

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL / CONFERENCE CALL MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
ORIGINATING AT THE CASS COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
WEST FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA
MARCH 16, 2023

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) held a virtual / conference call meeting on March 16, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.

Participating were John Finney, Greg Holmvik, Rodger Olson, Ben Varnson, Gary Thompson (alternate for Josh Ihry), Board members; Theresa Ebbenga, Pat Fridgen and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston, Executive Director; Nina Stone, Accountant; Melissa Hinkemeyer, Administrative Assistant; Rita Harmsen-Sveen and Jen Klostreich, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Randy Gjestvang and Cory Drevecky, North Dakota Department of Water Resources (NDDWR); Chris Marohl, Senior Policy Advisor for Senator Kevin Cramer; Bruce Anderson, Barnes County Water Resource District; Don Kemp, Pembina County Water Resource District; Dan Money, Two Rivers Watershed District; Mike Opat, Houston Engineering, Inc.; and Morrie Lanning, Barr Engineering Co.. Board member Bill Petersen was absent.

Agenda

It was moved by Rodger Olson, 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 Ben Varnson and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the December 14, 2022, meeting.

Financial Report

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

Bills

It was moved by John Finney and seconded by Rodger Olson to approve , Check #1595 and the wire transfers, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

NRCS report

Rita Harmsen-Sveen updated the Board on the status of ongoing dam rehabilitation projects and Regional Conservation Partnership Program Plans in the Red River Basin in North Dakota.

Keith Weston noted there are several upcoming RCPP plans in the Red River Basin that are going through the NRCS Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) process and recommended the RRRA submit letters of support for the Plans during the respective EIS and EA comment periods. Mr. Weston also suggested asking the NDDWR and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources or the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources for letters of support.

Outreach – Midwest Radio & Digital – 2023 radio commercial contract

Mr. Weston discussed a proposal from Midwest Radio & Digital of Fargo-Moorhead for continued commercials to highlight RRRA topics and retention projects in the Red River Basin. Mr. Weston discussed feedback received regarding the radio commercials thus far. The Board noted the commercials help promote retention to a wide audience.

A motion was made by John Finney and seconded by Rodger Olson to approve and authorize the Secretary-Treasurer to sign the 2023 radio commercial contract with Midwest Radio & Digital of Fargo-Moorhead for radio commercials in the amount of \$8,000. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Outreach – Midwest Council on Agriculture membership

Discussion was held on the RRRA potentially becoming a member of the Midwest Council on Agriculture. The Midwest Council on Agriculture is a 501(c)(6) non-profit coalition that represents 12 states, and its members comprise of various producers, businesses, groups and organizations related to agriculture. The Midwest Council on Agriculture was founded by former U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson and its intent is to bring midwest agricultural priorities to federal delegation members in Washington, D.C. Mr. Weston indicated the Midwest Council on Agriculture may be able to assist with things such as revisions to the PL-566 program, conservation programs or future farm bills. The annual dues for the organization are \$6,000.

A motion was made by Manager Olson and seconded by Manager Varnson to authorize Mr. Weston to contact the Midwest Council on Agriculture regarding membership and approve membership to the Midwest Council on Agriculture, contingent upon approval by the Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD) and the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB). Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network (NDAWN)

Mr. Weston reported Daryl Ritchison from NDAWN has met with the RRJWRD and RRWMB regarding funding for all-season weather gages. 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. The additional gages will help provide more accurate data throughout the Red River Basin and NDAWN data can be accessed by the public for free at www.ndawn.info. The Diversion Authority is also interested in purchasing gages that would be beneficial to the Metro Flood Diversion Project, which would lower the number of gages left to fund. The State of Minnesota is also considering funding gages through a bill in the Minnesota legislature. Mr. Ritchison will be presenting

a cost proposal to the RRJWRD and RRWMB for their consideration. Mr. Weston suggested gages could also be purchased over time. The Board directed Mr. Weston to proceed with obtaining a proposal from Mr. Ritchison regarding the purchase and installation of NDAWN all-season weather gages in the Red River Basin.

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 advertising options for the position including radio commercials through Midwest Radio & Digital of Fargo-Moorhead, online advertising and newspaper advertising.

A motion was made by Manager Varnson and seconded by Co-Chairman Finney to approve the following regarding advertising of the RRRA Executive Director Position:

- Radio commercials through Midwest Radio & Digital of Fargo-Moorhead from April 3–9, with the option to extend the commercials from April 10–16 if the commercials are successful in generating applicants and authorize the Secretary-Treasurer to sign the contract with Midwest Radio & Digital of Fargo-Moorhead
- A newspaper advertisement in The Forum from April 3 – 9, with the option to extend the advertisement from April 10–16 if the advertisement is successful in generating applicants
- Online advertisements on Indeed and LinkedIn from April 3–21.

Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

The applications received for the RRRA Executive Director position will be directed to Mr. Weston for review and determination of qualified applicants. Mr. Weston will then distribute the applications of qualified applicants to the Board for review and potential interviews.

Red River Joint Water Resource District – Pilot Watershed Project Update

Mr. Weston updated the Board on the Red River Joint Water Resource District Pilot Project for North Dakota RCPP projects in the Red River Basin. The RRJWRD initially requested \$12 million in funding for the project and after discussions in the North Dakota Senate, lowered the funding request to \$7,800,000. Funding below \$7,800,000 will not be adequate for the Pilot Project as the Pilot Project is intended to help complete more than one project.

2023 Farm Bill – Congressional meetings

Mr. Weston discussed a meeting with Senator Hoeven and staff from Senator Hoeven's and Senator Cramer's offices to discuss potential changes that could be implemented in the 2023 Farm Bill, particularly changes to the NRCS PL-566 Program. Mr. Weston also stated he provided testimony to Senator Klobuchar's staff during a 2023 Farm Bill listening session. The opportunity to discuss these changes with Senator Hoeven and others was very productive and the RRRA hopes the meeting results in bipartisan-supported multi-state updates included in the 2023 Farm Bill.

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding by NRCS in 2024

Mr. Weston discussed an upcoming opportunity for potential project funding through the NRCS and the Inflation Reduction Act. A list of potential projects that could qualify for the funding has been created and will be shared with the NRCS to gather their feedback. Then a formal request for funding will be made from the RRRRA to NRCS when the announcement for project proposals has been made.

Agency and partner reports

Theresa Ebbenga reported on recent updates of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). The MDNR is currently reviewing new proposed legislation and bonding packages in the Minnesota legislature. The MDNR also continues to monitor flood forecasts.

Pat Fridgen reported on SB 2020 regarding the NDDWR budget. Mr. Fridgen also noted the State Water Commission Pre-Commission meeting will be held this afternoon.

Meeting schedule

The next RRRRA meeting was re-scheduled for June 21, at 10:00 a.m. at the Red River Basin Commission office in 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