The Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), held a special meeting on Tuesday, July 22, 2014, at 7:00 PM in the Barnesville office. BRRWD Managers present were Gerald L. Van Amburg, Curtis M. Nelson, Peter V. Fjestad, John E. Hanson, Breanna L. Paradeis Kobiela, Troy E. Larson, and Catherine L. Affield. Houston Engineering Inc. (H.E.) Staff attending included: Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator; Erik S. Jones, Engineer, Julie M. Jerger, Senior Resident Administrative Assistant; and Danielle E. Scheffler, Resident Administrative Assistant. Others attending included Pete Waller, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), and Lyle Hovland, Wilkin County Commissioner.

Van Amburg called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM, and announced that the proceedings were being recorded to aid in the preparation of the minutes. Albright explained that the purpose of tonight’s special meeting was to continue with the BRRWD’s Strategic Planning efforts by holding a planning and goal setting session with the Board of Managers and Staff.

**BWSR Strategic Planning**

Albright discussed the status of the “Big Three” projects that the BRRWD would like to finish this year, including Project No. 39, Georgetown Levees, Project No. 56, Manston Slough Restoration, and Project No. 49, Oakport Flood Mitigation. He reported that we just received the requested $190,000 from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to complete the Georgetown Levee project this year. Once the Greywind house move is completed, the contractor, Reiner Contracting, Inc., plans to finish the project. Gladen Construction, Inc. is making progress on the Manston Slough project and plans to complete their work this fall. Funding for the Oakport project ($5.62 million) was not in the 2014 State Bonding Bill, so this project (Phase 4) will not be completed this year.

Albright talked about possible future large projects the Board might want to consider. He noted that one such project is the South Branch of the Buffalo River Channel Restoration, which the Board initiated in 2009 when they held a landowner informational meeting in Barnesville. The downstream end point for the project was designated as the Clay/Wilkin County line. One goal for the retention feature of the project would be a 20% stage reduction on the South Branch at the County line. Landowners are anxious to have a project completed for this area, but downstream issues about increased flows must be considered in the design. The channel restoration feature of the project will have to be combined with some type of water retention component in order to have the project meet the 20% stage reduction goal.

The Board reviewed the BRRWD’s Strategic Plan, developed by Donna Rae Scheffert, Leadership Tools, funded in part by a Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) grant ($4,000) from BWSR. They also received copies of the Guide to Succession Planning and a handout regarding the BRRWD’s potential membership in the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB) with information that Scheffert compiled. Albright briefly discussed each of the documents. He noted that the BRRWD has potentially 5-6 retention sites that could be developed, and at a price of $1,000-$1,500/acre foot for storage, a funding source needs to be secured. Albright pointed out that certain agency officials have indicated that State funding to pay for the non-local share of the costs for these potential projects might not be available, if we aren’t members of the RRWMB. He said that RRWMB membership would give the BRRWD access to an important funding resource for retention projects. He also discussed the BRRWD’s involvement with
the Upstream Coalition for the Wilkin and Clay County upstream staging area, associated with the proposed Army Corps of Engineers (COE) Fargo-Moorhead Diversion. There is a possibility that the installation of upstream retention sites might help reduce the impacts of the proposed staging area.

The Board reviewed a task list that Albright, Jones, Wade Opsahl, Technician, and Justin Johnson, Technician, H.E., had prepared. The list tracks/prioritizes ongoing work for the BRRWD’s projects and ditch systems. Albright said the group tries to meet 2-3 times per summer to stay on top of issues, and get as much work done as possible during the construction season.

Albright discussed the BWSR PRAP Standards, and the Board reviewed the standards checklist to evaluate their current status. He explained that BWSR makes an annual report to the State Legislature about the status of each Watershed District’s compliance with the Level I standards. They also pick a few Districts each year for a higher standard Level II review. He commented that eventually the BRRWD will be selected for a Level II evaluation.

**Greater Minnesota Watershed District Performance Standards.**

**Administration-Level I:**

- **Annual Reports.** Albright noted that we have the draft 2013 annual report completed for the Board’s review. Scheffler is working on the 2012 report and has started compiling information for the 2014 report. The Board discussed prioritizing the need to complete the older outstanding annual reports. They also discussed what information they would like to see included in future reports. Albright mentioned that once we have a current report completed, he would like to provide copies to the Counties and set up a time to meet with them to review the Report and discuss BRRWD activities.

- **Financial Audit.** Harold J. Rotunda, Certified Public Accountant, prepares our annual audits on a timely basis, and they are posted on the BRRWD Website.

- **Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Report.** Albright completes BWSR’s standardized form on an annual basis to report the number of miles of ditches under the BRRWD’s jurisdiction, the number of miles that are buffered, and the number of violations and course of action to make repairs if necessary.

- **eLink Grant Reports.** Jones handles this item for the various grants, and we are current. All BWSR grants are listed on the BRRWD's website.

**Administration-Level II:**

- **Rules.** The BRRWD’s Rules haven’t been updated since they were first adopted on May 21, 1979. Albright explained that the process to update the Rules would include informational meetings and a hearing where we would take input from the public. The proliferation of tiling in the BRRWD has made it important for the Rules to be updated to manage this new practice. The group discussed how specific/detailed the Rules should be, and what legal remedies we want to impose for violations. Albright suggested that the Board could explore this issue this winter.

- **Personnel Policy.** Currently, the BRRWD does not have any employees. The Staff is provided by H.E. according to an annual contract. In the future, if the Board decides to hire their own employees, then this standard will have to be addressed.

- **Data Practices Policy.** The BRRWD policy document was adopted 6/11/12.

- **Manager Appointments.** The Manager appointments are current.
- **Administrator.** Bruce E. Albright is the BRRWD's administrator.

- **Board Training.** The office doesn't keep individual records of training/education for the Managers.

- **Staff Training.** H.E. tracks the training/continuing education classes/seminars for their employees.

- **Operational Guidelines.** The BRRWD By-Laws are outdated, and should be revised. Van Amburg noted that he discussed this issue with the BRRWD’s Planning Consultant. He suggested that the Board could review examples of other Districts’ By-Laws to get ideas for revision.

- **Public Drainage Records.** Albright suggested that we could complete the ditch/project page on the BRRWD website, which H.E. setup last year when they created the new site for the BRRWD. The ditch system/project benefit maps are available on the website. Albright noted that we will be assuming jurisdiction of about 25 additional ditch systems in Wilkin County on August 14, 2014, which should be added to the website. There are also plan/fact sheets for the projects could also be posted on the website.

**Planning-Level I:**

- **RWMP.** The BRRWD Revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP) is current for the old BRRWD area, but the RWMP for the new area is still pending. It has been suggested that the BRRWD update both plans to bring them current at the same time. BWSR’s new deadline for the BRRWD to complete a combined RWMP is 05/31/15. Any part of the Watershed District that doesn’t have a current Plan would not be eligible for BWSR grants for new projects.

**Planning-Level II:**

- **Biennial Budget Request (BBR).** As authorized by the Board, Jones submitted the BBR for the BRRWD for 2015.

- **Strategic Plan.** The Strategic Plan is part of the RWMP. Albright noted that since 2010, this section of the Overall Plan has not been updated. This work would include updating the goals/strategies for the nine planning regions within the BRRWD. Jones noted that the RWMP update will include new regional assessment locations (RALs) for the newly added areas.

- **Local Water Plans.** The BRRWD is an active participant with Wilkin County and their local water plan. The future focus will be to work together to participate in BWSR’s “One Watershed, One Plan” effort. Albright noted that the BRRWD hasn't been too active with Otter Tail or Becker Counties in the water planning effort, and Clay County hasn't updated their Water Plan for several years.

**Execution-Level I:**

- **Engineer Reports.** Jones submits his Reports to BWSR and the DNR for all new projects.

- **Total Expenditures.** The annual audits meet this criterion, and the office prepares an administrative expenditures sheet monthly and annually, plus the overall budget is reviewed annually.

**Execution-Level II:**

- **Water Quality.** There are several programs that the BRRWD uses to track water quality trends, include the RALs, working in conjunction with the International Water Institute (IWI), and the
River Watch program in the local school systems within the BRRWD. Albright noted that a summary/map of the 23 water quality monitoring sites should be added to the BRRWD Website. The BRRWD also has water quality data available for a number of lakes within the BRRWD acquired through the Buffalo River Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Study. Jones noted that there are also data bases from other sources, including Lake Associations, which could be linked to the BRRWD website for public review.

- **Watershed Hydrology.** The United States Geological Survey (USGS) has water stage monitoring gauges on three Buffalo River sites in the BRRWD: Sabin, Hawley, and Dilworth. In the past we had volunteers who read 16 gauges located throughout the district and reported their findings to the BRRWD, but the program was eventually discontinued. Jones felt that the raw data we acquire from the gauges is vital to keep models calibrated accurately.

**Communications & Coordination-Level I:**

- **Website.** The BRRWD annual audits, reports, financial statements, Board members information, contact information, grant reporting, and the BRRWD's current RWMP are posted on the BRRWD's website.

- **Advisory Committee.** The BRRWD's Advisory Committee meets with the BRRWD Managers and Staff on an annual basis. The BRRWD also holds a Fall Tour to which the Advisory Committee is invited. Albright noted that the Committee meetings are usually very well attended.

- **Communication.** Albright prepares a press release after each Board meeting that is published in several local newspapers within the BRRWD and posted on the website.

**Communications & Coordination-Level II:**

- **Website.** Under the supervision of the H.E. website technician, Jerger is responsible for updating the Website on a regular basis. The upcoming meeting agenda is posted prior to each meeting, and the approved meeting minutes and press releases are posted on the Website after each meeting. Albright discussed a possible "Newsletter" publication for public distribution. Van Amburg suggested that the FM Extra in Moorhead should be added to our distribution list. Jerger will contact the editor. Commissioner Hovland noted that the BRRWD’s practice of distribution of minutes via email is very useful. Albright noted that our hearing notices are published in area newspapers.

- **Stakeholder Input.** Albright noted that during the RWMP update process, involved stakeholders' meetings were held in all seven planning regions.

- **Information and Education.** The BRRWD supports the River Watch water quality monitoring program in the local school districts within the BRRWD and receives presentations from at least two high school teams on an annual basis.

- **Coordination with Counties and Cities.** Albright noted that there's always room for improvement when it comes to communication with the local governments, but felt we had a number of good relationships.

- **Partnerships with other Agencies.** Albright felt that the BRRWD has excellent relationships with the various agencies (local/state/federal), watershed districts, and organizations throughout the BRRWD.
Short Term Goals.
The Board discussed "Short" Term Goals/Administration.

- Manston Slough project. Albright discussed the project progress/status. We hope this project will be completed in 2014.
- Georgetown. Albright noted that the $190,000 from the DNR has finally been acquired. The Board discussed the status of the house moving/contractor progress.
- Rules and By Laws Update (Winter 2014-2015)
- Catch up on Meeting/Hearing Minutes/Annual Reports-ongoing
- Clean out storage shed (09/01/14)
- Finish updating filing system
- Finalize Swede Grove Lake project
- Finish Elkton Township Wetland Banking site (construction/easements)
- Operational/Administration staffing. Financial records/QuickBooks (need reports for Bruce).
- Ditch/project repairs (approximately 20 in 2014). It has been suggested that we hire more contractors, but there are also concerns with construction quality. The Board discussed Wilkin County Highway Department's willingness to continue with their ongoing repairs. Larson commented that the County's backhoe operator is very skilled. Justin Johnson, H.E., has created a watershed map that shows all the ditch/project repairs with status markers and photos.
- Finish modifications to the new online permit suite.
- "Cloud" solutions for data storage.
- RWMP Planning Effort-deadline 05/31/15
- Hawley Buffalo River Restoration-deadline 06/30/15
  - EAW completed
  - Waiting for DNR, COE, WCA permits
  - Bid opening tentatively scheduled for 8/25/14
  - Phased construction
  - $496,000 DNR Grant
- Finish Whiskey Creek-Section 14 Connelly. DNR/WCA permit/landowner easements
- Finish scheduling/holding meetings on the list

Intermediate Goals (6-12 months). Board/Staff.

- South Branch of the Buffalo River
  - Carolyn Swenson-H.E. off channel survey.
  - Haick Peppel Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
  - Newman WRP
  - Identify work areas/meetings with landowners
  - Retention component
- Barnesville Township Drainage Study
  - Contact Greg Grommesh to finish project
  - HE survey ongoing
  - Work with landowners on retention site
  - Landowner informational meeting Fall/Winter 2014
  - Coordinate with Mediation Project Team (PT)
  - Retention component
- Stoney Creek Comprehensive Plan
  - Redetermination of benefits
  - Refine detention area/retention component
  - Comprehensive planning with PT (T.H. No. 9 to Hay Creek)
- Wolverton Creek Comstock Coulee
  - Watershed management districts (wmds)-priority-Jones recommendations (8/11/14 mtg)
Incoming ditches buffered/side inlets (Wilkin C.D. Nos. 26/5A, C.D. No. 22- Lat. 1 & 2)- apply for BWSR Grant
- Targeted Watershed Grant-due 8/29/14
- Work with SWCDs on buffer strips
- Stabilize ditch outlets
- DNR permit received

- Wilkin/Otter Tail Judicial Ditch (J.D.) No. 2
  - H.E. Survey pending
  - County ditch transfers by mid-September
  - Bradow repairs-fall 2014
  - Outlet Repairs

- Clay/Wilkin J.D. No. 1-Repair/Overflow ditch
  - H.E. survey completed/reports pending
  - Landowner informational meeting
  - Funding
  - Work start in 2014

- Whisky Creek
  - Comprehensive project
  - Retention component
- Donnelly Detention-Buffalo River Restoration

**Long Term Goals (1-2 years).** The Board decided that we had set enough short term and intermediate goals. They would revisit long term goals at a later meeting.

**High Priority Goals.**
- Update RWMP for entire BRRWD-deadline 05/31/2015
- One Water One Plan
- Annual Reports from past years

**Drainage Law Bufferstrips Violations.** The Board discussed putting in place a process to allow the Staff to contact landowners to address violations of the bufferstrip right-of-way (r-o-w) without Board review. The BRRWD could make repairs at the landowner's expense if they don't complete the work in a timely fashion and then contact the County Auditor to add the repair costs to the individual property tax statements. Albright will contact Auditors regarding the collection process. **Motion** by Fjestad to authorize the staff to handle bufferstrip violations without Board review, according to Minnesota Statutes Annotated (M.S.A.) 103E.021. **Seconded** by Larson. **Approved.**

**Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW).** The State Historical Society reviewed the EAW for the Whisky Creek project in Wilkin County and the Hawley Buffalo River Restoration project and has determined that an archeological investigation wasn't necessary for either project. However, the Wolverton Creek/Comstock Coulee project will need to have an investigation completed. Mike Michlovic, Department of Anthropology and Earth Science, Minnesota State University, Moorhead, submitted a contract for the work ($20,000) for the Board's approval/signature. Albright noted that the work would include an investigation of both sides of the 26 mile channel by Michlovic, one of his colleagues, and student assistants. The field work will be completed by 09/01/14. The staff will mail notices to the landowners on the Creek to notify them about the investigation. **Motion** by Hanson to authorize Van Amburg to sign the contract on behalf of the Board. **Seconded** by Nelson. **Approved.**

**Permit No. 14-092, Mike McCollum.** Applicant proposes replace a 12” dia. culvert with a new 18” dia. pipe in his residential driveway at the same elevation, approximately 40’ south of 12th AVE S in the NE¼, Section 15, Eglon Township, Clay County. The old culvert is too small and currently is plugged, causing
water to washout his driveway. **Motion** by Fjestad to approve Permit No. 14-092. **Seconded** by Hanson. **Approved**.

**Hawley Buffalo River Restoration.** An easement from landowner Larry Cossette is needed on Junction AVE in Hawley to create a cul-de-sac. Cossette would prefer selling the property (0.33 acres) to the BRRWD rather than having an easement for the project. The Board discussed a value for the property, which was estimated to be about $5,000. Jones anticipates that the BRRWD would be able to transfer the tract to the City of Hawley in the future. Albright suggested that Vogel Law Firm handle the closing.

**Carolyn Swenson South Branch Erosion.** The Board discussed Swenson’s erosion concerns on the South Branch of the Buffalo River and possible repairs. Any work in the channel would require a DNR permit and probably an EAW. Jones noted that as soon as H.E. acquires more survey data on the outside of the channel, he will submit repair recommendations for the Board's review.

**New BRRWD Area.** Hovland felt the new Managers were making progress in helping landowners in the new BRRWD area in Wilkin and Otter Tail Counties be aware of BRRWD Rules and procedures. He added that the Board seems to working together more effectively.

**Next Meeting.** The next regular BRRWD meeting will be held on Monday, July 28, 2014, at 7:00 PM in our Barnesville office.

**Adjournment.** **Motion** by Nelson to adjourn. **Seconded** by Fjestad. **Approved.** Chairman Van Amburg adjourned the meeting at 9:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

John E. Hanson, Secretary