

Sauk River Watershed – 1 Watershed 1 Plan Policy Committee

Meeting #11 Notes

January 10th, 2020 from 9am-noon; Sauk Centre City Hall, Sauk Centre, MN

In attendance were:

Policy Committee:

Chuck Uphoff (Stearns Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor)

Tyler Carlson (Sauk River Watershed District Manager)

Tom Williamson (Todd Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor)

Ken Rutten (Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor)

Randy Neumann (Todd County Commissioner)

Cody Rogan (Pope County Commissioner)

Steve Notch (Stearns County Commissioner)

Absent:

Jerry Rapp (Douglas County Commissioner)

Gary Reents (Pope Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor)

Advisory Committee:

Brad Wozney (Board of Water and Soil Resources)

Cole Loewen (Stearns County Water Planner)

Scott Henderson (Sauk River Watershed District)

Sarah Boser (Sauk River Watershed District)

Consultant:

Julie Blackburn (RESPEC)

Chairman Uphoff called the meeting to order at 9:04am. The meeting was started with a statement by Chairman Uphoff reminding the Policy Committee that they were attending a Sauk River One Watershed One Plan meeting and that although everyone has heard the stories floating around about the SRWD, that should not be the focus of this meeting. Chairman Uphoff also made an announcement regarding board elections, stating that there was nothing in the by-laws for the Policy Committee that would require them to elect new officers each year, and that he was okay keeping it status quo if no other members objected. No comments from other members were stated.

Finally, Chairman Uphoff announced that he would be resigning from the Stearns SWCD Board of Supervisors in the fall of 2020. He also explained that he intends to see the 1W1P through first. A couple of Policy Committee members expressed concerns regarding what happens as

new people fill their roles on the SWCD and Watershed District Boards, new County Commissioners, etc.

The minutes from the last meeting were sent out and reviewed prior to this meeting. Commissioner Rogan made a motion to approve the minutes. Supervisor Williamson seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor.

Julie gave an update on the plan progress. She has been writing the plan document, and has it posted on the Microsoft Teams site for the Advisory Committee to begin reviewing. She also explained the implementation table assignment given to the Advisory Committee, as well as how the data from the table will be used within the plan. Chairman Uphoff and Manager Carlson had a few questions regarding specific Best Management Practice Projects and the options available for landowners – such as rotational grazing. Julie explained that these items would be addressed throughout the plan.

There was also a brief discussion on the option of having a stormwater exchange pilot program, potentially within the City of Saint Cloud because of where their drinking water is pulled from.

Additionally, Julie gave the Policy Committee an overview of the different sections within the plan document, and provided a couple of examples of the content existing in the document at this time, as well as what could be expected as updates to the document are made.

Osakis Water Management District was given as an example section of the plan for the Policy Committee to look at. Commissioner Notch asked for clarification of the phrase “altered watercourse” within 1W1P – is it always referring to a public drainage system? Julie explained that any water body that has been altered from its natural state, including but not limited to public drainage systems, would be considered altered watercourses. Julie also made the clarification that this is not about drainage systems being “bad”, it is about learning how to manage them for drainage as well as water quality. Commissioner Notch also asked about the technical jargon currently in the example document. Julie explained that this will be her challenge as she continues to write the plan – to do so in a way that is understandable to the general public and to put the technical jargon in the appendices for the staff.

Manager Carlson asked where the water quality standards come from – what happens at that threshold? How does the waterbody change at that point? Julie explained the MPCA process for developing standards, also talked about the site specific standards pending at the EPA level for the Sauk River Horseshoe Chain of Lakes. Manager Carlson expressed further concerns about whether the state standards are attainable, why not figure something else out that is attainable and makes people happy? Both Julie and C. Loewen explained the current standards, site specific standards, as well as the developing metrics of using biological indices as a gauge for water quality. Manager Carlson again expressed that he would like to hear what the public

wants, would like to know how to communicate and base activities on what the public wants for water quality and what they are happy with. Julie and C. Loewen explained that we don't have a way to measure this effectively, but that adaptive management is important. Commissioner Neumann pointed out that a lot of this will be based on weather events. Commissioner Rogan stated that public sentiment regarding water quality is variable and not an ideal method for measuring progress/success.

Shifting gears, Julie presented some of the existing gaps between the agencies that could be addressed through 1W1P, noting that it is important for us to figure out how to do our work better, not faster – we need to leverage the strengths of each agency. The gaps were identified as follows:

1. Education and Outreach:
 - a. Small cities – how do we help them?
 - b. CMWEA has an urban focus on water quality – could we use this as a partnership opportunity?
 - c. Field to City and City to Field
 - d. General Awareness
 - e. Manager Carlson mentioned that the SRWD has a staff member dedicated to education and public outreach – could this mean shifting that position to fill some of these gaps?
2. Regulatory
 - a. Consistency within drainage systems (specifically related to volume and rate, flow)
 - b. Consistency with development, footprint, impact
3. Implementation
 - a. Capital Improvement Projects
 - b. Unique Programs
 - c. Ramping up new programs – BETTER, not faster
4. Administration
 - a. Reporting
 - b. Coordination
 - c. Communicating on Plan Progress
5. Monitoring and Data Management
 - a. Planning
6. To some degree, Administration and Monitoring/Data Management need to merge to bring this to the forefront – it tends to get stuck on the backburner – want people to know about the good work we are doing.

Julie presented the Plan Administration and Coordination document, and explained the different parts of the document. She then summarized the Sauk River 1W1P framework for agreement document. An interactive exercise was conducted with the Policy Committee members. The activity consisted of three questions to answer.

1. What are the greatest areas of opportunity or benefit from the proposed Joint Powers Collaborative (JPC) arrangement?
 - a. We can hold meetings as a committee to discuss potential projects to work on and decide which ones to prioritize first.
 - b. Project team framework and targeted public engagement around CIPs will lead to far greater “buy-in” by the public and elected representatives. Public hearings effectively become rubber stamp events.
 - c. Collaborative – the opportunity to share implementation on aspects of program management, sharing what works, planning and program implementation. Consistency with program and levels of management.
 - d. The 10 year goal.
 - e. They like local control. Also that it is solely within the watershed.
 - f. We discussed the MOU but not in detail, was preferred.
 - g. Area agencies working together to achieve water quality.
 - h. Difference between MOU – JPC – JPE. Chris Pence with BWSR explained about 1W1P at a county meeting.
2. What are the primary concerns or weaknesses with the proposed JPC agreement?
 - a. Lack of state funding to fund CIPs.
 - b. Communication with SRWD staff.
 - c. Competing interests of different counties and “getting their fair share” vs what is best for the watershed as a whole.
 - d. 100% agreement from SWCD heading on the right path to get something done.
 - e. Lack of 100% or active engagement by project team members. Or gets off on wrong foot and project team framework fizzles out.
 - f. Liability. (This led to a discussion about how with a JPC each agency maintains their current responsibilities and liabilities – group legal representation is not a requirement of a JPC, clarification on the difference between a JPC and JPE).
 - g. I think the SWCD should be the fiscal agent.
 - h. Weakness and strength – counties working together may not come to consensus on projects. Strength: Entire watershed working together to enhance it and subject (?) from each agency.
 - i. Having the SRWD be the fiscal agent.
3. What aspects of the proposed JPC need to be addressed for you to support the arrangement?
 - a. That all five county commissioners from Todd County understand our role.
 - b. Will need informational presentation to board. Need to ensure separation of funding from grants (not community (?) with county or SRWD).
 - c. Clean water up. Stop erosion. Improve wetlands. Wildlife enhancement. (Couldn’t read some of this one).

The Policy Committee expressed concerns with the turnover of Policy Committee members moving forward – they set the tone for what staff can accomplish, what if new members don't have the same level of dedication?

Discussion about how the funding from 1W1P will work. Manger Carlson expressed concerns about needing these funding to assist with CIPs, property taxes are not an ideal way of paying for projects, rural America cannot handle additional taxes. We will need creative funding options. There will be limits with the CWF funding for 1W1P. Brief discussion on CIP metrics, how decision process could work, project team framework.

Todd, Pope, and Douglas having BWSR present to their boards. Julie gave a brief overview of what to expect at the next meeting, she is planning to have a budget update ready for that meeting as well.

Upcoming Meeting for Policy Committee:

Friday, February 21st, 2020 from 9am-noon at the Sauk Centre City Hall

Upcoming Meetings for the Advisory Committee:

Wednesday, February 26th, 2020 from 9am-noon at the Sauk Centre City Hall