

Meeting Notes: Working Lands Watershed Restoration Program – Stakeholder Meeting

Date: July 28, 2017
Location: MPCA Boardroom

Attendance

George Boody, Land Stewardship Project; Mitch Coulter, MN Corn Growers; Anna Grace, Great Plains Institute; Scott Hanson, MN Rural Water Association; Barb Huberty, Legislative Water Commission; Andrew Keller, UM; Rod Larkins, AURI; William Lazarus, UM Applied Economics; Ann Lewandowski, UM Water Resources Center; Wayne Monsen, Sustainable Farming Assoc.– MN; Steve Morse, MN Environmental Partnership; Bob Patton, MDA; Jeff Peterson, Water Resources Center; Amit Pradhananga, UM Center for Changing Landscapes; Carissa Slotterback, UM Humphrey Institute; Suzanne Rhees, David Weirens, John Voz, BWSR

Agenda

- Project Updates – Suzanne Rhees, Dave Weirens
- Proposed Landowner Survey
- Introduction to Spreadsheet Decision Tool
- Next Steps, Meeting Scheduling

Meeting Notes

Project Updates:

- **Recent Workshops:**
 - Soil Health Field Day at UM Morris WCROC focusing on cover crops
 - International Sustainable Wetland Plant Management Conference – Hybrid Cattail Management for biomass
- **Selection of Major and Minor Watersheds:** How were watersheds selected?
 - Criteria included geographic diversity, diversity of crops and topography, land use, proximity to potential end users, including ethanol plants, university power plants, etc. Also looked at potential for multiple benefits (i.e., habitat, flood protection) and watersheds close to tipping point of impairment.
 - Most watersheds demonstrate some degree of prior planning, and many have completed WRAPS or TMDLs.

- Various scoring methods available; one that was most helpful was developed for the Ag Department in 2013 to select sentinel watersheds (for research).
- Minor watersheds were selected based on recommendations and discussions with local partners – the watershed districts, SWCDs, Land Stewardship Project, Great River Greening, BWSR staff, etc.
- **Minor Watershed Overview:** see “Selected Watersheds” table
- **Biomass crop scenarios:** Not all crops have immediate markets, so we’re developing scenarios based on some assumptions – that essentially, if you can identify emerging markets and support the growers for long enough to establish that market, the program will begin to be self-sustaining. Not all crops are suitable for all watersheds, but the spreadsheet tool will allow comparisons of all crops.
- **Modeling:** Chuck Regan gave a brief overview of HSPF and HSPF-SAM. George Boody discussed HSPF modeling that was done for several subwatersheds of the Chippewa River.
- **Federal farm programs:** One of the Working Lands program’s directives is to assess the opportunity to leverage federal funds. BWSR is working on a contract with a consultant to assess existing federal farm programs, as well as state agency and stakeholder priorities for the federal farm bill. We plan to report back to this group at the next meeting.

Proposed Landowner Survey: Comments

- Survey is intended to go out in mid-August, with two follow-up mailings.
- Q - Will there be enough farmers in each watershed to get a good sampling? What about absentee owners? A – There are more than 1,000 farm operators per county, so this shouldn’t be a problem.
- If a third reminder is sent to respondents in mid-late September, it coincides with harvest time – A – we should consider delaying the third reminders to late October.
- Term “alternative crops” seems to set the crops up as outside normal farming practices. Discussion – consider just calling them “perennial and cover crops” or “types of crops.” Also indicate that livestock systems are included, not just crops.
- “Corn grown for silage” should be identified separately in the survey.

Introduction to Spreadsheet Decision Tool: Comments

- The spreadsheet includes costs for producing grass-fed beef as a end-use for grazing / forage crops. Consider using “enhanced grazing” as the end use, rather than limiting it to grass-fed beef.
 - Alfalfa is already such an important crop in MN, it makes sense to add it as a distinct cropping scenario. Needs additional research.
 - Dairies using rotational grazing of alfalfa are generally organic ones, and the organic “premium” may skew the results.
 - MDA has a Clean Water Fund project to do a market study of alfalfa.
- It would help to include total acreage within each minor watershed, rather than only the acres in row crops.
- Consider using “mixed prairie” as a perennial crop type – it offers more options for grazing than single-crop pastures.

- Will typically produce one forage/feed crop per year if harvested in fall.
- AURI is not finding a lot of success finding end uses for switchgrass and miscanthus.
- Lots of interest among water suppliers in planting Kernza in wellhead protection areas, but supply of seed is limited.

Next Meetings

Meeting 4

- September 19 or 20
- Location: To be determined – possibly at UM – St. Paul

Meeting 5

- Week of November 6-10 or 13-17
- Location: To be determined – possibly at UM – St. Paul