

Citizen Meeting – Amboy Café August 27, 2013 Meeting Notes



Overview

On a hot Tuesday August 27, 2013, 35 citizens crowded into the Amboy cottage cafe to discuss the future possibilities for organizing an ongoing entity to keep harnessing and advancing the citizen energy that has emerged over the past year in the LeSueur River Watershed.

The citizens broke into four small groups and rotated from one group to another to discuss the following questions:

#1 - What type of citizen organization do we want to create?

#2 – How does this citizen group relate with other existing efforts (e.g. GBERBA, SWCDs)?

#3 – How do we involve existing farm organizations?

#4 – What ideas do you have for celebratory kickoff event at McGowan’s Farm?

Small group meetings were held in the café and nearby historic building including a restored train depot and school house, and the *Frame It Gallery* next door.

Lively and substantive discussions were held and the basic take aways from the meeting are that there is citizen energy to start a new watershed based organization; there are opportunities to work more closely with established agencies like GBERBA and SWCDs. The [Minnesota Agricultural Water Resource Center](#) (MAWRC) is currently organizing multi-county groups of farmers that could eventually connect and collaborate with the citizen led organization. It was decided to plan a celebration at [McGowan’s Farm](#) on Sept 24, 4-7 p.m.

After the small group discussions, the citizens gathered for homemade pie served by the Amboy Cafe. Participants all agreed it was a good night of connection and conversation between farmers, recreational users of the river, homeowners and agencies. The group is looking forward to meeting again to move the ideas generated by the meeting a little further down the road in a "build the road by walking" approach. Thank you to Lisa Lindberg and Steve Kittelson from the Amboy Cottage Café for their heroic efforts making the meeting a success.

Agenda

5:00 -6:00	Dinner at Amboy Café for those interested
6:00-6:30	People go to 1 of 4 small group discussions
	Move to first break out session #1
6:30-7:00	Move to next break out session #2
7:00-7:30	Move to next break out session #3
7:30-8:00	Move to next break out session #4
8:00-8:30	Everyone move back to café for large group discussion and pie

#1 - What type of citizen organization do we want to create?

Table host: Mark Bosacker

Should it be a non profit? Join an existing or create a new one?

- Everyone favors starting our own nonprofit group as opposed to being a satellite of another nonprofit
- An independent group is preferred to focus on interests we have here in the watershed
- Some sort of citizen led nonprofit group is the best way to keep the citizens going into the future
- Benefit of a 501c3 is that you can take money from anyone

Pros

- Ability to make a cohesive group with people who have very different abilities and interests
- 501c3 creates a culture

Cons

- Need to be aware of special interests. Should be independent from other groups (e.g. commodity groups, other environmental groups)
- Need to think about the comfort zone of participants? Must have differing views present including agricultural community and environmentalists
- Le Sueur has significant water quality challenges - one of the most degraded watersheds in the state

How does Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance ([GBERBA](#)) fit in?

- Can connect with SWCDs, counties, other conservation partners
- GBERBA has a joint powers with Le Sueur, Blue Earth, Watonwan watersheds
- GBERBA differs from proposed 501c3 due to more citizen involvement.

Next Steps

- Small, 6-8 people come together to create bylaws and send it out to larger group
- Need to settle over some type of structure
- Can learn from other watershed groups, watershed districts, [Shell Rock River Watershed](#)
- Can build on recreational opportunities of the river as we move forward

Volunteers

Jack McGowan, Mark Krosch, Boyd Krimer, Becky and Don Waskosky

#2 – How does this citizen group relate with other existing efforts (e.g. GBERBA, SWCDs)?

Table Host: Chris Hughes & David Bucklin

Suggestions

- Commitment to continue to meet! (Less humid evening however)
- Need a safe place to express your point of view
- Continue to meet with paid staff in watershed
- Keep meeting with a target that leads to action in watershed
- Demonstrations and peer-to-peer work most effective. Knowledge comes from farmers; hard to pass on information through government agencies
- Farmers showing other farmers what they are doing
- Farmer exchange program to get experience from farm to farm
- More demonstration sites and safe places to talk
- Need to see more examples of projects that work
- Have meetings near hands-on project or potential project
- Have landowners present how a project works
- Show example of restoration of drained lakes
- More demonstrations of constructed wetlands. If we do more demonstrations, then more people will come
- Urban stormwater projects can make a difference
- Stabilizing the river, toe-wood design using trees. We used to use trees in the river for fire wood – this kept river clean

Reflections & Questions

- Rivers flood much quicker and more often – too much drainage
- Science doesn't buy trust
- Farmland costs too much; farmers want to farm every inch of land
- Government requires too much from farmers to build conservation practices
- Projects don't have to be so big
- Farmers don't want to deal with government; too much information needed from farmers
- MPCA wants a bigger citizen involvement
- Need to know the language of the organization you are applying to
- Weak link in this particular group is lack of landowners
- How can we connect with agencies to see if our goals align?
- Where are there inefficiencies or overlap?
- What are the concrete ways we can use citizen energy working with existing paid staff in the watershed?
- How can we be useful to a SWCD?
- Can we organize by watershed when government is arranged by county?
- Will rivers stabilize on their own? (with all of the extra drainage?)

Next Steps

- Take the next step from here – have a joint voice
- More action-oriented agenda would help; need action now!

- Le Sueur is just getting started
- Learn more about where we go for money. Government needs to do better at getting information out about where money is available
- Getting the word out - Local cafes have much knowledge and Talk/radio programs are a good route
- People need to be invited sometimes
- Active Groups include: Prairie group, Dark House Assn.; Blue Earth Pheasants Inc.; Key City Conservation Club, lake associations meet, other watershed groups?

#3 – How do we involve existing farm organizations?

Table Hosts: Patrick Moore and Emily Javens

What groups or individuals would be beneficial to connect with?

- Needs data collection. Look at member organizations
- MAWRC, 19 member organization
- Corn growers, soybean growers, some statewide leaders are in this watershed
- Pork producers
- Crop advisor network
- Discovery Farms – Hager Farm (starting small, multi-county farmer groups)
- Earl Ziegler – Soybean growers
- Dave Ward – Corn growers
- Kevin Papp, Kathy Guse – Farm Bureau
- [Green Star Farms Initiative](#) (voluntary, farmer-led educational program with an online self-assessment of 32 questions)

Who is the messenger?

- Farmers should be the messengers
- Jeremy Geske -- watershed education specialist from the MAWRC talked about how he is working to organize multi-county groups of farmers who care about water quality -- the first of which will be in the LeSueur/Blue Earth area. These farm groups first need to meet on their own and establish their identity but there is potential down the road for a citizen led group to collaborate with this farmer led group in the watershed.

Issues

- The current system of incentives and payments is broken, can't compete. Cost share money is going back due to high prices of commodities and land
- Discussed role of money in all of this - Practices are not cost effective
- Need more targeting because of less money
- Some farmers say that we don't need more money and programs with good research, market and the landowner ethics will drive change
- Crop advisors are a driving force
- Need to be working at the ditch -- subwatershed scale to bring neighbors together to discuss these issues and to advance solutions

#4 – What ideas do you have for celebratory kickoff event at McGowan’s Farm?

Table Host: Kim Musser

When

- Last Tuesday in September or early October
- Peak color is 2-3rd week in Sept, bugs might be better later however
- Need to consider harvest time

Time

- 4 pm – 7 pm (gets dark about 6:30 then)

Concept

- Family friendly river celebration, a potluck with an array of activities
- Near the river bank. (Sheep Barn can be Plan B)
- Celebrate the river and explain why people love the watershed
- Learn about the river
- Make it better because we live here
- Citizen group – recruiting people to join, get plugged in
- Gathering for people interested in a Le Sueur River Watershed group
- Fall colors
- Do you want to be part of a newly forming citizen group?
- What is a watershed? Downstream impacts?
- Make it FUN!

Facilities

- Will be held at [Jack McGowan’s Farm](#) in Blue Earth County near Mankato
- Sheep Barn can hold 150-200 no problem. Jack has a 25 foot serving table.
- Can use many buildings (cabins, etc)

Food

- Open fire – Chestnuts roasting, sweet corn on BBQ
- Boston Baked Beans
- Hog roast – need farmer to donate. Jack has a roaster. Would need to get started by 10 AM or earlier. This is an all day project.
- Ducks?

Activities

- Have many interactive events
- Fishing, canoeing, tubing? Possible? (Need to check flow and temperature)
- Big canoe- paddling and outing club?
- Water safety tips – bring a life vest that fits
- MN Aqua Program – Deb Grebner 359-6049 (Jack Lauer suggested)
- DNR Fisheries – Fish shocking demo – Craig Soupier (Jon Lore suggested)
- Weeds-Invasive Species – Takara Blacksmith 507-276-2826 (also a blacksmith, Jack McGowan suggested)
- Wood Duck Boxes – Ducks Unlimited (Jack Lauer suggested)

- Butterflies – Scott Moeller (Gustavus Arboretum)
- Polka Music
- Music in saloon (has pianos) but a bit far from site
- Mussel/shell collecting
- Macroinvertebrates and mussels by river – Scott Kudelka
- Kids playing by river
- Treasure hunt by river

Advertising

Radio

- KTOE – 8:45-9AM Tuesdays, Gene Braam has a show, recommends coming to talk about it one week in advance of event
- Country Radio Station - DJ and Lisa (Rick Moore has contacts)
- PING science teachers in the watershed about events
- MPR
- KMSU

Newspapers

- Home Magazine has events section
- Mapleton Messenger - Boyd Krimer has an Outdoor column, Tyler is contact
- Madison Lake Times
- Eagle Lake
- New Richland
- Lafayette Ledger
- Lake Crystal paper
- Amboy – Red Cow Gazette
- Free Press – John Cross, Tim Krohn, Rob Murry (Jack McGowan has contact)

Local Groups

- Prairie Enthusiasts
- Boy and Girl Scouts – (Twin Council in Mankato)

TV

- PSAs

Web and Email

- Greater Mankato Area Events Page
- Minnesota River Weekly Update

Outreach, Messaging

- Generally need to publicize what scientists and citizens have learned about the river
- Get articles in the paper explaining all of this
- Use the local press to get the word out about what is going on with the river, what have people already done, what needs to be done
- Highlight recreational opportunities of the river as we move forward
- Paint a picture of what the goals of the group are to engage people

- Clearly explain the problem. Is muddy water the norm?
- Tell a story of what the water was like in the 40s and 50s compared to now. Jack McGowan told a story about when he was a kid he used to trap crappies & bluegill. Randy Schindler also has good stories of growing up by the river. Before the dam on the Blue Earth River was removed, Blue Earth had best Walleye fishing
- Explain that the Minnesota River is seeing improvements. Smallmouth bass are back in the river. Paddlefish are back.
- People don't realize what is coming next if things don't change... infrastructure costs will be a lot if the river continues to expand
- Need to explain how the altered hydrology has impacted fish (some can't reproduce)

Volunteers

Kristi Thompson, Jack McGowan, Boyd Krimer, Chantil Kahler Royer, Becky Waskosky, Anne Queenan