

Becker Soil and Water Conservation District

Annual Retreat and Yearly Planning Meeting

Tuesday, January 12, 2016

The special annual retreat and planning meeting of the Becker Soil and Water Conservation District was held on Tuesday, January 12, 2016 in the conference room of the US Fish & Wildlife building located at 26624 North Tower Road, Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.

Those present were Supervisors Tony Beck, Kathy Stenger, Jerome Flottemesch, Travis Schauer and Eugene Pavelko. Others present include NRCS staff Ed Musielewicz, Jeff Norby, Ray Hummel and Leticia Kiehl; District staff Peter Mead, Jen Wentz, Ed Clem, Marsha Watland, Claire Olson, Karl Koenig and BWSR Board Conservationist Brett Arne.

Peter Mead started the meeting at 10:07 a.m.

2015 Accomplishments

Clean Water Legacy Programs

Ed Clem highlighted a presentation of county projects. We have received almost 1 million in CWL over the last 4-5 years. He spoke about the geomorphological history of Becker County including soil types and the resulting terrain which led into the various practices that we've installed over the years.

- 2013 CWL
- 2015 Buffalo Red Shallow Lakes
- 2015 Wild Rice Sediment Reduction
- 2014 Drainage Ditch Inventory.

These program dollars have helped to leverage at least 2:1 federal funds for each state grant.

Shoreland Program

Marsha Watland highlighted a presentation of various shoreland installations including storm water, rain gardens and maintenance throughout the county this past year. 2015 total shoreland impact area 38,319 feet with a total of 44 site evaluations.

- Shoreline stabilizations
- Native buffers/critical area plantings
- Rain Gardens
- Stormwater Mitigation

Farm Bill Assistance

Aaron Salo and Adam Kleinschmidt and Ed Clem produced 101 new CRP contracts in 2015 with roughly 1,400 acres overall. Farm Bill Assistance Funding and Contribution agreements brought in a total of about \$90,000 additional funding for the District.

- Outreach and planning
- Continuous CRP
- General CRP

- Soil health and habitat enhancement

State Cost Share

State Cost Share Allocations in 2015 were used for X Tree Plantings, X Shoreland Projects, 1 Ag Waste System and a variety of stormwater mitigation practices. Most of our state cost share projects have leveraged landowner funds at a 1:1 ratio.

2015 Workload Analysis

Hours and Expenses per Program

Peter reviewed our staff FTE for each program and highlighted the key areas on a pie chart. We are a total of 8 staff, 7 full-time and one part-time. We were fortunate to have two college interns with us this summer, a Conservation Corps crew and a high school intern during various seasons of the year.

2016 Grants and Projects

Buffer Initiative

Peter met with Tera Guetter from PRWD, Kevin Ruud from Wild Rice WD, Ellis Peterson from Cormorant WD and Bruce Albright with BRRWD to develop ideas for promoting and managing landowner questions and concerns. Our mailing list including buffer maps and close proximity locations identified approximately 280 Landowners or Ag Producers that may be in need of a buffer to be in compliance by Nov 1 of 2017. Some ditches and tributaries are surprising but overall Becker County looks to be in fairly good shape going into this new legislation.

Soil Health Initiative

Continue to assist our NRCS partners and hope for funding through the Sustainable Agriculture & Research grant. We're hoping to provide state cost share dollars with federal funding for comparison plotting and strip trials.

Local Water Management Plan (LWP) – Update

Buffalo Red Shallow Lakes & Main-stem Improvement Strategy

South Branch Wild Rice Sediment Reduction Project

Targeted Phosphorus Reduction and Lake Protection Project

Shoreland clean water grant used to address Phosphorus sensitivity issues, reduce sediment and stabilize shoreline.

Pulling Together Cooperative Weed Management Area

Awarded \$15,000 for 2016.

Becker County Drainage Ditch Inventory and Inspection Project

Additional PRWD duties and drafting in-house to finish this grant and projects.

MDA Township Nitrate Testing Program

Karl Koenig is working with RMB Labs on this.

2016 Technical Assistance Programs

Shoreland Program

2016 installs, design and site evaluations are already underway.

MN Ag Water Quality Certification Program

Our goal is to earn 10 commitments or applications and we hope to accomplish this through the next three landowners meetings. Two area specialists are to be hired—one in East Otter Tail and one in East Polk.

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention

The 2015 report was distributed to County Commissioners. Karl reviewed his 2016 plan for AIS prevention. DNR has been pleased with our reports, ideas and projections. We will continue to inform the public with educational materials and outreach. We want to be more of an educational advocate instead of a regulator of public accesses. Funding seems firm through 2017. He is looking for inspector referrals.

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

LWP Implementation

Agriculture / Seed Inspector

Observation Well Monitoring

Farm Bill Assistance

Should have several related to buffers; 85 CRP contracts will expire in 2016.

Native Plant Materials

Includes 2016 tree orders, native plant kits and plant materials.

Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)

No RIM funding due to CREP.

RRVCSA Administration

Blue Thumb Network

Renew membership; \$150 for 2016 dues will ensure this promotional piece for urban rain gardens and stormwater practices.

2016 Outreach and Educational Programs

Ag Landowner Forums

Three meetings and possible joint meeting with Clay SWCD.

Ag in the Classroom

Jr & Sr Envirothon

Cormorant Fall Field Days

Spring Field Tour at Ike Fischer Farm

Becker County Fair

Water testing this year

Water Festival

Soil Health Strip Trials

AIS

Continue meetings with school groups and lake associations.

County tax flyer

There was an AIS tax flyer generated by PRWD and inserted with tax statements last year. We would like to revamp this for 2016 and make it more educational towards all water quality issues including septic inspections and shoreland programs. In addition, the CWMA grant as required by DNR is requesting a county tax insert as well.

Environmental Advisory Council

Claire serves on this at the high school.

Buffer Advisory Council

BRRWD fall tour

This will be completed in Becker County in 2016.

2016 Staffing Plan

Position Classifications

Re-categorize some; add a full-time Shoreland Technician and part-time Program Coordinator which could lead to full-time.

Workload Projection

Lengthy discussion regarding Planning & Zoning oversight through our office.

Position Descriptions

New positions and revisions. Peter distributed a draft of the Shoreland Technician announcement and job description.

Training Needs & Employee Development

Peter distributed an approach we would like to endorse regarding core competencies for all District staff. Identify local priority resource concerns and create a plan to provide the practices that are needed.

Time Tracking

Hoping to remain vigilant and be as specific as possible with timesheets and time tracking.

Break for Lunch

Personnel Policy – Revisions and Additions

Article II, Employment Classification

Make distinction for seasonal workers noting that workload will not exceed more than 67 days in order to avoid unemployment.

Article VII, Working Policies

Not specifying office hours in order to allow for early leave times on Friday. Entire office does not work on a compressed schedule, instead offer NRCS federal guideline options for work schedules: traditional and three alternative schedules – flexible (flexitour), 5-4/9 biweekly schedule or 4-10 hour workweek.

Article VIII, Time Reporting

Not so specific with wording

Article XII, Vacation Policies

Offer vacation leave with less years of service. Federal rules allow 4 hours of annual for 0-3 years of service, 6 hours earned from 3-15 years and after 15 years employees earn 8 hours of leave.

Article XIII, Leaves of Absence

Word specifically to include the option to use paid leave for family leave. Employees may substitute paid leave for unpaid family leave with comp time taken first.

Article XXIII, Work Related Expenses and Policies

Follow federal guidelines by offering meal and lodging allowances based on the region of travel. Specify that rates change annually and reference federal guidelines.

2016 Fiscal Operations

Grant Verification Findings

Peter distributed a copy of BWSR draft letter findings. Most findings and observations have already been addressed and brought to our attention by our BC Brett Arne.

Authorized Representative(s)

Open grants can be signed by Peter, Jen or Ed Clem. Board terms and officer positions.

Program Allocations

Capital Investments

Purchase an AIS truck, District vehicle and District VRS units (3) plus additional equipment for shoreland, soil health surveys, etc. as needed.

Employee Compensation

Building Progress

Nothing started yet but we're expecting some progress in May. Recent changes were noted and understood by Briggs management.

Review 2016 Budget

Total budget needs 1,187,828.

Program Fee Schedules (WCA, Shoreland, Stormwater, Tree's)

Stormwater – there should be a distinction between commercial development and residential property.

We are currently using \$150 for residential plans.

Road Authorities – \$200 per occurrence

Shoreland Site Plan – nominal fee of \$75

Billable Rates

State Cost Share Policies

After Technical Assistance (\$5,208.80) is subtracted; we foresee one Ag waste system (\$3,500), various shoreland protection projects (\$13,835.20) and additional priority erosion control projects (\$3,500).

2016 Annual Plan of Operation

Clarification of Objectives

Draft Plan Review

Suggested Edits / Items for Inclusion

Outreach

Midwest Soil Health Summit, February 17-18 in Alexandria. Open to NRCS & District staff and supervisors.