"Local Watershed Discusses Drainage Ditch Slope Failures"

At their meeting held on Monday, February 8, 2016, the Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), discussed slope failures that are occurring along several of their drainage systems in Clay County. There are two sites along Clay County Ditch (C.D.) No. 10 in Section 16, Morken Township and Section 13, Kragnes Township. In 2015, Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI), along with geotechnical review from Terracon, completed an evaluation of alternatives to fix the slope failures. An alternative to deal with the slumping is to move either the ditch or paralleling road bed to provide for a flatter slope. Engineers are recommending a combination of granular fill and cellular concrete to repair the slumping which would not require road or ditch realignments. The estimated cost for repair of both sites is $76,340. The information will be reviewed with Morken Township since the slope failures are along their roadway (130th AVE N).

A second analysis was furnished for Clay C.D. No. 32 where there are three slope failures. Two of the sites are located in Section 16, Kurtz Township and the third site is located in Section 17, Kurtz Township. The total cost estimate for the repair is $217,636. The repair survey and proposed design work will be reviewed with the Clay County Highway Department as 80th AVE S is also County Road No. 67.

Four slope failure sites along Clay C.D. No. 33 were also discussed. Those sites are located along 90th AVE S. The estimated repair cost is $390,000 to $465,000. The information will be reviewed with Kurtz Township.

Other business included:

- Noting that the BRRWD's bank balance totals $823,471.14. Including recent receipts from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for the Hawley Buffalo River Restoration ($253,376.56) and the closeout of the Georgetown Flood Control Levee ($200,264.42). The 2016 potential accounts receivables total $9,416,697.

- Issuance of a permit to the Minnesota Department of Transportation for a mill and overlay project on Trunk Highway No. 59. In addition to the road surface work, approximately two center line culverts and fifteen driveway/approach culverts will be either cleaned or replaced. In all cases, existing culvert sizes and elevations will be maintained.

- Authorized HEI to conduct a drainage investigation involving Sections 20, 21, 28, and 29, Manston Township, Wilkin County. Work in this area involves a natural watercourse that drains into the Manston Slough Restoration Project. Affected landowners are interested in addressing erosion, flooding, and sedimentation concerns. One of the alternatives will be possibly straightening the channel. The estimated cost of the study is $1,500-$2,500.

- Noting that a conference will be held on 02/16/16 regarding scheduling of the hearing needed for Project No. 77, Clay C.D. No. 51, Proposed–Lateral No. 3 appeal/lawsuit.

- HEI presented an Honor Award to the BRRWD for the Manston Slough Restoration Project. HEI submitted the project to the American Council of Engineering Companies of Minnesota.
Noting that a preconstruction meeting was held on January 29, 2016, with RJ Zavoral and Sons regarding their work on Phase 4 of the Oakport Flood Mitigation Project. The contractor intends to start clearing and grubbing in the next several weeks. The project’s substantial completion date is October 31, 2016. The Board also discussed the status of negotiations with the Fischer family regarding a stockpile of material located on their property that will be used to finish Phase 4. Recent discussions included the size of the area being utilized by the storage pile. Initially, the BRRWD obtained a temporary easement for 5.63 acres. The project's engineer, Ulteig Engineers, Inc., measured the current stockpile using 4.24 acres. The Board agreed to use the larger number in an attempt to settle this issue.

Noting that the office has received the final DNR payment regarding Project No. 39, Georgetown Flood Control Levee. The current amount in that account is -$89,085.86. Some of those costs will be offset with a reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Cleanup work will be expected this spring. Progress has been made regarding a condemnation issue involving U.S. Bank.

Interviews continue with several interested ringdike candidates. Farmstead ringdikes should qualify for Environmental Quality Incentive Program funding through the Natural Resource Conservation Service. The Red River Watershed Management Board received a grant through the DNR of $400,000 following the 2015 Legislative session for ringdikes in the Red River Valley. The BRRWD is currently working with six potential candidates. Landowners interested in the farmstead ringdike program should contact the Watershed Office.

Noting that the next Mediation Project Team meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 7, 2016, at 1:30 PM in the Watershed Office.

Regarding the Barnesville Township Investigation, teleconferences were held last week with NuStar and Magellan Pipelines. Both companies have pipelines running through the project area and seem agreeable to work with the Watershed on project development. The Watershed Office continues to work on an easement value factsheet that the Managers can use to set prices that they are willing to pay for flood damage reduction easements.

Noting that the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has approved the boundary petition filed by the BRRWD and the Bois De Sioux Watershed District. The order changes the Watershed District boundaries to more accurately align the hydrological and legal boundaries. The Watershed Office will work with the two County Auditors (Wilkin/Otter Tail) and the State Auditor's Office to make sure they have the correct legal descriptions.

Work continues on the Revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP). All draft sections have now been completed and are being reviewed by BRRWD Administrator, Bruce Albright. The Board should see a complete "draft" of the RWMP at their 03/14/16 meeting.

Noting changes to the 2015 Buffer Strip Legislation. Governor Dayton announced last week that he would retreat on his demand that buffer strips be required on all private ditches within the benefitting area of a legal ditch system. With the change, the legislation now requires that all "protected" waters have a 50' buffer and all legal drainage systems have the required one-rod (16.5') buffer. On a county by county basis, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts will be required to come up with a third level of mapping regarding additional waterways/ditches that may need buffers and did not meet the preceding requirements. However, counties only need to develop the map, and
it will be up to each county as to whether or not they want to develop an ordinance requiring that these waterways/ditches also be buffered. Albright will be meeting with the Clay County Board of Commissioners on 02/23/16, to discuss the ongoing efforts in Clay County to meet the Legislative requirements.

- Noting that Albright and Erik Jones, Engineer, HEI, will be meeting with representatives from BWSR on 02/22/16, to discuss the Targeted Watershed Program. The nomination period will run from February 1 through March 9 with the BWSR Board selecting watersheds at their 05/25/16 meeting. The BRRWD has been talking about submitting the Stony Creek Project west of Barnesville and the Wolverton Creek Restoration Project between Comstock and Wolverton. BWSR will have $8,757,000 available for the selected projects. Other potential funding sources include the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. That application deadline is March 11, 2016. The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council funding is also being considered for Wolverton Creek.

- Discussed a tentative date of Friday, April 1, 2016, to meet with the BRRWD’s Advisory Committee. The meeting will start at 1:30 PM in the Barnesville Watershed Office. Advisory committee membership was reviewed. Additional committee members will be sought from Becker and Clay Counties. Interested individuals should contact the Watershed Office.

- Discussed reservations for the upcoming 2016 Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts Legislative Reception and Day at the Capitol which will be held on March 30-31, 2016, in St. Paul.

- Approved payment of bills totaling $202,374.42.

The next meeting of the Board of Managers, BRRWD, is scheduled for Monday, February 22, 2016, at 7:00 PM in the Barnesville Office located at 1303 4th AVE NE, Barnesville, MN. All meetings are open to the public. For more information, please visit our website at www.brrwd.org.