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Quarterly Activities Report for 10/07 through 12/07

Submitted by Theresa Smydra

- 1) **FULL GROUP MEETING.** Spent a significant amount of time organizing and preparing for full-group meeting held Nov 7. I took full responsibility for this meeting which was attended by approximately 40 people from 22 organizations. We missed seeing some of familiar faces but also saw new ones. Many thanks to those who presented at that meeting. I noticed that during lunch folks were taking advantage of the gathering to network and know each other. Just another benefit of this meeting.
- 2) **NEWSLETTER.** The other milestone I reached was to complete and mail out my first newsletter in December. This entailed another significant learning process but believe the next one will be much easier to compile as long as I have articles submitted on a timely basis. I created the necessary mailing labels which I add to as I work with additional owners.
- 3) **EVENTS.** Events attended during Q4 learning about current and future activities and projects:
 - a. CF & USACE boat trip and site visits @ Wynot – October 11
 - b. NEPA training - October 30
 - c. Real estate meeting @ Yankton – November 8
 - d. Meeting w/ SDFGP and FWS @ Pierre – November 13
 - e. Judging FFA Natural Resource speeches @ Bloomfield – December 5
 - f. Gas-line tower drop @ Ponca – December 7
 - g. WRP meetings/site visits - Oct 3, Nov 1, Nov 15, Dec 12
- 4) **LANDOWNERS.** Made approximately 34 landowner contacts associated with 12 different properties. This includes 6 contacts with 3 new landowners this quarter. In addition to the contacts were various research and follow-up activities for a number of reasons.
 - a. Still actively pursuing one fee-title transaction With this particular property, it's farming concentration, exceptional grain prices, and sky rocketing land prices is keeping this process always one or two steps behind. In Nebraska land values statewide have increased nearly 20%. Currently working with an NGO who can cover more aspects of a land purchase such as tax strategy ideas, etc.
 - b. Initiated landowner meetings that resulted in a EQIP contract in Holt County with the Legacy program and 5-6 acres of quail buffers in Charles Mix County.
 - c. Seeing interest continue in easements, from sloughing to rec river, to backwater enhancement, to youth development. Due to budget constraints, funds are very limited thus programs not well supported. I still believe that easements are our best opportunity to protect river frontage. I am currently pursuing other avenues for procuring and supporting easements.

- d. We have several real estate proposals in limbo waiting for funding and further action.
- 5) **PUBLIC MEETING.** Started planning for March public meeting currently planned for March 13 at the 4-H building in Yankton. I am currently gathering suggestion from similar activities to insure good attendance. The favorable response I have received so far has been very encouraging.
- 6) **WEBSITE.** It is live! Tim Cowman with the Missouri River Institute continues to update the site with information as I pass it along to him and together I think we have organized an effective website. This continues to be a work in process and any suggestions would be encouraged. We hope to have most current information included on the site by March 1.
- 7) **WRP.** A key easement opportunity for the MNRR including the beautiful Niobrara. Interest in the WRP program increases and applications continue to come in. I am training to function more as a team leader for these applications which are due Mid February and as well as contract maintenance.
- 8) **MOU.** I have completed the new MOU, and getting annual funding agreements signed. I want to get these completed by the end of February. Thanks for the assistance by the involved agencies.
- 9) **ESH.** Have been monitoring current projects that have been underway since last fall. Lately due to the bitter cold, work had come to a standstill. I have gotten several comments from nearby landowners as they watch this process with interest. Beginning work associated with 08 and 09 projects such as potential staging areas and locale considerations.
- 10) **COTTONWOODS.** Been involved with the planning of a modeling study associated with Mark Dixons research on the 39 & 59. Working to identify potential restoration/regeneration sites for possible future study and projects.
- 11) **GRANTS.** Looking into identifying funding sources for future projects that have been hampered by budget cuts/restrictions. NAWCA is a possibility but a long term project that requires many man-hours to complete. Matches are a challenge as well.
- 12) **NRCS.** Continue to attend trainings where I can. Many changes are occurring due new farm bill(?), new soil labeling system and organization, new programs administration programs, etc.
- 13) **MNRR PROMOTION.** Becoming more involved in the promoting stewardship and appreciation of the natural resources in this unique stretch of river like being involved with projects like the water trail project, boat cleanup, river clean-up etc.
- 14) **PROGRESS.** Initiated landowner meeting that have lead to the enrollment of 37.8 acres of quail buffer in Charles Mix County and application of 997 acres of cedar removal along the Niobrara in Holt County.
- 15) **MONITOR.** Continually monitor activities possibly affecting the MNRR reach. This is often discussed by the agencies/organizations and I need to be aware of what is transpiring. Also continually look for other ideas have led to success stories that could be used up in this reach.