

# Seine-Rat River Conservation Districts Response to Watershed-Based Planning in Manitoba

## MODERNIZING MANITOBA'S CONSERVATION DISTRICTS PROGRAM

### Priority 1: Align to Watersheds

The Seine-Rat River Conservation District (SRRCD) is a good model size to follow for Watershed Authorities, not bigger. Taking both population and geographic area into consideration is important when creating a Watershed Authority (WA) as to make it not too big to administer locally or manage projects that are too far away logistically from the grassroots governance board members.

Watershed Authority boundaries can be somewhat aligned with IWMP boundaries, but can be comprised of more than one IWMP area in a Watershed Authority.

Larger, rather than small, Watershed Authorities would be more beneficial in order to leverage more funding and implement programming most effective and efficiently for both governance and program delivery.

The SRRCD currently runs on watershed boundaries effectively and efficiently.

Municipalities should be mandated by the Province to be members of Watershed Authorities.

### Priority 2: Refresh the Program Mandate

The Province should manage waterway infrastructure in our waterways, but they have difficulty. The Municipalities would do a better job as local grassroots residents, but funding must be consistent, guaranteed, legally binding and include engineering support in-house. Municipalities could take ownership only after the drains are brought up to as-built-spec (or the Province could provide funding to RMs to bring the drains up to spec). Before any ownership is transferred or even negotiated, a third-party assessment must be done. The Minnesota model of a levy system for drain maintenance is favourable. In Minnesota, each drain is assessed and each landowner has a say in the needs of the drain and pays for the maintenance according to how much benefit they receive from the drain. For example, the Roseau River Watershed District facilitates this in the USA. The waterway infrastructure needs grassroots advocacy from a third party (maybe a Watershed Authority could play this role) and waterway infrastructure should be managed on a watershed basis, not on political interests. There needs to be a plan.

Watershed Authorities should be involved with the planning of sustainable surface water management and would be great surface water managers to manage the

infrastructure, providing adequate funding. In the Minnesota model, the USA contributes 90% for reconstructions or major drainage projects; farmers pay individual levies to the local watershed district to pay for the annual cleaning and mowing of the waterway. The landowners decide what work needs to be done on their drain annually through a consultation meeting facilitated by the watershed district.

Is there a specific TYPE of infrastructure that should (or should not) be managed by watershed authorities?

Watershed Authorities should NOT be managing bridges, major culverts/infrastructure, ring dykes, evacuations or emergency services for historically flood-prone areas.

What support and resources would be required to expand the role of watershed authorities to include management of infrastructure? Example – funding, engineering support, etc...(try to expand beyond just “funding” to get input on other types of support (ex. expertise, hydrologist, engineering, surveying/design, etc.)

In order to expand the role of Watershed Authorities to include management of infrastructure, WA's would require adequate core funding for both environmental projects and waterway maintenance, an engineer in-house (or shared with another WA), survey and design equipment for in-house quick delivery (some WA's have this and some don't), LiDAR and GIS/AutoCAD software with LiDAR based precision tools, heavy equipment (high-ho, tractors, mowers, cattail cutters, high capacity pumps, etc.) and additional personnel capable of using all equipment, technology and administering the extra workload. Communications support in international waterways and interprovincial waterways is imperative as well as with federal organizations, NGOs, provincial departments and the like.

When all the funding criteria is met and after a third party assessment is complete to determine the funding necessary and when that funding is provided in perpetuity with inflation, the SRRCD would consider taking on the responsibility of managing only the maintenance of waterway infrastructure.

The Municipalities should be a partner/voice in the management of waterway infrastructure. The Province should pay for capital investments/reconstructions, mitigation, flood protection and ensure annual adequate funding for Watershed Authorities. There is a need to clearly define the mandate of the watershed Authorities and the Province with regards to waterway management.

### **Priority 3: Amend Legislation**

Municipal partner contributions should be calculated by negotiating with each Municipality and going back to them if in need of more funds for viable projects. In the experience of the SRRCD, considering the size, population and assessed value of each Municipal partner's land all works together to negotiate individually what levy both partners can agree to and has always come out a win-win.

Moving forward to a true watershed based approach, a flexible funding model with a 3:1 minimum for each Municipality should be considered.

For each WA to operate fully, there should be minimum contributions that are negotiated with each Municipal partner.

### **Priority 4: Modernize Funding Models**

Each municipality joined their Watershed Authority on the promise of grassroots-dictated program delivery. A two-tiered system contradicts this original guarantee and one of the core values of watershed-based planning in general. Watershed Authorities need core funding for both administration/operations and for programming. This ensures their mandate is met and programs are delivered through the grassroots decision-makers.

The 3:1 funding model needs to stay consistent, with no tiered application-based approach to funding.

A two-tiered funding approach is NOT beneficial for the implementation of grassroots watershed programming. Each Watershed Authority needs consistent core funding for both operations and program delivery.

Watershed Authorities are outcome-based already as their IWMPs dictate the programs they offer to landowners and priorities for the watershed. All WA programs and projects must be delivered through the grassroots decision-makers on the ground.

The Province should recognize the Watershed Authorities as the Watershed Planning Authorities for administering and delivering the best, consistent, sustainable programs and projects on the ground in concurrence with the goals of each WA's IWMP and under the direction of the grassroots governance in place. Therefore the Province has no need to be reviewing applications or proposals for approval and can be less hands-on with the Watershed Authorities.

## **Growing Outcomes in Watersheds**

Local delivery of GROW is best done through the WA's but requires full-time staffing. The governance of GROW should go through the local WA board and the administration/implementation through the local WA manager. The oversight of the GROW program should be by the WA board and manager with a third party monitoring system that should suffice the Province's needs. The Province can be less hands-on this way, while keeping the grassroots organization of the WA's honoured.

Watershed Authorities can secure funding, manage the program & administer it. Funding can be filtered to WAs from the Carbon Tax and filtered to each WA. Multi-year funding and maintenance for all projects is a necessity. Incentive payments for landowners are essential!!! Re-assessments for land put into ALUS programming would also be an added benefit for key projects in high valued agricultural areas.

Water quality based programming should be prioritized under GROW to mitigate agricultural run-off in areas of known high Phosphorous discharge like the Red River Valley and its tributaries close to Winnipeg. Deciding what programming fits best for each watershed specifically should be a local decision made individually by each Watershed Authority.

Watershed Authorities should be included in ALL aspects. WA representatives (more than one) especially need to be sitting on any Interdepartmental Government Steering Committees or decision-making teams in order to ensure grassroots decisions are honoured and implemented.

Projects that implement IWMP priorities for each and by each Watershed Authority should be prioritized with quick turn-around timelines for program delivery.

Partnerships with other initiatives such as ALUS Canada, carbon credit taxes, Municipalities, Ducks Unlimited, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation and other agricultural and sustainable organizations both federal and provincial could be funding partners to achieve more outcomes on the landscape.

## **Watershed-Based Drainage and Water Resource Management**

LiDAR is needed to define accurate water retention capacity. Water retention capacity should mean management of water storage where timing and storage volume are considered and defined for each local area. Intense hydrological studies/assessments and digital information (GIS/MIKE 11 modeling) for each sub-watershed are also a necessity for delineating an accurate projection of water retention capacity in any given watershed.

A Sub-watershed scale to deliver a no-net loss approach for water retention capacity is most desirable, with on-farm mitigation if at all possible.

Watershed Authorities can provide assistance or direction or at least requirements to landowners who want to do retention to ensure it is sustainable and WA's can also implement, manage and maintain larger multi-partner retention projects, with additional costs set aside for maintenance from the project participants.

First of all, the SRRCD needs a completed wetland inventory for all of Southeastern Manitoba, especially along the Red River, to have a baseline of all of our wetlands. Then, compensation could be 1:1 by volume of water, but only for farming livelihood alongside the perimeter of a wetland that ebbs and flows with the wet cycles of the season and no draining of the established, historic wetland to ensure it will not be affected. There should be no draining of wetland for new landowners. Minimum drainage for an established farmer to farm in a wet year should be okay to help him, as long as it does not drain the wetland. Again, wetland inventory completed to the Red River across the southeast would be required. NO draining of permanent wetlands should ever be permissible.

To deliver a no net loss approach that includes Class 1 and 2 wetlands an incentive programming for landowners would be beneficial here, with annual payments to the farmer to stop farming these wetlands. Current research is showing that the smaller wetlands are more effective in taking up nutrients and that should be considered.

WAs could work with landowners that want to drain by choosing (or being paid to implement) the compensation projects required. This would ensure the project was constructed properly and sustainably. Or, the WA could regulate the projects before, during and after construction to ensure they are beneficial for their watershed and properly implemented. With additional funds from the landowner, the WAs could take on the annual maintenance of all the retention projects to ensure they continue to operate indefinitely as the law requires.

Class 6 watershed-based plans for drainage would include no fee for WAs. All projects/plans would follow IWMPs and follow surface water management plans from a WA.

To develop Class 6 watershed-based plans, a surface water management plan is needed for each watershed with accurate hydrology, LiDAR and LiDAR-based precision tools for each sub-watershed. The WA sub-districts would then be able to work with WA staff to develop and implement the surface water management plan effectively. This would require mainly hydrology support and LiDAR from the Province with the WAs implementing the plan in-house.

Detailed, accurate hydrology and elevation data for each sub-watershed is the

level of detail to be ultimately desired for each watershed. A separate SWMP from an IWMP is needed with more detail of the applied hydrology, LiDAR tools and local input together to be used as an actual daily resource for Municipalities, planners, landowners and the WA itself for implementing projects and discussing ideas. With Hydrology and LiDAR tools, the Sub-watershed can develop the plan on their own with WA staff. An engineer on staff for a WA would be helpful, possibly shared between 3 WAs could be cost-effective and most efficient. The current turn-around time for Provincial engineering support is 10 months to receive a comment on a project proposal.

WAs should be involved with the implementation of the plan and be consulted on any enforcement of regulation or by-laws.