

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
JUNE 17, 2020

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on June 17, 2020, at 9:00 a.m.

Participating were John Finney, Gary Thompson, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Roger Mischel and Dan Jacobson (alternate for Ben Varnson), Board members; Duane Pool (for Pat Fridgen), Theresa Ebbenga and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston, Executive Director; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Mary Podoll, Christi Fisher, Debra Walchuk and Lea Holter, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota State Water Commission (NDSWC); Jerry Bents and Zach Hermann, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Blake Carlson, Widseth Smith Nolting; and Nina Stone, Cass County Water Resource Districts Accountant.

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

Agenda

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

Minutes

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the April 14, 2020, meeting. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Financial Report

The Secretary-Treasurer presented the Financial Report for review by the Board.

Bills

It was moved by Dan Jacobson and seconded by Gary Thompson to approve the wire transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

2019 Audit

A motion was made by Roger Mischel and seconded by Gary Thompson to approve the 2019 audit of the Red River Retention Authority. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

2021 budget

The preliminary 2021 budget was reviewed. Keith Weston reported he currently works approximately 60-65% of a full-time position and would like to be closer to a half-time position in 2021. He will discuss the matter further with the Co-Chairs and indicated his willingness to negotiate terms regarding the Executive Director position. Outreach and education items were also discussed.

A motion was made by Gary Thompson and seconded by Rodger Olson to approve the Red River Retention Authority 2021 budget. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669 – Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Memorandum of Understanding

Keith Weston pointed out NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669 – RCPP Memorandum of Understanding ends in May 2021 and has a balance of \$1.2 million.

Mr. Weston stated the *6-Month Progress Report* for Reporting Period 10 from November 21, 2019, through May 20, 2020, regarding the *Memorandum of Understanding – NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669* has been completed and submitted to the NRCS.

The success of RCPP Watershed Planning was discussed. All look forward to design and construction of projects resulting from the program.

Fiscal Year 2021 RCPP Renewals

Extensive discussion was held on whether to request funds to complete only the designs on approved NRCS RCPP Watershed Plans or to pursue an opportunity to expand the scope of existing projects through the 2018 Farm Bill. Mr. Weston has met with people in various capacities as well as the Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD) and the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB). A PowerPoint presentation outlined potential outreach and education, as well as the possibility of hiring a watershed planning specialist or someone to assist with operation and maintenance plan development and implementation.

Because of COVID-19, the agreements were extended one year through the NRCS. The RRJWRD and RRWMB believe utilizing the \$1.2 million remaining through the current agreement may be the best option.

A couple of new watershed planning starts may submit applications through the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program. Christi Fisher pointed out that there is an August deadline to submit projects to the WFPO Program.

It was moved by Gary Thompson and seconded by Rodger Olson to proceed under the existing Memorandum of Understanding, working within constraints of COVID-19 extensions, and to look at utilizing the WFPO Program for future planning starts and design needs.

NRCS report

Debra Walchuk reported that she has been working remotely since March 15, 2020, due to COVID-19. She met with all watershed districts over the winter and spring on planning, progress, and the status of respective RCPP Watershed Plans.

2021 Retention Project Prioritization

Randy Gjestvang reported on 2021 Retention Project Prioritization. The RRRA will vote on highest priorities at the December 2021 meeting.

There is concern that reduced oil revenues could potentially result in reduced funding for projects in North Dakota.

Executive Director Report

Mr. Weston offered assistance to the Red Lake Watershed and Bois de Sioux Watershed to get additional support for construction through the RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA).

Mr. Weston continues to offer assistance for Forest River Watershed Planning.

Work continues with Randy Gjestvang and Rob Sip on strategic planning efforts.

Agency and partner reports

Theresa Ebbenga reported that the Flood Damage Reduction Workgroup finished its mission principles and practices document.

Duane Pool informed the group that the NDSWC has deferred cost-share on a large number of projects due to reduced oil revenue collections. The next full SWC meeting will be held on July 16, 2020.

Meetings hosted by SWC members will be announced in the next couple of weeks. There will be 8 meetings held in the last 2 weeks of July.

Mr. Pool thanked project sponsors for helping build the *2021 Water Development Plan*. He asked for feedback, input, corrections, etc. to make the document more accurate to assist the legislature to move projects forward.

Ted Preister reported that he is cautiously optimistic on an application the Red River Basin Commission submitted to the RCPP AFA for support in the amount of \$3 million for the Proposed Comprehensive Subwatershed Pilot Program. A positive response has been received from the owners of 9,000 of the 17,000 acres involved with the project. Mr. Preister explained that 2" over 9,000 acres would equate to 2,000 acre-feet of water that would be held back by the project.

Adjournment

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

APPROVED:

Gary Thompson
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Secretary-Treasurer