

Formal Testimony

Speaker: Kent Bosch, Landowner – Montevideo, MN

My name is Kent Bosch, I farm 20 miles north east of Montevideo and I've got some notes cause I'm not a public speaker, I wish I would have written a letter so I could just read. A little bit of background here – well first of all I would like to start off by saying that I want to encourage the board to vote for option D and be done with this.

A little background on who I am, I farm, I raise corn, soybeans, sugar beets, sweetcorn and peas, and 3 children, and a couple of horses. I am also a drainage contractor, for full disclosure here, I'm a drainage contractor I do some local assessing in the winter time so I understand the tax system - the property tax system - and what I see here is ah a grab game to increase our property taxes. I also have been very involved in a lot of these brainstorming sessions about water and water quality. I've been farming for 20 years I see our water quality improving a great deal and I think it's wonderful and the reason that it's improving is because of all these organizations and all this money that's being spent. We have the DNR, SWCDs, NRCS offices, private organizations like HUER, we have the MPCA. I served on the MPCA citizen advisory committee for the TMDL on turbidity and I've also served on the Chippewa Water Plan Community and a lot of other things in the last 20 years, too numerous to mention. But that's my background, and one of the things I did this past summer was I went to one of these bigger associates brainstorming sessions in Willmar talking about the future of this board and I came away from that thinking I was, like I often think of when I go to these brainstorming sessions, that I'm a stakeholder that doesn't get heard very often and I'm representing a silent majority of stakeholders and there are very few of us in these rooms; it's usually agency people who have a great benefit of prolonging these things and spending our money. So, I want to encourage the board to have some courage and true leadership and vote for option D and be done with this and let these other organizations that are doing great work and are challenged to clean up the river there doing great work and I think we should let them do their work and forget about another umbrella agency and another umbrella organization that's going to spend money to help these organizations. They don't need any more help, they are getting funding. Soft money v. hard money – it's all money it all comes from somewhere and it all costs money and I don't think that this board, which has spent mostly money the past 5 years to pay administrators to do nothing is worth it, I don't think developing a new organization is worth it, I think we need to quit. The organizations that we have are working, cleaning up our river, their testing shows that. I'm collaborating with the Chippewa River watershed project to help show what our pattern tile systems are doing to help clean up our water....TIME...so I encourage you to vote for option D, thank you.

Speaker: Tom Kalahar, Renville SWCD

Yah hi, my name is Tom Kalahar I'm a conservation district technician for the last 35 years in Renville county. Twenty years ago, I was full of optimism about this board; I thought we really had an opportunity to really move the Minnesota River cleanup forward, 20 years later I'm about as disappointed as a person could be. Its 20 years of lost opportunity. Basically I have no confidence in the Minnesota River Board to get much of anything done. Einstein said that those who created the problem can't fix it. It

think he's right, our landscape looks the way it does simply because of our policies of the last 100 years that have been manipulated by the same group of people. When we have a Minnesota River Board made up of one group of people that created the problem it's going to be pretty hard in their defense to fix it. As far as water management in this part of the country, it hasn't changed at all in the last 20 years; in fact the Minnesota is getting a lot more water everyday just basically due to water management or water mismanagement. I haven't seen much improvement in water management at all from any entity, not to lay the total blame on the Minnesota Board, is because of the fact that they had a task that they couldn't do from the very start. We don't need another layer of government, like the last gentlemen said, we have plenty of government out there, I work for the government and the government does some great things. But building us another big stadium isn't going to make us any better players. Quite frankly we all have to be better players, that's every department that is out there. That is supposed to be implementing conservation practices – it's on our shoulders to do a better job and it's on the state legislatures shoulders to be sincere and have the will in order to move the cleanup of the Minnesota River forward. And that is the problem with what we face today. We can have all the boards we want and God knows we have plenty of boards, committees, that's not going to fix this problem. After 35 years of working with local, state, and federal government, and legislatures, both in congress and in the legislature, what is see is the lack of political will to do the hard lifting. We all want to do the easy stuff, we all want to pick that low hanging fruit, we all know – just about everybody in this room knows what it's going to take to clean up the Minnesota River. There's hardly anybody in this room that has the will to do it.

Speaker: John Lindquist, Otter Tail County Commissioner

I'm John Lindquist, Otter Tail County Commissioner.

(Reading Letter):

The Pomme de Terre River Association would like to comment on the Minnesota River Board Basin Entity and Funding Recommendation.

By unanimous vote, the Pomme de Terre River Association Joint Powers Board is in favor only of Option D as summarize in the Minnesota River Board newsletter distributed by Shannon Fisher.

Members Counties and SWCDs of the Pomme de Terre River Association include: Otter Tail County and West Otter Tail County SWCD, Grant County and the Grant County SWCD, Douglas County and Douglas County SWCD, Stevens County and Stevens SWCD, Swift County and the Swift SWCD, and Big Stone County and Big Stone SWCD.

This is sincerely as the letter was written by the Pomme de Terre River Association Joint Powers Board.

Thank you.

Speaker: Linda Meschke, President of Rural Advantage

Good morning, my name is Linda Meschke, I am president of a nonprofit based in Fairmont called Rural Advantage. I've been involved at some level with the Minnesota River group since the beginning. Anyway, I would like to say I'm against Options C and D. They have no value for the local region and the state would not form a group and the

state would just pick it up within the agencies and the agencies would just be dictating more to you what you should be doing around water quality issues in the Basin. And while I can support Options A and B, I don't agree with the budget and administrative structure of what's proposed. Historically, the Minnesota River Board has always sort of been pushed towards an implementation agenda. I think a better role for the Minnesota River Board is more of a policy role, a policy role that would support, and bring resources to the basin for implementation, for monitoring, for education, for reform, just as it states in the strategic plan and to establish clout for the region. Sort of think about the IRRRB in the iron range, they're not a watershed entity or a water related entity, but they are more economic entity. But think about the clout they bring to their region, the Minnesota River Board could have that clout that could bring resources associated with water issues which are broad ranging to the region. This could also extend to other things like transportation, economic development, and tourism, use the assets of our local, state and federal partners that we have in the region to do the work and to get the work done, but set the framework to do that work with the policies that you can help drive and support and get money from state, federal resources, and other resources. This role would accomplish the goals identified in your handouts with a smaller capacity than what has been outlined. Work with your partners, many have already been involved, almost all have been involved and other people have alluded to that already. There is a need for local dollars to leverage additional money, I don't think the Minnesota River Board has ever been credited or gotten credit for the local money that goes into water related issues in the region, thank you. TIME

Speaker: Scott Sparlin, Executive Director, CCMR

Thank you and good morning and thank you for the opportunity. On behalf of the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River and its board of directors and members we would like to endorse either A or B. Just as a side comment, we talk about political will and you hear much about what political will is; well really I think what we're talking about is money. The Minnesota River Board has never been funded to the degree where it's able to do great things, but I think on the money they've been given that there's been some significant things - just like Linda stated prior, the political clout that this entity could have could be very influential and could raise a lot of money. And really money translates to political will, if the money is there paying for a project or for a program, I point to CREP as a great example. When we all got together and the River Board endorsed moving forward with the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, 100,000 acres of cropped flood land and repeat cropped flood land was put back in the Minnesota basin - that was working together. Well, we have the opportunity under a new structure to work together again, raise some serious money, and I would like to translates once again to political will, because you can't do something unless you have the money to do it - and that's what this boils down to. So when someone says it's a way to get taxes out there and raise them, there's no doubt about it - let's call a spade a spade - we got to raise the money, but the reason the Red River gets the funding it gets to do what it is doing, in a major way is because they come to the state of Minnesota, or they come to the federal government with some asset and some money and say "we're here to match - and we can do some great things". So I encourage you to be visionary in this thing, and you know a lot of times these things are hard; and I know that

counties collecting taxes to do something – it's not going to be very popular. But I point back to the legacy amendment, the people in Minnesota made a strong statement that there for our natural resources, the Minnesota River and Minnesota River Basin is 20% of our land mass. We have spent very little money trying to clean this river up; \$1.36 an acre is about what it comes out to today. So let's get real: political will – I wonder?

Speaker: Paul Nelson, Scott WMO Administrator, Scott County

Paul Nelson I'm a staff from Scott County, Scott County is a member organization, but this last year has chosen to have a staff attend rather than one of the commissioners or delegate. The opinion that my staff would support would be Option C or D. We thank the board, we've done a number of different things together that have been successful, with ravines, and near channel sediment, but I think one of our concerns would be the parcel tax, we would consider that unfair given the number of parcels that we have as a small land area in general. And also the fact that we are already apart of the Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act area so we have water organizations across the whole county area that are doing a significant amount of work and local fundraising. Part of this also has I think, the board is really too big, structurally that makes it hard to find a common vision and to make decisions. Third, I think there are other alternatives out there, as Shannon had said, the one water thing is moving forward. And given that I think a couple things I'll say in closing, I've watch a number of water management organizations in the metropolitan area dissolve, and in their ashes different organizations have come up and they've been okay, they haven't been that scary, they've been okay, and they've done their job. The last thing I would say is we do a survey of citizen needs and so forth every three years and so forth, and this last year what it came out with, in terms of citizen priorities: 911 dispatch was the highest priority, sheriff was second, water was third, ahead of transportation. So, even though endorsing C & D I want to emphasize the importance of water to people and encourage that if they choose that other organizations take advantage of the one water program and do step up.

Speaker: Lou Ann Nagel, Yellow Medicine SWCD Manager

I am Lou Ann Nagel and I am with the Yellow Medicine Soil and Water Conservation District and I am speaking on behalf of my board and staff. We would recommend to approve the option to immediately being the process of business disclosure and disband. This decision was based on the facts that the Legislation's approach for One Watershed One Plan and we feel this should be done at the local level, with local input, from our local stakeholders and landowners, and from our local government: the County, and the Watershed Districts, and the SWCD's. We feel that this plan can be written without the help of the Minnesota River Board. We also feel that the Minnesota River Board choice to seek taxing authority – we do not agree with this. Yellow Medicine County has two formed watershed districts and our landowners are being taxed by them as well and they are actively involved in Clean Water Partnership grants, 319 monies, and we are getting conservation of our land with the help from our watershed districts and our SWCD's and the federal government. And there is also been a statute, Minnesota Statute 103b that currently gives the County the authority to do special projects and we can get conservation of that land through that as well. Thank you.

Speaker: Bruce Kubicek, Steele County Commissioner

I'm Bruce Kubicek, I'm a commissioner in Steele County, been a commissioner for 13 years, and actually Steele County was a paying dues member and I was a board member approximately 10 years ago. A couple of things, Steele County board has been in favor of a lot of water projects, we believe water quality is important. Couple of things I'll mention, we help with our SWCD and the Straight River Marsh Restoration that's approximately 2,000 acres of wetland restoration and upland restoration, we just finished a joint project with Dodge County which is another 800 acres. We also work with the South East Minnesota Water Resources Board, which is possibly a different structure type that maybe some of you would like to consider. That's a 10 county group – we have one staff, and we've got millions of dollars in grant money to do feedlot fixes for our feedlots, to help our water quality. We've done well water sampling for nitrates in a 9-county area on about 600 wells, and we've got wastewater coordinators, 2 of them, they go around and help un-sewered communities and develop sewer plans for their communities and we've done 3 of those in Steele County. So, we do a lot of water work. I'm for local control, local spending, and I think my board has sent me here to say that, we're not afraid to fund local projects, but when I have to explain to my tax payers that I taxed them and sent money someplace else, that's when I get in trouble. So I'm not in favor of the Minnesota River Board staying in operation. Thank you.

Speaker: Pauline VanOverbeke, District Manager; Water Plan Coordinator, Lincoln County Soil and Water Conservation District

I am Pauline VanOverbeke with the Lincoln Soil and Water Conservation District and I am here on behalf of the Lincoln County commissioners, Lincoln SWCD, and I just got a letter that was signed by Joan Jagt, who is a county commissioner for Lincoln County. And it basically says that the Lincoln County Water Management Task Force met on December 12th in which they reviewed options for future funding and funding for the Minnesota River Board. And they have members, like I said, from the county commissioners, SWCD board, the watersheds represented, along with citizens, and cities. They basically vote for Option C/D to immediately begin the process of business disclosure and disband for some of the same reasons that Lou Ann had stated. The taxing – we also have 2 watershed districts that are now currently both being taxed, or taxing the people in Lincoln county, and to tax another tax on top of what we've already done is not necessary. With that thank you. We also in Lincoln County are doing great things; we do get Clean Water Fund and do a good job at implementing conservation on the land, with that thank you.

Speaker: Ron Antony, Yellow Medicine County Commissioner

Ron Antony, Yellow Medicine County Commissioner, I've been a commissioner for about 10 years and I'm here representing the Yellow Medicine County Board we would like to encourage this board to seek Option C. I want like to make known that we applaud the board for their efforts and we don't want to see all the efforts that they've done gone to waste so we would like Option C to be implemented so they can go into the process of disbanding. Also like Lou Ann had said, our county is already being taxed

on our committee watersheds so another tax at this, as a commissioner we're constantly trying to pull local control down and we see this as an initiative to losing some local control and some taxpayer money to be exiting out of our community.

JOHN SCHUELLER: I would to kind of make one comment, I know that a lot of people are talk C and D. When we started this process we knew the river board as it is today would not exist. So when you say D it's kind of a moot point. Whether we move forward with a new entity – the River Board as it is now will not exist – whether we don't move forward with a new entity – the River Board now as it is will not exist. We knew that and I give Shannon great credit, he knew going in that he was out of a job, because we didn't want to do business as usual. We knew what happened 18 years ago at the Citizens Advisory Committees recommendation was not implemented and left a lot of hard feelings with a lot of local water planners, and we know that. We are trying to get back to what the original intent was and I don't want to discourage any comment by any means, but just want to clarify that the River Board as it is, we knew this going in, would not exist. Welcome to some more comment, please.

Speaker: Kerry Netzke, Area II Coordinator

Good morning I'm Karry Netzke representing Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects out of Marshall, we are a 9-county joint powers board and we deal primarily with flood control projects. I was lucky enough to be a part of the steering committee and I appreciate being asked, again there's what 18 months of a lot of brainstorming and it wasn't easy – it was difficult. The one thing as I sit in listen I hear a lot of talk about the disbanding, I agree with John 100%, we knew that going from the outset. Couple things I just want to bring to your minds: stable funding, our soil and water districts, our watershed districts, the organization that I work with – we're not stable we're at the liberty of state government, federal government even local government. The organization I work with, we used to get a quarter of a million dollars from the state – we're down to right now, we've been down to 80, we've been down to 0 and we bounce back and forth and so we struggle after 36 years of business to keep going. Soil and water districts aren't created equal either, some are funded very well by their counties, others are minimal. So this is an opportunity to create that local funds to help these organization do the good work that Tom Kalahar, and others are talking about. There's financial windfalls out there for some counties, others not so much. The other thing I don't think has been exaggerated much here is that this is a possibility, the local funding – even though I don't agree 100 percent with the funding, the formula that's being offered. The possibilities of having that local funds to go to our soil and water districts, to my organizations, it's going to alleviate the burden that some of the counties have. You're not going to be looking at funding these organizations as we know today. The last thing I want to mention before my time is up is that, the local funding in the pocket is going to allow projects to be done that can't be done today. We have got watershed districts and we've got soil and water districts who have got multimillion dollar projects but they don't have the money to do it. Having this money in the bank that we can pool, we can get those bigger projects done and continue to work in partnership to do that. I can't believe my time isn't up. So again just to reiterate, don't discount this. I'm a farmer's wife so I don't like the taxation I get either, we have acres and I don't want to

see it taxed either more than it needs to be. But again you're overlooking the possibility of local funding, the red river has power, the IRRRB that was mentioned, they have power because they have money in their pocket. The Minnesota River Board, the Area II, myself, we don't have money in our pocket but we could do a whole lot more if we did have a little bit.

Speaker: Drew Campbell, Blue Earth County Commissioner

Well I've been serving as a commissioner for four years from Blue Earth County, my name is Drew Campbell, and you kind of get thrown in to these different boards and meetings and I've said a few comments about that in the past. I know as the River Board has existed now for about 18 years, run by solely commissioners basically with agencies and outside influences and voices and a lot of meetings, a lot of conferences, educational programs, things I've been a part of over the last four years. My whole life I've been passionate about God's creation and the investment that it takes from all of us to be mindful of taking care of what we've got, so we can have what we have. And that goes for farming, that goes for our cities, that goes for our parks, everything that we've got. I don't know if I'm going to speak directly towards one option necessarily, but I don't want to remind folks that I'm also on the GEBERBA, and I was just recently at a meeting for GEBERBA. It's the Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance, and you've got the Watonwan River flows into there and the Blue Earth and Le Sueur and all that comes together – it's a large watershed basin. And the words that we just heard I can echo Carrie's for quite a long time at our meeting was that there's not stable funding. And I don't know if maybe some of you folks that don't want to see something changed don't realize that there's a lot of conservation groups, water and soil conservation groups out there that are having a really hard time. And what happens is, a married couple – they want to maybe have a child, believe it or not, and they maybe want to think about some kind of stable funding instead of being totally grant dependent. Most of these projects and things are grant dependent only, with very minor amount of funding. And what happens is that the engineering costs used to be 10%, is what I was told – don't quote me as a big authority on this, it's just what I hear from people working on the ground – now it's 15% automatically out of the grants. And then the administrative costs used to be 15%-20%, now it's 25%. So right there you've got, what 40, approximately 40% off the top of these grants that come in. So then they do a trade-off, 'well let's see what we can do here, we'll cut here, we'll do that we'll try to collaborate' - which is good, but at the end of the day it's threatening staff positions that are trying to do something they love to do, they've been trained to do, and are doing on our behalf. So I just want to speak towards some sort of movement in the future for, providing for stable funding for these people that are committed, their lives are committed to these things. A lot of times their just dying for a job with the county because they know it's more stable funding because they have taxation authority. TIME.

Speaker: Rodney Stensrud, Lyon County Commissioner

I'm Rodney Stensrud from Lyon County, a Lyon county commissioner. Lyon County withdrew from the Minnesota River Board about 5 years ago I believe, and the organization I think was probably just a little too big, too broad, and we saw things – not that things weren't done – but slipping back and more or less covering trying to get their

bills paid for the administration end of it. I think it's real important that we look at our local things that are going, we have a wonderful area too, our Soil and Water, RCRA, Yellow Medicine River down in our area, that works hard and has some very nice projects on the ground and I think we need to take care of our local dollars, our local people, our local rivers – not that we don't need to look broad – but if we clean up ours, everything will help down the way.

Speaker: John Oeltjenbruns, Cottonwood County Commissioner

John Oeltjenbruns, Cottonwood County Commissioner, been around for 21 years, was in Mankato when the group was formed and I think there's only 1 or 2 possible in the room that can say that. I don't like to see my local dollars go to a larger group like the Minnesota River; I think we can do the same thing locally. If we want to raise things we can go to taxing authority or whatever on our own. I know your talking some pretty big dollars administration of a big group – 37 County again. So I would encourage you to vote for D. Thank you.

Speaker: Rylee Main, Project Manager

Hi I'm Rylee Main, I'm with the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance and I didn't necessarily plan to speak today. What I've been working on primarily with this organization is trying to work with people upstream; the biggest source of pollution for us is the Minnesota River. I've been working with a number of counties trying to figure out what's successful and what's not. So, I know I'm not directly affected by the taxes that would be increased if the Minnesota River Board continues, but I know from our organizations perspective having a board or basin entity that's actually working with other counties, working with local governments, trying to be kind of that intermediary group that can bring everyone together, have a stable source of funding, would really do a lot for us. So I'm definitely in support of continuing the Minnesota River Board and trying to restructure it so we can be more effective and it would help us down the road, but we'd also like to work with the group and see if we can kind of figure out something together rather than have all of these different separate things happening that aren't really coordinated and effective.

Speaker: Lowell Schraders, Landowner – Chippewa County

Hi I'm Lowell Schraders from Chippewa County, a producer and I don't know the total ramifications of plan D, but I would like to support a real limited amount of our being taxed and generating money that helps others tell us as producers what we should be doing. We've got a tremendous amount of that already going on, I would like to see that limited. Like I said I don't know the total ramifications of the Option D but I sure would like to head that direction and would like to encourage all of you guys out there to support limited amount of involvement from more governmental agencies.

Letters: Read by Shannon Fisher, Executive Director

I have 4 additional written comments that I would like to submit Chair for the official record. I will read them exactly as they were provided to me last Friday.

First one is from the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, dated December 13th, 2013 to John Schueller, Minnesota River Board Chair from Mark Zabel, Association President:

“On behalf of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), I am submitting the following comments in response to the invitation for input related to the December 16, 2013 Minnesota River Board meeting agenda item: *MN River Organizational/Funding Options Forum*.

The Association currently does *not* have policy positions specific to the Minnesota River Board.

The Association Board of Directors has adopted policy that supports the recommended scale for watershed planning should be on the basis of 81 major watershed boundaries (8 digit Hydrologic Unit Code scale). During the Association Annual Business meeting, our members adopted 2013 Resolution No. 2 supporting watershed planning and implementation on a major watershed scale.

The Association, along with the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), and the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD) understand the value and strength of working together and have developed the **Minnesota Local Government Water Roundtable**.

On November 25, 2013, the Local Government Water Roundtable adopted the *Comprehensive Water Planning and Management Policy Paper*. The policy paper also reaffirms the 81 major watershed scale for watershed management and implementation.

If you have questions related to the Association policy positions please feel free to contact me. Thank you for the opportunity to convey our policy positions related to watershed planning and implementation.”

So I submit this letter on behalf of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The next one I have is a written statement from Les Everett from the University of Minnesota, Water Resources Center:

“Among the listed options, it looks like Option B might have the greatest chance of success, given that it appears to mirror the organizational structure in the Red River Basin. In the 10th point under Option A (which is part of Option B), that addresses additional fiscal authority to implement major watershed plans, I would add Watershed Districts in addition to SWCDs and Counties. I believe the key to success in the Red River Basin has been the fact that each of the major watersheds is covered by a watershed district that has the financial, administrative and technical capacity and authority to prepare and carry out watershed plans, including major retention projects. Watershed districts working together with drainage authorities and a revised Minnesota

River entity would be able to address the water management and water quality needs of the Basin. A less comprehensive approach is not more likely to succeed than the current situation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,
Les Everett”

So I submit that one.

The next one, Chippewa River Watershed Project, Resolution 04-13, December 6th, 2013:

“Be it resolved by the Board of the Chippewa River Watershed Project, that it hereby supports Option D with respect to the Minnesota River Board published recommendations on future basin-level coordination and funding.

Whereupon the above resolution was adopted at the December 6, 2013, regular meeting of the Board of Chippewa River Watershed Project.

Signed by Dean Shuck, Board Chair and Paul Gerde, Board Secretary and Treasurer”

So I submit that one.

And the last one that I have to submit, that wasn’t already covered here today is from Paul Moline in Carver County:

“The Carver County Watershed Management Organization supports the continuation of the Minnesota River Board. The Board provides the opportunity for larger planning activities that need to take into account the many jurisdictions and issues present in the basin. This large basin approach will compliment local efforts and provide an additional funding mechanism from the state which local jurisdictions may not always have access to. This additional funding will allow for balanced pollutant reduction projects for all the jurisdictions in the basin and for ALL land uses – urban and agricultural.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.
Paul Moline”

Those are the written comments, Chair.
