

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
DECEMBER 10, 2020

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on December 10, 2020, at 2:00 p.m.

Participating were Gary Thompson, John Finney, Ben Varnson, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Roger Mischel, Board members; Pat Fridgen, Andrew Graham (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); Jerry Bents and Zach Hermann, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.; Chuck Fritz, International Water Institute; and Linda Vavra, Bois de Sioux Watershed District.

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

Agenda

It was moved by Ben Varnson, 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 John Finney, seconded by Roger Mischel and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2020, meeting. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Financial Report

It was moved by Ben Varnson and seconded by Rodger Olson to approve the Financial Report, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Bills

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

Amend 2020 budget

It was moved by Greg Holmvik and seconded by John Finney to authorize the Secretary-Treasurer to amend the RRRA 2020 budget. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

2021 meeting dates

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Roger Mischel to set the following as the regular meetings dates, times and places for the RRRRA in 2021:

- March 17 at 9:30 a.m. (virtual meeting);
- June 16 at 9:00 a.m. at the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB) office in Ada, Minnesota / virtual meeting;
- September 15 at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota; and
- December 9 at 2:00 p.m. in conjunction with the Prairie Grain Conference, Alerus Center, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Red Lake Watershed District - Black River Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Troy Daniell addressed questions relating to the denial of funding for the Red Lake Watershed District - Black River RCPP Project. The primary issue was the Red Lake Watershed District hired a contractor with a favorable bid that could begin work in the fall, prior to approval by the NRCS.

Chairman Finney expressed his frustration with the matter when hiring the contractor would save the project over \$1 million. Mr. Daniell said they understand the Watershed District's action due to the cost savings and that conditions were favorable to start work on the project. Unfortunately, the rules were not followed per the funding agreement that was entered into which resulted in the decision by the NRCS to deny funding.

Update on evaluating benefits for flood damage reduction projects

Keith Weston presented information relating to the evaluation of benefits for flood damage reduction projects in the Red River Basin. Mr. Weston reported on a meeting held with Dean Bangsund, NDSU, regarding the best way to refine the collection of cost-benefit data. Moving forward, the effort would take people and resources. Rob Sip has experience with this type of work in Minnesota. Mr. Weston and Randy Gjestvang could reach out to North Dakota agencies on the matter. Mr. Weston suggested the work should be flexible and be considered an evolving document. The Board concurred with Mr. Weston.

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

Mr. Weston updated the Board on the 6-Month Progress Report for May 21 through November 20, 2020, regarding *NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669 – RCPP Memorandum of Understanding*.

NRCS report

Ms. Walchuk reported on planning, progress, and the status of RCPP Watershed Plans. Only \$122,865.53 was expended on Minnesota plans during the 4th quarter. She encouraged the watersheds and consulting planners to keep these plans a priority and to continue working towards completion.

Christi Fisher reported Moore Engineering, Inc. is working with the NRCS to address comments received on the Rush River Watershed Plan. The final draft plan is under review for the Upper Maple River Watershed Plan. Houston Engineering, Inc. continues work on the final design for the North Branch Park River Watershed Plan.

Mr. Finney left the meeting at this time.

2021 draft Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List

Mr. Weston reviewed the draft Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List as well as the status of the projects.

It was moved by Ben Varnson and seconded by Rodger Olson to accept the Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Strategic planning efforts

Mr. Weston reviewed the updated draft of the *RRRA Strategic Plan* and thanked those assisting him on the matter. It was moved by Ben Varnson and seconded by Greg Holmvik to accept the *RRRA Strategic Plan*, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Electronic Watershed Plan Library

Mr. Weston reported on a meeting with NRCS staff to discuss opportunities regarding the development of a watershed plan document library. The NRCS indicated they would be willing to provide documents they have on file. Mr. Weston suggested scanning them on an as needed basis rather than commencing the large task of scanning them all at one time. Minnesota is working on a similar project. Mr. Weston will act as the point of contact on the project. He is confident between the RRRR and NRCS of a path forward on the project.

Outreach

Mr. Weston reported on attendance at the RRRR booth at *Big Iron*. Attendance was down this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion was held about continuing with additional public service ads and announcements for the RRRR. Gary Thompson suggested including reports on what the RRRR is working on. Another suggestion was to address issues in the Red River Basin.

It was moved by Ben Varnson and seconded by Roger Mischel to allocate up to \$1,000 for RRRR public service ads and announcements on KFGO-AM Midwest Radio of Fargo-Moorhead to start the end of February 2021. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously. A proposal for additional ads and announcements can be considered later in the spring.

The RRRA did not participate in several of the usual conferences due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Red River Basin Commission conference will be in January 2021. It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Greg Holmvik to authorize spending up to \$1,000 for RRRA participation in the virtual Red River Basin Commission conference in January 2021. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Agency and partner reports

Andrew Graham informed the Board that after extensive discussion and consideration, the Minnesota Legislature approved, and the Governor signed, the bonding bill. Program management for hazard mitigation has been working out a plan for \$15 million, some of which will be in the Red River Basin. Figures will be presented at an upcoming RRWMB meeting. The cost-benefit analysis on natural resource enhancements is important to the Department of Natural Resources.

Pat Fridgen reported the Water Development Plan will be on the NDSWC agenda tomorrow. He thanked those that submitted information for the plan. There is interest from several areas to look at bonding to supplement the ability to fund water projects, particularly large water projects. Borrowing against Legacy Fund earnings is being discussed.

Ted Preister reported on the upcoming Red River Basin Commission conference in January. They are trying to keep the virtual conference abbreviated, but relevant. He thanked those supporting the Lower Red River Basin Retention Study.

Meeting schedule

The RRRA will hold a virtual meeting on March 17, 2021, at 9:30 a.m.

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