

UPPER BIG BLUE NRD

WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND VOLUNTARY INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT PLAN

One District, Two Plans, One Water



Minutes from Stakeholder Meeting 5

January 14, 2019
7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Upper Big Blue NRD Office
319 E. 25th St.
York, NE 68467

Attendees

See attached attendance sheet

Agenda

1. **Welcome and Update** provided by Steve Wolf and Rick Wilson, JEO Consulting Group

Welcome to our fifth stakeholder meeting. This is where we are going to be wrapping up this phase of our two plans. We hope you've had a chance to review the materials we provided in advance and were able to see how all your suggestions have been tracked. Your work is moving forward in the development of these goals and objectives. We can't thank you enough for how diligent and seriously involved you've been to put this together. In our team meetings, we review and look at the progress that's been made, and it's really because of the stakeholders. Things are going well. We're very busy and very involved in the writing process. There are multiple chapters in production. Along with that, there is water quality modeling that is coming along. As a project, we're happy; we know our end date is coming up in the end of April. We are on track, and that's because of the stakeholders.

2. **Discuss Stakeholder Research Assignment** facilitated by Adam Rupe, JEO

Adam reminded the stakeholders of the handouts from the last meeting: a NRCS pamphlet that discusses main Best Management Practices (BMPs) utilized and a handout the project team put together to give background information on Voluntary Integrated Management Plans (VIMPs) and authorized groundwater/surface water controls (VIMP controls).

- He directed the stakeholders' attention to the BMPs specifically and asked whether any stood out from the list provided.
 - I think, as far as water quality goes, there's two things to look at: grass filter strips and bank stabilization. Any time there's water moving, it seems like once you go through a grass filter strip, it really clears the water up before it moves into a stream.

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- There are quite a bit more cover crops taking off. There's more research going into it. People are starting to see benefits. Is it economical? Well, that's a tough one, but how much does that erosion cost you in productivity in the future? It's kind of hard to put a dollar figure on that. They can accomplish a lot of different things, and I won't dispute the claims on any of them. Some of them sound pretty outlandish, but I mean, apparently, they can do some of those things, like helping with nutrients and keeping the soil stabilized. Not blowing away, not washing away. Those are the key ones I see on it.
- For any of these BMPs, is it the cost-share that is the main incentive that gets people to install them or are there other motivators that could be helpful?
 - I would say cost-share. It's all about economics. If there's no economic benefit, then why do it?
 - When you talk about long-term benefits, we tend to be a bit shorter-sighted with the economics benefits right now. That's the stumbling block to some of these things. One of the benefits I see to cover crops is that, when you see dirt blowing, there's nothing more helpless. Those dirt clouds, that's a tough thing to see.
 - There's a certain amount of peer pressure. If somebody's field is blowing around, it doesn't reflect well on them.
 - Efforts of the City of Hastings are more towards providing cost-share for things like washer sensors for evapotranspiration (ET) gauges, soil sampling, those kinds of things. We haven't gone into things like cover crops or anything like that yet; we're more on the education side rather than the boots on the ground.
 - Are there any urban water quality management practices?
 - We offer soil sampling to the homeowners as well. We also do rain sensors; the idea is to shut their sprinklers off when there's been a certain amount of rain. We've also done discounts for mulching mowers and blades. We've done rain gardens, those kinds of thing. You can offer it, but most people just don't; they say it's not worth the paperwork.
- We're working on a list of priority BMPs to include in the Water Quality Management Plan. It's not to exclude any; it's more to narrow down for scenarios and cost-estimating. Is there anything on this list you haven't heard of?
 - If I may just say, we need to use the words soil conservation. When you look at cover crops or buffer strips or terraces or anything like that, we just generally need to get back to good soil conservation practices.
- Is there anything on here that you don't feel like your neighbors would be interested in, something that isn't appropriate for the landscape across the district?
 - Well closures.
 - Adam Rupe, JEO: That's a good one to put on there.
 - How about irrigated land retirement? Isn't that a program where someone can opt to take a payment to retire irrigated land?
 - Rod DeBuhr, UBBNRD: The NRCS has had—I don't know what the current program is—a program where you can get a three-



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- year payment for a 4-year retirement. They can farm it; they just can't irrigate.
- I'd like to make a comment about the well abandonment. In Hastings, we actually pay for some of well abandonment; it's basically 50% of what the NRDs don't pay. If the NRD doesn't pay for anything, we still pay 50%; though we like to see contributions from the NRDs on that. I think it's been a good program. You still have some people who won't abandon wells, but there are others who decide to do it and seem very appreciative of the help from the city and NRD.
 - One thing about well abandonment is that a licensed well driller has to do it, and it's really not their highest priority. If you could just sign off that you followed all the practices and you did it yourself, it would probably just happen. You could get it done, but well drillers usually wait until they have about four- or five-days' worth of work to do.
 - There was an interesting project, a source water protection grant, where they put together a list of 30 wells that needed to be closed. They decided to have a contract with one well driller to close all of them. They really focused in and got it done. That might be a strategy to think about.
 - We also do septic tanks besides that. The same thing applies to that as wells. What we find is contractors look at it and go, "Am I going to get paid for that by a private citizen?" If we could get the citizen to give us the \$50, we could just pay the bill, and that way, the contractor will know that they will get paid.

Adam then referred the stakeholders to the other handout regarding authorized VIMP controls and unauthorized controls. He asked whether there were any the stakeholders were unsure about or if they had any general thoughts they'd like to share. Amy Zoller, NeDNR, provided handouts to the stakeholders and presented the following information:

- NeDNR has several VIMPs that are either adopted or close to being adopted.
- NeDNR has new measures in place, including requiring flowmeters on new surface water uses, tracking municipal uses, publishing notices of new surface water applications, and requiring education for new groundwater and surface water permits.
- The NRD and NeDNR are ultimately in charge of setting VIMP controls, but they are really interested in knowing what the stakeholders think.
 - Rod DeBuhr, UBBNRD: There are already groundwater controls in this area. We have triggers set for allocation, well spacing requirements, mandatory water use reporting, and rules for groundwater transfer. We already have those in place, but if you think of something else, please speak up.



3. Review and Discuss Potential Action Items facilitated by Adam Rupe, JEO

Adam went through the handouts to explain that the action items listed for the WQMP and VIMP have been updated to reflect the stakeholder comments made in the prior meetings, as well as technical expertise and review of other relevant plans and existing rules, regulations, and polices in the district. He then asked the stakeholders to review and revise the potential action items listed. The stakeholder group's revised potential action items. The tracked changes of these revisions are provided in Attachment 2.

4. Review Draft Goals and Objectives facilitated by Steve Wolf, JEO

Steve Wolf thanked the stakeholders again and asked them to take one last look through the goals and objectives for the WQMP and VIMP to ensure it reflect their hard work and research. No further changes were requested by the stakeholder group.

5. Stakeholder Concurrence of the Draft Goals and Objectives

Stakeholders concurred with the final draft of their goals and objectives for the WQMP and the VIMP. Steve Wolf, JEO, explained that, going forward, this work will be turned over to the NRD board, and they will be encouraged to move forward to the maximum extent they can with the recommendations provided by the stakeholders. He emphasized that this is not the end of the stakeholders' ability to be involved, as they are welcome to attend NRD board meetings. There will also an open house meeting on April 2 to allow the public to weigh in before the WQMP is submitted to the State of Nebraska. Writing on the VIMP will begin in the summer of 2019. It was noted that these documents would be made available with the meeting minutes on the NRD website.

6. Stakeholder Roundtable

- I think it's been pretty good, what's come out of this. It's incorporated a lot of things I'd like to see in there.
- We talked a lot about water quality and quantity, and we've briefly touched on soil health. I think maybe we might be missing how vitally important soil health would help water quality and quantity, possibly. We're just getting into new ways to measure soil health. It will improve nutrient management. I think that may need to be stressed a little more.
- We had a stakeholder research assignment and were supposed to write notes. There is so much data we're dealing with here, for example the data that's collected to make sure we are statistically correct. I was just wondering if there was a way to actually manage this data. Is there a statistician in-house? With all the data coming in, just managing it is a huge process. It takes more than one person to do that. That's my concern. I think we've got enough regulating entities out there already. If something new comes up, it should be able to be handled under one of them already without creating a new one. On BMPs, the big emphasis on that should be the marginal lands; that's really where the problem is centered.
- I want to echo earlier comments on soil health. When I think of soil, I don't only think of it as a growth medium, it's also a filter for our water. If we have healthier soils, the quality and quantity of water certainly go hand-in-hand, because our water use



- efficiency goes up. We have neglected soil health long enough. I think we'll learn a lot in the future.
- One of the things I really liked was the projects. Providing technical and financial assistance, emphasizing those things I think is great. Studying on-farm research and that stuff was great. My main thing that I would caution is anything that says mandatory or things like that.
 - I like the idea that education is always kind of the forefront of what you're trying to do here. For me, I've learned a lot just going through this process. Even if this process doesn't go any further, I still take this knowledge back to the system, so you're already working on what the VIMP is trying to do. I think the idea of bringing stakeholders back and so forth is a good step to continue education for all of us. Even though we have a few years to go through it, there may be people who move on, but I would say go find someone to represent that person. I think there are a lot of people who could fill that role. Thank for allowing me to be a part of this process!
 - Steve Wolf, JEO: The NRD did an exceptional job finding someone from every part of this district that also represents every strata of a type of water user.

7. Public Comments

- One thing that I see is that we are getting a lot more cooperation from the co-ops on sharing data back and forth. We are getting more and more on the same page as far as things like fertilizer recommendations and soil health. The quantity thing, I feel that, as a district, we have a good handle on. The quality thing is hard to get a hold of. We know we need to do it. If we don't have quality, quantity doesn't mean a thing.
- Another instance of lack of coordination is the extra road ditch incident when the Corps of Engineers came out on a road ditch that held water. All it took was a backhoe and take five or six inches of dirt out of the bottom of the road ditch, but it didn't turn out that way. There were all kinds of problems. They thought maybe they should change the elevation of the road or maybe they should change the culverts, but nobody thought maybe they could just backhoe a little dirt out of the road ditch. I thought maybe that was an example of an out-of-control situation, but if it had been a farmer out there, it would have just been cleaned up. Since they were a government entity, they were following all the governmental rules. They could've just done it and not talked about it. There needs to be...we all need to get on the same page and have a little common sense.
- We are trying to get into online reporting. When you're online, it's so easy to go over there and see how I compare to somebody else if all that information is on there.
- I feel that we (NRD) have a real good relationship with the NRCS. If we need something, they'll help us out.
- Thank you for letting me hear your conversation. I've enjoyed it, and I think it worked out well, came up with some great ideas. I appreciate being able to listen in.
- On behalf of the NRD, I've known most of you guys for many years one way or another, and I really appreciate you taking the time to do this.

Prior to the meeting adjournment, Steve Wolf asked the stakeholders to take a moment to absorb what they've been doing through this process: helping to make state history in the first



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joint planning process between water quality and water management between the NeDNR and NDEQ. Hopefully, this precedent may have helped to create an innovation that is used in other parts of the state. Amy Zoller thanked the stakeholders on behalf of the NeDNR, and the meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting Date

- Open House Public Meeting on April 2, 2019 at 7 p.m.

