

Meeting of Advisory Committee for RR 1W1P

November 4th, 2019 9:30am-12:15pm

Room 108, Fillmore County Office Building, 902 Houston St. NW, Preston, MN

Meeting Notes – Nikki Shaw, Fillmore SWCD

Open meeting and Introductions:

- Laura Christensen, Fillmore SWCD; Nikki Shaw, Fillmore SWCD; Jennifer Ronnenberg, MM Dept. of Health; Jeff Weiss, MN DNR; Jason Wetzel, Friends of the Root River; David Schmidt, The Nature Conservancy; Sheila Harmes, Winona County; Adam Beilke, BWSR; Shaina Keseley, BWSR; Dave Walter, Root River SWCD; Margaret Lyngholm, Friends of the Root River; Dean Thomas, Area 7 Soil Technician; Skip Langer, Olmsted SWCD; Dan Wermager, Root River SWCD; Tim Miller, US Fish & Wildlife Service – Upper Miss. Nat. Wildlife & Fish Refuge – LAX.

Watershed Effort Reports

- First round Watershed Based Implementation Funds (WBIF)
 - \$850,000 total, roughly 50% used as of date, expires in 2021.
- Regional Conservation Program Partnership (RCPP)
 - 2020 rates consistent with EQIP rates, historically RCPP rates are higher than EQIP rates.
 - Root River 1W1P was given roughly \$850,000 for the first round of projects; 13 projects have been implemented; monies not used will roll over. Will have future conversations on priority projects and areas; ability to shift funding to where interest lies even after plan completion and approval.
- Watershed Conservation Planning Initiative (WCPI)
 - Update was recently given at RR1W1P Planning Workgroup meeting held a month ago; plan is to have 100 conservation plans implemented in the three-year grant period. The focus is on two priority watersheds - Money Creek in Houston County, and Torkelson Creek in Fillmore County. Also have been speaking at outreach events [Root River SWCD Cons. Tech.]. Has been a slow summer for projects - now that crops coming off we [Root River SWCD] are getting more response; neighbors talking and recommending services [of local SWCDs] is helping greatly in Money Creek. Grant expires at the end of 2021.
- Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS)
 - Upper Iowa and Mississippi-Reno WRAPS is prepping for public notice in December, RR 1W1P will be notified of its release before public notice for comment period. Contact Emily with MPCA with any questions. First round of monitoring for RR 1W1P was completed in 2019.

Committee Member Updates

- Jeff Weiss, MN DNR: taking on new projects and permits due to Lake City hydro retiring; Dye tracing at fish hatchery; Whitewater projects and restorations are moving along and looking good for funding next year. Stockton/Rollingstone Watershed District meeting tonight, geomorphology overview.

- Jennifer Ronnenberg, MN Dept. of Health: Wellhead Protection Program (Freeborn County has the most collection of municipal wells left, 15 total municipal wells left for plans to update) & 1W1P @ MDH (aquifer characteristics defined better). Cedar is in for final review, along with Cannon. Zumbro and Shellrock are just getting started on their plans. Most municipal wells are done, now working on non-muni., like subdivisions, mobile home parks, etc., where people live but aren't necessarily associated with a city. Next would be non-transient non-muni, like nursing homes, schools, etc., where people may not necessarily live, but they spend all of their time there. Audience targeting for drinking water.
- Jason Wetzel, Friends of the Root River: Every summer we [Friends of the RR] try to have a float down the RR with canoes and a pontoon-like floaty to look at different aspects of it (bluffs, substrate, shorelines, areas in need of help, recent improvement projects, access... this year from Whalon to Peterson, also had riverside cleanups in both areas this year. Looking to get more signage for different stretches of the Root and its branches (what road you are crossing under, nearest communities, fishing locations, etc.). Looking for access points and signage, reviving accesses and how to make better access in the future. Working with the National Trout Center for increased angling access as well. Continuing with rain barrels, always looking for more public awareness outreach and opportunities. Have not worked with well owners, are interested in trying (MN Well Owners Organization). Have a handful of active members, looking for more, are having a hard time reaching more people. Friends of RR would sponsor and help maintain access sites, with the hope to make them [access sites] like Adopt-A-Highways so that there would be different sponsors for every site to help with maintenance.
- David Schmidt, The Nature Conservancy: Acquisition and habitat work, less larger-landscape work. Closed on 900 acres just north of Rushford, cleaning up site and removing farm debris and buildings, will transfer to DNR end of year, Rush Creek WMA will be its name. Goats manage cleared sites well, working with three contractors with herds who manage them well (fencing, moving, etc). Prairie & bluff side restorations. RR now a focus area; monitoring and bringing in funding for active management.
- Sheila Harmes, Winona County: Rush-Pine Farmer-Led Council outreach event; amended water plan is up to date, hopefully poised to enter into 1W1P.
- Adam Beilke, BWSR: Grants: Cooperative Weed Management, supports smaller and local groups; \$1mil out of Clean Water funds set aside just for cover crop education/outreach; Lawns to Legumes (priority for Rusty Patch bumble bee); next round of planning grants for 1W1P.
- Shaina Keseley, BWSR: Working on a number of 1W1P's, most of South MN; from fully completed plans to plans that are just starting out.
- Dave Walter, Root River SWCD: Pheasants/Quail Forever employee now doing considerable number of projects with Houston County, can expand out. Also had poor construction season due to weather.
- Skip Langer, Olmsted SWCD: Weather has been holding back construction, early freeze will stop all fall construction. North Branch of the RR has seen MN DNR Fisheries crew working on severely eroded sites and including 50ft buffer within their work plans. City of Chatfield public works dept. is looking at 3-5 basins in the Whalon Valley area; stormwater issues; currently a

makeshift drainage system is functioning well; working with the city and a private landowner for the basin locations. Sinkhole project in RR on a dead end road, local historic dump site, would like to just fill in and seal – very expensive project.

- Dan Wermager, Root River SWCD: Helping Dave survey.
- Margaret Lyngholm, Friends of the Root River: Local, likes to hear all of the work that we have been doing.
- Tim Miller, US FWS – Miss. / LAX: Working with some dike removals on Mississippi, now working with RR due to excess Miss. flooding because a RR levee was breached. Audubon grant to work on Reed Canary Grass and other terrestrial invasives, implementing forestry practices while also working on invasive species management. University of MN and University of Wisconsin-LAX working together with US FWS with habitat restoration; forestry and wet meadows. Treated 16 acres of hops on lower end of the RR.

Overview of WBIF Program Policy – Adam Beilke & Shaina Keseley, BWSR

- Transitioning from county-based water monitoring to watershed-based, also from competitive funding sources to known allocated, non-competitive amounts. 1W1P has been a pilot program up until this point; received \$5 million in funding to continue the program. Handout includes timeline and background, input from stakeholders, what the policy looks like; it is used to show legislature that the project is progressing as planned and monies are being used in the best way possible. Also shown is how funding is split up and allocated from Clean Water funds to the watersheds. Pilot grant that RR 1W1P received in 2018 was ~\$850,000, RR 1W1P has now been allocated \$1,469,000, that new grant ends in 2022, but can be extended to 2023. Outlined is what grant monies can and can not be used for; monitoring is a large component explicitly noted as what funding can **NOT** be used for – monies is meant to get conservation practices on the ground.

Second Round WBIF Group Discussion

- Where does data collection fit within the monitoring system? Well testing/monitoring, or data collection – how to use clean water monies. Likely to be considered monitoring; holding well testing clinics and providing education materials and testing equipment could be filed under civic engagement. Monitoring is not an applicable practice for WBIF.
- Compiling and analyzing data is allowed.
- Well inventories; updated well inventory within watershed, target sealing wells especially in flood-prone and highly-vulnerable karst areas. Going through county records and doing mailings. Cost-share funding and other resources.
- What's working, projects to keep funding/using 1W1P funds for: roadways (bigger projects to use up more money, as with seasonality changing, smaller field projects are more and more difficult to put in place).

Timeline and Next Meetings

- Policy Committee Meeting

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- Planning Work Group
 - November 18th
- Advisory Committee
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Adjourn