

MINUTES OF SPECIAL VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
ORIGINATING AT THE CASS COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
WEST FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA
DECEMBER 15, 2021

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on December 15, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.

Participating were Gary Thompson, John Finney, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Bill Petersen, Ben Varnson, Board members; Theresa Ebbenga and Pat Fridgen, non-voting members; Keith Weston, Executive Director; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Nina Stone, Accountant; Melissa Maertens, Administrative Assistant; Mary Podoll, Christi Fisher, Rita Harmsen-Sveen and Cassie Ahmed, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota Department of Water Resources (NDDWR); Rob Sip, Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB); Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.; Bruce Anderson, Barnes County Water Resource District; Dan Jacobson, Southeast Cass Water Resource District; and William A. Hejl, Rush River Water Resource District.

Gary Thompson called the meeting to order and introductions were made.

Agenda

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Ben Varnson and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda.

Minutes

It was moved by Greg Holmvik, seconded by Ben Varnson and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the September 15, 2021, meeting.

Financial Report

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Greg Holmvik to approve the Financial Report, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Bills

It was moved by Ben Varnson and seconded by Bill Petersen to approve the wire transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Amend 2021 Budget

It was moved by John Finney and seconded by Rodger Olson to authorize the Secretary-Treasurer to amend the RRRA 2021 budget. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Set regular meeting dates for 2022

It was moved by Ben Varnson and seconded by John Finney to set the following as the regular meetings dates, times and places for the RRRRA in 2022:

- March 16 at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota;
- June 15 at 9:00 a.m. at the RRWMB office in Ada, Minnesota
- September 14 at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota; and
- December 14 at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota

Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

NRCS report

Cassie Ahmed introduced herself as a new NRCS watershed engineer in Minnesota and noted she will be assisting with current and new projects in the Minnesota Red River Basin. Ms. Ahmed reported all Agreements regarding the RCPP Watershed Plans in Minnesota have been closed out as funding expired September 30, 2021.

Rita Harmsen-Sveen reported on the status of the 6 active RCPP Watershed Plans in North Dakota. The Rush River Watershed Plan is currently in the 60-day formal public comment period. The North Branch Park River Watershed Plan and Tongue River Watershed Plan are being revised based on comments received. The Shortfoot Creek Watershed Plan, Upper Maple River Watershed Plan and the North Branch Antelope Watershed Plan are currently working on maximizing environmental benefits.

Ms. Ahmed and Ms. Harmsen-Sveen discussed potential available funding for watershed projects in the Red River Basin through various NRCS programs.

RRRA draft 2022 Retention Project Priorities List

Keith Weston discussed the draft 2022 Retention Project Priorities List and noted the list will be helpful for discussions with legislators and parties interested in RRRRA activities.

It was moved by Ben Varnson and seconded by Bill Petersen to approve the RRRRA 2022 Retention Project Priorities List, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

EPA and USACE announce pre-publication of rule to revise definition of WOTUS

Mr. Weston reported the EPA and USACE are hosting meetings around the U.S. in January 2022 regarding the revision of the definition of WOTUS. Pat Fridgen noted the North Dakota Attorney General's office is coordinating meetings held in North Dakota regarding the matter. Mr. Weston indicated a revised definition of WOTUS could have impacts to the agricultural community.

Outreach - Red River Basin Mapping Project

Mr. Weston stated he worked with Houston Engineering, Inc. on the Red River Basin Mapping Project and displayed the finished results.

The first map shows the public what has been done in the basin by the Red River Joint Water Resource District and Red River Watershed Management Board. Shading shows different agency / state ownership or easements. The second map shows flood retention in the Red River Basin. These maps are available on the RRRRA website and will be used at conferences to assist with outreach regarding the RRRRA. The maps are also available as handouts for individual water resource districts and watershed districts in the Red River Basin.

RRRA role in operation of new retention structures

Mr. Weston stated the RRRRA could play an important role in facilitating operating plans for ecological systems implemented as part of flood retention projects in the Red River Basin. This would help reduce strain on sponsors to develop individual operating plans for ecological systems implemented in their projects. Mr. Weston stated he is conducting research on the matter and more discussion will occur at future meetings.

Outreach – public service ads and announcements

Mr. Weston played a public service ad / announcement that is running on KFGO and discussed upcoming opportunities for additional outreach through radio. Discussion was held on potentially running commercials on an additional radio station in the northern area of the Red River Basin.

Agency and partner reports

Theresa Ebbenga was pleased to report the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) recently approved the *Adaptive Management and Mitigation Plan* for the Metro Flood Diversion Project. The plan was a condition to the MDNR permit for the project. Mr. Ebbenga also discussed the abnormally dry conditions in Minnesota.

Pat Fridgen reported the NDDWR is hosting a virtual tutorial at 3:30 p.m. today on the new cost-share request process through WebGrants. Mr. Fridgen stated the next State Water Commission meeting is February 23, 2022.

Minnesota LiDAR collect

Rob Sip reported on the status of the LiDAR collect in Minnesota. Ground control point surveys are currently being collected and quality control is being completed in a pilot area in the Roseau River Watershed District. Mr. Sip also reported on the success of the RRWMB and RRRRA shared booth at the recent Prairie Grains Conference in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

North Dakota LiDAR collect

Mr. Gjestvang reported the North Dakota LiDAR data acquisition is complete and some of the raw data is available for download on the NDDWR website. Most of the LiDAR raw data in the Red River Watershed will be available soon.

Meeting schedule

The next RRRA meeting is scheduled for March 16, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business to be considered by the Board, the meeting adjourned without objection.

APPROVED:

Gary Thompson
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Secretary-Treasurer