"Local Watershed Discusses Easement Values"

The Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), discussed easement values at their meeting held in Barnesville on February 13, 2017. Bruce E. Albright, Administrator, compiled a list of ways the BRRWD can acquire property needed for flood damage reduction (fdr) and natural resources enhancement (nre) projects. For the past several years, the BRRWD has been considering projects west of Barnesville, including Stony Creek, Barnesville Township, and the South Branch of the Buffalo River in Wilkin County. These projects are also being reviewed by the BRRWD's Mediation Project Team (PT). The analysis stated that there are three ways for the BRRWD to acquire the necessary property: 1) Purchase the land directly (it may not be for sale); 2) Transfer the land from agricultural production to some type of conservation acreage; or 3) Acquire an easement that would allow the landowners to continue to farm the property.

New Manager Jay Leitch, Clay County, is currently working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on their Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Work includes an economic analysis of fdr projects in the Red River Valley. This issue was also studied by the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC) following the 1997 spring flood. Their report titled "Long Term Flood Solutions" is dated September 2011. In that study they used a 20% reduction model. As pointed out by Manager Leitch, that study used the 1997 spring flood for comparison. Many projects have been completed since that time, which changes the modeling and the economic benefits of fdr projects. For example, will there still be a need for local fdr sites now that projects in Grand Forks, East Grand Forks, Wahpeton, and Breckenridge have been completed, and if the Fargo-Moorhead Diversion Project were ever completed. Some other benefits of developing local fdr projects, include water quality enhancement, wildlife habitat, recreation areas, etc. The Manston Slough Restoration Project is a good example of a multi-purpose project. The BRRWD approved a motion asking the RRBC to take a second look at their long-term flood solutions regarding the hydrologic efficacy and the economic sense of the proposed 20% reduction. Albright said he would contact Jeff Lewis, Executive Director, RRBC, in this regard. He expected that Lewis may want to attend an upcoming BRRWD meeting.

Other business included:

- Reviewed the BRRWD's financial status. Since January 1, the BRRWD has received income totaling $246,889.77. Cash on hand totals $2,299,403.72.

- Approved Permit No. 17-001 to the Wilkin County Highway Department for the resurfacing of County State Aid Highway No. 52 from Rothsay to the Clay-Wilkin County line south of Barnesville. The project will include some minor culvert repairs.

- Discussion regarding an outlet for a tiling project completed last fall in Section 28, Mitchell Township, Wilkin County. In 2012, when the permit was approved for this work, the outlet was to drain north and west towards Wolverton Creek. The project was installed in the fall of 2016 and the outlet was brought directly west, where the water needs to drain south towards the Red River of the North. Landowners along the new water path expressed concerns regarding adequacy of the outlet. The Managers authorized Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI) to conduct a survey to see what it would take to drain the water north. The present outlet location is along the east side of 180th AVE. They survey work was started, but then halted due to ice and snow in the ditches. Once conditions allow, the survey will be completed. Albright felt the
BRRWD should schedule an informational meeting when the survey is completed with all of the affected landowners (both north and south routes) to discuss possible options.

- Discussed a request from Clay County to schedule a meeting to discuss buffer enforcement procedures and administrative penalty order plans regarding the 2015 Buffer Law. The decision needs to be made by March 31, 2017, notifying the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources whether or not the County and/or the BRRWD will accept that jurisdiction. Albright has asked HEI create a map showing the number of miles of legal ditch systems, protected waters, and protected wetlands within each County within the BRRWD so that we can look at possible allocations of the enforcement on a percentage basis. Albright will work with the County Administrator to set up a meeting.

- Noting that the BRRWD has a hearing on March 10, 2017, before Judge Steven Cahill regarding a summary judgement for dismissal of a lawsuit filed against the BRRWD regarding drainage matters in and around the Kragnes area. A proposed project for that area was dismissed.

- Noting that the BRRWD will schedule a meeting with landowners along Project No. 21, Wilkin County Ditch (C.D.) No. 13-Lateral. Last fall, it was determined that the ditch requires a complete repair. The meeting will talk about when that work will begin and ask landowners for permission to access the ditch system on their property so that the repairs can be done in a timely manner.

- Received a proposal from HEI regarding establishment of a water management district (wmd) for the Wolverton Creek Restoration Project. The opinion of probable cost for the project is $10.4 million. It is hoped that over 50% of the estimated project costs will come from federal, state, and other outside funding sources. Local funding cost share for the project could come through the wmd process. The BRRWD will be required to hold a hearing to start this as a project and to adopt the wmd. The modified, combined runoff and erosion methods were used to calculate the fees. Land use was consolidated into four use categories: 1) Production agriculture, 2) Developed areas, 3) Farmsteads, and 4) Natural areas (grassland, pasture, gravel operations, etc.) The BRRWD is at Step 6 of the wmd process, where they need to hold the required hearing to initiate the storm water utility charges. It is anticipated that the wmd could raise about a $100,000 annually to help offset project costs.

- Noting that the next meeting of the BRRWD's Mediation PT has been scheduled for Thursday, February 16, 2017, at 1:30 PM in the Watershed Office. Active project discussions include Stony Creek, Barnesville Township, and the South Branch of the Buffalo River in Wilkin County.

- Agreed to work with the Becker Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS regarding submittal of Environmental Protection Agency 319 Grant for work in the Buffalo River Watershed. The application is due March 10, 2017.

- Discussed options to repair the Clay C.D. No. 3 outlet located in Section 8, Moland Township. The first alternative is to recreate a portion of the ditch with 4:1 side slopes and install two rock drop structures and fill the ditch bottom to the proposed grade. The estimate of probable cost is $85,000 to $95,000 for this alternative. A geotechnical review has not been completed of the erosion areas. Erik S. Jones, Engineer, HEI, will bring a recommendation for the Board's review at the next meeting.
• Approved a motion requesting the Minnesota's Association of Watershed Districts to hold a special meeting to review their bylaws in conjunction with their Summer Tour, to be held on June 21-23, 2017. The bylaw changes are anticipated as the organization looks to hire both a new Administrator and a lobbyist.

• Approved payment of bills totaling $227,594.73.

The Board of Managers, BRRWD, will hold their next meeting on Monday, February 27, 2017, at 7:00 PM in the BRRWD Office, located at 1303 4th AVE NE, Barnesville, MN. All meetings are open to the public. For more information about the BRRWD, please visit our website at www.brrwd.org.