

Waterloo Creek Watershed Meeting

September 25th, 2012 – Spring Grove, MN

Attendees:

Suzy Meneguzzo, Program Coordinator – Hiawatha Valley RC&D Council

John Beckwith, Executive Director – Hiawatha Valley RC&D Council

David Studenski, Corps of Engineers

Aaron Peter, Area Engineer, NRCS – Rochester

Michelle Elliott, District Technician – Allamakee SWCD

Jacob Groth, Soil Conservationist – NRCS

Glenn Kinneberg, Soil Supervisor – Root River SWCD

Sara Berges, Watershed Coordinator – Allamakee SWCD

Dave Mellick, Civil Engineering Technician – NRCS

Brian Green, Project Manager – Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

Steve Klotz, Area Fisheries Supervisor – MN DNR Fisheries

Jeff Hastings, Project Manager – Trout Unlimited

Bill Kalishek, Fisheries Biologist – Iowa DNR Fisheries

Steve Kemp, Councilman – City of Spring Grove

Ron Meiners, Soil Conservationist – Root River SWCD

Rick Frank, Director – Houston County Environmental Services

Local landowners and Bee/Duck Creek Watershed Committee: Roger Stenhoff (Chairman), Jan Lee Buxengard (Recorder), Daniel Griffin, Arlen Doely, Kenneth Anderson

I. Welcome & Introductions

Suzy Meneguzzo opened the meeting by welcoming participants and asked each participant to introduce themselves and name their organization or interest in the Waterloo Creek Watershed.

The Bee/Duck Creek landowners group is eager to move some projects forward to improve the watershed. The purpose of today's meeting is to consider how to move this forward and find ways for the two states to work together.

II. NRCS Watershed Hydrology Report

Gary Larson, District Conservationist – Houston County NRCS, was going to discuss this report but was unable to attend the meeting.

III. Monitoring Activities

Michelle Elliott reported on monitoring that is currently being done in the Waterloo Creek Watershed. Biweekly stream monitoring at seven or eight sites has been done from 2010–2012. 2010 was more of a high water year; in 2012 there were three rainfall events in a drought year.

Several water quality parameters have been tested, and macro invertebrate, thermograph, and fish sampling data were also collected.

Waterloo Creek is the only high quality water that is impaired (E. coli) in Iowa.

IV. Shared Watershed Technician Position

Jacob Groth reported on a Watershed Technician Position to be shared between Minnesota and Iowa.

Discussion is under way to federally fund a new Watershed Technician Position. The position would start in January 2013 and would be NCRS staff working out of the Waukon office. Time would be split between the two states. NCRS will know more in October following budget discussions.

Ron Meiners also shared a grant opportunity they are pursuing through the Clean Water Legislation. Sites in Bee/Duck Watershed would be eligible for funds. There will be more information available in December. EQIP will provide 100% cost share for flood control projects. Ron is looking at projects of about \$60-80,000.

V. Local Planning Committee Goals and Objectives

Roger Stenhoff reported on the Watershed Committee's goals and objectives.

The goal of the Bee Creek/Duck Creek Watershed Committee is a 50% reduction in peak flows. The group would like to see changes in practices that support this outcome.

They have conducted a survey with landowners to assess their support for watershed projects.

One of the main challenges to moving projects forward is availability of funds. Another is the high price for corn; farmers are eager to keep as much land planted as

possible so practices may have to focus on non-crop areas. Bureaucratic complexity is another reality.

Bear Creek is an example; they promoted less expensive upland projects. Another practice being implemented in the area is cover crops.

The group has had three large meetings with landowners and has a lot of support locally.

VI. Discussion

John Beckwith led participants in a facilitated discussion around the opportunities available in the Waterloo Creek Watershed.

- It takes a lot of funds – how do we pay for improvements?
- Farming practices of the past are hard to keep in place; strips don't work like they used to; should put in waterways and any control structures by the woods; few will give up farm land.
- There are quite a few people implementing practices (cover crops, minimum tillage, etc.). Much of this is in the education and talking to fellow farmers.
- There is interest in working across state lines; two states, federal government, and landowners working together. While there are differences in each state, there is also a willingness and anxiousness to get something done.
- Landowners need help and technical guidance to get this going.
- In August, Allamakee SWCD received a \$100,000 grant from the Watershed Improvement Review Board (WIRB) for grade stabilization structures and terraces in Iowa.
- There has been some discussion about applying for a 319 grant. This presents some challenges with working across state lines and across two EPA districts. Participants wondered who would be the best EPA rep to begin this discussion with. Bill Kalishek will speak to Steve Hopkins (Iowa DNR) who works directly with EPA funds. On the Minnesota side those funds come through the MPCA.
- Watershed planning is underway in Iowa. Minnesota is on a slightly different schedule. There may be advantages to working on coordinating schedules and efforts.
- For the purposes of the Minnesota planning, projects need to be “shovel ready”; that is, identified and ready to go.
- The Root River comprehensive watershed plan is due to be rewritten in 2017.

- There was some discussion about changing how the CRP rental rates are structured to make them more appealing to farmers during a time of high corn prices. Some exploration of how to get rates to \$200 would be beneficial (Iowa is up to \$180).
- Trout Unlimited has some restoration dollars for streams.
- There was interest in getting one of the federal special designations for the watershed. Martin County was selected for this and it would be an advantage for this area. Aaron Paul will contact Kasey Taylor (MN NRCS) about how these designations were made.
- Root River is working on a county-wide request and wondered if there were willing landowners. Roger Stenhoff and Michelle Elliott have contacts with such landowners and will connect with Ron Meiner.
- We have DNR data/monitoring (MN/IA) for the Upper Iowa Watershed for 13 years; MPCA process to come in sync.

John then led the group in a discussion of what steps would help move projects forward in the Waterloo Creek Watershed.

- Encourage NCRS State Conservationists to meet.
- Hiawatha Valley RC&D will help the Watershed Committee draft a letter to NCRS to encourage supporting these efforts.
- Hiawatha Valley will look into Farmer Led Councils as a way of implementing some of the practices.
- Ron Meiners and Roger Stenhoff will arrange to meet to discuss landowners interested in implementing practices.
- Roger will take the lead in scheduling a Landowner Meeting in December or January. Agenda items will include: resources available, education on practices, education on impacts of current practices. Suggested educational speakers: Adam Berg with the Department of Agriculture – he has been having success focusing on small watershed projects; Geologists: Jeff Green – MN DNR, Tim Wysbro – NRCS Geologist, and Bob Libra – Iowa's State Geologist.