

MINUTES OF SPECIAL VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING  
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY  
ORIGINATING AT THE CASS COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT  
WEST FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA  
SEPTEMBER 7, 2022

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call special meeting on September 7, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.

Participating were John Finney, Gary Thompson, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Bill Petersen, Ben Varnson, Board members; Theresa Ebbenga, Pat Fridgen and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston, Executive Director; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Nina Stone, Accountant; Melissa Hinkemeyer, Administrative Assistant; Christi Fischer and Lance Smith, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota Department of Water Resources (NDDWR); Rob Sip, Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB); Jerry Bents and Mike Opat, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Blake Carlson, Widseth, Smith, Nolting; Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.; Dan Jacobson, Southeast Cass Water Resource District; and William A. Hejl, Rush River Water Resource District.

John Finney called the meeting to order and introductions were made.

**Agenda**

It was moved by Gary Thompson, seconded by Ben Varnson and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda, as presented.

**Minutes**

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Bill Petersen and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the June 15, 2022, meeting.

**Financial Report**

It was moved by John Finney, seconded by Rodger Olson and unanimously carried to approve the Financial Report, as presented.

**Bills**

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

### **2021 Audit**

A motion was made by Gary Thompson and seconded by Rodger Olson to approve the 2021 Audit of the Red River Retention Authority. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

### **NRCS report**

Christi Fischer briefly updated the Board on the status of ongoing Regional Conservation Partnership Program Plans in the Red River Basin in North Dakota.

Lance Smith introduced himself to the Board and stated he is the NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for the northwest Minnesota area. Mr. Smith reported Minnesota NRCS is finishing up work on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Troy Daniell, NRCS Minnesota State Conservationist, will be attending the September 29, 2022, meeting of the RRWMB to discuss NRCS funding options for projects in the area.

### **Draft RRRR Retention Policy Statement**

Keith Weston discussed a draft policy, requested at the previous RRRR meeting, that includes sentiments that the RRRR wishes to retain storage in the Red River Basin but fully supports local watershed districts and water resource districts regarding retention at their facilities in the Red River Basin.

It was moved by Ben Varnson, seconded by Gary Thompson and unanimously carried to approve the RRRR Retention Policy Statement, as presented.

Mr. Weston indicated he will share the RRRR Retention Policy Statement with various federal, state and local entities.

### **Draft 2023 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List**

Mr. Weston reviewed the 2022 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List and indicated he is working with project sponsors on updating the list for 2023. The Board discussed various projects on the list in more detail. John Finney noted many projects in Minnesota need to obtain state funding to move forward with construction.

### **Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations program opportunities**

Mr. Weston discussed a meeting with various NRCS staff regarding potential funding opportunities through the NRCS for projects in the Red River Basin. Mr. Smith noted it is best to engage the NRCS early in project planning to determine NRCS program eligibility. Discussion was held on environmental benefits that can be added to projects to increase the cot-benefit ratio. Mr. Weston stated the RRRR is interested in exploring the possibility of the RRRR coordinating the operation of additional environmental aspects of projects, such as biomass harvesting, for watershed districts and water resource districts in the Red River Basin.

### **Outreach – Big Iron Farm Show September 13-15, 2022**

Mr. Weston reported the RRRRA will have a booth at the annual Big Iron Farm Show at the Red River Valley Fairgrounds from September 13 through 15, 2022.

### **Strategic Plan – future staffing discussion**

Mr. Weston announced he will be retiring from the RRRRA in the next year and indicated this is an opportunity for the RRRRA to discuss future staffing needs, including discussion on a potential addition of a federal liaison. The Board discussed the future of the RRRRA and staffing options. Mr. Weston suggested the RRWMB and Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD) develop a list of objectives they want the RRRRA to fulfill. Following discussion, the Board indicated the RRRRA should continue as it provides a conduit for Minnesota and North Dakota to work cooperatively on water resource issues and projects. Mr. Weston suggested the Board also examine the Executive Director duties and determine any changes that may be needed to the position. The Board determined the RRWMB and RRJWRD should individually discuss and bring ideas on the future of the RRRRA to the next RRRRA meeting including the role and size of the RRRRA, future staffing needs and desired objectives of staff and the RRRRA.

### **Agency and partner reports**

Theresa Ebbenga reported on recent updates of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). The MDNR is currently working on budgets to submit to the Governor's office for the upcoming biennium. They are also working on the design of updates to Lake Bronson State Park.

Pat Fridgen reported on recent updates of the NDDWR. The NDDWR is working through the budgeting process and collecting feedback on the State Water Commission cost-share policy and prioritization process. Mr. Fridgen also reported the 5-year strategic plan of the NDDWR is now available on the NDDWR website. The NDDWR has temporarily relocated to the North Dakota Job Service building and working remotely due to issues identified in the current NDDWR office.

Ted Preister updated the Board on recent activities of the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC). The RRBC is meeting tomorrow and registration is now open for the 40th Annual Red River Basin Land and Water International Summit Conference that will be held January 17-19, 2023, at The Fort Garry Hotel in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The RRBC continues to be actively involved in a long term flood solutions modeling project and a Lower Red River modeling project, among other projects

Mr. Gjestvang reported there are currently four projects in the RRJWRD that are under construction, including three Elm River Dam improvement projects and the Bourbanis Dam project. Mr. Gjestvang noted the RRJWRD is encouraging Water Resource Districts to preserve the current level of retention at the facilities under construction.

Rodger Olson briefly updated the Board on the status of the Metro Flood Diversion Project.

**Meeting schedule**

The next RRRA meeting is scheduled for December 14, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to be considered by the Board, it was moved by Gary Thompson, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

APPROVED:

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Gary Thompson  
Co-Chair

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John Finney  
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

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Carol Harbeke Lewis  
Secretary-Treasurer