



Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting

July 14, 2021 – 4:00 p.m.

In-person and Zoom Videoconference

WPC Members in Attendance

Mark Henry Chuck Clanton
Josh Borton James Kotz
Ken Betzold Tony Wotzka
Andy Riesgraf Steve Hamrick

Staff in Attendance

Mark Zabel, VRWJPO
Mark Ryan, VRWJPO
Brita Moore-Kutz, VRWJPO
Paula Liepold, VRWJPO

Others in Attendance

Curt Coudron, Dakota County SWCD

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Henry at 4:04 p.m.

2. Roll Call

All members present except Carolyn Miller.

3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

None.

4. Approval of Agenda

Chair Henry asked for any changes to the agenda. Upon hearing none, Chair Henry called for a motion to approve the agenda as provided in the packet.

Motion by Commissioner Borton, second by Commissioner Betzold, to approve the agenda. The agenda was unanimously approved by an 8-0 vote.

5. Approval of Minutes

Chair Henry requested any adjustments to the minutes as presented. Upon hearing none, Chair Henry called for a motion to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2021, meeting of the WPC.

Motion by Commissioner Clanton, second by Commissioner Kotz, to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2021, meeting, as distributed. The minutes were unanimously approved by an 8-0 vote.

6. Business Items

a. Landspreading of biosolids

Chair Henry called on Mark Zabel to introduce the item. Mark Zabel opened a presentation for Commissioner Clanton to present information on land application of biosolids. Commissioner Clanton includes this as a component of one of the university courses he teaches. Commissioner Clanton began by going through the potential end uses of biosolids (the recovered solids materials in the wastewater treatment process), one of them being land application. Incineration is used at about 22%, Landfilling at about 17%, and Land spreading at about 60% of uses. Sludges contain; organic and inorganic solids, nutrients, heavy metals, pathogens, and persistent organic chemicals. Biosolids are sampled for solids, pH, Nitrogen, Metals, PCBs, Phosphorus, and Potassium. There is a set of requirements for calculating the rate of application that is very strict based primarily on Nitrogen content. Nine metals are tested. There is a maximum annual application rate based on heavy metal concentration that limits the "site life". There is a maximum amount of specific heavy metals (limiting constituent) that can be applied to a site through land application of biosolids before the site can no longer be used for biosolids applications. Site life is usually in the 75 to 100-year range. Chair Henry commented that there is a site in Castle Rock Township that receives annual application of biosolids that may be a concern. There are concerns about odors and road maintenance associated with applications. Commissioner Clanton commented that the treatment plant should have records of where applications have taken place for which they can calculate the site life. Commissioner Clanton then described the fate of heavy metals applied to soil, concluding that due to chemical characteristics heavy metals do not generally move in soil. Heavy metals are also phytotoxic (poisonous to plants) and reach toxic levels for plants before they would be toxic to animals. Commissioner Clanton then went on to describe the concerns and fate for pathogens and persistent organic chemicals. There are also nuisance concerns for odors, insects (flies and mosquitos), varmints, and birds. Insects, varmints, and birds can be attracted to the spread area. Commissioner Clanton discussed commercial uses like the sale of milorganite or similar products as fertilizer or soil treatments. Commissioner Clanton went on to speak to specific cases involving Duluth, Mille Lacs County, City of Owatonna, Metropolitan Council, City of Omaha, City of Denver, and New York City. There was presentation about issues in debate about the land application of biosolids and application of risk assessment in decision making about land application of biosolids. Commissioner Kotz asked about incineration and whether that causes issues of concentrated pollutants in the ash. Incinerator ash is normally landfilled. However, incineration has increased costs associated with energy demand for burning. Mark Ryan commented that Met Council must apply for and obtain permits for land application of biosolids through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and so there is some oversight and checks-and-balances there. There is also information available about the processes used at each of the Metro Plants for solids processing. Mark Henry described the process of Met Council and MPCA coordination with Castle Rock Township, especially route and road management. Commissioner Kotz asked about the consistency of the biosolids material; how solid are they? Commissioner Clanton commented that they are usually more liquid than solid, but treatment plants try to dry as much as possible because of costs to transport. Commissioner Betzold said that working fields where it has been spread can be challenging because if its consistency and tractors can have difficulty getting traction. Commissioner Clanton added that only about 2% of the agricultural land in the state receives land application of biosolids. Mark Zabel asked if the WPC members felt that the VRWJPO should take a role related to the control or management of land application of biosolids. There seemed to be consensus that there is not a need for VRWJPO involvement at this time.

b. Mid-term Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan Review

Mark Zabel referred to a spreadsheet that was shared via email, handed out at the meeting, and shared on-screen, and described its contents. The spreadsheet contains all the objectives and actions included in Section 6: The Goals, Objectives, and Actions identified for the VRWJPO in its Watershed Management Plan. Staff have assigned a status for each action as; Done, Ongoing, or Future. Zabel indicated that staff are asking for input from the WPC members as to priorities for each of the actions identified as Future or Ongoing in status. Zabel reminded members that this is the mid-term which means we still have almost five full years to implement the plan. The purpose of this would be to inform our future work plans and staff time allocations to get the high priority work addressed. Zabel is not asking for immediate input, rather staff is hoping that the WPC members will review this information and give their input and comments and perhaps have further discussion at future meetings. Commissioner Clanton asked about the assignment of status by staff, when assigning future as the status does that mean it hasn't been started? Zabel replied that in many cases, yes. Commissioner Clanton pointed out the action directing development of procedures to operate wetland banks and asked if that wasn't already addressed. Zabel commented that establishing a wetland banking policy has been addressed but this action addresses procedures for the trade of credits which has not yet been developed and will need to be soon as credits become available for sale. Commissioner Borton asked if there is a staff priority or a means of adding some context. Zabel asked if another column is needed. Zabel added that there is a lot of work that is a matter of opportunity where a partner comes forward with a project that becomes a short-term priority. But in the context of Section 6 of the Watershed Plan it's a matter of comparing these actions to each other and prioritizing. Paula identified 71 actions as future, 132 as ongoing, and 32 as done. Brita identified that much of the public outreach and communications work is inherently ongoing activities. Paula noted that roles may overlap where an action may appear under one role but have application under other roles as well. Mark Ryan commented that as members go through the list, they may see something that is of interest to them and may like to highlight that area. That is also feedback that we would like to capture in this process. Commissioner Clanton suggested that he would likely go through and rank one third high, one third medium, and one third low for each status. Zabel commented that he didn't know if dividing into thirds would add value, but ranking as high, medium, or low could. Commissioner Clanton commented that ranking all actions as high wouldn't be useful at all. Commissioner Clanton spoke to an action regarding fencing across the river and how common that is on the river. Zabel commented that there was no fencing across the river from Hwy 52 to Hastings. Zabel pointed out that there were many actions identified as Coordination and Collaboration as the role; yet that is a smaller part of the VRWJPO Budget. That may reflect an expectation that Coordination and Collaboration is done simply as part of our daily work. Commissioner Betzold commented that if too many actions are ranked as high it doesn't help prioritize. Zabel commented that if you limit to one third you create an artificial cutoff that once reached you are now forced to rank something that you may see at one level as something else. Zabel commented that real ranking in the context of high, medium, or low is a good approach; but without a limit as to how many can be ranked in a category. Commissioner Henry suggested perhaps a 1 through 5 ranking. Zabel then asked how members would like to rank; high-medium-low, 1-5, 1-10? Members should agree on one method that everyone will use and then we can compile and report the result. Zabel commented that if members have questions on some of the actions, we can discuss those at future meetings as this will be completed over a few months.

7. Updates

a. Chairperson's Report

Chair Henry asked if Dakota County and the VRWJPO would have a presence at the County Fair in the Natural Resources Building. Brita replied that yes, they will, and she would be covering that in staff reports.

b. Staff Updates

Curt Coudron commented that weather has been favorable for completing projects. Most of CIP funds from the VRWJPO have been allocated to projects. There has been an application of interseeding of cover crop. Interseeding allows germination and some plant development during crop growth that is favorable to getting a good stand of cover as opposed to having to wait until the crop is harvested to be able to seed the cover. Some projects are being adjusted due to dry weather to provide a better opportunity for seeding and plant growth rather than risking losing plants due to their drying out after germination. Commissioner Clanton asked about a mailing that had gone out from the SWCD. Curt described the purpose of the mailing for targeted landowners in the Hastings Drinking Water Supply Management Area for promoting Kernza as an alternative crop. There is a field day coming up in Goodhue County associated with this promotion where a landowner is growing Kernza. Chair Henry mentioned the pollinator event that was held in Dakota County recently highlighting native prairie strips planted on the contours.

Brita Moore-Kutz reported that she was scheduled to be at Hastings at their Party in the Park, but unfortunately the event was cancelled. The VRWJPO will have a presence in the Natural Resources Building at the Dakota County Fair along with several others from Dakota County Environmental Resources Department, Minnesota DNR, and Dakota County SWCD. Brita commented that there are coordination meetings working to develop a cohesive conservation message among these groups. The group is also coordinating with Dakota County to include an environmental component in the County Building where Transportation is the main theme, perhaps a salt/ deicing management component. Brita then reported about the media coverage picked up in regard to goldfish, beginning from a tweet of a picture of a large goldfish found in Keller Lake in Burnsville. There was coverage on Good Morning America (GMA) this morning and a colleague from Carver County was interviewed by Inside Edition yesterday. There was also a Washington Post article. Zabel added that the GMA report included a good education/ outreach message directing people not to release goldfish into the wild. Mention was made of an alligator (dead) being found in Lake Marion in the past. Staff are also planning for a Watershed Tour later in September.

Commissioner Clanton asked about groundwater sampling. He referred to a form that had been sent by Dakota County requesting sampling of his private well be taken and submitted and he was curious about what it was about. Zabel commented that he could ask Valerie Grover, Supervisor of the Groundwater Unit, for more information.

Zabel presented the draft 2022 VRWJPO Budget going over line items that were changed or added compared to the 2021 VRWJPO Budget. The VRWJPO Budget will be presented for WPC recommendation at the August meeting. Staff welcome any input from WPC members prior to the August 11, 2021 meeting. The budget totals presented are; revenues of \$2,160,700, expenses of \$1,885,010, with a cash reserve of \$275,690 (12.8% of total budget). A reduction of the overall budget from \$2,497,900 this year to \$2,160,700 next year. This may change before recommendation to the Joint Powers Board based on gathering new or more accurate information. Chair Henry asked if he VRWJPO was accessing any of the American Recovery Plan funds (COVID money). Zabel commented that the VRWJPO did not submit projects for that funding and that several projects were submitted by Dakota County Environmental Resources Department that would support projects of interest to the VRWJPO that we may be coordinated in implementation.

Commissioner Clanton referred to the Watershed Based Funding Implementation (WBIF) grant funds for anti-icing equipment for the City of Rosemount and asked if other Cities were interested in similar access. Zabel commented that representatives of the cities and townships were invited to the same meeting to identify and prioritize potential projects for the WBIF grant and so there is equal opportunity for them to put forward their priority projects. Zabel also added that due to the highly porous soils in the majority of the City of Rosemount they manage most of their stormwater through infiltration and so require less overall stormwater management and treatment.

8. Adjourn

*Motion by Commissioner Betzold, second by Commissioner Borton, to adjourn the meeting at 5:54 p.m.
The motion passed on an 8-0 vote.*