

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
APRIL 15, 2020

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on April 15, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

Participating were John Finney, Gary Thompson, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Roger Mischel and Dan Jacobson (alternate for Ben Varnson), Board members; Pat Fridgen, Theresa Ebbenga and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston, Executive Director; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Debra Walchuk and Christi Fisher, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Pat McQuery, Corps of Engineers; Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota State Water Commission (NDSWC); Rob Sip, Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB) Executive Director; Dan Money, Two Rivers Watershed District Administrator; Tracy Halstensgard, Roseau River Watershed District; Jerry Bents and Zach Hermann, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Mike Bassingthwaite, Interstate Engineering; Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.; Blake Carlson, Widseth Smith Nolting; Chuck Fritz, International Water Institute and Mark Wierschke, property owner in the Whitney Lake Watershed Project area.

Gary Thompson called the meeting to order and introductions were made.

Agenda

It was moved by John Finney, seconded by Roger Mischel and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda.

Minutes

It was moved by John Finney, seconded by Dan Jacobson and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the December 12, 2019, meeting, as amended.

Financial Report

It was moved by Greg Holmvik and seconded by Roger Mischel to approve the Financial Report, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Bills

It was moved by Dan Jacobson and seconded by John Finney to approve the payment of Checks #1586 through #1588 and the electronic funds transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669 – RCPP Memorandum of Understanding – remaining funds

Information distributed regarding the current status of Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Agreements in Minnesota and North Dakota was reviewed. Agreement extensions were also outlined.

Cost benefit analysis – next steps

The North Dakota State Water Commission Economic Analysis Cost-share Policy was discussed. Concerns as to the consistency of the policy were discussed.

Rob Sip believes additional study is needed to get appropriate values in the Red River Valley. Chuck Fritz referred to a document on the Red River Watershed Management Board website. Christi Fisher thinks the document does a good job of defining values, not just in dollars.

Zach Hermann said there are serious funding implications at the state level, but he is encouraged they are working to get some consistency in the process now. Pat Fridgen reviewed the economic analysis process used by the State Water Commission. He hopes the goal would be to make the analysis as accurate as possible. State legislators look at the analysis process to help determine the benefit the state gets for the dollars spent.

Mr. Weston will work with Mr. Sip and Mr. Gjestvang to set out key issues for the Board's consideration at the next meeting.

NRCS report

Debra Walchuck reported on RCPP Watershed Planning. The comment period on the RCPP Interim Rules has been extended to May 12, 2020. Outreach is being done through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). Comments were submitted on behalf of the RRRRA on April 8, 2020.

Report on Minnesota and North Dakota 2019 RCPP Project Proposals – USDA-NRCS-NHQ-RCPP-19-GEN0013072

Brief discussion was held regarding 2019 RCPP Project Proposals. Retention and watershed projects in this area could be competitive for the funding available. Applications could be submitted for RCPP Classic and RCPP AFA (Alternative Funding Agreement). A substantial amount of reporting would be required, which may require additional staffing.

Executive Director Report

Cooperative Agreement 68-6633-16-512 with the NRCS to fund cooperation and joint coordination of flood damage reduction projects relating to the RCPP was officially closed February 27, 2020.

The NRCS has ramped up the rehabilitation program on old PL-566 dams. The RRRRA has been asked to participate in the Project Team. Seven dams in Grand Forks, Pembina and Walsh Counties are in the process of rehabilitation.

The International Joint Commission (IJC) could assist the RRWMB and Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD) pursue further study of water quality benefits. Mr. Weston will draft a letter to the IJC on the matter.

Grand Forks County Water Resource District is looking into submitting an application for a watershed flood damage control / multi-purpose project to the NRCS.

Discussion was held on submitting proposals for alternative federal funding agreements. Up to 15 can be selected nationwide from \$250,000 to \$10 million. Mr. Weston asked for input as to whether the RRRA would like to act as the lead agency or more of a collaborator to assist with putting proposals together. Mr. Weston pointed out that additional staffing may be required, depending on the requirements that need to be met.

Tracy Halstensgard asked how COVID-19 will impact funding efforts. Ms. Fisher said they do not expect changes to the budget. Extending deadlines on current agreements or future funding is not known at this time.

Mr. Weston asked for input regarding review and updating the RRRA By-Laws and developing a strategic plan. John Finney suggested members of the RRWMB and RRJWRD develop priorities and bring them to the RRRA for consideration. Rodger Olson said he likes the idea of putting effort into a strategic plan to keep the RRRA focused on what we want to accomplish.

Mr. Weston said the RRRA meeting in Ada and 2020 Summer Tour will probably not take place this year due to COVID-19.

Mr. Weston reported on outreach and additional outreach topics for the future.

Agency and partner reports

All agencies reported monitoring and tracking information regarding the spring flood event.

Pat Fridgen said the deadline to submit projects for the North Dakota 2021 Water Development Plan has been extended to May 20, 2020. Randy Gjestvang said the RRJWRD will update its Water Management Strategy Report with the new information.

North Dakota State Water Commission cost-share policy was discussed. If federal funding is provided, funding on retention projects is decreased from 60% to 50%. An economic analysis is also required now. Projects with less than a 1:1 benefit to cost ratio would be funded at a lower percentage; however, special considerations can be made.

Ted Preister reported on the downstream of Halstad, Minnesota, modeling effort. They are working with the Corps of Engineers on potential cost-share for the project. Work should be completed by June 2021. Some impacts are expected from COVID-19. Work also continues on the Long Term Flood Solutions agreement.

Meeting schedule

There is some uncertainty as to the next scheduled meeting due to COVID-19. Mr. Weston will work with the Secretary-Treasurer on the matter.

Adjournment

There being no further business to be considered by the Board, the meeting adjourned without objection.

APPROVED:

Gary Thompson
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Secretary-Treasurer