# Working Lands Watershed Restoration Program

## Meeting Notes

Thursday, January 26, 2017 – 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

MPCA Room 300, St Paul, MN

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| 8:30 a.m. | Welcome and Introductions |
| 8:50 a.m. | Project Background |
| 9:20 a.m. | Related Agency Efforts and Coordination |
| 9:45 a.m. | BREAK |
| 9:50 a.m. | Discussion:<br>• Criteria for selection of sample watersheds<br>• Suggestions for economic analysis<br>• What's missing? Other elements to incorporate? |
| 10:20 a.m. | Next Steps – Meeting Scheduling |
| 10:30 a.m. | Adjourn |

**Attendees:** Ryan Galbreath, NRCS, Bill Fitzgerald and Bob Patton, MDA, Jason Garms, DNR, Ted Fuller and Chuck Regan, MPCA, Randy Ellingboe, MDH, Suzanne Rhees and John Voz, BWSR

**Introductions, agency roles**

- Ryan, NRCS – Synergies with NRCS programs, specifically Conservation Enhancement Activities under CSP
- Bill, MDA – Ag Water Quality Certification Program (Pesticides & Fertilizer Management Division)
- Ted Fuller, MPCA – new at MPCA; modeling with HSPF
- Randy, MDH – Director of Drinking Water Protection division –interest in adding to the options for protection of Wellhead Protection Areas, DWSMAs
- Bob Patton, MDE – Energy & Environment Section Supervisor and EQB tech. rep
    - AGRI – Bioincentives program (part of the impetus for the Working lands initiative
    - New Clean Water Fund initiative on Vegetative cover and Soil Health; primary focus will be on forage
- John, BWSR – Working Lands Specialist (formerly Ducks Unlimited consultant) with a lot of experience with landowners, grazers (through RIM), MN Prairie Plan
- Chuck, MPCA – has been working on TMDL studies and HSPF modeling for over 10 years
- Jason, DNR – Ag. Liaison, Policy & Planning – former state prairie biologist. Background on previous efforts to promote biofuels – need to incorporate perspectives of growers and their risks, not simply state agency ideas.

**Comments on background presentation**

- Consider incorporating The Nature Conservancy – Upper Miss. initiative
- Should we be contracting with Applied Economics Department?

- Bob – note that the Bioincentive program is part of the AGRI program funding, so funding would only be available under that program – and there is a lot of demand for other AGRI funds. A problem with the NextGen program was that so many projects failed to materialize.
    - We should "mine" the data on the program to determine where projects fell short
- RIM-CE legislation is still in place – could help growers manage risk (through payments)

**John Voz – opportunities in Buffalo-Red River watershed**

- Agriculture to the west, forest to the east; significant amount of grazing; woody biomass being cut to manage RIM easements and there are questions as to how to dispose of it. Barnesville's interest in developing a pellet mill. Lots of landowner interest in biomass. Bruce Albright, watershed district administrator, is also development director for Barnesville; BWSR Acting Chair Gerald Van Amburg is also chair of WD Board
- Maps show proximity to highway and rail lines (direct link to Fergus Falls); Prairie Plan core area and corridors
- Modeling by Henry Van Offelen shows sediment loading for subwatersheds, catchments, and 5m cells, plus ranked Stream Power Index – gives some indication of where perennials would be most effective at improving water quality. Modeling was "PTM"

- "Local leaders" should be among the criteria for selecting sample watersheds
- Need to balance the desire for a diverse biofuels seed mix with the need for a marketable feedstock – will likely end up with regionally adapted mixes (BWSR currently has Biofuels/Biomass seed mixes for Northwest, Southwest and Southeast MN).
- Consider rotational grazing as a first step
- Many state and federal lands with ongoing biomass removal – consider as an initial catalyst.
- Also substantial interest in cattails as a biomass component in this watershed – lots of interaction with Canada.
    - Manston Slough project – possible harvesting for phosphorus removal

**Sample watersheds in general**

- Forage might be the most viable approach for one watershed; biofuel for another – can be specialized.
- 7 Mile Creek is the pilot watershed for the COE Minnesota River Coordinated? Plan – lots of modeling has occurred in this 38 square mile watershed
- Greg Eggers at DNR has modeled Shakopee Creek and Straight River near Owatonna
- Are we looking at progress on WRAPS, 1W1P in watersheds?
- Is groundwater protection a relevant criterion – i.e., nitrate pollution?
- Ryan – State Technical Committee has been meeting to select watersheds for certain programs – includes SWCDs and other partners – this info could be shared
    - Examples include NWQI, Miss. River Basin Initiative
- One issue is "program overload" or "planning fatigue" in areas with too many prior initiatives
- Look at MDA's township testing program for nitrate hotspots
- Impaired waters in western MN – one benefit is a reduction in irrigated acres = less stress on surface waters
- Worthington Wellhead WMA example
- Need community involvement, not just SWCDs
- Look at locations with high concentration of dairying – i.e. Stearns County

    - Cold Spring area, where water supplies are under stress, lots of groundwater/surface water interaction
    - Dakota County – an area with high nitrate issues – proximity to Koda plant
    - Also look at Southeast – loss of livestock industry - interest in bringing it back, vulnerable to erosion
- Can intermediate wheatgrass be pelletized as a fuel source?
- Could prescribed grazing (without processing) be one of the strategies?
- Options might be:
    - pelletizing
    - direct grazing
    - biomass for biofuel

- Questions re crop insurance – there are some options re forage – managed by RMA-USDA
- Other ways to manage risk:  multiple markets

**Next steps, economics:**

- Consider including Sustainable Farming Association among stakeholders
- Economic analysis:  might determine that a particular watershed isn't viable
- Upcoming stakeholder meeting (February 13)