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MINUTES OF VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL SPECIAL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
ORIGINATING AT THE EAGLES CLUB
EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA
WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 2024
10:00 A.M.

A special meeting of the Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) was held on July 31, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. at the Eagles Club in East Grand Forks, Minnesota.

Present were John Finney, Bill Petersen, Greg Holmvik, Board members; Theresa Ebbenga and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Brian Fuder, Executive Director; Melissa Hinkemeyer, Secretary-Treasurer; and those whose names appear on the attached roster. Board members Josh Ihry, Rodger Olson, and Ben Varnson were absent.

Brian Fuder welcomed everyone to the 2024 RRRA Partners Summit.

Mr. Fuder discussed the background of the RRRA, including information regarding the mission, purpose, and goals of the RRRA.

Partner updates

Randy Gjestvang presented an update on the Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD). The RRJWRD is a partner of the RRRA. The RRJWRD provides cost-share to member districts for detention projects. Mr. Gjestvang said the RRJWRD has cost-shared over \$4,000,000 for over \$42,000,000 worth of studies, and over \$16,000,000 for over \$72,000,000 worth of construction projects. There are 57 retention dams in the Red River Basin in North Dakota. Currently, there are several dam rehabilitation studies ongoing as well as watershed planning through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP). Other current projects the RRJWRD is involved in include the rehabilitation of Elm River Dams Nos. 1, 2 and 3 that is in construction, as well as the Lower Red River Regional Detention Study.

Mr. Gjestvang then discussed current challenges the RRJWRD and its member districts are facing, including increased construction costs, difficulty in reaching benefit:cost ratios to secure cost-share funding for projects, project funding in general, right of way acquisition, the ability to maintain existing water storage sites as infrastructure ages, and permitting concerns.

Rob Sip presented an update on the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB). The RRWMB is a partner of the RRRA. Mr. Sip reviewed the background of the RRWMB and discussed projects the RRWMB has completed including a recent LiDAR update, habitat and water quality programs, partnering in the International Water

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Institute's River Watch program, stream gauge monitoring with the U.S. Geological Survey, among others. Mr. Sip indicated the challenges the RRWMB are facing largely involve funding, as well as navigating permitting requirements of multiple agencies, inflation and contractor availability and readiness. With all the projects ready for funding combined, there is 1,000,000 acre-feet in storage waiting for the ability to construct. Mr. Sip further discussed the current known need for the Minnesota Flood Hazard Mitigation Program, amounting to \$130 million. Further discussion was held on the Flood Hazard Mitigation Program. Mr. Sip indicated in the future, the RRWMB would like to see changes made to the NRCS PL566 program, funding meeting demand for projects throughout Minnesota, and statewide short and long-term visions on flood storage in Minnesota. The RRWMB aims to protect city and rural infrastructure, farmsteads, social, natural, cultural, and financial capital.

Ted Preister presented an update on the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC) that is a unified voice for the Red River, encompassing North Dakota, Minnesota, and Manitoba, Canada. Mr. Preister discussed the RRBC's background, *Natural Resource Framework Plan*, and current projects, including the Netley-Libau marsh restoration pilot in Manitoba, soil health projects, modeling, nutrient credit offsets work, rural water expansion in western Minnesota, and a corporate supply shed collaboration project.

Farm Bill, PL566, and future funding of flood mitigation and water storage projects

Former Representative Collin Peterson presented on the Midwest Council on Agriculture non-profit multi-state membership coalition that he founded to advocate legislatively for strong agriculture and economic policy promoting long-term sustainability of the agriculture industry throughout the Midwest. The Council's activities include crop insurance improvements, addressing issues regarding livestock and ethanol, work on the Farm Bill, among others.

Former Representative Peterson then discussed the Farm Bill in more detail and indicated he does not anticipate a Farm Bill in 2024. Discussion was held on Farm Bill extensions, the upcoming 2024 election and the possibility of changes to various federal programs including PL566.

Mr. Fuder thanked former Representative Peterson for his work and the work of the Midwest Council on Agriculture.

WDAY Here We Grow program

Bridgette Readel encouraged Summit attendees to participate in all available opportunities to comment and share their interests in supporting retention and agriculture in the Red River Basin.

Ms. Readel then discussed the WDAY Here We Grow program that the RRRRA is a sponsor of. As a sponsor, the program helps provide outreach and education on the RRRRA to farming and non-farming consumers who listen to the program.

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Watershed plan updates and funding opportunities

Christi Fisher, NRCS State Conservation Engineer (ND) presented on RCPP projects and dam rehabilitation studies ongoing in the Red River Basin in North Dakota.

Dave Jones, NRCS State Conservation Engineer (MN) discussed opportunities available through the NRCS Small Watershed PL566 Program. There are no projects in Minnesota currently using the PL566 program. Mr. Jones recommend sponsors who intend to seek cost-share for dam rehabilitation projects start with a dam hazard re-classification assessment. Mr. Jones then discussed the PL566 program process and indicated project sponsors interested in learning more about the PL566 program should involve the NRCS early in the project planning process.

Facilitated discussion of issues and priorities for the future of water management in the Red River Basin

Moriya Rufer facilitated a discussion with attendees of issues and priorities for the future of water management in the Red River Basin. Issues identified include funding of projects, permitting concerns, right of way acquisition and others. Attendees indicated potential future priorities for the RRRRA include forming relationships with legislators, state and federal officials and stakeholders, securing federal funding for retention projects and positive legislative change related to retention, outreach and education efforts, and others.

Mr. Fuder thanked everyone for attending the 2024 RRRRA Partner Summit and providing input on the current challenges and opportunities and priorities for the future of water management in the Red River Basin.

Adjournment

There being no further business to be considered by the Board, the meeting adjourned without objection.

APPROVED:

Josh Ihry
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Melissa Hinkemeyer
Secretary-Treasurer