

Getchell Creek/CD26 Project Team Meeting Notes

January 26th, 2021

Meeting# 1

Attendees: Drew Kessler (Houston), Amanda Hillman (DNR), Brad Wozney (BWSR), Chris Middendorf (Landowner and Producer), Chuck Uphoff (Stearns SWCD Supervisor, Landowner, Producer), Dennis Fuchs (Stearns SWCD), Garrett Monson (Houston), Greg Bowles (Houston), Jason Weirnerman (BWSR), Jeff Hoppe (Landowner and Producer), Mary Hoppe (Landowner and Producer), Kathryn Prince (MLT), Leah Hall (TNC), Nicki Blake-Bradley (DNR), Paul Hartmann (SRWD Board), Shawn West (Stearns Highway Department), Sheldon Myerchin (USFWS), Steve Notch (Commissioner, Landowner), Tom Roelike (Oak Township), Loren Goebel (City of Freeport Public Works), Evan Ingebrigtsen (USACE), Scott Henderson (SRWD), Sarah Boser (SRWD)

Introductions – name, agency/occupation, and why you are interested in participating in the Getchell Creek/CD26 project team.

Discussion on recording and posting meetings – would group prefer meeting notes to be posted instead of video/audio recording? Some feedback was received that the group would prefer to have notes posted for the public to keep them informed rather than having the video posted.

Drew provided an overview on the project team process, what the goals of the group are/what we are hoping to achieve, defined Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) – according to the 1W1P/CWMP: cost exceeds \$500,000 and has a life expectancy greater than 20 years, regional footprint instead of individual, require maintenance, etc. Talked through the Agreement to Participate form.

Purpose and Goals discussion, these have been determined through: items from draft 1W1P (One Watershed One Plan), current SRWD Comprehensive Plan, landowner meetings – reviewed the information gained from these items. Landowner feedback regarding the landowner meetings we've had in the past – contentious, ditch repairs still needed, cannot afford additional assessments – landowners feeling very stuck with how to make things better without financial hardships. It seems like the flooding conditions have gotten worse since the ditch was cleaned out in 2014.

Clarification on the goal of 420 acre feet of water storage – this is a goal from the Sauk River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP) - (420 acre feet is equal to 136.8 million gallons of water per year). One acre foot equals about 326,000 gallons, or enough water to cover an acre of land one foot deep.

Consensus form regarding project need reviewed. Photos from landowners shared to show the group some of the concerns that the landowners have, large amounts of flooding – even during smaller rain events whereas it used to only occur during large events.

Discussion on how to start ranking potential projects – looking for a lot of feedback as we are in the beginning stages of the project concepts. Reviewed ranking criteria. Reviewed categories of habitat, hydrology, and administrative (constructability) standpoint – looked at potential projects in each of these categories for storage/edge of field type practices and for stream restoration practices. Talked about topography changes between upstream of I-94 and downstream of I-94. Landowner insight on culvert under the old highway (CR157) – definitely holding back water, looks like culvert may have shifted over time. Also seems like the heavy vegetation in the channel is holding back water. Houston Engineering will reach out to landowners for confirmation as they dig into these areas further. The culvert on CR157 is on the county plans for reconstruction in 2022 – we will need to keep this in mind as we move forward with projects as it may impact the projects. There are other culverts (near County Road 11/330th) that are above grade – these would need to be addressed by the township/county, but is important to consider moving forward. DNR has been successful in the past with getting funding for culvert replacements if they are preventing/obstructing fish passage. Obtaining this funding would help with incorporating culvert replacements into management of the system and incorporating culvert replacements into water quality and storage projects.

Houston will look into: fish and aquatic impacts of these culverts – this information will be communicated to the county and townships to help them plan ahead for their projects.

Went through the concepts plans for projects. Potential water storage locations identified looking at maps – showing existing depressions in the landscape. To implement the actual project, some excavation may occur, in addition to berms, other control structures, etc. Since we are in the preliminary stages of development, these details have not been identified yet. Also discussed costs of the projects, how original project costs and future maintenance could be funded. At this stage, we do not have enough information to talk in concrete terms about costs. However, as we move forward in the process, this information will be discussed and developed, and will be a part of the public hearing process for the SRWD if a project is initiated.

Site 7 and 8 potential projects (near Getchell Lake on the downstream end of Getchell Creek/CD26) – some of this is already happening without a structure – how does that work? Landowners are struggling to see the benefit of this project based on current assessments and the current state of the land. In response, it was explained that this project would include a control structure, which could help with some of the access issues the landowners in this area are currently experiencing. Some of the primary focuses of this project would be to either help compensate for holding the water here, minimize future assessments by redetermining benefits, etc. Concerns were also expressed regarding the Freeport holding ponds, and the area around Getchell Lake becoming another holding area. Discussion on where the issue points are – storage projects are not off the table, but we need to make sure adequate and consistent water conveyance is available prior to doing the storage projects. This would be the most efficient way to address the problems and spend funds wisely.

Landowners noted that immediately after the ditch cleaning in 2014, and for about two years after ditch repair, the water moved well and there was not nearly as much flooding on the lower end of

Getchell/CD26. Once the ditch repair was finished, the flooding on the lower end of the system got worse.

If the stream/ditch is functioning and flowing properly, how much storage will be needed? Focus on repairing the stream/ditch to function properly prior to focusing on storage. Storage recommendations may still be a part of this process, but they will be looked at in relation to what it will take to get the stream/ditch flowing properly.

Oak Township – water quantity is increasing every year between tiling and increasing rain events and storage for that water will be needed as a result.

Feedback received during team meeting regarding concept plans: The two North sites suggested are prime farmland, landowners will likely fight tooth and nail. The third location for storage would be a good site as it is more of a wetland area already. It will be helpful for the group to look at areas that are currently wetland type areas for storage projects instead of looking at prime agricultural land – this will be more successful/acceptable by the landowners/producers. Landowners suspect fish passage issues in the system at this time.

After the meeting, Sarah with the SRWD will send out the concept plans, the presentation from the meeting, and the notes compiled during the meeting. We will plan to meet again as a full project team in the spring or summer of 2021.