"Local Watershed Meets with Congressman"

The Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), at their meeting held in Barnesville on Monday, June 27, 2016, met with 7th District U.S. Representative Collin Peterson. Earlier in the month, the Congressman held a press conference in Moorhead to discuss federal programs that might help with flood damage reduction (fdr) in the Red River Basin. BRRWD Administrator, Bruce Albright, was in Washington D.C. and met with the Congressman on June 10. One of the things sparking the discussion at this point in time is the proposed Fargo-Moorhead (F-M) Diversion. The Congressman feels that tiling incorporating drainage water management (dwm) could help lower flood levels in the F-M area. The Congressman commended the BRRWD for their excellent work. He also felt that Administrator Albright was an important part of that success.

If re-elected, the Congressman looks forward to working on the new Farm Bill in the next two years. Another item that he hopes to address will be the acquisition of lands by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The Congressman would like to see when these agencies purchase lands and restore wetlands, that they build in management regarding the wetland restorations that can also be used for fdr benefits when needed.

A recent Field Day held on June 23, 2016, at the Nordick Farm in Wilkin County was also discussed. The Nordick Farm, which is located in Meadows Township, is a Discovery Farms site, as well as a Red River Valley Drainage Management Project headed by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. A goal of the project is to minimize the environmental impacts of subsurface drainage while maintaining or improving agricultural productivity. An objective of the project is to demonstrate the water quality and quantity benefits of dwm. The project is intended to set a compelling example to increase acceptance and adoption of dwm in the Red River Valley. Albright, who attended the Field Day, said there were approximately 50 landowners present in addition to agency personnel. He felt the information presented was very informative, and will be of interest to other landowners in the BRRWD and Red River Basin.

Other business included:

- Noting that the 5th Annual Red River Valley Agricultural Water Issues Forum will be held at two locations within the BRRWD. On July 14, the Forum will be held at the Ray Johnson Farm near Glyndon. On July 15, the Forum will be held at the Chad and Troy Larson Farm near Rothsay. This year’s Forum is titled "Building Grower Awareness and Local Engagement". The Forums are scheduled to run from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM. A free meal will be provided by the sponsors following adjournment. Agenda items include a review of the Minnesota Legislative session, discussion about the new Minnesota buffer law, local implementation plan for meeting the new buffer requirements, recent agricultural water issues, and the role of flood water storage in water management.

- Approved the payment of bills, totaling $175,356.21.

- Reviewed the BRRWD’s financial status. The current balance is -$266,929.65. Administrator Albright noted that we are still waiting for reimbursement from the DNR for the Oakport Project ($593,389.01). The office is using the BRRWD’s line of credit at Midwest Bank to cover all existing payments. Since the 06/13/16 meeting, the BRRWD has only taken in $412.75. Excluded from the account balances are two checks that were received from Becker and Otter Tail Counties, which need to be broken down and distributed.
• Approved a permit to the City of Moorhead for street and underground utility improvements for Phase 3 of the Village Green 6th Addition located in the SW1/4, Section 22, Moorhead Township, Clay County.

• Noting that the office continues to deal with concerns from a landowner in Oakport Township regarding Phase 4 construction on the Oakport Flood Mitigation Project. Many of her claims appear to lack a legitimate basis. Recently, she claimed that we were working on an Indian Reservation, and most recently, claimed that the easement obtained in 2010 from her grandmother is not valid. The Board approved a motion to have their attorney, Tami L. Norgard, Vogel Law Firm, send a letter to the complaining party indicating that if there are additional delays or expenses associated with her bogus claims, she will be held liable.

• Noting that contractor Tim Crompton continues to make progress regarding the culvert installations on Clay County Ditch (C.D.) No. 59. If everything goes well, he should be done in the next several weeks. A motion was approved to pay Pay Request No. 1 to Crompton in the amount of $23,634.14.

• An agreement was signed by R.J. Zavoral & Sons, Inc. for their work regarding two slump repairs on Clay C.D. No. 10. The contractor still needs to furnish his insurance certificate. A motion was made for the BRRWD to sign the notice of award.

• Noting that the next Mediation Project Team Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 18, 2016, at 7:00 PM in the Watershed Office. The Fall Tour is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, September 8.

• Regarding the South Branch of the Buffalo River, the BRRWD is now looking at Phase 1A, which is restoration of the river channel east of Trunk Highway No. 9. The next step will be to hold an agency informational meeting which will include Townships in this area to review the proposed restoration plans. Assuming that there is agency buy-in, the next step will be to meet with the affected landowners.

• Regarding Wolverton Creek Restoration, Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI) continues to look at ways to develop an assessment to raise local funding for the project. In accordance with Minnesota Statutes Annotated (M.S.A.) 103D.729 Watershed Law allows a Watershed District to establish a water management district in the territory within the watershed for the purposes of collecting revenues and paying the costs of projects initiated under Watershed Law. Erik S. Jones, Engineer, HEI, stated that he would bring some examples to the 07/11/16 meeting. The fee could be based on the runoff methodology, a contribution based on sediment, or a combination of both methodologies. A hearing will be required to adopt the assessment area. The Board authorized signatures on the Targeted Watershed Program grant obtained from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for this project in the amount of $2.8 million. Initial plans are to begin construction in the spring of 2017. For Phase 1, a meeting will be scheduled with the landowners in the near future to discuss the status of the project, the BWSR grant, and possible additional funding that may be available from the Natural Resources Conservation Service through their Wetlands Restoration Enhancement Program.

• Managers Van Amburg, Hanson, and Fjestad gave a summary of the recent Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts’ Summer Tour held in Winona on June 22-24.

• Now that the 2015 Annual Report/Audit is prepared, the Board wants to schedule meetings with Becker, Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin County Commissioners. Albright will take care of arrangements.
• Continued discussion regarding updating of the BRRWD’s Rules. Manager Affield would like to see the Board concentrate on getting the Rules done. Managers should begin preparing, as Pages 1-6 will be discussed at the 07/25/16 meeting.

• Noting that BWSR has opened up the fiscal year 2017 Clean Water Fund competitive grants request for proposals. This year, they have a total of $15,617,000 available in six different agency funds. All grants require a 25% local match. The application deadline will run from 06/27/16-08/08/16. A meeting will be scheduled with the Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation District and the Wilkin County Environmental Planning Office to discuss possible grants for the newly added watershed area. The BRRWD is not eligible to apply for grants for this area because we are still working on the Revised Watershed Management Plan.

The next meeting of the Board of Managers, BRRWD, is scheduled for Monday, July 11, 2016, at 7:00 PM in the Watershed Office, located at 1303 4th AVE NE, Barnesville, MN 56514. All meetings are open to the public. For more information, please visit our website at www.brrwd.org.