

## **Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Root River, One Watershed One Plan**

**Wednesday, July 19, 2017, 9:00 AM – 12:00 noon**

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

### **Meeting Minutes**

In attendance: Dan Wermager (Root River SWCD), Jennifer Ronnenberg (MDH), Joe Magee (MPCA), Kevin Kuehner (MDA), Sheila Harmes (Winona County), Jeff Hastings (Trout Unlimited), John Beckwith (Hiawatha Valley RC&D), Dean Thomas (Area Soil Health Technician), Jeff Weiss (DNR), Tim Ruzek and Justin Hanson (Mower SWCD), Caleb Fischer and Donna Rasmussen (Fillmore SWCD)

1. Open meeting: The meeting opened at 9:07 a.m.

2. Introductions were made.

3. Purpose: Gather input from partners for the 2018 watershed work plan and budget:

- a. Factors affecting Planning Work Group (PWG) recommendations: Funding was approved by the legislature from Clean Water Funds in the amount of \$9.75 million for the five 1W1P pilot areas and 7 metro Watershed Management Organizations for two years. The second year, 7 more 1W1P areas with approved plans would be added to receive funding. The funding formula has not been finalized for “performance-based” grants, but if divided equally, there would be about \$400,000/watershed in the first year, and \$250,000/watershed the second year.

We discussed other the other factors considered, such as areas where landowners have expressed interest in practices or have formed cooperative relationships (e.g. Rush-Pine watershed). We have partnerships established with MDA in the Field to Stream Partnership (FSP) study watersheds as well as areas where MDH is beginning to work with municipalities on wellhead protection plan implementation (e.g. Utica). There is the need for equitable distribution of funds among the counties also, although it may not happen every year but with the intent that over time each county will have access to funding for local practices and programs. PTMApp is intended to be used for prioritizing and targeting areas for BMPs. Those who attended the training feel that the web-based version has some applications, but to really utilize its functions, someone with good GIS skills is needed. Several maps were shown that Adam Beilke had compiled for the areas that the PWG has identified for 2018 projects. The maps have limitations but can be helpful for showing key areas for implementation.

- b. Staffing is a need in several areas, as mentioned with GIS. Other needs are for nutrient management to address nitrates in DWSMAs and other sensitive ground water areas being identified through the MDA township nitrate testing. Technical assistance for soil health practices has been successful having the Area Soil Health Technician. The funding for that position runs out in 2018, and the funding source that now comes through the SE MN Technical Support JPB is no longer available through BWSR so some other cooperative approach to funding the position is needed.

- c. Review of maps:

Several maps were shown that Adam Beilke had compiled using the web-based version of PTMApp for the areas that the PWG has identified for 2018 projects. The maps have limitations but can be helpful for showing key areas for implementation.

Focus areas as identified by the PWG were based on the factors mentioned above as well as the “A” priorities in the plan.

- Drinking water: Three Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs) that are considered vulnerable in the watershed have nitrate levels above or near 10 ppm—Chatfield, Utica, and Lewiston. A fourth, Spring Grove, is considered vulnerable and has had issues with industrial chemicals from a past manufacturing facility. Utica and Chatfield are pilots for forming MDA Local Advisory Teams to address nitrate in groundwater. The Township Nitrate Testing Program overlaps with our plans. Testing has been done in Dodge and Olmsted for two years, one year in Winona County, and Fillmore County is in progress. Testing will be done in 2018 in Houston County and in 2019 in Mower County. The Advisory Teams can address both groundwater and surface water issues.

Winona County has been awarded a 319 grant to work on nutrient management in the Whitewater watershed, which would include the cities of Utica and Lewiston. The SE MN Water Resources Board is in the process of developing a Clean Water Fund grant application for ground water protection in DWSMAs and sensitive groundwater areas using soil health (cover crops) and

nutrient management practices and education. DNR is completing groundwater modeling in Houston County as part of the geologic atlas project.

- Civic Engagement: Support for the Rush-Pine Farmer Led Council is another priority identified by the PWG. Funding for practices, demonstrations, advertising and administrative support for meetings (postage, coordination) is suggested. There have been reports that the legislature appropriated funding for building the capacity of farmer led councils, but no one is sure which agency received the funding. Joe said he would inquire through channels at MPCA. The RC&D Council wants to stay engaged in watershed efforts and keep communication open regarding shared services, outside funding and matching funds.
- Streams and rivers: Crooked Creek Watershed District has plans ready for a flood control structure in an area of the watershed that had severe flooding last fall. The cost is about \$200,000 and the Watershed District has increased its levy to help pay for the construction. Bob Scanlan can provide more details for the work plan and budget.

Mower SWCD has identified several practices (grassed waterways and water and sediment basins) in the Middle and South Branch headwaters. A list of the practices has been developed with preliminary costs plus and estimate of the technical assistance to conduct farm walkovers similar to those done in the FSP study.

Hiawatha Valley RC&D has provided assistance to farmers Bee/Duck Creek. An NRCS hydrology study helped to identify project sites to reach a goal of 50% reduction in peak flows. Dave Walter has more information. The Upper Iowa WRAPS will be completed in 2019 which may provide more information useful to prioritizing and targeting practices.

Kevin reported that MDA Root River FSP monitoring is expected to continue another 7 to 10 years. Two of the sites may sunset so monitoring could be moved to other areas of the watershed. A paired design over 3-6 years could quantify benefits in a side-by-side comparison. Bill Bond from the MN Crop Production Retailers has taken a proactive interest in the study and in what local co-ops can do to elevate communication to growers about N BMPs. Kevin provided a summary of the Phase II implementation activities and an updated brochure for the project. He estimates that the farm walkover process costs from \$5 to \$15 per acre depending on the size of the farm fields. Trout Unlimited has received funding for the South Branch and Middle Branch. The next four phases are funded at \$2 million each through Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund. A Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant was awarded to utilize NRCS EQIP funds which will lengthen the time to use the state funds and allow additional projects to be funded.

- i. Are these the areas to focus on? Consensus is to work on these areas and to continue to communicate with partners, such as Trout Unlimited and RC&D for potential cooperative efforts. A method is needed for tracking partner projects in order to add them to the list of BMPs being implemented.
- ii. What BMPs make sense? PTMApp data can help with this along with the other factors mentioned earlier.
- iii. What resources are available for practice implementation? This also requires good communication with partners to maximize opportunities for leveraging funding.

4. Break

5. Advisory Committee role in future work plan and budget development: The Advisory Committee will have the opportunity to review the 2018 work plan and budget and provide comments to the Policy Committee. There will be a role also for developing scoring criteria for setting future priorities for funding.

6. Timeline and next meetings

Policy Committee meeting, Monday, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 9 am, Room 108, Fillmore County Office Building

Agenda items:      Review Advisory Committee meeting discussion

Similar overview of the factors leading to the project recommendations

Funding update

Rough budget for project recommendations

Consider a presentation on the economics of trout angling in the region

Provide an ongoing update of partner projects

7. Adjourned at approximately 12:05 pm.