

Middle Snake Tamarac Rivers Watershed District
Judicial Ditch #14 – Watershed Planning
Project Work Team Agenda
Tuesday, January 31, 2017 at 10am
Viking Diner
Viking, MN

A Project Team meeting of the JD14 Project Team was held on January 31, 2017 at the Viking Diner. Those present:

Charles Swenson (landowner), George Bjorgaard (landowner), David Bakke (MSTRWD Manager), Jonathan Hams (New Solum Twp), Garret Reiersen (landowner), Ben Kleinwachter (MSTRWD Manager), Doug Franke (DNR), Greg Dyrdal (landowner), Craig Jarnot (USACE), Dave Jones (NRCS), Brian Dwight (BWSR), Brad Blawat (MSTRWD Manager), Tony Nordby (HEI) and Brent Silvis (MSTRWD Administrator).

Brent and Tony gave brief introductions and attendees were invited to introduce themselves.

Tony gave some background of the project, including the redetermination of benefits in 2014, complaints from landowners regarding the performance of JD14 and the procurement of federal funding for the project through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCCP). He gave an overview of the area of interest. He discussed the six review points/concurrence points that must be met in the RCCP process and the need to attain a greater than 1.0 benefit-to-cost ratio. Tony presented the results of the public comment forms that was distributed at the initial public meeting held on April 16, 2016.

Tony also discussed the Draft Scope of Environmental Assessment worksheet that had been distributed and requested that attendees complete the worksheet, indicating their perceived relevance of various environmental concerns. He explained that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) must be adhered to.

Tony reviewed the Feasibility Study/Review Point One Submittal and the Hydrologic and Hydraulic Report that has been completed for the Existing Conditions within the sub-watershed and discussed the methods to the modeling approach. He noted that NOAA's Atlas 14 precipitation frequencies had been recently updated and were used for the modeling efforts.

Tony discussed the need to develop a Purpose and Need Statement. This would take into consideration environmental concerns. The Purpose and Need must be documented and defensible. Craig clarified that this statement should identify the problem and explain why it is a problem.

Dave J. also added that the purpose should be specific if stating flood reduction goals. This statement can be used to help reduce the number of alternatives. Needs must be

defensible, such as stating what damages have been experienced and what the model results show.

Brian pointed out that there is a need for benefits to exceed costs on projects proposed.

Craig explained that, although a benefit-cost analysis, including quantifying crop damages, is important for the Purpose and Need Statement, the USACE/404 permitting process does not require an economic analysis.

Tony said that the team may discover during the watershed planning process that the project being identified is not compatible with federal funding guidelines and pursuing other project funds may be an option to implement the project. He explained the next steps of the project which are to develop a Purpose and Need, review the environmental assessments and develop alternatives.

Dave J. stated that, if the team requests his feedback, he will give his opinion of the chance of a project being eligible for additional NRCS funding. He must submit any proposal requested regardless of his opinion of the project. NRCS is not a regulatory body and cannot stop a project, but may not be able to assist in funding the project. RCPP funds spent in planning do not need reimbursed even if the project is not completed or eligible for continued funding.

Doug asked how the cost-to-benefit ratio is calculated. Dave J. explained that benefits are calculated over the life of the project. Damages must be quantifiable, such as FEMA declarations, insurance claims and insurance payments.

Brian asked what should be done if natural resource enhancements (NREs) added to the project cause the costs to exceed benefits. Craig answered that NREs can also increase the benefits. Dave J. responded that NREs should not be included in the project if they don't increase benefit-to-cost ratio.

Brian asked if NREs are necessary under the mediation agreement. Ben asked if it was necessary to include NREs in the benefit-to-cost analysis if the NREs were being funded from another source. Dave J. commented that NREs should not be required if they cause costs to exceed benefits. A landowner asked if NREs would be required of this project, if its purpose was flood reduction.

A landowner asked if there was any idea of what type of project would be proposed.

A landowner suggested that flood maps could overlay land value maps to determine benefits/damages. He said it might be helpful to have that for the next meeting.

Tony said that a technical committee would be convened to develop the Purpose and Need draft, which would be presented at the next Project Team meeting, in about two months. Brian asked Dave J. and Craig if the level of detail of the Purpose and Need statement was the same for the 404 process and for the NRCS process. The response

was they may be slightly different but that can be worked out when the sub-committee meets to develop the P and N statement.

Doug asked if more input from landowners could be obtained to identify exactly where flooding/drainage problems were. Dave J. agreed that this was a good idea. A landowner pointed out that it was a small watershed without a lot of landowners.

Craig asked why there was a problem with flooding in this system. Tony replied that it was a very small ditch, possibly a 2 to 5-year designed ditch with minimal ditch grades, inadequate outlet at the Lilac Ridge, and downstream erosion. Doug commented that it would be helpful to know what the impact of the various conditions contributing to flooding are, as well as the solutions to these conditions.

Brian and Ben provided comments, asking that the concerns related to this ditch be explained to landowners, an explanation of concurrence points be provided, more information provided on the RCPP process, a list of acronyms provided and an explanation of the mediation agreement be provided. It was suggested that these things be mailed out.

Dave J. suggested that a policy of this team be that we do not use acronyms, and that we not overwhelm landowners with any more information than they need. He also pointed out that more information was needed related to the influence of NREs on the benefit-to-cost ratio, and the influence of the mediation agreement on this process. Dave J. said he would get answers to these questions by February 10, 2017.

Ben and Tony stated that the next project work team meeting would be in early March (date to be determined).

Adjourned.

Brent Silvis
Administrator
MSTRWD