



## **Board Spring Quarterly Meeting Thursday, January 18, 2018**

4:00-5:30 PM

Stanhope Community Room  
600 Main St Stanhope, IA 50246

Board Members Present: Jean Eells, Harold Hove, Sonia Dodd, Tanner Scheuermann, Steve Carlson, Selden Spencer, Rick Sanders

Absent: City of Ames, City of Stratford

Also present:

Tadd Stupp, Water & Wastewater operator, City of Gilbert

Penny Brown Huber, Kayla Bergman, Dan Haug, Mike Brandrup Prairie Rivers of Iowa

Pat Conrad, Emmons & Olivier Resources Inc.

Cindy Hildebrand, interested citizen

### **Welcome and Demonstrations**

Jean Eells, Chair

Eells performed two demonstrations with soil samples taken 50 feet apart, one under grass and one heavily tilled. In a slake test, soil samples are placed on a screen suspended in a container of water. The tilled soil quickly disintegrates, while the soil under grass has higher organic matter and tends to hold together. In the infiltration test, water is poured over a cup of soil. The water that comes out the drainage holes in the bottom is darker brown for the tilled soil and has higher nitrate levels, measured with a test strip.

The message is that healthy soils don't leak (don't readily leach nutrients to drain tiles or groundwater) and don't move (are resistant to erosion). Cover crops and reduced tillage can improve soil health to improve water quality and make farms more resilient to extremes in weather.

### **Introductions and Board Member Updates**

WMA Board Members

### **Review and Approve October 12, 2017 Minutes**

Sanders motioned to approve, Selden seconded. Motion carries.

### **Old Business:**

- Prairie Rivers of Iowa Watersheds Program Update
  - Squaw Creek Year in Review

Kayla Bergman, PRI

- Bergman shared a handout showing the accomplishments of PRI's Water Quality Initiative Project for 2017. 1,631 acres of cover crops, 1,060 acres of no-till, and one denitrifying bioreactor were funded. PRI held four field days with 137 attendees and two workshops with 26 participants. 16 other outreach events reached a total of 600 adults and 400 youth.
      - A board member asked how this compared to the number of acres in the watershed--146,000 acres, 118,657 acres of which are planted to row crops. The goal in the management plan is to do no-till and cover crops on 20% of the cropped acreage. At 1,631 acres of cover crops, we have reached 7% of our goal under the nutrient reduction strategy, very similar to the level of progress on a statewide basis.
      - Hove suggested that PRI attend the Farm Progress Show in Boone this August and doing soil health demonstrations. Bergman said the Practical Farmers of Iowa, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), and Iowa Learning Farms have trailers with these kinds of demonstrations.
    - Educational Program Inventory
      - Bergman shared a handout showing the educational materials that PRI has available, including Retain kits that farmers can use to test the nitrate levels coming out of tile lines.
    - Squaw Creek Water Quality Initiative Grant Continuation
      - Bergman said that PRI applied with IDALS for a three year extension to their Water Quality Initiative grant. If approved, there will be a seamless transition at the end of March from the old to the new grant. PRI will continue providing technical and financial assistance to farmers with some new special projects to promote new practices and reach specialized audiences. Water quality monitoring will continue on Squaw Creek at Lincoln Way, and PRI will distribute Retain kits for edge-of-field monitoring. The grant extension also includes a program to match farmers who are new to conservation practices with experienced mentors.
      - Hove suggested working with FFA groups. Bergman said this will be part of our educational efforts for 2018.
    - Map Selection
      - Haug showed some examples of Squaw Creek watershed maps and said that PRI has budget to print quite a few.
      - Eells said a high level of detail (roads, section numbers) are needed to be able to find her property on the map. She suggested that board members could distribute maps to schools or libraries
  - Continued Discussion of Goals and Objectives Penny Brown Huber, PRI
    - Goals from the management plan were revisited at Spring 2017 meeting. Huber said we would consider how additional goals could be incorporated into the grant extension and that this could be discussed at the next WMA meeting.
    - Eells asked if anyone would be interested in reviewing the goals and objectives. No volunteers.

## **New Business:**

- Term Timeline for Board Members (See Bylaws) Jean Eells, Chair

- Under the WMA bylaws, board members have a term of office from July 1 through June 30. Eells brought up the concern that this does not line up with the terms of office for most elected officials and that commissioners' involvement in the WMA could be cut short in January due to elections
  - Carlson said that getting a new elected official involved in the WMA by January is difficult and that it would be better to leave it
  - Sonia said the intent of the bylaws was to align the terms of office with fiscal years for the purpose of grant writing
  - Huber said she was concerned with turnover and efficient operation of the WMA, but suggested that we live with the current term structure for a while and revisit it at a later time
  - Eells concluded that there were no easy answers and that the issue would be tabled
- **Prairie Rivers of Iowa & WMA Memorandum of Understanding** Jean Eells, Chair
    - Huber said that Prairie Rivers of Iowa is the partner that handles day-to-day work of implementing the watershed management plan, but that the statute does not allow for a formal role for us. She requested clarification of PRI's role so that the WMA drives the ship.
    - Eells stated that a 28E applies only to government entities. She offered to draft a memorandum to clarify PRI's role in the partnership
    - Spencer asked for clarification on PRI's status
    - Huber said that PRI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit created in 1999. Its first major grant was a watershed project on the Raccoon River. It was originally affiliated with the NRCS as a Resource Conservation and Development serving six counties, but that source of funding dried up. PRI has expanded its reach statewide, managing the Lincoln Heritage Byway and working on Outdoor Learning Environments. PRI is mostly funded by grants and contracts rather than individual donations.
    - Scheuermann asked if PRI has a memorandum with other WMAs
    - Huber responded that we only work with this WMA and that there are no other watershed projects in the state being managed. IDALS is watching
    - Spencer said that the Story SWCD acts as a passthrough for funding from the supervisors, but that they have funded PRI to do projects in the past and would be happy to continue.
    - Eells brought up issue of efficiency when a government is part of multiple WMAs (Hamilton will be involved in Squaw, Keigley, South Fork) and questioned whether the WMA has the capacity to manage the day-to-day aspects of watershed management. She said most SWCD commissioners don't have much daytime flexibility, and that involving County Conservation Boards would make the WMAs stronger.
    - Scheuermann said that while Boone County supervisor weren't interested in being involved the WMA, he was, so having conservation board members or staff represent the county makes sense.

### **Stanhope source-water protection**

- Bergman summarized issues from source water protection meetings in Stanhope. A horse farm is located near a well head and overgrazed pasture makes well vulnerable to contamination by overland flow after heavy rain events

- Hove said that well was replaced Wednesday. It was made of plastic stuff that lasts 50 years. 50 years ago, cropping practices were different and nitrate leaching was less of a concern. There's an opportunity to do conservation with cover crops and no-till and still farm profitably but that we need to provide cost share to help with the transition.
- Hove posed question of how you make money off cover crops
- Bergman said that some cover crops can be grazed or harvested for silage. Cover crop seed and rye straw are also potential markets. She said that farmers often will test cover crops on 40 acres but that one farmer went all in. She said soil health benefits can pay off after 3-5 years.
- Spencer said the dilemma of convincing a tenant farmer to make the initial investment in conservation is something that comes up at every SWCD meeting
- Eells said the research from ISU has shown that tenants won't bring it up, so she has been focusing on women landowners. There are several ways for a landowner to get their tenant doing conservation. An extended contract with conservation practices written into it. Take less rent for a while. The landowner can provide the seed, and over time the tenant will see
- Spencer said we still have a long way to go. He saw heavy tillage and erosion along Highway 63

#### **Parking Lot:** Goals and Objectives through 2021

**Next Meeting:** April 19<sup>th</sup> @ 4 PM – Business Meeting; Location TBD (Boone Supervisors)

Eells said she intends to move things around so we can all get exposure to conservation practices. She suggested Lost Lake Farm in Hamilton County and Worle Creek by the United school in Boone County.

We may revisit the Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor when stream restoration is more advanced. Spencer said this would be valuable since bank stabilization is a common question that they get. Eells said she has access to the slide set for the project.

#### **Adjournment**

*Adjourn 5:23*

*Attendees brought water samples from their area and tested them for nitrate at the conclusion of the meeting.*