



RRWMB DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS MEET TO REVIEW WRP PROGRAM

District Administrators from the respective watershed districts of the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB) met Friday, March 2nd in Fertile, MN to review the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Keith Weston, Red River Basin Coordinator from the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA/NRCS) co-facilitated the meeting with Sand Hill Watershed District Administrator Dan Wilkens. Peter Mead, Water Resources Staff member of USDA/NRCS, accompanied Mr. Weston.

The focus of the three-hour long session was to provide background on the WRP, and to address questions as to how to best proceed with the program. At the behest of the board of managers of the RRWMB, the meeting served as a way for district administrators to share a platform for voicing their concerns, opinions and questions about WRP from their vantage point as the administrative leaders of their respective watershed districts.

The WRP is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. A financial incentive is offered for a conservation easement.

The NRCS administers this USDA program. Funding for the WRP is through the Conservation portion of the Farm Bill.

WRP funding is a source of federal dollars to secure water retention projects in the Red River Basin. The Red River Basin Commission has identified retention as a means to reduce flood potential, and a goal of one million acre-feet of storage or a 20 percent reduction in the peak flows from tributaries of the Red River of the North has been established.

In response to the WRP's guidelines, Weston said that although not perfect WRP does represent the only available program with significant funding available. As such, it can be an important approach to leverage federal funding for a percentage of an eligible project.

Concerns from the attending district administrators about the program ranged from the policy issue that excludes watershed districts from the WRP definition of eligible landowners, the prohibitive time element of obtaining necessary easements, to the balancing of various goals to meet program specifications.

Out of some uncertainty as to how a watershed entity can best use WRP in their overall flood retention plans, a degree

of agreement emerged around the following:

1) WD's can develop projects that incorporate WRP into land acquisition and construction costs on a select basis with a proper measure of collaboration.

2) With an intention to use WRP, WD's can execute preliminary engineering studies/reports identifying projects they wish to do; with that background and in concert with WRP processes, the WD then may enter into the program.

3) Easement processes can be time-consuming but partner entities (such as BWSR and NRCS) are interested in strategic approaches that shorten this up.

4) The WRP program, in select cases, may provide significant cost savings to WD's with respect to Natural Resource Enhancement (NRE) goals of a watershed district.

5) There may be opportunities to go back to established projects to leverage WRP funding for retention measures, a possibility requiring review by the necessary parties.

6) WD's role in WRP projects should be oriented in a manner which places them as the lead element to a project, coordinating with other entities and facilitating the process which achieves end results compatible to its goals as

well as program mandates.

While acknowledging that WRP was a tool available for flood control, an observation made by one participant was that it is important that communication about WRP does not characterize the program as something that will "do everything." The consensus was that a better description was "it's one tool in the toolbox."

Keith Weston emphasized the value in getting started by finding a project for this year's funding, and suggested assembling a list of five to six projects that may have potential as good ones that align with WD goals.

One district administrator offered the apt metaphor that "we need to get our feet wet, so-to-speak. Every site is going to be different."

EVENTS COMING UP

The next meeting of the RRWMB will be on Tuesday, March 20, 2012 at 9:30 a.m. at the Wild Rice Watershed District, 11 5th Avenue East, Ada, MN.



WATERSHED DISTRICT DEVELOPMENTS

ROSEAU RIVER WD

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 on the Hay Creek/Norland project. The three main areas of concern include overall mitigation feasibility, short and long-term maintenance costs and objectives of the District. The District is awaiting a reply.

The District received the Minnesota DNR revised joint powers agreement for the Palmville project which is being reviewed by the district's attorney. In a related matter, the District received an amended DNR permit to clean an additional 100 feet upstream of the Mickinock Creek, Wilson Road culvert.

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) met in February. Discussion of the 12 members included the current rules of the District and ongoing and proposed projects. A summer 2012 tour of the Hay Creek/Norland project area is planned for the group.

HDR Engineering has begun onsite surveying on the Roseau River Wildlife Management Area project.

A project team meeting was held February 24th at the District office to discuss the Hay Creek Headwaters project in the Beltrami Island State Forest (BISF) as well as the second location at BISF, the Beaver Township site.

WILD RICE WD

The Wild Rice Watershed District Board of Managers awarded contracts to R.J. Zavoral Construction (East Grand Forks) on Project 30 and to All Seasons Construction for bridge removal and replacement (JD Lateral 1).

Agreements in principle on community ring dikes have been reached with the three largest landowners around the city of Shelly to either purchase or do land swaps to address their concerns.

The District continues to have ongoing dialogue with NRCS staff on both WRP applications and potential use of that program in retention projects.

Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) permits for State Highway 9 in Ada and State Highway 113 from Waubun to Mahnommen County 4 have been approved.

RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

At its regularly scheduled February meeting, the RRWMB:

- *Discussed the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).*
- *Discussed the petition to adjoin the Lower Otter Tail Watershed within the Buffalo-Red River Watershed District.*
- *Received a report from Chuck Fritz of the International Water Institute (IWI) that included a reminder of the River Watch Forum (March 13th at University of Minnesota- Crookston), an update on river gages that possess new monitoring capacities funded by the MPCA (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency), and information on the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Grant submitted by IWI in the amount of \$194,000 which was approved.*
- *Received a report from RRWMB Administrator Naomi Erickson that included information on the reallocation of surplus ring dike funds.*
- *Received a Technical and Advisory Committee (TAC) report from Dan Thul.*

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Your comments and contributions are always welcome. If you are receiving this newsletter and are not currently a member of a governing unit in the Red River Basin, please notify us and provide the name of the appropriate person to be added to our mailing list. News & Views, c/o RRWMB, P.O. Box 763, Detroit Lakes, MN 56502-0763, Phone: (218) 844-6166; Fax: (218) 844-6167.