

South Branch Root River Watershed Project  
September 13, 2007 Meeting Notes

In attendance: Mark Dittrich (MDA), Matt Taylor (Mower SWCD), Rich Biske (The Nature Conservancy), Bill Sweetser (Bennington Twp), Katherine Logan (MPCA), Warren Netherton (Mystery Cave), Jeff Duchene and Donna Rasmussen (Fillmore SWCD)

Improving Pasture Management: Jeff Duchene, Grazing Specialist for the Root River Watershed, was hired with grant funding from the Clean Water Legacy Act to assist farmers in the watershed with grazing plans and implementation of their grazing plans. The goal of the grant is to get more implementation of rotational grazing systems on land where that is the best use of the land. Most pastures are usually grazed continuously from spring to fall. This is the most inefficient use of the pasture because cattle always eat the new growth and keep the vegetation short. If roots do not establish well, the plants do not resist overgrazing or extreme dry or wet weather. Rotational grazing allows the grass enough time to recover before grazing again. The rule of thumb is to leave 4 inches of growth because the growth point is about 3 inches off the ground in most grasses. Below that point, the plants draw on their roots to grow. Leaving 4 inches allows more leaf area for photosynthesis which equals higher productivity leading to better animal performance and weight gain. Extra money is not necessarily made by grazing more cattle but by increasing weight gains in calves. The cheapest way to raise a cow is to rotate it on pasture. Feeding costs are usually higher than costs to install fencing and watering systems. About 1.5 acres is needed per cow/calf pair, so average herds of 25-35 cattle need about 50 acres. Costs for fencing and watering systems are about \$20,000 for 40 acres. The federal EQIP program has 50% cost-share for implementing a grazing plan plus a \$25/acre incentive for 3 years. There is also a Challenge Grant for the Root River that will provide 75% cost-share up to \$4000 implementation. Producers in the Conservation Security Program need to manage their pastures in order to be in the top tier for payments. Grazing programs have not been in place very long, so producers often do not know that there is assistance available. Stream crossings cost \$3-5000. Producers can get \$15/acre for stream exclusions for each acre excluded. However, total exclusion is not ideal since streams are adapted to grazing animals, such as buffalo and elk. Exclusion results in box elder and wild parsnip. Limited grazing keeps these weedy species down. Permanent watering tanks need a heavy use pad so portable tanks may be preferable. If a producer wants to take a small first step, it would be to manage stubble height by forcing the cattle into areas they may not use as much. Better control of weeds can come over a period of time by better managing the grass. The more variety in the grass mix the better. Warm season grasses need different management, such as grazing in late June and leaving 6-8 inches of stubble height. The activities being carried out through this grant include landowner contacts and education through workshops and field days. A grazing workshop is being planned for the South Branch Watershed project sometime this winter.

Discuss revisions to 319 grant work plan: We are nearing the end of the grant next year, and there are some areas where funds are not being spent so some modifications to the work plan could be made to reflect some needs that have arisen. We talked last time about the wetland restoration project and the difficulty finding a cooperating landowner. Due to the JD#1 clean out, the Mower SWCD has been trying to encourage more buffer sign ups along the ditch, especially where there are side inlets for the tile drainage systems. These areas funnel the water into the ditch and can develop erosion problems and reduce the buffering that would occur if the water went through the 16.5' required buffer. Mower SWCD staff have suggested that an added

incentive may encourage more to add more buffer. If the whole ditch were buffered at the minimum of 33' in CRP, 36 acres could be enrolled. If the maximum of 120' were enrolled, the total would be 132 acres. Not all would be enrolled, so based on half enrolling, we would likely be looking at 18 acres. In the Brown Nicollet Cottonwood watershed a \$30 per acre incentive was utilized, which over 15 years would amount to a \$450 bonus payment upfront. A bigger incentive could be given if the buffer were made wider, using a sliding scale to encourage wider buffers.

Administrative and GIS budgets: The administrative budget will be used up by the end of this year. However, due to staffing changes at the SWCD, the GIS budget has been underutilized, so there is about \$13,000. This would cover most of the cost for the coordinator's position until September when the grant ends.

CWP loan extension has been requested and granted so that we have a year to spend those funds. As of June 30, \$95,000 had been spent of the \$240,000 allotted for Fillmore County. Mower has made just one loan from the \$60,000 they received.

Cost share for grazing practices. With Jeff working with more of the producers, we could utilize the unused portion of the grazing economic analyses funds for grazing practices (\$6,000) and the feedlot cost-share funds that don't get used.

Items for the fall newsletter:

- Value of manure by Jerry – not included in spring newsletter
- Articles about Jeff and Dawn, nutrient management specialist
- Reminders about programs
- RIM/Clean Energy funding from Clean Water Legacy
- Buffer article
- Flooding and manure management in emergency situations

Updates:

Forestry workshops: all cancelled so far due to low registration; October 6<sup>th</sup> tree planting workshop is next one to be held. Two more are scheduled for 2008 about timber sales and financial aspects of forest ownership

Township meetings: all but one township meeting held (Beaver). There has been good response and some sign ups as a result of those meetings.

MDA monitoring stations: The stations on JD#1 are up and running. The site in Forestville State Park has not been approved by the DNR yet, so the equipment is not installed.

WSU contract for stream channel survey: \$20,000 with WSU to help provide data for the SWAT model. Adam Birr (MDA) and Toby Dogwiler (WSU) are out collecting data from now until the end of the year.

NLL video: Setting up a contract with the mass communications director at RCTC to put the power point presentation on video/DVD for distribution to non-ag audiences.

FANMAP: Planning to start soon to re-do the FANMAP on farm interviews with 60 farmers in the watershed as a follow up to the 2003 interviews. About \$25,000 will come from the 319 grant for MDA staff to conduct the interviews.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.