

**NLRS Sub-Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
March 13, 2017 at 1:00 pm  
Northfield Inn, Springfield, IL**

**Members/Advisors Present:**

Steve Fulling, Chairman  
Steve Stierwalt, AISWCD President  
Dan Doedtman  
Dan Duval  
Ken Kesler  
Tom Beyers  
Sheryl Phillips, AISWCD, minutes  
Terina Coffey, ISWCDEA

**Absent:**

Jason Anderson  
Tom Anderson  
Glen Bowers  
Paige Buck, NRCS  
Kenny Vosholler

Roll Called: Sheryl Phillips

Motion to approve the agenda: 1<sup>st</sup> Dan Doedtman; 2<sup>nd</sup> Tom Beyers

**Motion passed**

Motion to approve December 2016 Communications Focus Area Committee minutes:

1<sup>st</sup> Steve Stierwalt; 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan Doedtman

**Motion passed**

**Future of NLRS**

Steve Fulling opened the discussion by stating we need to do more with NLRS. Is there interest? How can we move forward? Where can SWCDs help? How to gauge progress?

Dan Doedtman discussed cover crops. Tough to get people to try. Tough to get funding. Chemical carryover an issue. In his area, no one is taking funds to get cover crops in.

Ken Kesler brought up that we need to get Universities (and Extension) involved. University Extension has also suffered from budget cuts. They should provide background for NLRS, but not all Extension offices on same page, many have different agendas. Some research done but with different results. It does not seem as though they are advertising NLRS well.

Tom Beyers raised the point Illinois does not have a reliable Extension service; not enough people like in years past. Dr. Cooke is still available from Illinois Extension – tile & drainage expert. We should also take advantage of the expertise of Laura Christianson – 10 ways to improve tile systems. Research into Nitrates being done by many groups, but all doing separately; does not seem like cross collaboration is happening. Data is not being peer reviewed thus credibility is questioned. SWCDs should be taking examples from NRCS Soil Health Initiative. SWCDs should be hosting shows/events with other partner groups. Discussion of water sampling and testing. We lack water quality sampling to prove to landowners they are losing nutrients. We have water test kits at many SWCD offices, but they are underutilized. Believe is that many landowners don't test because they just don't want to know. We need some simple, inexpensive standard tests that may not be as accurate but can give general trends. Vermilion County is doing water sample testing at specific points and times and

recording data. Other SWCDs could pursue this. General thought is that landowners are not going to test water quality until there is a reason (i.e. legislated).

Dan Duval discussed that SWCDs are in a unique position to lead the charge on NLRs. Lead charge, but how? Need good direction and research on what to do in each county or region. In his area, irrigated sandy soils have different issues than other parts of Illinois. Discussion of iPhone apps that continuously monitor nitrate.

Tom Beyers went on to discuss some NLRs options: Control boxes have minimal effect; they are hard to design and difficult to get approved from NRCS. Bio reactors work but cost and installation is a problem (need hole about basement size – 50' x 30' x 4' deep and getting enough wood chips can be problematic). Cost estimate is about \$10,000 - \$15,000 and they drain 80 to 100 acres. There not many bio reactors installed in Illinois (12 in the state?). Saturated buffer strips work. Constructed wetlands cost \$25,000-\$100,000 but take crop out of production and are not suitable everywhere. Aquatic plants help convert nutrients. Constructed wetlands drain about 120 acres. Other management tools (cover crops, buffers, etc.) will not address nitrates enough. Our challenge is to figure out a way handle 2,000 to 3,000 acres at a time, the size of Drainage Districts. Drainage Districts can be excellent resource/partner for SWCDs.

Steve Fulling discussed concerns raised at a meeting he recently attended. General feeling is that SWCDs are the local, trusted partner, but most groups are waiting for us to take the lead. Many potential partners are member organizations so have multiple high priority issues, thus can't take the lead on NLRs. They want to partner with SWCDs. Difficulties? No or little cost share funds to SWCDs. General feeling that there is not support and SWCDs are just "winging it" right now; without support – failure. Need to control what is put on the field in order to control what comes through the tiles.

Steve Stierwalt discussed how to move forward with NLRs. What is the common goal of SWCD? Need to get Districts to move towards common goal – decide upon our #1 priority collectively (i.e. Water Quality). Once #1 priority is decided by Districts, can bring to AISWCD Board through delegates. If approved, we can all move forward. AISWCD will be given direction to work towards goal and finding ways to bring solutions to SWCDs; lobbying our #1 priority. Then back to Districts who have local knowledge and know local NLRs issues. Will possibly result in better SWCD image and more funds by attracting outside groups to invest with us.

Terina Coffey raised the point that 97 small voices talking about 1 issue is powerful rather than 97 voices talking about dozens of concerns. We need to search out solutions to local water quality issues. Districts having difficulty getting landowners to sign up and attend NLRs workshops.

Steve Fulling added that we need to our message to get retailers and get them involved; We work with dozens, but they work with 100s of people and can pass along our message.

Dan Duval added that they have been planting cover crops for 10-20 years in his area due to sandy soils and wind erosion. Many are selling cover crop seeds, but no one is demonstrating the results.

A general discussion ensued about BMPs and landowner buy-in. SWCDs and participating landowners have no “control” over what is happening on non-participating farms. Most farmers see NLRS costing them money. We need to educate them on ways NLRS can save money.

Discussion on NLRS terminology. It was felt that Water Quality is a better focus than NLRS – Water Quality is easier to sell and promote, it is not so scientific, and it addresses both urban and agriculture concerns.

### **Adjournment**

At 2:25 Motion to Adjourn: 1<sup>st</sup> Dan Doedtman; 2<sup>nd</sup> Tom Beyers

**Motion passed**

Minutes by: Sheryl Phillips, AISWCD