

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
ORIGINATING AT THE CASS COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
WEST FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA
DECEMBER 14, 2022

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on December 14, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.

Participating were John Finney, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Bill Petersen, Ben Varnson, Dan Jacobson (alternate for Gary Thompson), 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, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota Department of Water Resources (NDDWR); Rob Sip, Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB); Bruce Anderson, Barnes County Water Resource District; Mike Opat, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Damon DeVillers, Interstate Engineering, Inc.; Blake Carlson, Widseth, Smith, Nolting; and Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.. Board member Gary Thompson was absent.

Agenda

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Bill Petersen and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda, as presented.

Minutes

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the September 7, 2022, meeting.

Financial Report

It was moved by Ben Varnson, seconded by Bill Petersen and unanimously carried to approve the Financial Report, as presented.

Bills

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Greg Holmvik to approve the Financial Report, checks #1592 through #1594 and the wire transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Amend 2022 Budget

It was moved by Bill Petersen and seconded by Rodger Olson to authorize the Secretary-Treasurer to amend the RRRA 2022 budget. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Set regular 2023 meeting dates, time and location

It was moved by Bill Petersen, seconded by Rodger Olson and unanimously carried to set the following as the regular meeting dates, at 10:00 a.m. at the Cass County Highway Department in West Fargo, North Dakota, for the RRRRA in 2023:

- March 16
- June 22
- September 21
- December 13

NRCS report

Christi Fischer updated the Board on the status of ongoing Regional Conservation Partnership Program Plans in the Red River Basin in North Dakota. Ms. Fischer also discussed other ongoing projects in the region and the seven ongoing dam rehabilitation projects.

PL-566 Subcommittee – updated PL-566 Report

Keith Weston reported on the RRRRA PL-566 Subcommittee discussions. The Subcommittee recommended allowance of bigger, single storage structures up to 50,000 acre-feet under the PL-566 program, rather than structures up to 12,500 acre-feet that is currently allowed. The Subcommittee also recommended increasing total project storage volume in a watershed from 25,000 acre-feet to 50,000 acre-feet and adding language to limit the total project sponsor cost-share (non-federal) to 25 percent on flood prevention and watershed protection projects.

Another recommendation from the Subcommittee is to increase the project cost / timing approval by Congress requirement from projects that exceed \$5,000,000 and/or 4,000 acre-feet to:

- Allow approval by NRCS state conversationist for single-site projects up to \$25,000,000 (or 25,000 acre-feet)
- Allow approval by NRCS Chief for projects up to \$50,000,000 (or 50,000 acre-feet). Approval by Congress would be required for projects over \$50,000,000 or 50,000 acre-feet
- Omit need for an Environmental Impact Statement because of Congressional Committee approval due to project volume and cost

The Subcommittee also recommended eliminating the requirement under economic and environmental principles and guidelines for water resources implementation studies for individual benefit to cost ratio calculations on each individual project and instead allow flood control projects to be based upon an overall basin plan providing international treaty benefits.

Lastly, the Subcommittee recommended under the dam rehabilitation section of the PL-566 program, to utilize Section 313 of Public Law 106-472 to provide dedicated funding for rehabilitation projects in the Red River Basin where the primary purpose is the development of additional flood storage. The intent is to retrofit existing PL-566 projects that have little or no storage to be able to build into them a storage component where possible.

It was moved by Ben Varnson, seconded by Dan Jacobson and unanimously carried to approve the RRRA PL-566 Subcommittee November 2022 Report, as presented.

Outreach – Big Iron Farm Show 2023

Mr. Weston reported on the RRRA booth at the annual Big Iron Farm Show at the Red River Valley Fairgrounds September 13 through 15, 2022. Attendance at the Big Iron Farm Show appeared to be down compared to previous years. Discussion was held on outreach opportunities at the Big Iron Farm Show and various conferences for 2023. The Board suggested requesting a new location for the RRRA booth or better signage of the building the RRRA booth was located in this year at the Big Iron Farm Show in 2023.

A motion was made by Ben Varnson, seconded by Rodger Olson and unanimously carried to approve the payment of one booth deposit in the amount of \$550 for an RRRA booth at the Big Iron Farm Show 2023.

2023 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List

Mr. Weston reviewed the 2023 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List and discussed various projects on the list in more detail.

It was moved by Bill Petersen, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to approve the 2023 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List.

North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network (NDAWN)

Mr. Weston stated NDAWN is looking for funding for more monitoring sites in the Red River Basin. The information NDAWN collects, including soil moisture and soil temperature, is useful for flood forecasting efforts. NDAWN is also considering upgrading equipment at many sites. The RRRA would benefit from the data collected at the sites and a partnership with NDAWN may be beneficial for both parties. Mr. Weston indicated he also discussed the topic with the Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD) and RRWMB individually as they would also benefit from the data collected and could potentially be cost-share partners. The cost to construct and operate a monitoring site is approximately \$13,500 and NDAWN is looking to add approximately 100 sites throughout the Red River Basin. The Board discussed potentially funding priority NDAWN monitoring sites in the Red River Basin. NDAWN sites could also potentially be shared with USGS and NDDWR PRESENS sensors.

A motion was made by Bill Petersen, seconded by Dan Jacobson and unanimously carried to direct Mr. Weston to continue discussions with NDAWN, the RRJWRD and RRWMB regarding NDAWN monitoring sites in the Red River Basin and bring more information on the topic to a future meeting for further discussion.

Strategic Plan – future staffing discussion

Discussion was held on filling the RRRA Executive Director position as Mr. Weston will be retiring from the RRRA in 2023. The Board discussed future staffing needs and options and directed Mr. Weston to work with the Secretary-Treasurer to advertise the RRRA Executive Director position after January 1, 2023.

RRRA Retention Policy Statement

Mr. Weston reviewed the RRRA Retention Policy Statement and noted a copy of the statement was sent to state and federal agencies that the RRRA primarily works with, as well as to the North Dakota and Minnesota Congressional delegations.

Nutrient objectives and targets for the Red River at Emerson

Discussion was held on the nutrient objectives and targets for the Red River at Emerson that were recently approved by the United States and Canada and is recognized by the International Joint Commission. Ted Preister noted the goal of the objectives is to reduce the phosphorous concentration in Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

North Dakota Red Tape Reduction Working Group

Mr. Weston reported Governor Burgum recently created a Red Tape Reduction Working Group. The NDDWR is an active participant in the initiative. The goal is to enhance citizen and staff experiences and success by reducing regulatory burdens. Mr. Weston provided comments on the NDDWR economic analysis process on behalf of the RRRA that stated if water-related projects are already going through the federal economic analysis process, an NDDWR economic analysis for the same project would be duplicative.

Outreach

Mr. Weston stated a radio announcement will be produced regarding the availability of the 2023 Red River Basin Retention Project Prioritization List on the RRRA website.

John Finney suggested a radio announcement regarding the Executive Director position opening. Mr. Weston will work on the idea.

Agency and partner reports

Pat Fridgen reported on input received regarding the NDDWR through the Red Tape Reduction Working Group. The NDDWR is working through the budgeting process and finalizing changes to the State Water Commission cost-share policy and prioritization process. Mr. Fridgen thanked the RRRA for their feedback on the matter. The changes to the State Water Commission cost-share policy and prioritization process become effective July 1, 2023.

Theresa Ebbenga reported on recent updates of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). The MDNR recently welcomed new staff and is currently working on budgets to submit to the Governor's office for the upcoming biennium.

Mr. Preister updated the Board on recent activities of the Red River Basin Commission. Mr. Preister discussed the upcoming 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.

Meeting schedule

The next RRRA meeting is scheduled for March 16, 2023, 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, the meeting adjourned without objection.

APPROVED:

Josh Ihry
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Secretary-Treasurer