



Voluntary Stewardship Program

Work Group Meeting, Tuesday, June 27, 2023

Attendees: Ben Floyd, Delaini Disher, Elsa Bowen, Ron Mielke, Craig Madsen, Valerie Vissia, Melissa MacKelvie, Jo Gilchrist, and Rex Harder.

This meeting was virtual. All attendees participated via Zoom or phone call.

This meeting was called to order to give an update on cost-share projects, the new budget for the next biennium, and the current biennial report. The meeting started at 7 pm with Ben reading the agenda.

Delaini and Elsa gave a brief monitoring update and overview of the current cost share projects, mentioning that all have been completed and approved, and landowners are ready to be paid. Delaini shared that the Mielke Livestock Watering Facility had been completed as had the Sieverkropp Grassed Waterway and asked if there was a motion to approve their cost share. Ron made the motion to approve the payment, Rex seconded; motion passed.

Elsa provided details regarding the new budget and discussed the cost share dollar amount listed for individual producers. She asked the group if they thought the \$50k allocated to this task was enough, considering rising costs for watering facilities, which are the most highly requested cost share project. Rex agreed that increasing this dollar amount may be beneficial. Ron asked about the cultural resources budget, which Elsa explained goes toward cultural resource surveys if necessary on ground-breaking projects. Ben expanded on WhiteBluffs Inc.'s role in the contracted services budget, explaining that they are responsible for handling the 2- and 5-year reports, advising on equipment purchases and monitoring strategies, and helping to enhance and expand monitoring and outreach efforts. Ron moved to approve the budget as presented and Rex seconded; the motion passed.

Elsa shared and explained a list of potential cost share projects made by Elayne Hovde. Of a proposed 18, shovel-ready projects, 12 were for watering facilities. The group was also asked if any revisions to the 2019 project ranking system should be made, and discussed what those may be. Elsa let the group know that as the ranking system works now, a lot of projects have similar rankings. The group suggested adding "readiness to proceed" to the ranking system to increase the chance of projects that are shovel-ready being approved. Craig mentioned adding criteria for overall environmental improvement or mutual benefits from a project, and agreed to develop a criteria to bring forward at the next meeting. Val mentioned the new applicant criteria having little determining factor on most projects, and Ben suggested adding the "readiness to proceed" item to this criteria. The group agreed that the District will rank the current potential project list for the next meeting with the existing ranking system before making any changes.

Ben briefly went over the 2021-2023 biennium report draft. He the workgroup to send any recent photos and project descriptions from their own or nearby properties by July 14th. For the agricultural viability portion of the report, he asked which successful practices and concerns had not been highlighted that the workgroup would like to add. The group will consider which practices should be added and revisit the topic at the next meeting. The draft report will be sent to the workgroup by July 7th for them to read and suggest amendments for.

A final update will be sent to the workgroup before the July meeting, including the ranked proposed projects. Additionally, Elsa mentioned the upcoming request for qualifications (RFQ). These will be brought to the upcoming meeting as well.

Ben proposed a meeting for July 25th and asked about any preferences surrounding the meeting time. The group concurred that keeping the 7pm start time would be convenient.

The meeting adjourned at 7:48pm and the **next meeting is scheduled for July 25, 2023 at 7:00 pm (subject to change).**