



Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting

July 13, 2022 – 4:00 p.m.

In-person and Zoom Videoconference

WPC Members in Attendance

Mark Henry James Kotz
Josh Borton Andy Riesgraf
Steve Hamrick Chuck Clanton

Staff in Attendance

Travis Thiel, VRWJPO
Brita Moore-Kutz, VRWJPO
Mark Zabel, VRWJPO

Others in Attendance

Curt Coudron, Dakota County SWCD
Valerie Neppl, Dakota County

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:01 p.m.

2. Roll Call

All members present.

3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

None.

4. Approval of Agenda

Chair Henry called for any changes to the agenda. There were none.

Motion by Commissioner Borton, second by Commissioner Kotz, to approve the agenda as presented. The agenda was approved by a 6-0 vote.

5. Approval of Minutes from the April 13, 2022 Meeting

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 April 13, 2022 meeting of the WPC.

Motion by Commissioner Clanton, second by Commissioner Riesgraf, to approve the minutes of the April 13, 2022 meeting, as distributed. The minutes were approved by a 6-0 vote.

6. Business Items

a. Recommendation to release VRWJPO Plan Amendment to Plan Review Authorities for 30-day Public Review

Travis Thiel introduced the proposed Plan amendment and described the need for the amendment. The amendment is required to ensure that all potential projects are identified in the Plan document to be eligible for Watershed Based Implementation Funding program of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. Projects that were not originally included in the 2016-2025 Vermillion Watershed Management Plan include projects resulting from Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies analysis, Total Maximum Daily Load Studies, other feasibility and assessment studies, and project identified by project partners that address goals of the Plan. The amendment also provides additional clarification on Plan elements based on new information learned in the last five years. The amendment indicates a \$1,243,000 increase in spending, which is offset by an increase of \$1,243,000 in revenue anticipated from Watershed Based Implementation Grant funding.

Commissioner Clanton asked for clarification of the prioritization of subwatersheds in the Plan. The priorities shown in the Plan remain, however, spending on implementation does not match the set priorities. This is largely due to needing willing landowners implementing projects.

Motion by Commissioner Clanton, second by Commissioner Borton, recommending approval of the amendment to the 2016-2025 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan was unanimously adopted by a 6-0 vote.

b. Update on the Dakota County Agricultural Chemical Reduction Effort (ACRE) and Monitoring Well Network

Valerie Neppel presented on the Dakota County Agricultural Chemical Reduction Effort (ACRE) program being implemented through the Groundwater Protection Unit. The ACRE program is being initiated as a result of the Dakota County Groundwater Plan. The Groundwater Plan was adopted in January of 2021. The Groundwater Plan is a planning effort under authority of Minnesota Statute 103B and is therefore a plan eligible for funding similar to the Watershed Management Plans as discussed in the previous item. The Groundwater Plan identified agricultural chemicals, specifically nitrates and pesticides, are a significant concern in groundwater in Dakota County, especially in the south and southeast portions of the County. The ACRE Plan was the first effort resulting from the adoption of the Dakota County Groundwater Plan. The ACRE Plan will be out for public review starting July 20th for a 45-day review. The Minnesota Rural Water Association and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources published guidance in 2021 identifying practices that are most effective in protecting groundwater and drinking water. This is the guiding framework in the ACRE Plan. Tier 1 identifies nitrate using the right nutrient, at the right rate, during the right time, in the right place. Tier 2 looks at using other cropping and cropping practices

other than just corn and soybeans. Tier 3 looks at taking portions of the landscape out of the cropping rotation using conversion to perennial cover such as native prairie plantings. Going forward it may require implementing of all three tiers in different locations to address the nitrate levels in out groundwater. Everything is voluntary within this Plan. Three rounds of outreach were performed with rural and agricultural interested parties with surveys asking for input on the Plan. An Agricultural Advisory Group was formed to get further input in more detail. There were town hall meetings as well as meetings with townships and cities. There were overarching themes. Most farmers want to do the right thing as they live here and expect their operation to stay in their families. Voluntary practices are preferred and are expected to be supported through incentives. The SWCD was identified as the most trusted resource. The overall goal of ACRE is to reduce agricultural chemicals, specifically nitrates and pesticides to below levels which could impact human health of the environment. Outcome measures for this goal are to:

- measure the levels of nitrate in private drinking water wells with the target to reduce levels to less than 5% of wells above standards within a township.
- no public water supply wells exceeding the standard.
- median values of nitrates below standards
- no private drinking water wells exceed 50% of drinking water guidelines
- reducing chloride levels from agricultural sources

Strategies to address this are to:

- 1- Develop information for decision making (monitoring, modeling, and surveys)
- 2- Communication, outreach, and education
- 3- Technical assistance
- 4- Financial incentives

Commissioner Henry asked if dust control chemicals is a large contributor to chloride in groundwater. Valerie responded that she did not know how much dust control contributes but it is not among the top three which are: deicing salt, water softeners, potash fertilizer.

There was some discussion of cover crops and perennial crop alternatives including camelina and kernza.

The Groundwater Protection Unit is working on developing a grant program for the implementation of drinking water treatment systems for low income households on private well water sources used for drinking water that exceed drinking water standards. Valerie noted that in areas of the County with high nitrates even if all sources of nitrate were completely addressed it would still take time for a response in the groundwater and so treatment systems may be required for some time into the future.

The Groundwater Protection Unit is working with the Dakota County SWCD in implementing a Minnesota Department of Health grant for updating the Dakota County Model Mining

Ordinance. This is another action resulting from actions identified in the Dakota County Groundwater Plan.

The Groundwater Protection Unit is doing a feasibility study through a redevelopment block grant to look at the possibility for a rural water system for the portions of rural Dakota County where water quality is an issue.

c. Report on Measurable Outcomes as Identified in the 2016-2025 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan

Brita Moore-Kutz presented a summary of information contained in the report. Brita highlighted specific areas. The report is in the order of the goals and measures within the 2016-2025 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan. The report shows where we are improving in water quality. Brita highlighted changes in outreach where website use has increased significantly in the past year. Commissioner Riesgraf noted that the number of site visit views are up, the duration is shortened. This report is not a requirement, it is provided for the benefit of being able to track progress and trends.

7. Updates

a. Chairperson's Report

Commissioner Henry asked a general question about the potential impact of pesticides. He mentioned that there has been a great deal of progress in habitat development but wildlife (pheasants) are not as prominent and is wondering if pesticides may not be a factor. Commissioner Riesgraf asked if there is similar effects seen in neighboring states. Zabel mentioned that more intense spring rain events during nesting season could also be a factor and so there may be difficulty in pointing to a single factor that is impacting pheasant populations. Commissioners also discussed presence of other wildlife (deer, turkeys, coyotes, opossums, etc.) that seem to be thriving. Commissioner Henry also mentioned a field event being held at Kurt Kimber's farm which will include a highlight of Kernza as an alternative crop.

b. Staff Updates

Brita Moore-Kutz reported on developments for the We Are Water exhibit and events. Brita distributed a post card and bookmark with information relevant to water and the We Are Water exhibit and activities. Brita invited Commissioners to be a volunteer docent at the exhibit. Brita also mentioned that the Dakota County Fair is coming up next month and the VRWJPO will have a presence in the Natural Resources Building along with the Dakota County Groundwater Protection and Water Resources Units, Minnesota DNR, Dakota County SWCD, and Trout Unlimited. There will be a "Water Bar" at the display as part of the We Are Water activities.

Curt Coudron reported that Landscaping for Clean Water workshops are moving forward. There are a lot of cover crop contracts in place including 700 acres of new contracts and about 300

acres of previous contracts for a total of about 1000 acres of cover crop contracted in the Vermillion River Watershed. Commissioner Clanton asked how many have participated and have not continued. Curt responded that there are some contracts where a cropping rotation change makes it infeasible for cover cropping and so those situations do not continue. Curt also noted that there are fields where the producer is doing cover cropping on their own without contracting for cost share and those acres have not been tracked.

Mark Zabel reported that the VRWJPO has been selected for a Performance Review and Assistance Program review. Mark provided an overview of what that will entail for the VRWJPO in completing the review. Mark noted that there is a survey that is included in the review which goes out to partners for their input and that will include members of the Watershed Planning Commission. Mark mentioned that he is currently working on developing the draft budget for 2023. Mark presented an overview of current planning draft for the 2023 VRWJPO Budget. A formal presentation of the draft budget will be presented to the WPC at the August 10, 2022 meeting for recommendation to the Vermillion River Joint Powers Board.

Commissioner Clanton mentioned that the Watershed Planning Commission still has three vacancies in membership. Brita informed members that there had been no applications. There was an interested party who unfortunately does not reside in the watershed. Zabel encouraged members to recruit anyone interested to apply. Zabel did acknowledge the Commissioner Clanton did try to get an eligible applicant. Commissioner Henry had also put staff in touch with a potential applicant who declined at this time. Brita mentioned that she will try contacting him again next year. Commissioner Henry also mentioned that he has some contacts in Scott County that he will approach on this. Commissioner Riesgraf asked if the time of the meeting might be a hindrance to people applying? Zabel mentioned that people who have expressed interest have never asked about the meeting time. Zabel commented that the meeting time is not firm and the WPC can choose to meet at a different time.

Commissioner Henry commended and thanked staff.

8. Adjourn

Motion by Commissioner Clanton, second by Commissioner Kotz, to adjourn the meeting at 5:46 p.m. The motion passed on an 6-0 vote.