

**Minnesota River Board
Annual Report to the Board of Water and Soil Resources
May 5, 2009**

Submitted by Shannon J. Fisher, MRB Executive Director

The Minnesota River Board (MRB) had a very busy year, balancing new grant programs and basin promotions with existing outreach efforts and ongoing policy development. FY09 was a very active year of outreach support and advocacy, funded in large part by the \$100,000 provided to the MRB via the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for FY09. In addition, we had approximately \$40,000 in carry forward money from FY08 that added to our capacity during FY09. Once again this year, the MRB is late in submitting this annual report. The Executive Director takes full responsibility for this delay. I apologize for the delay in submission and would request that you accept this report for the one that was due in February.

To highlight FY09 progress and capacity to fulfill the progress measures, I have included the FY09 goal statements and our progress measures below. For each work area, I am including a brief statement that highlights what we have accomplished, and rationale regarding why delays in some areas have occurred.

In 2006, the MRB completed a “Procedures Guide and Strategic Plan (2006-2010)” to guide our work (<http://www.minnesotariver.org>) and in FY08 produced the first work plan under the renewed legislative funding scenario. As a result of these plans, a substantive review of our statutory obligations and an ongoing assessment of what the MRB could and should be for the Minnesota River and our partners have been completed. As a result of these conversations, the FY09 work plan included a directive to update the statutory language that guides the MRB duties and processes. Bills were introduced in the 2009 session and subsequently passed both houses of the legislature and was expected to be signed by the governor.

The 2009 statutory update clarified the roles the MRB plays, including a renewed focus on multi-major watershed projects; a de-emphasis on provision of local implementation project management (as those duties are best managed by local watershed project and conservation district staff). In addition, the new language calls for new directives to establish a technical advisory committee that will have more imperative duties – building a stronger partnership with the board and establishing a progressive relationship between local policy makers and technical staff.

In FY09, the MRB focused much of its attention on the successful Conservation Innovation Grant to bring water quality credit trading to Minnesota. The initiative, now known as Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota (CMM) is progressing and will continue to be a major work area over the upcoming year. The FY09 work plan was achieved in many aspects; however, due to government changes, budgetary downturns, and increasing demands from some of our programs, not all aspects were achieved. A few goals from the FY09 plan are carried forward into the FY10 plan, as they were not accomplished to satisfaction and we desire to keep working on them. In the following FY09 summary section, we address our progress, shortcomings, and items to be carried forward to the FY10 work plan.

GOAL 1. Efficiently complete MRB administrative duties on schedule and be accountable for expenditures of public funds.

- A) Prepare, obtain MRB and BWSR approval for, and implement FY09 Work Plan and budget. (9/08)
- B) Evaluate and implement, if approved by the MRB, a plan to dissolve the existing Assistant Director Position and hire an administrative assistant (0.5 FTE; 9/08)
- C) Finalize a calendar of events for FY09 and future years that establishes the upcoming calendar year's meeting times and locations, officer nominations and installments, budget preparation, staff reviews, award nominations, annual meetings, etc.... (10/08)
- D) Provide a progress report to BWSR by February 1, 2009. (2/09)
- E) Complete Executive Committee planning sessions in September of 2008 and April of 2009. (4/09)
- F) Complete an annual internal audit. (5/09)
- G) Conduct performance reviews as scheduled for the staff (6/09).
- H) Continue to visit and communicate with county boards, water planners, SWCD representatives, and other water-quality related partners in the Minnesota River basin. (6/09)
- I) Strive to bring non-member counties back to the MRB, with an objective of securing at least 1. (6/09)
- J) Hold 6 full board meetings (bi-monthly), one of which will serve as the annual meeting, and two of which will be in partnership with basin organizations. (6/09)
- K) Provide an Annual Report to BWSR and basin legislators by June 30, 2009. (6/09)
- L) Write at least two grant and/or contract applications to bring external funds into the MRB to support our financial foundation and bring needed projects to the basin and provide significant cash and in-kind contributions to the projects. (6/09)

Goal 1 Progress: *Progress measures A, B, E, G, H, and J were completed as scheduled and as detailed above. For item J, partner meetings were held in Mankato (July 2008; in conjunction with Blue Earth County and Blue Earth SWCD) and Savage (May 2009; in partnership with Scott County and other metro entities). Progress measure C has largely been completed and will be a work-in-progress for likely years to come, as the MRB evolves and new items are added. We consider this goal completed for work plan purposes. Progress measure D was not accomplished on time again this year. The Executive Director takes full responsibility for the delay in submitting our annual progress report to BWSR – which this report represents (submitted in May 2009). Item F is “in progress” and a committee is being set up at the May 2009 meeting to complete the audit. Item I was a priority to the MRB this past year; however, non-member counties are not demonstrating any interest at this point in returning and the additional financial burden, even though limited, has been an issue during hard economic times. This progress measure went into the “red” this past year, as Watonwan County withdrew from the MRB starting in FY10. Progress Measure K is intended to be completed at the end of the fiscal year, at which time a short summary report of progress from this past year and highlights of the FY10 Work Plan will be sent. For Progress Measure L, the MRB has pursued additional funding opportunities through ongoing EPA STAR grant applications in association with the current CMM grant, LCCMR funding through a joint application with partners in Kandiyohi County to work on Shallow Lakes Conservation Planning, and extensive discussion with various basin stakeholders about how to tap sales tax amendment funding for Minnesota River projects.*

GOAL 2. Reconvene the technical and citizen advisory board to the MRB.*

**Completion of this goal will likely extend into FY10*

- A) Establish and utilize a budget to defray the costs of participant travel to an initial advisory board meeting, to include county water planners, SWCD representatives, watershed organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. (9/08)
- B) Utilize the collective experience of the basin citizens and technical staff to better develop a suite of services that the MRB can package for the basin. (12/08)
- C) Establish a committee structure and process of technical representatives and citizen representatives whose input is critically important to the future work of the MRB. (1/09)
- D) Develop a plan on which to formally gather input from and to provide services to the advisory group. (1/09)
- E) Establish a meeting schedule and format based on input from the advisory committee. (1/09)
- F) Establish a platform based on policy, education, and service, not implementation. (4/09)

Goal 2 Progress: *Progress Measures A, B, and F have largely been accomplished. We have established a budget on which to help support and sustain an advisory committee. Through various conversations and a meeting of stakeholders on March 6, 2009, a set of clarifications about MRB duties and a platform on which to base our work on policy, education, and service, not implementation were included in a bill during the 2009 legislative session – at the time of this report’s preparation, the bill had passed both houses and was awaiting final approval by the governor. Progress Measures C, D, and E have been delayed, but progress is being made. There was more resistance and long-standing tensions between the MRB and the technical professionals in the basin that I had anticipated. These tensions have slowed the process of reconvening the technical and citizen advisory board. In addition, clarifications on the technical committee were included in the same bill mentioned above, and we were waiting for that to pass before having a meeting. The basin-wide technical professional meeting has been tentatively scheduled for June 17 – venue and speakers have not yet been confirmed. At this meeting, we anticipate significant closure on measures C, D, and E.*

GOAL 3. Resolve the real and perceived MRB identity problem.

- A) Establish a committee to take another look at important questions surrounding the MRB identity, including further definition of our role(s), services that we could/should offer, and what sets the MRB apart from other watershed organizations. (9/08)
- B) Provide recommendations to the MRB regarding the results of Goal 3A. (9/08)
- C) Develop a proposed statutory revision based on the recommendations from Goal 3B and with input from the advisory committee. (11/08)
- D) Request assistance from and work with basin legislative leaders to submit bills to make suggested modifications on Minnesota Statute 103F.378 in the 2009 legislative session (in conjunction with Goal 9 as appropriate). (11/08)

Goal 3 Progress: *All progress measures in this Goal were completed on schedule and the result was a passed bill that clarifies the roles of the MRB, formally changes the*

name to the Minnesota River Board, and established better guidance on project goals, missions, and advisory committee participation. SF0275 was presented to the governor for signing on 5/5/09.

GOAL 4. Develop and implement a visibility plan.

- A) Convene a committee to discuss visibility options and to develop a set of recommendations to the MRB regarding the visibility plan. (9/08)
- B) Develop a brochure that highlights the MRB mission, programs, services, and strategic objectives. (11/08)
- C) Develop a high quality display for use at county fairs, basin events, etc... (11/08)
- D) Begin implementation of visibility plan components. (12/08)
- E) Reformat the MRB website into a more user friendly and easily updated venue that can serve as a “go to” place for a variety of information. (12/08)

Goal 4 Progress: *This goal is a carry-over from the FY08 work plan and was again set as a low priority for FY09. It was determined that a committee was not needed and staff would handle these matters, thus Progress Measure A was not completed and no formal visibility plan was developed and Measure D was also not implemented. We have increased efforts to put forth press releases, participate in radio interviews, and attend more meetings and conferences – these have increased our visibility. The other Progress Measures (B, C, and E) have proceeded slowly, as we tried to utilize students for these efforts. We delayed intentionally as well to see what the legislation would catalyze regarding any changes in MRB mission and duties. We are still working on completion of these outreach tools prior to the end of June 2009.*

GOAL 5. Facilitate a process to improve and increase the level of communication within the MRB and between the MRB and our partners.

- A) Implement bi-monthly MRB newsletters (2-4 pages), including features written by delegates, county staff, watershed professionals, and others. (10/08)
- B) Begin to profile delegates/watershed professionals in each newsletter. (9/08)
- C) Include condensed articles on major Minnesota River issues, similar to Envision 2020 reports. (9/08)
- D) Develop and utilize a set of committees to draw on the expertise and input of delegates and our partners into the mainstream workings of the MRB. (11/08)
- E) Enhance communications in conjunction with other media/outreach such as the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, local newspapers, etc... (12/08)

Goal 5 Progress: *None of the progress measures in this goal have been fully implemented due to time constraints. The CMM grant consumed more time than anticipated and it was decided that this piece of the FY09 work plan would have to be placed on hold. Director Fisher completed more than a dozen interviews for written publications this year and completed two radio addresses with KTOE radio in Mankato – both of which were geared to improve communication. We continue to provide assistance to the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance as needed and are working with the Water Resources Center and MN State University, Mankato to obtain additional grant support from the McKnight Foundation to maintain the communications role that*

the Alliance is playing. We do not have a clear vision or strategy to implement this piece and will see additional assistance on this next year.

GOAL 6. Elevate MRB involvement in continuing education and outreach.

- A) Gather information as part of Goal 2 to determine what educational needs are truly warranted. (10/08)
- B) Prepare a fact sheet for distribution to our various partners that highlights our programming options, available services (including funding assistance), and upcoming events. (11/08)
- C) Increase activity with and visibility to the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, watershed organizations, private partners, and county staff. (4/09)
- D) Complete at least one major and one minor workshop in the basin, preferably based on needs identified from the technical advisory committee. (6/09)

Goal 6 Progress: *Of all the goals for FY09, progress was potentially the most significant with Goal 6. Progress Measures A and B were completed informally, rather than in conjunction with Goal 2 or in the form of formal fact sheets. Substantive efforts were made to request topic ideas and bring forth assistance requests to enhance education and outreach in the basin, including several RFPs for financial support to educational initiatives. As a result, the MRB supported several training opportunities, including a series of conservation drainage workshops, a 5-day geomorphic assessment training, the Agro-ecology Summit, kids fishing clinics, conservation implementation training, Clean Water Legacy Funding Work Session, the Shallow Lakes Forum, and the upcoming Technical Professional meeting. Based on attendance at these programs, the MRB estimates more than 1,200 basin members (ranging from citizens to technical staff to elected officials) participated in one or more programs. As a result, we estimate that more than 16,000 hours of educational time was collectively garnered. This effort, assuming funding allows, will CERTAINLY be a part of the FY10 work plan.*

GOAL 7. Serve as a “voice” and ‘resource” for the Minnesota River Basin.*

**Completion of this goal will likely extend into FY10 and be ongoing*

- A) Provide services as requested to support the various watershed and water quality interests in the Minnesota River basin, allowing the voice of 38 counties to be heard on issues in local areas, St. Paul, across the region, and beyond. (6/09)
- B) Provide assistance to agencies, counties, watersheds, etc.... in the dissemination of information regarding policy changes, funding opportunities, and staffing/project service options. (6/09)
- C) Provide *pro bono* grant preparation assistance/consulting services as requested, with a target of at least 2 collaborations that benefit MRB members and/or local partners. (6/09)
- D) Provide a minimum of 2 presentations on behalf of the MRB and our partners as requested.(6/09)
- E) Continue to provide assistance as needed to existing partnerships, such as BNC septic initiative, the BMP Challenge, and the Crystal Lake Clean Water Partnership. (6/09)
- F) Serve as a resource for program information, legislative updates, etc.... (6/09)
- G) Serve in a lobbyist capacity for approved MRB topics/legislation. (6/09)

Goal 7 Progress: *At the request of basin stakeholders, the MRB provided a venue, funding for, and coordination of a basin-wide conversation on sales tax amendment funding (March 6, 2009) – which also turned out to be a great opportunity to meet with and hear the concerns of many throughout the basin regarding the MRB mission and roles. The comments we received played an important role in shaping the statutory changes and the development of the FY10 work plan. As requested, we have served a role writing support letters, providing services, and advocating on behalf of the basin – including funding efforts for LiDar data collection, ongoing integrated watershed management efforts from the Corp of Engineers, local support requests, among others. Therefore, we believe that Progress Measure A has been met. Measures B and C have also been met. There were fewer than expected requests for assistance, but see Goal 1 progress. Progress Measure D was readily accomplished, as Director Fisher and Program Director Carlin both participated in count board meetings to provide information on the MRB, presented at the Coalition for Clean Minnesota River annual meeting, and provide information as requested at GBERBA meetings, a meeting of the watershed coordinators, and at various agency functions. Measures E, F, and G were also met as needed. The MRB, as is noted in the statute changes, focused on large basin-wide issues this past year, including lobbying for additional research funding, data collections, and collaborations.*

GOAL 8. Evaluate progress measures identified in FY08 and develop a progress report for the Minnesota River Basin in FY09 that covers all the major watersheds.

- A) In partnership with BWSR and water quality professionals from the Minnesota River Basin, evaluate the FY08 Progress Report Measures submitted to BWSR and the basin legislators, including ongoing collection of additional input received from agency, watershed, county, SWCD, private partner, and citizen representatives. (9/08)
- B) Finalize the measures to be used and refine the data collection and reporting strategy, to include, but not be limited to, funding acquired, projects implemented, potential water quality improvements, future needs, and partner perceptions. (11/08)
- C) Complete and submit a full Minnesota River Water Quality and Watershed Improvement Progress Report using the measures described above, to the legislature, governor, basin stakeholders, and other interested parties. (4/09)
- D) Include in this report a summary of the county water plan updates and priorities and in conjunction with the progress report, include recommendations for measures of success on which to gauge water plans. (4/09)
- E) Use the information garnered during this effort to assist MPCA, US Corp of Engineers, and others develop an updated Minnesota River Management Plan as opportunities arise. (6/09)

Goal 8 Progress: *Progress with Goal 8 is ongoing, but it has been slower than desired. Several meetings and discussions have been held with BWSR staff, MPCA representatives, local officials, and technical professionals. Most of the data needed to complete the progress report have been secured; however, some aspects of the desired data are very hard to obtain. Therefore, measures A and B are partially completed and Measures C and D are still pending, but completion is anticipated prior to the end of*

June 2009. Measure E potential has yet to be determined, as the progress report needs to be finished first.

GOAL 9. Evaluate MRB membership structure and watershed funding and implement recommendations.

- A) Form a committee to evaluate and consider revisions to the current MRB membership process and structure, to include a full consideration of the addition of watershed, citizen, and technical representatives as delegates to the MRB. (9/08)
- B) Evaluate watershed-based funding scenarios, including a per household fee for water quality and watershed improvements. (11/08)
- C) Work with legislators and watershed staff on future watershed-based management legislation. (11/08)
- D) Utilize the information here to prepare draft bill language for the formation of a modified watershed management unit in the Minnesota River Basin in conjunction with Goal 3. (11/08)

Goal 9 Progress: *Progress Measure A was discussed at length by the statutory review committee that we established early in FY09. The decision at that time was to move ahead with a statute language change request that did NOT include any changes to the current voting board structure, a measure that was subsequently supported by the full MRB. Along those same lines, Progress Measure B was deemed no longer a priority for discussion, as the MRB desires to see how the sales tax amendment funding rolls out and what kind of impacts it will have. Given the economic downturn, it was not a good time to spend time reviewing additional levy authority or taxation potentials. Measure C was completed to an extent. We made ourselves available for review of documents and participation in discussions regarding watershed board establishment and structure, however, the political environments did not support any movement on such measures this year – thus Progress Measure D was not completed as there was not opportunity to work on it.*

GOAL 10. Recognize the contributions of professionals, citizens, and students in the Minnesota River Basin.

- A) Re-evaluate an awards/incentive program for junior and senior high students from the basin participating in sanctioned science fair programs. (9/08)
- B) Modify nominations process to allow staff to nominate after deadlines pass if no nominations are brought forward. (9/08)
- C) Develop and implement an undergraduate scholarship program for students in the basin studying water quality issues. (10/08)
- D) Award two deserving participants from the basin with the “Confluence” and “Tributary” awards. (6/09)

Goal 10 Progress: *All Progress Measures in Goal 10 were completed. Awards and Recognition at the Senior and Junior High Regional Science Fairs were provided to numerous well deserving students working in water quality, watershed, and water-related research areas. Progress Measure B was also completed and the staff will now nominate in the absence of nominations from the delegates. Program Coordinator*

Carlin developed and implemented an undergraduate scholarship and research program, thus fulfilling Progress Measure C. The recipients of these awards will be announced at the May 18, 2009 meeting. Progress Measure d was also completed, with recognitions going out to Kylene Olson (Chippewa River Watershed Project) and to Bob Brush and Jim Putnam (Lura Lake Association). These awards have been very well received and will be continued in FY10.

GOAL 11. Effectively manage the first year of the Conservation Innovation Grant from the NRCS for Water Quality Credit Trading

- A) Provide support services for the \$999,997 CIG grant to develop and implement a water quality credit trading program here in the Middle and Lower Minnesota River Watersheds, the Greater Blue Earth River Basin, and to provide administrative support for the Sauk River Watershed.
- B) Provide significant administrative services and work with various partners to enhance market-driven water quality improvement via land use modifications.
- C) Contract technical services with appropriate entities based on work plan requirements.

Goal 11 Progress: *All progress measures for the Conservation Innovation Grant have been completed to the satisfaction of the granting agency (NRCS) and the various partners. A majority of Program Director Carlin's time has been reallocated to this project. MRB Office Manager Karnell Johnson has been provided the needed administrative support and thus far it is going well.*