Meeting Notes
North Ottawa Project Team
August 31, 2022 at 10:00 AM
LOCATION: WENDELL COMMUNITY CENTER

Project Team Members

SWCD Representative	Randy Larson	
Landowners	Dominic Blume	Jordan Schneeberger **[absent]**
County Commissioners	Eric Klindt **[absent]**	Bill LaValley
DNR Representatives	Nick Brown	Christine Herwig
BdSWD Board Managers	Ben Brutlag **[absent]**	John Kapphahn

Also Present:
Troy Fridgen, Engineer Technician & North Ottawa Operations
Linda Vavra, BdSWD Board President and Alternate
Jamie Beyer, BdSWD Administrator

Introductions
Introductions were made.

Signed Statements of Commitment
Signed statements of Project Team Commitment were signed and collected.

Operations & Repair Update: Flows
Fridgen provided an update of spring and summer operations. Aggressive, but controlled, releases were needed this spring to stay even with incoming floodwaters – there were three late spring storm events, two of which were classified as FEMA disasters. Over the summer, the Impoundment has received little inflow. Historical documents from the Impoundment declare that a steady 5 cfs will be provided downstream. The Impoundment does not have any equipment to measure outlet flows, so Fridgen is not confident in how actual releases compare to the 5 cfs standard. District Engineer Chad Engels has been contacted to provide a flow test. Brown stated that there has been discussion within DNR as to where the 5 cfs standard came into existence, and a feeling that the standard may not need to be overly rigid – Brown says the standard is not reflective of natural conditions. Kapphahn agreed that a fixed standard may not make sense. Beaver removal is needed, but interest from area trappers has been low.

The District has been approached by at least two downstream landowners who are interested in receiving water for subsurface irrigation and livestock drinking supplies from Judicial Ditch #2.

The District graveled the center road at North Ottawa.

Brown stated that sago pondweed is present in B4, and that the sago pondweed grows well in turbid water. The sago pondweed is preferred by ducks.

Operations & Repair Update: Japanese Millet
Kapphahn reported that he could not secure as much millet seed as he wanted to plant A3 – supply is limited due to the large number of acres in the region being put into prevent plant. Prior to planting, A3 was weedy – the weeds were sprayed and the land worked (no bill for the land working yet). Millet has 155,000 seeds per pound; seeding was done at 33 pounds per acre, with marked test rows seeded at 22

pounds per acre. Brown recommended that, since the millet is being used to suppress weeds and the crop isn't being used for crop production, that a minimum planting rate be used in the future. Kapphahn stated that 33 pounds per acre is the recommended rate. Staff considered broadcasting the seed, but it seemed economical to have Traverse SWCD use a drill ($2,500) to plant ½" – ¾" deep. Broadcast planting would also have required dragging or rolling. Seeds had excellent soil contact – the millet emerged within 4 days of planting.

Kapphahn recommended harvesting a portion of the millet in order to have seed stock for next year, at an estimated cost of $20/acre. The seed would need to be cleaned. It is unclear how long the seed would be viable for future use beyond next year. Larson stated that one advantage to using the millet is to prevent the chance of having outside and/or invasive weed seed in the future mix. Discussion compared the use of Japanese millet to last year's extensive tillage, spray, and rye cover crop. The rye was planted thinner, and ultimately died anyway under spring floodwaters. Brown added that decaying grasses promote invertebrates, which brings ducks and shorebirds. Kapphahn stated that it is important to suppress water hemp weed growth, because water hemp seeds can float on water and travel downstream. Larson added that barnyard grass growth is extensive in the impoundment, and will be controlled by the millet crop.

Kapphahn proposed the harvest of 40 acres of Japanese millet and leaving 60 acres. Kapphahn stated that the physical act of combining the millet will distribute more seed on the ground, and likely reseed. If the millet had been planted earlier, the seed would have more time to grow before fall migration. As it stands now, harvest would likely be October 1st. Herwig stated that there would be benefits for ducks if harvest could be done in strips across the field. Fridgen stated that the east side of A3 is high – the cell gets deeper moving to the west. Brown recommended that as much of the unharvested crop be flooded as possible, that the District combine the east side. Herwig asked if swaths from the 33-pound and 22-pound seedings could be compared for yield.

Operations & Repair Update: Cell Inlets/Outlets

Fridgen described problems associated with existing oak stop logs. The stop logs become heavy when saturated, swell, and some have been damaged by beavers. Fridgen is targeting for improvement Impoundment gates that get used the most. Aluminum stop logs were constructed and installed last year, and this year, a new screw gate was installed. Brown explained that stop logs are awakward to manipulate and are used to set a cell elevation; stop logs are added or pulled, and staff can walk away while cell water levels fall to the top stop log elevation. In contrast, screw gates are easier to operate but usually draw water from the bottom of a cell – which requires staff to monitor elevations and close the screw gate once the desired elevation is achieved. Fridgen stated that the Impoundment features concrete spillways on either side of an outlet, so if water in one cell gets too high, it will flow to the next cell rather than damage levees. The inlet to the cell can then be closed. LaValley asked if it would be possible to add a cover and insulate cell outlet equipment, similar to a sewer pond control structure.

Upcoming Fall Operations

Fridgen will have road gates installed this fall to prevent future damage to roads.

Fridgen reported that he saw American avocets nesting in the Impoundment.

Beyer stated that the Agassiz Impoundment had completed a cattail removal study that appears to have worked – it involved mowing and burning and spraying and drowning the plants. Brown stated that if

the cattails are actively growing, if you can mow them (might need a marshmaster) and then flood them to control future growth.

Fridgen asked members to consider at what depth cells should be kept. Brown recommended enough water to float a duck.

Road Signs
Herwig explained aspects of the Pine to Prairie program, which involves two different membership levels (usually used by a city, county or economic development authority) to promote tourism. Membership is not required to have a location identified on the Pine to Prairie map (last revised in 2019), and the program provides two road signs and a geotag for visitors to find the location. Herwig stated that visitors sometimes have a hard time identifying the North Ottawa Impoundment because the physical structure reflects a subtle landscape change. Herwig recommended that staff put together a better map for the Impoundment. LaValley offered to host access to the map on the Grant County website. Herwig added that the map should also be titled and search engine tagged, "Tintah Impoundment."

Other
Kapphahn asked if the Impoundment could be featured with Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine. Herwig affirmed that it could, and stated that the whole process could take a year.

Herwig offered to share a bird presentation that she has been giving based on data collected by Brown and a technician who visited the Impoundment for a period of 3 years.

Committee Members discussed possible funding opportunities to construct permanent bathroom facilities, including: LCCMR, DEED, Explore MN, Grant County Economic Development. Herwig recommended that the District put together a brochure encouraging donations to a building drive. Committee members asked where a site could be located?

Agricultural Lease
Committee members reviewed the current agricultural lease. Beyer stated that most of the terms are boilerplate and are required and reviewed by the Minnesota Management and Business Office. Committee members stated support for a 3-year lease as opposed to 1- or 2-year leases. The longer lease term results in higher land rent and also provides a continuum of landowner care.

Next Meeting
Project Team members requested a meeting following agricultural lease bid approval so that a budget can be set.