

## JD2 Project Team Meeting Notes

**Meeting Date:** January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Meeting Time:** Noon

**Facilitator:** Sarah Boser, SRWD

**Location:** SRWD Office (642 Lincoln Road, Sauk Centre, MN 56378)

**Attendees:** Troy Bednarz (Landowner), Adam Hjelm (SRWD), Paul Hartmann (SRWD Board), Tom Anderson (JD2 Drainage Inspector), Jon Roeschlein (SRWD), Bruce Magnus (Osakis Lake Association), Randy Neumann (Todd County Commissioner), Susan Capitola (Landowner), David Zerr (SRWD Board), Janice Hauri (Landowner), Alan Larson (Osakis City Council), Adam Ossefoort (Todd County Planning and Zoning), Emily Siira (DNR), John Maile (DNR), Ken Rutten (Douglas SWCD Supervisor), Jerry Rapp (Douglas County Commissioner), Danielle Anderson (Douglas SWCD), Donavon McKigney (SRWD Board), Leah Hall (TNC), Shawn Papon (USFWS), Tessa Zee (Stearns SWCD), Mark Anderson (DNR), Deja Anton (Todd SWCD), Sarah Boser (SRWD/Team Facilitator)

Boser began the meeting with several housekeeping items – this meeting is being held in a hybrid format with people attending online and in person, courtesy of Todd County allowing us to demo their equipment. Due to the hybrid format, it is extremely important that people are not talking over each other and that people aren't having side conversations as the people attending remotely will not be able to hear or understand the speaker in those situations. If there is something you'd like to say to a neighbor, please jot it down for after the meeting. If at any point folks online aren't able to hear or see the screen, please let us know so we are able to troubleshoot and correct the issue as soon as possible. Like last time, the meeting will be recorded so that Boser can capture notes after the meeting.

The main content for this meeting will be to follow-up on questions and concerns that were raised at the last meeting, as well as those that have been presented to the SRWD since the last meeting, with the goal of getting everyone on the same page.

Boser reviewed the process for selecting water quality monitoring sites, as well as what kind of environment is needed to have a quality monitoring site that will provide reliable data. Main considerations for a monitoring site include:

1. Will this site provide the data needed to answer the question we are trying to answer?
2. Accessibility, Safety of Staff and Equipment, Stable Platform for Site Access
3. Hydrology – what is the channel doing at this location and is it conducive for data collection?
4. Historical Data – has this site been used in the past? Was it a quality site that produced quality, reliable data? If so, why was it discontinued?
5. Staffing and Equipment Availability

Boser also provided a list of sites on JD2 that have been monitored in the past, and the challenges that each of those sites have presented. Water chemistry data from JD2@CR3, the only active monitoring site on JD2 at this time, was presented. Some questions were asked about why this site was used, and other sites were not. Boser reviewed the data that she had presented regarding the monitoring sites that have been used in the past that haven't provided reliable data, including the inlet and outlet of the

JD2 Sediment Ponds. A recommendation for monitoring at a landowners property was provided, discussion about whether it would be possible to collect flow measurements without a platform occurred. Boser explained that the SRWD does have a proposed monitoring plan on the following slides. The rest of the data from JD2@CR3 was presented, along with some discussion about what possible contributions to high phosphorus levels in JD2 in 2021 could have been – such as groundwater influence. Tile influence was likely minimal due to the drought. Other contributors could have been decaying plant matter within the system. Dry, hot weather, following a season with minimal snow and ice cover, allowed aquatic vegetation growth to thrive, and as that aquatic vegetation breaks down, additional nutrients are released into the water. An overview of water quality data from Lake Osakis was also provided. Per the SRWD's rotational lake monitoring plan, Lake Osakis is scheduled for water chemistry sampling again in 2022.

Since JD2 has been a difficult system to gather quality monitoring data on, the SRWD has been using sonar equipment to track the bottom of the Sediment Ponds to determine how much sediment is accumulating in the ponds and how quickly. The SRWD is also putting together a sediment core sampling plan for the ponds to determine the type of material accumulating in the ponds. The project team members also requested collection of sediment cores upstream and downstream of the sediment ponds, as well as in Miller Bay of Lake Osakis. Staff still need to determine how often this type of sampling would need to be conducted, and what parameters need to be analyzed from the samples. There was some additional discussion/clarification about the difference between the survey data collected using the sonar equipment (provides a map/picture of where the sediment is collecting, and can be compared to as-built plans to determine how much sediment has collected), and collecting sediment cores to determine what the material is. The sonar data would be used to help determine where the sediment cores should be collected. Team members also requested sonar data collection in JD2 and Miller Bay. Further discussion and clarification about how these two data collection methods are different, and how they work together to provide a complete picture of what is occurring in the Sediment Ponds, as well as Miller Bay, and before and after the sediment ponds. The team would like this to be submitted for the bonding bill this year. SRWD staff explained that the core sampling in the JD2 Sediment Ponds should be funded through the SRWD to ensure that regular data collected can occur, instead of data collection only occurring when grant or bonding funds are available. The SRWD staff will need to check the SRWD monitoring and project budgets to see if there is funding for the JD2 Sediment Ponds sediment cores for this year or if it will need to be added to the budget for next year. We will need to determine how to fund the additional cores wanted by the project team (upstream and downstream of the ponds and Miller Bay). Some additional discussion about current condition of Miller Bay, and whether there will be water in the bay in the spring/summer to collect the sonar data, since the amount of data we need to collect will be difficult to collect through the ice.

Several team members would like to submit a bonding bill for the sediment sampling and creation of a feasibility study. They have received information from Representative Poston and Representative Franson that they would like the team to come up with a plan and submit the project for this years bonding package. Landowners have received indication that they/we will receive 100% funding through the bonding bill for whatever we propose – engineering, monitoring, implementing a project or any combination thereof.

Several members of the project team also have the desire to explore re-routing JD2 to the Long Prairie river and would like cost estimates on that.

A question was asked about whether fish surveys have been completed recently, and if so, what the results of the studies were. Bruce Magnus, Lake Association President, summarized that both pan fish and larger fish numbers have increased in Lake Osakis as of recent (last five years or so) fish studies.

Boser presented clarification information on several different roles within the project team process to address some misunderstanding that had been brought to her attention over the last few months. The roles Boser defined include: state representatives, SRWD Board members, the Project Team, and the JD2 Drainage Authority.

Landowners in Miller Bay have decided not to take the money from the SRWD because they do not know where the money is coming from and do not want to tax their neighbors to dredge Miller Bay. Boser explained that on some level it will be tax funding since the SRWD is a local unit of government and that is how money is generated. The Board did not specify if the money would come from a special project tax or from the general levy. Boser also explained that in the future it would be helpful for staff to be made aware of these concerns right away so that they can bring the concerns to the Board for further clarification and direction.

Next Boser explained the Project Team process, and where the Team is at in the process. There is a lot of work left to do to complete the entire big picture project, and it will be a multi-year process, though there are some steps that can be taken in the near future to keep the process moving forward. There was discussion about legal process needed to move through the project development and implementation process, and how those processes will still need to be followed even if the team is successful in receiving bonding funds. Bonding bills and grant funding do not fund project maintenance, so when the project is established, a funding mechanism for project maintenance will also need to be established.

Commissioner Rapp asked about whether the One Watershed One Plan Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) could be used for some of this work. At this time, the Sauk River Collaborative does not have a grant for the WBIF, and therefore is not able to contributing funding. The Collaborative is working to develop a work plan, and JD2 is a priority area, but the amount of money the Collaborative will receive will not be enough to pay for an entire capital improvement project on JD2.

There has been a general message from grant funding entities that they will not fund dredging projects. Some have said they will not fund it at all, others have said they will consider funding it if there is a larger project included, though it is possible that they would fund everything except the dredging component of Miller Bay. The state representatives have indicated that dredging Miller Bay will only be funded through a bonding bill if a project addressing the issues causing the build-up in the bay is also implemented.

The Team would like the concept of rerouting JD2 to the Long Prairie River evaluated for cost and feasibility.

At the November Project Team meeting, the team had decided that the focus of the team would just be JD2, with the understanding that Miller Bay and Lake Osakis would benefit from any work completed on JD2. Since then, Boser has received feedback from multiple sources that the Team is no longer in agreement with this, so raising the discussion again on what the Team focus should be. Boser asked what the group thought about adding Miller Bay to the focus of the project team, in addition to JD2.

Boser asked if there was anyone that did not want to add Miller Bay as a focus area for the team. Hearing no objections, Boser made a note to add Miller Bay as a focus area for the team.

At the November meeting there was a desire to have federal agency participation in the Project Team process. Boser reached out to US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Shawn Papon will be their representative on the team. Papon gave a brief overview on the services USFWS could offer the team. Todd County representatives for USFWS would be John Reins and Jason Nordman, Papon will help keep them in the loop as needed. Boser also reached out to the US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE). Their regulatory team will not actively attend project team meetings, however, they are available as needed to review projects and determine whether a permit from USACE will be needed. Boser also reached out to their Project Management Branch, who is also willing to provide feedback and guidance as needed. They also had several funding opportunities to offer the team. The two opportunities that apply most directly to this team are a Planning Program which would provide 50% cost share to complete a feasibility study, and the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program. This Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration (Section 206) funding will cover up to \$100,000 of the planning/feasibility work, with a 50% cost share after that. For the actual project design and implementation, this program would provide 65% federal cost share. USACE would run a cost benefit analysis (based on habitat) for any projects funded through this program. Once the project is implemented, all maintenance would be the responsibility of the local partner, such as the SRWD.

Another grant option would be the NRCS Watershed Program. This would be a federal funding option, and they would like to work with the team early in the process and play a role in developing the projects. The planning process through this grant would likely take 3-5 years, and would have federal requirements. 20% of the benefits for projects funded with this program need to be rural or agricultural benefits.

Other grant options include Lessard Sam's, LCCMR, BWSR, and Conservation Partners Legacy. The focus will need be on restoring the habitat in Miller Bay, not dredging.

Boser also provided a summary of the bonding information provided by Representative Poston's Assistant, Karl Morton Badger. That information includes:

1. Funding must be used "to acquire public land and building and other public improvements of capital nature"
2. Bonding bills are often over \$1 million
3. 50% local match is usually needed
4. Bonding bills are usually passed in the spring of even-numbered years
5. Project should be shovel ready

Boser will reach out to the representative's after the project team meeting to clarify the requirements for bonding bills, as several members of the project team have indicated that Boser's summary does not reflect the information they were given. The team would like to propose a feasibility study and core sampling plan as a bonding bill for this year.

Another option would be to utilize the SRWD's unique abilities and authorities to use a project levy to fund project development and implementation. Even if grant funding is used to implement the project, to staff knowledge there is not a source of grant or bonding funds that will fund project maintenance, so

whatever project is implemented, a plan for funding maintenance and the legal process to establish that funding source will need to occur. There are several different options the SRWD has in statute to generate funding for project implementation and maintenance, and legal processes associated with those. Boser's understanding of the SRWD Board stance is that they will not move forward and approve a project in this area without the public and political support for the funding structure – now and for funding of future maintenance.

Specific discussion about the JD2 Sediment Pond assessment area occurred, Boser explained the different options for funding this project, and how the Board has handled those discussions over the last few years, and the Board has decided to leave the assessment area as is.

The Team discussed the importance of the habitat in Miller Bay, and how that habitat has changed dramatically over time. Moving forward, the Team will focus on the habitat restoration discussion, instead of placing the emphasis on the dredging of Miller Bay.

At the November Team meeting, several project concepts were brought forward for discussion. Boser followed up on some of those concepts, including:

1. Using the wetland area downstream of the JD2 Sediment Ponds as a filter for JD2. Some considerations provided by WCA Staff include:
  - a. Verify that ditch would still be functioning as designed to avoid drainage lawsuits
  - b. Addressing high levels of ortho and total phosphorus already in the system, in addition to the excess nutrients that would likely be contributed by the wetland.
2. Rerouting JD2 to the Long Prairie River, or create a high-flow pass to the Long Prairie River
  - a. Historically the high-flow pass existed, but is no longer connected. It would require drainage proceedings to re-establish.
  - b. Water levels in Lake Osakis would likely drop, and the impacts of that would need to be evaluated prior to moving forward.
  - c. Simply shifting the problems we are battling from JD2 to another watershed is not a responsible water management decision, and as water resource professionals we could not support this without actually addressing the problem instead of simply shifting the problem.
  - d. Drainage Inspector, Tom Anderson, provided the history of Crooked-Hanford Lakes, and the natural waterway that flowed to the Long Prairie River. Due to the elevation of the system, this is not a successful flow path. JD2 was constructed to drain Crooked-Hanford Lake.
3. Lake Ida grant with Douglas SWCD, and how the two projects may be similar, what could we learn from this existing project? The SWCD has the feasibility study completed, and they are in the final design phases on the project. Funding has come from Clean Water Legacy funds.

Boser asked project team if everyone was in agreement that we have a lot of existing project concepts, and our next step will be to select which concepts are worth moving forward.

Manager Hartmann requested that one more be added to the list. He would like to explore the cost and benefits of making JD2 an enclosed tile line instead of an open water ditch. Team members considered how a project like this would impact surface water and subsurface water.

Some discussion on the restoration of Crooked-Hanford Lake, and the portions of the restoration that are currently being developed. USFWS mentioned their working lands easement as an option for the landowners within the historic Crooked Lake Basin that have not yet enrolled in an easement program. There is some funding to restore properties under SRWD easement within Crooked Lake that has received preliminary approval through the Lessard Sam's Outdoor Heritage Council. That funding will be available in July 2022.

A Team member provided another suggestion to consider for addressing the issues within JD2. The suggestion is to reconstruct the ditch to slow the water down. This would involve following drainage proceedings, and may not be favorable by the landowners within the benefitted area of JD2 that would be paying for the project.

Boser asked for a general consensus from the group that a feasibility study is needed to help the group assess the existing project concepts and determine how to move forward in addressing the issues in JD2 and Miller Bay.

Team members brought up additional concerns about habitat in the bay, specifically for grebes. Boser asked the team if they knew of any existing studies or published papers that talked about the grebe habitat, as this information would be beneficial for writing grant applications.

Commissioner Neumann asked why risers were not put in the JD2 Sediment Ponds. Jon Roeschlein explained the design of the plans, and why the risers were not needed. Some discussion about maintenance schedule on the ponds also occurred. Manager Zerr asked what would happen if we didn't clean the sediment ponds when the next round of maintenance is scheduled to occur. He would like to refrain from doing anything to the sediment ponds because every time something is done to the ponds Miller Bay is destroyed. Boser proposed to collect and analyze the sediment cores prior to making that decision. Due to the amount of vegetation in Lake Osakis, it is likely that some of the material in the bay is decaying plant matter, not just sediment. Knowing the make-up of the material will allow us to make informed decisions about how to move forward. The SRWD plans to conduct another sonar survey of the ponds this spring, and will also plan to survey JD2 and Miller Bay at the same time if conditions allow.

Some confusion about the 30% reference in previous meetings – was it of the water or of the goal? Boser will look this up to verify for the next meeting.

Janice Hauri mentioned near the end of the meeting that she collected about 12-14 sediment cores from around the bay last year but was unable to find anyone to analyze them. She still has them, but is unsure if they are still usable. They had Trout Scientific out of Waite Park pull the cores, and have GPS coordinates of each core location.

Boser asked for confirmation that the team is in agreement on pulling sediment cores from JD2 upstream and downstream of the JD2 Sediment Ponds, at several locations within the sediment ponds, and in Miller Bay. Locations of the cores will be determined using a sonar survey collected by the SRWD this spring. Boser also asked for confirmation on the need for a feasibility study. Boser will follow-up with the Representatives to determine whether these will be eligible for the bonding funds. Boser asked if everyone was comfortable with her taking this on, or if anyone else wanted to participate in the process. No volunteers, so Boser will begin working on this as time allows. One member of the project

team mentioned being uncomfortable with the NRCS funding option, but is ok with looking into it as an option without committing at this time. Boser will also look into the NRCS and USACE funding options for the sediment cores and feasibility study. Commissioner Neumann stated that the team has until the end of May to pull the information together for the bonding bill.

Boser asked the folks attending the meeting if they had feedback on the hybrid meeting format. They liked the option and using the equipment, but had a tough time hearing certain people, and side conversations made it difficult to hear remotely. The team would also like a short break during the next meeting.

Moving forward, the team will refer to the Miller Bay project as a restoration project, not a dredging project.

Another discussion occurred about the Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) that will be coming available for implementing the Sauk River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, and whether a project in this area would be eligible. While projects will likely be eligible, there will not be enough funding to completely cover the project costs. That being said, JD2 is a priority area that is in the current drafts of the work plan.

Upcoming meetings to be held at the SRWD office:

1. Monday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at noon
2. Monday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022 at 9am
3. April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at 9am