**Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes**

**2/5/20 Dunn County Community Services Building, Menomonie, WI**

**Present at the meeting:** Dan Prestebak – Dunn County Land Conservation; Liz Usborne – DNR & TMLIA; Jessica Schoen, Bryan Crum – DNR; Chris Ferguson, Tina Lee – UW-Stout; Randy Eide – City of Menomonie; Dick Lamers – TMLIA; Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

**Review of Last Meeting and Current Agenda:** Outcomes from the December meeting were discussed with no changes. The current agenda was reviewed and discussed with no changes.

**Discussion of monitoring study from Bill James:** Bill James released his report on the five years of water quality monitoring he did for the Corps of Engineers collaborative project. We had hoped to get him on the phone to discuss this with us, but his schedule changed and he was unable to join us (now living in South Carolina). The report shows that in the five years of study, all years were mostly above average for flow (with one year being more close to “normal”), which led to a lot of flushing of the system. With high rainfalls in most of those years, substantial amounts of phosphorus were flushed into the system and Lakes Tainter and Menomin, but with short residence times, algae blooms were not as intense as they could have been. Having some below average precipitation/flow years would have been helpful to better understand the system and its responses. The recommendations from the report are in keeping with many of the goals of the watershed plan; to reduce soil erosion and the transport of soluble phosphorus to water bodies, and to decrease the amount of phosphorus being applied to the soil. Bill may try to join us remotely at our April 1 meeting in Barron.

**Discussion of Legislative Water Quality Task Force recommendations:** The Water Quality Task Force that met in various locations in 2019 to take public input on water issues in the state issued their 13 recommendations in January. The Partnership had a broad discussion of each of these recommendations with an eye toward how they would affect our work and the issues in our watershed. The Partnership was mostly in favor of the recommendations with a few exceptions. Bills to address these 13 recommendations are now in discussion in the legislature. As they move forward the Partnership will look at their implications and look for ways to put any of the resources to use that result from the legislature’s work.

**Check-In and Discussion:** Everyone shared any new information/developments pertinent to the Red Cedar River Watershed effort.

Dan Z: Two farm field days/workshops will be held in the Eau Claire River watershed next week that may be of interest to some in the Partnership; Monday, 2/10 in Thorp, and Wednesday, 2/12 in Augusta, with the same agenda for each day. Had discussions with Extension colleague Whitney Prestby who works with the Fox Demo Farms, and something they’re going to try is sort of “micro” field days, where a demo farmer brings 2 or 3 other farmers to his operation and spends the day showing and discussing what he does on his farm, making for a more personal learning experience versus a large-group field day.
Bryan: Has been checking out local farms and getting to know the area better, and may be getting more involved in Red Cedar watershed issues in the future.
Tina: LAKES REU has received another NSF grant to continue work for another three years, though they are taking 2020 off and will resume with bringing students to Stout in the summer of 2021. Stout is looking at a possible new degree program in environmental community development. There is also discussion at Stout for a possible center for sustainable rural development. There is now a report on the LAKES REU website compiling summaries of the student research for some of the past six years.
Liz (DNR): Shared an article with everyone regarding a controversy about installing permanent piers on water bodies. Applications for 2021 runoff management grants are now posted. And there will be grant application webinars on Feb 26, with TRM webinar from 9 – 10:30 AM, and urban storm water construction webinar from 1 – 2:30 PM. Applications are due April 15. Notable changes for TRM grants include lowering the max amount for large scale TRM grants to $600,000 and also raising the percentage of the grant that can be used for personnel from 10% up to 40%. Soft practices such as cover crops and no till will be more acceptable now than they had been in the past. Stream restoration standards are being discussed and under review. Working with an organic dairy in the Chippewa County portion of the watershed, as they have had a Notice of Discharge for some time now. They want to compost their manure.
Liz (TMLIA): Has been meeting with Randy to coordinate on signage for detention ponds in the city of Menomonie and may be applying to Rain to Rivers for mini-grants toward such signage. The County Highway M erosion control project, toward which the Corps of Engineers had dedicated some money, is apparently dead, as county money that had been appropriated to meet the Corps match ended up being spent on other priorities. TMLIA’s Menomin Meander bike ride is set for August 15th. Also sponsoring an environmental film festival on November 11 at the Mabel Tainter Theater. Glennwood High School in the watershed was awarded a pollinator grant from the Sand County Foundation. Two events coming up on Feb 8 include the Polar Plunge, and also an ice fishing contest. The Red Cedar River Conference is set for Thursday, March 12 at Stout.
Randy: Crop rental lease agreements that the City has for about 200 acres of City land were just renewed. One field will have a nutrient management plan and no-till, and there will be minimum tillage on the other field. Wakanda Park regional retention pond bidding will start soon. This will be the second of eight ponds the City is building. Randy will be doing a storm water presentation at the Red Cedar Conference on what the City of Menomonie is doing for storm water, along with a representative from the Beaver Dam Lake District in Cumberland on their work toward managing storm water.
Dick: Talked about the Red Cedar Conference and handed out some posters for people to post.
Dan P: Filed a report recently with DNR on the County’s lakes protection grant, which will be ending in June of 2021. There are plans to hire someone to fill the post left vacant by Jessica Schoen’s departure. Both farmer led councils in the County have spent all their incentive money from last year, and both were successful in getting the DATCP grants for 2020. Spotted a manure pit issue on a far near the Chippewa County line, and had a talk with the farmer, with good result. Groundwater studies outside the Red Cedar watershed but within the County have been underway in collaboration with the County Health Dept. New data from those studies show that has been an increase in nitrate levels in wells since the last data was available, and also an increase in the number of wells showing excess levels of nitrate. The County would like to expand this testing to other areas of the County. CRP signup is now open. EQIP advisory group for Dunn, Barron, Polk and St. Croix Counties wants to require nutrient management, cover crops and no till be mandatory for any EQIP funding. County has applied for the multi-discharge variance funding available, which should be around $10,000.
Chris: Nothing further to add.
Jessica: Left the meeting before check in.
Gerry Johnson (via e-mail): I do not have anything new to report since my last update, as winter is typically a slow time for us.
Tyler Gruetzmacher (via e-mail): I'm sure Dan P will update the group more on our West Central Association meeting in which we heard from Rep Rob Summerfield who is on the Water Quality Task Force.   He is very encouraged on the Bill to increase funding for County Conservation.  It might be difficult in Senate, but he is positive. Up here in Barron, we discussed our Land & Water Plan with our LCC this morning and we are going to get it on future agendas to discuss both a Soil Health Program and a Lakes Program.  Alex Smith will be visiting us on Thursday to talk Lakes.   We want to get ahead of the curve on these items to be able to take advantage of opportunities as they come up.  This is something that I'm sure the group has noticed about Barron.  We are always saying the timing isn't right for us to jump on a project.  I want to get it so we take advantage of opportunities as they come up.
Amanda Hanson (via e-mail): The Farmers of the Hay River Farmer-Led Council continue to progress with meetings and incentives. Some will be attending the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Annual meeting on February 19, which is a requirement of the grant they received from WI-DATCP, but also a good time to learn, share and network. They have met to review their watershed boundary, discuss upcoming incentives, and brainstorm on how to reach out to other farmers. Bill Hogseth has been a great addition to the council and has been good at sharing different resources, tools and ideas to utilize. Winter is a great time for planning, so I hope winter stays around for a while (even though the groundhog didn't see his shadow).
Andy Bensend (via e-mail): We had a good Barron County Watershed group educational meeting last week with Jason Cavadini, Jeff Lake, and Logan Dwyer presenting.
Rod Olson (via e-mail): I read over Bill James report, it is very similar to his conclusions from a Desair Lake study in 2014. "It’s all about keeping the soil on the land!" Desair Lake submitted a Lakes Protection: Wetland grant application on Jan. 31st. We would like to place 22 catchment weirs throughout the Desair Lake watershed on seven properties. Two of these are restorations of blown out detention ponds. Our goal is to capture some runoff in the uplands for infiltration and to reduce stream flow speeds. This will reduce inflow into Desair, reduce sediment burden  and protect streambanks we have previously armored. The grant request is for $38,000 with $9000 from Lake Association in-kind work. I want to thank Alex for grant application consultation and letters of support from Dan and Tyler! All well appreciated and now we wait to see of it is funded.  I am working with a local farm family who rents 70 acres of cropland. I proposed reducing rent if they will begin using cover crops and perennial buffers. They have found no-till is beneficial but only tried cover crops for one year and it "failed". They are willing to try again with some encouragement, but need support and advice on what to do from NRCS and BCLWCD. I am working with the Rice Lake District to restore 200 feet of shoreline overgrown with buckthorn and honeysuckle on Lakeshore Drive. Our Township had a Planning meeting and will investigate adapting to more frequent flooding. Can we make town roads more resilient? Can ditches be areas of infiltration rather than runoff channels?  The RCR Conference is March 12th. We are looking for a knockdown keynote speaker for our tenth annual conference in 2021. Does anyone have someone in mind, please let Dan or Alex know.  I am including my notes from the Farmers of Barron County Watersheds' conference. Tyler and Liz with fill you in on a well attended and informative day by people out there doing the right thing.

**Evaluation:** All attendees ranked the meeting on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the best. Everyone ranked the meeting as a 5.

**Next Meeting:** The Partnership’s next regular meeting date is Wednesday, April 1 in Barron. Some discussion took place regarding this date, as it’s also the first day of the statewide Lakes Conference in Stevens Point. However, most did not see it as a conflict, so the date holds.