

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
MARCH 17, 2021

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on March 17, 2021, at 9:30 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, Andrew Graham (alternate for Theresa Ebbenga) and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston, Executive Director; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Troy Daniell, Christi Fisher and Debra Walchuk, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota State Water Commission (NDSWC); Rob Sip, Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB), William A Hejl and Jacob Gust, Rush River Water Resource District; Dan Money, Two Rivers Watershed District Administrator; Jerry Bents, Mike Opat and Tony Nordby, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.; and Bert Quintero, Midwest Radio of Fargo-Moorhead.

John Finney called the meeting to order and introductions were made.

Agenda

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Roger Mischel and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Minutes

It was moved by Gary Thompson, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2020, meeting. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Financial Report

The Secretary-Treasurer presented the Financial Report.

Bills

It was moved by Roger Mischel and seconded by Rodger Olson to approve the wire transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Update on evaluating benefits for flood damage reduction projects

Discussion was held regarding the evaluation of benefits for flood damage reduction projects and reaching out to various state agencies for information. Keith Weston said there is not as much information available as thought, but some has been compiled and they will continue moving forward to accumulate additional information to present to state legislators.

Rob Sip looked into the USDA risk management dataset. Information can be sorted by county, state, and type of damage to crops, but cannot be sorted by watershed. Looking at 2019 and 2020 damage from flooding, frost damage, cold weather and rainfall in Minnesota, there was well over \$1 million in crop damage in 2020 alone. There is good information available, but it is time consuming. FEMA also has large datasets.

Randy Gjestvang said an extensive analysis of flood damage was done in North Dakota a while ago that would also have useful information.

NRCS report

Debra Walchuk reported on the status of RCPP Watershed Plans in Minnesota. There are 6 active planning agreements and \$148,272.57 was paid to Minnesota watershed districts during the 4th quarter of 2020. A total of \$4,286,089.35 has been paid out since the start of the program.

Christi Fisher reported work is finishing up on the final steps for the Upper Maple River, North Brach Park River and Rush River Watershed Plans in North Dakota. She explained the effort required to get through the final steps of the process and that things are going well. Work also continues on the Tongue River and Shortfoot Creek Plans

New NRCS / RRRR Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Mr. Weston has been meeting with administrators to review progress on project planning activities and how to best utilize time and funding. The current MOU with the RRRR expires in May 2021. A new MOU has been drafted and is in review. A meeting is scheduled with the NRCS next week to discuss the matter.

Outreach - Red River Basin Mapping Project

Rob Sip presented a series of maps developed with Houston Engineering, Inc. The main intent is to update a RRWMB project map. One of the key issues is the ability to share information with state and federal partners to show what has been done and making sure all concerns relating to habitat, water quality, flood damage reduction, etc. are met. This would require a huge effort to put the dataset together for the RRWMB.

Mr. Weston said he would like to see this done for the RRRR through the entire basin. Maps showing the location of current projects, easements, communities, and broad basic information is valuable and could be used for a new watershed plan.

Randy Gjestvang said North Dakota would have maps of Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD) projects that have received state cost-share. One map shows added storage volume for flood damage reduction and another with public lands. Mr. Gjestvang believes the maps are of similar quality.

Mr. Weston said the maps would show efforts on both sides of the Red River and the importance of continuity. He offered to reach out to Houston Engineering, Inc. regarding the scope of work and estimated cost.

The Board indicated support for the project. Mr. Finney said the information could be made available on the RRRRA website. Mr. Olson said it would be good to have the information in one user friendly place and emphasized the importance of scheduling updates to show progress to legislators.

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Greg Holmvik to proceed with the Red River Basin Mapping Project. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Outreach – public service ads and announcements

Bert Quintero met with the Board to discuss options for public service ads and announcements on KFGO-AM Midwest Radio of Fargo-Moorhead. She played two ads on which the Board provided input and suggestions.

It was moved by Gary Thompson and seconded by Dan Jacobson to approve the proposal from KFGO-AM Midwest Radio of Fargo-Moorhead for RRRRA public service ads and announcements at a cost of \$7,875. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Outreach - USGS Flood Poster and Story Map

Mr. Weston, Mr. Sip and Mr. Gjestvang have met and discussed updating the USGS 1997 Red River Flood Poster and creating a story map. The USGS is unable to work on the project this fiscal year but could possibly start on the project in the next fiscal year, after October 1, 2021.

A story map is an interactive map that provides additional information when someone clicks on a site. Story maps are costly to produce, but there may be cost-share opportunities in the future with the USGS. The estimated cost is \$30-50,000. Printing costs could also be shared. The information could be displayed at upcoming conferences.

The Board directed Mr. Weston to continue working on the matter with Mr. Sip and Mr. Gjestvang and come back with a proposal at a future meeting.

2021 draft Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List

Mr. Weston updated the Board on the Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List. The list will be reviewed and updated annually.

Strategic planning efforts

Mr. Weston reviewed the final draft of the *RRRA Strategic Plan*. The plan will be reviewed annually and updated as needed. It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Roger Mischel to approve the *RRRA Strategic Plan*. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Agency and partner reports

Andrew Graham reported on various ongoing projects in Minnesota. The Flood Damage Reduction Work Group hopes to complete the process of updating technical papers for project planning by this spring.

The Minnesota DNR is partnering with various groups to look for ways to synergize and multiply its efforts for farmers to apply best management practices.

Minnesota continues to work with the Diversion Authority and Corps of Engineers through a series of issues on the lower Otter Tail River.

Rob Sip said Minnesota fisheries staff members will give a presentation at the next RRWMB meeting. Anyone interested is invited to attend.

Randy Gjestvang reported the North Dakota legislature is in session and continues to work through funding bills. They are looking at bonding for the Metro Flood Diversion Project and the Mouse River Flood Control Project to free up funds for other water projects. A two-year water study will likely result from one bill being considered. Legislation relating to drain tiling is going well with good cooperation between contractors and water resource districts. Some reformulation of the State Water Commission is also being considered.

Ted Preister reported the key thing the Red River Basin Commission is working on is Lower Red Retention. Another meeting is planned in a couple weeks. Local consultants are scaling up their work to compile information to help people understand hydrology in the watershed. Mr. Preister thanked Mr. Weston for the work on outreach. He hears comments from people almost weekly.

Meeting schedule

The next RRRRA meeting is scheduled for June 16, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. It will be determined around June 1, 2021, whether to meet in person or hold a virtual meeting.

Adjournment

There being no further business to be considered by the Board, it was moved by Roger Mischel, seconded by Gary Thompson and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

APPROVED:

Gary Thompson
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Secretary-Treasurer