

Planning Work Group for Root River One Watershed One Plan
Tuesday, October 23, 2018, 9:00 am
SWCD/DNR/MDA Conservation Building, 912 Houston St. NW, Preston

In Attendance: Adam Bielke, Sue Glende, Dan Wermager, Dave Walter, Gary Larson, Jessica Bronson, Tim Ruzek, Brian DeVetter, Daryl Buck, Sheila Harmes, Bridgette Timm, Skip Langer, Teddy Moreno Santos, Justin Hanson, Mary Peterson, Caleb Fischer, Donna Rasmussen

Progress report on Watershed Conservation Planning Initiative—Dan Wermager, Root River SWCD, and the Watershed Conservation Partners Team: *This is one of three team meetings that will be held each year. In mid-September, press releases were sent to the newspapers announcing the planning initiative and the outreach letter that would be mailed to the two priority areas: Torkelson Creek and Money Creek watersheds. Once the letter had been reviewed by the watershed team, 511 letters were mailed to the priority areas. Seven responses have been received so far, and three walkovers have been completed with four scheduled for October/November. Most who have contacted Dan are absentee landowners. Dan is working with Gary on the basics of conservation planning. The goal is to complete 20 plans in the first year, and 11 are done. Dan is working towards his JAA and will be attending BWSR Academy trainings. He is to mentor with the DCs in the other counties about how he is to work in their counties. Jessica asked that he email updates to her and tell producers to sign paperwork in her office. If she knows who he is working with, she can check with other staff if there any projects proposed with the cooperators. Sue and Brian expressed that they would like a similar arrangement. Two soil health events are to be held per year; one is planned by Root River SWCD later this winter. If the SWCDs are planning any field days or workshops, contact Dan to present information on the initiative. Dean Thomas should be contacted to be sure any events he is assisting with would include the planning initiative information. Nothing has been confirmed yet regarding the computer and vehicle to be provided by NRCS; Mary reported that the Middle Minnesota is to get their computer within 30 days for their new hire. Mary will follow up with Ryan Galbreath to ask if he has contacted the Assistant State Conservationist about the computer and vehicle for Root River SWCD. She had sent out an update on the initiative on October 3rd; she will resend to the DCs. The amendment has been signed by NRCS and BWSR to extend the end date from December 2020 to October 31, 2021. The budget was also adjusted to allow for funding up to Step 8 engineering and TA in addition to the planner positions. It still needs to be worked out how that money will go out the door. The host SWCD should see the funds added to the grant agreement by September 2019 after it is known how much money is available after all planning staff are hired. Of the seven watersheds, six have staff hired with the seventh being in the Cedar. Justin reported that the Cedar planning position will be James Fett to start since he has the background. A new staff person is being brought on who will then transition into the planning position long term with hopes that that person will be on board by Thanksgiving. S/he will also be doing work in the western Root in Mower County. Mary commented that if there are JAA or training needs for planning staff, contact Laurie Svien or Aaron Peter or the NRCS Area Office. Two of the staff hired attended the Conservation Planning Course, and the others are working on training individually. A progress report is due December 15th. Mary will send information out in November including a spreadsheet and guidance about what financial information should go into eLINK. Mary will then compile all seven reports and provide to NRCS in order for BWSR to get the 50% reimbursement. Reports are due every six months on December 15th and June 15th.*

Funding updates:

- Review of 2018-2019 Work Plan and Budget with NRCS staff: *The Root River 1W1P has four "A" Priorities: Drinking Water, Rivers and Streams, Landowner Engagement, Livability, so those are reflected in the work plan. The projects also divide the funds among five of the six counties. Total allocation for 2018-2019 is \$851,301. Each SWCD has a sub-agreement with Winona SWCD based on this budget.*

- RCPP: \$2.5 million total has been awarded to BWSR with \$0.5 million for NRCS TA. We are anticipating \$400,000-500,000 in EQIP to be available for the entire 1W1P planning area for practices. In the 1W1P budget, we allocated 20% of that amount for TA for RCPP projects, or \$100,000. The budget distributes \$52,500 among the six SWCDs with the remainder available as projects develop. There is also \$56,243 in project funds to use as match for EQIP projects to get to 75% or higher cost share rate. BWSR is setting up RCPP training in Nov. or Dec. for the pilot areas. Adam handed out a copy of an email from Doug Thomas with updated information. The agreement with NRCS has been signed both by Washington DC and state officials. An initial allocation of EQIP financial assistance will be made to each of the five watersheds with assurance that funds can be shifted after the first ranking period. The funding period is five years from 9/21/2018 to 8/1/2023. NRCS may be open to having two sign-ups per year. A major consideration is that time and project costs are not charged to multiple federal sources, such as MRBI, RCPP feedlot, or these funds. Feedlot practices will not be eligible from Root River RCPP since there are funds available through the SE feedlot RCPP pool. We will need to set priority areas, which could match those in 1W1P or choose other areas, and develop local ranking questions. The pilot watersheds summit will roll out RCPP and address how to organize a local work group, as well as share what has been learned with 1W1P implementation. Those may be regional meetings versus one statewide meeting.

Other watershed work plan and budget items include:

Drinking water:

- DWSMAs for Chatfield and Utica have nitrate reduction as a priority; cost share may be for cover crops or other nutrient reduction practices; some project development funding for SWCD staff to work with landowners; coordination with MDA in DWSMAs, nitrate impaired townships and watersheds.
- Staffing costs for NMP Specialist (80%) and Soil Health Technician (15%). Nitrates in groundwater are a priority, and these positions address practices needed to reduce nitrate leaching.

Rivers and Streams

- Crooked Creek: structure to be constructed using watershed district, 1W1P and EQIP funding.
- Mower SWCD: practices in the headwaters of the South and Middle branches. Outreach patterned after farm walkover process in Field to Stream watershed using project development funds.
- South Fork and Riceford: Piloting use of PTMApp at subwatershed scale to ID water storage/sediment capture locations. Subcontract with SE MN Water Resources Board for GIS analysis. Also funds for project development and TA and cost share.

Landowner Engagement

- Rush-Pine Farmer Led Council: The council will help decide the use of the funds, which could be for cost share or incentives, education, or farm walkovers. Some staff time for Winona County and SWCD and Fillmore SWCD is budgeted for project development and TA.
- Administration/Coordination: Day-to-day contact is Fillmore SWCD (Caleb and Donna). Fiscal agent: Winona SWCD.

319 Grant update: We received word verbally that the Root was not one of the ten selected for the first round of 319 funding. No particular reasons were given other than it was very competitive. We are being encouraged to apply again, or consider applying for the regular 319 funding when application period is open later this year.

Work plan progress

South Fork/Riceford watershed

- PTMApp-Fillmore SWCD and SEMNWRB: Fillmore SWCD staff met with Bridgette a couple of weeks ago to be sure she had the data she needs, especially the culvert inventory data for Fillmore County. We are going to begin with a small segment of Riceford Creek watershed upstream of Mabel to ID water storage sites

and compare to LiDAR imagery that shows existing structures. The locations will be prioritized using the cost/benefit tool in PTMApp.

- Root River SWCD projects: A structure is being installed today in Riceford Creek. It was originally using state cost share but the funding source will be changed to use the 1W1P funds for Riceford.
- Crooked Creek watershed-Root River SWCD: There were some design changes completed. The watershed district is paying for the engineering costs. An EQIP application has been submitted so it could be 100% cost shared.
- Mill Creek-Olmsted SWCD: Terraces are ready to go for the contractor; 2/3 will be completed this year and 1/3 next year. A portion of the RCPP match funds (~\$8000) are being utilized leaving a balance of \$48,109.
- Rush-Pine watershed-Winona/Fillmore: A December 7th meeting is set with the council leaders to discuss use of funds for cost share and education/outreach. There were concerns raised at the last Winona SWCD meeting about the council having access to these funds.
- Upper South and Middle Branch Root River-Mower SWCD: The watershed conservation planner/new staff person will have technical duties in that part of the Root when they begin. Outreach and project development will follow the example of the farm walkover process used in the Field to Stream Partnership study watershed.
- DWSMAs: Olmsted, Winona, Fillmore: There are some leads for structural practices in the Chatfield DWSMA. MDA and MDH will be involved in initiating activities in the Utica DWSMA.

Other:

- PTMApp update—Matt Drewitz, BWSR will attend the November 13th Advisory Committee meeting. Bridgette stated that the data preparation is the biggest task with running the application, especially having culvert data for hydro-conditioning which is especially necessary when running at the field scale.
- Civic Engagement Plan development—There is a potential funding opportunity with U of M Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnership <https://extension.umn.edu/regional-partnerships/submit-idea-rsdp>. Beth Kallestad contacted Donna about plans for CE in our watershed plan. A first step is to develop a CE plan, and she suggested applying for assistance from Extension through RSDP—not grant funds but access to U of M resources, such as faculty or students to gather information, conduct research, write a plan or provide coaching services (e.g. to Rush Pine on facilitating meetings with landowners about use of watershed funds). There is a short idea brief that should be submitted for their next SE Work Group meeting next week (Oct. 29th). Could apply for up to \$15,000 to pay for creation of a plan. They have money to approve for spending by the end of June—longer to actually spend it. Two phases: submit project idea, then get the Natural Resources Work Group to recommend to the full board. Sheila and Shaina were on this work group. The consensus of the group was to submit an idea brief for their consideration.
- Clean Water Accountability <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/healthier-watersheds>. We looked at the website which has one category where the number types of BMPs are shown by watershed. A table shows the types of BMPs and number of units with some pollution reductions calculated. Another table shows the sources of the data (e.g. eLINK, NRCS, MDA Ag BMP Loans). This could be one location for compiling BMP information from other agencies.

Next meetings

Advisory Committee meeting—November 13th, 9 am – noon, Fillmore Co. Office Building, Preston

Agenda: Progress reporting

- Watershed grant projects: It would be helpful to add other priorities (EQIP, conservation planning) to the priority area map that was shown to the Policy Committee with the work plan.

- *Partner projects: how to gather information before the meeting? Contact Ashley Ignatius, MPCA GIS specialist, about online mapping tools. A table listing projects with a link to a map location would be one way to show the data. Use of Story Mapping, such as that used by the Green Corps intern for the Whitewater karst tour, could be another mechanism. Sue Glende suggested the information specialist with NRCS (Dan ___), who may also have ideas about how to show this information because he is looking for stories about projects.*
- *2019 activities: end of year summary and map to form basis for 2019 work plan.*

*Policy Committee meeting—November 28th, 9 am – noon, Fillmore Co. Office Building, Preston
Agenda will be similar to the Advisory Committee meeting to show projects and work plan progress; provide an end of year summary and map including the Advisory Committee's projects to use as a basis for the 2019 work plan. Winona SWCD will prepare a budget update. We may also have information about the civic engagement plan by then.*

Planning Work Group meeting: wait until after the RCPP pilot project meeting. If not needed before, it is preferable to wait until after the first of February to avoid January grant reporting.

Other: MDA Noxious Weed Grants: Fillmore SWCD 2018 grant subcontract with Stantec began work this summer for treatment of Japanese hops. Work is to continue in the spring from Preston to Lanesboro. A 2019 grant application was submitted in coordination with Houston County to continue work from Lanesboro through Houston Count to the confluence with the Mississippi. A private contractor is doing the water-based treatments. A Conservation Corps crew did land-based treatments along the Root River Trail and at public access points in 2018; plans are to apply for a crew again in 2019. Bridgette said that Monika Chandler, MDA, will be presenting on the MDA noxious weed program at the March Water Resources Advisory Committee meeting.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 11:15 am.