

South Branch Root River Watershed Project  
March 13, 2008 Meeting Notes

In attendance: Rich Biske (The Nature Conservancy), Mark White (DNR Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park), Jean Krahn, Fred Beier, Bill Sweetser (Bennington Twp), Carol Kohn (farmer), Chuck Amunrud (Fillmore Co. Commissioner), Donna Rasmussen (Fillmore SWCD)

Gearing up for the Root River Turbidity TMDL: TMDL stands for Total Maximum Daily Load, or the maximum amount of a pollutant that can enter a water body without affecting the use of that water body. There are 11 segments of the Root River, including the South Branch, that have been found to be impaired due to turbidity caused by sediment in the water. A stream segment is designated as impaired if the turbidity level exceeds 25 NTUs, the unit used to measure turbidity. Turbidity affects the amount of light that can penetrate through the water. This, in turn, impacts aquatic life, such as fish and invertebrates. Sediment covers food sources and egg laying areas, reduces visibility making it more difficult to find food, reduces sunlight in the water which affects plant growth, and increases water temperature. Transparency tube measurements submitted to MPCA by citizen stream volunteers have been used for the assessment of almost all the stream segments that are impaired in the Root River. That information is then corroborated by local natural resources personnel. For each stream segment that has been designated as impaired, a TMDL must be completed. The goals of the TMDL are to 1) complete the calculations for sediment loading for each impaired segment and allocate the sources from which the sediment is coming, and 2) develop management strategies to address the sources of the sediment. To accomplish the first goal, more intensive monitoring is necessary on each of the impaired segments. There are 16 proposed monitoring stations maintained by several entities. The Fillmore SWCD is the lead agency for the three-year TMDL project. Cooperating agencies include the MPCA, DNR, MDA, and Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center. At each monitoring station, turbidity and stream stage measurements will be recorded continuously using a datalogger. Grab samples will also be collected 15-20 times from April to October from those sites. Eleven of the stations will be maintained by the SWCD. The others will be maintained by DNR Fisheries (1), Eagle Bluff (1) and MDA (3). A budget of \$300,000 is allocated for the project. Most of that will be for staff time for monitoring and coordination of the project as well as funding to subcontract with DNR for flow measurements and the University of Minnesota to develop a watershed computer model using SWAT, the program currently being used by MDA in the South Branch. Flow measurements are used to determine the pollutant loads based on the volume of water passing the station at a certain stream stage. That information is paired with the concentration of the pollutant at that same stage to calculate the pollutant load. Other information about land use, stream corridor condition, biological data, and storm water discharges from cities will be used with the monitoring data to calibrate a watershed model. The model can then be used to predict the effects on water quality by implementing various BMPs on the landscape. Those strategies that are most cost-effective will be incorporated into a TMDL implementation plan for the watershed. Another aspect of the TMDL process is involving local stakeholders in understanding what the study means for the watershed. Those stakeholders would include ag and producer groups, landowners, elected officials, and agency staff. Public meetings and education and outreach materials will be used for educating the general public. This whole process is building on the work that has already been completed in the South Branch.

Review of proposed work plan revisions: An extension has been requested to September 30, 2008, to complete some of the actions for the 319 grant. This allows one more field season to

promote programs and complete feedlot fixes, stream channel surveys, grazing economic analyses, and additional time to complete the FANMAP report, the video project.

The work plan changes that are proposed include:

- Using the funds for a wetland restoration for a sign up bonus for installing buffers along JD#1 to protect side inlets that were installed as part of the ditch clean out project.
- Using \$20,000 of feedlot fix cost-share for cost-share for implementation of grazing management plans. This would fund 5 projects at 50% cost-share up to a maximum of \$4000.
- \$4800 from the evaluation portion of the work plan was approved for transfer to monitoring to pay WSU for biological monitoring in 2006 (12 sites) plus three sites in JD#1 in 2008. Utilize unused funds for well testing to continue stream monitoring and purchase bacteria testing equipment with the SWCD.
- Transferring additional funds to Administration/coordination if the grant is extended.

Updates:

Spring newsletter: This issue will include: Heusinkveld Farms named Conservationist of the Year for Fillmore County by the Fillmore SWCD, information about the Root River Turbidity TMDL, monitoring at Forestville and JD#1 by the MDA. Other topics suggested include the low-interest loans and low-income grants for septic system upgrades.

Forestry workshops: The January 24<sup>th</sup> workshop and the February 7<sup>th</sup> workshop were attended by 3 watershed landowners who will be reimbursed for the class fees. The Tree ID class and the Forest Wildlife classes have been rescheduled for June 10<sup>th</sup> and June 12<sup>th</sup>, respectively, both from 6 to 8:30 in the evening.

Grazing workshops: The workshop was held on February 12<sup>th</sup> in Ostrander with 5 in attendance. There were a couple of other producers who wished to attend but could not. The weather was a factor in the number attending. Jeff is planning a Grass-fed Beef workshop in April in Preston that we will be co-sponsoring.

JD#1 Buffer promotion: Mower SWCD staff mailed a letter to the 12 or so landowners along JD#1 to gauge their interest in installing CRP buffers if a sign up bonus were offered of \$500 per acre for a 33' buffer and \$1000/acre for a 66' buffer. This amounts to about \$33 to \$66/acre/year over a 15-year CRP contract. Two main points are being used to promote the buffers: meeting the 66' setback from tile inlets for atrazine applications and reducing sedimentation in the ditch which cost about \$10 per linear foot to clean out. Seven Mile Creek data showed an average of 2.5" of sediment deposited after average rains. One early spring storm event deposited 30 tons of sediment alone. No one has responded to the letters yet so staff are planning to make one-on-one visits.

FANMAP: Follow-up FANMAP on-farm interviews are in progress. There are about 40 participants so far, so more phone calls are being made to the list of people receiving the initial letter. A \$25,000 contract has been signed with MDA with funds coming from the evaluation portion of the 319 grant work plan.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

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