

State of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District – January 2021

Last year at this time I addressed a decade of events that had occurred in our District. Thankfully, we can put the Great Flood of 2019 in the history books. Damages have been addressed, for the most part, and major repairs have been accomplished. And then comes the pandemic of 2020. Thank God we were in a drought situation which otherwise might have added to the catastrophes we must face. As much as computer models and bear fat in a Mason jar can predict for us, we can never let our guard down on dealing with our natural resources.

Reflecting on this past year and among our own lives and situations during the COVID-19 era, we must look forward with optimism in this coming year. The country will have a new President, there are new senators in Lincoln, and our own Board is refreshed with two new members. With the talent of the staff and the direction in which are mandated to follow, the optimism and “can do” attitude will result in a continuation of our success.

If I can sum up the condition of our District during this past year, the word diligence comes to mind. The entire staff of the Papio displayed their diligence during this past year and we sit here in testimony that we continue to be in great shape because of their efforts. Of course, everyone has been affected by the pandemic and for one month only, we discovered what it was like to “zoom” into our meetings and take action. We have become relatively comfortable starting out in 2021 and with the vaccine here, we all hope to get back to a normal condition of operations, but likely with underlying changes. And our combined diligence will allow us to succeed.

Infrastructure is going to be the word most ever-present in our vocabulary. With 6 dams currently under design, coupled with our ongoing efforts with erosion control, the infrastructure throughout our district will take money and talented resources to address. The bigger picture of the various projects can be summed up with an attitude of keeping our infrastructure sound. Protecting lives and property continues to be our number one goal.

Looking forward we can be proud of the extra efforts of General Manager Winkler and others in their effort to create national legislation that will allow us to respond more effectively to emergency situations. Of course we hope these actions will be non-existent, but the tools are lining up for cost effective and prompt solutions. This change is the beginning of much needed US Army Corps of Engineers reform. Everyone will benefit during this progression.

This year we are embarking on a long-planned expansion of our trails program with the Beltline Trail. Soon designs will be made, the path will be laid out, and the commitment to the Omaha area will be, again, established with a major network of transportation and recreation. What a nice problem we face when hearing that the trails are crowded. The recently developed Trails Connectivity Plan will help to guide us on future actions.

Our personnel continue to build confidence in their actions, especially with the test of COVID-19 influencing our lives. The work got done in spite of those nasty little spheres floating around, but it could not have happened without the diligence of our staff. If it sounds like I am repeating myself it is because staff deserves such praise. I do not get tired of professing the combined years

of experience of the staff. It really does make a difference when faced with the decisions the Board must make. And as such, makes our role less demanding.

It has taken a broad view of our business relationships to ascertain that we are in a very good position of acquiring the services we need within our community. The core of consultants reveals strength at all levels of professionalism available to the District. As good as our staff is, we must depend on those businesses and associates out there to help complete the great puzzle of protection of our natural resources. These relationships are only enhanced by our continued partnerships with other government entities. There will be changes forthcoming in that regard due to elections and turnover, but the foundation of those relationships is secure and changes will be based heavily on the ability to put politics aside and react towards what is good for the environment and consistent with our mission.

I look forward to proudly serve towards this mission of the Natural Resource Districts both local and statewide and encourage my fellow Directors continue to fulfill their oath of office accordingly.

Jim Thompson
Chairperson