

## Water, Water Everywhere, So What's a Person to Do?

Pete Nowak of the Nelson Institute moderated the Spring Green information meeting at River Valley High School in November. Stating he was there to listen and only listen, Nowak invited all who filled the little theater to present their questions or provide information related to the town's flooding and groundwater issues.

"I want to hear questions," he said. "My goal is to help find a workable solution." After introductions, Nowak explained the process. This first meeting was to gather questions and information about issues of concern.

Nowak said the Nelson Institute was ideally situated because it is connected to all departments on the UW-Madison campus. He told attendees this was their opportunity to establish avenues to pursue solutions. He also said his role was to begin the conversation between town residents and experts. The residents will determine the direction they judge best to pursue after they get answers to their questions and concerns. All residents have to recognize ownership of both the problem and the solutions if they are to have a chance to work.

One resident wanted to know if the drainage board still exists, and drainage board members assured everyone it does exist and that's why Nowak was there to help move the process forward, using input from town residents. Another resident said he did not want gridlock; he wanted forward motion and solutions.

Mark Cupp, director of the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board, said his board's objective was good science and an objective analysis.

Residents raised concerns and questions about taxes and the real economic impacts of flooding and remediation to agriculture, residential, and highways, as well as the economic impact to the farmers, town and taxable land, the total economic impact on subsidized versus cash crops, the net profit or loss and the cost of making corrections.

The assistant airport manager wanted to know if there were any soil studies done below the topsoil. He wondered if a layer of clay held water around the airport. One resident wanted to know why now even a minor rain fills ditches and sumps run in basements while another said he has been continuously pumping his basement since 2007 and water still stands where the National Guard was pumping in 2008.

A number of people wanted to know if there was any connection between river levels, groundwater levels and rainfall. Some wanted to know why homesteads with no flooding history in the past now had flooded basements and new homes in the same area were not affected. The president of the Pineland Association said association members wanted to know how their neighborhood would or could be impacted.

A long-time resident said 60 years ago local soils were sandy and the area was dry. Then in the sixties, pivots came into the valley. Prairie grasses and wind breaks were taken out. This prompted a question about how the land was used in the past and how it is used now. Could changes be related to more than the water cycle? Do farming practices, irrigation, the number of pumps in the valley and their capacity, paved roads, compaction and railroads affect groundwater flow? Some wanted to know about water table elevations from the edge of the valley and the time it takes for water to travel to the river. One resident asked if the flooding issue was man made.

Several residents wanted to know more about the history of the land, if it was a wetland in pre-settlement times and if there is any data on the area. Several citizens who

monitor sites said years of data were available. There is also the Wisconsin Geological History survey, Ken Lange's technical bulletin about post glacial vegetation in Sauk County, years of aerial photos, and a number of studies made by private firms. All this material is available by request.

One resident said he wanted an independent third party study. Several said they believed an historical analysis of the Bakken Pond area was necessary.

After this first meeting, these concerns were grouped into several general topics:

- concerns and questions about the Wisconsin River, what impacts its levels and why, and the impacts of runoff downstream;
- construction, placement and maintenance of culverts and ditches;
- an array of environmental issues from ag nutrients and chemicals in runoff to removing trees from a bluff;
- the Tri-County Airport;
- local, state and regulatory agency action;
- land use impacts from pre-settlement times on;
- the Bakken Pond area and its history;
- resources and data available and needed.

These topic areas will now be addressed by the Nelson Institute staff incorporating the expertise of the other university experts when necessary. Upon the completion of their investigation, the results will be presented at a second open house to be held February 16, 2011, at 6 p.m. in the little theater at the River Valley High School. The first part of the meeting will consist of presentations regarding these questions, and the second portion will gather citizen input into follow-up questions and concerns that may have arisen through the presentations.

A third meeting will take the input provided by residents at the second meeting and develop a set of recommendations based on working with the local planning committee. Members of that committee include elected officials from both Sauk and Richland counties, town of Spring Green, the DNR and Jewel Engineering. They are the voting members. Nowak is a non-voting member of the committee.

Pete's email address is: [pnowak@wisc.edu](mailto:pnowak@wisc.edu). Residents may also send written questions and comments to him at: The Nelson Institute, Science Hall, 550 N. Park St. Madison, WI 53706. More information can also be found on the Sauk County Land Conservation website at: <http://www.co.sauk.wi.us/landconservation>

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