

Willow Creek Watershed Project Plan-EIS
Stakeholder Orientation Meeting Notes
November 2, 2018, 9:00 am

1. The project was introduced by Steve Becker with some background information provided by Terry Tatsey, Blackfeet Tribal Business Council (BTBC).
 - a. The intent of the meeting is to provide an overview of the project, discuss how the community feels about the prevalence and frequency of flooding on Willow Creek, gather input on who the stakeholders should be, and discuss ideas on the best ways to engage the Browning community on this project.
 - b. Terry Tatsey noted that the project could have many benefits to the community, including economic and recreational benefits in addition to the flood control component.
 - c. The project is funded the by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Protection Program. Congress allocated \$300 million to the NRCS flood program in the last two years. Funding for this program may or may not continue.
 - d. Last year BTBC applied for funding to redo the 1975 Willow Creek Watershed plan for flood control. The 1975 plan was suspended, potentially due to inability of the Sponsor, the Blackfeet Tribe, to acquire land for the preferred alternative. NRCS will be paying 100% of the planning costs of this project.
 - e. When the planning is completed to the satisfaction of the NRCS and the BTBC, and a preferred alternative selected from the plan, NRCS will fund 100% of design and construction if available. Eligible costs may include dam construction, flood proofing, relocation of property, floodplain and wetland acquisition for easements, and construction of channels and channel improvements. The Sponsor, the Blackfeet Tribe, is responsible for 100% of the costs of land acquisition. In 1975, 400 acres was required.
 - f. Flooding may not be Browning's top issue, but funding opportunity is available that pays 100% of the planning, design, and construction and may lead to other development and economic opportunities.
 - g. The 1975 Willow Creek Watershed Plan was completed through final design. The Watershed Plan indicates that in 1975, there was significant flooding in 5 out of the last 10 years, but part of the current project is to determine the extent and severity of flooding today. Willow Creek has a watershed of 29 square miles that comes into the town of Browning. The 1975 Watershed Plan included a flood control dam southwest of Browning and flood control improvements through Browning, but because not all stormwater could be intercepted by the dam (only 15 square miles of the watershed), two diversion structures were proposed. The first diversion structure was west of the museum and the other diversion routed water from Willow Creek to Flat Iron Creek

northwest of Browning. Housing has been constructed at the Flat Iron diversion and along Flat Iron Creek. Therefore, 1/3 of the final design plan devised in 1975 is now obsolete.

2. Steve Becker then invited participants to provide input on whether flooding is still a major concern in the Browning area and what improvements could be made.
 - a. Gerald Lunak, Tribal Water Resources - Grew up along Willow Creek and his mother still lives along Willow Creek. Flooding is not typically as severe as it was around 1975. Little infrastructure was present in 1975. Roads were not paved and didn't have curb and/or gutters. There were fewer diversions around town. Infrastructure has changed the dynamics of how flood waters move through town.
 - b. Virgil Edwards, Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) - 1975 era infrastructure was greatly different. East Boundary Road was a bermed road and Browning was a swampy area with gravel roads. Then infrastructure, including a ditch called sewer creek, was built to divert some of the flood water. In the 1975 era Willow Creek contained swimming holes that are no longer present. Flooding is still a concern; during runoff periods, the museum/campground culverts are typically plugged and unable to be unplugged. The town of Browning no longer exists, and maintenance is now the responsibility of Two Medicine Water. There is uncertainty on whether there is a plan in place to take care of that drainage system and the floodwater that get into the system.
 - c. Glacier County Commissioner Tom McKay - Last winter was bad and produced significant runoff. Cemetery Lake along Southwest Boundary Road at times would saturate the area and the crawl spaces of adjacent housing would flood. The lake was previously drained to Depot Coulee via a drain pipe constructed by Housing, but the drain was crushed by heavy equipment and does not effectively drain anymore. The town put in drains just lower than the lake on the east side. The drains have plugged up. There needs to be a more definite plan to handle the runoff.
 - d. Ray Augare, Domestic Water - Winters are no longer as bad as they were around 1975, but if winters begin to be as bad as they previously were, then flooding may again be concerning. Drifting was bad in Browning around 1975 and prevented car travel around Browning.
 - e. Steve Becker, NRCS – In the 1975 plan it states that up to 24 town blocks would see flood waters between 0 and 2 feet. The biggest flood on record, the 1964 flood, resulted in 31 deaths on the reservation, but no deaths in Browning. Therefore, this project doesn't target a loss of life situation, but aims to prevent economic damages and sanitary issues, including basement molding. Portions of Browning are below the Willow Creek channel; high quality aerial survey is available through Browning and will aid in defining flood control problems. Although funding obtained through this program can't be used for urban drainage and urban storm water purposes, urban drainage will play into the project.

- f. Don White, Blackfeet Tribal Transportation Program - Previous developments didn't often consider water control, which resulted in numerous creek diversions, including Sewer Creek, West Boundary drainage system diversions into Willow Creek. Drainage systems often fill with trash and drifting snow. Below ground drainage systems should be considered since they don't fill with drifting snow and trash.
- g. Terry Tatsey, BTBC – The Tribe has inherited the town of Browning. Combining this project with other planning efforts will maximize economic benefit. Other coordination efforts should include coordination with Indian Health Services (IHS).
- h. Steve Becker, NRCS – System analysis will define where Willow Creek “pinch points” are located to determine Willow Creek conveyance capacity. The channel capacity will be compared to the amount that the channel should be able to convey. Numerous other side projects may be able to key off the Willow Creek project.
- i. Gerald Lunak, Water Resources - Numerous beaver ponds along Willow Creek may decrease channel conveyance but are an accepted part of the community due to their cultural significance. Dams are often removed and drained at the celebration grounds to alleviate the ponding water hazards.
- j. Russ Reed, DOWL – The drone imagery shows 5 or 6 beaver dams right through the community.
- k. Virgil Edwards, THPO - Inquired if the Cemetery Lake system can be part of the project. Cemetery Pond can be included in project since it is within the watershed.
- l. Jeff Combs, NRCS - As development continues, increases in impervious area will intensify runoff. Future planning should look at these impervious surfaces and how they will affect runoff.
- m. Terry Tatsey, BTBC - Additional proposed housing developments include those along Depot Coulee and north of Starr School Road.
- n. Don White, BF Tribal Transportation Program – The Blackfeet (BF) Tribal Transportation Program is planning the Northwest Boundary Road project, which will run from Highway 89 to Flat Iron Road and will cross Willow Creek. The road is projected to be built within the next few years. How will this road affect flood conveyance of Willow Creek? This will need to be considered.
- o. Russ Reid of DOWL stated that the Willow Creek Watershed Plan-EIS project will provide immediate value to the Tribe because it will provide the basis of Willow Creek hydrology and hydraulics for the Northwest Boundary Road design and other design projects. A map provided to DOWL by the tribe showing what areas have been flooding and what features are presenting issues would be beneficial.
- p. Steve Becker, NRCS – Flood water from Willow Creek should come down through town on its own merit, but it sounds like somewhere along the way the underground

stormwater system is actually being a crutch for some of that willow creek water. That means the system is not operating correctly.

- q. Terry Tatsey, BTBC – Due to the nature of many of the Tribal funding mechanisms, community strategic planning is rarely completed prior to undertaking a project. This project will provide the science and engineering to serve as a basis for these project plans.

The population of Browning has grown since 1975; many people are moving back home to Browning from off the reservation and many people are selling back landlocked properties to move to Browning. The Tribe is developing a Comprehensive Land Use Plan to pull together all available land use data.

- r. Steve Becker added that floodwater typically can't be bended around development and that flooding and floodwater conveyance needs to be prioritized before development. Planning and development must adjust to floodwater passage.
- s. Russ Reed, DOWL – The study will provide very detailed flood inundation maps that the tribe can then use in their future planning efforts.
- t. Gerald Wagner, Blackfeet Environmental Office – Sampling has been completed west of Browning by Parsons and there is a fish population through Willow Creek. Beavers also are present throughout Willow Creek. The BF Environmental Office should work with other parties to develop the Plan-EIS document. Regarding planning, previous effort didn't take into account flooding.
- u. John Murray, THPO – Browning has historically been a wetland. Boardwalks were typically used between buildings when the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Agency first located to and settled in Browning. Cultural stories in the area include those of the Willow Creek School and later the Methodist Mission. South of Highway 89 unmarked graves from the Willow Creek School exist. Other features include rings and cairns, which may be able to remain in place. Willow Creek used to run near Nevins Tire Shop, but has since been diverted.

An EIS is potentially not needed for the project; an EA could likely suffice. However, Steve Becker, indicated that an EIS would be completed so as to have a defensible document to address the diverse public opinions that would stem from this project.

- v. Mark Magee, Blackfeet Land Department – Most of the land within Browning is Tribal. Outside of Browning it may be fee or allotted lands.
- w. Terry Tatsey, BTBC – The project would work to enhance Willow Creek recreation, fisheries, and wildlife habitat, instead of creating a sterile environment similar to that created with the Havre flood control project discussed by Gerald Lunak. The Willow Creek project will focus on being more user-friendly and will not relocate the creek. Dams wouldn't be used to reroute the creek, but to only throttle floodwaters.

- x. Tom McKay, Glacier County Commissioners – Parsons gravel pit, which is being used for Highway 89 construction, may be an alternative detention pond site for flood control. Willow Creek could be diverted into the pit once Highway 89 construction complete and the site could serve as a public recreation area.
3. Steve Becker then invited participants to provide input on the public and interagency participation process.
- a. The Tribe is advertising for community advisory board members that would meet twice per year and could be targeted for attending public meetings.
 - b. An interdepartmental tribal advisory board will be used throughout the review process to guide review and engage in public meetings. The team should include the Blackfeet Environmental Office, the Blackfeet Land Department, Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife, and THPO.
 - c. Successful Water Compact public scoping began first on a broad level and then focused on directly affected individuals. Residents in outlying communities may have ties and roots in Browning and thus may have an interest in the project. It isn't known how exactly all residents of the Blackfeet Reservation receive information-there are likely multiple sources of information, ie Facebook, direction from family elders, flyers brought home to grandparents, basketball games, etc. Therefore, information should be provided in all ways and the public should be saturated with the message.
 - d. Food is served at most successful public hearings. The senior center and Blackfeet Community College may be good public meeting locations.
 - e. Notices through Tribal Facebook and other media should be coordinated with Jim McNeely. The project may also be announced through the Tourism, Parks, and Rec newsletter.
 - f. NECI will send the updated public participation plan to all stakeholders at the meeting for feedback. The public and interagency participation plan will then be presented to the Tribal Council for adoption.
 - g. NECI will develop newspaper press release article for advertisement within two weeks. The newspaper article will layout dates and locations of public meetings and indicate that updates will be posted on the Tribe's website.
4. Additional stakeholders identified include:
- a. IHS
 - b. Two Medicine Water Company
 - c. Bureau of Indian Affairs
 - d. Federal Environmental Protection Agency
 - e. Tribal Environmental Protection Agency

- f. US Fish and Wildlife Service
 - g. US Army Corps of Engineers
 - h. Blackfeet Planning
 - i. Blackfeet Housing
 - j. Bureau of Reclamation
 - k. Glacier Electric
 - l. Montana Governor's Office
 - m. TERO
 - n. USGS
 - o. Environmental Advisory Groups (Ducks and Trout Unlimited)
 - p. US and State Representatives and Senators
 - q. Montana Department of Transportation
 - r. BNSF
5. The meeting ended at approximately 11:50 am.