

**Heartland Conservancy
Prairie Du Pont Watershed Plan
Watershed Planning Committee (WPC) Meeting #3 Summary
Clyde C. Jordan Senior Center, East St. Louis, IL
April 25, 2023 at 5:30pm**

Watershed Planning Committee in Attendance:

Walter Byrd, Centerville Citizens for Change (CCC)
Lester Dorian, Centerville Citizens for Change (CCC)
Hallie Jones, Resident
Gracie Robinson, Resident
Koran Payton, Regular Everyday Citizens Team (REC) /CCC
Courtney Payton, Regular Everyday Citizens Team (REC)/CCC
Kalila Jackson, Equal Housing Opportunity Council (EHOC)

Virtual/Online Participants in Attendance:

Elena Haynes, U.S. Senator Durbin's Office
MaryGrace Lewandowski, East West Gateway Council of Governments (EWG)
Natalia Ospina, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Meleah Geertsma, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
JD Dixon, Empire 13 and Clean Cities Coalition
Thomas Brown, BTF Building the Foundation, Inc
Zack Chike, City of Joy Fellowship Church of East St. Louis and Clean Cities Coalition

Project Team Members in Attendance:

Laura Lyon, Vice President of Impact and Strategy, HeartLands Conservancy
Jennifer Reiman, Resilient Communities Manager, HeartLands Conservancy
John O'Donnell, Water Programs Manager, HeartLands Conservancy
Jesus Sanchez, Environmental Programs Technician, HeartLands Conservancy
MaryAnn Taylor Crate, Added Dimension, LLC
Kayla Allen, Added Dimension, LLC
Ronnie Paul, Heneghan and Associates
Christine Davis, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)
Joe Stitely, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)

Meeting resources and materials can be found at: <https://heartlandsconservancy.org/pdp/>

Notes From Meeting: For the meeting recording and PPT presentation, go to:
<https://heartlandsconservancy.org/pdp/>

Welcome and introductions were facilitated by MaryAnn Taylor Crate of Added Dimension, LLC

Jennifer Reiman of Heartlands Conservancy gave an update on the overall project and the revised project schedule. She went over the role of the watershed planning committee, as well as promoted upcoming community engagement events, expressing that everyone should come out for the Juneteenth Celebration on June 17th in East St. Louis. She also mentioned that the next Open House for the Watershed Plan will be held on July 25th. She stated that the team will also be having some pop-up events as they are identified. She explained that these community events must be a good fit for our message and the people who need to be reached regarding the plan and its development. She reiterated that as a member of this committee, this group guides the development of the overall watershed plan, which includes the Judy Branch portion to the north as well as the Prairie du Pont portion.

Jennifer then gave an update on the project schedule. She explained that Heartlands Conservancy was given more time to get into the details of the plan. They are currently putting together the draft plan. Between now and the open house this summer, the goal is to get as much input and feedback on the plan by doing one-on-one meetings with community groups, municipalities, and stakeholders to discuss the draft and to make sure they are on track. She stated that nothing will be finalized until the WPC Committee has had the opportunity to review the final draft plan.

Jennifer also shared that the team is on track with the BMP demonstration projects. There are some projects in the works to begin this summer, and to be completed, hopefully, this fall. She then gave a recap on what has happened since the WPC meeting last summer. She stated that the team has been working to gather technical information and analyzing it to find out what is working and not working in the watershed. She reviewed some of the key findings from stakeholder outreach and data analysis:

Stakeholder Identified Critical Area - This map highlighted at all the reported flooding, sewage, and infrastructure that is poorly maintained or falling apart by the stakeholders. It is already helping to drive more interest and investment in repairing things identified by stakeholders. There was also a change in the way the team presents information collected on the map. The team decided to move from having maps that showed just the watershed, but to focus on the areas that are feeling the most impact. So, the maps zoom in on those areas so they can see in detail where the water is coming from and the area most impacted.

Subwatershed Unit Map – This map showcased the different groupings of water that all flow together into certain tributaries. For example, everything in the purple section of the map flows from Palmer Creek near Columbia, Dupon, and East Carondelet down through the creek that lets it out into the Mississippi River near the JB Bridge. So, each of the colors on the map is an area of water that is grouped together before it enters a big tributary into the Mississippi River.

Critical Flooding in the Watershed Map – This map focused on the computer modeling of the water in the watershed. The model was designed to figure out where its flooding and how much water is flowing through the system and when it gets to be too much water for the system, where does the water puddle up and cause flooding. She explained that the team ran a series of models that looked at a particular rainfall event. For example, if it rains 2 inches in 3 hours, the model can then be used to figure out how much water is going into the creeks and if those creeks can't handle it, where does the water overflow to and where does it puddle up. The model results in maps that show areas that would be wet under a certain flooding condition. This information from the computer models combined with reports from residents who told us

where they experience flooding, under certain conditions, together tells the team where there are areas of critical flooding concern in the watershed. On the map presented, it looks like a lot because there is a lot. If there was to be a 100-year storm event, like an event that has a 1 percent chance of happening in a year, a pretty big storm, was to happen when conditions on the ground is already wet, the ground was saturated, and puts more water in the watershed, how much water will be puddling up is depicted in the light blue area of the map. The dark blue colored areas of the map depict the 500-year storm, an even more rare occurrence. The team is looking at different ways of showing where the water will go if there is too much water in the system.

Mr. Payton asked if the storm from last year would fall into this category? Jennifer stated that there were some high-water marks that were collected, didn't think it was a great match to the models but thought it was informative to see how high the water got in certain areas. One of the limitations of models is that they generally apply the storm to the whole watershed. The storm that occurred in July hit a smaller portion of the watershed hard and didn't touch some other areas at all. So, it is not an apple-to-apple comparison. The storm in July was instructive as to how bad it can be.

Causes of Flooding

Jennifer then discussed some of the causes of flooding. One of the biggest causes identified was the poor condition of the drainage system at the neighborhood-level. There is a real flow problem in areas that are very flat and where there are lots of problems with the infrastructure not operating as intended. The team also knows that there has been an increase in impervious surfaces like pavement, sidewalks, and rooftops. These are areas where when rain hits it, it runs right off and goes into the stormwater system. It does not have a chance to soak into the ground and be in a place where it won't do as much harm. So, the more impervious surfaces lead to more runoff, the system must handle more and more water as the areas get built up and developed.

The team has also heard a lot of reports about the changes in the water table. Jennifer explains the water table has become higher over the last few decades because originally there was so much heavy industry presence here in East St. Louis. Those industrial factories had groundwater well pumps, so they were pumping their own groundwater to use in their processing. For example, think about the National City Stockyards area. They pumped a lot of water to keep that place hosed out. Since that industry and others like it are no longer pumping groundwater to use for processing, that ground water table has come up. You don't have to dig as deep a hole to get to where the water is under the ground. That also means that when it rains, you can't soak as much water in before it gets completely saturated and starts puddling up in your yard. When industry declined, groundwater usage declined, the water table came up.

The team also knows that the pumps are in poor condition. The pumps that were supposed to only pump sanitary sewage aren't functioning well and in a lot of cases, the pipes are allowing groundwater and stormwater into them. So, the pumps there were designed to only pump sewage, is now pumping all that groundwater and stormwater which is wearing out the pumps.

The team acknowledges that the ditches are getting filled in with dirt coming from erosion of upland sites. So, like the stream bank seen in some of the pictures, if a fast rush of stormwater comes down through there, it is chewing away the dirt on that stream bank and that muddy water comes down the hill and then it slows down and the dirt settles out and fills in the ditches, which is a problem. Driveway culverts and street level neighborhood ditched being filled in or blocked was also identified as cause of flooding in the area. Sometimes they are just crushed by people driving on them. It is understandable that it happens and should be repaired or replaced. The big culverts and the big ditches are also filled with settlement for the same reasons. More erosion on the upland, dropping that dirt into the water and then it fills up with the bottom of the hill.

Other Flooding Concerns

Ms. Jackson ask if the team had factored in the impacts of man-made infrastructure like highways or other types of projects that may have diverted the natural flow and caused flooding to worsen. Particularly thinking of projects like I-255. Did the team factor in highway projects in our study? Jennifer responded that the highways are represented as impervious surfaces. She also stated that the team heard some concerns from stakeholders about I-255 and how flooding appeared to get worse once the highway was constructed. Jennifer then summarized some of the information the team obtained when they met with IDOT. She stated that IDOT was not aware of a drainage study that was done when I-255 was designed back in the 1970s. Things have changed since then. The team pressed them a little bit and IDOT said they've done a drainage study for the new interchange at Dupon on a station area, and that the drainage study was much more robust than anything they might have done at the time I-255 was constructed. Also, during the conversation with IDOT, Jennifer stated that they asked IDOT if it was possible for water to move underneath the I-255 embankment, and they said that any place there was a water weight, like a visible ditch, they put a culvert underneath, or a box or something to carry the water under the embankment for I-255. This is how engineers think. It is possible that there might be areas where the embankment might be obstructing an area of ponding, causing that ponding to be worse. However, the way IDOT considers its construction, there's a designated waterway, a ditch where water is supposed to move, they accommodate the ditch. Sheets flow or ponding wasn't really a concern. Jennifer asked John O'Donnell of Heartlands Conservancy if he had any further insight to add from that meeting with IDOT.

John mentioned that IDOT talked about the flap gates on those culverts, and maintenance for those would be under the MetroEast Sanitary District (MESD).

Ms. Jackson then asked Melah Geertsma of the Natural Resources Council, who participated via Zoom for further input.

Ms. Geertsma added that it is very clear from the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that IDOT did survey all the existing sanitary sewers and stormwater infrastructure around its proposed route. Somehow the agency doesn't seem able to put its hands on the actual detailed report that is referenced in the summary documents. She believes finding these documents would help answer the important question of what I-255 was built over and whether it might have had more impact to that existing infrastructure than perhaps IDOT would like to admit. Thinks it's unfortunate that IDOT can't find its own studies from that era, but they were done. There are references to the studies in the record and she

continues to think that it is important to try to get those documents. Ms. Geertsma also thinks it's great that the team has finally identified that MESD is supposedly responsible for the culverts under I-255, which it appears has been damaged for quite a while, but MESD didn't seem to want to take responsibility or acknowledge that that was its infrastructure.

Ms. Jones, a resident, asked who is a stakeholder? Who are these people? Is it anyone that's interested in the area? Jennifer replied that a stakeholder is a resident, a person who works here, but doesn't live here. It can be someone who cares about the area, somebody who used to live here and is still fighting for it, a business owner, anybody who depends on this area or cares about this area is a stakeholder.

Jennifer then goes on to talk about another meeting where individuals expressed concern about flooding and issues in the area. One thing that has come to light is the top line of the levee that holds in Harding Ditch on the side close to Parkside pump station (Jennifer references the map), there's a little spot where instead of the levee being nice and leveled consistently, there's a little dip, a little notch in it. Which means that when Harding Ditch is full, if it's going to overtop, it's going to overflow the levee. That would cause Parkside neighborhood to experience flooding. This is something that needs a closer look, and we're hoping that engineering can see if it makes sense to even out that so that the neighborhood has a fair chance of surviving a flood, if Harding Ditch gets to the top. Mr. Payton asked if the team had a picture, Jennifer stated no, a picture is not available. This issue just came to the team's attention last week.

Water Quality Sampling Data (Draft Report)

Jennifer briefly reviewed the sampling work being analyzed by John Sloan at NGREEC, Lewis and Clark University, Community College. She explained that John has looked at water sampling data going back decades for this area. So, every time they took a sample of water to see if there were contaminants in it, or if there is anything we should be concerned about with the water itself is recorded in various databases. The team also have water samples that were collected by NGREEC, River Watch and Heartlands Interns to supplement that data to give us some more numbers to work with to see what was in the water. Jennifer shared the good news that the water quality samples from streams that go through the agricultural areas, are looking pretty good. They don't have a lot of excessive fertilizer or manure runoff. As far as heavy metals, there are some areas that have manganese, but that seems to be coming from far upstream, in the Canteen Creek area. So, it's not an extreme manganese pollution problem actively happening in this watershed, but there's something upstream that might be of concern.

In the flood plain, Jennifer explains the dirt, muddy water coming down the hill, suspended solids are high, plus high. High levels of phosphorus and low dissolved oxygen is a problem. The problems seem to be related to a specific tributary and not completely widespread. It also seems to be related to specific storm events or seasonal effects. Not much data on fecal coliform but that bacteria which are found in feces, birds, animals, and people does show up enough that it's clear that it exceeds limits pretty frequently. She says that is a problem because if the bacteria that travels feces is showing up in your flood water, and that floodwater is making it to your yard, in your house, and you're exposed to contaminants from those fecal bacteria.

Jennifer also reviewed the water impairment list. The list of impairments, that Illinois EPA collected, tells which statement has a problem and what kind of problem it is. The first column is aquatic life, talking

about the fish, the frogs and things that live in the water. The orangey color means that there's a problem; if it's in the green, that means it's in good shape. (Looking at the chart) There are quite a few that have contaminants that are a problem for aquatic life.

The next one column was aesthetic quality use. So, in this one, if there are sludgy areas, if it's smelly, those problems would show up in that column. The next one is fish consumption, so going fishing, eating the fish, might be concerned about the levels of some of these chemicals that could be transferred to the fish. The last column focuses primary contact use, so that's swimming or wading in the water where the water is in contact with your skin and your body. Of all the segments and lakes and everything else in this entire watershed, the ones that have problems were identified and it lists the specific.

Ms. Jones asked what are we going to do about the ones that have problems? Jennifer shared a map that lists where the problems are located.

Jennifer then paused the meeting to allow the introduction of people who joined the Zoom call late. The following individuals joined the meeting, JD Dixon of Empire 13 and Clean Cities Coalition; Thomas Brown from the BTF Building the Foundation, Inc; Zack Chike, City of Joy Fellowship Church of East St. Louis and Clean Cities Coalition

Ms. Jackson asked about the data on fecal coliform and if it was reflected in the table. Jennifer replied that the information comes from IEPA 303D and that the water sampling data on fecal coliform comes from local water samplings and has not necessarily been reported to IEPA yet. Ms. Jackson followed up by asking if Heartlands did a risk project test for fecal coliform or were the team just discussing existing data? Jennifer replied that they were discussing existing data and supplemental testing. Ms. Jackson asked another follow-up to see if it was reflected in the chart. Jennifer stated that it was not included because the sampling was not completed in time to be incorporated into the official report. Ms. Davis of the EPA echoed Jennifer statement and said that they are working on getting the information incorporated into final data and having it available for the community. Ms. Jackson stated about the importance of transparency and why a summary wasn't provided to the group. Jennifer indicated that the data just showed up on her desk that morning.

Another effort, in the watershed, that emerged from the advocacy of residents in the area, is that Senator Durbin has secured an earmark of \$1.5 million of congressional directed spending to focus on improving conditions in the area. Jennifer stated that the process takes some time, but it was important to determine what the funds would be spent on and the area where it could be spent. She said that the money will flow through Heartlands, but it is to build infrastructure that will belong to the communities where it is built. The official title is Storm Water Management and Sewer System Improvement in Cahokia Heights and the Prairie DuPont Watershed. The census tracts in orange are the areas where the money can be spent. She said that Heartlands will basically take the list of projects the community has ranked as their top priorities and spend the IEPA money first and then use this earmark money to work on the other projects. The team will continue to go down the list of projects until all the money is spent.

Christine Davis of IEPA reported that they do have the grant work going on for the City of Cahokia Heights. This is the Wastewater Collection Transport Infrastructure Rehabilitation Restoration Project. She said that it is about \$9.9 million that is moving incredibly slowly for everyone. She stated that they are trying to take the appropriate steps to ensure that the grantee and other partners and state agencies fit together in a good way. They want to make sure the operations and maintenance plans are

developed appropriately. They are looking at enforcement actions to take and that everyone is working collaboratively and on the same page. Some strategies have been approved but there is a lot of paperwork to put in place to ensure that everything works together. This project is just a starting point. She stated that the team is trying to be sure that the money being spent is being watched and spent appropriately.

Jennifer explained that the Corps of Engineers is doing some work in the area. She said they are doing some additional computer modeling at a much finer scale to look at what it will take to alleviate the flooding impacts and how much it will cost to relieve some of the impact. It is a way to try some things to see what will happen and how much it will cost to make those improvements.

Ms. Hayne from Senator Durbin's office reported that the USACE has received approval to move forward the existing Trunkline Project. This is good news for the area.

Ms. Jackson indicated that sewer lining is part of the regular system maintenance. It just was not happening in this area. It is less expensive than replacing the line. The gold standard would be to replace the line. It is a standard practice in most other areas.

Ms. Geertsma commented on the Truckline Project and asked that communication happens with the community to ensure that they are not impacted from the fumes that result from the lining process. She also asked if there was a specific report from the USACE regarding the Ping Pong flooding and if they have received additional funding to move forward on Piat Place Study. Jennifer replied that it is her understanding that the USCE is not ready to release all the result from the modeling work they have been doing. Since the last Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), the USACE has continued to work on the modeling project and the results are not currently ready for release. Ms. Geertsma asked if they could see what had been conducted so far. Jennifer explained that the USACE did incorporate some of the suggested projects in their modeling efforts, so USACE and Heartlands are communicating with each other.

Ms. Haynes indicated that she would double check the status of the Piat Place Study.

John provided an update on the Best Management Practices (BMP) projects. He indicated that they received several project ideas from private citizens, municipalities, and partner agencies. The team then took all submitted projects and prepared a list of potential BMP projects. This list was presented to the BMP Committee where they had the opportunity to rank the projects based on what the projects would do, some of the benefits and cost ratios of some of them. A final ranked list was then compiled and shared with IEPA. John stated that a lot of the projects the community was interested in were repairs and investigations into the stormwater and waste management systems in Ping Pong, Parkside, Piat Place, Edgemont, and City of East St. Louis. Part of the problem is that it is hard to propose a fix to those without fully knowing what the issues are. So, a lot of the initial project will be conducting smoke testing and televising of these areas. A full inventory of what the problems are in these areas will be prepared with Heneghan and Associates. IEPA has approved the initial list of projects and Heneghan is working on the numbers in terms of cost.

Another issue identified was a culvert in the southwest corner of the Ping Pong area is a culvert that is essentially undersized and not carrying enough water toward the area it is to drain into. One of the biggest components of this project is repairing and resizing the culvert properly so that it drains better.

This is the first step to improving the drainage system in the Ping Pong area. There were also some ditch clean outs, Steiger ditch and a ditch clean out potentially along 62nd Street. Additional clean out of the ditches will occur as more funding from the US EPA comes in as well as the funds that Cahokia Heights is receiving.

Ms. Jones asked about televising and smoke testing. Ronnie Paul of Heneghan and Associates provided an explanation of what is involved. He explained that a camera will be sent down the sewer and take pictures of the pipe. He then talked about the location of the manholes in the area and explained that his team and DNR have surveyed GPS locations on all the manholes to track on a map where the stormwater pipes and sanitary pipes are located. He then talked about smoke testing and stated that harmless smoke will be sent down the sewers and the smoke will come to the surface to indicate where there might be a problem in the system.

A resident indicated that since she has been attending some of the meetings that she is noticing that the water is moving faster, and she is seeing that some of the drains are not clogged. She said there are a lot of simple things that the community and residents can do to help the water move faster in the community.

Ms. Jackson indicated that smoke testing and televising is not going to solve the problem. A lot more money is needed, and it is going to take a long time to fix the problem. She said that it is very important for the community to remain engaged. This is just the beginning of the process of understanding where the problems are located.

Chris of the IEPA stated that she totally agrees with what Ms. Jackson stated about televising and smoke testing. She encouraged everyone to stay engaged and show up.

Ms. Jackson then stated that there are some powers that be that would rather that the residents in the area be relocated and not have to deal with the problem. She reiterated again the importance of staying involved.

A person online asked about the other projects on the BMP that are near Sauget and Dupo that were not on the list of priority projects and on the maps. John responded that all projects submitted are on the list and that the BMP decided to focus on the projects in areas that were the most impacted.

This project does not look at other projects, communities or other sources that are sending water through this community into the Hardin Ditch. Caseyville has a project that is seeking funding to make some improvements to the Hardin Ditch.

Mr. Dorian asked who is funding the project on Maryville and 59th, under I-255, that is draining into Hardin Ditch. Jennifer indicated that it is probably MESD. She noted that this project has been on the list for repairs from East St. Louis for some time.

The group then broke into two groups for a small group discussion. The first group did a review of critical areas and project recommendations. The second group did a review of project goals, strategies, and actions. After about 20 minutes, the groups switched so that everyone had an opportunity to discuss each topic.

The meeting ended at 8:00pm