

MINNESOTA RIVER BOARD PROGRESS REPORT FY10 WORK PLAN

GOAL 1. Effectively manage the second year of the Conservation Innovation Grant, now known under the project name Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota (CMM).

- A) Provide administrative support services (accounting, contracting, invoicing, match tracking, and financial reporting) for the CMM project team. (6/10 - O)
- B) Coordinate and facilitate the National CMM Advisory Team, including setting up meetings, assisting with travel, establishing and clarifying duties, and working with partners to establish and distribute agendas. (6/10 - P)
- C) Coordinate and facilitate the Policy Committee(s) for project areas within the Minnesota River Basin, including setting up meetings, assisting with travel, establishing and clarifying duties, securing policy that works for all areas of the Minnesota River Basin, and working with partners to establish and distribute agendas. (6/10 - E)
- D) Coordinate and facilitate the Technical Committee(s) for project areas within the Minnesota River Basin, including setting up meetings, assisting with travel, clarifying duties, and working with partners to establish and distribute agendas. (6/10 - P)
- E) Provide support to the Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance in associated with the CIG by hiring and providing HR services, work space and transportation for an employee that will work on the CMM project by transferring CMM funds to the Water Resources Center to cover the costs of the employee (8/09 - E)
- F) Serve as the overall project advocate and liaison between the MRB and the project partners, including provision of update on project issues and progress to the Executive Director and assisting with project tasks as requested from project partners. (6/10 – P)

The NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant to develop the Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota (CMM) concept was the major focus of the Minnesota River Board staff this past year. As a result, the initiative consumed a substantial portion of the executive director and program director's workload. The project is on task and we continue to coordinate this effort that involves more than a dozen different committees and collaborators from across the country, with focus on building a program and relationships in five major watersheds: Middle, Lower, Watonwan, Blue Earth, and Le Sueur. The MRB also provides administrative support to the Sauk River Watershed in its capacity as a contractual partner in this grant. Goal 1A has been completed to the satisfaction of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (CIG grant administrator) and Karnell Johnson deserves our gratitude for managing this project on her limited funding. She has devoted substantive volunteer hours to ensure that all obligations have been met. Goal 1B has been managed by Susie Carlin. The National Advisory Team met on-site in the Sauk River Watershed in August 2009; it is scheduled to meet again in the Lower Minnesota River Watershed in June 2010. Susie has completed the tasks of this goal, but coordinating with people from across the country that have a variety of budgetary and workload restrictions has been very challenging for her. Goal 1C has been completed and the Policy Committee has been formed for the Minnesota River Basin. The 8-member team is comprised of stakeholder representatives as identified by the Minnesota River Board. A contract was developed with the Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA) for their participation in the CMM project and Brooke Hacker was hired by GBERBA to serve as the new Ecosystem Services Specialist. As part of this agreement, the MRB worked with MSU Mankato to provide hiring assistance, thereby fulfilling Goal 1E. Brooke works directly with GBERBA and is currently housed at the Blue Earth SWCD office. Program Director Carlin, along with substantive assistance from Brooke Hacker, have done a very good job of achieving Goal 1D. The Technical Committee has been very active, developing a CMM Minnesota River Business Plan, setting technical objectives, and moving forward on forms and procedural planning. Goal 1F duties have been met by all staff and we expend considerable energy and resources advocating for Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota and providing assistance to the contractual partners. Overall, this project is on task and progressing very well. The partners, grant sponsors, and agency liaisons have been pleased with the work done to date.

GOAL 2. 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 FY10 Work Plan and budget. (approval by 8/09, completion by 6/10 - E)
- B) Provide a progress report to BWSR by February 1, 2010. (2/10 - E)
- C) Complete Executive Committee planning sessions in 10/09 and 4/10. (4/10 - E)
- D) Complete an annual internal audit. (5/10 - O)
- E) Conduct performance reviews as scheduled for the staff (6/10 - E).
- F) Bring non-member counties back to the MRB, with an objective of securing at least 1. (6/10 - E)
- G) 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. (6/10 – P/O/E)
- H) 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. (6/10 - E)

MRB administrative duties have been completed on schedule (Goal 2A). The Goal 2B deadline was again missed this year, and Director Fisher takes full responsibility for the delay in getting the progress report to the Board of Water and Soil Resources. The report was submitted May 10, 2010 to Jeff Nielsen. Two Executive Committee meetings were held (Goal 2C), an internal audit was successfully completed (Goal 2D), and performance reviews were conducted (Goal 2E).. Non-member counties were approached and presented opportunities to rejoin, but none pursued membership, perhaps due to budget restraints (Goal 2F). Unfortunately, we lost one county during FY10, as Yellow Medicine County submitted a resolution removing themselves from the board once again. Highlights from the year include an annual meeting in Redwood Falls on water conservation featuring nationally recognized speakers, partner hosted meetings in Blue Earth (Faribault County) and Morris (Stevens County) (Goal 2G). Two major grant applications were submitted to further support Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota: one to LCCMR and another for the next phase of the Conservation Innovation Grant program (Goal 2H).

GOAL 3. Reconvene the technical and citizen advisory committee and work with this committee to develop a process of communications and input.

- A) Facilitate completion of a start-up meeting for the Minnesota River Basin Tech/Citizen advisory committee and utilize funding to defray the costs. (10/09 - E)
- B) Work with basin stakeholders to determine a committee structure and process of technical representatives and citizen representatives whose input is critically important to the future work of the MRB. (12/09 - E)
- C) Develop a plan on which to formally gather input from and to provide services to the advisory group, including a formal process of communications and meeting schedule. (2/10 - E)

The technical and citizen advisory committee was reinstated and has met formally twice. At a meeting on October 1, 2009 in Morton, Steve Lawrence (Pope County) addressed technical and citizen members of the basin regarding the need for technical and citizen participation in the MRB. He called for volunteers to participate in the planning committee and 22 people indicated a willingness to serve. Ten participants from across the basin were brought together to develop a new technical/citizen team. Therefore, Goal 3A was achieved with some delays. The planning members are still working on Goal 3B. The initial proposal is to develop a communication structure and input process (between the tech/citizen team and the MRB) with three Advisory Units: Upper (Lac qui Parle, Pomme de Terre, Chippewa, and Upper Watersheds), Middle (Hawk, Yellow-Medicine, Redwood, Cottonwood Watersheds, and the Middle west of Hwy 15), and Lower (Watonwan, Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Lower Watersheds, and the Middle east of Hwy 15). The committee will continue to meet in late FY10 and early FY11 to finalize this plan. They will determine structures for each group, identify additional stakeholders to be represented (statutory review included), and institute a formal communication and meeting schedule as listed in Goal 3C..

GOAL 4. Facilitate improved and increased communications between the MRB and our partners and among basin stakeholders.

- A) Collaborate with the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance and various projects of the MRB and Water Resources Center to implement a MRB newsletter (2-4 pages), including features written by and/or regarding delegates, county staff, watershed professionals, and others. (10/09 – P/C/E)
- B) Include condensed articles on major Minnesota River issues, similar to Envision 2020 reports. (start by 11/09 and then ongoing after that - C)
- C) Monthly website update that feature the products from 4A and 4B, along with event notices and other items of interest. (6/10 – C)
- D) Contract with communications staff at the Water Resources Center for assistance on completing this task. (10/09 - E)
- E) Support ongoing enhancements of communications efforts in conjunction with MPCA, local media outlets, provision of press releases, etc....(6/10 – E/C)

This goal continues to be a difficult effort to fully engage in and implement. The MRB has partially achieved Goal 4A, as we regularly provide information to the MN River Watershed Alliance; however, we have not been able to implement an MRB newsletter. The MRB continues to provide support and services to the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, which provides newsworthy information via e-mail and newsletter updates (Goal 4B). Goal 4C has been difficult to complete due to budgetary restraints. We have attempted to utilize internal staff and students to accomplish this task (Goal 4A) however, progress has been minimal and we are assessing end-of-year funds to determine if we can contract this out. The MRB has been supporting ongoing enhancements in and continuation of communication efforts – providing news information to the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance and the MPCA's Watershed Network, and developing press releases as needed on critical issues.

GOAL 5. Promote and complete a program of continuing education, outreach, and partnership to enhance and encourage ongoing interest and work in Minnesota River Basin improvement efforts.

- A) Utilize the expertise of the Technical Committee to identify the educational needs of the basin and work with the technical committee to prioritize programming dollar expenditures. (11/09 - E)
- B) Based on input from 5A, put out an RFP for workshop, continuing education, and/or conference opportunities. (11/09 - E)
- C) Complete at least one major and one minor workshop in the basin based on selection criteria and needs identified from the technical/citizen advisory committee. (6/10 – E/P)
- D) Bring back the Minnesota River Research Forum series in association with the Water Resources Center and other basin partners. (4/10 – E).

Given the delays in establishing the technical and citizen advisory team, Goals 5A and 5B have not been completed as described above. Instead, we informally spoke with a wide range of basin members and identified a variety of needs. This effort led to the water conservation focus at the MRB Annual Meeting and a Watershed Basin Professionals Assembly that was held on October 1st to focus on issues such as the basin bill legislation and methods of measuring progress. A Request for Proposals was released in March for programming grants and we received over \$42,000 in requests for the available \$9,000.

Several projects were funded, including:

- Chippewa SWCD/Chippewa SWCD Conservation Field Days/\$1,700
- GBERBA/Testing CMM in the Greater Blue Earth River Basin/\$3,000
- Coalition for a Clean MN River/Working Together for the MN River/\$3,000
- CURE/Annual River and History Weekend & River Signage/\$1,300

The two conferences listed above, the educational tours/programs held at the Blue Earth and Morris meetings, and the Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota National Advisory Committee meeting fully account for successful completion of Goal 2C, which continues to be one of the MRB's greatest strengths. Planning is underway for the Minnesota River Research Forum (Goal 5D), with a target date of January 2011.

GOAL 6. Serve as an ongoing legislative and funding resource for the basin.

- A) Work with the advisory group and delegates to identify legislative issues that the MRB could provide support and advocacy for during the 2010 session. (11/09 - E)
- B) 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. (6/10 – E/P)
- C) Provide assistance to agencies, counties, watersheds, etc.... in the dissemination of information regarding policy changes, funding opportunities, and staffing/project service options. (6/10 – E/P)
- D) Provide grant preparation assistance as requested, with a target of at least 2 collaborations that benefit multiple major watersheds and/or local partners. (6/10 – E)
- E) Provide a minimum of 2 presentations on behalf of the MRB and our partners as requested. (6/10 – E/P)

To satisfy Goal 6A, the MRB staff made numerous announcements at watershed meetings, at MRB meetings, and at the Watershed Basin Professionals Assembly indicating that the MRB is available to serve as a voice for the basin. But very few partners have accepted that offer and therefore the MRB completed very little legislative work this past session. The MRB continues to provide input to the basin bill language and process and Director Fisher has been asked to provide comment on legislation that will govern water use from the Mount Simon Aquifer. Due to limited participation in Goal 6A, Goal 6B was also limited. The MRB has served as a venue for agencies to present policy changes, to announce monitoring program alterations, and to advertise funding cuts/opportunities. The MRB and the Water Resource Center have been collectively invited by the US Army Corps of Engineers to serve on the Minnesota River Integrated Watershed Study team. The MRB/WRC has also hosted a wetland specialist training program by the University of Minnesota and served on the planning team for the Minnesota Clean Water Framework (Goal 6C). Goal 6D was completed this year with three collaboration grants being prepared and submitted – LCCMR (\$600,000+) and CIG (\$800,000+) submitted by the MRB and the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (\$300,000+) submitted by the Redwood SWCD. The MRB staff have presented at more than 15 events this past year, including professional conferences, annual watershed meetings, and environmental fairs. Therefore, Goal 6E has readily been completed.

GOAL 7. Complete a substantive outreach effort to deliver the Minnesota River Progress Report results (developed as part of the FY09 BWSR grant) to basin communities, water quality improvement stakeholders, legislators, and agencies.

- A) Deliver the report for review by legislators, agency staff, conservation professionals, MRB delegates, the basin technical team, and others and establish a series of meetings to discuss the product and mechanisms for improvement (10/09 – E/C)
- B) Formally deliver and present the Biennial Progress Report developed during FY08 and FY09 to the MRB delegates and partners at the November Board Meeting (11/09 – E/C)
- C) In conjunction with other progress reports, trend assessments, and basin planning efforts, advance a series of town hall meetings across the basin to deliver a message of basin water quality progress, continued challenges, and community involvement. (6/10 – E/C)

The Minnesota River Progress Report will be completed and ready for distribution by June 2010. The report is a thorough collection of the restoration and protection work that is ongoing in the Minnesota River Basin. The report highlights the impacts those efforts have had on our basin environment, culture, and economics. The report overviews projects throughout the basin by major watershed. The document addresses ongoing concerns, recommendations for future work, and a basin timeline. The staff at the Water Resources Center have provided significant assistance to the development of this document.. Due to the expansive scope and level of detail in the report, it is still in the final draft phases and portions of Goal 7A, 7B, and 7C are not yet complete. These goals will be carried forward to FY11.

GOAL 8. Based on Goal 7 feedback, develop a framework on which to build the next iteration of the Minnesota River Progress Report that will be completed in FY11.

- A) Gather input as part of the Goal 7 information meetings and determine if appropriate measures were utilized for the progress report, giving consideration to new measures that should be included for future reports, deletion of measures with limited or difficult to understand data, and determining which measures provide the most valuable information (5/10 – E/C)
- B) Develop a plan on which to base the FY11 biennial progress report. (6/10 – C)

Goal 8 has been moved to FY11, at which time Goal 7 items will be completed.

GOAL 9. Become an involved member in the ongoing discussion of Basin Watershed Organization legislation, including an evaluation of the MRB membership structure.

- A) Join, as opportunities arise, in forums, committees, legislative hearings, and work groups to continue providing input into basin and watershed management legislation and policy modification proposals. (1/10 - E)
- B) As part of 9A, complete a work session on watershed based management options with the executive committee and other interested parties, including legislative sponsors, watershed representatives, and others to provide input into future proposals. (11/09 - E)
- C) Utilize the information gathered in 9A and 9B to determine the MRB position on such matters and then provide support or opposition as requested by the delegates (1/10 - E)
- D) Evaluate the current MRB structure to determine if any changes at this time would be appropriate. (1/10 - E)

Basin management legislation continued in the past year, but at a much lower profile due to larger budget issues before the legislature. There were limited opportunities for involvement, but Director Fisher completed Goals 9A, 9B, and 9C as best possible. At the Basin Professionals Assembly, basin bill information was shared, stakeholders thoughts were collected, and "next steps" were suggested. The results of these roundtable discussions were provided to the legislative authors of the bills. As part of this process, Executive Committee work sessions continue to evaluate the MRB structure. In addition, structural questions have been raised with the planning team on the technical and citizen advisory team. Their feedback to the MRB delegates suggests that both the basin bill language and the partnership vision should incorporate a more inclusive and diverse board delegate membership.

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

- A) Provide an awards/incentive program for junior and senior high students from the basin participating in sanctioned science fair programs. (5/10 - P)
- B) Provide an undergraduate scholarship and an undergraduate research award for two students studying in the basin that are focused on water quality issues. (5/10 - P)
- C) Award two deserving participants from the basin with the "Confluence" and "Tributary" awards. (6/10 - E)
- D) Institute a delegate, watershed, and project spotlight section in future watershed communications associated with Goals 4 and 5 above. (6/10 – P/C)

Goal 10 sections A, B, and C have all been successfully delivered. A total of seven awards were presented to Science Fair participants at the high school, middle school, and elementary levels for projects that assessed watershed, water quality, or other biotic research. The recipients of the FY09

GOAL 10 Progress Continued:

MRB Undergraduate Research Awards presented their findings to the MRB delegates at the March 2010 meeting. In FY10, one Undergraduate Research Grant and three MRB Scholarships were awarded to deserving students in the basin. The annual MRB professional awards were presented at the July 2009 annual meeting. Mary Homan (Confluence Award) was recognized for her work in the Lac qui Parle and Yellow Bank Clean Water Partnership. Jim Doering (Tributary Award) was recognized for his innovative work with the Redwood Cottonwood River Control Area, and as both a citizen and now an employee of the City of Redwood Falls. Goal 10D was not instituted, pending completion of Goals 4 and 5.

GOAL 11. Evaluate the potential of bringing the Blue Thumb program into areas across the Minnesota River basin by working with the Rice Creek Watershed and delivering information to our partners.

- A) Establish contact with and meet with the Rice Creek Watershed District staff to learn more about the Blue Thumb Program. (10/09 - P)
- B) Identify appropriate venues and develop information materials for the dissemination of information regarding the Blue Thumb program among Minnesota River Basin stakeholders. (12/09 - P)
- C) Work with at least one basin entity to establish partnership in the Blue Thumb program and/or determine how the Blue Thumb program could be applied in our basin (4/10 - P)

Program Director Carlin met with Rice Creek Watershed District staff and identified possible opportunities for collaboration (Goal 11A). During Blue Thumb's open enrollment period (December 2009), the MRB became a Blue Thumb partner. MRB staff continue to explore Blue Thumb's potential for providing innovative outreach and educational materials to homeowners throughout the basin (Goal 11B). An MRB intern will assist with Blue Thumb tasks during Summer 2010. Blue Thumb material will be shared with technical partners—SWCDs, county staff, watershed projects, and watershed districts—while encouraging them to join during the next open enrollment period in December 2010 (Goal 11C).

GOAL 12. Status evaluations of priority issues to county delegates and basin citizens.

- A) Prepare and implement a plan to survey counties in the basin regarding the status of re-determination of benefits on county ditch systems. (11/09 – E/C)
- B) Present the findings of Measure 12A to the MRB and then determine a course of action and implement such action. (6/10 - E)
- C) Prepare and implement a plan to survey Minnesota River basin citizens and stakeholders regarding groundwater concerns, monitoring status, and research needs – including a summary of known contaminants, research, and management strategies for aquifers under the MRB territory. (6/10 - E/P/C).

Progress on Goal 12A is underway. An interview script and plan to survey all basin counties has been developed and interns will collect data in May/June 2010. These results will present the results to the MRB (Goal 12B). Goal 12C has also been initiated and a draft report has been completed. The document needs more detail and thus MRB interns will visit aquifer and groundwater experts this summer.