

Brief Meeting Minutes

Rock River floodplain working group

Meeting of Wednesday, April 9, 2025

held at the Dodge County Administration Building, Room 302

convened at 10 AM, adjourned at approximately 12:30 PM

1. Attendees:

a. in person

Sadie Odell, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Cassandra Skaggs, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Eric Kilburg, Wisconsin DNR
Francesca Sanchez, Wisconsin DNR
Will Disser, Wisconsin DNR
Shelly Allness, Wisconsin DNR
Perry Goetch, former town board chair and farmer, Town of Ixonia
Brian Derge, chair, Town of Ixonia
Phil Dahnert, supervisor, Town of Hustisford
Steve Vavrus, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Paul Buchmann, University of Wisconsin-Madison
John Bohonek, County conservationist, Dodge County
Rob Montgomery, consulting engineer

b. remote

Todd Tessmann, Village of Hustisford
Kevin Neu, Village of Hustisford
Patricia Cicero, County conservationist, Jefferson County
Tim Cargill, property owner, Town of Lebanon
Bill Nelson, attorney
Derek Punches, attorney

2. Update on winter 2024-2025 flows, water levels and gate operations

Refer to slides 5 through 7. More frequent and longer duration flooding downstream of Hustisford has been a recurring problem and floodplain extent is large. Three approaches were identified in 2024: coordinated gate operation upstream to provide storage in the spring to reduce flood discharge downstream, enhancing watershed storage such as via wetland restorations, river corridor management policy initiatives.

3. Winter 2024-2025 operations:

Refer to slides 8 through 20. Generally dry conditions through the winter. River flows near long-term average. Relatively low and decreasing water levels in Lebanon and Ixonia in Jan & Feb. Hustisford dam open gates to late Dec produce Sinissippi drawdown in January and February. Gates were not opened at Horicon dam but drawdown of approximately 1 foot due to leaking stop logs in January and February. Water level decreases in the federal marsh due to reduced water levels upstream of Horicon dam.

4. Discussion of the objectives and constraints on water level management to be considered in a future multi-structure gate operation plan.

Refer to slides 21 through 34. Structure operators and floodplain residents were invited to share constraints and objectives. Federal wildlife refuge has multiple wildlife propagation objectives- slide 23 through 25. Stable water levels during waterfowl nesting season are important. State marsh has multiple wildlife and hunters/fishermen access objectives. Controlling Lake Sinissippi has operating orders allowing January February drawdown. Ongoing discussion by Sinissippi residents on what if any drawdown is appropriate. Downstream of Hustisford, flooding is still an ongoing problem in the towns of Hustisford, Lebanon and Ixonia and others.

5. Discussion of watershed storage options

Slide 35. We briefly discussed upland watershed storage options. Patricia Cicero was prepared to give some specific project examples but technical difficulties with our remote system prevented this, we agreed to have watershed storage presented and discussed in detail at our next meeting.

6. Introduction of the UW-Madison Rural Partnerships Institute team.

See slides 36 through 48. Steve Vavrus of the state climatologist office described the Rural Partnerships Institute projects, providing information and support for preparing Wisconsin rural communities for amplified weather extremes in a changing climate. Paul Buchmann presented data on increasing flows in the Rock River based on analysis of data and Watertown. There has been a substantial increase in the number of days above action stage (2000 CFS), particularly since 1980. Analysis of discharge by month shows a similar substantial increase in flooding duration and flooding during summer over the past several decades.

7. Action plan for 2025

We reviewed background information on the flooding problems in terms of stage fluctuations and the duration of flooding that has increased in recent decades. This information is in the October 2024 PowerPoint presentation to the Dodge County land conservation committee.

We want to create a group to discuss coordinated gate operations at Hustisford, Horicon dam and the federal dike. We will confirm the people involved in this evaluation at our next meeting. The University Wisconsin RPI initiative will provide some support to this effort. Perry Goetch volunteered to serve in this effort also. DNR personnel will need to confer to determine who will participate.

Rob Montgomery suggested that DNR designate a person to serve as a participation coordinator, because the DNR has so many functions on the Rock River, facility manager, dam operator, regulator of dam and gate operations, regulator of floodplains. Shelly Allness will investigate who might be available.

8. Next meeting

Agreed to be in approximately 6 weeks, with discussion of ways to implement watershed storage including discussion by Patricia Cicero

After meeting follow-up:

Our next meeting is proposed to be from 11 until 1 PM, Wednesday, April 21

Attachments

PDF of slides "Rock River working group April 9 2025"

PDF of slides "October 21 to Dodge County LCC"

MS Word updated contact list "April 14 2025 contact list for Rock River floodplain working group"