Meeting Summary 8-3-17
Jack Lauer, MNDNR Fisheries and Scott Sparlin, CCMR Executive Director
10:45 AM to 12:15 PM DNR Regional Headquarters, New Ulm, MN

The purpose of the meeting was to explore action ideas regarding two of the Minnesota River Congress' adopted and prioritized policy statements. This was done as a follow up meeting and recommendations from a prior meeting with MNDNR Fisheries staff in the upper part of the Minnesota Basin.

The first policy statement resolution reads as follows:
Streams Flow Control Adopted

Be it resolved, that the Minnesota River Congress: Recommends all Federal, State, Tribal, local and non-Government entities who work with any aspect of natural resources which affect the Minnesota River system to increase and support current efforts to implement practices which currently exist such as managed drainage and other conservation drainage techniques, which will decrease wildly fluctuating rate flows in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd order streams that feed the Minnesota River System. And furthermore, to aggressively seek adequate human and financial resources required to do so by appointing one state agency as the lead agency responsible for coordinating a unified initiative to accomplish these actions collectively.

After a thorough discussion, these are the potential action ideas which bubbled to the top given the various areas of responsibility and chains of command for each entity. These will be pursued by the appropriate Minnesota River Congress Interest Network team leaders and members.

- Discuss with key SWCD staff (some have been identified) about the idea of having a **"Conservation Consultant"** embedded in each county in the basin (Jack and I both agreed to start this). A champion of this potential initiative who is a crop consultant and farmer has already been identified (Steve Sodeman). His expertise would be critical moving forward and he will be contacted for support. Close attention would need to be paid on how and who to hire. These consultants would be a person who has the full comprehensive grasp of the diversity of farm operations, as well as all programs and options for each type of situation they would be confronted with and suggest opportunities or make recommendations to the land owner. They would need to possess a unique set of social skills that would be welcomed by land owners and preferably have some agricultural background. It was even discussed as to having this be a curriculum within the University systems to develop people with the unique set of skills and talent needed, attained through coursework of conservation biology, hydrology, wildlife, agricultural sciences, and natural resources management, economics, and policy. The consultants would be designated to check in with all farmers in the county on how things were going, then if asked, be able to give advice and walk the land with them to determine what options could be undertaken. Being

advantageous to both their operation and local water quality/quantity integrity would be a priority. Their work would be primarily in the field to make positive relationships with the producers and provide outreach tools for land management opportunities. They would be a communication bridge and not that part of the current SWCD staff, but would however work with SWCD staff to get land practices implemented on a larger scale.

- A potential cost for this initiative would be about $120,000 per year per county; salary, benefits, fleet, and supplies. It could be a smaller such as a 5 to 10 county area to start.
- Funding could come from Minnesota's Legacy - Clean Water Fund.
- **The lead agency for this effort should be BWSR** and someone will need to contact Ex. Dir. John Jaschke about the possibility of support for this. This may need to come from BWSR staff. We should also suggest a unit be created within BWSR to undertake this initiative.
- The Congress should work with Mark Dittrich at MDA to develop more and varied public messaging about their efforts to promote conservation/managed drainage components such as bio-reactors etc.
- Continue to step up media efforts and tell the story and lessons learned.
- Lastly, Jack suggested bringing in a subject matter expert from all government entities for a smaller in-person meeting directed at this specific resolution to help clarify areas of responsibility, by agencies, and ask for additional ideas for actions in this regard.

The second policy statement resolution reads as follows:

Waters Connectivity Adopted

Be it resolved that The Minnesota River Congress urges all Federal, State, Tribal, local and non-Government entities who are involved in natural resource management and oversight to research and identify existing plans which address connectivity issues and laws regarding 1st, 2nd and 3rd order streams and adopt or incorporate and implement such an existing plan which does so and further recommend that the entities dedicate the adequate human and financial resources to accomplish those actions. Furthermore, if it is found no such plan exists within the aforementioned entities which incorporates a plan to restore connectivity of all potential fish spawning habitats in the Minnesota River System, then direct the MNDNR to bring the entities together to create one and implement it in addition to dedicating the adequate human and financial resources to accomplish that set of actions.

- After an examination and discussion of the above resolution Jack brought up several points. He revealed that there is an existing habitat plan from 2013 within the MN DNR Section of Fisheries that this is applicable too.

http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fisheries/index.html. He also stated that there are additional plans relating directly to connectivity not only in the plan but elsewhere.

- Dam removal continues to be a priority for the agency and LGUs as they are working to reconnect as much of the stream system as they can. He cited projects such as High Island Lake and Freeborn Lake, the latter is the headwater source of the Le Sueur River and is funded as a collaborative lake restoration and dam modification project to be implemented this fall. Another huge project has finally commenced at the Marsh Lake outlet, whereby a variable crest dam is being modified to facilitate drawdowns to rehabilate Marsh Lake habitat, fish and wildlife, and a re-route of the Pomme de Terre River into its natural channel. These along with the most recent three slated dams for the Cottonwood River are in process. There are other agencies such as MNDOT which also have a role to play in culverts, roads and bridges and replacement thereof. We should contact Brian Nerbonne with MN DNR Section of Fisheries in St. Paul for stream connectivity ideas and priority areas.

- A problem exists with the very limited monitoring surveys within the MNDNR and MPCA when it comes to the tributaries. MNDNR funding is very limited and in some cases, does not exist to allocate resources and fisheries staff to accomplish desired survey work on southern Minnesota streams. I suggested that this might me an opportunity for citizen and student bio-monitoring on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd order streams. This is an action the Minnesota River Congress can initiate with key partners such as the IWLA, Friends of the Minnesota Valley and others.

- The MNDNR Section of Fisheries did recently receive a 3-year $500,000 grant from the LCCMR to complete a phase 1 study by 2019 which includes river areas bluff to bluff. It's titled, *Enhancing Understanding of the Minnesota River Ecosystem.* This would include oxbow lakes and streams within the floodplain itself
- A discussion about floodplain impoundments created by dike walls designed to protect crop production which have since went out of production was undertaken. A number of these exist and some have areas where water comes in but cannot fluctuate with the natural rise and fall of the water levels in the river. No strategy exists to address this situation at the present. It was suggested that additional targeted removal and breach management of the dike wall water entry and exit points should be considered in these instances enhancing potential spawning and repopulation of the main stem. Simply re-connecting the natural river floodplain.