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NEWS & VIEWS

RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD

USING FARMLAND FOR FLOOD CONTROL BENEFITS MANY

The board members of the Bois de Sioux Watershed District in Wheaton are proud of their flood control projects. Two, in particular, bring smiles to board members' faces and to landowners, farmers, and citizens of Traverse, Grant, Wilkin, Big Stone, and Otter Tail counties.

The North Ottawa Impoundment and the Redpath Impoundment are shining examples of how farmland can be converted into flood mitigation systems. Where once the farmland that now makes up the North Ottawa and Redpath impoundments yielded beans or corn, when the projects are completed they will potentially hold and divert up to 30,000 acre-feet of water during spring runoff. This means farmers will be able to begin their operations earlier. As a result, impoundment systems will benefit the agricultural livelihoods and economies of the entire area.

The conversion of perfectly good farmland into water storage impoundments seems odd, but according to Ron Harnack, Project Coordinator of the Red River Watershed Management



The North Ottawa Impoundment Project storing approximately 6,000 acre-feet of water, April 2009.

Board, the sacrifice pays off. Harnack points out that the impoundments allow for agriculture, the lifeblood of local economies, to move forward. Without the water storage facilities, agriculture is halted and the region's economy potentially stalls—especially in rural Minnesota. “Converting the farmland into water storage impoundments makes economic sense,” notes Bois de Sioux Watershed Board Member Jerome Deal. “The water that is held back, means the economy of the region can

move forward,” says Deal.

Converting rich and potentially profitable farmland into water storage systems is a difficult pill to swallow, says Bois de Sioux Watershed District engineer, Charlie Anderson. But ultimately, once the impoundments are completed, they will allow for earlier planting in the spring and potentially greater harvests in the fall. “The impoundments are designed to hold a lot of water for long periods of time. In the event of a major flood event, this not only keeps water off of

production fields, but out of towns, neighborhoods, and businesses,” says Anderson.

Bois de Sioux Watershed District Administrator, Jon Roeschlein stresses that a lot of hard work, sacrifice, and commitment by board members and citizens of the Bois de Sioux watershed district have made for successful implementation and continued development of the North Ottawa and Redpath projects. “The neat part is that the projects protect man in our watershed district, and since everything flows north around here, the projects benefit the whole [Red River] valley.”

Roeschlein notes that the North Ottawa project is ready and able to collect water from parts of the watershed but will not be fully operational until spring 2010. The Redpath project is in the acquisition and design stages. The Bois de Sioux Watershed District is currently working to secure funding and land rights for the Redpath project. According to Roeschlein, “The sellers are willing to sell right now so we just need to line up the dollars, and that looks promising right now.”

RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

At its regularly scheduled May meeting, the RRWMB:

- Received a report from Mark Meister, Public Information Officer and designated the Public Information Committee, along with Administrators Jesme and Drees, to assist with the planning effort for the joint annual meeting scheduled for July with the North Dakota Red River Joint Water Resource Board.
- Authorized \$2,000 for a collaborative effort with the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) regarding a video project public information initiative.
- Received an update from Julie Goehring, Communications Coordinator, Red River Basin Commission (RRBC), regarding the board meeting and tour of the Devils Lake Basin scheduled for June 3-4, 2009. The tour will be conducted on Wednesday, June 3rd, with the board meeting scheduled for Thursday, June 4th in Grand Forks, ND.
- Authorized a resolution regarding a plan for funding priorities for the following flood damage reduction projects: Redpath, Hay Creek/Norland, and Agassiz Valley.
- Received a report from Henry Van Offelen and Linda Kingery regarding a plan for strategic wetland restoration through the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources.
- Received a report from Naomi Erickson, Administrator.
- Authorized the Step II submittal of the Upper Becker Dam Enhancement Project of the Wild Rice WD.

EVENTS COMING UP

The next meeting of the RRWMB will be on Tuesday, June 16, 2009, at 9:30 a.m. at the Red Lake Watershed District, 1000 Pennington Ave. S, Thief River Falls, MN. Following the board meeting, the Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group will meet at 1:00 p.m.

WATERSHED DISTRICT DEVELOPMENTS

ROSEAU RIVER WD

The Roseau River WD reported that the District office has relocated to one block west of the previous office to the former Roseau County Law Enforcement Center.

The final engineering plans have been completed for the Hay Creek/Norland Project. The District is awaiting permits for the project and plans to begin construction of Phase I this summer.

MIDDLE SNAKE TAMARAC RIVERS WD

The Middle Snake Tamarac Rivers WD reported that the 2008 construction season ended with approximately 85% of Phase I completed on the Agassiz Valley Water Resource Management Project (AVWRMP). The District anticipates that work remaining on Phase I along with Phase III (wetland mitigation) will be completed this summer.

The bid opening for Phase II of the AVWRMP was conducted on April 16, 2009. The District accepted a bid from Davidson Construction for this phase of the project which should be completed this construction season.

RED LAKE WD

The Red Lake WD reported on the Grand Marais Outlet Restoration Project. The District received a 50/50 grant from the Working Lands Initiative of \$128,878.52. The grant will be used to assist in the acquisition of 450 acres of perpetual easements required in the project area and will augment the Re-invest in Minnesota (RIM) easement funding that was previously awarded to the project. The Grand Marais Creek Joint Powers Board of Managers plans to present a Step I submittal for the project in the near future.

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