

Sauk River Watershed – 1 Watershed 1 Plan Policy Committee

Meeting #10 Notes

November 22nd, 2019 from 9am-noon; Sauk Centre City Hall, Sauk Centre, MN

In attendance were:

Policy Committee:

Tyler Carlson (Sauk River Watershed District Manager)
Chuck Uphoff (Stearns Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor)
Tom Williamson (Todd Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor)
Ken Rutten (Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor)
Gary Reents (Pope Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor)
Cody Rogan (Pope County Commissioner)
Jerry Rapp (Douglas County Commissioner)
Steve Notch (Stearns County Commissioner)

Absent:

Randy Neumann (Todd County Commissioner)

Advisory Committee:

Jason Weinerman (MN Board of Water and Soil Resources)
Cole Loewen (Stearns County Water Planner)
Sarah Boser (Sauk River Watershed District)

Consultant:

Julie Blackburn (RESPEC)

Chairman Uphoff called the meeting to order at 1:00pm. The meeting agenda was reviewed. Manager Carlson made a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Rogan seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor.

Minutes from the October 7th, 2019 meeting were handed out. Policy Committee took several minutes to review them. Manager Carlson made a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Rapp seconded the motion. It passed with all in favor. Chairman Uphoff requested that the minutes be provided to the members prior to the meeting in the future. S Boser apologized, and said that yes, in the future the Policy Committee would receive the minutes in advance of the meeting.

Julie gave a report of the Advisory Committee (AC) progress. The AC has been looking at the priorities within the Water Management Districts. Julie provided examples and talked through how the priorities were identified.

- Commissioner Rapp asked about Lake Osakis and where it fell as a priority

- Julie: On channel priority lakes

Julie continue to talk through the different categories of priorities/projects the AC identified within altered hydrology, surface water, ground water, etc. She also explained the mapping activity the AC completed identifying known Best Management Practice locations within each water management district.

- Manager Carlson asked about the prioritization structure.
 - Julie explained that the AC has been looking at each resource based on a combination of metrics, then RESPEC completed the analysis based on the feedback from the AC.
- Manager Carlson asked how the implementation would be setup.
 - Julie explained that the implementation would take the following items into consideration: what are the achievable/measurable outcomes and where can they be obtained?
 - Where are the willing landowners?
 - Where is the biggest bang for the buck?
- Manager Carlson asked if the waterbodies in Tier 1 have sufficient data to be placed as a priority.
 - Yes, though there have been data gaps in other areas (such as groundwater). Those data gaps have been identified and will be listed in the plan as activities for gathering data.
 - In the groundwater example, since the DNR usually does the groundwater sampling, they may be willing to take on this work.
 - Commissioner Rapp asked if irrigation wells could be used instead of drilling new wells.
 - C. Loewen explained that yes, if the existing irrigation wells happen to be in the locations that are needed at the correct aquifer depth they could be used.
 - Supervisor Rutten asked about how many part per million / \$1 million would make a project work it?
 - Lake Osakis (JD2 Sediment Pond) discussion. Explanation from S. Boser regarding how flow information could affect those type of calculations and that wasn't factored in.
 - Clarification from Julie and Jason (BWSR) about the One Watershed One Plan process being voluntary, NOT a required process. Each partner signed an agreement to enter into this process.
 - Discussion regarding the involvement of USFWS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) – Commissioner Rapp expressed concerns, would like to see funding from them in this area, etc.

- Several grants within the Sauk River Watershed partners currently are from USFWS (such as Lessard Sam's), and the USFWS staff have been helping with some of those projects.
- Discussion regarding the JD2 Sediment Pond cleanout – how and why it was done, how those activities and the process the SRWD has followed is legal.
 - Grant funds are also tax payer dollars
 - USFWS funds are also tax payer dollars
 - Almost any funding source available comes from tax payer dollars at some level
 - If we, as the Sauk River Watershed partnership, all work together for the mission of water quality instead of working against each other, we can create an high quality plan that provides better access a lot of those different funding sources.
 - Julie reminded the PC that it is also important to acknowledge what the lake would be like without the sediment pond project. The data shows an increase in nitrogen with decreases in phosphorus and sediment.
 - C. Loewen posed the question of how do we maximize the support of the public to accomplish water quality work?
- Manager Carlson expressed the need for public support when doing water quality work, regardless of whether local tax dollars are involved or not. The voices that tend to be the loudest are those that are unhappy, which makes it difficult to gauge what the public actually wants.
- Supervisor Reents described the Minnewaska plan and how having that solid, well-constructed plan has helped get a lot of work done in that area.

Julie shifted the communication to the options for the partnership moving forward, asking what level of collaboration the partnership would like to have together and emphasizing the importance of communication.

- Commissioner Notch explained that by creating a good plan, discussions regarding funding would follow naturally from there because without funding you can't move forward to implement the plan.
- Jason emphasized the importance of looking long term into the planning process – the water quality didn't get to where it is overnight and it will not get better overnight either.
- Discussion about the level of oversight the PC would like to have on the local agency partners.
 - Manager Carlson asked about preparing cities, farmers, etc for climate change, how can we help with that? Seeing more water and flooding than we have in the past.
- Julie explained that a huge part of this plan revolves around taking action today to mitigate future/long term threats – it is cheaper and easier to address these things now than it will be to try and correct them later. That is why it is critical to keep high quality waters in a high quality state.

What kind of a structure do we want for the partnership to accomplish the work identified in this plan?

- Julie went through the presentation given by BWSR earlier this year.
 - Discussion regarding how local planning with individual agencies will or won't occur after the 1W1P is accepted.
 - Local agencies may choose to still do internal planning, but those plans should align with the goals of the 1W1P.
 - Discussion about the 1W1P process intentions – again it was clarified that this is a voluntary process and that whether another unit of government is created (Joint Powers Board) is up to the PC.
 - Discussion regarding the “base” funding from BWSR, how much, how often, etc. (~\$800,000 for the partnership every two years – don't anticipate that amount decreasing but it is based on legislative action).
 - Clarification that each partner agency will keep their existing roles, authorities, etc., but that the objective of a 1W1P is to collaboratively work together for a common goal.
 - Julie explained the current grant application structure (each agency individually) and discussed how the 1W1P process would make this more efficient.
 - Having the funding based on 1W1P instead of each individuals partnership encourages collaboration and communication and it help eliminate duplication between agencies.

Julie presented the three primary structures of governance the PC could adopt to move forward with implementing the plan.

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
 - Must have 1 meeting/year at a minimum
 - More like a handshake agreement
 - Current risks are retained for each agency
 - Could have fiscal agent to distribute funds to each agency, or could have BWSR distribute
- Joint Powers Collaboration (JPC)
 - No new entity created
 - More formal than MOU
 - Work together to implement the plan
 - Fiscal agent
 - Requires more coordination
 - Joint Powers Collaboration would be the Policy Committee + whoever else they would like to add
 - Do not need to hire any additional staff, but could choose to
- Joint Powers Entity (JPE)

- Creating a whole new unit of government/governmental entity
- Policy Committee would become the board of the new governmental entity
- Having legal counsel would be a requirement
- Discussion about the three options presented:
 - Manager Rogan mentioned that Pope County uses a MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) and asked if that would be an option.
 - Julie explained that it would be very similar to a JPC; Jason W added that the line between MOA and JPC is very thin and usually both end up as a JPC.
 - Manager Carlson expressed the following points for the Policy Committee to consider when making this decision, and things that should be done moving forward:
 - Plan better than currently planning
 - Project teams of multiple agencies working together to strengthen the planning and implementation processes
 - Public engagement and communication is important
 - Leaning toward Policy Committee members having a vote on water quality/capital improvement projects but would like to see this happen without becoming a JPE.
 - Since many of the Policy Committee members are elected, it could help serve as a final check of public support for a project
 - Agreement from other Policy Committee members was expressed
 - Jason W. (BWSR) explained that this discussion should go back to each individual board and the county attorney's for information, discussion and decisions.
 - Julie provided some additional clarification about the difference between JPC and JPE – and indicated that the discussions seem to be leaning towards a JPC to create and implement the plan. If that is correct, the Policy Committee could choose to just edit/adapt the existing agreement that was created for the planning process since it was structured similar to that of a JPC.
 - Manager Carlson asked about the JPC capacity for hiring an engineer since that seems to be a major expense in this field.
 - Supervisor Uphoff indicated that we (the group) would need to have a plan for funding the position, but that it was an option.
 - Discussion occurred regarding existing 1W1Ps and whether the watershed district was looked at for the coordinating role, and whether that would be an option in this plan.
 - C. Loewen explained the benefits of having a watershed district that encompasses the majority of the planning area (with several small boundary differences). He also explained how this is a great resource to the partnership

that could be relied on in several different ways, while still allowing each individual agency to focus on their specialty areas.

- Julie asked for clarification from the committee that JPE was out and that a JPC was a “step up and partner” move and an MOU wasn’t much different from the current operating partnership.
 - Policy Committee agreed.
- Manager Carlson summarized what he would like to see as “Proactive, targeted collaboration based on this plan with public engagement occurring the whole way”.
- Discussion on what a JPC for this group would look like, what information should be brought to each individual board for consideration, etc.
 - Ideally would have quarterly meetings, but this can be revisited while the group continues discussions on this idea.
 - Staff – would we need to hire additional staff? This will be discussed at a later date.
 - Fiscal agent would be needed for the group, this person/agency would also do all of the grant and financial reporting
 - Commissioner Notch suggested the SRWD, Commissioner Rapp agreed. Manager Carlson asked if the SRWD would be interested and he responded that SRWD would be interested in doing what makes the most sense for the partnership.
 - C. Loewen mentioned that eLink reporting through BWSR may need further discussion. The Crow River Watershed is leaving the BMP reporting to the corresponding agency, not the fiscal agent.
 - Jason W. mentioned that if board discussions start to go off course, to table the discussion and have Julie W or Jason W from BWSR., etc. attend each partner’s board meeting to help facilitate the discussion and provide additional information. Discussion on this from the Policy Committee indicated that Julie B (RESPEC), Jason W., C. Loewen and S. Boser would work together to get something for the Policy Committee to bring to their boards. If any Policy Committees members want Jason W. or Julie W. (BWSR) to attend their meetings right away to help with these discussions, please let them know ASAP.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Manager Carlson and seconded by Commissioner Rapp.

Upcoming Meeting for Policy Committee:

Friday, January 10th, 2020 from 9am-noon at the Sauk Centre City Hall