

*Remarks by: John Jaschke, BWSR Executive Director, 4-5-09, Ada, MN
Wild Rice Watershed District Public Meeting*

Let me start with a bit of background about roles and responsibilities. As you know:

- county commissioners have a responsibility to appoint managers to govern watershed districts;
- the legislature establishes the authorities of watershed districts and has provided a substantial portion of the funding for watershed district flood control projects, and
- the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has a responsibility for oversight of watershed districts via approval of their plan and participation on the project review teams.
- The COE and DNR also play important roles in both project planning and funding and in environmental review and permitting.

However, it is the Watershed District itself - via input from its citizens and other constituents - that is primarily responsible for determining and implementing the most cost-effective approaches to water quality and quantity issues.

What all watershed districts have in common is that they are established to address problems in one place with solutions in other places. Flooding doesn't happen only from excess rain that falls on the property being flooded, and the soil particles and dissolved loads that lead to sediment and water quality degradation don't accumulate at the place of their origin.

Another thing watersheds have in common, regardless of scale or landscape, is that management of a watershed requires a balance between federal and state responsibilities and local autonomy.

Despite these commonalities, there is no model that can fit all circumstances -- there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each watershed (and for that matter, each sub-watershed); its issues, its solutions, its projects, its programs, require a customized application of science and policy. This has become even more pronounced in the past few years with increased regulatory scrutiny, and expectations and mandates for clean water in addition to the challenges of achieving a reasonable level of flood control.

Watershed management is difficult, it is difficult because:

1. Upstream landowners believe downstream landowners are to blame - e.g., because they have acquired property susceptible to flood damages.
2. Downstream landowners believe upstream landowners are to blame – e.g., because they have altered the landscape to allow more water to come faster than nature intended.
3. Upstream landowners (contributors) believe downstream landowners (benefiters) should pay.
4. Downstream landowners (the benefiters) believe upstream landowners should pay.
5. The one thing - sometimes the only thing - everyone agrees on is that someone else should pay.

Perspective: watershed management is hard work – that is why we have a watershed district, here and elsewhere in the state where water management presents real challenges. It is not easy, but is it any harder than farming, or teaching a class of developmentally challenged students, or manning the night shift at a hospital emergency

room? And, it certainly is not harder than the work our soldiers must do to defend this great country. But just like these other tough jobs, not doing them is not an option. So what do we do? My advice:

1. Listen...if you want to be listened to.
2. Seek to understand... if you want to be understood.
3. Be transparent...if you want to be believed by others.
4. Be systematic and thorough...if you want to get results that are cost-effective and realistic.
5. Be inclusive...if you want to solve problems rather than just talk about them.

Going forward toward to get something done will require all present to assure progress in these areas. From what I have seen and heard today, I believe this watershed is positioned to do just that.

John Jaschke – introduction biography

(Mr. Jaschke/John) is the Executive Director of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) (see <http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us>). He was formerly the Dakota County Water Resources Manager and the Administrator of the Vermillion River Watershed. His prior positions were as Land and Water Section Administrator and Wetlands Program Manager at the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), and Area Hydrologist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in Duluth and New Ulm. He has B.S. degrees in Geology and Geophysics from the University of Minnesota and a M.A. in Public Administration from Minnesota State University – Mankato. He grew up on a dairy farm in central Minnesota (Morrison County) with 10 younger siblings.