



## FARM BILL IMPORTANT TO RED RIVER BASIN RETENTION EFFORTS

### PETERSON SPEAKS TO RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY BOARD

Urging members of the Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) to “get on the ball,” Congressman Collin Peterson (D-Minn) addressed the January meeting of the RRRA board with a clear message that focused on the importance of readiness for Red River Basin retention projects.

With a mission to achieve joint, comprehensive and strategic coordination of retention projects while securing federal funding to off-set local costs in the Red River Valley, the RRRA meeting attendees were an attentive audience. The RRRA is comprised of member water management organizations from North Dakota and Minnesota.

After outlining the current farm bill budget process, Peterson said he anticipated that the money will be “there for the taking,” and that “you need to get projects ready to go.”

Retention is considered an important component to flood control in the Red River Basin, which has experienced significant flooding events over the years.

The money in question is \$238 million for fiscal year 2012, beginning in October. That allocation would be

available to five regional water entities on a competitive basis. Those five include the RRRA, the Florida Everglades, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes and Ogallala Aquifer regions.

Peterson indicated that the RRRA would do well in that competitive process if projects were ready.

The federal money is linked to the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) wetland reserve program.

Peterson said that the initial hope of securing \$50 million for Red River Basin water projects was no longer realistic in light of the efforts in Congress to achieve significant budget cuts.

In addition the Congressman provided background on the farm bill process to date. He said that the congressional budget “Super Committee” designed to seek federal budget cuts fell apart, giving a context to the proceeding that signaled the usual committee process was less than certain. Instead, Peterson said the farm bill may be subject to an “open rule,” which is a procedural rule in the U.S. House of Representatives that permits floor amendments to appropriations bills.

That, said Peterson, can lead to “all kinds of mischief.”

Even so, he said the bill would be completed at some



*Reps. Rick Berg (right) and Frank Lucas (next) host a roundtable discussion in Fargo, ND.*

point. And Peterson added that “the sooner you can get your act together and projects going, the better.”

The Congressman concluded his comments by suggesting that RRRA supporters attend the farm bill roundtable hosted by Rep. Rick Berg (R-ND) and House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-Okla) in Fargo on January 12, 2012. (See story this page.)

“Go to that meeting and show grassroots support,” said Peterson.

### AG COMMITTEE MEMBERS BERG AND LUCAS HOST ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Although the current farm bill process is occurring in a “difficult environment” that includes an emphasis on trimming spending, Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-Okla) said “ag is the only entity to come together in a bipartisan manner to write a bill and agree to federal budget cuts.”

Both Lucas and Rep. Rick Berg (D-ND) emphasized the need to come up with agriculture policy that would both engender support from diverse groups and result in a bill President Obama would sign.

Lucas and Berg held a roundtable discussion at the Fargo Holiday Inn before a group of about 30 attendees. After an introduction, the two

Congressmen invited questions and participation from the group.

Jim Lyons, the North Dakota co-chair of the Red River Retention Authority, thanked Reps. Berg and Lucas as well as Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn) for their work to support the farm bill and stated that water retention funding was vital to people in the Red River Basin.

“My farm was surrounded by water,” said Lyons, referring to a past high-water event. “Infrastructure is important” in providing flood protection,” he said, imploring the two Agriculture Committee members to “please stay the course” with respect to farm bill water project funding.



*Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn) at the January Red River Retention Authority Board meeting.*

### EVENTS COMING UP

The next meeting of the RRWMB will be on Tuesday, February 21, 2012 at 9:30 a.m. at the Red Lake Watershed District, 1000 Pennington Ave. S., Thief River Falls, MN.

The 14th Joint Annual Conference of the Red River Watershed Management Board and the Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group will be held at the Courtyard by Marriott, Moorhead, Minnesota on March 13-14, 2012.

## WATERSHED DISTRICT DEVELOPMENTS

### RED LAKE WD

The Red Lake WD held a project team meeting in January for the "Cut Channel" and Grand Marais Outlet Restoration. The discussion included channel design, funding updates, permitting and an update on Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) sign-up.

In District news, it is anticipated that Clearwater County will have named a replacement for outgoing member Kelly Nordlund sometime in February 2012.

A meeting to utilize a collaborative approach to project-related surface water quality issues was held in January that included the East and West Polk Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Watershed District Administrators of Polk County, and Brian Dwight of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. The intent is that information shared between the respective entities will be used in the Polk County Water Plan as well as for use in grant submissions through the Minnesota Clean Water Legacy funding.

A forum titled "Is the Legacy Amendment Money Going to Projects and Programs as Voters intended?" was held January 5, 2012 at the Crown Plaza Hotel in St. Paul. The Red Lake Watershed District was asked to participate in the roundtable that was part of the 2012 Stakeholders' Forum on Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment Funding. Along with five other panelists, District Administrator Myron Jesme represented the Red Lake WD, answering questions and providing information on the types of projects that were funded as part of the Clean Water Legacy funding.

### ROSEAU RIVER WD

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has confirmed support in the amount of \$50,000 for the preliminary engineering study of the Roseau River Wildlife Management Area project.

The Roseau River Watershed District Board of Managers sent a request to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for consideration of a proposed adaptive management plan for wetland mitigation requirements for the Hay Creek/Norland project.

The cleaning of 450 linear feet downstream of the Wilson Road culvert on Mickinock Creek occurred this fall at the Palmville flood damage reduction project site. An additional 100 feet upstream from the culvert has just been confirmed for cleaning.

The remaining Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) work on the West Interceptor Project, Hay Creek/Norland project and State Ditch No. 51 will be completed this winter and next summer.

### WILD RICE WD

Verbal agreements on land acquisition with the three largest landowners related to the Community Ring Dike project have been reached.

The Ditch Modernization Grant from Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has allowed the district to complete approximately 70% of record digitizing. Plans are to complete the remaining records this year. Later a link will be added to the WRWD website providing for public access, transparency to district processes and efficiency to operations.

## RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

*At its regularly scheduled January meeting, the RRWMB:*

- *Conducted the annual board organization. RRWMB officer positions are as follows: President- John Finney, Joe River Watershed District; Vice President- Orville Knott, Red Lake Watershed District; Secretary- Jerome Deal, Bois de Sioux Watershed District; Treasurer- Dan Wilkens, Sand Hill Watershed District*
- *Received a report from RRWMB Administrator Naomi Erickson which included information on the 14th Joint Annual Conference to be held March 13-14 at the Courtyard by Marriott and Conference Center, Moorhead, MN and also a summary of the Red River Retention Authority Meeting which featured U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn) and his discussion on the current farm bill process in Congress.*
- *Received a report from Public Information Officer Jeff Nyquist that included a summary of the RRWMB Public Information Committee January meeting.*
- *Received a report from Project Coordinator Ron Harnack. Ron addressed the 20% flow reduction plan strategy and noted that Bois de Sioux has completed their assessment, which was done as a pilot project by the Red River Basin Commission. He also suggested that since Charlie Anderson provided the lead on that work that it would be useful to have him provide assistance to other watershed districts as they begin their individual plans.*

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