

BWSR joins partners on tour



Virginia Regorrah of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers discussed work at the Grand Forks Riverside Park Dam on Aug. 24, during the Red River Partners Summer Tour. **Photo Credits:** Jenny Gieseke, BWSR

Flood damage reduction and water quality projects take center stage during an annual conservation tour set in the Red River Valley and presented by a host of state, regional and local partners.



A late-August tour in the East Grand Forks area crossed state lines and encouraged stakeholders to collaborate as they approach local conservation and water quality projects.

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Board members, staff and partners gathered Aug. 24 for an annual conservation project tour.

Stops featured projects focused on flood damage reduction and water quality in the Red River basin. More specifically, the tour highlighted flooding and mitigation sites in northwest Minnesota and North Dakota.

Unlike previous BWSR Board tours which focused solely on Minnesota, this daylong event was routed through Minnesota and North Dakota. Local government units in coordination with BWSR typically host the tour, but



this year several local, regional, state, federal and national partners assisted with tour planning. Rob Sip, Red River Watershed Management Board executive director, began reaching out to partners last winter to gauge interest in a combined effort. With their support, Sip started coordinating several tour planning meetings per

The Grand Forks Riverside Park Dam was featured during the tour.

month.

“It was not just one person or one entity, it was several coming together,” Sip said of planning the tour.

Tour planning partners included the Red River Basin Commission, the Red River Retention Authority, the Red River Joint Water Resource District, the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, the Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees and BWSR.

A tour planning subcommittee selected nine different project sites. At some sites, participants disembarked to have a closer look and hear about the project from the project managers, while others were drive-by sites, with tour guides sharing more information about the project on the bus. Subcommittee members said they wanted to create a well-rounded tour and began brainstorming tour stop ideas early on; these ideas were then presented at a larger planning meeting.

“Once we started narrowing them (site ideas) down, I really looked for the projects that highlighted the multi-benefit aspects,” said Matt Fischer, subcommittee member and BWSR board conservationist. “Projects that are doing flood damage reduction, they have water quality components, and they have habitat components.”

While most projects were already complete at the time of the tour, others were still in the planning



Dan Money of Two Rivers Watershed District discussed the Springbook Flood Protection project during the tour.



The Agassiz Valley Water Resources Management project was developed under a mediation agreement between the state of Minnesota and the Red River Watershed Management Board. It was designed for flood control and environmental enhancements, and spans about 2,600 acres in Marshall and Polk counties.

phase. The tour featured drainage, soil conservation, wildlife habitat and flood damage reduction projects.

“My hopes were to really showcase the diversity of work being done in the Red River basin. I think a lot of times people from outside the area think, ‘It’s only flood damage reduction. That’s what they do up there,’” Fischer said. “But these projects are complex, and they go through lengthy processes with multiple

stakeholders to really take advantage of achieving multiple benefits.”

Approximately 120 people attended the tour. A popular spot amongst the group was the Agassiz Valley Water Resources Management Project. It offers multiple benefits, such as flood damage reduction, improved water quality and habitat development. Fischer said participants thought the project was impressive and

expressed their desire to return during the migration season because the project had also partnered with the Audubon Society and there could be ample bird-watching opportunities.

Ryan Hughes, BWSR northern regional manager, said the tour was the most complex tour that he has ever been involved with.

“My hope, from a regional perspective, was to showcase the complexity of projects in the Red River basin area, and the diversity of partners, and emphasize collaboration and partnership, which leads to beneficial projects being implemented on the ground,” Hughes said.

Based on feedback, Hughes said people enjoyed the trip and believed it exhibited a good mixture of projects. Attendees also received tour packets full of project information to read during their transition from one stop to another.

Sip, Hughes and Fischer said they hoped attendees were able to walk away inspired to create more partnerships and to find more ways to work together to benefit Minnesota’s lands and waters.

Registration fees collected by tour organizers from attendees helped cover the majority of the costs for holding the tour. All partners contributed significant staff time to plan the events as part of the three-day meetings and tour.