

Red Cedar River Water Quality Partnership Meeting Outcomes

2/2/22 Meeting held via Zoom due to Covid19 pandemic

Present at the meeting: Chase Cummings – Dunn County Land Conservation; Liz Usborne, Alex Smith – DNR; Nick Stadnik – Rusk Co Land Conservation; Tara Daun – Farmers Union; Nicole Hayes – UW-Stout; Brad Luedtke – 3M; Dan Zerr – UW-Extension

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

Year-End Report Discussion: Dan has been asking to get a small summary of the year's activities in the Red Cedar Basin by each of the Partners, and has received a few so far, but still waiting on others. He's hoping to be able to get NRCS cost-share data from 2021 as he did last year, and be able to do some rough calculations of phosphorus load reductions based on that data. Once all data has been assembled Dan will finish compiling and get it out to everyone. Some discussion also took place regarding future updates to the plan, and how we might start thinking about that before the fact so that we are ready when the time comes.

Discussion of Grants: DNR recently announced its surface water grant recipients for the year. There are several in the Red Cedar Basin including a monitoring/training grant to Beaver Creek Reserve to train monitors in several counties including Dunn and Rusk. Many lakes in the watershed will be getting funding for Clean Boats Clean Waters work. And there were other grants for AIS and Healthy Lakes work. Farmers Union got a Lake Management Implementation grant which Tara applied for. Some of the work involved in that grant will be done in Dunn County. Possible TRM grant applications for the upcoming cycle (due in April) may be coming from Dunn and Rusk Counties for some possible projects in the watershed.

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

Brad: Nationwide, 3M is going to eliminate contracts for farming on their lands (currently Five Star Dairy has a contract to farm the approximately 300 acres around the plant in Menomonie), but it's not clear what they want to do with these lands. The Partnership told Brad they'd be glad to offer any help or assistance in finding ways to manage the land for more natural and native landscapes that would reduce runoff. Currently some removal of invasives is happening on some of their lands in Menomonie.

Nick: Will be applying for a municipal dam grant for work on the Pidgeon Creek Dam. Rusk County will soon be getting a drone, with plans to use it for agricultural assessing as well as shoreline assessments.

Tara: The DNR grant going to Farmers Union will be used to support her work with four farmer-led watersheds in the region including the Hay River group in the Red Cedar watershed. Plans include doing

some benchmark monitoring on farms to determine what conditions are like in the watersheds and then compare it to future data. Also some sociological surveys of farmers within those watersheds. Recently all four farmer led groups that Tara works with applied for and received funding from the DATCP producer led grant program to use as incentive payments to farmers.

Nicole: Did some sampling last summer of microcystin in Lake Menomin with students using some inexpensive equipment. Most of the samples showed levels too high for the instruments to record, so is hoping to do more detailed measurements soon. Some students in a capstone course will be doing under-ice monitoring this winter yet. Earlier work showed significantly high levels of chlorophyll a under the ice but mostly from conventional algae, not showing the presence of cyanobacteria.

Alex: Talked about the various grants that were awarded in the watershed, which kept him busy most of the last few months.

Liz: There will be an upcoming online workshop on February 15 for those applying for TRM grants. In her capacity as the former president of the Tainter/Menomin Lake Improvement Association, the last Board officers met recently to vote to completely dissolve the organization since no new board members could be recruited. Much of the remaining assets of TMLIA will be given to the Dunn County Alliance of Sports Clubs, as some of their work intersects with what TMLIA was trying to do in the lake region. This is a sad moment for the Partnership, as TMLIA was instrumental in getting the Partnership off the ground, establishing the Red Cedar River Conference (which will continue self-contained), and many other activities in the watershed dedicated to water quality improvement.

Chase: Will be meeting later today with the Friends of the Red Cedar River group, who are currently working toward establishing a Lake District for Tainter Lake. They have a draft proposal in the works, and are looking for ways to get the petition out to the public and moved forward. They want to do a flat fee for the district tax rather than something based on the mill rate. Both farmer led groups in Dunn Co received DATCP grants during the most recent awards. Multi-discharge variance (MDV) funds coming to Dunn County this year will go toward a buffer program for both shoreland buffers and field buffers. Recently inspections of some manure storage facilities taking on contaminated dairy products led to new nutrient management plans for these facilities. Dunn County will be taking on a new intern paid by funding from the Dunn County Alliance of Sports Groups. This position is usually housed at NRCS, but current circumstances made Dunn County a better option. The County is looking at the possible application of some sort of “carbon farming” in the county, but details are not final and skepticism exists on just how any sort of payment program would work.

Dan: Reminded everyone of events coming up or cancelled. The Red Cedar Conference is cancelled for this year. Though discussions took place to possibly have a virtual conference, it was decided to cancel for 2022 and save much of the already established agenda for March 2023. The Wisconsin Land and Water Conference will be all virtual, held March 2-4. The Producer-Led Conference and Cover Crop Conference are still slated for in-person activities on February 23rd and 24th. The Wisconsin Lakes and Rivers Conference is still moving ahead with in-person plans for April 6-8.

Gerry Johnson (via e-mail): The Red Cedar Lake Association is in the process of working with our consultant to update the 2004 USGS report. The primary sources of data for this update is from results of a multi-year DNR Water Quality Grant and a 3-year DNR AIS Control Grant. Secondary source input comes from multi-year Healthy Lakes grants, Clean Boats and Clean Waters surveys, and shoreline habitat/woody debris studies. Estimated timing for plan completion is Q2, 2022.

Evaluation: All attendees ranked the meeting on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the best, with most ranking the meeting a 5, with a few ranking lower, mostly because of low attendance at the meeting.

Next Meeting: The Partnership's next regular meeting date is Wednesday, April 6th, but that is the first day of the Lakes and Rivers Conference which many folks may be attending, so the group decided to move the date. Dan will send a Doodle Poll out to everyone for their preference for a next meeting near that date. Once a date is decided, it will be determined as the date approaches whether to meet in person or virtually.