

Devils Lake Outlet Management Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 11, 2022; 1:00 pm

In Person/Virtual Meeting

Committee Members Present:

Andrea Travnicek, Director, ND Water Resources

John Paczkowski, State Engineer

Steve Best, Planning and Education Division, ND Water Resources

Jon Kelsch, Director of Water Development Division, ND Water Resources

Ben Varnson, Nelson County

Theresa Haugen for Dana Vanderbosch MN Representative

Elliot Brown for Nicole Armstrong, Manitoba, Canada

Joel Anderson, Towner County

Bruce Grubb, City of Fargo

Tim Meyer, City of Lisbon

Douglas Sr. Yankton, Spirit Lake Nation

Michael Steffan, Benson County

Bill Mertens, Ramsey County

Mary Lee Neilson, City of Valley City

Cindy Schwehr, Barnes County

Jeff Frith, Devils Lake Basin Joint Water Resource Board

Dick Johnson, City of Devils Lake

Representative Dennis Johnson for ND Senator Dave Oehlke

Representative Bill Devlin, ND House of Representatives

Committee Members Absent:

Kenneth Vein, City of Grand Forks

Nicole Armstrong, Manitoba, Canada

Senator Dave Oehlke, ND State Senate

Dana Vanderbosch MN Representative

Introduction

Committee Chairman Andrea Travnicek and Director of ND Water Resources called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm. She provided opening remarks. Jon Kelsch, ND Water Resources (DWR) Water Development Division Director, informed that 3 committee member terms will be expiring in July 2022.

Presentation

A PowerPoint titled "Devils Lake Outlet Advisory Update 2022" was presented. The presentation is available on the ND Water Resources' Devils Lake Outlet webpage. **Jon Kelsch** presented introductory and background information. Last year the lake precipitation was just under average at 17.67 inches. The past four years has been drier which has contributed to the lower lake elevation.

Amanda Lee, Service Hydrologist for the National Weather Service in Grand Forks, presented a climatological and forecast update. She also presented gage data information and an update regarding the recently updated climate normals which reflect the time period from October 2020 through May 2022. She indicated that the most recent lake simulation is indicating a 50 percent chance that the lake could reach an elevation of 1,551 feet by November with the current pumping schedule at 350 cfs.

Jon Kelsch presented the 2021 operational summary. The water quality should improve as a result of the large lake inflows and base flow in the river. There was some metal that showed up in one of the standpipes so there is one pump that needs to be replaced before this pumping season.

Karl Rockeman, Water Quality Division Director for the ND Department of Environmental Quality, presented information about water quality during the 2021 outlet operating season. White Rock Dam, at the Bois De Sioux River, was discharged in mid-October to increase the flood storage capacity which caused the sulfate to spike in November.

Jon Kelsch finished the presentation by providing information on the current Outlet operations. This year's plan is to run the East End Outlet and the West End Outlet while keeping discharges balanced so that water quality can be met. The maximum flow in the Sheyenne cannot not exceed 1,000 cfs. with outlet discharges. The flow is gaged at Cooperstown before it goes into Lake Ashtabula. We will continue to monitor throughout the year as conditions change.

Committee Member Status Update

Bruce Grubb

The farming people he has spoken with are very happy for the resort owners and people using the boat launch areas. The docks and launches are in. Everyone agrees that the pumps should run. Some of the farmers are happy with the significant rain in the pasture. He wished we could have had a report from the Game and Fish.

Jeff Frith

All the basin counties reported that they are extremely wet and saturated. There is lots of water to be moved and encourage the operation of the outlets to as much extent as possible. Looking at the inflows at 99 percentile that Amanda gave us is 625,000 acre foot increase of inflows and should surpass 2011 by 30,000 acre feet of inflows. We increase 33,000 - 35,000 acres within the basin.

Joel Anderson

Last year was the driest summer ever seen and now we are looking at record inflows this spring. Several years ago, the National Guard was ordered to clean out the natural plug which never happened. As the water went up, we were told that we cannot clean out the plug and was told the water needs to drain naturally. Would like to see the lake level maintained at 1,446. He suggests the natural plug outlet needs to get cleaned out. He appreciates the dike around Devils Lake as the city would be under water if it was not in place. Currently there is 168,000 acres under water. He shared concerns about an additional 28,000 acres under water with the increased water level. Most of the land under water consists of private property owners. He suggests the best solution is to clean out the natural outlet. He would like to see the structure control the lake level at 1,446.

Tim Meyer

Understands the farmers that have lost land but he represents downstream entities. Two weeks ago, Lisbon reached a fourth record crest. Now that the lake is going up, we need to keep the pumps running to keep the downstream communities from being flooded all at once.

Rep. Dennis Johnson

It is important to note that water should be pumped as much and as long as we can to help recover land. We need to keep balance between economic development and the farmers but do not forget the farmers.

Ben Varnson

Inquired about the minimum outlet intake elevation of 1,445 feet and inquired if there was something causing blockage of the flow.

Jon Kelsch

Noted that the West End Outlet was constructed with a minimum intake elevation of 1,445 feet. He added that the flow into Round Lake has some restricted flow due to culverts. The East End Outlet is built to go down to 1,446.

Mayor Dick Johnson of Devils Lake

Supports getting as much water off the farmland as they can. Substantial efforts to remove the natural plug with the Corp of Engineers but has not happened. Pump as much water for as long as they can to recover farmland. He is very thankful that the outlets are running and that the state has them well managed. Important to note that water should be pumped as much and as long as we can to help recover farmland and to prevent damage downstream and improve the water quality. There are so many other issues downstream that need to be considered without having those pumps running.

Representative Dennis Johnson for Senator Dave Oehlke

He has heard people downstream on the Sheyenne are frustrated with as full as the river is running and concerned if they do get a 2-3 inch rain will they get any acreage or damage compensation. On the upstream, this is a real wakeup call this spring getting complaints about the levels being at record highs this year. He would like to see the water moving and fix the problem with the inlet at Round Lake is to keep the pumps primed so they can keep the water moving.

Opened Discussion for Online Member Comments:

Elliott Brown, Manitoba

Appreciates the update on water quality from last year including the sulfate numbers. Good note with lower operations last year with the drought that the sulfate levels at the border were down. No exceedance last year. Appreciates the considerations of the downstream water quality issues demonstrated in operations in starting the West End Outlet first then the East End Outlet.

Theresa Haugen for Dana Vanderbosch MN Representative

Being downstream of the Devils Lake Outlet she appreciates consideration of water quality especially in relation to sulfate total dissolved solids and all the efforts being done when waters are discharging to improve the water quality.

Opened Discussion for Public Comment:

Karen Hausmann - (Farmer near Churchs Ferry)

She appreciated their honesty that they did not think they needed to dig out the highway when the level was at 1,447 so the water could get to the pumps. They had five neighbors willing to help dig that highway so the water could get to the pumps. She stated that it was mentioned that last year the West End Outlet did have problems at 1,445. Now we are looking at higher water levels this year and she is supporting to keep

the pumps going. She suggested that the West End Outlet be updated with more capacity to pump using pipes like the East End Outlet.

Jonathan Erdstad – (Farmer)

He does not feel there has been a lot of urgency in using these pumps as emergency outlets.

Dan Webster – (Land Owner)

He indicated the emergency was over several years ago. Land is under water and keeps disappearing. He has several thousand acres he cannot get access to. Land should be bought out if it cannot be farmed.

Andrea Travnicsek appreciated the perspectives shared and reiterated that the outlet is being run as an emergency effort to get the water moved off the land so the farmers can get back in the field.

Ben Varnson asked if there would be another meeting planned.

Andrea Travnicsek informed that the Sheyenne flows are being monitored to determine when the pumps are able to be turned on. Ben inquired what constitutes another meeting. Andrea stated if any issues come up that need the committee's decision a meeting will be scheduled.

It was asked, "What is the final decision procedure for the Outlet operations?" Andrea informed that the State Water Commission we will be meeting on June 7, 2022, where the final decision will be made about the Outlet operations.

Meeting adjourned at 2:20pm.