



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting

Wednesday July 17, 2019

Agenda Item

Item 6. B. - MN River Congress Request

Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

Summary

This is an item that has come before the Board at the April and June Board meetings. Mr. Scott Sparlin plans to be present to answer any questions the Board may have. I asked Mr. Sparlin to prepare a proposed work plan or scope of work for the project. The information he provided is attached. Funding is included in the 2020 budget for this project. If the Board chooses to provide funding for this project in 2019, there is funding in the 2019 budget intended for a project that Friends of the MN Valley proposed, that could be re-directed toward this project.

Attachments

Water Storage Legislation Work Plan and Timeline

Proposed Water Storage Legislation

MN River Congress participating entities and organizations.

Recommended Action

No action recommended

Minnesota River Congress/CCMR Water Storage Legislative Initiative
Work Plan-Timeline 7-1-19 to 7-1-21

July 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019

Continue to solicit, collect, compile and adapt input to be used to develop the various components of the bill. This requires face to face meetings and communicating with the potential implementers of the legislation including SWCD's, Watershed Districts, BWSR, State Agencies and numerous others. This will also be an on-going communication task given the nature of bill creation and perpetual negotiations with legislators. I will also meet with bill authors to share the compiled input in order to create first version of the bill in this time frame. This also requires face to face consultations. The bill is projected to be introduced this upcoming session of the legislature as previously indicated to me and other members of the Minnesota River Congress by the authors in both the State House and Senate.

I will continue to work with Minnesota State University Mankato Water Resources Center staff to compile and create a packet of existing data and associated documentation from various compelling studies. This will be made to distribute to legislators and partners for use in proving the need for water storage and securing support for the legislation from all parties and the public.

Do comprehensive targeted outreach, meet, as well as communicate with key water related, conservation, natural resource and agricultural entities to secure all levels of backing such as partnerships, resolutions and letters of support. This task is a focus of this time frame but will continue to be a task for the entire time as well.

I have met and will be meeting in person with Governor's past federal staff. I am confident I will ultimately obtain a meeting with Governor through those contacts and my past relationship with the Governor during his time in the U.S. House of Representatives. I will attempt to persuade the Governor to champion the water storage legislation and the river system in general going forward. He has close ties to Mankato and served as the House of Representatives chair of the "Sportsman's Caucus"

In consultation with authors we will also explore the potential for working within existing legislation to modify content which will likely take the same route of activity and actions by myself and others as laid out here.

Total \$3500 Includes on-going full 2-year period tasks from above

December 1, 2019 to May 15, 2020

Meet in person and continue distribution of created information packets to legislators from both political parties in both houses of the legislature to obtain sponsorship and sign on to the bill.

Continue meetings with SWCD's for advancement of basin resolutions in support of a water storage bill to be taken to the state level for confirmation vote.

Work with bill authors to introduce the bill and obtain first hearings in both house and senate and foster progress.

When hearings are scheduled, we will arrange for testimony from important key affected individuals and entities such as agricultural producers, farming organization representatives, The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District, conservation organizations, city, county and state entities that deal with infrastructure maintenance.

We will develop an infrastructure protection awareness document and identify and secure point communication persons able to articulate the potential for infrastructure damages if something is not done on a larger scale such as we propose.

We will work with key partners to develop regular press releases and other means of media communications to increase public awareness about the nature and status of the bill.

We will participate in and work with organizers of "Water Action Day" at the State Capitol to include it as a priority talking point with all state legislators and see that information about it is included in the packet handout for the day by participants.

We will solicit and request statements in support from the Governor. To accomplish this task, I will set up a meeting with staff, provide information and consultation as to what we want to convey to the greater public.

Time frame total \$2000

May 15, 2020 to December 31, 2020

I will work with the bills authors and sponsors to obtain committee hearings and consult with them to make any critical changes to ensure progress.

I will continue to foster the progress of the bill and advocate for its enactment. I will also seek out additional member support. This task requires trips to St. Paul and face to face meetings with legislators.

I will meet in person with federal elected house and senate members to explore options for federal partner funding if the state were to sign a water storage bill. The bill will be under more serious consideration at this time and federal funding opportunities can become a critical incentive for the state to enact a water storage bill if significant dollars are accessible at the federal level. Given that circumstance we will work to communicate these opportunities to the public and work in consultation with federal legislators and staff to develop the communication strategy and plea for public support at the state level to access the federal funding.

I will explore the potential for private foundation funding by meeting face to face with officers to discuss the feasible possibilities if the state were to enact the water storage bill.

I will explore the potential for Legacy Amendment funding through the LSOHF and Clean Water Fund by meeting with officers and discussing face to face the feasible possibilities if the state were to enact the water storage bill.

I will explore and compile other forms of funding to partner with by meeting with organizations and businesses who may want to play a part in creating and or enhancing water storage.

Time frame total \$2500

January 1, 2021 to July 1, 2021

I and the authors of the bill will continue to shepherd and monitor the bill through the next critical final phases. This task involves trips to the capitol for hearings and meetings to strategize with various legislators, staff and other key partners and people. I will set up and help coordinate testimony people in consultation with legislative staff as needed.

Working with bill authors and sponsors we will secure committee hearings and get a vote on a final water storage bill passage.

I will work with federal partners to strategize on process for accessing federal dollars available after the legislation is passed and enacted.

I will provide a final report on the initiative **Time frame total \$2000**

Initial process and sequence for seeking support for a
Water Storage bill and its components
“The Next Big Thing”

The fact is that all the data shows clearly that we need to put more water storage on the landscape. This is a clear, understandable and in most cases a well-received way to accomplish the goal of replacing historical and currently drained lakes and wetlands. It is literally intuitive to most people and especially land owners.

A very desirable by-product of this entire process is the exposure in the various medias.

Area 6 SWCD Supervisors and staff which comprise of 11 county SWCD's in the middle part of the Minnesota River basin has been met with three times have passed the resolution in principle. Area 5 has also been met with and notified of the initiative and will be going through the same endorsement process. We are emphasizing that surface water storage has come to the forefront in all our related meetings and discussions with other groups. We are using “in the interest of not wanting to waste your time, are you comfortable with, and agree that this is a program you would look forward to implementing. And do you feel that it is a public natural resource priority?” We are scheduling meetings with all the other affected SWCD district areas and key individual ones also.

The Minnesota River Congress is spearheading an initiative to secure significant funding by requesting a bill in the state and national legislatures that would create a pool of money targeted **specifically for surface water storage** in the Minnesota River Watershed. We will refer to CREP #1 and successful process that took place with much public and organizational support. This would be a little different however because we would already have a bill in the state legislature to take to the federal level when we make the federal request.

We are describing what we envision that the program/initiative could look like and how it might work and will be asking for additional input on how best to make it work or improve on the way we have it laid out. (See initial description on next page) It should have an acreage or percentage goal which will most likely be linked to the amount of money the bill would have in it.

We are using the CSSR (Collaborative for Sediment Source Reduction) study recommendations and allude to all the other numerous past and present related data and recommendations which currently exists and will be compiled by me shortly. We will enlist Patrick Belmont, Karen Gran, Chris Lenhart, Peter Wilcock and numerous others with completed studies and supporting data to provide that data and documentation.

We have created a template resolution that can be edited to fit what ever entity would be offering its endorsement. We will also be creating other narrative to be plugged into current letters of endorsement.

We are meeting/contacting other organizations who already participate in the Minnesota River Congress, (list included) to get support letters or resolutions, or their group sign on to a single letter along with other groups. Groups initially targeted include but not limited to IWLA, LPLA, CURE, MEP, FMV, CCMR, LSP, SFA, DU, PF, any farm organization or commodity related etc.

We will seek to obtain letter endorsements from other area SWCD's, Watershed Districts, and all other water related entities able to do so.

We have met in person with and secured legislative authors in the State House and Senate.

We will solicit other House and Senate sign on support aggressively.

We have met with one of the Governor's former national staff people who is now a MNDNR staff person along with other former national staff who have agreed to expose the initiative to the Governor and ask him to champion it. We will also be seeking meetings with the Governor himself for strategies and support counsel.

We will meet with federal level Minnesota legislators possessing state support and seek federal support and matching dollars.

We will seek private foundation funding for water storage.

We will investigate the potential for Legacy Amendment support.

Water Storage Program/Initiative (first draft) very preliminary description

A one-time purchase to willing land owners of a permanent easement on land that has been identified as historically water covered by a concurred upon date such as the 1895 land survey or later, as well as existing MNDNR maps including Lidar etc. Rates for payment should reflect land values of the surrounding area and cropping history. A maximum payment limit should be established. Referencing other similar bills for additional requirements and components can and should be done for detailed legal descriptions. Much of this can be done at the legislative level during the bill creation process. Inclusion of components and incentives suggested by SWCD's would be a critical part of the initial bill makeup. There could also be an option of revising current program legislation to fit the storage priority.

Some features could include:

*Allowing use of the shallow lake/wetland and surrounding buffer to be leased for hunting by the land owner.

*If open to the public for hunting etc. further additional payment for land could be offered.

*Priority should be given to areas with ability to store larger volumes of water?

Area 2,4,5,6,7 SWCD's

Counties in the Basin

Blue Earth

Cottonwood

Faribault

Freeborn

Jackson

Martin

Watonwan

Chippewa

Douglas

Grant

Kandiyohi

Otter Tail

Pope

Stevens

Swift

Brown

Lyon

Murray

Redwood

Lac qui Parle

Lincoln

Yellow Medicine

Renville

LeSueur

Steele

Waseca

Carver

Dakota

Hennepin

McCloud

Nicollet

Pipestone

Traverse

Big Stone

Ramsay

Rice

Scott

Sibley

*Stearns

Minnesota River Congress Participating entities/organizations to date:

Minnesota State Mankato Water Resources Center, Minnesota Agricultural Water Resources Center, Minnesota Soybean Growers Assn, Clean Up the River Environment, Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River, Minnesota Corn Growers Assn., Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative, Joseph Brown Center, Friends of Pool #2, Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance, The Minnesota Earth Sabbath Team, Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition, Tatanka Bluffs Corridor, Minnesota Valley History Learning Center, The Mankato Paddling and Outings Club, LeSueur River Citizens Watershed Network, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Farmers Union, Lower Sioux Community, Friends of the Minnesota Valley, Rural Advantage, MN Board of Water and Soil Resources, The New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen, Redwood Cottonwood Rivers Control Area, Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District, Mankato Paddling and Outings Club, Wild River Academy, University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, Numerous county SWCD staff and supervisors, County Commissioners, State and Federal elected officials and staff, crop consultants, Row Crop Producers, Certified Organic farmers, Community Supported Agriculture producers, American Fisheries Society sub-unit MSUM, US Geologic Survey, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Center, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Minnesota River By-Way, Hawk Creek Watershed Project, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance, Agri-News, Pioneer Public Television, KEYC Television, 5 basin newspapers, Barr Engineering, Friends of High Island