Willow Creek Watershed Project Plan-EIS
Interagency Scoping Meeting Notes
January 24, 2019, 2:00 pm

1. A project overview was provided by Terry Tatsey
    a. The project initiated in 1970's to address flooding in Browning, but the proposed project was not funded. The Tribe applied for funding last year from the NRCS and the project was selected. The project is in the preliminary planning stages.
    b. Introductions were conducted.
2. A project introduction was provided by Amy Darlinton.
    a. NECI was contracted by NRCS to develop Plan-EIS. Project is currently in early stages of scoping. Preliminary scoping being conducted to determine extent of flooding in Browning and gauge acceptable alternatives.
    b. Purpose of preliminary scoping is to gather input and provide opportunity to participate in NEPA process, determine extents of flooding in Browning and correlate preliminary flood maps to observations, discuss potential flood control alternatives, identify environmental issues, and identify regulatory requirements.
    c. Previous major floods in 1964, 1948, 1920, 1970s. Flooding nearly every other year in 1970s. Typically a result of snow melt and rainstorms.
    d. Watershed work plan prepared in 1975. Recommended dam, diversions, and channel improvements. Browning development makes plan no longer feasible and plan must be redone.
    e. Plan-EIS to be completed by March 2020. Currently in preliminary planning stages. Draft EIS to be developed to evaluate three alternatives and recommend preferred alternative. 80% design to begin in September 2019; will occur independently of Draft EIS.
    f. Watershed is approximately 14 square miles, originates west of Browning, and continues through Browning.
    g. Flooding observed through Norman Tract and West Boundary Road areas. Basement flooding observed in south Browning. Results of 1964 flood and frequent flooding areas and patterns presented.
    h. Terry Tatsey - Department heads to be involved with meeting since various projects effected by unknown flood hazards.
    i. Flood mapping overview provided by Russ Reid and Josh Robbins with DOWL.
        i. Flood mapping is preliminary and seeking input to refine numbers.

ii. Max depth model developed for Willow Creek from upstream of Highway 89 and extended to Depot Coulee. Additional basin inflow south of Highway 89. Sensitivity analysis underway to refine results with accurate parameters. Previously obtained LiDAR from Tribal Transportation/IHS/Housing being utilized.

iii. Terry Tatsey – Areas of flooding overlaps with areas of proposed development.

iv. Last Star Road could be used to impound water with culvert to control out flows.

v. Environmental planning factors to be evaluated include fishing, economics, infrastructure, recreation, land access/ownership, and irrigation. Resources identified by Laura Shipley.

    1. Water resources – preliminary riparian areas mapped, water body creation, wetland impacts.
    2. Biological resources – Invasive species, culturally significantly plants, fish and wildlife.
    3. Soil resources – Site specific investigation to occur after alternatives identified.
    4. Human resources – Effects to community access, recreation, quality of life improvements, cultural and historic properties, environmental justice, crop land, infrastructure, land acquisition.

vi. Flood reduction alternatives

    1. Channel improvements through Browning – similar to All Chiefs Park
    2. Diversions – Depot Creek diversion, Willow Creek north/south split
    3. Storage dams – South of Highway 89, unnamed drainage to east, Northwest Boundary Road
    4. Combination of alternatives

vii. Plan-EIS development process

    1. Preliminary investigation phase underway. Initial alternatives to be identified and initial screening to be completed.
    2. Draft – EIS to include detailed environmental reviews, 30% design of about 3 selected alternatives, and another public meeting to occur. Identification of preferred alternative to occur with this phase
    3. 80% design of selected alternative
    4. Final Plan-EIS

viii. Additional information to be posted to Tribal media and mailings. Contact information provided.

3. Steve Becker provided program and project overview:

    a. In July 2017 the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council requested flood control plan assistance from NRCS through the Watershed Flood Prevention Program. The Tribe has received Phase 1 funding for planning. Congress funding infrastructure projects and includes regional equity considered. Funding received in October 2018 and NECI was contracted to develop the Plan-EIS due to familiarity with area. DOWL subcontracted to provide technical support.

    b. Floodplain modeling underway for variety of flood events and Council to determine if flooding issues still exists and if flooding is a problem to be addressed. Council may elect to not pursue flood mitigation. Flooding may not be number one community priority, but funding is available.

    c. If it is determined that flooding is an issue, the community must determine what level of flood protection is desired. Flood protection is typically expressed in frequency as probability of exceedance. 100-year level of protection is typically used by most communities for NFIP qualification. Watershed Prevention Program is written to prevent or reduce flood damages.

    d. Flood protection alternatives limited to channel enhancements or enlargements, bypass channels around town, and storage through dams to regulate flows. Unfeasible alternatives to be identified by community.

    e. Alternatives to be screened down to one or two by April 2019. Impacts to be analyzed and cost-benefit analysis to be completed.

    f. Council can apply for funding upon Plan-EIS completion.

General comments were provided as follows:

4. Gerald Wagner, Blackfeet Environmental Office – Identifies with flooding in Browning. Cost effectiveness of NFIP participation questionable. Retention basins and channel widening/stabilization are best alternatives. Detained water would be beneficial for use throughout summer. Sponsor contribution will need to be planned for early.

5. Steve Becker, NRCS: NRCS will fund 100% of Plan-EIS, design, and construction. Sponsor responsible for purchasing and securing easements and land, as well as permanent maintenance, and incidental, non-flood prevention related elements. Steve to verify if NRCS will fund compensatory wetland mitigation.

6. Terry Tatsey, BTBC – Some alternatives may drive economic development, such as water park.

7. Russ Reid and Josh Robbins, DOWL – Hydraulic modeling observations and opportunities were identified:

a. All Chiefs' Park channel improvements provide effective flood control for 25-year flood or 1500 cfs. One alternative may be to expand reconstruction effort to provide same level of protection throughout town. If channel depth is increased by about 2 feet, then capacity is increased to 2000 cfs or a 50-year level of service. A 40-foot bottom width would convey approximately a 100-year level of service.

b. Point inflows identified and model to simulate dam construction by "turning off" upstream flows. Additional drainage control to be used to control remainder of flood flows.

c. Improvements to West Boundary Road channel/storm drain may enhance drainage.

d. Channel splitting west of Browning is rerouting flows.

8. Gerry Lunak, Blackfeet Water Office –

    a. Questioned what has changed regarding landowners refusal to sell, lands outside of channel to be effected and will people be willing to accommodate change?

    b. Havre diversions are substantial. Will drastic transformation be acceptable in Browning?

    c. How will project be maintained and what will the maintenance cost be? A lack of maintenance may lead to higher hazard.

    d. May be opportunity to develop irrigation to Tribal Leader Ranch. If there is no State water right, the Tribe has the water rights.

9. Terry Tatsey, BTBC - May be opportunity for water treatment plant and recreational enhancements.

10. Steve Becker, NRCS - 14 high hazard dams built by NRCS in Montana. Maintenance is typically a challenge. State permitting would not likely apply to Tribal projects.

11. Dylan Hickey, ACOE – Corps permit will likely be required. Proposal must be for Least Environmentally Damageable Practical Alternative (LDPA). Part of individual permit for larger, more comprehensive project. Economic factors, in addition to environmental factors, can tie into the LDPA. What would be the effect of leveling undeveloped land and water storage?

12. Melissa Weatherwax, Blackfeet Community College – Has property adjacent to Willow Creek. Beaver mimicry project underway to determine how beaver dams slow down water flows and promote riparian habitat development. Channel is plugged and must be cleared prior to continuing project. Current infrastructure is not maintained and may be contributing to maintenance. Community improvements with water storage desired.

13. Mark Magee, Blackfeet Land Department - Very little Tribal land available in area of previously proposed dam. There may be significant land acquisition costs. Owner of proposed dam site may be willing to sell subject property. Parsons is not a Tribal member.

14. Don White, Blackfeet Transportation Planning – Northwest Boundary Road project included on Transportation Improvement Plan. Proposed road would begin at Highway 89 and go north through wetlands to Flat Iron Road. Last Star opposition is being addressed and Methodist Church land is being avoided due to refusal to sell. Purpose of road is to alleviate traffic congestion, provide alternative school access, and open area to Housing. Drainage is being evaluated and wasn't originally intended to be impoundment. West Boundary Street flooding observed in 2018.
15. Virgil Edwards, THPO – 600 block flooding occurs annually in south Browning. Drainage improvements to Cemetery Pond outlet on north side may alleviate flooding. Reactivation of Flat Iron Creek and water storage near walking paths/skate park may be a potential area for proposed new water park. West Boundary storm drainage pipe unable to be cleared and replacement may be warranted.
16. Graham Gaither, Agricultural Resource Management Plan – Willow Creek water being considered for use at multi-species meat processing facility. Profit from meat processing facility could be used to offset project maintenance costs.
17. Don McNett, Montana Department of Transportation – No road overtopping occurred in 2018. All culverts were replaced with Highway 89 reconstruction. Design capacity to be confirmed with MDT.
18. Roland Kennerly, BTBC - Ice build-up by campground; flood flows would come down alley and go under mother's house. 2018 flooding mild since there was not a rapid temperature increase.
19. Ray Augare, Blackfeet Water Resources – Water Resources installing water infrastructure in conjunction with IHS. Northwest Boundary Road may increase flooding to Norman Tract housing area; area currently floods every year. Willows and beaver dams may limit flows through Willow Creek. Damming may increase already high water table. High water table contributes to road damage and lead to sewer line seepage. Improved conveyance through Browning may help alleviate groundwater issues.
20. Cheryl Reevis, Blackfeet Planning – Inquired about accommodating recreation with the stored stream flows. Siyeh has casino expansion plans in areas of apparently intense flooding, although flood maps are being refined. Federal grants prohibit spending federal funds on projects within the floodplain.
21. Dean Berkram, Glacier Electric – No flood damages to Glacier Electric facilities have been observed, other than repairs to anchor wires damaged by water. No major projects planned except Depot Coulee Housing. Underground lines typically used for all new developments; underground lines are typically 2.5 times the cost of overhead. Underground can only be installed in summer working months.
22. Stephanie Vielle, Blackfeet Parks and Recreation – Would like water diverted to Pikuni Park since it is a State mitigated wetland, but rarely sees water. Would also like to see Stampede Park filled to further development potential and improve Willow Creek access for fishing, walking paths,

and other recreation. Cleanliness initiatives desired to reduce amount of trash and pollutants. Water park and water fountains also desired.

a. Additional input provided by Steve Becker:

i. Significant sustained flows could be sustained through summer with a dam

ii. Walking paths would eliminate possibility of vertical channel walls. Channel improvements would have to follow geomorphic principals.

23. Gerry Lunak – Concrete channel linings may pose safety hazard during community celebrations. Beaver dams removed during celebrations to lower water level to eliminate safety potential. Significance of beavers to be considered as projects move forward. Safety of community and children of utmost importance.

24. Dylan DesRosier, The Nature Conservancy – As community member would like to explore mimicry bio-storage options to determine upstream capacity.

25. Wally Gladstone and Don White will be conducting personal interviews to determine extents and effects of flooding.