



WILD RICE WATERSHED DISTRICT “READY TO BUILD” FLOOD PROTECTION PROJECTS ON SOUTH BRANCH WITH FUNDING

Local funding for flood prevention projects will be the next major hurdle for the Wild Rice Watershed District Board of Managers as the District moves closer to construction of flood reduction projects in the Watershed District. That was a message at the Wild Rice Watershed District’s Time to Build II meeting held in Ada.

The meeting was well attended, and people heard that the District has two projects moving towards a final hearing in 2009. Engineer Jerry Bents explained that these projects are Phase #1 of the Project No. 42 initiative on the South Branch.

The projects came about following a long effort, working with the Wild Rice Watershed District Project Team, to look at potential water retention sites in the South Branch watershed.

As envisioned, Project No. 42 will ultimately include five or more upstream storage sites above the historic beach ridge, and a large off-channel site below the beach ridge. The purpose is to control flood water from approximately 210 square miles of the 250 square mile South Branch drainage area, and work towards a 30-40% reduction in the discharge at the outlet of the South Branch, as an effort to reduce flood damages and erosion problems.

Phase #1 engineer reports have been completed on two of these projects. They include a project to enhance the Becker Dam Project to increase its flood water holding capacity, and a CD No. 18 tributary project site.

The proposed CD No. 18 project is located primarily in Sections 10 and 11 in Goose Prairie Township in Clay County and would involve construction of a gated flood control reservoir to hold flood water from the 11.7 square mile drainage area. Total capacity would be 1,760 acre-feet of water. Probable cost is approximately \$4.3 million, with a local share estimated at approximately \$1.4 million. The District would seek funding help for the project from the State and the Red River Watershed Management Board.

The other project that will go to public hearing in 2009 involves enhancing the Upper Becker Dam, located in Spring Creek and Riceville Townships in Becker County. The project would involve rais-



Construction of flood reduction projects was the topic of a panel discussion at the Wild Rice Watershed District’s Time to Build II meeting held recently in Ada.

ing the dam elevation by roughly 15 feet. That would increase the capacity of the project from approximately 2,000 acre-feet of ungated storage to 10,400 acre-feet of gated flood water storage. Total cost is estimated at \$10.6 million, with a local cost share estimated at approximately \$2 million. The District would seek cost share funding from the State and the Red River Watershed Management Board.

If both Phase #1 projects are constructed, Bents said it will control approximately 50 square miles or about 1/5 of the drainage area of the South Branch.

He added that when you look at the overall effect of both projects at the Wild Rice River at Hendrum, the project would control about three percent of the area contributing to peak flows on the Wild Rice River at Hendrum. The projects would have the capability of holding 12,000 acre-feet of flood water, which is more flood storage than the District currently has in combined projects.

While there is funding assistance for flood reduction projects available from the State and the Red River Watershed Management Board, it will also take a local share. Administrator Steve Dalen explained that over the past year the WRWD Board has been working with county commissioners on developing an ordinance for a fee based system (called a water management district or WMD) that would be charged to property owners to raise the money to pay for the local share of flood damage reduction project costs. This approach would spread the local share over the entire watershed district, with property assess-

ments based on land type and run off. There is no consensus among counties on this approach. The traditional way to raise local funding is a special assessment district based on benefiting area, which is done on ditch projects.

The largest contributor to downstream flooding is the Wild Rice mainstem and the District continues to seek congressional approval for funds to go forward with the project approved in the 2008 WRDA bill to have the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers look at alternatives to the Twin Valley Dam project. Representatives from Senator Klobuchar and Congressman Collin Peterson reported at the meeting that congressional leaders support this project, and continue to seek funding. It was noted that there will also likely be federal funding for U.S. Army Corps of Engineer initiatives in the stimulus package passed by the House and being considered in the Senate.

Other future projects include looking at a way to increase the channel conveyance through setback levees in a corridor project along the Wild Rice River. However, holding additional water in the channel will also have negative impacts downstream. That means it has to be tied to upstream storage. This is being looked at on the Wild Rice River as phase two of the feasibility study with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Phase one showed that the project would have positive flood control and natural resource benefits along the river, but have negative impacts downstream.

The projects currently nearing possible construction were developed with the assistance of the Wild Rice Watershed Project Team, and Ron Harnack from the Red River Watershed Manage-

RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

At its regularly scheduled February meeting, the RRWMB:

- Received a report from Ron Harnack, Project Coordinator.
- Discussed the Governors' budget with John Jaschke, Executive Director – Board of Water & Soil Resources and Kent Lokkesmoe, Director – Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Waters.
- Received a report from Naomi Erickson, Administrator.
- Distributed a report from Mark Meister, Public Information Officer.
- Discussed the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) proposal of the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC) with Lance Yohe, Executive Director.
- Authorized a resolution submitted by Wayne Goeken in conjunction with a grant application for the Water Quality Project Monitoring initiative.
- Distributed the Step I submittal of the Upper Becker Dam Enhancement Project of the Wild Rice WD.

ment Board noted that working cooperatively is the right direction in finding flooding solutions. As a little history, Harnack noted that flood prevention projects up and down the valley ground to a halt in the early 1990s as a result of concerns raised by regulatory agencies and environmental groups, which led to an Environmental Impact Statement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and DNR that placed a moratorium on all new flood control project construction. After the 1997 flood in the Red River Valley, the groups sat down and developed a mediation agreement which led to the Flood Damage Reduction (FDR) project team concept.



Ron Harnack,
RRWMB
Project
Coordinator

problems and develop solutions. While everyone may not reach consensus, they

“The mediation process and project teams have allowed projects to effectively move forward. It provides the framework for land owners, local interests, state and local government, regulators and non regulators, to sit down as project teams, to assess the

can reach an informed understanding about how to move forward in reducing damages in their areas,” Harnack said.

The mediation process also assures that a project is practical, reasonable and permissible. “Don’t get caught up in this non-permissible approach to doing business,” Harnack said. “You deal with those issues up front, instead of at the end, rather than saying we are going to run the DNR over or run the Corps of Engineers over. We may have been able to use political clout to do that in the past, but those days are gone. It just doesn’t work. And we throw good money after bad trying to make that work.”

Harnack said he didn’t believe there will ever be total consensus on any flood prevention project. “I don’t believe there is such a thing. However, I do believe we can have informed understanding, where individuals feel while it’s not their preferred option, or be strong advocates of supporting it. But they are not standing in the way of it moving forward, because they recognize the greater good to the whole,” he said.



Dave Vipond,
Wild Rice
Watershed
District
manager

Wild Rice Watershed Manager Dave Vipond noted that seeing the whole, or the big picture in flood protection is the challenge that faces the Board as they move forward with flood damage reduction. “That’s what we’re talking about, creating a long-term

difference for people down stream and improvements to land near the project. That’s why we’re talking about CD No. 18 and Upper Becker Dam, of Project No.42. They are not popular projects locally and people don’t like that ‘it’s in my neighborhood, it’s on my land.’ Sometimes you have to look at the big picture, and that’s the challenge of being on this Board, what kind of difference can you really make and how can you make that difference,” Vipond said.

This article was reprinted courtesy of the Norman County Index, Timothy A. Halle.

The 11th Annual Joint Conference of the Red River Watershed Management Board and the Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group

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