

Public “Open House” Meeting on “Yellow River Initiative”

Representatives of the *Midwest Natural Resources Group (MNRG)*, a federal interagency partnership, held two informal public “open house” meetings on Wednesday, March 26th, at the Farmers and Merchants Bank in Waukon to introduce the “Yellow River Initiative” for the Yellow River watershed. Details of the “Yellow River Initiative” were presented by Mr. John Sowl of the National Park Service’s Midwest Regional Office located in Omaha, Nebraska, followed by an opportunity for questions from the public as well as a chance to for them to meet and talk with some of the partners. About forty people, including landowners, attended these presentations.

The purpose of the “Yellow River Initiative” is fourfold:

- To assess the natural resources within the Yellow River watershed, *based on existing information*, and determine their extent, distribution, and condition;
- To allow a team of federal and local, non-federal partners to summarize the assessment results and use them to identify possible options to promote the long-term sustainability of the watershed’s natural resources;
- To develop a “toolbox” of technical and financial assistance information and contacts to help the public to implement these various identified options, *if desired*; and
- **To empower people to *voluntarily* use this information to help them achieve long-term natural resource sustainability and stewardship within the Yellow River watershed.**

In order to accomplish the “Yellow River Initiative” within its allotted two-year time period, the *MNRG*, under the leadership of the National Park Service, has established a broad partnership among federal, state and local agencies and offices, together with a number of non-governmental organizations and individuals. About 35 members of this multi-level partnership met at the same location the next day to conduct the first organizational meeting for the “Initiative.”

Members of the “Yellow River Initiative” partnership succeeded in reaching consensus in several areas during their discussions.

First, the group established a basic framework for action to accomplish the purpose of the “Yellow River Initiative,” the exact details of which remain to be developed through team collaboration. Participants were challenged to keep the end products of this effort “simple, practical, and understandable” for everyone.

Second, the partnership agreed to adopt a proposal made by Mr. John Schultz, Chairman of the “Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development, Inc.” (RC&D), that the RC&D should function as the long-term local coordinator for this initiative within the watershed. Mr. Schultz stated that he felt the “Initiative” would be a “natural fit” for the RC&D and would be appropriate to its purpose. In this capacity, the RC&D would work together with the National Park Service,

the latter providing administrative coordination for the “Initiative” though its estimated completion in 2005. The RC&D would then take over and provide information and guidance to assist those individuals, landowners, or organizations that would voluntarily like to implement any options to promote long-term natural resource stewardship within the watershed that were identified during the development of the “Initiative.” The partnership also noted that having the RC&D function as the long-term coordinator would promote local leadership and control of the “Initiative” based on the public’s collective vision for the future of their watershed.

Third, the group created a steering committee with the following members: Messrs. Rick Cordes and Pat Henry, Northeast Iowa RC&D, Mr. Tex Hawkins, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ms. LuAnn Rolling, Allamakee County Soil & Water Conservation District, Mr. Dave Smith, Mr. John Schultz, Mr. Dave Oestmann, Winneshiek County Conservation Board, Mr. Tim Englehardt, Clayton County Conservation Board, Mr. Jim Janett, Allamakee County Conservation Board, Mr. Larry Stone, Mr. Phil Specht, and Messrs. Rodney Rovang and John Sowl, National Park Service.

The *Midwest Natural Resources Group (MNRG)* is an ongoing federal interagency partnership that focuses activities to support the health, vitality, and sustainability of natural resources and the environment. It is the overarching goal of the *MNRG* to develop processes, marshal resources among agencies and partners, seek opportunities for collaboration and communication, and provide timely assistance where it is needed. Working together, the agencies represented by the *MNRG* are committed to bringing results to the American people in the rural communities, towns, and farms of the Midwest.

This initiative is scheduled for completion within two years. For further information on the “Yellow River Initiative,” contact Mr. Rodney Rovang at Effigy Mounds National Monument, (563) 873-3491.