Our Missouri Waters Lower Missouri watershed meeting notes

February 6, 2017 at Valentine Hall in Starkenburg, MO

1. The February 6, 2017 meeting held in Starkenburg, MO kicked off with presentations given by Aaron Young, Sustainability Planning Manager at East-West Gateway Council of Governments, Tracy Haag, Missouri Department of Natural Resources and Rusty Lee with University of Missouri Extension program. The presentation outlined the purpose of the Our Missouri Waters program, water quality and water pollution issues in the Lower Missouri River watershed and the progress so far that producers have made in improving water quality using programs provided by MU extension.

2. Panel #1 consisting of Rusty Lee from MU Extension, Tammy Teeter from Natural Resource Conservation Service and Jennifer Hoggatt from MO Department of Natural Resources presented their perspectives on soil erosion, water quality, wastewater management and the services that exist to help deal with those issues. Points of discussion with audience members included:

- In review of educational programs with the Missouri Extension, 90% of farmers know about NRCS program. 90% of farmers in Montgomery County are participating in some voluntary program
- Voluntary programs are incentive based which is different from a grant. Support has to be for erosion control and there has been a move way from farm ponds.
- DNR is interested in conversations with rural communities, especially concerned to help small towns which have pollution control issues with sewage treatment. DNR will work with communities to address a path forward for the next 10-20 years and seeks innovative alternatives to meet community needs.
- Nutrient trading – this may be a solution to small town challenges – credits can be traded or purchased, and DNR is working on a framework for trading.
- How can we communicate better about what is happening in other parts of the watershed so that we can find common ground to bring issues to the attention of state reps or senators?

3. Panel #2 consisting of Matt Hunn from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Steven Engemann from Missouri River Towing and Hermann Sand and Gravel; and John Noltensmeyer from Tri-County Levee District presented their perspectives on navigation of the river and water level issues related to tributaries, levees, flood fighting, and maintenance. Points of discussion with audience members included:

- Levee districts operate under the Plan for Reclamation. Emergency management issues are paramount. The Corps is working on a federal program to address rebuilding levees impacted by changing regulations. Funds have recently become available to assist levee districts.
- The Corps has heard the notches in wing dams are a problem for landowners losing land because of them
- Is there coordination between DNR and the Corps or DNR and other federal agencies? For example, the Corps seems to dump dirt in the MO River which can't be good for water quality.

- During flooding events, the levees managed by levee districts could be helping water quality by slowing the water coming into the River from the watershed and causing the floodwaters to drop polluted sediment before entering the River
- Compliance of water quality standards should be an attainable goal, not an aim for perfection
- The Corps is charged with inspecting levees at least every other year. The St. Louis district inspects every year for safety.
- National levee database www.nld.usace.army.mil – trying to set up a state level committee with DNR.
- The maintenance costs of levees is going up but no one wants to pay for them.
- Herman Sand and Gravel dredges 6 million tons of sand on the Missouri River, where there is typically a 20-30 foot layer of sand moving on the bottom of the river. This volume of sand (85 million tons below the dams) is 25% of what was there pre-dams.
- Tows carry dry cargo goods mostly from St. Louis to Kansas City and back-- fertilizer up and grain back – the towing season officially is April 1 to December 1, but they will tow whenever there is adequate water (at least 9 feet)
- There is a need a for a more reliable river channel (there is less water in the system now, post 2004) because of changes in the Master Manual for river management. There used to be more towing on the river, it peaked in the 1980s but declined due to less water in the system. Changes are now being proposed for the Master Manual. The Corps stopped their dredging because the channel became self-sustaining. The towing industry is trying to work with the Corps on low water navigating. A consistent water level is needed to invest in ports.
- Bank stabilization along the MO River is an issue.
- Navigation and recreation can share the river as long as there is communication.

3. Panel #3 consisting of Ernst Uthlaut from the Montgomery County Farm Bureau and Gary Heldt, Farm Bureau and Hermann Chamber of Commerce, presented their perspectives on protecting soil, erosion control, land rights, fertilizer and food production in the watershed. Points of discussion with audience members included:

- Farmers are using best practices and there have been significant changes in the last decade to reduce fertilizer and pesticide use. One example is the use of grid sampling to limit applications – only applying what the soil needs. Montgomery County is a leading county in the use of most agricultural programs. 80-90% of farms use no till farming.
- Education will help bring the other 10-20% along, especially when they see the successes of their neighbors.
- Personal property rights remain a big issue – people do not like being told how to manage their land. Many regulations push up costs of farming – which is a marginal business anyway.
- Water quality regulations are a big concern.
- One issue is that farmers cannot maintain channels in their streams by removing gravel or stabilizing stream banks, unless they apply for and receive a permit. Even a tree that falls and blocks a creek cannot be removed, if it is pushing the creek out into a field and damaging crops. There is a need for more flexibility with routine maintenance of streams near or through fields.
- Need more information on stream channel maintenance

- Farmers want to do a good job with management of land and water, but regulations constrain them.
- Land application – waste needs to be dealt with by those producing it. It's probably okay to spread it on land.
- Fertilizer use in urban neighborhoods a problem.

Other Comments:

An attendee expressed concern that the Our Missouri Waters meetings would lead to regulations or some kind of plan. DNR explained that these meetings are to improve communication and develop effective relations with people who live in the watershed.

Another expressed concern that these meetings are expensive and a waste of tax dollars. They wish to see funds used effectively.

Another concern was that often people do not hear about a new government initiative until it is all planned. Sharing information early in the process is important.

One comment was that there was good discussion and good dialogue

One said that as an Ag family we use, live and play on our ground. We don't want polluted waters around us and we are doing the practices to keep it clean. We don't need more regulations.

One said I think it was informative for the urban people about agricultural practices.