

BUFFALO-RED RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

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MEDIATION PROJECT TEAM MINUTES

July 18, 2013

The Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD) Mediation Project Team (PT) held a meeting on Thursday, July 18, 2013, at 7:00 PM at the BRRWD office, Barnesville, MN.

Attending were: Gerald L. Van Amburg, Roger G. Ellefson, Curtis M. Nelson, John E. Hanson, and Peter V. Fjestad, BRRWD Managers; Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator, Erik S. Jones, Engineer, Houston Engineering, Inc. (H.E.); Robert A. Zimmerman, Engineer, City of Moorhead; Pete Waller, Board Conservationist, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR); Lynn Foss, Clay Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD); Mandy Erickson, Fisheries, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR); Julie Aadland, Area Hydrologist, DNR; Don Schultz, Area Wildlife Manager, DNR; Keith Mykleseth, Assistant Regional Manager, Division of Ecological and Water Resources, DNR; Jack Frederick, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA); Brian Winter, Program Director, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Don Bajumpaa, District Manager, Wilkin County SWCD.

Members absent were: Breanna L. Paradeis Kobiela and Troy E. Larson, BRRWD Managers; Shawn May, Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District (WMD) and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); Doug Wells, Fergus Falls WMD and USFWS; Emily Siira, Area Hydrologist, DNR; Brad Grant, District Manager, Becker SWCD; Henry Van Offelen, Red River Basin Coordinator, DNR; Edward J. Musielewicz, District Conservationist, Becker Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Keith Weston, Red River Basin Coordinator, NRCS; Tony Nelson, Farm Bill Biologist, Pheasants Forever (PF); Ross Aigner, Landowner/Wilkin SWCD; Ryan Frohling, Detroit Lakes WMD and USFWS; Audubon Dakota; Brian Dwight, Board Conservationist, BWSR; Craig O. Evans, PM-D, Army Corps of Engineers (COE); Larry Martin, USFWS and Fergus Falls WMD; and Kevin Kassenborg, District Manager, Clay SWCD.

Albright called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM. The PT members introduced themselves. Albright noted that the meeting was being recorded.

Business brought before the group included:

Meeting Minutes. The 05/23/13 meeting minutes were distributed with the meeting notice. **Motion** by Fjestad to approve the minutes. **Seconded** by Waller. **Approved.**

Long Term Flood Damage Reduction (FDR) Goals/Opportunities. Albright commented that the BRRWD receives frequent landowner inquiries about our goals related to flood damage reduction/storage. He discussed the BRRWD's Revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP) update that has been started to include the new watershed area in parts of Otter Tail and Wilkin Counties, adding approximately 450 square miles to the BRRWD. The Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group (RRBFDRWG) has allocated funding for this effort. The new area will be divided into two planning regions, where potential storage sites have been identified.

Albright discussed the Red River Basin Commission's (RRBC) Long Term Flood Study (LTFS), which calls for a 20% stage reduction goal at the first major gauging station on the Red River downstream of a

particular watershed. The RRBC received an additional \$500,000 from the Fargo-Moorhead Diversion Authority to develop the "Halstad Upstream Study" (HUR), which can be used to determine both the upstream and downstream impacts of possible storage sites for the F-M Diversion area. Jones discussed H.E.'s continued modeling work to find new sites within the BRRWD in conjunction with the RRBC's LTFS efforts. Through the use of an HEC-RAS unsteady model, the RRBC has been able to create hydraulic and hydrologic modeling to look at the 100-year runoff event and the benefits of potential storage sites within a given watershed. The RRBC and the BRRWD are working together to cost share a model project for the BRRWD, prepared by H.E. The results of this modeling can be used to in helping design the Fargo-Moorhead Diversion Project.

The group discussed possible site/opportunities for NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) in the BRRWD. There is a potential for significant funding for WRP in the new farm bill. Jones distributed a handout showing a possible retention site in the NW¼, Section 4, Manston Township, Wilkin County, along Trunk Highway (T.H.) No. 9, on properties owned by Edward Haick and Raymond Peppel. Phil Doll, Minnesota Waterfowl Association Biologist, encouraged the BRRWD to investigate this potential WRP site. The site contains approximately 28 acres on the Peppel property that are enrolled in the Permanent Wetlands Preserve (PWP) program. The existing drainage area to the site is approximately 149 acres, and it produces 50 acre-feet (AF) of water during a 4" runoff event. Jones discussed two alternatives. Alternative No. 2 would be designed to include the PWP site and a small amount of land to the north (Stangeland) and east of the PWP wetland easement area (Haick). This would increase the overall drainage area to the site to 487 acres. An embankment could be constructed to elevation 976.00, and a "horseshoe" embankment with ditch plugs on either side of T.H. No. 9 would be needed to direct additional runoff into the site. The site would outlet to the south into the South Branch of the Buffalo River. Don Bajumpaa supported the development of this site, and commented that over the last 3 years, the Wilkin SWCD has acquired approximately 800 acres in permanent easements along the South Branch of the Buffalo River with the long range goal of developing off channel storage opportunities to provide flood reduction on the South Branch in this area. Phil Doll will be meeting with the landowners to negotiate contracts. The PT agreed that Alternative No. 2 was the best design, as it would provide both flood damage reduction (fdr) and natural resource enhancement (nre) benefits.

Albright mentioned other potential WRP sites within the BRRWD including the Robert Hovland site, Reep Lake, and the Sabin Coulee. These sites could be investigated using the current model developed for the BRRWD to determine feasibility and potential benefits. Albright noted that as our current work load and ongoing projects are completed, the BRRWD is interested in working with landowners along the South Branch of the Buffalo River to develop a long range project for this area to address both the fdr and nre issues.

The group briefly discussed implementation of the Accelerated Project Planning Tool.

Project No. 56, Manston Slough Restoration. The Board made the Order to construct the project on 4/29/13. The 30-day appeal period expired on 5/29/13, and bids were opened on 6/10/13. The low bidder was Gladen Construction, Inc. at \$2.4 million. Albright explained that the increase in project costs made it necessary for the BRRWD to ask the participating agencies to contribute more funding to the project. The Board plans to award the construction contract at their next meeting. The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LOHC) Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) Program grant (\$350,000) will be used to acquire the C&H Farms and Woolson easements by the 6/30/13 deadline.

Don Bajumpaa noted that the landowners surrounding the project area have agreed to participate in the Walk-In Access program, which allows hunters access to hunting areas that would otherwise be private.

Don Schultz discussed the implementation of a "moist soil unit" on 160 acres purchased from John and Phil Schritz within the project area to encourage the growth of waterfowl food/vegetation. Water levels within the unit would be manipulated over the growing season to facilitate the production of the food source plants. Water could be pumped out of Wilkin County Ditch No. 13-Lateral into the unit in the fall, which would require a water appropriation permit from the BRRWD. Funding for this new feature would be separate and would not be a part of the Manston Slough Restoration project costs.

Project No. 49, Oakport Flood Mitigation. The DNR has agreed to cover the current expenditures for Phase 3 construction costs (approximately \$500,000). Kent Lokkesmoe, DNR, also indicated that there might be excess funding left over in the 2013 budget for some work on Phase 4. The BRRWD needs approximately \$5.18 million from the 2014 State bonding bill to complete Phase 4. Oakport Township will be annexed into the City of Moorhead in 2015.

The DNR has approved the levee certification on the east side of the coulee. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has indicated that following the 90-day review period, the levee will be certified. Demolition work on various sites and weed spraying were completed this summer.

Wolverton Creek/Comstock Coulee. Jones reported on his work with the DNR on the channel geometry configuration for the restoration so that an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) can be completed this fall. He is also revising the Clean Water Fund (CWF) grant budget, and will request an extension of the grant deadline to the full five years (12/31/15).

Project No. 39, Georgetown Levee Improvements. The contractor finished the levee on the east side of T.H. No. 75 last fall and has all the underground work completed. He will be working on the west side of the highway in the next few weeks. The entire project should be completed by this fall.

Barnesville Township FDR Study. Albright mentioned that he continues to receive landowner inquiries regarding a potential project for this area. The BRRWD will hold an informational meeting when time permits.

COE F-M Diversion. Van Amburg mentioned that the Diversion Authority has proposed a new Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) that the BRRWD will need to review and sign.

City of Wolverton. The group discussed the 2013 summer flood. Albright noted that the City and surrounding area received 9"-11" of rainfall in 3 hours on 6/25/13. This was a 500-1,000-year event. Jones displayed photographs of the area after the storm.

The group discussed a possible project to construct a dike to protect the City. COE Diversion funding might be available to help fund a project. Jones explained that the 2013 flood was 3" higher than the 2009 flood. The two floods differ because in 2009, the spring flows caused the Red River to back up into the City. Bajumpaa noted that the Wilkin SWCD has a 320 acre WRP site east of Wolverton that did hold some water during the event. Jones explained that a potential project would be designed to protect the City from both a spring and summer flood.

Van Amburg noted that a similar project could be developed for the City of Comstock; however, Jones pointed out that the geotechnical issues would be different because of the proximity of the Red River to Wolverton. Zimmerman mentioned that there are still questions about how much funding the DNR and State will contribute to upstream ringdike projects related to the F-M Diversion project.

Buffalo River/Upper Red River Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Studies. The Buffalo River TMDL draft report should be ready for review by 12/31/13.

The Upper Red River TMDL/Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan (WRPP) study on Whisky Creek and the Red River in Wilkin County is in its second phase. Jack Fredericks commented that MPCA is planning to use the Hydrologic Simulation Program FORTRAN (HSPF) model, but currently, data is not available to populate the model. He added that MPCA is also working on a bacteria study on the Red River for the Fargo-Moorhead area. Frederick explained that since the study found E. coli present in the sampling, it indicates that the Red River is not impaired, as previously supposed, and the Fargo Moorhead reaches of the Red River should be delisted. According to new State legislation, public hearings will be held regarding this issue.

Otter Tail River Erosion. Bajumpaa has been working with landowners (Etten/Wilson) along the Otter Tail River regarding serious erosion problems on their property. Restoration work would include installation of woody toe debris, riprap along the bank, stream barbs, etc. Jones displayed photographs of the erosion site in NE¼, Section 33, Foxhome Township, Wilkin County. Bajumpaa explained that there is a 1,200' long stretch of river bank with nearly straight sides. To create a stable bench and slope for seeding, 5,400 cubic yards (c.y.) of dirt will be needed, which would be the most expensive part of the design. The landowners have already enrolled 100' wide buffers on both sides of the river into Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)/Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM). DNR would require a more detailed plan before they could review it.

Fjestad commented that there is also an erosion site where Judicial Ditch No. 2 enters the Otter Tail River.

Albright noted that this project has a couple of important criterion in its favor: the landowners are willing, and it would show the new Watershed District area what the BRRWD can provide. This site also has readily available onsite materials and established buffers. Bajumpaa noted that without the BRRWD, they would have to rely on federal funding, which could add 5-8 years to the development. He thought it would be a good demonstration project for more erosion repair projects along the Otter Tail River. Ellefson thought it would be a good project because it is a smaller undertaking. Bajumpaa noted that Jones has experience with design/applications for this type of project. The PT agreed to recommend that the BRRWD move forward with this project at their 7/22/13 meeting and to submit it for BWSR grant funding later this fall.

Hawley Buffalo River Restoration. Albright briefly discussed the history of project development/funding. The COE recently appropriated \$450,000 for the project, which could be used for mitigation if the F-M Diversion project is constructed. The City of Hawley and the BRRWD are working with landowner Dean Whaley to acquire a 16.3 acre parcel of land where the project is located. Whaley has agreed to sell the property to the City for \$65,000, which includes a \$15,000 contribution from the BRRWD. The Board will discuss this proposal at the 7/22/13 meeting.

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP). Albright gave a brief update and distributed handouts regarding this program. In June, the BRRWD's application for Whisky Creek in Wilkin County was selected for this three-year program as one of the three pilot project areas in Minnesota. The Department of Agriculture will be meeting with the BRRWD next week to discuss project implementation. Van Amburg noted that State officials told him that the BRRWD's application was considered one of the strongest that they reviewed. Bajumpaa discussed the limited signup window for 2013 for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). There are a few landowners who have already expressed interest in the program. The State has earmarked approximately \$3 million and the NRCS approximately \$6 million for this program and for the three pilot areas to use as incentives.

Watershed District Enlargement. Jones has completed preparing the revised boundary maps according to the information Manager Fjestad and Albright provided following their tour of the eastern boundary. The BRRWD will review the new boundary maps at their next meeting. The boundary hearing will be continued in the near future to finalize the BRRWD's eastern boundary. The BRRWD had 2 years from 4/25/12 to complete the Revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP) for the new area. Some RWMP work has been started.

Ellefson Retirement. Manager Ellefson will retire from the BRRWD Board of Managers on 8/31/13. He thanked the PT for their work with the BRRWD. He pointed out that the PT's involvement with the BRRWD has made project development easier.

Next Meeting. The Fall Tour is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, October 3, 2013, at 1:30 PM in the Galaxie Supper Club, Barnesville.

Adjournment. There being no further business to come before the group, Albright adjourned the meeting at 9:15 PM.

Respectfully Prepared and Submitted by

Bruce E. Albright, BRRWD Administrator