

Big Sandy Area Lakes Watershed Management Project
Executive Council & Technical Team Meeting Minutes
May 12, 2021

Attendance: John C. Hooper, Aitkin County; Ramona Hooper, McGregor Township; Carmen Rinta, Round Lake/Tamarack; Al Rinta, Tamarack Sno-Flyers; Frank Turnock, Aitkin Co. SWCD; Richard Beatty, Big Sandy Lake Association; Dianne Knoblen, SWHIM; Gary Peterson, Carlton County; Joni Torgerson, Talon Metals; Barb Dahl, Carlton Co. SWCD; Melanie Bomier, Carlton SWCD

1. The meeting was called to order at 2:00 pm. Introductions were made. The agenda was approved as presented. M/S/C Carmen Rinta / Al Rinta.
 2. The April 2021 meeting minutes were reviewed and approved as presented. M/S/C Ramona Hooper / Frank Turnock.
 3. A financial report for the month of April 2021 was shared. Cost Share Funding through the CWF Stormwater Management Grant remains. Total expenses for the spring newsletter and mailing came to \$3,208.53, with \$1,484.03 for Postmaster – mailing, \$1,634.65 for printing and \$89.85 for mailing labels. The newsletter was funded through several grants including: \$500 from Lake Country Power, \$2,250 from the Aitkin Co AIS Prevention Grant and \$458.53 from the Carlton County Clean Water Fund grant. The report was approved as presented M/S/C Gary Peterson / Frank Turnock.
 4. Brian Goldner and Joni Torgerson from Talon Metals Corps and Kennecott Exploration respectively presented to the group. Since their last presentation there have been several updates. Talon is now the operator and has grown since taking ownership from 7 to 54 employees. Talon has purchased a drill rather than relying on contractors. They are in an intensive drilling phase, with 60 holes and about 6.8 miles of drill core collections since August 2020. Their interest is in the nickel market for the U.S. battery production/electric vehicle market. Talon has raised \$35 million for exploration work. They are also ramping up their environmental work, with 19 surface water testing sites (including Big Sandy Lake) and 12 ground water testing wells. Previously they monitored quarterly, but they will be ramping up to every other month. They are also starting to monitor water flow between aquifers and adding more water quality parameters to test in their ground and surface water samples. All their data is available upon request (Joni Torgerson is the contact). They have an open-door policy for rig operation and their core shed. The Big Sandy Lake Association is planning to coordinate with Talon on getting surface water data and future monitoring efforts.
4. Old Business:
- 4.1. MPCA / EPA Section 319 Small Watersheds Focus Program: Melanie Bomier reported that we have not heard from MPCA with an update. Janet Smude did reach out before the meeting, and we hope to have an update in June.
 - 4.2. Cromwell Stormwater Runoff Management Projects Update: Melanie Bomier reported that the Hedin project is scheduled to begin construction later this month.
 - 4.3. 2021 Aitkin County AIS Education / Prevention Grant: Melanie Bomier and Barb Dahl reported on the Crowell – Wright school program. The 4th and 5th grade classes heard presentations on Aquatic Invasive Species, water quality, and watersheds. We were lucky to have good weather so presentations could be outside. The students also enjoyed a pizza party afterwards. Students came up with a t-shirt design based on what they learned, and the group voted on the top 2 t-shirt designs for each class.

4.4. 2021 Spring Newsletter: Janet Smude reported (via written correspondence) that the newsletter was sent out on April 15th – right after the last meeting. We were able to send it before the annual bulk mailing permit expired, so we saved that permit fee. We did have to include a “Return Service Requested” statement. All of the newsletters with bad addresses were returned. There was quite a stack. We had to pay a fee for this, so it balanced out not needing the bulk permit fee. Comments have been good. The Aitkin SWCD saw many plant sales thanks to that information being included. She has talked on the phone with several landowners about their shorelines, and met with one landowner on Big Sandy last week who is interested in a shoreland buffer.

5. New Business: No new business was reported.

6. Working Session:

6.1. Sub Watershed Project Reports:

6.1.1. SWHIM: No updates

6.1.2. Sandy Lake: Richard Beatty reported that Big Sandy Lake Association received a DNR grant to treat Flowering Rush. They still need to apply for a DNR permit for treatment application. Signs are also being added to all the boat launches.

6.1.3. Sandy River: John C. Hooper shared that water levels are lower on the Sandy River since April due to low precipitation. The Aitkin Highway Department has been ditching in the McGregor area, and has been able to remove old beaver dams due to lower water. Drone photos are also being collected on the ditches.

6.1.4. Tamarack River: No report was shared.

6.1.5. Prairie Lake / River: Joe Beaupre reported (via written correspondence) that the Lake Association is working with DNR to get a grant to reclaim some fish spawning habitat that has been overcome with silt over the years. Ice fishing activity over the winter was very busy compared to the past couple years. The 2020 loon nesting comprised only two nesting pairs. One of four chicks survived to fall. Lake levels are down quite a bit due to low precipitation, and clarity levels are good.

7. Agenda Additions: Carmen Rinta reported that they applied for a DNR permit to apply copper sulfate to control swimmers itch, and they were approved. Round Lake Association is also talking about applying for a permit. The permit costs \$8 and the treatment costs \$1 per pound.

Gary Peterson and Melanie Bomier shared information on the Local Government Water Roundtable and future One Watershed, One Plan efforts. If anyone has suggestions on these efforts, Gary encouraged people to bring ideas to him to share with the Local Government Roundtable.

8. The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday June 9th, at 2:00 pm. The meeting will be held at the Cromwell Pavilion. Janet Smude will invite a researcher to share buffalo fish information at the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 pm. M/S/ Dianne Knoblen / Ramona Hooper.