

**St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group  
Meeting Minutes  
City of Havre - Basement Conference Room  
Thursday, April 13, 2023**

**Attendees In-Person**

Kristal Fox, Greg Jergeson, Ken Kiemele, Chris Klobofski, Gerald Lunak, Marko Manoukian, Bob Nelson, Jennifer Patrick, Dave Peterson, Stefnie Redding, Wade Jones, Steve Darlington, Robert Bruskotter, Cheryl Ulmer, Bob Sivertsen, Kristi Peterson

**Attendees via Teams**

Katie Devlin, Joanne Harmon Curry, Lt. Gov. Kristen Juras, Autumn Coleman, Ann Kulcyk, Jeff Pattison

1. Lieutenant Governor Kristen Juras, Co-Chair called the meeting to order.
2. Comments by Marko Manoukian, Co-Chair
  - a. Marko asked for introductions of those attending online and in the room.
3. Welcome SMRWG Coordinator Dave Peterson
  - a. Dave and Kristi Peterson from KP Marketing & Management were officially introduced and welcomed. KP Marketing & Management was awarded the DNRC contract for the SMRWG Coordinator Position. Dave will be the Coordinator and Kristi will support the group with various tasks.
  - b. The coordinator job description was provided to the group. Kristi explained that the job description reflects the job duties listed in the contract.
  - c. Marko asked Dave to make additional comments about his appointment as the United States Co-Chair of the Public Advisory Group (PAG) for the International St. Mary's Milk River Study Board (ISMMSB) and the upcoming meeting on May 2, 2023, in Havre, MT. Dave said that he would send an invite to the group. Marko talked about the advantage of the continuity with Dave taking over as the coordinator for the SMRWG after his time as a SMRWG board member. Dave has been on the board since its inception. He said that it was also advantageous to have Dave as the PAG Co-Chair on the ISMMRSB as he sat on the Montana/Alberta Joint Study Commission as a board member with Randy Reed. Marko, Jennifer, Greg, Bob and Jeff Pattison also sit as members on the PAG for the SMRWG.
  - d. Greg Jergeson asked questions about the DNRC contract for the coordinator position and voiced concerns regarding the amount of the contract (\$100,000/year) and whether that would be enough in light of the amount of work listed in the job description.
  - e. Stefnie Redding and Autumn Coleman shared the floor to address the SMRWG budget, including a contract amendment from June 2022, where the contract was increased by \$150,000. The available funds totaled \$450,000, and the \$100,000 contract was funded out of that money. Stefnie and Autumn agreed that they may need to review this for clarity. Marko said that would be task #1 for the group moving forward.

- f. Dave Peterson commented that he hoped that he and Kristi could help field questions and take on coordination efforts that Jenn and Marko have historically taken upon themselves to do for the group. He encouraged the group to call him with questions or needs in the future.
        - g. Lt. Gov. Kristen Juras thanked Jenn and Marko for their efforts in the past.
- 4. Review and Approve Proposed Agenda
  - a. The agenda was approved.
- 5. Review and Approve Minutes from June 28, 2022 Meeting
  - a. The minutes were not approved. Jenn and Marko will review the minutes and present them to the group at the next meeting.
- 6. Financial Update - Bear Paw Development
  - a. Stefnie Redding said that Montana Water Resources was requesting our membership dues for their services. Jenn Patrick said that Mike Murphy is doing an excellent job at the legislative session and that she is getting updates from him on a daily basis. The group agreed to pay the \$3,000 membership fee.
  - b. Stephanie said that she would call Autumn Coleman to review the contract amount and the budget for SMRWG.
- 7. Tribal Updates
  - a. Blackfeet Tribe

Gerald Lunak gave an update on what is going on with the Blackfeet Water Compact. The enforceable date for the settlement is July of 2025 and until then, the tribe can only request 50% of the settlement. The tribe is busy with purchasing property and working on several projects with the settlement money. He also stated that the Council is very appreciative of all the support of the project. He presented a letter to the SMRWG stating effective April 13, 2023, he will be stepping down as the board member for the SMRWG and his replacement will be Deputy Director Kwebb Galbreath. Gerald will continue as the Director of the Blackfeet Water Department and continue to assist with SMRWG activities as needed.
  - b. Fort Belknap
    - i. FBIC 2023 Water Settlement Bill – Joanne stated that the Tribe is working with the Department of Interior on reducing the cost of the bill. Changes include changing of the plan for the gas-fired power plant, reducing the Lake Elwell potable water project to just the southern portion of the reservation. Removal of the Granell lands and a number of parcels for Federal lands. Part of the bill requests \$275 million for the complete restoration of the St. Mary's Diversion Project.
    - ii. Letter of Support – The FBIC is asking for a letter of support from the Group on the bill. The Group gave a thumbs up for Dave to write of letter of support.
- 8. Legislative Updates
  - a. Federal
    - i. Cheryl Ulmer from Sen. Jon Tester's office shared legislators are working on the updated federal funding of \$144 million for the Milk River Project. They are pushing to complete the cost share study and legislation on the ability to pay.

- ii. Robert Bruskotter from Sen. Steve Daines' office shared the same sentiments on the funding and legislation work. He said they are committed to get this project funded with a cost share that the irrigators can afford.
- b. State
- i. As of April 26, 2023, the following outlines the status of House Bills 6 and 8 regarding funding for the Milk River Project:
    1. Rep. Paul Tuss, Sen. Mike Lang, and Rep. Mike Hopkins continue to push for grant funding for the Milk River Project.
    2. House Bill 6 - There is \$26 million appropriated in grant funding to the St. Mary's Siphon Replacement Project.
    3. House Bill 8 - This Bill includes the reauthorized \$40 million that was appropriated in the 67<sup>th</sup> legislature. A loan of \$40 million at 3%, or the rate at which the state bonds are sold, whichever is lower, for up to 30 years is appropriated to the St. Mary's Diversion Project. An additional \$26 million loan is appropriated to the Milk River Joint Board of Control for the project stakeholder cost share for the Milk River Repair Projects. The interest rate on this loan is 3% or the rate at which the state bonds are sold, whichever is lower.

## 9. Agency Updates

- a. Milk River Joint Board
  - i. Jenn Patrick updated the group on the two-year environmental impact study the Joint Board is executing. She said that the study should help all parties to understand and appreciate the impact the project has on Tribal lands and culture across northern Montana. The Tribes will be involved throughout the project and so far discussions focused on the benefits and issues for the Tribes and how to mitigate any negative impact. All those involved are very appreciative of this effort and hope that it will create a collaborative relationship as the projects move forward.
- b. Bureau of Reclamation
  - i. Steve Darlington talked about Fresno Safety of Dams Project and the cost being \$77 million for the work. It is a three-year project and MW Construction was awarded the project. They will be Phase 1 of the project this spring. There should be no impact to access at Fresno. Phase 2 will begin next summer. Phase 2 will affect access as additional work will be done to tie into the dam spillway. Havre Sand and Gravel will provide the materials for the work on the dam. Because of the amount of material needed, the public needs to be aware of the high volume of truck traffic that will be happening in the area starting in May. The material will be coming from the Hockett pit south of Highway 2 and moved to the staging area at Fresno.
  - ii. The BOR Deputy Commissioner, along with Congressional Representatives, will be in Montana to tour the St. Mary's Project, Blackfeet Reservation, along with the NCRW Water Treatment Facility at Tiber Dam on April 24-25, 2023.
  - iii. The St. Mary Environmental Analysis is currently out for public comment. There will be a public meeting on Apr. 19, 2023.

- iv. Steve shared a video of the St. Mary Diversion Dam project. He walked the group through the project design and said that it is 98% complete at this time. The video can be found at <https://youtu.be/4bnBHamVbwg>.
    - b. DNRC
      - i. They will work with Stefnie at Bear Paw on the remaining \$350,000 in the DNRC grant funding. This money is available for updating the work plan.
    - c. International St. Mary Milk River Study Board
      - i. There will be a Town Hall Meeting at the Best Western Plus Havre Inn and Suites on May 2, 2023 for the ISMMRSB to update the public on their progress, work plan, and timeline of their studies through 2024. Dave reminded everyone to get the word out for the meeting as it is important for the Board to get input from everyone, including the public. The meeting will be from 6 – 8 PM. The board will also be meeting with the PAG members in the morning from 8:30 – 12:00 PM.
    - d. NRCS – No updates.
    - e. Other Updates – None.
- 10. Public Comment – None
- 11. Membership Update
  - i. Process Agreement – Dave and Kristi will work on updating the group membership list.
  - ii. Each member of the group should have an alternate that will attend meetings if needed.
- 12. Next Scheduled Meeting
  - i. We will confirm a date that will work for Lt. Gov. Juras and Marko during the week of May 22, 2023.
- 13. Meeting was adjourned.