

# RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY

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February 10, 2020

Mark Gabriel  
IJC Commissioners  
U.S. Section  
1717 H Street Northwest, Suite 835  
Washington, DC 20006

Re: Recommended objectives at the U.S./Canadian border for nitrogen and phosphorus in the Red River Basin:

Dear Commissioners,

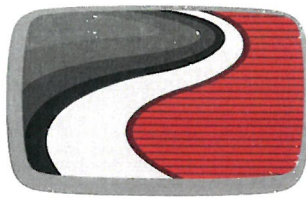
The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) appreciates the opportunity to comment to the International Joint Commission (IJC) on the proposed Nutrient Water Quality Objectives for the Red River at the U.S./Canada Boundary rules. It seems the public notice of these proposed rules was not widely communicated. The RRRA did not receive any official notice about the recent Fargo hearing nor did we receive any information about the proposed rules.

The RRRA is a joint powers board created in 2010 to address flooding issues in the Minnesota and North Dakota portions of the Red River Basin (RRB). The RRRA represents seven watershed districts in Minnesota and fourteen water resource districts in North Dakota. The RRRA is supportive of water quality efforts but we are concerned about the potential effects on landowners and agricultural producers who will be asked to achieve such water quality objectives and loading targets.

Are the nutrient concentration objectives and nutrient load targets for the Red River at the US/Canada border reasonable and attainable? In April 2019 much discussion about what type and amount of Best Management Practices (BMPs) was discussed amongst agricultural and environmental leaders from both the United States and Canada at a Cold Climate BMP conference/workshop held at the University of Minnesota Crookston campus. As of yet, no clear results or solutions have come forth from this event. We recognize we have a water quality issue but can the objectives and targets being proposed be reasonably achieved?

There are many ongoing efforts by watersheds, soil and water conservation district, Federal and state natural resource agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations to address water quality in the RRB. Efforts from our Minnesota member watershed districts are being done by updating older comprehensive watershed management plans using the One Water One Plan (1W1P) framework in Minnesota.

The State of Minnesota also has a nutrient reduction strategy (weblink below) that was released in 2014. Weblink: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/nutrient-reduction-strategy#nutrient-strategy-718f1971>



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In North Dakota a number of Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) and the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) have used the EPA Section 319 watershed program to implement non-point source watershed projects and improve water quality in the RRB.

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is utilizing several conservation programs such as Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP), Environmental Quality incentives Program (EQIP), and Conservation Security Program (CSP) to address water quality concerns in the Red River Basin.

In addition to this watershed planning work, the Red River Basin Commission and United States Army Corps of Engineers recently finalized a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the RRB. This plan should be reviewed in connection to the proposed water quality rules to ensure the plan will help meet the water quality goals of the IJC.

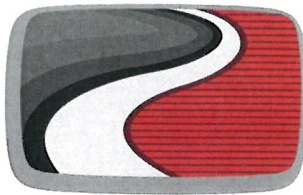
Should these efforts be evaluated more thoroughly to determine if the (BMPs) implemented, or those being planned, are or will have the desired impact on water quality in the Red River and its tributaries? BMPs need to be put in the right place, at the right time in the right amount to make a difference. Setting targets without a strategic plan will result in random acts of conservation for water quality improvement and likely will result in very mixed results. You have set nutrient concentration objectives and nutrient load targets. However, would setting a reasonable percent reduction of long-term water quality average loads and concentrations be a better way to move towards improving water quality? A hard numerical target may result in frustration and hardship amongst the residents and stakeholders in the RRB without ever being able to achieve the objectives and targets set by the International Red River Board (IRRB) and IJC.

The RRRA is concerned these proposed rules will affect our member watershed districts and water resource districts and their ability to operate and manage public drainage systems and retention projects.

The RRRA requests the IJC jointly meet with the States of Minnesota and North Dakota along with representatives from the RRRA, Red River Joint Water Resource District (RRJWRD), and Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB) to discuss proposed rules at all levels. While there was a recent formal hearing in Fargo, North Dakota, it appears a number of questions still exist and the RRRA encourages the IRRB and IJC to conduct additional outreach opportunities and if necessary consider extending the comment period to accommodate such outreach.

The RRWMB and RRJWRD have funded close to 75 Flood Damage Reduction (FDR) projects in the RRB since 1976. The RRRA requests the IJC further consider the effects of constructed FDR water storage (both retention and detention), restored wetlands, soil health practices, agricultural best management practices, upgrades to wastewater treatment facilities, and stormwater projects before enacting water quality rules with set nutrient concentration objectives and nutrient load targets.





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These projects can and do provide multiple benefits or Natural Resources Enhancements (NREs) to society including but not limited to flood control, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat. One area where the IJC could assist the RRRA and its member organizations (RRWMB and RRJWRD) is through further study of the water quality benefits of constructed FDR projects. Additional study is warranted to determine how these projects provide NRE benefits as well as societal and economic benefits. The RRRA asks that the IJC consider partnering on additional watershed water quality research efforts.

The RRRA supports water quality efforts and believes that further leveraging of programs, financial resources, and comprehensive plans can be done to meet reasonable and attainable water quality goals in the RRB. We can accomplish meaningful change in the RRB by closely communicating with our partners and stakeholders. Should you have questions or need additional clarification, please contact RRRA Executive Director Keith Weston by email at [rrra@ideaone.net](mailto:rrra@ideaone.net) or at 701-566-2121 (cell). Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Gary Thompson  
Co-Chairman, RRRA

**CC:** Mike Renouf, IRRB Co-Chair, Canadian Section (e-copy)  
Col. Karl Jansen, IRRB Co-Chair US Section (e-copy)  
Nicole Armstrong, IRRB WQC Co-Chair (e-copy)  
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