

## Ripple Effect #38

### **WORKING TODAY FOR A BETTER TOMORROW**

The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Red River Basin Land and Water International Summit Conference sponsored by the Red River Basin Commission recently took place in Fargo, ND. The title of the conference was *"The Ripple Effect: Working Today for a Better Tomorrow."*

Many topics were covered throughout the three day conference, including: the efforts that took place after the 1997 flood that helped make the 2006 flood more manageable and the technology developed to help better forecast future floods; the water quality of our rivers and Lake Winnipeg and what is being done to monitor and improve the water quality; and our water supply situation and the differences in how water is appropriated between the states and province.

Throughout the conference, several themes kept appearing amongst the presenters. The most common was that cooperation is a key in managing water. Improving cooperation, from flood forecasting to biological monitoring, is necessary in order to manage our water resources effectively.

Presenters discussed actions that have taken place over the past decade with respect to flood damage reduction and resilience, and we are now able to see the results. There were many examples of how improvements to flood management made the 2006 spring flood a 'non-event' in some areas. However, there are some situations that still need solutions, and the complexities involved in arriving at equitable and efficient solutions are difficult.

The conference public presentation came from Arctic explorer Lonnie Dupree. With his presentation, "On Thin Ice," Dupree shared his enthusiasm and adventurous spirit as well as his concern for global warming. He along with adventurer Eric Larsen, completed the first ever summer expedition to the North Pole on July 1, 2006. The men took turns doing the hard work of breaking the trail. They had to take good care of themselves and of one another and had to trust one another. He reminded us again of the need to work together, cooperate and work hard to achieve the positive desired results.

Other presenters gave us guidance to consider as we plan water projects to meet our shared social goals. We should design and implement water projects and policies that use natural resources and financial resources efficiently. These projects should promote equity among the parties involved and be fair to future generations. Water projects that provide stability in our homes, communities, enterprises and governments also stabilize the economy. It was emphasized that water projects should contribute to the general well being of the society.

Speakers during a public speak out session sounded the alarms. Water quality in Lake Winnipeg, and throughout the Red River Basin, must be addressed comprehensively and quickly. The Lake Winnipeg deteriorating water quality is an indicator of the overall water quality health of the Red River Basin. We must work together, every individual, in order to improve the water quality throughout the entire Basin.

Several tools for assessing water quality were discussed at the conference. Total Maximum Daily Loads and forthcoming non-point to point source trading standards provide some promise. Basin-wide cooperation in developing biological monitoring has enabled us to assess the ecological health of rivers and streams in the basin. Programs such as Minnesota's Clean Water Legacy Act and Manitoba's Nutrient Management Zones are examples of policies that foster action toward clean water.

Presenters also shared the good news that soil erosion trends are on the decline, and that wind erosion continues to be a significant contributor to soil losses. Tillage practices, cover crops, wind breaks and other conservation practices will be needed to continue this positive trend.

The cycles of too much and too little have characterized the water supply in the Red River Basin for generations. The future likely brings at least as much variation and range. A panel discussion about water appropriation at the state and provincial levels, and the need to come to agreement on apportionment of our shared resources illustrated the challenges that still lie ahead.

We heard about better communications, better communication tools, and better access to data. We heard about high tech tools for flood forecasting and modeling. We heard that sometimes the low tech methods work well. We heard about hundreds of millions of dollars invested in flood protection. We have heard from several speakers that the future of water management involves protecting aquatic ecosystems and even more broadly protecting ecosystem services.

While progress, especially in the areas of flood protection and communication has been made, we have also heard that the stakes for water management are high, maybe higher than ever. Effective water management will be an on-going challenge to this and future generations.

Many speakers reminded us that each person can make a difference. Small river clean-up efforts by individuals and organizations can have a cumulative positive impact on our water quality. Flood protection efforts throughout the basin are accomplished by many individuals doing what they can do, and working together.

Every action and decision at the individual level, units of local government level, at the basin level, will create ripple effects. Change your light bulbs to compact fluorescent bulbs; recycle more, drive less; enjoy but also take care of the natural resources when you are fishing, canoeing, or boating.

What action will you take?

The conference proceedings can be found on the Red River Basin Commission website: [www.redriverbasincommission.org](http://www.redriverbasincommission.org).

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at [www.redriverbasincommission.org](http://www.redriverbasincommission.org).

