MAWD News & Legislative Update

By Ray Bohn
January 31, 2017

The MAWD Board met on Saturday, Dec. 3rd after the Annual Meeting and elected Manager Ruth Schaefer, Middle Fork Crow River WD president, Manager Jerome Deal, Boise de Sioux WD vice-president, Manager Perry Forster, Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek WD secretary, and Craig Leiser, Brown’s Creek WD treasurer. In addition, three new members were welcomed to the Board. They included Manager Peter Fjestad, Buffalo Red WD, Manager Ben Kleinwachter, Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers WD, Manager Duane Willenbring, Sauk River WD.

Thank you to those who have left the board for their invaluable service to watershed districts statewide: Lee Coe, manager Red Lake WD, Linda Vavra, manager, Boise de Sioux WD, and Larry Kuseske, manager, Sauk River WD who passed away.

The Board met again on January 13, 2017 in a workshop format to plan the calendar for the year, make committee appointments, finalize staff appointments, and determine our legislative program for the 2017 Session. Committee appointments are posted on our web site. If you are interested in serving on one of our committees in the future please let the MAWD office know and you will be put on the list for consideration.

The 2017 Legislative Program was adopted as outlined below:

MAWD 2017 Legislative Program

   - Advocate for the inclusion of $20 million for Flood Hazard Mitigation Program for statewide needs
   - Advocate for $30 million in CREP funding
   - Advocate for $10 million in Local Road Replace funding
   - Advocate for $10 million in Rim Reserve funding

2. Watershed Omnibus Bill
   - Clarify Watershed Based WCA Implementation
   - Watershed District Funding: Statutory Correction to Impose a Project Tax
   - Amend MN Open Meeting law to allow WD manager meeting participation via electronic means, both inside and outside the territorial limits of the WD and state of MN
   - Increase per diem payments to managers to $100 per day

3. Tax Issues
   - Modify Levy authority for non-Metro WD’s/Increase levy authority by adopting 103B type authority
   - Support returning to past tax breaks for conservation easements.
   - Advocate for $10 million in local government aids to counties and watershed districts to help defray the cost of the buffers enforcement program.
4. MAWD supports the recommendations of the Clean Water Council.
   - One Watershed One Plan Planning - $4.2 million
   - One Watershed One Plan Implementation - $12 million

Ray Bohn was contracted to administer MAWD and provided administrative and legislative lobbying services. This will be Ray’s last contract administering MAWD. He plans on reducing his work load in the future and ease into retirement. Peg Bohn has retired from her past duties with MAWD, but don’t be surprised if you see her helping out with events in the future or hear her voice when you call the office!

The Board also contracted with Madeleine (Maddy) Bohn to provide program management services for MAWD. She will be responsible for managing the various MAWD programs and events along with the various committees associated with the programs.

The Transition Committee has begun work on figuring out how to provide for the goals of the MAWD Strategic Plan as adopted at the Annual Meeting. Plans are to have a new administrator on board before the 2017 Annual Meeting.

The MAWD Budget committee will be working on developing a budget to meet the goals of the strategic plan as well. They hope to have recommendations ready for our March Board meeting. An announcement for a Special Meeting of MAWD membership to deal with the transition is being planned for the 2017 MAWD Summer Tour on June 21-23, 2017.

Watch for more details on the work of the Transition and Budget Committees as the Board deals with the staff transition and budget considerations.

By now all of you should have received your invite to the 2017 MAWD Legislative Reception & Breakfast on March 29-30, 2017. Please contact your legislators and ask them to join us for the Reception on March 29th or the Breakfast on the 30th. Our activities will take place at the Embassy Suites in downtown St. Paul (see info on our web page www.mnwatershed.org). Please put it on your calendar today!

MAWD Legislative Update – January 2017

Since the beginning of the 2017 Legislative Session we have been spending most of our time on the bonding bill & the buffer funding issues ... all left over from last year. The Governor laid out his bonding proposal which pretty much reflected his priorities from last year. The Senate picked up last year’s bill (SF210) and has already passed that bill out of the Capital Investment Committee to the Senate Finance Committee for action. The Senate bill reflected basically last year’s bill on steroids. See breakdown below.

With the Governor and Senate basically showing their cards on the bonding bill, everyone is wondering and working to find out what the House is planning to do on their bonding bill. There has been some talk that the House won’t even pass a bonding bill this year, but most regard that as being very unlikely.

The Tax bill from last year appears to still be play. The Governor has laid out his Tax bill (SF45). He has included the $10 million for county and watershed district enforcement buffer funding. The House has indicated that they will work with us on this appropriation. The Senate has talked about taking the same approach with the Tax bill as they did with the bonding bill ..... dust off last year’s bill and move forward. I believe overall we do have good support on the buffer enforcement funding of $10 million ... mainly because most legislators want the counties and watershed districts to handle enforcement, not the State (BWSR). AMC & MAWD have been working with BWSR and Revenue to make sure we have the
correct language on distribution of the funds, and that language will be in the governor’s tax bill when it is introduced. When the funding will begin (FY17 or 18) is still in flux and is being negotiated by us.

Several weeks ago I along with Scott Henderson, administrator of the Sauk River WD, testified to a joint committee hearing of the Environment Finance and Policy Committee and Ag Policy Committee on buffers and stressed that we needed the funding to do the job they want us to do. If we don’t get funding, it will be very difficult or impossible for some WDs to participate due to budget constraints. The AMC sent the joint committee the same message.

We continue to work up our bills in accordance with our legislative program. We will have our bills put together in the next week to ten days for introduction. We will alert you when they are ready and ask for your help to contact your legislators in regards to our bills.

On January 17 Governor Dayton signed a new Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture for $350 million in Federal funding with the state having to come up with $150 million funding match.

The 404 Assumption Study was delivered last week by BWSR and DNR. DNR & BWSR are saying not to assume the 404 authorities, but the legislators and stakeholders are not in agreement … look for a larger, more comprehensive study being done over the next year or two coming out of the leg this year with further discussions with the COE and EPA. I anticipate no immediate impacts at this time for WDs. See the complete study here: http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/wetlands/cwa_404/Minn_Section_404_Assumption_Feasibility_Study_Report_Final.pdf

Committee deadlines released last week are unusually short this session. Typical the first committee deadline is the last week of March, but this year the first committee policy deadline is on Friday, March 10, second committee policy deadline is Friday, March 17, with final Finance committee deadline by Friday, March 31. It appears they don’t want to pass much policy legislation this session.

**Major Bills of Interest**

HF (none) SF210, Sen. Senjem, Omnibus Capital Investment bill. $1.64 billion -- $976 million Bonds, $335 million net general fund, $196 million trunk Hwy bonds/cash, Misc $118 million. Also includes $11.55 million for Flood Hazard Mitigation, $4.2 million ear-marked for Cedar River WD ($1.7 M), Browns Valley ($750 M), and Ortonville ($1.8 M). The remainder is not ear-marked. $10 M is included for RIM and $5 M for local road replacement.

HF (none) SF 45, Sen. Rest, Governor’s Tax bill. Includes $10 million recommendation to fund the buffer enforcement program.