

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL SPECIAL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
ORIGINATING AT EAST GRAND FORKS CITY HALL
600 DEMERS AVENUE
EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA
DECEMBER 13, 2023

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call special meeting on December 13, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

Participating were John Finney, Bill Petersen, Rodger Olson, Ben Varnson, Gary Thompson (alternate for Josh Ihry), Board members; Pat Fridgen and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston and Brian Fuder, Executive Directors; Nina Stone, Accountant; Melissa Hinkemeyer, Administrative Assistant; Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota Department of Water Resources (NDDWR); Chris Marohl, ND Senator Kevin Cramer's office; Bruce Anderson, Barnes County Water Resource District; Tom Perdue, Grand Forks County Water Resource District; Don Kemp, Pembina County Water Resource District; Christi Fisher and Cari Roepke, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Dan Money, Two Rivers Watershed District; Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.; Londa Hager and Bridgette Readell, WDAY. Board member Greg Holmvik was absent.

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

Agenda

It was moved by Bill Petersen, seconded by Gary Thompson, and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda, as presented.

Minutes

It was moved by John Finney, seconded by Bill Petersen and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the September 21, 2023, meeting.

Bills

It was moved by Gary Thompson and seconded by John Finney to approve Check #1599 and the wire transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the following Board members voted in favor: John Finney, Gary Thompson, Ben Varnson, Bill Peterson, and Rodger Olson. Greg Holmvik was absent. The motion passed.

Set regular 2024 meeting dates, time and location

It was moved by Bill Petersen, seconded by John Finney and unanimously carried to set the following as the regular meeting dates, at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota, for the RRRRA in 2024:

- March 21
- June 20
- September 19
- December 18

NRCS report

Christi Fisher presented on the status of Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) plans in the Red River Basin in North Dakota.

Ms. Fisher then introduced Cari Roepke, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist (Field Operations) East Zone. Cari introduced herself, and the Board welcomed Ms. Roepke.

North Dakota Ag Coalition

Discussion was held on the possibility of the RRRRA applying to become a member of the North Dakota Ag Coalition as an Associate Member. Brian Fuder said the membership would provide valuable networking opportunities and could potentially garner support for RRRRA activities such as the RRRRA's efforts to update the NRCS PL-566 program.

A motion was made by John Finney, seconded by Bill Petersen and unanimously carried to approve and authorize the Executive Director to apply for membership to the North Dakota Ag Coalition as an Associate Member.

Draft 2024 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List

Mr. Fuder presented the draft 2024 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List. The list was compiled with input from various stakeholders and projects on the list have been prioritized based on construction readiness.

It was moved by Gary Thompson, seconded by Bill Petersen and unanimously carried to approve the 2024 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List.

Letter of support to the NRCS – dam rehabilitation projects

Christi Fisher discussed a request from the NRCS for a letter of support from the RRRRA to continue the Environmental Assessment (EA) process for the ongoing dam rehabilitation projects in the Red River Basin instead of completing the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. Shifting to the EIS process would delay the projects by an estimated one year.

It was moved by Gary Thompson, seconded by John Finney and unanimously carried to approve and authorize the Executive Director to sign a letter of support to the NRCS to continue the EA process for the ongoing dam rehabilitation projects in the Red River Basin.

WDAY Ag Director – Bridgette Readel

Bridgette Readel and Londa Hager introduced themselves and discussed opportunities for the RRRRA to reach a rural and urban audience through WDAY radio. Ms. Readel focuses on agriculture in the Red River Valley and hosts an afternoon radio show on WDAY. She said Mr. Fuder has been a guest on the show and WDAY radio can help the RRRRA with outreach and education on the RRRRA mission and help engage communities and advocate for support of retention projects in the Red River Basin. Mr. Fuder indicated working with WDAY radio be a great opportunity for informational outreach for the RRRRA. The Board discussed potential projects and topics to discuss through radio. The Board directed Mr. Fuder to meet with Ms. Readel to prepare a proposal regarding RRRRA informational outreach on WDAY radio and bring the proposal to a future meeting for further discussion.

Outreach – Red River Basin Flood Impacts Survey

Discussion was held on the results thus far of the Red River Basin Flood Impacts Survey. The survey helps the RRRRA gain insights into farmer and landowner views toward flood control in the Red River Basin in North Dakota and Minnesota. Mr. Fuder said the survey was promoted at the RRRRA booth at the 2023 Big Iron Farm Show and will be promoted during the Prairie Grains Conference to gather as many responses as possible. The Board noted of the survey responses thus far, there is interest from the respondents in paying for additional flood control measures. Mr. Fuder will report back at the next meeting on updated survey results.

PL-566 update

Mr. Fuder reported he met with the Midwest Council on Agriculture to discuss RRRRA's proposed updates to the NRCS PL-566 program. Meetings were then organized with U.S. House Agriculture Committee staff to discuss the proposed updates. The proposed changes have little to no cost associated with them, so Mr. Fuder remains optimistic the changes can be implemented. Mr. Fuder indicated he has also received assistance from the Metro Flood Diversion Authority regarding the proposed updates. The Board discussed the updates and additional discussion will be held at future meetings.

Advertising and outreach update

Mr. Fuder discussed developing an outreach curriculum that details topics the RRRRA wants to discuss through various advertising and outreach efforts. The Board directed Mr. Fuder to work with WDAY Ag Director Bridgette Readel to develop a proposal for RRRRA advertising and outreach efforts in 2024.

2023 Farm Bill update

Mr. Fuder noted the current Farm Bill was extended through 2024. A new Farm Bill is not anticipated to be implemented until potentially 2025.

Correspondence with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between USACE, NRCS and RRRRA

Mr. Fuder discussed an MOU with USACE, NRCS and RRRRA that stated the parties would collaborate to support retention projects in the Red River Basin. The MOU

expired in 2017 and the parties are currently evaluating the possibility of renewing the MOU.

Financial Report

It was moved by Gary Thompson and seconded by Bill Peterson to approve the Financial Report, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Amend 2023 Budget

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by John Finney to authorize the Secretary-Treasurer to amend the RRRA 2023 budget. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Appreciation of former Executive Director Keith Weston

The Board expressed thanks and appreciation and presented a plaque to former Executive Director Keith Weston for his work and dedication to the RRRA as Mr. Weston is retiring from the RRRA. Mr. Weston expressed his gratitude to the Board.

Agency and partner reports

Randy Gjestvang and Pat Fridgen updated the Board on the NDDWR. The NDDWR is currently accepting comments on the draft administrative codes and recently created a permit portal on their website for permit applicants. Mr. Gjestvang also updated the Board on recent activities of the Red River Joint Water Resource District including funding of 15 NDAWN all-season weather gauges in the Red River Basin in North Dakota as well as funding of a pilot study by the International Water Institute to improve crop acreage estimation for the economic analyses of two RCPP projects in the Red River Basin in North Dakota. Mr. Fridgen noted the NDDWR will also be sending out letters soon requesting proposed projects for the 2025-2027 biennium to be compiled into the NDDWR Water Development Plan. State Water Commissioner meetings are being scheduled for this summer across the state of North Dakota.

Ted Preister updated the Board on recent activities of the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC). The 41st Annual Red River Basin Land and Water International Summit Conference will be held January 16-18, 2024, at the West Fargo Convention Center in West Fargo, North Dakota. Mr. Preister noted the final draft of the Long Term Flood Solutions study will be presented at the conference. The RRBC was a recipient of a new NRCS Partnership Program grant regarding soil health in North Dakota. The RRBC is very excited about the opportunity.

Meeting schedule

The next RRRA meeting is scheduled for March 21, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota.

Biomass harvesting

Discussion was held on biomass harvesting included in several RCPP Plans in the Red River Basin in North Dakota in relation to reduction of phosphorous in water in the Basin. Rodger Olson suggested exploring other solutions to reduce phosphorous in water. Ms.

Fisher said there are a lot of inherent difficulties to reduce phosphorous in water in the Red River Basin such as the geology and soils in the Basin. Ms. Fisher suggested inviting someone to give a scientific presentation on what is know about phosphorous in the Red River Basin and how phosphorous moves through the river systems. Mr. Fuder also encouraged everyone to attend the presentation on biomass harvesting at the RRBC Conference in January.

Adjournment

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

APPROVED:

Josh Ihry
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Melissa Hinkemeyer
Secretary