

Minnesota State Technical Committee (MSTC)
Minutes
March 17, 2011

PARTICIPANTS:

Don Baloun, NRCS	Joe Pavelko, PF
Tim Koehler, NRCS	Gary Michael, DNR Forestry
Myron Taylor, NRCS	Mark Lindquist, DNR
Warren Formo, MAWRC	Ray Norrgard, DNR Wildlife
Brian Williams, MDA	Wayne Anderson, MPCA
Kevin Paap, Farm Bureau	Adam Warthesen, LSP
Bruce Henningsgaard, MPCA	Shawn Schuttler, St. Croix Research Station
Terry Bovee, MDH	Les Everett, U of M – WRC
Ralph Lentz, Farmer	Barbara Weisman, MN Dept of Ag
John Nicholson, NRCS	Sheldon Myerchin, USFWS
Chris Alberty, Agassiz Seed	Wanda Garry, FSA
Maggie Anderson, FWS	Greg Anderson, FSA
Gregg Knutsen, USFWS	Jodie Provost, MN Chapter of the Wildlife Society
Neal Feeken, TNC	Rhonda Osterman, NRCS
Kevin Lines, BWSR	Dale Walz, Stearns SWCD
Tim O'Hara, MN Forest Industries	Dave Zumeta
Dan Gulland, Agassiz Seed Co.	Linda Meschke, MN Rural Partners
Al Juhnke, Senator Franken's Office	Ian Cunningham, MASWCD, Pipestone SWCD
Bob Lefebvre, MMPA	Wanda Garry, MN FSA
Corey Hanson, RLWD	Dean Current, Dept of Forest Resources, UMN
Bill Penning, DNR	Al Kean, BWSR
Riley Maanum, MCGA	Mike Greenheck, Gorman Creek Restoration

Opening Remarks/Intro, Tim Koehler, ASTC, NRCS

Tim Koehler opened the meeting by welcoming MSTC members in the room and those joining the meeting via teleconference. Introductions were made by the attendees. Don Baloun is in Washington DC and will be arriving after his plane lands at about 10:30 a.m.

Tim reviewed the agenda and the minutes from the January 4, 2011 meeting. No changes or additions were made to the minutes. A motion was made to approve the minutes of the January 4, 2011 MSTC meeting and seconded.

Tim gave an update on the NRCS budget. The CR signup ends March 18, 2011. The Watershed and RC&D Programs set to end.

Charlie Blair, Project Leader, MN Valley Wildlife Refuge

Charlie Blair welcomed the MSTC to the Refuge. He talked about the history of the refuge and what the functions of the refuge are. Charlie invited everyone for a short tour of the building later in the day and some history of the refuge.

Easement Program, Tim Koehler

Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)

General FRPP discussion was conducted. A Request for Proposal (RFP) is currently occurring that ends April 1, 2011. Eligible entities are encouraged to apply for FRPP funds (see attached).

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

2011 will be a record year for WRP in Minnesota with approximately \$40M of funding. Allocations have been reviewed from Washington for the following:

RIM-WRP floodplain program	\$15M
RIM-WRP Partnership – Regular	\$17.4M
Mississippi River Basin Initiative WREP	\$7M
Scott County WREP	\$600,000

Additional WRP funds are available from Washington.

Also, if the Red River WRP Conservation Initiative, funded to focus on both flood mitigation and wildlife habitat, MN could receive over \$5M of additional WRP funds.

Signups are currently being conducted for all forms of WRP with obligation deadlines set for early summer.

A question was asked on what NRCS and BWSR are doing to accelerate the time it takes to close an easement. Tim and Kevin Lines responded with the following:

- Additional staff is being proposed
- More title agents are being hired (from 4 to 10)
- More legal surveyors are being hired
- Additional services are being supplied by the agents

GRP – Grassland Reserve program

As a follow-up to the January MSTC meeting, here are a few updates:

- GRP is jointly administered by NRCS and FSA
- Linda Hennen, State Executive Director, FSA, and Don met recently and the following proposals:
 1. National guidance in a 60% consent/40% rental agreement split. The recommendation is to use this split up for an initial allocation for the \$600,000 GRP 2011 allocation.
 2. After an initial scoring period, if funds remain in one of the two accounts, those will be transferred to the other and continue funding.
 3. Prioritization or targeting of funds should be ?????? for 2011. This will reduce the workload of employees, provide realistic expectations to producers and get a bigger “bang for the buck.”

A number of prioritization ideas were discussed including the NW MN beach ridge area. This issue will be discussed at a future GRP subcommittee meeting as recommended to FSA and NRCS.

The MSTC was supportive of the three areas above.

Action:

- **Kevin Lines, BWSR and Tim Koehler, NRCS will submit a listing of RIM-WRP Floodplain Easement applications to MSTC members**
- **NRCS and BWSR will conduct a Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) Subcommittee of the MSTC teleconference to finalize guidelines for 2011, especially related to allocation distribution between easements and agreements and targeting.**

Financial Assistance Programs – Myron Taylor

- Financial Assistance Programs Update
 - Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) – MN was allocated \$853,543
 - Focus for the initiative is water retention and beach ridge erosion
 - Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) – \$24.2 million allocated to Minnesota
 - \$1.7 m to the organic initiative
 - \$1.86 m to the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI)
 - \$20 m will be distributed to the 7 areas in Minnesota with the intentions of meeting the following goals:
 - 60% funds distribution to livestock producers
 - 10% distribution to underserved and beginning farmers
 - Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) – MN allocated \$417,210
 - Approximately 50% of the funds have been obligated to date focusing on; forestland and open land concerns
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Approximately 1,400 eligible applications in Minnesota
 - Applicants can expect to notification of field verification visits to verify their ranking in early April

CRP – Greg Anderson, FSA

Greg updated the committee on the CRP Program and provided a handout - CRP Fact Sheet General Sign-up 41.pdf – with General Sign-Up 41 information

Action:

Greg Anderson, FSA will make the soil rental rate values available to members of the MSTC

The Minnesota Nutrient Management Initiative – Brian Williams

Brian gave a presentation on the Minnesota Nutrient Management Initiative including background information and some current statistics. His presentation - Nutrient Management Presentation.pdf - may be found on the MSTC web site.

Action:

Brian Williams, MDA, will work with NRCS and put a call out to MSTC members and others to discuss funder alternatives for the NMI for the 2012 crop year.

Water Quality/Quantity Study for the Thief River Watershed – Jim Leach, Corey Hanson, Shawn Schottler, Gregg Knutsen

Members of the US Fish Wildlife Service, Red Lake Watershed District, St. Croix Watershed Research Station and the Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge gave presentations on Water Quality/Quantity Study for the Thief River Watershed.

Corey Hanson, Thief River Watershed Sediment, Sources, and Solutions

- The Red Lake Watershed District and the USFWS conducted parallel water quality studies within the Thief River watershed.
- Long-term condition monitoring has identified water quality impairments on the Thief River (Turbidity, DO), Mud River (DO), and Moose River (DO).
- Intensive monitoring conducted for the Thief River Watershed Sediment Investigation found additional E. coli impairments throughout the watershed.
- A Surface Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) Model was developed by Houston Engineering, Inc. for the Thief River Watershed. This model breaks the watershed up into sub-basins. We can use the sediment yield data to create maps that show where the problem areas are located. We can focus our initial efforts on the sub-basins that are in the worst shape. The sub-basins in the northwest part of the watershed (between Thief Lake and Agassiz NWR) appear to be contributing the highest sediment yields.
- We can also use the SWAT modeling data to estimate a sediment budget for the refuge. The SWAT model shows that most of the sediment is coming from the Thief River. Although the Mud River is a relatively clean river through most of the year, it is still a river and still carries sediment. Therefore, a significant portion of the sediment input to Agassiz Pool is still contributed by the Mud River. The model estimates that 57% of the sediment coming into Agassiz Pool is deposited there.
- The Thief River Watershed Sediment Investigation also makes recommendations for water quality improvement projects; some are specific, some are general.
 - Specific erosion sites were photographed and GPS'd. Some projects have already received funding from Clean Water Fund grants.
 - Many places throughout the watershed are in need of buffer strips and SWIs.
 - The SWAT model simulated the effectiveness of 50 foot buffer strips, 100 foot buffer strips, and side water inlets. All three of these scenarios were effective at reducing sediment yields.
- Agassiz NWR USFWS, NRCS, and RLWD staff have been working together to develop a buffer initiative project plan for the watershed. We've chosen several target areas for buffer strip and side-water inlet implementation. We have chosen the reach of the Thief River between Thief Lake and Agassiz NWR, the Mud River, and a reach of Marshall County Ditch 20.
- Our draft plan for our buffer initiative project includes:
 - Identification of target areas for buffers and side water inlets.
 - Intensive assessment of the watershed. Where are buffers and side water inlets needed.
 - Intensified outreach, which will include individualized maps and letters.
 - Promote the existing incentives and accomplish as much as we can with them.
 - We will be competing with high crop prices. So, we anticipate having to look for ways to fund additional incentives or alternative programs.
- If we are successful, this program will have many benefits for both agriculture and natural resource interests. It will improve water quality in the rivers and reduce the sediment coming into Agassiz NWR pools. For the farmers, it will keep sediment out of the ditches, preserve the flow capacity of ditches, reduce soil loss, and provide payments.

Shawn Schottler gave a presentation on the Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge. His presentation is available on the MSTC web site.

Gregg Knutsen - Water Quality and Quantity Impacts to Wildlife Impoundments

Since Eurosettlement dramatic landscape changes have occurred throughout the Upper Midwest. Natural resources personnel that manage wildlife impoundments in northwestern Minnesota are dealing with impacts related to both degraded water quality and increased water quantity. Examples of these negative impacts are available for both Agassiz NWR (61,500 ac) and throughout the 683,000-ac Thief River Watershed. Increased sediment and nutrient (e.g., nitrogen, phosphorus) loads, coupled with dramatic runoff events all result in the degradation of wildlife impoundments, as well as natural wetlands throughout Minnesota.

Migratory Bird Conservation Initiative – Myron Taylor

- Northern Plains Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (NPMBHI) – Proposal between Minnesota, Iowa, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota to restore and enhance wetlands in the Prairie Pothole Region
 - Goal of protecting 100,000 square miles of critical nesting and migration habitat
 - The focus in MN will be counties with high Prevented Planted acres: Roseau, Kittson and Marshall

MSTC Membership and Organization – Don Baloun and Tim Koehler

Don and Tim discussed possible MSTC membership, organization and other items. A few decisions have been made, including:

1. Each agency and organization will be asked to designate a primary and secondary representative to the MSTC. Additional staff/members can be present since the MSTC meetings are open to the public.
2. Programmatic subcommittee – Will be chaired by NRCS/FSA. They will be maintained to cover the Farm Bill Programs. Subcommittee members will assist USDA with Program development and recommendations.
3. Resource Focused Groups – There is a need for resource focus groups to provide guidance and support to USDA. In some cases there are existing groups already functioning in this capacity. In other situations there may be a need to establish new areas. Three areas that Don would like to either focus on or establish include:
 - Drainage
 - Forestry
 - Nutrient Management

Actions:

1. NRCS will send letters requesting P/Soc representatives on MSTC and subcommittees
2. NRCS will work w/partners to review existing and the need for new focus groups.

Action/Decision: *Presenters at this and future meetings are requested to provide a short write-up and handouts of their presentations to Rhonda Osterman (rhonda.osterman@mn.usda.gov). For future meetings it is requested to have these submitted two weeks prior to the meeting which the presentation is scheduled.*

***For more information, handouts and additional materials check out the MSTC web site:**
<http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/>

Next Meeting: May 19, 2011

Stearns History Museum

235 33rd Avenue South

St. Cloud, MN

9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Note: This meeting will not have audio conference capability.