

Advisory Committee for the Root River One Watershed One Plan (RR1W1P)  
Tuesday, March 20, 2018, 9:00 am – 12:15 pm  
Room 108, Fillmore County Office Building, 902 Houston St. NW, Preston, MN

In attendance: Brian Hazel (Fillmore SWCD Supervisor), Travis Willford (Fillmore SWCD Supervisor), Kevin Kuehner (MN Dept. of Ag), Sheila Harmes (Winona County), Jeff Hastings (Trout Unlimited), Mary Peterson (BWSR), Tim Connolly (USFWS), Adam King (Dodge SWCD), Justin Watkins (MPCA), Jeff Weiss (DNR), Brian Burkholder (City of Chatfield), Justin Hanson (Mower SWCD), Caleb Fischer (Fillmore SWCD), Jason Wetzel (Friends of the Root River), Gary Larson (NRCS-Caledonia), Dave Walter (Root River SWCD), Brian DeVetter (NRCS-Austin, Dodge Center), Shaina Keseley (BWSR), Adam Beilke (BWSR), Bridgette Timm (SE MN Water Resources Board), Daryl Buck (Winona SWCD), Jim Fritz (NRCS-Rochester Area Office), Mark Ruen (Fillmore County Pork Producers), David Schmidt (The Nature Conservancy), Nancy North (Newground, Inc.), Jennifer Ronnenberg (MN Dept. of Health), George Spangler (National Trout Center), Dean Thomas (Area Soil Health Technician), Melissa Konsti (DNR-Fisheries), Donna Rasmussen (Fillmore SWCD).

Open Meeting and Introductions: The meeting opened at 9:05 with introductions. Donna Rasmussen provided an overview of the agenda, the role of the Advisory Committee and purpose of the meeting. This meeting serves to combine two locally led roles: the RR1W1P Advisory Committee, which meets twice a year to set priorities for watershed planning and funds, and the USDA Local Work Group (LWG), which meets once a year to set priorities for the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs (e.g. EQIP, CSP, CRP). A report issued in May 2017 from a statewide work group made three recommendations for locally led efforts like 1W1P and LWG: 1) provide a framework that identifies future opportunities for leveraging federal, state and local conservation programs and funding, 2) reduce duplication of requests for stakeholder input at the local level, and 3) refer to and use priorities outlined in Comprehensive Local Water Management Plans or One Watershed One Plan as a starting place in the process for identifying resource concerns (keeping in mind that NRCS resource concerns include more than just water resources, i.e. wildlife and energy, that may overlap with water management priorities).

Adam Beilke, BWSR, reviewed the funding sources for the watershed implementation plan and budget for 2018-2019. The BWSR watershed-based grant approved in December for the RR1W1P is \$851,301. The work plan and budget has been submitted and approved by BWSR, and the grant agreement is expected within the next month. USDA-EQIP funding through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) has been approved for Minnesota's 1W1P pilot projects. Of the \$2.5 million approved, NRCS receives \$0.5 million for technical assistance. The remainder will be divided among the five pilot projects, estimated to be about \$500,000 for the Root River. Performance measures for the BWSR funds will be based on PTMApp estimated pollution reductions or numbers of BMPs.

The 2018-2019 RR1W1P work plan and budget were reviewed on the handout provided.

- Nitrate reduction practices in the vulnerable drinking water supply management areas (DWSMAs) for Utica and Chatfield
- Nutrient Management and Soil Health technical assistance with priorities in DWSMAs and nitrate impaired watersheds and townships
- Grade stabilization structure(s) in Crooked Creek Watershed District
- Farm walkovers/project development and practice implementation in the headwaters of the Middle and South Branches of the Root River
- PTMApp analysis and landowner engagement for water storage practices and erosion BMPs project development in the Riceford Creek/South Fork Root River watershed
- Support for the Rush-Pine Farmer Led Council with education/outreach, project funding and staff support
- Engineering and technical assistance for RCPP-EQIP
- Administration/Coordination by Fillmore SWCD and Winona SWCD, fiscal agent

Jeff Hastings reported that Trout Unlimited has received \$2.5 million in RCPP funds for Rush-Pine and Garvin Brook watersheds, which includes technical assistance that can be used by the SWCDs. Lessard-Sams (phase 10, now at \$20 million total) can also be used. The Root River is the highest target area for the funds. RCPP funds have a February/March signup with applications approved in June. There are engineering needs for streambank projects since local field staff do not have the technical job approval authority (JAA) in Minnesota. Pete Fryer, SE MN Technical Support engineer, can assist with some projects, and more local staff may be getting JAA with training planned to take place in the near future. Many Lessard-Sams projects utilize private engineering, and the projects incorporate other benefits, such as non-game wildlife habitat, flood control, and streambank erosion control which also provide water quality benefits. Trout Unlimited works from a priority list from DNR. RCPP funds can be used outside the list, but Lessard-Sams funds must be on public

access and only within the 66' easement area. Long range planning and coordinating the projects can maximize how these funding sources are used. Brian Burkholder, city of Chatfield, reported on projects the city has planned including work on a regional park along Mill Creek. They would like to include stream habitat work with TU.

Mary Peterson, BWSR Conservation Planner Coordinator, provided an overview of the statewide Conservation Planning Initiative with NRCS to alleviate the bottleneck in the planning process to get landowners ready to implement practices. It increases technical assistance in SWCDs to do planning and resource assessment to then hand off to NRCS or SWCD technical staff for implementation. The positions are to be located in the 1W1P and MRBI watersheds around the state (~8FTEs). NRCS is providing office space and computer, plus a vehicle if available. BWSR will provide grant funds to hire, contract, or support planners in the SWCDs to work through steps 1-7 in the planning process. Mary provided a handout with more details. The Root River SWCD is being considered as the location for the Root River watershed planner. Internal meetings to kickoff the program will include the District Managers, NRCS District Conservationists, Conservation Planner and BWSR staff. The kickoff for the Root will be held today after the LWG meeting. The Contribution Agreement between BWSR and NRCS is on a reimbursement basis. BWSR will upfront funds to the SWCDs based on a \$270,000 budget over three years (\$80,000-90,000 per year with NRCS providing office space and computer). They will be certified planners or can work under the DC until they become certified. Spaces are reserved in this year's basic conservation planning course for them to attend. Funding beyond the three years is uncertain at this time.

Justin Watkins, MPCA, added that there are funds (\$200,000) for planning support tools, such as modeling and practice inventories, to complement other work in the watershed. An example of the practice inventory has been completed in the Zumbro watershed. The Iowa portion of the Upper Iowa has been completed. LiDAR coverage can be used to locate dams and terraces and to calculate drainage areas. This combined with aerial photo review to assess if upland practices are needed, which was used in the Field to Stream Partnership watersheds, has been shown to be a good methodology to use. The Conservation Planner could ground truth the information which can also be used in conjunction with PTMAApp results. TU has projects mapped from 2004 to present to include in the inventory.

Jim Fritz, NRCS Area Resource Conservationist, provided an overview of the Local Work Group process. As a follow up to the conservation planning discussion, he explained that the certified conservation planner designation is from NRCS after a staff person attends the basic planning course (to be held on a farm near St. Cloud this summer) and then completes three plans. The Local Work Group process is used to identify priority resource concerns from those listed on a handout provided in categories for Soil, Water, Animals, Plants, Air plus Energy (SWAPA+E). Locally led can mean different things; in the past, each county convened a local work group, but now could be based on multiple counties or a watershed with common resource concerns. The RR1W1P identifies local resource concerns for sediment, nutrients, bacteria and flooding. The outcomes from the local work group process are to 1) identify the top five resource concerns and rate them, 2) identify the top two practices and why, 3) identify a priority HUC12 watershed for which applications in that watershed receive extra points, and 4) identify road blocks to signing up for financial assistance. Scoring questions for EQIP applications are based on these priorities. Practices can repair problems (e.g. fix a gully) or prevent problems (e.g. practices upstream that can reduce gully erosion). The local work group priorities are sent to the State Technical Committee, where findings from 80+ local work groups are reviewed to find similarities. The Committee is a big group with a broad range of representatives, and it meets quarterly. All local work groups have a deadline to meet by May 8<sup>th</sup> to set priorities for FY19 funds that might include the RCPP funds. It was suggested to send out the Plan Summary document to the Advisory Committee along with links to the resource concerns fact sheets.

The timeline for upcoming meetings is for the Policy Committee to meet on July 30<sup>th</sup>. However, cost share policies and sub-agreements for the watershed-based grant agreement will be needed once the BWSR grant agreement is ready, so the Policy Committee may meet sooner for that purpose.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55 for a short break before convening the Fillmore County Local Work Group.