"Local Watershed Reorganizes for 2016"

At their annual meeting held on January 11, 2016, the Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), elected officers for the new year. Those officers will be as follows:

- Gerald L. Van Amburg, Clay County, Chairman
- Peter V. Fjestad, Otter Tail County, Vice Chairman
- John E. Hanson, Becker County, Secretary
- Mark T. Anderson, Clay County, Treasurer
- Breanna L. Kobiela, Clay County, Manager
- Catherine L. Affield, Wilkin County, Manager
- Troy E. Larson, Wilkin County, Manager

At the annual meeting, the Board also re-appointed Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI) as their engineering consultant, Vogel Law Firm was hired as the BRRWD's legal counsel, Harold J. Rotunda, Certified Public Accountant, West Fargo, ND, was hired to do the 2015 audit.

The Board also spent considerable time at their meeting discussing Fargo-Moorhead Diversion Authority (DA) issues. On the agenda, was approval of the proposed fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget totaling $237.5 million and approval to sign contracts with the DA regarding Phase I funding for three retention sites being studied by the BRRWD. Those sites are Stony Creek, Barnesville Township, and the South Branch of the Buffalo River. The Board did approve a motion to sign the DA's contracts for the Phase I funding. However, since Manager Kobiela was not in attendance, the Board decided to table a vote to approve the FY16 DA's budget until their next meeting on Monday, January 25, 2016. The vote will take place no sooner than 9:00 PM. Members of the upstream coalition attended the meeting questioning why the Board would approve the budget when they felt the DA still had more work to do before they should start project construction. All agreed that flood control work within the City of Fargo should continue. At issue were budget items pertaining to work on the Oxbow-Hickson-Bakke (OHB) levees. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is still working on the Environmental Impact Statement which is expected to be finished in the next several months. There is also the matter of the court's injunction regarding work on OHB.

Other business included:

- A review of the BRRWD's financial status. At the end of the year, staff undertook a number of transactions to the various accounts. They included allocation of interest income and expenses, assessment of a 1% administrative fee, and a number of transfers from the Minnesota Statues Annotated (M.S.A.) 103D.905, Subd. 3 general fund. The BRRWD's bank balance is $589,597.23. A summary of 2016 accounts receivable shows that the BRRWD could receive $9.5 million. Some of that income will be dependent on projects where grant funding is available

- Noting that an informational meeting will be held on Friday, January 15, 2016 at 8:00 AM in the Watershed Office to discuss a drainage survey conducted on the Clay-Wilkin County Line west of Trunk Highway No. 75. Affected landowners have been invited. The meeting is open to the public.
• Noting that a landowner informational meeting will be held on Friday, February 22, 2016 at 8:00 AM in the Watershed Office regarding a natural waterway that drains into the Manston Slough area. Questions about the waterway arose last fall and the Board authorized HEI to conduct a survey. Affected landowners have been invited. The meeting is open to the public.

• Noting that BRRWD representatives will attend the 01/12/16 Clay County Commissioners meeting in Moorhead to present the 2016 petitions for funding in accordance with M.S.A. 103D.905 Subd. 3. The general levy will raise $626,927. A second special levy under this same taxing authority will raise $450,000 for the Watershed Office, Stony Creek Comprehensive, Barnesville Township Investigation, Manston Slough Restoration, Otter Tail River Planning, and Reinvest in Minnesota/Wetland Restoration Enhancement investigations.

• Noting that BRRWD representatives will attend the 33rd Annual Red River Basin Land and Water International Summit Conference on January 19-21, 2016 at the Alerus Center/Canad Inns in Grand Forks, ND. The goal of the conference is to acknowledge, celebrate, and create awareness as to how much progress is being made each year in the Red River Basin. BRRWD representatives planning to attend include Albright, Van Amburg, Fjestad, and Hanson.

• Noting that the next Mediation Project Team meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 28, 2016 at 1:30 PM in the Watershed Office. The project discussions include Stony Creek, Barnesville Township, South Branch of the Buffalo River, and Wolverton Creek Restoration.

• Noting that work continues on the Revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP). Office staff and HEI are working on the draft sections. Once the draft RWMP is finished, it needs to be submitted to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources for a 60 day review period. The purpose of the update is to include the newly added areas in Wilkin and Otter Tail Counties.

• Approved a contribution of $500 to the 21st Anniversary River Watch Forum to be held on March 15, 2016 at the University of Minnesota-Crookston Campus. The Forum is sponsored by the International Water Institute.

• Approved payment of bills totaling $181,155.30.

The next meeting of the Board of Managers, BRRWD, is scheduled for Monday, January 25, 2016, at 7:00 PM in the Watershed Office located at 1303 4th AVE NE, Barnesville, MN. The special agenda topic will be an update of the BRRWD's rules. All meetings are open to the public. For more information, please visit our website at www.brrwd.org.