**Lower St. Croix Steering Committee, June 24, 2021**

**NOTES**

1. **Urban and Agricultural Projects** – Craig Mell and Mike Isensee
   * Discuss & decide whether to support the subcommittee recommendation of funding for the SWWD McQuade Ravine project
     1. Existing large ravine off of a farm field and SWWD and WCD have been working with the landowner for several years. Ravine was made larger by a 7-8in rain in Denmark Twp last year. Plume to the river is visible on Google maps.
     2. Is designed, bid and already under construction. Not ideal to fund a project already under construction but need to get projects in during our 2021-22 WBIF grant funding period.
     3. Project will prevent 200 tons of sediment from flowing straight to the St. Croix and 220lb of phosphorus per year.
     4. Emily H – what is the lifespan of the project?
        1. Matt M – probably 50yrs. The district will do maintenance for three years. They got the easement in exchange for the project so did not need to pay for it.
     5. Emily – what is the lifetime cost of the project and construction cost?
        1. Construction will be $245K. No estimate on lifetime cost but it will be folded into the SWWD annual maintenance program.
     6. The subcommittee unanimously recommended funding for the project because it will achieve 44% of our pollution reduction goal for the ag-urban portion of the 2yr WBIF grant. BWSR expressed concern about using grant funding for a project already underway but there is no policy prohibiting this from happening. Craig Mell is working with Chisago SWCD board and Chisago County attorney to ensure there is no problem with allocating grant funds to a project already underway.
        1. Barb Peichel – it is important that the project did not begin until after the WBIF grant was approved and encumbered. Did the subcommittee use the targeting-prioritization scoring mechanism from the Lower St. Croix 1W1P plan?
        2. Craig Mell – the project didn’t start until June. The group did use the scoring mechanism and the project ranked high because it drains directly to the St. Croix River.
     7. Emily – what is the requested amount for grant funds?
        1. Subcommittee is recommending $175k in grant funds to be applied to the project.
     8. Caleb – is the contributing area ag land? Angie – and has the WCD and SWWD worked with the upland landowners in the past?
        1. Jay – yes. SWWD and WCD have worked with upland landowner Shafer in the past on ag BMPs. Matt – this particular ravine has a small contributing area so the project should prevent future erosion.
     9. Craig Mell – does anyone have concerns about recommending this project to move forward?
        1. Jay Riggs – this is a classic ravine stabilization where high-level stabilization needs to happen and can’t be fixed by upland crop management. It is a huge contributor to the St. Croix River and he strongly supports the project.
        2. Craig Mell has done similar projects and supports it.
     10. Craig asked for everyone’s approval. There were no objections and everyone in the group approved the recommendation.
     11. Karen Kill – we won’t be following this process in the future but it is a unique circumstance due to the fact that we are just beginning implementation of our plan.
     12. Craig will put together an agreement between Chisago SWCD and SWWD to pass through the funds. This will go to Chisago SWCD and SWWD boards on Tuesday, July 13.
     13. Barb P – is there any approval required from the Policy Committee?
         1. Angie – no. The way the JPC is written, the policy committee only approves the annual work plan and all decisions within the year are made within the subcommittee, recommended to the steering committee, and then to the Chisago SWCD board for approval. We will provide bi-monthly to quarterly updates to the policy committee.
     14. Emily H – will the subcommittee send out the prioritization scoring matrix to the steering committee. Craig – yes, we can do that.
     15. Jerry – how would the project have been funded if the grant couldn’t be used? Matt M – SWWD cobbled together funding but it was a stretch. It will free up more funds for projects elsewhere in the district if WBIF funds are put toward this project.
     16. Emily will set up a One Drive for us to store files and for everyone to be able to access.
   * CMSCWD withdrew its request for funding for a Goose Lake project in Scandia because it is not a prioritized water body in the plan
   * The prioritization work for nonstructural BMPs will happen in the fall. Funds for street sweeping will be allocated in spring of 2022.
   * The group also discussed nonstructural ag BMPs and recommended adopting the policies currently used by each county’s SWCD. Currently only Washington and Chisago have policies related to nonstructural BMPs so the subcommittee will need to discuss that further. Isanti has nonstructural BMP rates, just not approved by BWSR.
     1. Angie – are the policies and rates very different between the counties? Jay – Washington is slightly higher because of high land costs
2. Update from Craig Mell and Emily Heinz on subcontracts, time tracking, and billing procedures for WBIF work
   * See attached invoice template – Craig and Emily will work with partners to ensure proper reimbursement requests, time tracking and contracts are in place
3. Subcommittee Updates

* **Agronomy Outreach** – Jay Riggs
  + See attached docs discussed at the most recent subcommittee meeting regarding the relative benefits of hiring a local staff person vs contracting with MN Extension for an embedded staff person
    1. Minnesota Extension has over 30 embedded staff around the state and the cost will be comparable to hiring a WCD staff person.
    2. On Wed., June 16 the subcommittee decided to move forward with contracting to hire an embedded agent.
    3. There were some concerns about how quickly the process could move forward. Jay has spoken with Joel Larson from U of MN about expediting the process to ensure someone is hired as quickly as possible. The person will likely be housed at WCD office but Jay has not yet brought this to the WCD board for approval.
    4. Craig M was not originally in favor of an embedded agent but has changed his mind.
    5. Angie – when would a person start? Jay – hopefully Sept or Oct. but that is hopeful thinking
    6. Matt D – what are the major benefits of this approach? Who would the person report to?
       1. Jay – better connections with MN Extension; better able to attract highly qualified candidates; more credibility with farmers. Cons = less control over the hiring and staff management
       2. Jay – direct supervisor would be an Extension staff person but could be done with input from the LSC steering committee. We can draft our agreement to provide strong direction for the agronomist and where they work. Would like to see the A1 subcommittee be the annual review panel.
    7. Angie – if the agronomist doesn’t start until the fall, how will funds be reallocated that were set aside to fund the position in 2021?
       1. Craig – it is a three-year grant, so we can reallocate as the group sees fit moving forward.
    8. Mike I – had suggestions for additions to the position description to focus on regenerative ag. Wants to make sure this isn’t a traditional agronomist that only works with conventional ag BMPs.
* **Watershed Education** – Angie Hong and Barbara Heitkamp
  + Barbara has been meeting with northern partners and doing site visits. Is identifying events, education needs, and content needs. Has also been doing events and activities for EMWREP. Lots of chloride related interest emerging in WashCo.
  + EMWREP steering committee met on Monday. Will be sending out a new 3yr contract for 2022-2024 and will send to northern partners to consider joining as well.
    1. EMWREP conducts stormwater education and provides partner support for projects and programs.
    2. WBIF grant funds will allow for additional work with rural and ag landowners; lake associations and shoreline landowners; and local decision-makers; as well as general ed in the northern portion of the watershed.
    3. If northern partners join as official EMWREP partners, that will allow for more staff support and a materials budget for the northern portion of the watershed.
  + Discuss fall project tour or social gathering for policy committee and other local elected officials
    1. Project tour in early Sept. of SWWD ravine project + other nearby projects. Try to rent a bus.
  + Info to include in Policy Committee “e-news” update?
    1. Nice project descriptions and photos for quarterly email updates
* **Wetland Restoration** – Becky Wozney
  + Working to develop a model for how pollutant reductions are calculated. This is a challenge. Not all counties are able to use soils data and GIS. SWAT models can take a long time. But we need real numbers to be able to achieve pollution reduction goals.
    1. Mike I – would like to see an option for monitoring instead of modeling. That is how they are determining where high loads are coming from. Emily – yes. CLFLWD does that as well.
    2. Becky – in the past when they did WCA wetland restoration the goal was ecological improvement and not phosphorus reduction so this is a new thing.
    3. Emily – EOR uses PondNet
  + Also working to develop ranking criteria.
    1. Caleb – what does it mean for a project to be embedded in a study?
       1. Becky – this is a gatekeeper question currently. They want projects to be identified in a study as a good location for a project. She will re-discuss this with the subcommittee if this could be a scoring vs gatekeeper question.
       2. Mike – there are still large gaps for studies in subwatershed analysis work. If you find a willing landowner but no study done, he wouldn’t want that project thrown out.
  + Subcommittee will be meeting July 7 to wrap up details and create an application for potential projects.
  + Angie – what about wetland restoration projects on ag land? Which category would those go into? There is much less funds available for wetlands than ag.
    1. Tiffany – if they fall under the ag category, they need to benefit a priority water body listed in the plan
* **Internal Analyses** – Susanna Wilson-Witkowski
  + Subcommittee met on Tuesday and reviewed a draft application form and began working to revise selection criteria.
  + Will meet again during the work of July 19 and will send a finalized application form and selection criteria for the SC to review at July meeting
* **Targeting Analyses** – Jay Riggs
  + See attached notes from subcommittee 8 meeting on May 27
  + Subcommittee will be developing protocols for how to do modeling and monitoring in different scenarios, such as wetlands vs ag land. These protocols will be ready in the fall.
  + Nonstructural urban work is underway. Street sweeping evaluation work will be happening in the fall.
  + Are developing a proposal to update the prioritization protocol. That will take a substantial amount of time. The update will include new things like targeted monitoring.
  + Will be sending a request for new prioritization projects to be completed by the group.

1. Progress Update – cumulative progress toward water quality goals  - Emily Heinz
   * With the McQuade project (220lb P per year) we will have achieved 44% of our pollution reduction goal for the ag-urban portion of the 2yr WBIF grant
   * The St. Croix TMDL goal is 38K pounds, so we still have far to go for that goal