NEWS & VIEWS

RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD

FARM BILL IMPORTANT TO RED RIVER BASIN RETENTION EFFORTS

PETERTON SPEAKS TO RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY BOARD

Urging members of the Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) to "get on the ball," Congressman Collin Peterson (D-Minn) addressed the January meeting of the RRRA board with a clear message that focused on the importance of readiness for Red River Basin retention projects.

With a mission to achieve joint, comprehensive and strategic coordination of retention projects while securing federal funding to off-set local costs in the Red River Valley, the RRRA meeting attendees were an attentive audience. The RRRA is comprised of member water management organizations from North Dakota and Minnesota.

After outlining the current farm bill budget process, Peterson said he anticipated that the usual committee process may be subject to an "open rule," which is expected to allow a procedural rule in the U.S. House of Representatives to be changed during the farm bill budget process.

"There is the only entity to come to a past high-water event. Legislation is primed to increase federal funding to off-set local costs in the Red River Basin," Peterson said. "Our job is to ensure that the federal money is linked to a past high-water event." After an introduction, the two Agriculture Committee members to "please stay the course" with respect to farm bill water project funding.

Congressmen invited questions and participation from the group.

Jim Lyons, the North Dakota co-chair of the Red River Retention Authority, thanked Reps. Berg and Lucas as well as Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn) for their work to support the farm bill and stated that water retention funding was vital to people in the Red River Basin.

"My farm was surrounded by water," said Lyons, referring to a past high-water event. "Infrastructure is important" in providing flood protection, he said, imploring the two Agriculture Committee members to "please stay the course" with respect to farm bill water project funding.

EVENTS COMING UP

The next meeting of the RRWMB will be on Tuesday, February 21, 2012 at 9:30 a.m. at the Red Lake Watershed District, 1000 Pennington Ave. S., Thief River Falls, MN.

The 14th Joint Annual Conference of the Red River Watershed Management Board and the Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group will be held at the Courtyard by Marriott, Moorhead, Minnesota on March 13-14, 2012.

The Congressman concluded his comments by suggesting that RRRA supporters at the January meeting of the RRRA would do well in that competitive process if projects were ready.

The federal money is linked to flood control in the Red River Basin, which has experienced significant flooding events over the years.

The money in question is $238 million for fiscal year 2012, beginning in October. That allocation would be available to five regional water entities on a competitive basis. Those five include the RRRA, the Florida Everglades, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes and Ogallala Aquifer regions.

Peterson indicated that the RRRA would do well in that competitive process if projects were ready.

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Peterson said that the initial hope of securing $90 million for Red River Basin water projects was no longer realistic in light of the efforts in Congress to achieve significant budget cuts.

In addition the Congressman provided background on the farm bill process to date. He said that the congressional budget "Super Committee" designed to seek federal budget cuts failed apart, giving a context to the proceeding that signaled the usual committee process was less than certain. Instead, Peterson said the farm bill may be subject to an "open rule," which is a procedural rule in the U.S. House of Representatives that permits floor amendments to appropriations bills.

That, said Peterson, could lead to "all kinds of mischief."

"Go to that meeting and show grassroots support," said Peterson.

AG COMMITTEE MEMBERS BERG AND LUCAS HOST ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Although the current farm bill process is occurring in a "difficult environment" that includes an emphasis on trimming spending, Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-Okla) said "ag is the only entity to come together in a bipartisan manner to write a bill and agree to federal budget cuts."

Both Lucas and Rep. Rick Berg (D-ND) emphasized the need to come up with agriculture policy that would both engender support from diverse groups and result in a bill President Obama would sign.

Lucus and Berg held a roundtable discussion at the Fargo Holiday Inn before a group of about 30 attendees. After an introduction, the two

Reps. Rick Berg (right) and Frank Lucas (next) host a roundtable discussion in Fargo, ND.
RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

At its regularly scheduled January meeting, the RRWMB:

- Conducted the annual board organization. RRWMB officer positions are as follows: President- John Finney, Joe River Watershed District; Vice President- Orville Knottt, Red Lake Watershed District; Secretary- Jerome Deal, Bois de Sioux Watershed District; Treasurer- Dan Wilkens, Sand Hill Watershed District
- Received a report from RRWMB Administrator Naomi Erickson which included information on the 14th Joint Annual Conference to be held March 13-14 at the Courtyard by Marriott and Conference Center, Moorhead, MN and also a summary of the Red River Retention Authority Meeting which featured U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn) and his discussion on the current farm bill process in Congress.
- Received a report from Public Information Officer Jeff Nyquist that included a summary of the RRWMB Public Information Committee January meeting.
- Received a report from Project Coordinator Ron Harnack. Ron addressed the 20% flow reduction plan strategy and noted that Bois de Sioux has completed their assessment, which was done as a pilot project by the Red River Basin Commission. He also suggested that since Charlie Anderson provided the lead on that work that it would be useful to have him provide assistance to other watershed districts as they begin their individual plans.