

# Policy Advisory Group Report

## Members

- Josh Boxell
- Steve Crowe
- Robert Guenther
- Jarrod Hahn
- Charlie Houin
- Mark Kingma
- Aaron Lee
- Mark Legan
- Steve Miller
- Mike Morehouse
- John Nidlinger
- Steve Nottingham
- James Ramsey
- Matt Schafer
- Roger Wenning
- Neal Wolheter

## Water Resources Policy Advisory Group

The water resources policy advisory group met on March 31. They received an update on the creation of a well monitoring network in Indiana, which was originally championed by the PAG. Farmers have embraced the idea of voluntary well monitoring with many successes:

- Farmers volunteering for the DNR operated network, which is adding over 20 wells in 2016.
- Creation of the LENK network.
  - A private monitoring project in LaGrange, Elkhart, Noble and Kosciusko counties.
  - Forty farmers and nearly 70 wells that are being monitored.

These networks will serve to monitor aquifers so that use does not have long-term negative impacts. With enough data, analyses will be done to create a picture of the amount of available water in aquifers.

Legislation passed in 2016 requires a review of data reported by significant water withdrawal facilities. This review will ensure that data has been properly reported. The PAG members suggested that additional educational information is needed to ensure that individuals know that they need to report actual monthly use, especially with seasonal uses such as irrigation.

The PAG discussed the recent proposal to create a conservation area in Indiana to address challenges caused by erosion of the banks of the Kankakee and Yellow rivers. Ideas being discussed include:

- Stabilizing a five-mile stretch of the Yellow River to reduce the largest contribution of sediment.
  - Essentially create a two-stage ditch by creating shelves in the rivers to support vegetation and direct normal flow in a narrow channel and high flow in a wide channel.
  - Lower the river channel by removing built up sediment.
- Creating up-stream water storage areas to reduce peak flows and flood events.

The PAG plans to participate in a field day on the Yellow River to discuss the project. Part of the goal of participating in this project discussion and design is to identify strategies to improve drainage projects to have less environmental impact, require less

maintenance and be more cost effective. PAG members have already witnessed success with reduced stream bank erosion through the use of two-stage ditches.

It was noted that wetland review and jurisdictional waters determinations have increased challenges for local government units trying to get approval for drainage projects. It was suggested that the federal and state government need to move to a process where agencies consider the overall environmental benefit/impact and allow projects with net benefits to move forward in a reasonable manner.

The PAG also revisited the issue of levee operation. Justin Schneider noted that there seems to be little interest within local or state government to create a new organizational structure for local management of levees. The PAG discussed whether changes need to be made to existing statutes to facilitate better operation. The PAG's official recommendation is that Farm Bureau pursue legislation for 2017 that will require reporting by the county of all assessments made for levee operation and any disbursements made through county offices.

The final focus of the PAG was to review policy sections related to water and to reformat them to a *we support/we oppose* format. In addition, the PAG made several recommendations to remove duplicate policies. The recommendations will be submitted to the resolutions committee for consideration.

## **CALL TO ACTION**

As part of the ongoing debate about water usage and long-term availability concerns:

### ***County Farm Bureaus can***

- Work to identify existing entities that oversee maintenance of local levees so that we can better engage them in discussions on how to address funding and maintenance challenges.

### ***Farmers are asked to***

- Consider off-site impacts from new well installations and proactively collect information to identify whether the new wells are causing impacts to neighbors.

### ***Farmers can***

- Use conservation measures where feasible to reduce the need to pump water.
- Volunteer to participate in the DNR aquifer monitoring project for the state.

Questions regarding the activities of the water resources PAG can be directed to one of the group members or to [Justin Schneider](#), 317-692-7835, the Farm Bureau staff member facilitating the group.