

**Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District Meeting Minutes
October 8th, 2024 at 6:30 pm at the MFCRWD Office**

Board of Managers Present: Ruth Schaefer, Jay Hedtke (arrived at 7:07 p.m.), Jeff Gertgen, Shane Braegelman, Amanda Toutges.

Staff & Guests Present: Dan Coughlin – District Administrator; Andy Johnson – Project Manager; Jon Morales – Program Manager; Leah Melges – Office & Finance Manager; Chris Meehan – District Engineer; and John Kolb – District Attorney; Brian Weist – DLARA Board President; Mark Streed – DLARA Board Member; Bruce Moe – Diamond Lake Homeowner; Darwin Hauptli – Diamond Lake Homeowner

1. President Schaefer called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.
2. President Schaefer recited the District’s mission statement: “We exist for the protection and preservation of water quality in the Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District.”
3. Additions / Corrections to the Agenda: **A motion to approve the updated distributed agenda was made by Manager Toutges, seconded by Manager Braegelman. Motion passed unanimously.**
4. Consent Agenda
 - a. Financial Report
 - i. Finance Report
 - ii. Approval of Payables / Expenditures
 - b. Regular Board Meeting Minutes – September 10th, 2024
Motion by Manager Toutges, seconded by Manager Gertgen, to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion passed unanimously.
5. Discussion / Business Items
 - a. Review and Consideration of 2025 Aquatic Plant Management Work Plans:
 - i. Diamond Lake Aquatic Plant Management Workplan
Prior to the start of the discussion, Manager Gertgen presented a disclaimer disclosing that he owns property and a recreational resort on Diamond Lake, that he currently serves on the DLARA Board and that he will act objectively and impartially on this matter.
Diamond Lake’s workplan originated in 2016. Current updates to the workplan include an increase in the special assessment amount due to the number of growing improvement projects that the DLARA board has prioritized, potentially including a nanobubble unit. Board President Ruth Schaefer encouraged utilizing point-to-point / point-intercept surveys to increase statistical validity over the currently utilized meandered surveys. Program Manager Jon Morales added that using the BioBase software will help measure the density.
 - ii. Nest Lake Aquatic Plant Management Workplan
Nest Lake’s workplan originated in 2012. Current updates to the workplan include a decline in their special assessment amount due

to increased success in managing their aquatic invasive species thus decreasing their need for chemical weed treatment.

A motion to acknowledge and accept the Diamond Lake Aquatic Plant Management Workplan and the Nest Lake Aquatic Plant Management Workplan as presented was made by Manager Braegleman, seconded by Manager Toutges. Motion passed unanimously.

b. First Reading of Diamond In-Lake Water Quality Project Order

i. Overview of Draft

District Attorney John Kolb produced a draft Diamond In-Lake Water Quality Project Order based off the inclusion of levied funds to fund a Diamond Lake Nanobubble. The draft order could be considered following a public hearing. It was presented to the Board to authorize setting a hearing for the November meeting to present the scope of the project, what the technology is, how it will be employed in Diamond Lake and what impact it may have. Ideally, the Tadd Lake pilot project results would be available to share at that time as well.

ii. Set Public Hearing for November 12th, 2024 at 6:30 p.m.

The public hearing will be announced in the West Central Tribune, Lakes Area Review, Bonanza Valley Publication, on social media as well as the lake association communicating the hearing out to their property owners. District Administrator Dan Coughlin also noted that he would send out courtesy notices to city clerks as well. All board members were in agreement to have the hearing set for 6:30 p.m. on November 12th, 2024. It was suggested that Administrator Coughlin look into a suitable meeting space that could accommodate more people than our limited meeting room could hold and to work with President Schaefer to finalize such arrangements.

c. Spicer Proposed Downtown Development Project Discussion:

District Administrator Coughlin shared the preliminary proposal for a downtown in-fill development / re-development project that includes phase 2 ground level commercial space with residential housing above it. The City of Spicer hopes to partner with the District regarding the gravel parking lot that stands to be impactfully changed, especially due to its close proximity to Green Lake.

d. Project Updates:

Atwater Tadd Lake Pilot Project Update:

District Administrator Dan Coughlin shared collected data of Secchi disk clarity readings from Tadd and Upper Lakes. In the last two days, Tadd Lake has set a new clarity record of three feet. At the beginning of the summer both Tadd and Upper Lakes started at two feet of clarity and since then Upper Lake's clarity has diminished considerably. Coughlin's working theory of increased clarity is that due to lack of rain less nutrients have been flowing from Upper Lake into Tadd Lake, so the treatment of the lake has

been more isolated which allows for more targeted treatment by the nanobubble system. Currently the pilot project will be decommissioned on 10-31-24 and Dr. Denise Devotta, from Moleaer, is compiling the entirety of the data with the goal of having a full working draft report by the November board meeting.

e. Agenda Additions / Other Matters:

Board President Ruth Schaefer inquired if there would be DNR permits needed for a nanobubble/aerator, and if ozone would be allowed under those permits. Currently in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin DNR is not allowing the use of a nanobubble unit with ozone because it is considered a chemical pesticide. President Schaefer felt we need to clarify with the Minnesota DNR if it would be allowable. She expressed that she would not want to go through the process of acquiring a nanobubble unit to later find out that the DNR will not allow the ozone component, which is potentially what increases efficacy. Program Manager Jon Morales clarified that as of now, the DNR is viewing the nanobubble unit simply as an aerator and District Administrator Dan Coughlin shared that the Diamond Lake Nanobubble unit being proposed does not include an ozone treatment component although the system could be upgraded in the future if desired. Attorney John Kolb advised that if the proposed system does not include ozone treatment, he suggested to not “poke the bear” and ask about hypothetical ozone usage.

6. Reports & Updates

a. Administrator – Dan Coughlin:

No further reports.

b. Program Manager – Jon Morales:

Program Manager Jon Morales reported a good turnout of volunteers at the Clean the Crow event and the Pope County Water Fest education event also went well. The WPLMN contract has been finalized and sampling has resumed. He will assist in training Chloe, the new North Fork Crow River Watershed District technician. The WPLMN contract will work the same as the last round with the exception that we will be the fiscal agent for the grant this round. Morales also reported that on September 24th the Lakes Area Review published, and KARE 11 news aired, a story about the underwater drone partnership with the NLS Robotics team and the potential capabilities of the drone. Morales pointed out the potential for early AIS detection with the camera feature, as well as the ability to vary sensors to seek out specific specs of preference. Program Manager Morales ended his report with a thank you to all the volunteer samplers for the season and shared that he will be working to get all the field data entered and submitted to MPCA EQULS.

c. Project Manager – Andy Johnson:

Project Manager Andy Johnson reported that all the Diamond Lake benefits for all the parcels have been updated and sent to the county. He received a conservation grant to obtain the yearly subscription renewal to ESRI GIS at a

discounted price again. Johnson also reported that he has been working with Chris and Brady from Stantec on the next steps for CD-47, but it is weather dependent on getting the crops out of the fields. Johnson was asked by a community member to present on October 16th at 1:30 p.m. at the Atwater Community Center to the Atwater Area for Seniors group about what the watershed district does and educate them on our projects/focus. He has also been working on a project for Peace Lutheran Church for stormwater management from their parking lot that drains into their over-flow gravel parking lot. Peace's board is in favor of the project and the City of New London is being approached to potentially partner on it. Johnson ended his report highlighting that the MPCA shared out a waterfront bulletin which included an article on our District and the potential Diamond In-Lake Water Quality Project.

d. Finance Manager – Leah Melges:

Finance Manager Leah Melges shared that recent Non-Discrimination testing was conducted on our Flex Benefits Plan by CDS which resulted in passing results. The insurance checks from the League of MN Cities for the 2023 July Storm claim have been received in full. Melges also reported that the 2024 Quarter 3 quarterly payroll tax returns, both federal and state, have been filed, and that wage detail reporting still needs to be submitted but there was a formatting problem with the Banyon report which resulted in errors that need to be corrected and re-submitted. Once this wage detail reporting is submitted, then the quarterly MN Unemployment Insurance payment can be made. Lodging confirmations were received today from Grandview Lodge in Nisswa, MN for the annual MN Watersheds Conference in December and registration for the conference has also been completed for the staff and Board President. Melges ended her report sharing that she has been working on uploading necessary documentation to website for compliance.

e. District Engineer – Chris Meehan:

District Engineer Chris Meehan reiterated that it is just a waiting game at this point to start work on CD-47. He shared that the initial round of surveying, wetland delineations and core soil borings have been conducted on Lake Calhoun. Concept designs are starting to get put together and there will be a meeting on Oct 24th to look at all the “wants” of the project and determining what will fit in the scope of the project based on the available budget.

f. District Attorney – John Kolb:

No report.

g. Other Reports from Managers / Staff: No additional comments offered.

7. Public Access Forum:

DLARA President Brian Weist addressed the MFCRWD Board recapping that the Diamond Lake Nanobubble will be the focus of the November Public Hearing and based on the September meeting minutes there is split support and opposition

among the board. Weist asked what the nature of the opposition is so that they can focus on providing information to address it.

Board President Ruth Schaefer then clarified that she did not speak against the project or the science of the project, rather that she wanted reconsider its inclusion 2025 budget for now. She also expressed her belief that nanobubble technology is being sold as a cure-all for everything which is concerning to her.

Manager Gertgen took issue with the president's comment and highlighted the creation of subwatershed project area to identify and address potential nutrient input sources into Diamond Lake as evidence that the proposed system is not being presented as a "cure-all". Gertgen said the work to limit nutrients getting into lakes and streams is critically important to slow the compounding of legacy nutrients in lakes, but it does nothing to address nutrient loading issues that already exist in lakes and that's where nanobubble technology has its value.

Manager Amanda Toutges shared that she feels there are multiple projects going on all at once, the Tadd Lake Pilot Project isn't complete yet and a nanobubble unit for the New London Mill Pond is also on the table, but spending so much money right now does not seem feasible to her. She said she was not convinced the project as proposed will improve lake conditions the way that it is hoped.

District Attorney John Kolb shared that the decision needs to consider how it will benefit the whole district and that DLARA needed to help make that case. Kolb then described the process steps he has recommended for the district to follow when considering such a project.

DLARA Board Member Mark Streed commented that it is not just the Diamond Lake residents that would benefit from improving this lake and that there are other public uses of this lake that benefit the whole community.

DLARA President Brian Weist expressed his belief that if the project is not approved this year due to concerns about costs, he said he believed the board would never approve the project because inflation and other costs go up year after year so next year it would probably be an even more expensive project. He urged the members that if they were opposed to the project due to the price involved at present, they should be honest that the same issues will be at play next year and beyond.

Property owner Bruce Moe shared that the lake has never been as bad as it is now and that every effort to stop the lake's decline and improve it thus far have not worked. Doing more of the same will not produce any different results.

DLARA Board Member Mark Streed expressed his belief that though nanobubble aeration technology is a relatively new technology, the results being seen in various places in the country and world-wide have scientifically shown it can help improve lake water conditions. He asked the MFCRWD Board how long the technology needs to be around for them to believe it.

8. Adjournment: **Motion made by Manager Hedtke, seconded by Manager Gertgen to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously.**

The meeting declared adjourned by President Schaefer at 7:50 pm.

Submitted by,

Leah Melges
Recording Secretary
Office & Finance Manager