"BRRWD Sets Buffer Values"

At their meeting held on Monday, January 22, 2018, at 7:00 PM in Barnesville, the Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), set the payment rates for the 2015 Buffer Law right-of-way (R/W) process on legal drainage systems. The Board decided to follow the same method they used to establish easement values for the Wilkin County ditch repairs last year, which were based on the County’s assessed land values. For any land above the crown of the ditch slope, the BRRWD will use the full county assessed value as the payment rate, and for land between the crown of the ditch and the current existing ditch R/W, the easement value will be 10% of the assessed value. The BRRWD is required to have their ditch systems compliant with the Buffer Law by 11/01/18. Hearings will be held for approximately 90 ditch systems, which will include the preparation of Viewers' Reports, hearing notices sent to all affected landowners, and payment for all easement acquisitions.

Other business included:

- Reviewed the BRRWD’s financial status. Cash on hand is $2,093,845.94. Income since the 1/08/18 meeting was $74,742.24, primarily from Becker ($3,651.91) and Wilkin ($12,206.57) Counties for 2017 delinquent property/ditch taxes, the Red River Watershed Management Board for Mediation Project Team expenses ($8,709.21), and Wilkin County for 2015 Buffer Initiative Aid ($33,283) and County Ditch No. 3 seed/mulching reimbursement ($16,891.55). Total 2018 income to date is $74,968.25. The Board approved the payment of bills totaling $30,178.42.

- Discussed funding options for the Wolverton Creek Restoration Phase 1 easement acquisitions. The Board is considering adopting the Reinvest In Minnesota payment rates, instead of conducting a formal appraisal process on each parcel. The BRRWD will pay an initial temporary easement fee ($250/acre/construction year) and follow up at the end of construction with the final easement payments, so that project construction won’t be delayed this spring. The easement acquisition process requires that the BRRWD follow a sequence of steps to maximize potential funding through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Craig Lingen, Resource Specialist, Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), will provide Erik S. Jones, Engineer, Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI), with data that shows where potential CREP easements and BRRWD easements could be located.

- Reviewed the status of Project No. 78, Clay/Wilkin Judicial Ditch (J.D.) No. 1 Diversion. A meeting was held with the petitioners on 1/17/18 to discuss possible alternatives to their petition. After reviewing the Engineer's preliminary analysis, the petitioners had concerns regarding project costs, potential benefits, and the depth of the diversion ditch. Jones proposed an alternative outlet improvement for about three miles of J.D. No. 1 upstream of Wolverton Creek instead of a diversion ditch. The existing culverts could be lowered to get more separation between the field level and the ditch bottom. This would create better drainage at the outlet and improve drainage at the county line, allowing the road culverts to be fully utilized during a 50-year event. On the outlet end (west), the ditch bottom would drop about 3.5' with a continuous 0.4% grade upstream. Water from J.D. No. 1 will enter Wolverton Creek ahead of the water from the upstream watershed. Jones noted that while the project cost is still about $1.8 million, the project benefits are greater. The petitioners will file a revised petition.
• Authorized Board signature of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Drainage Records Modernization Grant agreement. The grant ($50,000) will be used to upload our ditch systems records to an online system to make them more accessible.

• Noted that the factsheet for the 220th ST ditch investigation has been prepared and will be forwarded to State Senator Torrey Westrom and Representative Jeff Backer this week. When landowner Tom Paulson met with the Legislators regarding the proposed project, they indicated that they might be able to find some State funding for the project and asked for more information. The Board authorized HEI to prepare to prepare the factsheet at their 12/11/17 meeting.

• Received a report from the Assistant Administrator Hiring Committee regarding their 1/17/18 meeting. A meeting has been scheduled with HEI President Jeff LeDoux on 2/2/18 to discuss the current staffing contract.

• Noted that BWSR requires that the BRRWD revise their Rules to include more enforcement options for bufferstrip noncompliance. Jones added Administrative Penalty Order language to the draft Rules to make it possible for the BRRWD to add the cost of buffer reestablishment to a violator’s property taxes.

• Authorized the signature of the One Watershed, One Plan Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The MOA is being circulated among the four Counties and SWCDs for review and signature. The goal is to have the MOA signed by the end of February, so that it can be submitted to BWSR, who will then release funds to start the planning process.

• The Board watched two training videos that BWSR provided regarding Minnesota Data Practices and Open Meeting Law. The videos are designed to provide Watershed Boards with free training on these topics to meet the Level II Performance Review and Assistance Program performance standard for "Board Training".

The Board of Managers, BRRWD, will hold their next regular meeting on Monday, February 12, 2018, 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](http://www.brrwd.org).