BUFFALO-RED RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

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BUFFALO-RED RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT
Minutes for Landowner Informational Meeting
Wilkin County Ditch No. 27

September 20, 2019

The Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), held a landowner informational meeting regarding the proposed Wilkin County Ditch (C.D.) No. 27 Retrofit on Friday, September 20, 2019, at 8:00 AM in the Wilkin County Environmental Office, Breckenridge, MN. BRRWD Managers present were Mark T. Anderson and Peter V. Fjestad. BRRWD Staff attending included Bruce E. Albright, Administrator, and Erik S. Jones, Engineer, Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI). Others attending included: Steve Neppl, Wilkin County Highway Department; Craig Lingen, Resource Specialist, Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD); Steve Marty, Lake Region Electric Cooperative (LREC), and landowners Doug E. Hansen, John Bertram, Chuck Schreiber, Steven Hasbargen, Dennis Hasbargen, Peter Hansen, Bryan Albertson, Jeff Yaggie, and Fred Hansen.

BRRWD Administrator Bruce E. Albright called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM. He announced that the proceedings were being recorded to aid in the preparation of the minutes. He also passed around an attendance sheet.

Erik S. Jones, BRRWD Engineer, gave a presentation about the proposed retrofit of C.D. No. 27. He explained that the C.D. No. 27 ditch system is comprised of two parallel branches located along two separate north to south roads. The west ditch starts 740' south of the north line of Sections 15, Foxhome Township, Wilkin County. It flows south along the east side of 310th AVE through Sections 15, 22, and 27 for 2.6 miles (mi.) until it turns east for 0.2 mi. and outlets into the Otter Tail River. The east ditch starts 1,300' south of the north line of Section 14, Foxhome Township, and runs along the east side of County Road (C.R.) No. 19, flowing south along the west line of Sections 14, 23, and 26 for 2.5 miles until outletting into the Otter Tail River.

The original ditch construction plans, dated September 17, 1916, show the ditch cross-section along the west ditch varied from a 4'-8' bottom width with 1H:1V sideslopes, and the east ditch consisted of an 8'-10' bottom width with 1H:1V sideslopes. The latest 2008 ditch repair drawings show sediment depths along the west ditch varied from 0.0' to 0.9' and from 0.0' to 2.9' along the east ditch with some deeper blocks along both alignments. The existing ditch geometry on the west ditch has sideslopes that vary from 1.5H:1V to 3H:1V with a ditch bottom that varies from 8'-14' wide. The existing east ditch geometry has sideslopes that vary from 1.5H:1V to 3H:1V with a ditch bottom that varies from 8'-12' wide. The 2008 repair work appears to have flattened the sideslopes on the field side while maintaining the original sideslopes along the roadside for both the east and west ditches.

The proposed gradeline shown on the plans varies from 0.03% to 0.12% and will be largely straight graded between the existing culverts to match the intent of the 2008 repair. Using the Plan and Profile sheets, Jones went through the existing gradeline along each ditch section and compared it to the proposed gradeline. The ditch side slope geometry was determined based on expected stable slopes and current road design standards. There are no plans to change the bottom width of either ditch. The proposed sideslopes will be at 3H:1V on both sides of the west ditch. On the east ditch, the sideslopes will be 3H:1V, except at an existing farmstead driveway on C.R. No. 19 near the Otter Tail River outlet where the north end of the driveway will be moved

approximately 30 feet east. The road sideslope at the driveway will be 4H:1V for the first 10' to allow for the mandatory recovery zone and then the slope will return to 3H:1V on both sides of the road.

After reviewing the survey results, Jones explained it was determined that installing side inlet pipes would help reduce sediment loading into both the ditches and the Otter Tail River, while also reducing ditch inlet erosion and long-term maintenance costs/efforts. Using LiDAR information and landowner input, the inlet structures will be sized according to the drainage needs for each location and will be placed within the ditch right-of-way (R/W) off the field edge.

Jones discussed the sediment depths in both ditch alignments and the proposed ditch grades. The east ditch grade increases from about a 0.08% at the outlet end near the river in Section 26 to a 0.12% grade in Section 14, causing more sedimentation in the upstream reaches. He noted that there is about 3' of material in the east ditch along Hasbargen's property in Section 14, Foxhome Township, in the upstream area. Jones added that there is more separation between the field level and the bottom of the east ditch in the downstream portions of the ditch.

Steve Hasbargen asked about the proposed scope of the work in Section 14. Jones explained that the project would stop at approximately the east-west quarterline of Section 14. Hasbargen asked if Dennis Hasbargen would be able to continue cleaning the ditch north another half-mile along the section line. Jones explained that any additional upstream cleaning would be outside the original footprint of the ditch system, and the work would have to be done at the landowner's expense. Albright added that cleaning the ditch would be considered regular maintenance, and the landowner doesn't need a BRRWD permit; however, they would have to coordinate the work with the Wilkin County Highway Department for permission to work within their road R/W.

Dennis Hasbargen observed that to install the proposed sideslope along C.R. No. 19 would require the ditch system to take more cropland along the ditch. Albright explained that the BRRWD would compensate the landowners for any additional ditch R/W needed for either the required buffer strip installation or ditch adjustments. Hasbargen indicated that if the BRRWD plans to pay for the additional R/W, he didn't have any objection to the proposed repair. Albright noted that while the landowners will receive compensation for the additional R/W, those costs are rolled into the project cost, and the landowners will be assessed for the repair project. Some of the grant money can be used to acquire the needed R/W.

Jones displayed a spread sheet showing the R/W tabulation of the existing and proposed additional/temporary R/W for each parcel tract along the ditch system. For the west ditch, the existing total R/W is 19.7 acres. The retrofit project would need an additional 9.6 acres of permanent R/W and 18.1 acres of temporary R/W. For the east ditch, the existing total R/W is 19.1 acres. The retrofit project would need an additional 15.2 acres of permanent R/W and 11.1 acres of temporary R/W. The temporary easement is a one-time construction easement, which would be staked next spring, and the land couldn't be planted while the project is under construction. The landowners will also be compensated for the temporary acreage. The BRRWD usually pays about $250/acre for the construction easement.

Hasbargen asked when the project would start. Jones explained that the Wilkin County Highway Department plans to start on the retrofit in 2020.

The group reviewed the proposed cross-sections and total volume tables.

Jones explained that the project is estimated to cost approximately $591,000 with $367,930 of the cost eligible for the grant cost-share split (75%/25%). About $275,000 of this amount could potentially be covered by reallocating funds from the Otter Tail SWCD Buffer Aid grant ($150,000) and the Wilkin SWCD Clean Water Fund (CWF) grant ($100,000) for the Otter Tail River gully repair project. The largest

non-eligible expense is additional permanent and temporary ditch easement which are estimated at $131,000. The estimated opinion of probable cost assumes side inlets would be placed at each of the subwatershed outlets to the ditch. If some regrading was done on the backside of the ditch spoilbank it could reduce the number of side inlet pipes needed, resulting in a lower project cost.

Albright summarized the proposed work for C.D. No. 27 and then opened the floor to landowner questions and comments.

Steve Hasbargen asked how the project costs would be allocated to the landowners. Albright explained that the costs would be assessed based on the current benefit area map, financed with interest over a 2 or 3-year period, starting in 2021. Jones estimated that the project cost could be about $40/acre. The current ditch system financial account balance is $38,302. A brief discussion followed regarding the Board's ditch tax levy process.

Hasbargen observed that their field edge won't be straight anymore in Section 14 because the retrofit moves the ditch system alignment further east and then stops at the legal extent of the ditch, but the rest of their field in that section will follow the old alignment. Jones thought we may be able to work with the Hasbargens on that issue.

Jones explained that when the ditch was built in 1916, the spoil from the excavation was used to build C.R. No. 19, so those costs were split between the ditch system and the road authority.

Hasbargen asked how the spoil will be handled. Jones explained that the berm created from the spoil on the field side will be used to cover the side inlet pipes. The landowners commented that the pipes will have to be buried in enough clay to keep them in place because of the 13' of fall at the upstream end of the ditch system. Albright noted that if landowners are aware of areas where the ditch breaks out, they should let the BRRWD know so we can address it during construction.

Doug Etten commented that according to the survey, the current ditch grade appears to be lower than the proposed grade on the north end of the west ditch in Section 15. He was concerned that the new grade would be higher than his tile gravity outlet in this same location. Jones and Albright assured Etten that the ditch grade could be altered to accommodate the elevation of his tile outlet.

Etten asked what effect the side inlets have on the life of the project. Jones thought the installation of side inlets could potentially reduce the long-term ditch maintenance costs by half. There was a brief discussion regarding the excellent job the Wilkin County Highway Department did a few years ago on the ditch retrofits in the northern part of the County. Jones stressed that setting the correct side inlet elevation is critical to the structure's performance. In response to a landowner question about culvert sizing, Jones said he would be willing to discuss inlet culvert sizes with any landowners who feel they need a different sized pipe or a crossing. Albright noted that the Board would also be willing to discuss additional crossings with the landowners.

Vice President Fjestad asked if anyone in the audience opposed the proposed project. A consensus of the group felt that the work should be done as soon as possible next year to take advantage of the available funding, which has to be spent in 2020.

Jim Marty, LREC, noted that the Electric Cooperative will work with the Highway Department on scheduling the project, as there might be some power poles that will have to be relocated.

Albright commented that since there didn't appear to be opposition to the proposed retrofit, the Board could make a decision at an upcoming meeting to go forward with the project and take advantage of the available

grant funding. The landowners will be contacted to acquire the necessary permanent and temporary R/W, which will be staked next spring prior to field work so that the Highway Department will be able to commence construction next summer.

A landowner asked about the buffer requirements pertaining to field drains. Albright explained that at the present time, the State only requires buffers on designated protected waters and legal ditch systems. He explained that each county also has a computer generated map, identifying other waterways that could be buffered, based on size criteria, erodibility, drainage area, etc., but currently those areas are only on a "voluntary" status. In regard to payments for establishing buffers, Albright noted that the landowners could receive payments if the area to be grassed was eligible to be enrolled in a conservation program like Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

Dennis Hasbargen asked about the required buffer installation for Wilkin C.D. No. 3 on the south line of Section 3, Foxhome Township. Albright said that the Board would like to get the easement acquisition proceedings for the BRRWD buffer installations completed this winter, which includes ditch system hearings. The next step will be to get all the R/W recorded for the nearly 200 ditch systems in the entire District. The Counties should value the ditch R/W at a lower rate than cropland.

There being no further comments or questions, Albright adjourned the meeting at 8:55 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

John E. Hanson, Secretary