

MINUTES OF SPECIAL VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
ORIGINATING AT THE CASS COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
WEST FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA
JUNE 16, 2021

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on June 16, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.

Participating were John Finney, Gary Thompson, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Bill Petersen; and Dan Jacobson (alternate for Ben Varnson) Board members; Pat Fridgen, and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston, Executive Director; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Mary Podoll, Christi Fisher and Debra Walchuk, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota State Water Commission (NDSWC); Zach Herrmann, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Josh Hassell, Moore Engineering, Inc.; and Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.

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

Agenda

It was moved by Bill Petersen, seconded by Dan Jacobson and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda.

Minutes

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2021, meeting.

Financial Report

It was moved by Bill Petersen and seconded by Dan Jacobson to approve the Financial Report, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Bills

It was moved by John Finney and seconded by Bill Petersen to approve the wire transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

2020 Audit

Discussion was held on the ongoing 2020 Audit. Approval of the final 2020 Audit will be considered at a future meeting.

2022 budget

It was moved by Dan Jacobson and seconded by Rodger Olson to approve the RRRA 2022 budget. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Future RRRR meeting format and location

The Board discussed the format and location of future RRRR meetings. Virtual meetings increase attendance, but open meeting laws also need to be followed. The Secretary-Treasurer will check into the technology available at the Cass County Highway Department to accommodate virtual RRRR meetings where people may prefer to attend in person.

NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669 (RCPP MOU) – final report

Keith Weston reviewed the final report submitted for NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669 (RCPP MOU). The watershed districts and water resource districts have spent \$3,240,600 and the NRCS spent \$7,981,500. PL-566 funding will be used moving forward. A map showing the status of RCPP Watershed Project Areas was presented.

New NRCS / RRRR Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Debra Walchuk informed the Board they have made good progress quickly on a new NRCS / RRRR MOU. They continue working through various edits to the document. The document will be considered for approval at a future meeting.

NRCS report

Debra Walchuk reported on various meetings attended and the status of RCPP Watershed Plans in Minnesota. Funds in the amount of \$173,917 were paid to watershed districts during the first quarter of 2021. A total of \$4,460,000 has been paid for planning costs in Minnesota over the life the agreements. There is \$638,000 of RCPP funds available that need to be utilized before September 30, 2021.

Ms. Walchuk assisted the Red River Basin Commission on a water quality off-set plan, working on municipalities in Minnesota trying to get watershed work credits to apply to those permitting procedures for their municipal water systems.

If watersheds are not members of the National Watershed Coalition, she suggested they consider it. The group provides outreach supporting watershed work going on across the country.

Ms. Walchuk has participated in Flood Damage Reduction Work Group meetings. The group has been actively implementing a new plan.

Christi Fischer reported the National Watershed Management Center returned over 100 comments on the Rush River Watershed Plan. It is now down to 10 comments. Review of the 60% design is ongoing. Work will be paused until after Plan approval. It is hoped the project will be close to construction by next spring.

Upper Maple River Watershed Plan revisions are being addressed at the state technical level. The Plan should be ready for submittal in the next month or two.

The North Branch Park River Watershed Plan did not have enough funds. Funding is available for authorized plans through watershed operations.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations update

Discussion was held regarding basin-wide leadership in the development and implementation of the ecological science components of Watershed Plans that will be moving forward. Maintenance plans and structural designs will need to be developed to derive maximum benefits from the Plans. There will be a 50-year commitment to maintain constructed Watershed Plans.

There has been discussion that to receive partner funding, ecological systems will need to be installed as part of flood retention projects. This could include biomass management, grazing systems or other similar practices.

Mr. Weston could start to look at a logical group of people to serve on the RRRRA Basin Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee (BTSAC) to lead the effort. The NRCS is a willing partner to help the RRRRA with this.

It was moved by Bill Peterson and seconded by Dan Jacobson to authorize Keith Weston to form a RRRRA BTSAC. Upon roll call vote, Mr. Olson, Mr. Holmvik, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Peterson voted in favor. Mr. Finney abstained. Motion carried.

Outreach - Red River Basin Mapping Project

Mr. Weston continues working with Houston Engineering, Inc. on the Red River Basin Mapping Project.

The first map shows the public what has been done in the basin by the Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD) and Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB). Shading shows different agency / state ownership or easements. Mr. Weston will forward the map to Rob Sip and Randy Gjestvang for input.

The second map shows flood retention in the Red River Basin. This map would be helpful to display at conferences.

The third map shows information from the RRJWRD, RRWMB, NRCS, Corps of Engineers and state agencies.

Outreach - USGS Flood Poster and Story Map

Mr. Weston continues working with Mr. Sip and Mr. Gjestvang on the best path forward to update the USGS Flood Poster and Story Map. They may look at another BTSAC recommendation on a product that would provide the most value. Mr. Finney suggested looking into information on the International Water Institute website.

Outreach – public service ads and announcements

Mr. Weston played a couple of public service ads / announcements that have been put together that will play until the end of July. The spots typically run 3-6 weeks. Funds have been budgeted for outreach through the beginning of December 2021.

Agency and partner reports

Pat Fridgen reported on reorganization of the State Water Commission to the Department of Water Resources effective August 1, 2021. This will combine the State Water Commission and Office of the State Engineer into a cabinet agency. A Director will be hired by the Governor and the State Engineer will report to the Director. The State Water Commission will continue to consist of 8 members. The next State Water Commission is on August 12, 2021. Funding applications need to be in by June 28, 2021. Mr. Fridgen updated the Board on state funding for water projects in the next biennium. He stated there is large interest and support for water development in the state.

Ted Preister reported that the Red River Basin Commission Lower Red Retention modeling work is going well. Most of the first set of data has been submitted to the Corps of Engineers. They are working on setting up a tour on July 21, 2021, in the Thief River Falls area. He encouraged anyone interested to register soon so they can arrange the bus transportation needed.

Meeting schedule

The next RRRRA meeting is scheduled for September 15, 2021, at 10:00 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