

Draft Minutes State Interagency Missouri River Authority; March 20, 2009

The meeting of the State Interagency Missouri River Authority was called to order at 8:30 AM March 20, 2009 at the 4th Floor West Conference Room; Wallace Office Building in Des Moines, IA.

Authority members present included Amy Christensen, Stan Peterson, Harold Hommes, Mike Tramontina, and Bernie Hoyer. Also in attendance were Al Sturgeon, John Fleig, Dick Vegors, Jane Clark, Bob Dolan, and Perry Beemon.

There were no minutes available from the Nov. 24, 2008 meeting, but Hoyer apologized and said they would be developed.

The Draft MoRAST agenda for the March 24-25, 2009 were looked at. There were no obvious action items. Neither Hommes nor Hoyer will attend because of financial conditions and travel mandates. Tribal proposals demanding \$10 million annually from the COE for cultural heritage protection and travel funds to support tribal participation on MRRIC and MRERP were noted. It was also noted that there will be a discussion on the White Paper with a possible reorientation towards explaining what and how the new congressional mandate for a restudy of the Flood Control Act of 1944 should be conducted. There was also a discussion of the Leland Rolf's report: *Background Report on the Federal Acts and Court Cases That Have Affected the Development of the Missouri River*. Mr. Rolf is an experienced water law attorney from Kansas.

Recent Missouri River Developments:

1. The GAO Navigation Study gave little commentary but mostly data on navigation types and tonnage on the Missouri and Mississippi along Iowa and Missouri. It documented less and less navigation on the Missouri, and no navigation (2003-2005) on the Missouri along Iowa was noted. Vegors noted that the Corps documented 20 barges from Blair NE in 2008 navigation season.
2. Congressional Passage of Review of 1944 Flood Control Act was noted but no actual language is available today. Hoyer noted that Kayla Eckert Uptmor reported that she had heard that the language was changed from that submitted by Sen. Dorgan.
3. The Spring Pulse was reported to take place March 21 & 22. It is not a large amount of flow and well below any flood stage. Many researchers will be out monitoring the pallid sturgeon to determine if the pulse sparks any spawning activities.
4. Two water projects are moving (or proposed to move) water from Lake Sakakawea on the mainstem Missouri River out of the basin to be used for domestic usage. Northwest Area Water Supply Project has been approved by the Bureau of Reclamation. It amounts to 15,000 ac/ft/yr. This water is going to serve rural water districts and towns in North Dakota. It represents about 20 cfs on the Missouri River, or about 0.06% of total flow. The Red River Valley Water Supply Project is entering its final environmental impact stage. This project proposes use of 80,239 ac/ft/yr of water or 110 cfs on the Missouri River, about 0.34% of total flow. Tramontina thought this seemed significant. Hoyer suggested it was minimal, but that Iowa (DNR) had minimal policy or rules applicable to any loss of water or transfer of water out of Iowa. Tramontina thought DNR should begin serious, immediate action on developing policy.
5. A meeting on a proposed 204 study by the COE on Reservoir Sedimentation on Mainstem Reservoirs was noted for April 6. Al Sturgeon, Skip Meisner and Bernie Hoyer expect to attend.

Al Sturgeon provided some comments on the Missouri River Restoration Implementation Committee (MRRIC) activities. He reported that both he and Skip had attended meetings and were active participants, along with Jim Redmond. He said that the meetings had focused on organizational and educational activities. He said that the group functioned on a unanimous, consensus basis, and that while he was originally skeptical of this process, he said that it is worth trying and has worked on other projects like the Everglades. He said everyone came in with preconceived ideas, but that many are reconsidering them somewhat. He suggested that everyone on MRRIC seem to agree with mitigation activities. He stated that in his opinion, the COE was placing too much attention on the restoration of three endangered species and not enough attention on the 'health' of the overall river and its necessary habitats. He stated that there was too much attention on biology and not enough on the river itself and the needed diverse habitats. He said not much is known about the river, so we need to use what we think we know, determine appropriate restoration activities, determine the results of these, and make appropriate necessary adjustments, a process called adaptive management. At Tramontina's questioning, he stated his surprise at how well the COE and FWS seemed to get along and work together. Tramontina asked what the river was recovering from, and he said the river had been 'tortured' from the channelization, flow modifications and losses of many floodplain habitats. He suggested that the river should become a 'destination place.' Minutes from MRRIC meetings are available at <http://www.moriverrecovery.org/mrrp/f?p=136:3:2448755345471336>

Hoyer and Dolan are Iowa representatives on the Missouri River Ecosystem Restoration Plan Activities (MRERP). This is a more scientific and engineering oriented technical group developing management alternatives and recommendations concurrently with an environmental impact statement. It was reported that the group was working on purpose and goals, and was beginning to develop a discussion on 'study units.' Technical workgroups will be established for each study unit. Hoyer reported that from his one meeting, it became apparent that the closer MRERP and MRRIC work together, the more likely solutions will be developed.

Hoyer passed out invoices to the SIMR Authority agencies for MoRAST dues and payment of MRRIC travel for Sturgeon and Meisner. With the current financial conditions in state government and special travel restrictions in place, agencies faced some problems. IUB cannot pay. IDALS cannot pay. DOT said that they would pay these invoices, but no others without prior approval. This led to a discussion about next year. Hommes suggested that MoRAST was not worth the investment and of marginal benefit to Iowa. He also raised concerns including relatively high executive director compensation and voting structure. Without IUB or IDALS, and perhaps without DOT, participation in MoRAST and support of our state representatives on MRRIC is threatened. Similarly, lack of support by DNR for MoRAST travel or MRERP travel out of state would severely hamper Iowa's influence in these activities. Christensen asked the group to think about whether MRRIC and MRERP are potentially more directly valuable to Iowa than MoRAST. Hommes will introduce a motion for Iowa to drop out of MoRAST at our next meeting. *(Following our meeting, it was determined that DNR will not pay for MRRIC activities out of state, either, as long as we are not supporting our own staff for MoRAST and MRERP out of state activities.)*

The next meeting will be held in Sioux City with some trip planned to the river or other pertinent features. Christensen emphasized the need for planning early so calendars can be arranged.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 AM.