

Ripple Effect #49

A LEGACY OF COOPERATION IN WATER PLANNING

Twenty-five years! That's a long time to carry out a major annual conference, with each year's gathering becoming larger and better. But that is just part of the legacy-in-the-making of the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC), who are planning their 25th Annual Conference on Water and Land Stewardship in January 2008.

Another way to think of the conference and the work of the Red River Basin Commission's 41-member board of directors representing Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Manitoba is as an ongoing conversation about the waters and lands of the Red River Basin.

That conversation has not always been as collegial as it is today—or even existent. At the Spring 2007 reorganization meeting of the Red River Basin Commission board, long-time board members shared memories of 25 years ago when the first group of people—citizens and local and state or provincial officials—came together to talk about water and land. The atmosphere was strained, one board member recalls, and there was a lot of turf protection on people's minds. This same board member explained that at that time—only 25 years ago—little dialogue occurred among state, provincial or local officials. Often, especially between Canada and the U.S., water and land managers had to go through official channels just to talk to their counterparts.

Sorting out the differences in water law was one of the first tasks of this new group. Here was one Basin or watershed, with four different governance structures and different ways of determining rights to water.

Today, signs of progress abound. Most striking is the Board's development in 2005 of a Natural Resources Framework Plan, which acts as a guide to water and land management in the entire Red River Basin. This comprehensive plan was done with consensus agreement among the Board—not to speak of the significant citizenry and local officials' involvement from across the Basin.

The Board and its several sub-committees meet regularly these days. But the Board knows that it must do more than talk. The projects in water and land management that the RRBC has carried out or assisted with is too long to list. The RRBC's emphasis for 2007 is on assisting communities and local and regional water and land management groups from all parts of the Basin to develop and

carry out plans that address their needs—and, yes, considering the “Ripple Effect.”

As one long-time member of the Board, Dan Wilkins, put it, “Over the 25 years we’ve worked together, we’ve become friends. And friends don’t hurt friends. With this attitude, there’s nothing out there than can’t be solved.”

To participate in RRBC activities, go to the website www.redriverbasincommission.org for contact information. Get involved and help guide land and water management in the Basin!

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.

