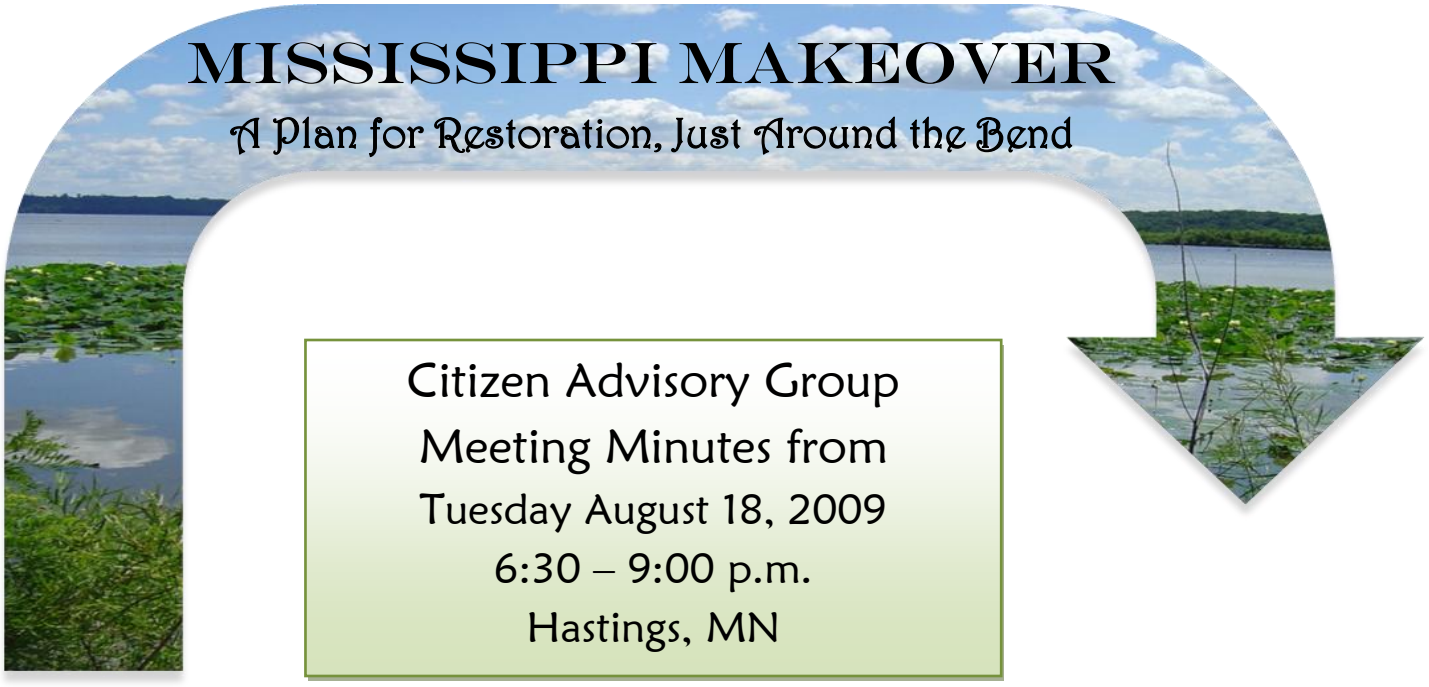

MISSISSIPPI MAKEOVER

A Plan for Restoration, Just Around the Bend

Citizen Advisory Group
Meeting Minutes from
Tuesday August 18, 2009
6:30 – 9:00 p.m.
Hastings, MN

Please note: Presentations referenced below are available on Mississippi Makeover website at www.dakotaswcd.org/wshd_missmak.html.

Welcome and Introductions: Laura Jester welcomed the group; introductions were made around the table. Participants included:

1. Representative Dennis McNamara, Hastings
2. Commissioner Joe Harris, Dakota County
3. Don Kern, Flint Hills Resources
4. Kevin Smith, Hastings Environmental Protectors; City of Hastings
5. Phil Vieth, Hastings Environmental Protectors
6. Joe Beattie, Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission
7. Mark Swanson, Wacouta Resident
8. Laura Jester, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District
9. Norm Senjem, MN Pollution Control Agency
10. Jennifer Ender, MN Pollution Control Agency
11. Tim Schlagenhaft, MN Department of Natural Resources
12. Jeff Janvrin, WI Department of Natural Resources
13. Steve Johnson, National Park Service
14. Jeff Luehrs, Dakota County Water Resources Department
15. Jon Hendrickson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
16. Paul Drotos, City of Red Wing
17. Trevor Russell, Friends of the Mississippi River
18. Wayne Ostlie, Great River Greening
19. Wayne Sylvander, Spring Lake Resident
20. Kristen Mickelsen, Upper Mississippi River Basin Association
21. Mike Slavik, City of Hastings Councilman

Norm Senjem, MPCA – Briefly described the two major site specific standards being proposed for solids and total phosphorus in the Lake Pepin and Mississippi River TMDL: 32 ppb chlorophyll in Lake Pepin and 32 ppm total suspended solids in the Mississippi River, Pools 2 and 3. These proposed standards match the Mississippi Makeover targets and will be reviewed through a public comment period this fall. A public meeting regarding the proposed standards is scheduled for September 22, 2009 in Red Wing. Once the site specific standards go through a public comment period and the EPA approves them, the TMDL document can begin the public review process.

Tim Schlagenhalft, MDNR – Report on Final Indicator Targets (See presentation: "Final Indicators MDNR")

Tim briefly reviewed how the Mississippi Makeover CAG and the technical experts arrived at proposed indicator targets and the group reviewed the final proposed targets table. Some questions and discussion followed:

- Is the mucket mussel a sensitive species? Answer: Yes. When water quality declines, so do mucket mussel populations; with improvements in water quality we should see a resurgence of this mussel. Host fish for this mussel are common species and probably would not be a limiting factor for increasing the Mucket's populations.
- Why isn't the waterfowl indicator on the top part of table? Answer: Ducks are affected by factors other than water clarity.

Tim also described fish assemblage targets for backwaters and main channel areas. He then went on to discuss the need for a waterfowl target. Unfortunately, there is only anecdotal information (little actual data) on waterfowl from Lake Pepin to the Twin Cities. However, waterfowl counts in this area will begin this fall with the Mississippi Fund providing the funding, the Fish and Wildlife Service providing the pilot and the data analysis, and the Minnesota DNR and National Park Service providing observers in the air. Two to three years of data are needed to set appropriate targets.

Additional general questions and discussion

- How will drawdowns affect mussels? Are total suspended solids/total phosphorus goals mutually exclusive with mussel goals? Answer: MDNR is studying how drawdowns affect mussels in other Pools that have or will be drawn down.There are many factors to consider when working to increase mussel populations.
- Has the Mucket mussel been extiripated from this reach of river? Answer: DNR have not found it in surveys.
- Additional discussion on mussels followed including how to effectively sample, how they can be re-introduced, if they reproduce naturally where they've been reintroduced, etc.
- What is the cost benefit of large restoration activities? What does it mean to the landscape? Answer: We need significant reduction of sediment coming from upstream, including changing farming practices. The restoration activities we do in this area are only part of the solution. Almost the entire state has a part to play in the restoration of this area.

Tim and Laura asked for confirmation from the group on the indicator targets table. There were no reservations or concerns from the group. They were asked to contact Tim or Laura SWCD in the near future if questions or concerns arise. They will also get another chance to comment through a public process to be held later this year.

Jon Hendrickson, U.S. ACOE – Restoration Project Planned and Proposed (See presentation "ACOE Proejcts")

Jon showed examples of how the river channel and backwaters have changed over time. He described the new Federal funding mechanism, the NESP (Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program). Unfortunately, money has not yet been appropriated to this program.

Jon went on to describe various restoration activities that have worked in other areas of the Mississippi and will likely be a component of restoration in this area including: island building, backwater dredging, water level drawdowns, secondary channel modifications, and biotechnical infrastructure (e.g. willow stakes and root wads). All of these changes are designed to improve habitat conditions and/or water quality.

Jon also addressed the fact that projects alone cannot fix habitat issues; sediment loads from the Minnesota River must also decrease. He reported that reach objectives are currently being set for this area and that the ACOE has similar objectives as this CAG.

Jon Hendrickson, U.S. ACOE – Possible Floodplain Restoration Priorities in Pools 1 – 4 (Geomorphic Reach 1) (See presentation "MDNR Projects")

Jon gave a second presentation put together by Scot Johnson, MN DNR showing specific restoration activities that could be performed in this area. Preliminary design on these projects is complete and will be proposed for various funding sources. See presentation for complete list, but some projects include island building in Pool 2, North Lake, and Sturgeon Lake to reduce wind fetch and increase bathymetric (depth) diversity.

Rep. McNamara asked about any plans to address the connection between the Mississippi River and Mud Hen Lake. He mentioned that the ACOE has repaired the Carter Slough spot dike within the last 5-10 years. He said the channel wasn't there in 1980's and that it has ruined Mud Hen Lake which is now a shallow mud flat with an excessive carp population. He wondered why that couldn't be fixed to go back to conditions in the 1970's.

Jon Hendrickson agreed that a fix was needed and should not be an expensive project. He said the NESP will look at historic conditions when designing projects.

There was additional discussion on this issue. Many CAG members have visited Mud Hen Lake recently to see current conditions. Phil Vieth reported a (approx.) 5 acre delta has formed at outlet of the slough into Mud Hen Lake. He said the northern section (actually separate lake) is much clearer than other 2 because there's no inlet from Mississippi River.

Jeff Janvrin, WDNR – Possible Projects in Upper Pool 4 (See presentation "WDNR Projects")

Jeff reminded the group that much of Upper Pool 4 is actually in Wisconsin. He described some possible projects in that area to improve habitats and water quality including: dredging, island building, forestry restoration, wetland creation within islands, and streambank improvements. He mentioned there are some hurdles to overcome issues with projects needed on private lands. He also reported the WDNR believes fish passage should be provided at every lock and dam (fish are hosts for mussels). He reported that the Pierce County Islands Wildlife Management Area (Bay City, WI to Red Wing on WI side) has much sedimentation of backwaters area. Projects are identified but plans are preliminary and there may be issues with contaminated sediments.
Some questions and answers followed his presentation and included:

- How much do carp affect water quality? Answer: Carp aren't only species that raise turbidity. Tundra swans, for instance, can also impact turbidity. However, there are studies showing impact of carp.

Additionally, the Lower Vermillion River TMDL indicates internal loading is a significant source of suspended sediment during low flow

- Are there mussels in LVR? Answer: Anecdotal information suggests there were historically but no current data exist. (Follow up note – Mike Davis, MDNR has info that can be provided).
- Are dredge spoils from the 9-foot channel under the same pollution controls as other activities? Answer: ACOE has a national permit for dredge spoil areas; stakeholders are notified when dredging will occur. If spoils are used for island building, then a state permit if usually needed. The biggest concern is that dredge spoils are sometimes placed in backwater wetlands. Typically, dredged sand is clean; fine sediments and silts are more problematic. However, everything is regularly tested for contaminants.
- Why is water clarity different among different backwaters areas of the Lower Vermillion River? Answer: Many factors affect water quality including wind action, flow and carp. If you have any of these conditions, then higher turbidity can occur.
- What kind of data are missing from these areas in order to design the appropriate projects? Answer: Generally have good data on flow, bathymetry, and fetch, but more data are needed in some areas.

BREAK

After the break, Laura asked for restoration project ideas from the group. The following items were suggested and discussed.

- Purple loosestrife control in Bullfrog Pond and areas adjacent to Spring Lake
- Diverting flow around Bullfrog Pond in order to improve canoeing in this stretch. FMR indicated that improving river recreation was half the issue in this area. While ecological restoration is important, getting the public to interact with the resource is another goal of restoration. The National Park Service mentioned that the Environmental Pool Plans were focused on habitat; not so much on water quality and definitely not on recreation. Future endeavors should certainly consider recreation; there is a need for a comprehensive recreation plan on Upper Mississippi. Rep. McNamara mentioned that the area around Bullfrog Pond was always really shallow, flat, and always changing.
- Spring Lake represents a bigger, broader ecosystem to restore and may offer a bigger payoff in the end. Others in the group agreed. NPS reported that an Environmental Impact Statement was being developed for mining in the Mississippi by Aggregate Resources. Great River Greening is working with the mine to enhance and restoration areas.
- Rep. McNamara mentioned that he liked the presentation regarding island building in Spring Lake and North and Sturgeon Lakes. He agrees that these activities along with drawdowns are important and should be accomplished. He indicated that a schedule of activities over the years is needed and should be tied back to indicators.
- Commissioner Harris indicated Dakota County is discussing the creation of a wildlife management area on islands in Spring Lake and that the County will likely turn the islands over to the State.
- Clean up of Spring Lake
- Improvement or dissolution of connection between Mississippi and Mud Hen Lakes at Carter Slough Dike.

Next Steps

More detail and sequencing on these projects will be provided including strategies and cost estimates. Prioritization of projects will include more stakeholder involvement. Another CAG meeting may be scheduled to get additional feedback. A public open house will also be scheduled to get feedback on targets and potential projects.