

BUFFALO-RED RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

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Buffalo-Red River Watershed District 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update Upper Red and Otter Tail Planning Region Informational Meeting Minutes January 13, 2015

The Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), held an informational meeting regarding the Revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP) on Wednesday, January 13, 2015, at 7:00 PM, in the Community Center, Rothsay, MN.

BRRWD Managers present were: John E. Hanson, Catherine L. Affield, Gerald L. Van Amburg, Breanna Kobiela, Troy E. Larson, and Peter V. Fjestad. BRRWD Staff attending included: Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator, and Erik S. Jones, Engineer, Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI). Other attending included: Wayne Johnson, Otter Tail County Commissioner; Lyle Hovland, Wilkin County Commissioner; Henry Van Offelen, Red River Basin Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Ecological and Water Resources; Julie Aadland, Area Hydrologist, DNR; Aaron Larson, Farm Bill Technician, West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD); Bruce Poppel, Wilkin County Environmental Officer; Pete Waller, Board Conservationist, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR); Larry Martin, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Fergus Falls Wetland Management District (WMD); Tara Mercil, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA); Don Schultz, Area Wildlife Manager, DNR; and Township Supervisors/landowners: Tony Nordick, Ted Terfehr, Ken Ehlert, John Kristianson, John Danielson, Chris Watterud, Orland Ohe, John Piekarski, Daniel Jennen, Casey Guest, Jim Wolters, Dave Emery, Rick Drevlow, Jonathan C. Piekarski, Michael Hansen, Fred H. Hansen, Jr., Orrin Sorum, Joel Borowski, Arlyn K. Hensch, Ken Oehler, Dan Beske, Dale Schmidt, Mark Davenport, and Dick Schuetze.

Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator, introduced the BRRWD Managers and staff. He gave a brief history of the BRRWD, which now covers about 2,000 square miles (sq. mi.) from Georgetown in the north to Breckenridge, MN in the south. He discussed the BRRWD's current RWMP, which was completed in 2010 and must be updated every ten years according to Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) requirements. As a result of the enlargement of the BRRWD in 2012, we are required to prepare a Comprehensive Plan/RWMP for the recently added areas in Otter Tail and Wilkin Counties, so the Board decided to update the Plan for the entire BRRWD at the same time. Each section of the Comprehensive Plan document represents Planning Regions. Albright noted that because there are different issues/concerns throughout the Planning Regions for the new area, it will be divided into two sections: the Upper Red and the Otter Tail.

Albright also explained that this update will be the initiative for the One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program. The State Legislature mandated the 1W1P in 2013. Five watershed areas were selected to pilot the program in 2014. The 1W1P is projected to go statewide in December 2015. This program aims to compile each organization's individual Watershed Management Plans into one Comprehensive Plan. The Plan would be equally owned by each agency involved.

Albright discussed the planning process followed to complete the RWMP. The District Managers, staff, and landowners begin by identifying issues and problems within the new planning regions. Today's meeting is the first of two public input meetings being held to solicit landowner concerns for this area. A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is then formed which consists of various agency people. They help develop the Plan to meet the required standards. Landowner volunteers are also sought for the Citizen Advisory

Committee (CAC). The CAC also helps guide the planning process. A hydrologic model of the Watershed District has been developed by BRRWD Engineer, Erik Jones, HEI, to help set flood damage reduction (fdr) goals. The BRRWD will work with the environmental agencies to complete a Natural Resource Assessment for each planning region. Information from the DNR and United States Fish & Wildlife Services (USFWS) will be used to establish habitat goals for each region. The TAC and CAC will meet to discuss potential solutions to the problems and issues identified during the public input meetings. The Natural Resource Assessment and hydrology modeling will be used to establish natural resource enhancement (nre) goals for each region. Albright displayed a map with example issues and problems and explained that a similar map for the new regions will be available for landowners to begin identifying problem areas.

Albright stated the existing issues already known to the BRRWD include managing the existing data, educating/informing the public, erosion and sediment control, flood damage reduction, long range work planning and financing, and water quality. Emerging issues include impaired waters, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting, wetland regulations, groundwater planning, tile drainage, drought planning, drainage law, land use changes, floodplain management, and shore land management.

Albright quoted the BRRWD mission statement, "The Mission of the Buffalo-Red River Watershed District is to alleviate flooding and to manage the water resources of the District in a manner that best protects this valuable Resource." The BRRWD uses eleven management categories for general planning, which support the mission statement. These same management categories are applied to the individual plans for each region. There are District Programs designed to support the mission statement as well. These include rules and permitting, data collection systems, educating and informing the public, opportunities for nre cost share, farmstead ring dikes, drainage system buffer strip cost share, wellhead protection, and the Surface Water Quality Enhancement Program.

Albright stated there are 32 Regional Assessment Locations (RALs) throughout the BRRWD. These locations are broken into primary and secondary locations with at least one RAL in each Planning Region. The RALs can be used to determine the success of the Watershed Management Plan over time. It also creates a long-term measurement for the Watershed District in regard to peak flows, hydrology, water quality, stream health, and geomorphology. Seven RALs have been added within the new watershed area. There are two primary locations within the new regions, one east of Breckenridge, MN where the Otter Tail River flows into the City limits and the other at the outlet of Whiskey Creek in Kent, MN. The remaining 5 locations are classified as secondary RALs.

Jones stated that hydrology modeling for the watershed area started at the time planning began in the new areas. This resulted in detailed hydrology maps to use for planning today. We begin moving forward with this process by obtaining landowner input. Then, we can address the issues and generate solutions/alternatives to include in the RWMP. Jones displayed some examples of hydrologic models from within the BRRWD. He reviewed each example and explained how the results aided in the planning process for these areas.

Jones discussed the goals of the BRRWD, as identified in the RWMP. He stated the fdr goals would be reducing peak discharge rates by 22% for the 100-year flood and 34% for the 10-year flood. It is estimated we would need to provide 155,000 to 175,000 acre-feet (ac-ft) of runoff reduction to achieve the fdr goal. He stated it is possible to accomplish some fdr through storage projects. Next, Jones talked about natural resource enhancement (nre) goals. These are 10-year goals developed in cooperation with the DNR and USFWS. The nre goals are targeted to planning regions where they can provide multiple benefits. An example would be using the nre in conjunction with fdr to get even greater benefits. Plan goals would also include ways to enhance water quality and biota or the biology, within the streams and lakes. The goal of the BRRWD is to have the streams meet state standards and to provide a good habitat to support fish and invertebrate communities. There would be Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) goals for the Buffalo River, Upper Red River, and Lower Otter Tail watersheds.

Jones discussed some additional features of the RWMP. Water Management Districts (WMDs) must provide an additional/alternative funding source for projects based on storm water contribution. These funds can be spent on storm water/runoff related projects only. There are four methods of charges discussed in the Plan. They are as follows: based on runoff, sediment contribution, a combination of runoff and sediment contribution, and drainage area. Although the BRRWD does not currently use this funding source, it has to be included in the Plan for potential future use. The new generation plans also have more specific and more goals and action items than previous Plans. Each planning region includes a long range work plan which is broken into the eleven management areas. Lastly, the development/refinement of the project implementation process meets the requirements of the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB), the Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group (RRBFDRWG) Mediation Agreement, and the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) Concurrence Points. BWSR, COE, and BRRWD met several times to refine the process documents. This should help to ensure that projects we develop can be permitted by the COE.

Albright noted the draft Plan should be completed by March 1, 2015, and it will be distributed for a 60-day public review and comment period, followed by a public hearing. The Plan will also be available on the BRRWD's website (www.brrwd.org). BWSR and BRRWD will review the comments and provide responses. BRRWD will then present the RWMP to the BWSR Northern Plan Review Committee. The BWSR Board could approve the RWMP sometime in May 2015.

Albright talked about the opportunities through the Minnesota Association of Water Quality Incentive Program (MAWQCP). This program recognizes the landowner for implementing best management practices through their farming operations. It is one of the few programs offered by the SWCD that rewards farmers for environmental land stewardship. Landowners must have one field within the boundaries of the Whiskey Creek Project area in order to be eligible for the MAWQCP. Interested landowners can start by meeting with a Wilkin SWCD employee. The SWCD will then perform an evaluation of the farming operation and will identify areas that might need improvement, including types of crops planted, type of tillage used, applied fertilizer and pest management programs, and whether or not the fields are tiled. They will also look at conservation work already accomplished in those fields. A score is calculated based off this evaluation. If the score meets the required standard, then the landowner will be recognized by the State for doing their part to help keep the waterways clean. The State will enter into a Collective Agreement with the farmer through the Department of Agriculture, MPCA, DNR, etc. and the landowner and their operation would be certified. A benefit of being certified is that the landowner would be exempt from any new water quality related requirements implemented for 10 years after they are certified. However, this does not mean they are exempt from existing regulations, which they should already be following.

Henry Van Offelen, Red River Basin Coordinator, DNR Ecological and Water Resources, stated the natural resource goals for the new planning regions will likely be similar to the seven other regions in the BRRWD. The DNR's goal from a water quality perspective is to make our watersheds healthier. The current conditions have been affected by altered hydrology, lost/degraded habitat, lost connectivity creating islands of habitat versus connected pieces, decreased water quality, and degraded soil health. The more goals are centered on the above issues. We want to protect our remaining resources. We also have to plan for groundwater resource use. There has been an increase in permit requests for irrigation within the last few years, and this is something for which we need to plan. He stated we want to improve the condition of our habitats, improve hydrology conditions by reducing flood peaks, and improve the general water quality and soil health. Van Offelen explained that there are tools we can use to set goals and locate areas of high priority. He also mentioned it is beneficial to develop a multi-purpose project so that we can apply for funds from several different organizations to potentially decrease the local cost share.

Albright mentioned the Wolverton Creek/Comstock Coulee project, which was originally discussed in the 1950s. The BRRWD finally received a permit in 2014 from the DNR to restore 26 miles of the channel. He stated it will take several years to get the project underway.

Tara Mercil, MPCA, presented some background information on water quality. She talked about the Federal Clean Water Act of 1970, which divided contaminants into two categories: Point source and Non-point source contamination. Point source contaminants are pollutants discharged into our waterways from a pipe or definite source. Non-point source contamination is water pollution occurring due to land use practices. The MPCA is required to assess the waters of the State in order to identify problems and develop solutions under The Clean Water Act. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set water quality standards for certain pollutants such as nutrients, dissolved oxygen (DO), turbidity, mercury, etc. A water system is considered impaired if any pollutant exceeds the standard level.

Mercil stated that Minnesota felt water quality was extremely important; therefore, the State Legislature passed the Clean Water Legacy Act in 2006. The MPCA applied a Watershed Approach, meaning they looked at the watersheds as a whole rather than individual streams. She stated the 81 Minnesota watersheds are assessed every 10 years through a staged approach. The MPCA spends two years performing intensive water quality monitoring, stressor identification and assessments. The public is asked to provide information on problem areas known to them and possible solutions. Agency personnel then meet to discuss potential solutions for sites identified as problem areas. Any impaired waters will have a TMDL, which is the amount of pollutants that a water body can handle without exceeding State standards. The TMDLs are submitted to the EPA for approval. Once approved, the local government agencies can begin to implement best management practices (bmps) with guidance from the MPCA and others. This process is referred to as the Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS).

Mercil stated the Upper Red River TMDL study was started in 2008 and will be completed this year. Whiskey Creek is an impaired watershed within the Upper Red Planning Region. Mercil displayed a diagram representing the sampling locations. She briefly talked about the diagram and the progress of the Upper Red River WRAPS assessment.

Mercil stated the impairment assessment for the Otter Tail River will begin in 2016. She mentioned that the Lower Otter Tail is currently impaired for turbidity, as measured by the amount of suspended solids within the water column that exceeds the standard. A TMDL report has been created for the turbidity impairment. The information included in the report includes location(s) of problem areas, levels of pollutants, and what we need to do to improve the impaired waters. A landowner asked if there are any problems upstream of the Lower Otter Tail since this is the stretch covered during the presentation. Mercil stated the Lower Otter Tail (Orwell to Breckenridge) was the stretch focused on because it had enough data to assess. There are impairments throughout the watershed as well. This is part of the reason the MPCA is taking a watershed approach, so we can see how everything connects.

Another landowner asked if North Dakota is taking a watershed approach to help repair and protect their impaired waters. Mercil stated they are not, as they are not governed by the Region 5 EPA and Minnesota's funding is from the Clean Water Legacy Act of 2006. Van Offelen stated that North Dakota primarily has the same water quality standards as Minnesota which is governed by their Department of Health. However, North Dakota is not working through a systematic approach for evaluating water quality as Minnesota is.

The landowners divided into small groups to identify/discuss existing problem areas and potential solutions. After meeting for approximately 70 minutes, Albright brought the meeting back to order to wrap up the discussions. Again, landowner input will be used to identify issues, fdr and nre opportunities, and suggested solutions. He thanked the audience for their participation and said the RWMP is the landowner perspectives and not just another "shelf" document. Things will hopefully continue to develop as referenced earlier. Landowners can also track the progress of the RWMP effort by checking the BRRWD's website. The meeting was adjourned at 9:26 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,

John E. Hanson, BRRWD Secretary