less resolutions and have more defined roles spelled out to committee guiding principles or association policy position papers. Kurt and Shawn met with the DBA (Dairy Business Association) to have a post budget conversation and to discuss what the future is going to bring. The Land + Water President, Bob Micheel, joined a group of people to have a discussion on the future direction in funding security of Conservation Wisconsin. Kurt had asked; what are the Counties doing with the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding? Kurt also would like to hear

 if any other county is running into contractor availability for projects?

 4. Poster/Speaking Contest Logistics – Justine Bula

 Justine mentioned that the Logo and theme have been released from NACD for the poster and

 speaking contest. The deadline to submit all materials for both poster and speaking contest for the

 Southern Area contest is January 25th. They are planning in person for the Area and State contest.

 Justine will need the hard copies of posters, and students will be in person for the speaking contest.

 The Southern Area poster contest is scheduled on February 1st and the speaking contest will be on

 February 2nd. Justine reported that she has 6 possibly 7 counties to participate in the poster contest

 and 2 possibly 3 counties to participate in the speaking contest. Justine mentioned that she had some

 inquiries in terms of the speaking contest of helping students get to the Area Competition and the

 State Competition helping to cover mileage and/or hotel if necessary. Justine asked if she could

 request some funding from the SAA for the students in our area to attend the Area and State

 Speaking contest.

  Dodge County made a motion to support paying mileage for the students in the Speaking Contest to

 attend the Area Level and reimbursement for mileage and 1 night stay in a hotel at the State Level

 using the IRS mileage rate, seconded by Dane County. Motion Carried.

 Justine reported that the Youth Envirothon is being planned for in person, they do have a backup

 virtual program that is an option. The Summer Camp Program: The High School has a lot of

 uncertainty, the middle school is possibly going to be moved because Sand Lake will no longer be

 able to host the camp.

 Lisa Derr completed some research on the ARPA funds. The eligible uses for the ARPA funding to

 include: water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. There is no requirement for the US Treasury to

 pre-approve. As Kurt suggested local governments are directed to the clean water revolving funds.

 Dodge county will be straightening out a ditch for better evaporation and upland best practices.

 There are 2 categories listed as Agricultural Best Management Practices as well as Surface Water

 Protection and Restoration. You have until December 2024 to commit the funds and December 2026

 to spend the funds.

 There are 4 items that have been suggested for each county to report on: Their COVID restrictions

 regarding travel and trainings, contractor availability issues, any report on the ARPA funds, and

 Regional Planning authority.

 5. County Roundtable

 Columbia County: Kurt reported that Columbia County has no affiliation with the Planning

 Commission. No in state COVID travel restrictions. About half the ARPA funds have gone to the

 infrastructure projects for solid wastes and recycling facilities, IT, and broadband. The Land

 Conservation Office along with the Highway Department both work with the parks program. They

 requested funds for the park infrastructure, shoreline buffers and tree planting. The remaining

 balance from the $2 million will be used towards roads. Problems with Contractors; waiting for

 supplies and receiving bids. Kurt would like to see DATCP come up with a waiver option.

 Dane County: Amy reported that they are not involved with the conversation pertaining to the ARPA

 funds. Majority of the money is going toward at-risk families, food pantry work, homelessness, and

 supporting small businesses. No in state COVID restriction travel, they still have a mask mandate.

 They are having challenges with getting 3 bids from contractors. Bids are coming in way more than

 the average cost. Amy stated that she is not familiar with the Planning Commission.

 Dodge County: John reported that they have stayed open from day 1 through the COVID Pandemic.

 No in state COVID restriction travel. Contractors are difficult to find. Some projects come in

 over-priced. Dodge County has one committed ARPA funded project, a full survey for broadband for

 the county. May also put a USGS station on the Rock River to monitor the water levels. They don’t

 do anything with Regional Planning.

 Grant County: Lynda reported that ARPA funds are being used for 911 and fiberoptics to the towers.

 Have not had any contractor availability issues, but projects are coming in at a higher cost. COVID

 travel must be approved by their supervisor. Grant County does work with Regional Planning

 through Zoning and Sanitation, they are also revising the Farmland Preservation Plan and they are

 doing a water quality assessment plan for one of the watersheds.

 Green County: Todd stated that they don’t work with the Regional Planning. They had no problems

 this year with contractor availability. Prices were a little higher than normal. They have no COVID

 travel restrictions, they just haven’t been traveling. Green County has had 2 land judging contests

 recently. The 1st land judging contest they had 10 schools with around 100 students attending. The

 Southwest WI Tri-County (Grant, Lafayette, and Green County) Land Judging hosted 11 schools with

 105 students. They had their youth conservation day for the 5th graders.

 Iowa County: Katie stated that they are using the ARPA money for highway broadband. A couple of

 projects have been postponed, not being able to get supplies. They have no COVID travel

 restrictions. They have been using the SEG funds for cover crops. They are working with Pheasants

 Forever and local farmers to take their nonprofitable land and put it into a vegetative cover.

 Jefferson County: Patricia reported that her office is fully staffed. It has been difficult to get 3 bids

 for their projects. Some projects have come in with higher cost estimates. They have no COVID

 travel restrictions. Jefferson is not covered by a Regional Planning Commission. They just adopted a

 new comprehensive plan for the county. The ARPA has been earmarked for health and human

 services and broadband. They set aside $200,000 in Clean Water initiatives.

 Lafayette County: Max reported that the ARPA funds will probably be going towards a

 hospital/manor complex and the roads. Contractor availability has not been bad. Costs of the projects

 have increased and receiving supplies has been a challenge. They have no COVID travel restrictions.

 Virtual meetings have been very helpful. Manure Storage Ordinance has been updated and reviewed

 by DATCP. The Southwest Regional Planning Commission does a lot of their planning, Farmland

 Preservation Plan, LWRM Plan, and the Nonmetallic mining. Due to budget cuts the Land

 Conservation Department may be moving next year.

 Richland County: Cathy mentioned that the contractors are very busy. They have no COVID travel

 restrictions. Cathy would like to utilize some of the ARPA funds for the well testing and analysis of

 that data. The Regional Planning is working with a landowner that has a segment of stream at the

 end of the drainage ditch. The landowner would like to restore the drainage ditch back to the

 meanders of the old streambed. Regional Planning, NRCS, DOT, DNR, WI Wetlands, the City of

 Richland Center, and the Land Conservation Office are working together to do this project. There

 LWRM Plan needs to be updated this year. The Land Conservation Department will be moving back

 to the basement of the Courthouse next year.

 Rock County: Wes Davis reported that they have ARPA money available. They have been looking

 for assistance on the housing issue. It is also being used for the Small Business Loan Fund and also a

 Small Business Grant Program They have contracted a company to do a study on the broadband.

 They are trying to get the whole county covered with broadband. Andrew reported that they are not

 part of any Regional Planning Commission. Rock County has a mask mandate for county facilities.

 They have no COVID travel restrictions. They have a core set of contractors that do conservation

 work. Their county is taking ARPA fund requests one at a time. The Land Conservation Department

 is concentrating on the Nitrate, groundwater issues.

 Sauk County: Melissa reported that the ARPA funds were decided by their County Administrator.

 Infrastructure improvements like radio and cell towers, economic development and tourism, ADRC,

 Nutrition and Aging Programs, some park improvements, the tri county airport has had some issues

 with flooding. They have always had issues with contractors putting the conservation practices as

 low priority. They are not a part of the Regional Planning Commission. They have planners on staff

 if there is a need for any of that work. They have no COVID travel restrictions. Melissa stated that

 the Film Festival will be coming up on November 6th. It is called: Conserve Sauk Film Fest. Their

 county farm is going through a master planning process. There was a threat to sell the property. The

 Land Conservation Department needed to have a solid plan in place to promote the property as an

 educational space. Their County Farm has been owned by the county for 150 years.

 Motion by Richland, seconded by Rock County to adjourn. Next meeting: To Be Determined

 Depending on the Land + Water Conference in March.