“Local Watershed Finishes Business for 2013”

At their meeting held in Barnesville on Monday, December 23, 2013, the Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD) took approximately four hours to wrap up their business for the calendar year 2013.

One of the items discussed included meeting with representatives from the Manston Township Board of Supervisors regarding their assessments for Project No. 56, Manston Slough Restoration. Their cost for the proposed project is $5,945.78. The Township said the proposed payment represents a large part of their annual operating budget. They felt if certain work needs to be done to their roads as a part of the project, the project should pay those costs. The Township did not ask for the work to be done. Bruce Albright, Administrator, reviewed the various work items that will be done to three of their township roads and the amount of project funding that will be needed for each road. He estimated that the project will spend over $150,000 on improving the roads in question by replacing culverts, installing gravel, raising roads, and building those roads to current design standards. One of the proposed work items included raising of one mile of road (230th AVE, between Sections 29 and 30). The estimated cost of the needed gravel is $45,000. The road currently stands under water during periods of heavy run-off. The Board and Township agreed to not add the extra gravel at this point in time, but to monitor the area after the project is completed. The gravel could always be added later. After more discussion regarding the project’s merits, a motion was approved to rebate the Township their assessment amount and to not gravel 230th AVE at this time.

Gladen Construction Inc. started work on the project late this fall. They plan to come back in the spring, weather permitting, to finish the work. The project has a 09/30/14 completion deadline. The office plans to work on obtaining the remaining easements this winter.

Other business included:

- Review of the Treasurer’s Report, which currently shows a positive balance of $1,339,261.07. The Board was pleased, because it has been several years since they have closed out the year with a positive balance.

- Noting that next week, Houston Engineering, Inc. (H.E.) will start the Permit Data Management Suite on the internet. This will be a new way for landowners to file permit applications electronically, landowners will be able to track the status of their application, and permit data can be forwarded to Managers. The Board approved permits to: Ryan and Michael Hough for pattern tiling in the N½, Section 18, Prairie View Township, Wilkin County, with an outlet to the south to Wilkin County Ditch (C.D.) No. 42, subject to downstream landowner approval.

- In accordance with Minnesota Statutes Annotated (M.S.A.) 103E.202, Subd. 6, a motion was approved to increase the bond for Project No. 76, C.D. No. 3-Lateral. The Board called for an additional $10,000 bond. Petitioners will be contacted. The preliminary hearing will be held this winter. The proposed new lateral will be located along the south lines of Sections 31 and 32, Akron Township, Wilkin County.

- Discussed scheduling of a meeting with landowners on Whiskey Creek, located in Section 14, Connelly Township, Wilkin County. Last summer, area landowners petitioned for a lateral to C.D. No. 31. The proposed lateral would have diverted flows from Whiskey Creek, south along the east side of Trunk Highway (T.H.) No. 9 to C.D. No. 31. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) expressed concerns regarding rerouting of the protected water course flows. An alternative would be to clean the natural watercourse. An informational meeting with area landowners and the project petitioners to see if the waterway repair is a viable option. If the
project moves forward, a DNR permit will be required, including an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW).

- Albright has contacted Charles Anderson, ARC Appraisal, regarding the status of the appraisal for the condemnation proceeding involving the Kent Rod and Gun Club Property pertaining to Project No. 56, Manston Slough Restoration. Albright met with him over the holidays. His report is expected to be filed at the upcoming 01/13/14 meeting.

- Albright reported that last week, he filed information with Koryn Zewers, Budget Committee, St. Paul, regarding the needed funding in 2014 to complete the Oakport Flood Mitigation Project. The BRRWD will be seeking $5.28 million in the 2014 bonding bill to finish the work. To date, there has been no further correspondence with the Fischer family regarding the stockpile of material on their property that is needed to complete Phase 4.

- Pertaining to the Georgetown Flood Control Levee improvements, Schmidt Construction/House Movers is planning to move the Greywind house on to the foundation on Thursday, December 26, 2013. Reiner Contracting, Inc. will be back next spring to finish seeding and clean-up.

- The Board authorized the removal of log jams from the Buffalo River in Section 33, Moland Township, Section 16, Glyndon Township, and Section 29, Elmwood Township, Clay County. Bids were submitted by William Nichol Excavating, Inc. The work will be completed this winter.

- At last week’s Mediation Project Team (PT) meeting, held on 12/19/13, the PT discussed possible future BRRWD projects. Three potential projects were discussed. The first project involves a DNR protected watercourse located in Barnesville and Alliance Townships, Clay County. Albright said the BRRWD has a long history with problems in this area. He conducted a survey of the area back in 1983. The Board scheduled an informational meeting with the affected landowners for Monday, February 3, 2014, at 7:00 PM in the Barnesville office. Affected landowners will be notified by letter. The second area involves a possible detention site on the Sabin Coulee southeast of Moorhead. The water from this area currently drains west to the Red River via Clay C.D. Nos. 11, 40, and 41. The Board will also schedule an informational meeting with those landowners, no date was set. The last area involves a potential detention site on the South Branch of the Buffalo River east of T.H. No. 9 in Sections 10 and 15, Manston Township. Again, the Board intends to hold an informational meeting with the affected landowners this winter.

- Albright will prepare an order to add the new lands in Wilkin and Otter Tail counties to the BRRWD. The order must be filed with the Secretary of State. Another step will be to start the planning process for the new area which will include formation of Citizen and Technical Advisory Committees. It is proposed that two new planning regions will be developed. The Board also discussed the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR) One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) concept. Wilkin County has already expressed an interest in the 1W1P. This spring, BWSR will be taking applications for Districts that may be interested in this process. Van Amburg noted that the new watershed management plans will need to include a section on ground water.

- The office will be working with the Viewers regarding the redetermination of benefits for Becker C.D. Nos. 10 and 19. The hearing was held earlier this fall and recessed for the Viewers to look at several concerns. Once the Viewers file their amended report, the hearing can be continued and finished. Notices will be sent to affected landowners.

- The Board discussed the status of the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP). A meeting with all four pilot areas is scheduled for January 15, 2014, in St. Paul.
A local steering committee meeting will be held on January 7, 2014, at 9:00 AM in the Wilkin County Environmental Office, Breckenridge.

- Noting that the Buffalo River Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy Report (WRAP) has been drafted. Albright will review the document before the end of the year. A conference call was held last week with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). A contract amendment will be issued to extend the project completion date until 06/30/14. The next step will be to solicit comments from landowners/agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

- The comment period for the Wolverton Creek EAW ended on 12/11/13. Comments were received from the MPCA, DNR, and Minnesota Historical Society State Historic Preservation Office. In accordance with Minnesota Environmental Quality (EQB) Guidelines, the Board approved a motion extending the comment period by 30 days to furnish additional data requested by the DNR. An informational meeting will be held this winter with the project landowners to update them regarding the status of the project. An application was filed earlier this month for the BWSR targeted watershed demonstration program. Van Amburg commented that BWSR received a number of applications. Projects selected for additional consideration will need to conduct interviews with BWSR later this spring.

- A sub-committee was formed to meet with representatives from H.E. to discuss 2014 office rent. A report will be filed at the 01/13/14 annual meeting.

- Albright reported on a meeting held last week with the City of Barnesville and DNR fisheries representatives regarding a proposed fish passage spillway for the Blue Eagle Lake/Whiskey Creek area. The estimated costs are approximately $400,000. Meeting attendees agreed to apply for several grants in 2014 to help fund the project. At the end of next year, we should know whether or not any of those applications were successful.

- The Board discussed the interviews held on 12/12/13 with two consultants to do 2014 Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) and training assistance. The BRRWD received a $4,000 grant from BWSR. Two interviews were conducted, including Donna Rae Scheffert, and Rebecca Baumann/Joe Newberg. In a closed vote, Scheffert was selected to do the planning. Work will include an analysis of district operations to include Board members and staff responsibilities; on evaluation regarding the adequacy of the present staffing level to carry out district activities and to meet the goals of the district’s watershed plan; evaluate the value and cost of a basin perspective relative to a “stand-alone” watershed district; and develop a strategic plan that will complement the District’s Watershed Plan. It’s expected that the planning will be completed later this winter.

- Approved payment of bills totaling $416,159.94.

The next regular meeting of the Board of Managers, BRRWD, is scheduled for Monday, January 13, 2014, at 7:00 PM in the Barnesville office. This will be their annual meeting, including election of officers and appointment of consultants for 2014. All meetings are open to the public. For more information, please visit our website at www.brrwd.org.