

MISSISSIPPI MAKEOVER

A Plan for Restoration, Just Around the Bend



Citizen Advisory Group
Meeting Minutes from
Tuesday December 1, 2009
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Hastings, MN

Please note: Presentations referenced below are available on Mississippi Makeover website at www.dakotaswcd.org/wshd_missmak.html.

Welcome and Introductions: Laura Jester welcomed the group; introductions were made around the table. Participants included:

1. Representative Dennis McNamara, Hastings
2. Commissioner Joe Harris, Dakota County
3. Don Kern, Flint Hills Resources
4. Joe Beattie, Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission
5. Mark Swanson, Wacouta Resident
6. Laura Jester, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District
7. Norm Senjem, MN Pollution Control Agency
8. Jennifer Ender, MN Pollution Control Agency
9. Tim Schlagenhaft, MN Department of Natural Resources
10. Jeff Janvrin, WI Department of Natural Resources
11. Steve Johnson, National Park Service
12. Jeff Luehrs, Dakota County Water Resources Department
13. Paul Drotos, City of Red Wing
14. Trevor Russell, Friends of the Mississippi River
15. Wayne Sylvander, Spring Lake Resident
16. Mike McKay, Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance
17. Patrick Sweeny, Freshwater Society
18. Katie Himanga, Lake City Resident
19. Molly Shodeen, MN Department of Natural Resources
20. Gabe Miller, Prairie Island Indian Community
21. Hank Tressel, Ravenna Township
22. Cynthia Hilmoe, MN Pollution Control Agency
23. Brian Watson, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District

Scot Johnson, MDNR – Scot gave a presentation on the potential to build islands in the floodplain, where they once existed (see presentation “*Island Planning Details*”) as a means to improve water quality and habitat, and adjust river hydrology and geomorphology to a more natural system. A positive shift in biology is often a result of these activities. The MDNR is proposing to build islands in 3 areas including Lower Pool 2, North Lake, and Sturgeon Lake. Preliminary plans are complete; the estimated total cost is over \$14 million. Scot noted that plans for building islands in Upper Lake Pepin are not as detailed at this time and involve the Wisconsin DNR (see presentation “*WDNR Projects*” from 8/18/09 meeting).

CAG members asked about materials used in the islands. Scot indicated that most of the material comes from dredge sites operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and that sand is generally used as the base of the island. Natural flooding and wave action are allowed to sculpt the edges of the island. Agencies have learned to work with scouring and deposition around islands, rather than fight those forces. Vegetation of a newly built island tends to occur naturally with willows, cottonwoods, and grasses.

If funding for island building can be secured, the next step is to involve local stakeholders including the public, local organizations and participating technical agencies to evaluate and select specific island designs.

Tim Schlagenhaft, MDNR – Tim gave a presentation on the use of water level management, or drawdowns as a means of ecological restoration in the Mississippi (see presentation “*Drawdown Potential in Mississippi*”). He indicated that there has been much planning for a drawdown in Pool 3, and not as much planning, thus far, in Pool 2. A drawdown can “jumpstart” the vegetation, both emergent and submerged, and can consolidate sediments, reducing turbidity. Typical drawdowns are 1.5 – 2 feet of water level. The bathymetry of Spring Lake and Sturgeon and North Lakes indicate the potential for a significant response in vegetation.

There are many issues to consider when planning a drawdown in Pool 3 including additional dredging of the navigational channel, boat access, power plant intake needs, permitting, and addressing needs of Prairie Island Indian Community, marina owners, and others. If funding is secured, 2012 would be the earliest drawdown in Pool 3; and 2015 in Pool 2.

There are sequencing considerations between island building and drawdowns including social, economical and ecological. Ideally, a drawdown should occur first to understand where the vegetation responded. Costs for drawdowns vary widely. The first step is to establish a local stakeholder committee; this Mississippi Makeover Citizen Advisory Group would likely compromise a large part of the committee.

Overall, the river management tools of drawdowns and island building can be used to help meet the goals of the Lake Pepin and Mississippi River Total Maximum Daily Load. However, it's possible that little or no ecological response would be seen as a result of these activities if turbidity is not decreased from upstream sources.

Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) Funding Proposal - Tim Schlagenhaft informed the group that drawdowns and island building had been funded by the U.S. ACOE. However, in Lake Pepin and upstream, these activities require a 35% cost share. The MDNR developed a partnership of local agencies and organizations and developed a proposal to fund multiple restoration activities along the Mississippi River. The funding proposal will be presented to the LSOHC on Dec. 9th. Tim indicated that the work of the Mississippi Makeover CAG was important in developing the proposal because of the work of citizens and stakeholders to set targets for the River.

Carter Slough and Bullfrog Pond Updates – Scot Johnson reported that additional investigation on the Carter Slough indicates that raising the dike here would only force additional water through other low points (or sag points) from the Mississippi River into the floodplain and the Lower Vermillion River during periods of high water. (See presentation “*New Carter Slough*”) He also said that water would still overtop this dike once a year during spring flooding. However, he understands the concern that sediment-laden water is coming through the slough (possibly constantly at very low flow rates) and it may be part of the cause of sedimentation in the Mud Hen Lakes. Some CAG

members reported large deltas in that area. Scot says the delta could have formed over a period of several years before the dike was repaired in 2002. He reports that although there does not appear to be a significant problem with the dike currently, the U.S. ACOE is willing to attempt to plug the holes within the structure with sand in 2010 to help stop constant flow. Scot will report back to the CAG after U.S. ACOE completes this task and will re-evaluate the situation.

Scot Johnson reported on the current situation in Bullfrog Pond in Hastings. (See presentation "*Bullfrog Pond Project*") He and others visited the pond in August. The old channel to the north of the pond used to carry the majority of the Vermillion River flow, but was blocked in recent years by a log jam. The flow was naturally diverted into the pond where the channel widens significantly and becomes very shallow and difficult or impossible to canoe. A simple solution would be to clear the log jam and install a rock spillway at the entrance to the pond so that water would be diverted into the older, narrower, deeper river channel. Various permits would be necessary and there are some ecological implications to consider (wading birds use the pond frequently). The benefits of this project would be almost entirely recreational. There is not enough water moving through that area to supply both the pond and the northern channel. The Mississippi Makeover project and CAG could pursue this option. The land where the project would be built and where there is access to the area in the winter is owned by the City of Hastings. Laura Jester will speak with Vermillion River Watershed JPO representatives about this possible project.

Future Monitoring of Indicators – Tim Schlagenhaft noted that a long term monitoring program was needed to determine if targets were being met in the project area. The same technical team that helped develop the indicators will work on this task and present various options for monitoring which will likely involve citizen monitoring. Annual or biennial reporting back to the public through a report card system could be initiated.

BREAK

Hastings Environmental Protectors (HEP) Update – Phil Vieth with this group was not able to attend the meeting. Laura Jester reported that a large clean up of Spring Lake was being planned for one Saturday next fall by the HEP, just prior to the duck season and after early goose season. (See presentation "*Spring Lake Clean Up*") The targeted area includes the shoreline, islands and Spring Lake (Dakota County side of river) from Hastings to the grain docks at C.F. Industries. The project needs up to 100 volunteers and 20 boats. Some sponsors already agreeing to help include Dakota County Parks, Ducks Unlimited, Flint Hills Resources, and DNR Wildlife. Volunteers will be solicited at Rivertown days and other venues.

Plans for Public Open House – Laura Jester noted that a public open house on the Mississippi Makeover Project was being scheduled for late January (before the start of the legislative session). The audience for the open house is the general public and elected officials, especially state senators and representatives. The goals for the open house include more awareness of the potential to restore Spring Lake and Pools 2 and 3 and Lake Pepin. Political will should be generated and this resource's potential recognized as important and possible. The group generated the following ideas with regards to open house planning and format: frame topic as something important and interesting; public responds better to stories than numbers and data; important to have technical experts there to talk one on one with folks; public should be able to come and go (true open house format); could provide power point presentations at booths rather than posters; could have an Internet open house as well; have people provide feedback on maps; offer professional CEU credits; should span afternoon to evening; CAG members should be very involved with visible presence in process and engaged throughout planning of open house.