

Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

6/2/21 Meeting held via Zoom due to Covid19 pandemic

Present at the meeting: Chase Cummings, Heather Wood – Dunn County Land Conservation; Alex Smith, Bryan Crum – DNR; Tyler Gruetzmacher – Barron Co LCD; Jamey Ladeen – Chetek Lakes Association; Megan Hines – City of Menomonie; Nik Stadnik – Rusk Co Land Conservation; Tara Daun – WI Farmers Union; Lindsey Ketchel – Landmark Conservancy; Tina Lee, Nicole Hayes – UW-Stout; Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

Review of minutes of last meeting and current agenda: The outcomes from the April meeting were discussed with no changes and the current agenda was discussed with no changes.

Future of Red Cedar River Conference: The Red Cedar River Conference Planning Committee met last week for a strategic planning session. The Conference has suffered some losses in attendance the last few years (some of which can be attributed to Covid issues just starting during the 2020 conference, and the 2021 conference being all virtual due to Covid), and feedback has shown that many people believe the conference has gotten away from local topics into too many national and international issues with little focus on the Red Cedar watershed. The Committee is now in the process of establishing some by-laws for more consistent governance, exploring themes, and beginning to plan next year's conference. Four members of the Partnership are also members of the conference planning committee, and asked input of the Partnership regarding the Conference.

Several people in the Partnership voiced the same concern, that the Conference is wandering off local issues too much, in favor of famous speakers from outside the area who often don't tailor their presentation to a local audience and local issues. Others suggested that more youth involvement would be good, and that targeting younger audiences with some presentations may be appropriate. Trying to get more Stout students involved may also be helpful, not only in reaching that audience, but in making better connections with Stout as they host the Conference. Possibly changing the venue every other year, rotating with Rice Lake, was also suggested.

Members of the Conference Planning Committee who were present agreed to take these comments to the Committee.

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

Dan Z: Extension employees were told that the plan right now is for a full return to office work and travel by July. Passed on to the group that our annual summary of activities for 2020 was well-received by DNR, with comments about it being used as an example for other watersheds of how to gather and report progress toward plan implementation, BMP installation, and estimated load reductions. Alex

mentioned that this has inspired a conversation at DNR about the best way to report load reduction estimates, and some way to standardize that process across the state. Is part of the “By Laws” subcommittee for the Red Cedar Conference planning team, and briefed everyone on the progress of that group.

Lindsey: Is working with Dunn County HEAT (Healthy Environment Action Team) to raise awareness of the declining status of many regional NGOs who work on environment and health issues. Many of these NGOs have seen declines in membership/leadership, while others are folding because of this problem (case in point, the Tainter/Menomoin Lake Improvement Association). Is working to better coordinate efforts between these groups to reduce doubling of tasks and increase the effectiveness of the groups.

Tara: Introduced herself to the group as the new farmer-led council coordinator, working for Wisconsin Farmers Union. Has only been on the job for a few weeks so still getting her bearings and learning and meeting people. Had to leave early today.

Nik: After completing a barnyard project in 2020 under a TRM grant, the County is now working on another awarded TRM grant project for this year, and doing preliminary work for another project to be implemented in 2022. All three of these projects are in the Red Cedar watershed.

Megen: Redesigning the storm water pond at Wakanda Park due to a blow out of the pond during a heavy rainstorm. Many of the plants survived, but much work needs to be done. Waiting on DNR approval for some repair funds. Working with the “Saltwise” organization on some training for applicator staff in early October. City is conducting inspections of public storm water ponds. City is also sponsoring some hazardous materials collecting since Dunn County is no longer doing much of that.

Tyler: Drove across the state earlier this year and it looked like a lot of possible no-till and cover crops. Driving the route again recently, it looked like many fields had been recently tilled. Meanwhile there still seems to be a good bit of no till and cover crop activity in Barron County. County recently decided to rent some county land for a demo farm east of Cameron. Andy Bensend is renting it this year, and will likely be introducing some cover crops in the fall.

Alex: Is part of the “Themes” subcommittee for the Red Cedar Conference Planning Committee, and briefed everyone on that group’s progress. Is busy with aquatic plant permits this time of year.

Bryan: Looking for ways to work with farmer led groups within the watershed. Will be in contact with Tara.

Jamey: Mentioned regarding the Red Cedar Conference, that what he enjoys about it is learning something that he can take back home and put in practice or tell others about, and would like to see more of those kinds of presentations. Citizen science is underway at the Chetek Lakes, with Clean Boats Clean Waters starting this past weekend. Signs at landings continue to be updated with new information. There are nine Healthy Lakes projects underway on the lakes and more interest for future projects. Still exploring ways to move water in back bays such that those waters do not become so

stagnant and act as growth area for algae and unwanted aquatic plants. Tyler commented that he thought a rock infiltration system installed on part of the lake looked great.

Chase: Lots of no till and planting green going on in the county. The county's manure storage ordinance is being revised to incorporate NR 151 standards. It passed the Land Conservation Committee and will likely be adopted sometime in July. Working on setting up a field day at Jeff Lake's farm during the summer. Budget was due last week, and is working to maintain the soil health position within his department. A vacant position may have to be eliminated in order to make that happen.

Heather: Boyceville schools had an education day this week, with lots of outdoor activities. Working with Chris Willger at DNR to round up volunteers for water quality monitoring. The county has about \$2,600 of Multi-Discharge Variance money to spend on phosphorus reduction projects and is looking for ways to use it.

Nicole: This was her first year at Stout. Wants to do some water quality sampling in Menomonie, and also looking at greenhouse gas emissions coming from the lakes. Stout, UW-River Falls and UW-Eau Claire are involved in a fresh-water collaborative and will be doing a six-day field course for incoming high school seniors this summer. Also wants to look at other lakes in the region that have algae bloom issues.

Tina: There are three more years of funding through the LAKES REU program, with a Covid-delayed start until summer of 2022. Her and Arthur Kneeland will be coordinating the next group of students. Hoping to start a water center at Stout in the future. Also hoping to add an academic program based more on behavioral change focusing on soil health practices.

Gerry Johnson (via e-mail): * The Spring/Summer activities are underway, while continuing to adhere to any COVID safety measures which remain in place. The Aquatic Invasive Species volunteers are in the process of conducting Curley Leaf Pondweed pre-treatment surveys on Red Cedar, Balsam and Hemlock Lakes. The results of these surveys will determine where and how much herbicide treatment will take place to control CLP in our lakes. We expect treatment to be conducted within the next week.

* Freshwater Scientific Services will perform a CLP turion study in the fall. Turions are the CLP seeds that fall off the mature plants into the lake and form the basis for future plant growth and phosphorous loading into the lakes. Turions can remain dormant in the lake bed for multiple years. This study will provide an update if CLP management work over the past few years is effective in reducing the presence of CLP in our lakes.

*We will be expanding our Clean Boats Clean Waters program this year with the installation of decontamination sites at public landings on the highest used landings on our three lakes..

* The first of nine Healthy Lakes Initiatives will begin this week. All nine of the grant requests were approved and funded on a shared 75/25 percent basis. The projects will include three rain gardens, four native plantings and one rock infiltrations project.

* The Water Quality Committee is scheduled to summarize it's past three years of data collection and report on phosphorous, dissolved oxygen, water clarity, stream flow, temperatures, and septic tank data on our lakes, streams and also data from the water flowing into Balsam lake from Big Chetac and Birch Lakes.

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, August 4**. Dan will check with everyone a few weeks before the meeting to see if meeting in person is possible, and if so, where the meeting should be held. If not, it will be via Zoom again.