

South Branch Root River Watershed Project
February 10, 2005 Meeting Notes

In attendance: Carol Kohn (farmer, stream monitor), Jeff Green (DNR-Waters), Stafford Hansen (Fillmore Co. Commissioner), Clint Miller (MN Land Trust), Lee Ganske (MPCA), Mark Dittrich (MDA), Fred Beier (homeowner), Bill Sweetser (Bennington Twp), Keith Voorhees (Clayton Twp), Mark White (Forestville/Mystery Cave SP), Sue Schrage (landowner), Mike Souhrada (Bloomfield Twp, farmer), Donna Rasmussen (Fillmore SWCD)

Introductions were made. Clint Miller distributed information about the Mississippi River Blufflands Conference in Red Wing on April 22.

Bacteria in Our Water: What Are the Health Risks? Eric Anderson, the District Epidemiologist with the MN Department of Health (MDH) in Rochester, presented information about the health consequences that can occur when humans are exposed to bacteria and other pathogens in water, either through ingestion of the water or body contact with contaminated water. The South Branch has been listed as impaired for water recreation due to fecal coliform levels that exceed the surface water quality standard. Bacteria, viruses, and protozoans are the most common culprits causing water-borne illnesses. Of 42 drinking water outbreaks in Minnesota, 24 were pathogen related and the rest were chemical. The biggest outbreak in the country was the 1993 Milwaukee incident caused by *Cryptosporidium*. Over 100,000 people became ill and the estimated cost for lost time and medical care was \$90 million. *Cryptosporidium* from cattle feces was not filtered out of the water coming in from Lake Michigan due to a malfunctioning filter, and chlorine does not kill it. Recreational outbreaks are mainly due to *Shigella*, *Salmonella*, or *E. coli* in freshwater. In treated water, such as swimming pools, *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia* are more common problems. The most common symptoms due to fecal matter in water are upset stomach, diarrhea, headaches, fever, and nausea that can range from mild to severe and last either short or long term. If the person who is ill visits the doctor and is tested, then the illness is reported to the MDH. If testing shows that a similar strain is found during a short timeframe in the same area, red flags go up and an investigation takes place. Calls to MDH about food-borne illnesses are much more common than those concerning water-borne illness, which are more sporadic and over a larger area. Ingestion of contaminated water is more likely to cause illness than contact of an open wound to contaminated water. Measures of water quality are tied to the risk posed for illness, but there is no testing for specific organisms. The risk is based on the amount of the organisms present and when the contact occurs. In karst areas, pathogens that wash from the surface into ground water could potentially survive a long time in ground water where no sunlight or heat are present to kill them. There have been no documented outbreaks due to exposure to pathogens in the Root River, but what is reported to the MDH is a small number, and a couple of days of illness may not be reported. Park visitors are always asking about where to swim or wade, and peak periods are of more concern. Health officials are constantly trying to reconcile water quality and risks to health. Water quality standards are based on epidemiological studies, but there are many complex factors that affect the risk. Human pathogens are of more concern because of the greater likelihood of causing human illness, but some pathogens can cause illness in humans also.

Brief overview of bacteria data and bacteria reduction strategies for the South Branch Root River watershed: Donna Rasmussen, Fillmore SWCD, reviewed the water quality data from the watershed and Fillmore County that indicate that fecal coliform bacteria are impacting both surface water and ground water. Average bacteria levels at Forestville were over twice the water quality standard. Forty percent of well water samples from the last 20 years from Fillmore County have had bacteria present. Funding for feedlots and septic systems are aimed at reducing fecal numbers.

Review topics for watershed newsletter: Articles have been drafted by Donna on the grant and loan awards for the watershed project and the New Look at Livestock Initiative's recommendations for the Fillmore County Comprehensive Plan. The first page may contain an announcement about an event to publicize the awarding of the funding for the project, but not much of that has been planned yet. The timing of this event could affect when the newsletter would be sent out. Jim Edgar is preparing an article on Forest Stewardship Plans. Denton Bruening is pulling together the highlights from the FANMAP interviews. The MDA conservation drainage project will also be included. Although there is little progress on CREP and CSP, we will include some basic information about the programs and alert people to watch for the sign-ups unless something changes before going to print. Something could be included on the impaired waters fee and the support it is getting from a variety of groups as well as how the funds will support existing water programs. A dye tracing article with a map would alert watershed residents of the work to be done over the next three years.

Forest Stewardship Plan funding: About \$4000 is allocated in the 319 grant over the next three years for grants to landowners to prepare Forest Stewardship Plans. Another \$1000 in SWCD grant funds can be used in the watershed this year. The SWCD funds need to be spent by September. The plans are written by a contractor who works closely with the DNR Forester who gives final approval of the plan. The basic charge for a plan is \$125/plan plus \$1.75/acre. Jim has one landowner already interested and Mark White provided a list of names to begin contacting. We are planning to use GIS to identify other landowners that may have land that is eligible. If there is anyone else who may be interested, please contact Donna or Jim Edgar. The Governor's budget cut private forest management in half which could have a greater impact in the southeast where more forests are privately owned.

Updates:

If there are no final comments or changes on the fact sheets, these will be printed and handed out at upcoming meetings.

The 319 grant agreement is still being processed by MPCA, so nothing has been signed yet by the counties. The loan agreement should be signed by the Fillmore County Board on February 22nd. An attempt was made to make the language changes desired by the county attorney, but MPCA said it would be a lengthy process since it would affect all existing contracts. MPCA is obligated under fair lending laws to have all contracts for the program identical, so changes to the Fillmore County agreement would have had to be incorporated into the existing contracts. Faced with this, the County Board decided to accept the agreement as is.

The tillage and satellite data maps are on hold since the person spearheading the project at the U of M is leaving. It appears that there is no one available to continue the work at this time.

The CSP sign-up is still expected in March. All the farmer meetings have been held in the watershed. Workbooks should be completed by the farmers and records pulled together before the sign up so they are prepared. CREP funding is in all versions of the bonding bill, which has not passed yet.

Denton is finalizing the results from the FANMAP interviews. He presented the information at a conference in San Diego last week. A final version should be ready by the next meeting or so.

The New Look at Livestock Initiative met yesterday and began preparations to create a video about the benefits of livestock to water quality. Three schools may be involved in helping to film footage and edit the film. The 319 grant includes \$500 for educational materials about the benefits of livestock. The next meeting will be Thursday, March 3rd at noon in Ostrander.

The city is now charging rent for use of the community center, which was not part of the administrative budget in the 319 grant, so future meeting locations may vary. Mystery Cave is an option for some of the afternoon or off-season meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.