

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 20, 2015
FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Bruce E. Albright, 218-354-7710

"Watershed Receives AIS Update"

At their February 9, 2015 meeting held in Barnesville, the Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), received an update from the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC) regarding Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) prioritization for the BRRWD. This study was funded by a grant the RRBC received from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. The study was also funded in part by the BRRWD in a motion they approved back on 04/14/14 to give an annual, renewable contribution of \$5,000 to the project. Moriya Rufer, RMB Environmental Laboratories, gave a Power Point presentation providing an overview of the project. The goals of this project were to assess the risk of zebra mussel infestation in the BRRWD in order to prioritize funding and efforts to prevent the further spread of AIS. Vectors of spread were evaluated for each lake, such as connectivity to other water bodies and public use. In addition, the suitability of each water body to zebra mussel establishment was evaluated considering water chemistry, substrate, dissolved oxygen, and temperature. A report card was developed for each water body showing the available data and assigned risk categories. As of 2014, there were no zebra mussel infestations in the BRRWD, but there are some aquatic plant infestations. Rock, Turtle, and Hovelsrud Lakes are infested with curly-leaf pondweed and LaBelle Lake is infested with purple loosestrife. The study also looked at the possible spread of AIS throughout the Buffalo River. Unlike lakes, rivers are not usually ideal habitat for zebra mussels. The Buffalo River is somewhat vegetated, and somewhat cloudy (turbid). These characteristics are limiting to zebra mussel veliger survival. The study did risk assessments for six lakes within the BRRWD and the various riverine systems. AIS program management recommendations include watercraft inspections, monitoring of adult zebra mussels and veligers, monitoring invasive plants, education and outreach, decontamination, and a rapid response plan. This information can be used as a framework for the best way to use available funding as it shows when the priority time of the year is and what the priority lakes are for each activity. Trained volunteers can be used to monitor lakes for adult zebra mussels. Because the highest risk time of the summer and one of the highest tourism times of the summer intersect on the 4th of July week, groups and organizations should focus on additional targeted education and outreach during this time of the year.

The Board also spent considerable time discussing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 budget proposed by the F-M Diversion Authority. The matter has been on the Board's agenda for the past several meetings and has sparked quite a bit of controversy, especially from landowners in Clay and Wilkin Counties that could be affected by the proposed staging area which is a part of that project. The proposed budget of \$210.8 million dollars has been approved by the North Dakota entities, by the City of Moorhead, and Clay County Board of Commissioners. The noted parties, including the BRRWD, are signors to a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) regarding the project development. Tami L. Norgard, Attorney, Vogel Law Firm, the BRRWD's legal counsel, rendered an opinion that one or more of the Managers could have a "conflict of interest" regarding a vote on this issue. The Board directed Bruce E. Albright, Administrator, BRRWD, to seek a second opinion in this regard. The Board received an update from Robert A. Zimmerman, Engineer, City of Moorhead, regarding the status of Moorhead's flood control work. Various other testimonies were also received from those supporting and opposing the Diversion project. The Board tabled any action on this matter until the second opinion is received regarding the conflict of interest issues.

Other business included:

- Approval of the preliminary hearing order to continue the development of Project No. 77, Clay County Ditch (C.D.) No. 51-Proposed Lateral No. 3. The next step will be for the Engineer to complete the detailed survey report. Once that is done, Viewers will be appointed to determine benefits and damages.

02/20/15 BRRWD News Release (cont.)

- Approval of permits to: Wilkin County Highway Department to replace a bridge over Whiskey Creek on County Road No.1 in Section 3, McCauleyville Township, including road reconstruction; City of Moorhead for a mill and overlay project on 20th ST from 28th to 30th AVE S, work will include extension of an existing box culvert under the railroad tracks about 400 feet south of 40th AVE; and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) to replace/repair centerline culverts through Trunk Highway (T.H.) No. 10 at three locations in Lake Park and Audubon Townships.
- Discussed payment rates for easements and the restoration of Whiskey Creek in Section 14, Connelly Township, Wilkin County. The rates will be used on temporary and permanent easements needed from four affected landowners. A hearing will be held by the Wilkin County Environmental Office for the conditional use permit needed for the project on Wednesday, March 4, 2015 at 8:30 AM in Breckenridge.
- Noting that Attorney Corey Elmer, Vogel Law Firm, continues to work with a number of lending institutions regarding the transfer of property owned by Michael Greywind in the City of Georgetown. Mr. Greywind's property is needed for final construction of the levee.
- Discussed House and Senate bills at the Minnesota Legislature for \$5.66 million of needed funding for the Oakport Flood Mitigation Project. In the end, we will need to see if there is enough flood damage reduction funding in the 2015 bonding bill to complete this project.
- Noting that the next meeting of the Mediation Project Team is scheduled for Thursday, March 19, 2015 at 1:30 PM in the Barnesville Watershed office. Pending projects include the Barnesville Township Area Study, a possible comprehensive project for Stony Creek, restoration plans for Wolverton Creek/Comstock Coulee, and a phased project for the South Branch of the Buffalo River in Wilkin County.
- Noting that work continues on the Revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP). The next step will be to schedule a meeting with the Technical Advisory Committee.
- Approved motions donating \$200 each to the Wilkin and West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) for the 2015 Area 1 Envirothon.
- Noting that several Managers and Bruce Albright plan to attend the 2015 Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts Legislative Reception & Breakfast and Day at the Capitol on March 11-12, 2015. Invitations will be sent to local Legislators.
- Agreed to contribute \$2,500 annually for a two-year period beginning July 1, 2014, to help fund a Pheasants Forever Biologist position at the Clay SWCD. The BRRWD will also contact the Barnesville Rod-N-Gun Club to see if they would help with the contribution by donating \$500 annually.
- Agreed to a match of \$18,125 for a grant application submitted by the Wilkin County Environmental Office to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to do hydrologic modeling to analyze buffer strips and side inlet needs on a number of waterways in Wilkin County. Work areas within the BRRWD include the South Branch of the Buffalo River, Deerhorn Creek, Lawndale Trout Stream, Wolverton Creek, Whiskey Creek, Otter Tail River, and the Red River of the North. The total amount of the project is \$203,716. If approved, BWSR would provide \$152,787, with the balance, or \$50,929 coming from the BRRWD, Bois de Sioux Watershed District, and the Wilkin SWCD.
- Approved the payment of bills, totaling \$123,254.73.

02/20/15 BRRWD News Release (cont.)

- The “special agenda” topic for the 02/23/15 BRRWD meeting will be another review of the Board and Staff’s short, mid-term, and long range goals. The BRRWD will also talk about possibly updating their Rules.

The next meeting of the Board of Managers, BRRWD is scheduled for Monday, February 23, 2015 at 7:00 PM in the Barnesville office, located at 1303 4th AVE NE. All meetings are open to the public. For more information, please visit our website at www.brrwd.org.