

NORTHERN COUNTIES LAND USE COORDINATING BOARD

Minutes

Thursday, February 3, 2011

Northome, Minnesota

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Past Chair Commissioner Todd Beckel with the following in attendance. Vice Chair Commissioner Chris Dahlberg assumed the chair upon his arrival and led Discussion items. (All actions of the Board were supported unanimously unless otherwise indicated.)

All Member Counties Present:

Commissioner Fritz Sobanja, Cook
Commissioner Brian McBride, Koochiching
Commissioner Rich Sve, Lake
Commissioner Todd Beckel, Lake of the Woods
Commissioner Skip Swanson, Pennington
Commissioner Chris Dahlberg, St. Louis
Commissioner Mike Forsman, St. Louis

Others Present:

Commissioner Mike Hanson, Koochiching, Con-Con Joint County Natural Resources Board
Trish Klein, Roseau County County Coordinator
Don Dewey, Itasca County
Mike Carroll, Department of Natural Resources, Bemidji
Craig Engwall, Department of Natural Resources, Grand Rapids
Douglas Skrief, NCLUCB Staff

Administrative Actions:

1. Approval of Agenda with the following additions:

1) Agencies' comprehensive plans for counties and note on MPCA statement (Carroll/State)
m. Sve s. Swanson

3. Approval of Minutes: January 6, 2011 Meeting

m. Forsman s. Sobanja

3-4. Financial Report and Bills:

The Director reported a general account balance of \$92,318.05 and a Land Use Conflict Management balance of \$15,005.28. Total accounts balance, after payment of approved expenses of \$745.20, was \$107,323.33. The Executive Director submitted an invoice for \$728.63 for one month of professional services and expense reimbursement. Added was an invoice for hall rental and refreshments for the present meeting for \$55.00.

m. Forsman s. Sve

The Director related that Comm. Raukar had pursued information from the St. Louis County auditor regarding merger of the General and Conflict Resolution funds and that Auditor Dicklich had recommended seeking out contracts from the Conflict Resolution grant projects as a starting point. The Director will search Board files for same. He added that in 2008 Comm. Fink had pursued this issue and the internal auditor of St. Louis County had recommended waiting until the next audit of the Board to combine the funds. At that time project director Deb Pile had offered to sign off on the project. An audit of the Board is due or overdue, and the Director will inquire after its timing.

Correspondence:

Invoicing of counties was completed in January.

Discussion Issues

LOCAL

1. Land Asset Management DNR Regional Director Mike Carroll reported that the pilot project in Roseau County will be expanded to other counties. The project analyzes DNR land assets and their use. Cooperative planning revolves around infrastructure and conservation and other similar issues. The more consolidated and heavily forested Northeast DNR region, under the supervision of Mr. Engwall, has also been involved. The new Commissioner of the DNR, Tom Landwehr, has assigned Mr. Carroll to head a statewide team to study land-asset management. A goal is clarification of understanding of the land base and streamlining of processes through education. (Mr. Carroll is also on the Lands Record Committee, which is close to launching a more automated records system.) There is a hope to join with NCLUCB to kick off this effort. A project definition will be completed and formal project schedule will be developed internally and then brought to the Board in the coming months. A new pilot project would follow.

Economic development is being considered, Mr. Carroll said in responding to a question of Comm. Sve. The complexity of land ownership and land use is a hurdle, but the DNR has sold some state parcels in the western part of Roseau County where consolidation was a goal. A more complex situation exists in the eastern part of the county. The state, for example, is maintaining forest roads used for transportation that might be better maintained by counties. The intent would be that with consolidation there would be higher value for development.

Mr. Engwall added that an example of better communications has occurred in Itasca County where lands were purchased or exchanged. These pilot projects may set up a structure to ensure communication between the DNR and counties, for example in advance of an upcoming land sale otherwise unexpected by counties.

Comm. Forsman noted, as an example, a positive exchange of road maintenance in St. Louis County. Ms. Klein added that the Roseau County pilot project would not have realized success without the building of a relationship by Mr. Carroll between the county board and the DNR. Mr. Carroll noted that the very complexity of land ownership is not always known by the involved parties, such as county boards. With the knowledge gained by the pilot project, the counties and the DNR may go in unison to the Legislature to request relief. County involvement is important presently, added Comm. Beckel.

STATE

1. Heart of the Continent Partnership Meeting February 24-25 in Eveleth Open invitation to this upcoming meeting at a member county location was noted along with the proposed discussion topic of the interaction between community economies and public lands. DNR staff will attend the meeting, though the DNR is not a member, reported Mr. Engwall. Brief discussion recalled that the partnership was initiated without county input and seemed initially policy oriented though it has since opened its outlook.

2. Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Continued membership on the council of formerly appointed legislators has been complicated by a change in majority leadership in both houses of the Legislature, a situation the director Bill Becker hopes to be resolved by February 11. Mr. Engwall reported that Rep. Hanson had been removed by the House and Rep. Denny McNamara was assigned to the seat and that Ron Schara was appointed as a citizen member.

Comm. Sve reported on attending a DNR roundtable at which attendees such as the Izaak Walton League expressed understanding that the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund is primarily for acquisition of land, though their focus was on metro and southern Minnesota lands. Mr. Engwall added that outside groups are tending to look at acquisition as a use for the funds while at the same time “restore, enhance and protect” projects might still bring dollars to the northern counties. An example might be the St. Louis River Estuary clean-up project that could use LSOHF monies. Some interests may bring funding decisions to court to ensure acquisition, noted Mr. Carroll. The DNR is willing to look at purchases in the metro and St. Cloud areas as well as public access acquisitions in southwestern Minnesota. (The new DNR commissioner will be looking at strategic acquisitions to protect access, hunting and water quality through a less scattered approach.) Comm. Forsman argued that land acquisition be more directed toward the metro area, adding that enhancing existing properties would be a good use of funds. As to general funding, the Constitution stipulates that the funds should not be to supplant but to supplement funding for state projects, noted Mr. Engwall. Under the grants program the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association was able to acquire land. Discussion on repercussions of land acquisition on PILT was encouraged by Comm. Beckel. The status of the land and the means of acquisition enter into PILT determinations in regard to the fund.

Comm. Dahlberg inquired after projects potentially funded by Lessard-Sams. Lessard Sams cannot be used for pure walk-in projects, noted Mr. Engwall. A snowmobile improvement would need to be funded through the Parks and Trails segment of the Legacy Amendment. Estuary clean up might be more appropriate, with the recommendation of a joint approach among counties and agencies. Final decisions do rest with the Legislature, reminded Comm. Beckel.

3. Future Forests Initiative Mr. Engwall reported that Lori Martinson of the DNR received nominee suggestions from Northern Counties and that he will recommend these two representatives. Comm. Beckel recommended that a letter be sent to DNR Commissioner Landwehr congratulating him on his appointment, inviting him to a meeting and thanking him for the participation of DNR representatives at Northern Counties meetings. The Board concurred. The Commissioner will be meeting his regional staff in February, reported Mr. Carroll. Staff appointments will be made within the month.

4. Initiatives to speed state permitting processes Informational materials in member packets included news that the Legislature was to consider quicker permitting rules while the Governor by executive order mandated the same. Bigger projects such as PolyMet drive these initiatives, commented Mr. Engwall, recalling that such situations are very complex. Mr. Carroll noted that there must be distinctions made in understanding the differences among permitting and mandates and regulations from different arms of government. Environmental reviews can stall a process. The state will be making efforts toward not slowing permitting processes.

5. Update on Comprehensive Planning Mr. Carroll offered that DNR, MPCA and BWSR are supportive of discussions on comprehensively addressing plans such as those developed around watersheds, soil and water districts, county interests and others. The question concerns whether planning efforts might be mutually considered and then sequenced and pursued jointly so as to produce a more comprehensive plan without duplication of effort – especially in a time of reduced staffs. Comm. Beckel urged elected county officials' presence at the beginning of planning processes.

FEDERAL

1. State Trust Fund Lands in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Mr. Engwall reported that there are about 90,000 acres within the BWCAW of school trust land that are not producing income for the trust. There is a push to swap out these lands, which might enable the DNR to acquire other federal lands that could be managed for timber. There have been proposals for 35,000 acres of exchange and federal purchase of the remainder. Bob Krepps has acted as a mediator of sorts. A map is being developed to reflect what state and federal staff have agreed to. The proposal is driven by federal funding. There is a perception among some that the federal government would be more protective as owner of the land. Some outside interests thus prefer federal management. Others wish for immediate funding. There would be a one-time payment to the corpus of the school trust. Given the restrictions on the BWCAW this may be the best outcome available for the trust, suggested Mr. Carroll. Comm. Forsman suggested that the funds would disappear, as have trust lands historically. The purchase receipts would go to the trust and be invested for growth, Mr. Engwall added.

NCLUCB

1. Consolidated Conservation Joint County Natural Resources Board Comm. Dahlberg recounted that Comms. Napstad and Forsman had made a motion at the previous Board meeting to consider discussion of a conversation between Northern Counties and the Joint County boards around possible joining of forces. Comm. Beckel recalled that the organizations have similar missions and are often visited by the same guest speakers; by combining they might have a larger voice.

Guest Comm. Hanson, Chair of the Joint County board, offered a background, recalling that the board is over thirty years old. Member counties include Koochiching, Marshall, Mahnomen, Roseau, Lake of the Woods, Clearwater, Beltrami, and Aitkin. Itasca, Polk and Lake Counties were once members. Initial issues of common concern centered on the Department of Natural Resources and Consolidated Conservation lands. Most conversations with the DNR ended up in litigation, though this has improved in recent years. More recent issues include peat harvesting regulations, public drainage state payments, biological surveys, land record research, the timber wolf and con-con payments. In December discussion began on reviewing its role. Former Aitkin County Land Commissioner and co-founder Roger Howard recently spoke to the board on its origins.

The Joint County board meets the fourth Monday of each month. Comm Hanson is suggesting that the next meeting of Northern Counties in Northome be attended by Joint County members. Some Joint County members have already expressed reservations concerning travel distance, issues surrounding mining which to them is irrelevant, and losing their own identity as proponents for northwestern Minnesota. Merger is not on the agenda, though there may be room for discussion. Dues are \$2,000 and this year are reduced to \$500. Educational and lobbying issues are now at the forefront. There does seem to be some duplication. Mr. Carroll spoke positively regarding the warmed relationship between the Joint County board and the DNR and suggested there may be ways to coordinate communication with both groups.

Comm. Hanson is the fourth chair in thirty years of the Joint County board. Ms. Klein argued for consolidation to increase impact at the state level.

A motion to invite the Joint County board to the April Northern Counties meeting in Northome was made with the addition that other non-member counties be invited should the Joint County board accept the invitation.

m. Forsman s. McBride

Comm. Sobanja presented the consideration that there may be more power in acting as separate boards with a common purpose; strength may come from a unified message aiming toward a shared action. Comm. Forsman noted that the environmental groups have, despite an overlap of board members, often carried similar messages and gained a perceived strength because of their numbers. Comm. Dahlberg agreed that a unified message might be blurred without coordination but that its coming from different angles may carry more weight. Ms. Klein offered that to make an impact at the legislative level, an educated, research-based voice aimed at legislative assistants is necessary, and that a professional policy analyst might best carry a research-based message whether the two boards merge or not. Input from the two boards and MRCC into AMC initiatives will carry weight, Comm. Sobanja added. The Joint County board has generally presented its views on its own in St. Paul, reported Comm. Hanson. Roger Howard, recalled Comm. Beckel, had often carried views of the Arrowhead. Distance remains an issue, remarked Comm. Swanson. As does the size of St. Louis County, added Comm. Beckel. The staff people who are sent is one of the most important issues, added Mr. Carroll.

2. Agenda for March – Updates on the Heart of the Continent meeting and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

Adjournment at 11:30 a.m.

m. Forsman s. Swanson

Next meeting March 3, 2011, 9:30 a.m. IRR Reclamation Classroom, Chisholm

Respectfully submitted by Douglas Skrief, Administrator