

**Missouri River Futures**  
**Full-Group Meeting Summary**  
**Thursday, November 19, 2009**  
**Ponca State Park**  
**MNRR Resource and Education Center**

The meeting started with introductions amongst the participants which included many new folks. Theresa began the meeting by presenting info on the many activities MRF has been involved with the past year including several types of easement actions, fee title transactions, cost-share programs, annual workshop, newsletters and a visit with the NRCS Regional Conservationist Tom Christensen.

Jerry Smith was unable to attend due to illness but Theresa provided some basic information on the recent USACE purchases along the MNRR both of which have been in process for over two years. Theresa had initiated the talks with the owners of the Vermillion property now called the Hagg/Knutson tract. Galen Jons gave some additional information pertaining to the interim management plans for the Nebraska and South Dakota properties. The goal is to restore back to as original conditions possible including cedar tree control and restoration of native grass stands. With the extra time, Theresa decided to have Steve Grube talk about how he initiated the discussions with the Nebraska landowner. Clint Miller followed by speaking about the role that the Conservation Fund played by first purchasing the property from the private landowner as an intermediary then selling the property to the Corps.

Galen went on to give the group an update on the recovery efforts for the tern and plover and emergent sandbar habitat (ESH) construction along the MNRR. 600 acres of sandbars have been constructed since 2004. Also since then, 600 acres of natural and constructed sandbars have been sprayed to hinder the encroachment of vegetation which limits tern and plover use. Galen provided data that indicated that constructed sandbars had positive effects for both endangered species. Two sandbars were constructed this fall at river mile 781 and 781.4.

Steve Grube spoke about the latest news in the WREP/WRP effort, focusing on how well it fit with the goals of the Missouri River Futures members identified in 2007. Based on these goals, the request was made to Steve Chick to expand the WREP eligibility area to the MNRR which happened in 2009. Now properties along the Nebraska Missouri River floodplain are eligible. He explained the program briefly and how successful it was in FY2009. 49 landowners decided to enroll their land for a total of 5800 acres. Most of these were along the Niobrara River and Bazile Creek but some significant ones were also enrolled along the Missouri River. He also covered the reorganization of WRP teams in Nebraska.

Tim Welker, pallid sturgeon research head for USACE, arrived to the MNRR area recently replacing Mark Drobish at the Yankton office. He provided an overview of the pallid data and research being done. The propagation program is a short term component of pallid recovery. Two of 102 fish caught in 2008 from Gavin's to Ft. Randall were potentially "wild" fish. One of 69 was "wild" from Gavin's to Ponca. The 2000 BiOp provides direction of population

assessment. Analysis indicates that around 27,000 pallid sturgeons now live in the lower reach of the MR. This averages around 33 fish per mile.

The group broke for lunch which was catered by Crossroads Catering. This is a great time for everyone to meet and greet new folks and touch base with previous acquaintances and colleagues.

Sam Schelhaas and Marty Pennock, wildlife conservation officers for the SD Game Fish and Parks were first on the afternoon agenda. They noted that they were striving to become more visible and accepted in the public eye. They reviewed programs that SD GF&P promote and support which includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and CHAP and some of their activities which unfortunately included search and rescue efforts. They also talked about the properties they own and manage along the MNRR. They have had great success at leasing private ground for public hunting along the river.

Doug Smith with the NE Nebraska Weed Management Area (NNWMA) provided an overview of the WMA's efforts for 2009. He noted that a great mix of agencies and organizations are involved in these cooperative efforts. As an example, a search and destroy effort for salt cedar (tamarisk) this summer yielded 35 participants who found 33 salt cedar plants in the 39 mile stretch. He also noted that ¼ of the acres of known leafy spurge is located within the 8 county WMA.

Mike Madell, Superintendent for the NPS, began by introducing their new staff which included Gia Wagner (replacing Wayne Werkmeister), and Anne Steffen-Doherty (replacing George Bernt) and Heidi, their new administrative assistant. He mentioned some of their activities in 2009 then dropped a bombshell by saying that he was leaving his position here for a new job in the Southern US.

Paul Lepisto, Izaak Walton League, spoke about the activities he has been involved with in the area which included the 1<sup>st</sup> MR Watershed Educational Festival for NE and SD schools, the annual Clean Boat Event emphasizing the importance of cleaning out your boat when pulling out, the annual MR Clean-Up effort with the National Park Service and River Relief, and briefly about his involvement with the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC).

Howard Paul, president of the Missouri River Sedimentation Action Coalition, gave us a brief update on his progress reducing the sediment loads into the mainstream lakes. Section 204 authorizes the Corps to develop regional sedimentation plans. The Governor simply needs to send ½ page requesting the Corps to write the plan. Steve Chick (NRCS) has agreed to complete the gathering and assessment of the data that addresses sedimentation from tributaries feeding Niobrara and eventually the Missouri.

Tim Cowman, director of Missouri River Institute, began by touching on research initiatives occurring in 2009. MRI provides research opportunities for undergrads & graduate students at USD. They are now in their second year of offering "Intro to River Studies" addressing ecology, water quality, geomorphology, cultural history, water law, and policy and management. MRI activities planned for 2010 are 1) Ecosystem indicator species study, 2) Cultural History, 3)

summer workshop for teachers. He encouraged all to attend the annual Research Symposium at the Missouri River Institute which will be held the spring of 2010.

John Deppe and Jeff Stewart, both RC&D coordinators for South Dakota, provided their progress on the watershed projects funded by 319 grants per the Clean Water Act. They have been highly successful in their progress of implementing practices on the land which are aimed at reducing non-point pollution into the tributaries and ultimately into the Missouri River.

Jim Petersen, president of the Missouri River Bank Stabilization Assoc., began by reminding everyone that the purpose of the Wild & Scenic designation for this river was to provide funding for bank stabilization. He feels that the ESH projects divert river flows into the banks, causing substantial erosion. He again mentioned the article in Nebraska History wrote by Dan Spegel, the over-spray incident this summer, and that a handicap accessible dock had been installed at Clay County Park near Vermillion.

Carol Hale, with the USFWS, then gave us an update on her agencies' activities. She explained the differences between Wayne Nelson-Stastny's position and hers, both having the same supervisor in Mike Olsen, MR coordinator for USFWS. Carol recently became the liaison for NPS and currently has an office in the new NPS facility in Yankton. She is the co-lead for the adaptive management effort in the Missouri River Recovery Program and serves as support staff for the 70 member MRRIC. Wayne is the Chairman of the MR Natural Resource Committee, co-lead for the MRERP effort, and the Services' support for MORAST. She also spoke of the Service's new initiative to develop cooperatives that will be cooperating with other agencies to get consistency in efforts in priority areas.

Theresa had the attending Deron Reusch, Steve Auch, and mark Rolfing, SD NRCS district conservationists, talk about their programs in the MNRR area which include EQIP, WHIP, and CSP to name a few. Of interest to the MNRR in particular is the WHIP program targeting cedar removal and control. Within the same program, grass seeding and other resource improvement practices can be incorporated to improve wildlife habitat.

Overall, we had 50-51 participants in and out of the meeting throughout the day, representing 22 different organizations. Of these, there were representatives from 7 federal, 4 state, 9 local, and 2 political groups/agencies.