



ACCELERATING FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION PROJECTS IN VALLEY FOCUS OF MEETING

As part of the Red River Watershed Management Board's (RRWMB) continuing strategy of support for local and basin-wide flood damage reduction, a special meeting and presentation was held for the Sand Hill River Watershed District Board of Managers in July. The meeting's emphasis was on the 20% goal of reducing the flood peaks on the Red River of the North as established by the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC). The Project Planning Tool, a newly developed web-based computer technology to more effectively and efficiently plan flood damage reduction projects, was also presented. The tool will be one of many decision support tools available on the Red River Basin Decision Information Network (www.rrbdin.org).

Led by Chuck Fritz of the International Water Institute, Charlie Anderson of engineering firm Widseth Smith & Noltling, Henry VanOffelen of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA), and Project Coordinator Ron Harnack of the RRWMB, the presenters reviewed the history and rationale for the Red River basin 20% flow reduction goal, emerging opportunities for federal and state funding support to build and operate flood damage reduction projects, and the potential for watershed districts to streamline project plan-

ning and development using the Project Planning Tool. Funding for the outreach effort comes from the RRWMB.

The Project Planning Tool is an online application using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and available geospatial information (information that has a physical location on the earth's surface). LiDAR is a sophisticated optical remote sensing technology that yields detailed elevation data over large areas. The tool uses this information to help managers define the local problem, develop goals, determine potential water retention sites, and evaluate the potential site or sites for their effectiveness in attaining the goals at some downstream location.

Fritz said that the information provided by the Project Planning Tool "has been developed for your use at the local watershed district level, to aid managers and the public to make better, more informed local decisions."

Fritz's outreach team plans to share their presentation throughout the Red River basin to assist watershed managers as they work to solve local problems while addressing the 20% flow reduction goals for the Red River basin. The RRWMB's goal is to "accelerate development and deployment of data and tools needed to propose at least one flood damage reduction project

in each Minnesota watershed by the end of 2012."

Ron Harnack said that while the farm bill is not yet finalized, the U.S. Senate has passed their version of a bill providing about \$100 million/year to 10 major river basin authorities and the U.S. House Agriculture Committee has passed a similar version. The full U.S. House has yet to act on the farm bill. He added that more money may be coming to the table which could include ~ \$15-20 million for Minnesota and North Dakota via the farm bill and with matching state and local funds this amount could increase to ~ \$30-40 million/year for projects in the Red River basin. Harnack urged local watershed managers to be the leaders in moving forward by getting projects "in the queue." He added that "without your support and commitment it won't get done."

Charlie Anderson reviewed the recently completed HEC-HMS modeling effort and how it will be used to evaluate project effectiveness in addressing the mainstem 20% flow reduction goal. Anderson advised the Sand Hill leaders to "find projects that offer multi-purpose opportunities including local benefits and mainstem reductions."

In developing projects, local watershed leaders know the difficulty that accompanies the permitting required to satisfy

various regulatory agencies. Henry VanOffelen noted that the Project Planning Tool "helps you document your process, which is a great benefit for navigating the permitting process." VanOffelen presented the "permit complexity" layer that is part of the Project Planning Tool. Proposed projects located near streams or wetlands, or areas of biodiversity significance conceivably may require additional mitigation costs. The Project Planning Tool generates a "Project Risk Report" that identifies potential permitting challenges should the District choose to move forward with a project in a specific location.

Concluding the meeting, Fritz said his group's intention was to "come and work with your project team, so that by year's end you (watershed managers) would be moving aggressively toward selection of a project area and moving through the process to get it established."

EVENTS

The next meeting of the RRWMB will be on Tuesday, August 21, 2012 at 9:30 a.m. at the Wild Rice Watershed District, 11 5th Avenue East, Ada, MN.



WATERSHED DISTRICT DEVELOPMENTS

RED LAKE WATERSHED DISTRICT

Erosion Control Project CD#20/SD#83 is a joint project between the Marshall County Ditch Authority, Marshall County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Red Lake Watershed District (RLWD). Project funding comes from a grant approved by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Clean Water Fund. The project will reduce sediment being delivered into the Thief River Tributary via stream bank and field erosion. Construction on this project is nearly complete.

A public hearing for the Grand Marais Creek Outlet Restoration Project 60F has been set for 11 am, August 23, 2012 at the RLWD office.

Construction continues on the Grand Marais Creek Cut Channel Stabilization Project 60 FF. On July 9 the RLWD office was informed that the trench on the south side of Grand Marais Creek yielded abundant bison bone at a depth of 2.8 meters in the palaeosol (buried soil strata). Some of the bone is burnt or partially burnt, and bone fragments indicate that the animals were being cooked at the location. Given this information, a Phase III mitigation or avoidance recommendation will be forwarded to the USACE.

The RLWD in partnership with the U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) was awarded a \$400,000 Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) grant which will be used to continue the post hydrological water quality study of Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge.

WILD RICE WD

The Wild Rice Watershed District (WRWD) board approved assisting the City of Halstad in reviewing FEMA certification for their community ring dike.

An engineer's report on the ring dike for the City of Shelly is nearing completion which will be followed up with a Public Hearing in late summer or early fall.

Hydrologist Chris Ellison of the Minnesota Water Science Center provided a summary to the WRWD board of data collection from a four-year study on the impacts of sedimentation on the Wild Rice and South Branch of the Wild Rice River.

ROSEAU RIVER WD

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has supplied a preliminary engineering design and concept of the proposed Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) project for the Arpin Impoundment that includes two phases. Landowner meetings will be held to discuss Phase I of the project.

Administrator Rob Sando has completed the annual review of the ditch inspections and supplied a map for spraying to the county.

HDR Engineering continues to work on the preliminary engineering plans for the Roseau River Wildlife Management Area (RRWMA) project. The USACE has completed the geo-technical assessment for the project and their report is forthcoming. A project team meeting held recently focused on the natural resource enhancement (NRE) concerns related to the project.

RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

At its regularly scheduled July meeting, the RRWMB:

- *Heard Project Coordinator Ron Harnack share information related to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) Regional General Permit; specifically that the comment period related to the issuance of that directive has been extended 60 days. Mr. Harnack indicated that there is a need to better define gaps in wetland coverage and that future communication with the USACE may be needed to achieve that. As currently written the Regional General Permit represents more permitting than is in place now; consequently it needs revision reflecting a basin wide perspective.*
- *Mark Deutschman of Houston Engineering covered the programming background of the Phase 6 tool and the capabilities it represents (see related feature story in this issue). Deutschman noted that there will be costs incurred to scale up the tool for use over the entire Red River basin. That total cost is unknown. A near-term decision by the RRWMB is to fund refining the tool, including further data assembly, for the development of a sub-watershed scale for the Sand Hill River Watershed District.*
- *Lori Dowling, Regional Director of the Bemidji office of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) attended the July meeting and shared her conservation background and role and responsibility working for the agency. She will focus on community outreach and water management issues in the Red River basin. Dowling also discussed the pending selection of a Flood Damage Reduction Work Group coordinator, a position financed by the DNR.*

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