

Strategic Planning/ NLRS Study Session  
March 13, 2017, 3:30pm

**Present:**

Steve Stierwalt, President  
Tom Beyers, Vice President  
Van Bitner, Secretary  
Dan Duval, Treasurer  
Jerry Snodgrass, Area 1 VP  
Steve Fulling, Area 4 VP  
Terry Bogner, LUC 2  
Lee Bunting, LUC 3  
Terry Davis, LUC 4  
Daniel Doedtman, LUC 10  
Kody Aldrich, LUC 11  
Dale Shumaker, LUC 15  
Kelly Thompson, AISWCD  
Kaila Long, AISWCD  
Sheryl Phillips, AISWCD  
Sue Davis, Christian SWCD  
Spring Duffey, ISWCDEA  
Terina Coffey, ISWCDEA  
Sondra Baker, Envirothon

**Absent:**

Myron Kirby, Past President  
David McCormick, Area 2 VP  
Kenny Hawthorne, Area 3 VP  
Vern Latwesen, LUC 1  
Chuck Schafer, LUC 5  
Randy Molitoris, LUC 6  
Joe Rothermel, LUC 7  
Bruce Yingling, LUC 8  
Jason Anderson, LUC 9  
Don Beisiegel, LUC 12  
Roger Johnson, LUC 13  
Tom Anderson, LUC 14  
Gerard Fabrizius, LUC 16  
Matt Hanauer, AISWCD

Steve Stierwalt called this session to order at 3:45pm.

**Strategic Planning**

**Forums-** Steve Stierwalt gave an overview of the Strategic Planning Forums and asked for thoughts from those that have attended. Jerry Snodgrass mentioned that while not mentioned at the forums, he would like to see the awards programs mentioned in strategic plan. Terry Bogner shared that he attended the forum in Dixon and noticed that many of the participants all had the same ideas. Dan Duval echoed that sentiment and mentioned that branding and image have become a common theme. Lee Bunting shared that he attended the forum in New Lenox and noticed that very few directors came to that forum. He shared that he is concerned about this, but that he is not sure how to encourage more attendance.

**NLRS**

**Preliminary thoughts-** Steve Stierwalt shared that we need to focus on NLRS now, so that this opportunity does not pass Districts by. Tom Beyers shared that he would like non-mandated days of training. He shared that the department used to have two day mandated training and it was hard to get directors engaged. He also suggested finding a way to fund engagement opportunities and training and suggested reaching out to the NACD. Jerry Snodgrass shared that the NACD has set up specific topics that must be covered in Director Training, but that very few Directors attend that meeting at Summer

Conference. Tom Beyers mentioned that while there may not be many, we still do have some Directors that attend this meeting and NACD recognizes those that attend. He also shared a desire to have a graded test or certification at the end of the course, and asked if anyone had any other suggestions for getting training for Directors and staff. Steve Stierwalt shared that if we expect nothing from our Directors, then we will get nothing. He stated that we need to build expectations and help create awareness that NLRS is an issue. He shared that he was invited to speak at a District Annual Meeting and he was astonished that they were not working on NLRS when Districts are perfect for this. He shared that he would love to see Districts state-wide taking the mantle on this and branding themselves as the go-to people for NLRS. He shared that for the next hour, this group will be brainstorming ideas.

Kelly Thompson shared that while she is not a trained facilitator, she will do her best. She reviewed the following timeline for implementing NLRS goals:

- March-introduction to NLRS and brainstorming session
- June-Strategies for NLRS
- July-Present strategies and develop plans

She also shared the agenda for this session and stated that there are many ongoing committees that are just talking about NLRS. She shared that we would like to be the ones collaborating and actually moving the needle on this.

**Initial Questions-** Kelly Thompson asked the group to think of some questions that they have about NLRS as a whole. She shared that she will try to find as many answers to these questions as possible before June. Below is a list of such questions. For the purpose of anonymity these questions will be labelled the following way: D= question from a Director/ LUC rep or Area Vice President, E=question from an employee.

- D-How are things going to be documented for implementation?
- D- Who will gather all the preliminary information? Kelly Thompson replied that there is a NLRS Scientific Advisory Committee that has already set the baseline.
- D- How do we get farmers involved in attending meetings? Limited staff members can make it hard to plan NLRS meetings.
- D- What do we need to do to get the needle moving on NLRS and get people attending NLRS meetings? Many people already have the information and do not want to go to a special meeting just to talk about it.
- D- How can we convince people that it is better to do this voluntarily than be forced to do this when it becomes regulated?
- E-What magic star are we shooting for? How will success be gauged? D- 2025 goal states that Illinois would like to reduce nitrates by 15% and Phosphorus by 25%. By 2045 the goal is to reduce both by 45%. He shared that there is a NLRS document that has all of this information on it and asked for this to be brought in June.
- E-Do we have a starting load number?
- D-This may be a work in progress. Will NLRS go away with new federal administration?

- E-Echoed concern about NLRS going away since the new administration is deregulating the EPA.
- D- How do we deal with the suppliers that try to push excess nitrogen?
- D-Should there be examples of potential consequences if this is not voluntary done? For example, should we be advertising what is going on in Chesapeake Bay?
- D- Heard that many Chesapeake Bay farmers sold their land to avoid dealing with this. Will this happen here?
- E- How do we individualize the benchmarks so we can meet them? For example should we say every 40 acres use a suite of practices to reduce nutrient loss by Y% or should we say only contribute X nutrients per acre? E- If we develop this suite of practices, the local offices can get this information and the corresponding numbers to farmers.
- E-Whole farm planning is an excellent idea.
- E- How do we deal with 1-2 year cash farmers who work on corporate farms? They only seem to care about their profit, since they are on such a short term.
- D-Where did the problem originate from? Some people may say "not me, I'm a good farmer", but how do we show them that what they think is true may not be the case?
- D-Do we need regulations to move the needle or can we use an incentive?
- D-What are the economics of cost to benefits ratio for doing this?
- D- Can we turn this into a goal oriented program like t by 2000?

**Brainstorming-** Brainstorming topics included: What opportunities do Districts have for achieving NLRS goals? What needs to be done? What is the role of the SWCDs? What are some of the challenges that Districts face? Items in bold are ones that were thought of by more than one group

#### Challenges:

- **Need training**
- **Need branding**
- **Need to Market ourselves**
- Getting our foot in door
- **Low staff numbers**
- **Cost**
- **Resistance to change**
- **Board member complacency**
- **Lack of program uniformity**
- **Motivation and communication**
- **Partner involvement and support**
- **Not sure what we are supposed to be doing or where to start**
- Farmers are independent people
- Quantifying work to the producers
- **97 different districts that all "act like thumbs"**
- District plans need to be individualized

### Opportunities:

- **Local presence that is non-political and known among local partners**
- Customized programing, navigation and implementation of NLRS
- Fundraising opportunity with seed sellers
- Opportunity to become Nutrient Management Trainers
- **Educate local landowners and other groups**
- **Create a networking hub**
- **Document NLRS practices and place a dollar value on them to show return on investment**
- Emphasize NLRS at the summer conference; explain what has been done, and where SWCDs can start to fit in
- How can we entice SWCDs without funding?
- **Use RUSL and RUSL2 to document the amount that is saved so can be visualized**
- Absentee landowners (look into developing conservation leases for tenants)

### **Further Steps**

Kelly Thompson shared that she would like the attendees to be thinking of goals and a to-do list for NLRS. She also shared that regional suggestions would be excellent since the state is so diverse. Steve Stierwalt pointed out that we would like to come to a consensus in June about how to address this issue and he reiterated the importance of NLRS. Kelly Thompson stated that AISWCD will summarize the flip charts and send the results out to the Full Board and everyone in attendance. She also mentioned that if anyone has further ideas, they should send them to her Kaila Long, or Sheryl Phillips. Tom Beyers shared that he agrees that is critical to emphasize the NLRS sessions now, as well as at the June meeting and the Summer Conference. Steve Stierwalt reiterated that SWCDs have opportunity to show that they are the people for NLRS. He shared that we need to work on attaining this image before someone else snatches it from us. He shared that he would like to see a NLRS resolution shell at Summer Conference.

This session closed at 5:03pm.

Minutes take by: Kaila Long, AISWCD