

SMRWG Meeting Minutes

June 28, 2022

The St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group met on June 28, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. at the Havre City Hall in the Basement Conference Room. A list of attendees is attached to these minutes.

1. Lt. Governor Juras called the meeting to order.
2. Introductions
 - a. Marko Manoukian welcomed everyone and introductions in the room and online were made. In addition to those in attendance, online guests were Lt. Governor Kristen Juras, Cheryl Ulmer (Sen. Tester), Ryan Newman (BOR), Steve Dalby (FWP Glasgow), and Autumn Coleman (DNRC).
3. The agenda was approved with the addition of “2023 State Legislature” under Item 6. The March 6, 2022, minutes were approved as presented.
4. The Financial update was approved.
5. Ability to Pay Study.
 - a. Steve Darlington said there will be a policy review in July, along with an economic discussion.
 - b. Cheryl Ulmer mentioned Energy and Water Commissioner Tooten.
 - c. Lt. Gov. Juras Budrow last month, will expedite and send letter this week.
 - d. Ryan Newman said he did recognize the Ability to Pay study is delayed. He will confer with the state and Senator Tester by July. The team is committed to getting this done, but some members are divisive.
 - e. Marko mentioned that the State budget will have a surplus of more than \$2 billion dollars. He proposed asking the State for \$100 million for the St. Mary/Milk River construction, possibly for the siphons. Lt. Gov. Juras agreed that revenue looks good. She said if you are going to ask, designate a legislator and get it in the hopper.
 - f. Jeff asked if ARPA was repurposing. Autumn said it has six categories, not sewer and water, and diversion does not fit. Dave said even though drinking water or mixing zones do not qualify. Autumn said drinking water sources and storage do not qualify. Dave asked about the city diversion and treatment plant. Autumn said the treatment plant qualifies. She also mentioned water and sewer funds have been allocated.
 - g. Robert for Senator Daines said that Senator Daines and Feinstein, along with others, sent a letter to Treasury regarding the purpose of ARPA and whether it was for water, including reservoirs and dams. The treasury did not respond.

- h. Greg asked if ARPA would free up other money in the State budget. He thinks it is something we should argue for.

6. Coordinator Position

- a. Jenn discussed the coordinator position.
- b. Autumn, Jeff, and Greg comprise the committee. It includes three entities: Joint Board, St. Mary Rehabilitation, and the Milk River Watershed Alliance.
- c. We have four conservation districts Greg, Ken, and Jeff represented. They work on many things, not just weeds and clean up along the Milk.
- d. Job description would be a contracted person or company. May not be just one person and they may hire out. We can mesh the entity into this person, and they will do outreach to the public. The person or company will report to Ann and be an information hub.
- e. Jeff said there is one purpose, five Conservation Districts in alliance in May of 2022, you could walk across the Milk. The HJ 7 resolution showed unity of state message.
- f. Greg complimented Jenn and Autumn it will be more work than payment. He said they could handle IT and outreach and represent the interest of the three groups.
- g. Lt. Gov. Juras asked about a job description and responsibilities. She also asked about funding.
- h. Jenn said there would be \$150,000 from Milk River Watershed Alliance and another \$35,000. The next step is the request for proposal, meet about the job description, form the hiring committee, and use different pots of money.
- i. Miles asked if it would be full time. They still need to get an answer on that.
- j. Jenn, it will be an information hub as we spend \$200 million in the basin over the next several years (Fresno safety of dams and diversion structure). There are lots of meetings and information to get out.
- k. Lt. Gov. Juras asked about contracting with St. Mary Working Group and what other contract with MRWA? Funding or a contract project.
- l. Jeff said NRCS is partner. With a Watershed Plan, we qualify for PL 566 funding. Milk River Watershed Alliance \$50,000. Line item with NRCS from \$35,000 up to \$100,000 with NRCS.
- m. Jenn said to run the contract through Bear Paw. Better fiscal reporting. MOU with DNRC.

7. Fort Belknap Update

- a. Kristal reported that the Belknap Water Compact has been negotiating with the Department of the Interior. Andrew Werk joined the Water Team.

- b. Andrew described the Water Team and negotiations with the DOI, State and delegations. The same discussion ensued regarding keep communicating and mitigation and they should get a bill in this session. They still need help with the bill.
- c. Dolores Plumage asked about Mr. Belcourt and coordinator position needs. She reviewed the purpose, Ability to Pay, MRWA, tribal confusion, CSKT bill, coordination committee, and having communications in the paper weekly. There are two committees formed in the Fort Belknap compact. They have a job description working with the tribes.
- d. Kristal responded there is a website and announcements made for the public. Negotiations are private. Contact her directly.

8. Other Updates

- a. Dave is leaving his job with the City. Jeff said to apply for the coordinator position.
- b. Robert reported on late May hearing on cost share as written and the \$54 million. He discussed the drought and that maybe bill will see markup.
- c. Jenn reported that the release date for the Milk River should be July 6 or 7. The turn on date is up to 25 days from 15 days. IJC Study Board toured the Canadian side the week prior. This week they will tour US side.
- d. Kristal reported a New Diversion Dam engineer, BIA.
- e. Wade thought the BOR did a good job one world from the entire group.
- f. Miles asked about letter of intent that includes the 60% - 40% split. Jenn said there may be a revision and that DNRC has a report.
- g. Cheryl reported that she, Robert, and Henry met Rob, Lt. Gov. Juras, and State representatives.

9. Board of Reclamation

- a. Steve said that Fresno has undergone Acquisition Review. In August, there was a 60-day bid and technical report proposal. It will be awarded late winter and they will dig dirt in May 2023. They need more clarity on cost. They are just starting discussions on cost of the spillway which will begin in 2025. Repayment contracts are available. Users pick preferred repayment on \$77 million, \$11.5 million for beneficiaries. Diversion dam is 60% design. It will be sent to various reviewers. There are 110 drawings. Plan In Hand Review includes permitting, TARO, USFWS, and diversion dam. There are also mitigation requirements during construction. Draft will be done in early August 2023. Industry Day late August 2023, virtual vs in-person. Estimated at \$65 million. End of March 2024, construction to begin.
- b. Jeff asked about Canadian constriction materials vs the Buy American Act. Has there been a comparison of a batch plant vs Canadian concrete?

10. Senator Lang asked about the July IJC meeting and if could there be a CA-USA trade.

11. Ann mentioned the Contract BP and the change of goal in that contract.
12. Autumn talked about the next steps for a coordinator.
13. Jenn said NRCS/BOR completed MOU and NRCS Watershed Plan.
14. Miles asked if all three groups agreed to the coordinator position.
15. Jenn discussed a tour.
16. Meeting was adjourned.