



NEW WATERSHED DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR EXCITED ABOUT MOVING FORWARD WITH FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION INITIATIVES

By Tim Halle, Editor,
Norman County Index

Steve Dalen, the new administrator of the Wild Rice Watershed District, talks passionately about district-wide flood damage reduction and working with people in the District.

"The job is proving more complicated than I envisioned," Dalen said after the first three months on the job. "But I love it, because I love the people. I really enjoy coming to work every day."

Dalen has a good background in how the watershed district operates, serving on the Board as a member from Clay County for seven years before seeking the administrator position. "I had decided to make a career change from farming before I decided to seek this job. I wanted a people job, and I think that is truly what this job is," he said. "I appreciate the Board's faith in me and I want to do the best job I can for all the people in the District."

Dalen said he promotes an open door policy, and said he believes that if you are straight with the people you work with, you build a level of trust. "I just try to tell it like it is, and I think most people can deal with that," he said.

It is also proving to be an exciting time at the Watershed District, with a number of flood damage reduction initiatives beginning to take shape. Most recently, the District's request to the Minnesota Legislature with funding help to create flood damage reduction projects on the South Branch of the Wild Rice River has received \$1.5 million in matching funds from the bonding bill just approved by the legislature. "The Board of Managers have done a great job at going out and working with legislators to find that funding and build relationships," he said.

The state funding will be available from the DNR for use on the South Branch. The funds will be used for developing plans for upstream retention projects and a downstream off-channel project, as well as land acquisition.



Steve Dalen is the new administrator of the Wild Rice Watershed District.

The initial focus will be on developing the upstream retention projects. The possible sites upstream have been narrowed from 14 sites to seven, with hope to develop five or six of these sites as water retention areas. The District has also done soil borings to learn if conditions support dam construction on an off-channel retention area downstream, just east of Borup. However, this is still in the early stages and no site decisions have been made at this time.

"We are planning landowner meetings on the lower sites, and we're getting legal descriptions to begin discussions with landowners in the upstream sites," Dalen said. "We hope to have a meeting with both groups later this summer."

Dalen said some of the questions still in front of the Board will be how the District can initiate a project of this magnitude and how to fund the local cost share portion of the project. Dalen said these are some answers they need before the District meets with landowners. Three million dollars also will not come close to funding the entire scope of this project, and discussions will continue for additional support as the initiative develops.

Also in the area of flood damage reduction projects, the District has pro-

vided information about the proposed Upper Felton Creek Project to Congressman Collin Peterson for inclusion in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Dalen said a question is if the project can pass through congressional committee without a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Study. However, the preliminary report completed on the initiative may be sufficient to have the project added to the WRDA bill. "If it is included and a bill is passed, it will still require the appropriation of funds. But it will be in the bill, which means it is alive," he said. "There is a strong interest by the landowners in the project area to see this project happen." Dalen said he feels hopeful about the future of the project and noted that Collin Peterson's staff have been extremely helpful in seeing it move forward.

On the mainstem of the Wild Rice River, Dalen said that letters have gone out to land owners where the District is requesting to do land borings on possible retention areas below the beach ridge. "The borings are just to look at the soils to know if it is worth our time to even consider that area," Dalen said of seeking retention areas.

The District is also waiting for the results of a sediment analysis on the Wild Rice River which is being conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Dalen noted that the District knows that a huge amount of downstream sedimentation has taken place, but the analysis will provide the actual information to back this up. This should be completed by this fall as part of the Corps Feasibility Study on the Wild Rice River. "The result will be providing us with the real data of what is happening related to sedimentation in the river and how we can look at controlling what is a major problem," Dalen noted.

Also related to the feasibility study, Dalen said that if the Board of Managers decide to go forward with the next phase of the study, it appears the federal fund-

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ing should be available to go to the next stage. The District's cost share of the feasibility study thus far has been covered by the State.

Another positive in the area of flood damage reduction is the interest by upstream landowners in the Green Meadow Dam project area for creating upstream impoundments in this area, Dalen said. "It is really good to see the land owners come to the District and use it as the tool it is meant to be to assist in creating this kind of flood damage reduction projects," he said.

TWO RIVERS WD

The Two Rivers WD reported on the Ross No. 7 project. The district has received verbal approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regarding their wetland permit, and is awaiting written notification. Notice and approval has been received from the Roseau Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) under the Wetland Conservation Act. Roseau County will have a public hearing on July 11 regarding the district's petition to impound water on Roseau County Ditch No. 13. Two other permits are needed, including a DNR Dam Safety permit and the MPCA's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Once the Roseau County public hearing has been conducted, the district will advertise for bids. Phase 1 construction is expected to begin early fall.

The district received a presentation from the University of North Dakota - Energy & Environmental Research Center (EERC) regarding a trial site of the Waffle plan that was

conducted in Kittson County, within the district. The EERC has offered to donate the culvert material and equipment that was used on the site if the district would be willing to assume operation of the site in the future. A culvert through Kittson County Road No. 19 was altered by outfitting it with a stand pipe and control valve. The Kittson County Highway Department suggested that the district seriously consider the offer. A decision will be made by the Board of Managers within the next couple of months.

RED LAKE WD

The Red Lake WD reported on the Grand Marais Sub-Watershed Creek Project 60 project. The Board of Managers opened bids for the construction of the Euclid East and Brandt Impoundments at their regularly scheduled board meeting on May 25, 2006. Low bid for the Euclid East Impoundment in the amount of \$1,574,672.14 was awarded to R.J. Zavoral & Sons, Inc. from East Grand Forks, MN. The Engineer's estimate for this impoundment was \$2,010,172.95. Low bid for the Brandt Impoundment in the amount of \$1,980,388.01 was also awarded to R.J. Zavoral & Sons, Inc. The Engineer's estimate for this impoundment was \$2,354,268.50.

Construction on Euclid East started on June 14, 2006. Plans are to begin construction on the Brandt Impoundment as soon as the USACE permit has been approved. The 30-day public review of the USACE permit ended June 3, 2006 and the district is optimistic that a permit is forthcoming.

RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

At its regularly scheduled June meeting, the RRWMB:

- *Received a report from Naomi Erickson, Administrator.*
- *Authorized a funding request received from the Red River Basin Commission for \$5,000 relative to the Red River Basin Mainstem Modeling effort.*
- *Received a legislative update from Ray Bohn, Media & Government Affairs.*
- *Authorized a committee consisting of Ray Bohn, Jerome Deal, Dan Money and Naomi Erickson to develop recommendations for retaining a Public Information firm for the board.*



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