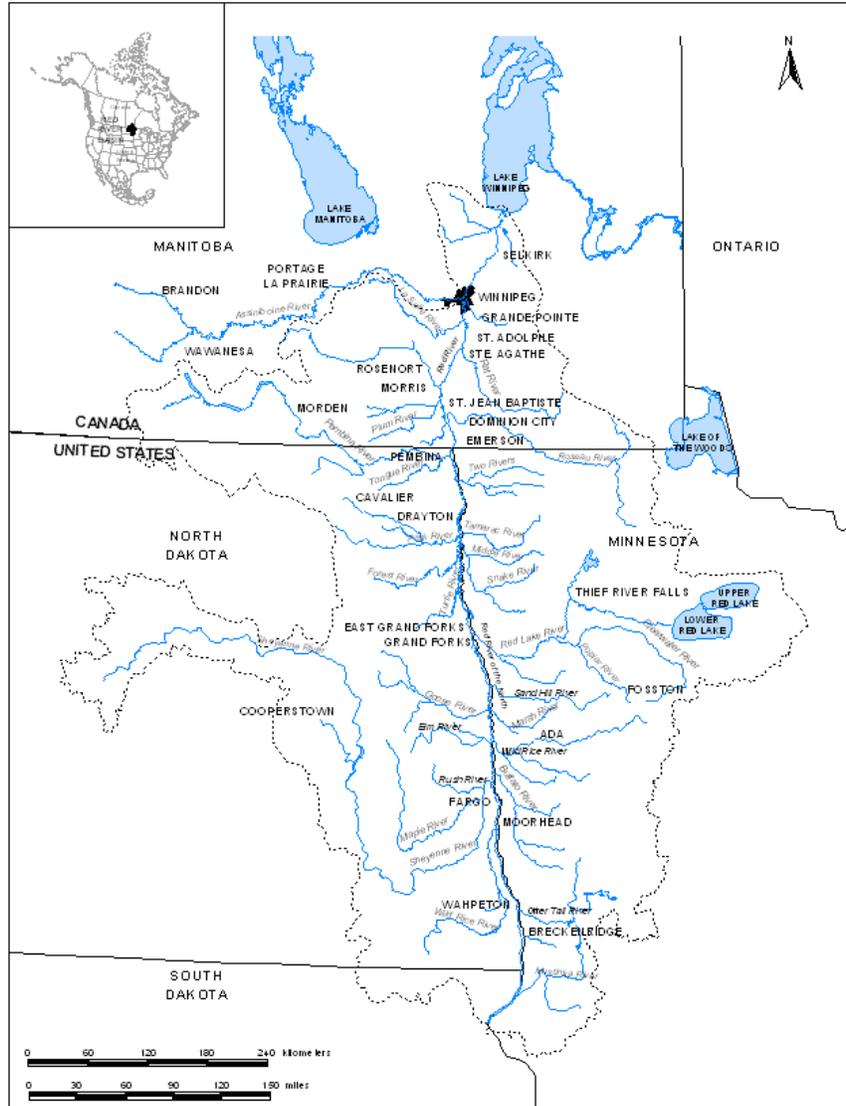


THE RED RIVER BASIN BOARD

Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, U.S. – Manitoba, Canada



From: Red River Basin Disaster Information Network

INTRODUCTION

The Red River encompasses a large drainage basin that includes two nations, three states, and a province. Due to the natural flows of the river and the geology of the basin, this area is prone to extremes, either too little water in the form of droughts or too much water causing flooding. A devastating flood in 1997 highlighted the fact that flooding is an imminent threat to the ecology and economic vitality of the region and that effective

water management requires collaboration among the many stakeholders on both sides of the international border.

Over the years there have been a variety of collaborative efforts in the basin, creating a web of transboundary activity. Much of this cooperation has been between the two federal governments, through the work of the International Joint Commission (IJC). While the IJC Boards have done extensive work regarding flood-related concerns, the governmental cooperation has not addressed all local concerns. In the 1990s there was growing frustration in the region about the inability of the governments to solve local problems. Out of this frustration came the Red River Basin Board, an international, grassroots organization, which hoped to resolve disputes among stakeholders in the region and to be a leader in the basin. While there are still a number of transboundary efforts in this region, this case study will highlight the work of the Red River Basin Board because this group is striving to be the central coordination point for the entire basin.

There are a number of important lessons from the experience of the Red River Basin Board (R2B2). This case illustrates the strength that local communities can bring to a transboundary effort by providing a forum for addressing local concerns. It also highlights the importance of including all relevant stakeholders in the process and making sure the local community understands and supports the effort. While the Board has accomplished many of its initial goals, it has taken longer than expected, highlighting the importance of patience as well as understanding in any effort to cooperatively manage a shared natural resource.

Why Transboundary Management?

A variety of factors led to cooperation across the border in the Red River watershed. Complexity of management due to the many jurisdictions responsible for management of the Red is certainly a reason for transboundary cooperation. The vital link between the river and the economy of the region as well as the threats to the economy from the many uses of the river and the possibility of flooding also facilitated cooperation among stakeholders throughout the region. The history of collaboration by the two governments in this watershed set the tone for new efforts and made it easier for them to include stakeholders from both sides of the border.

CONTEXT

Description of the Red River Watershed

The Red River begins in the United States in Minnesota and flows north, delineating the border between North Dakota and Minnesota. It flows into Manitoba, Canada, ending in Lake Winnipeg. The basin covers a completely flat area of 45,000 square miles¹ and falls within the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, as well as the province of Manitoba.² There are few, if any, natural features to slow water if there is a flood in the basin, and floods are natural occurrences in this region. This flat terrain also means there

are few natural places to store water in the area, making lack of water supply as much of a problem as flooding.

Multiple Stakeholders

This is a complex region with many different players trying to utilize and manage a single river. The traditional management of the Red River is closely linked to the land ownership and usage patterns throughout the region. The majority of the land on both sides of the border is privately owned and much of this land is used for agriculture, making comprehensive management of the entire watershed difficult. Coordination is necessary because there are three states, a province, hundreds of localities, and two nations responsible for management of this river and its drainage basin. Because the Red River basin is a single system, any actions taken by a single jurisdiction influence what happens in other parts of the basin. For instance there have been a number of proposed but not implemented water diversion projects within American communities that need an increased water supply. These projects were often stopped due to Canadian concerns of the impacts on their side of the border of altering rivers in America. The primary concern in Canada is that allowing river basins to come together that do not naturally flow together will lead to the introduction of non-native species into their waters.³

Ecological and Economic Values

While a diverse array of stakeholders makes it more important to manage the river binationally, the economics of the region gives an even greater incentive to work cooperatively across the border. This region includes both commercial centers and rural areas that rely on agriculture. About sixty percent of North Dakota's population, two percent of the population of Minnesota, and seventy percent of Manitoba's residents reside within the Red River watershed.⁴ These population centers, such as Fargo and Winnipeg, need the Red River for a steady water supply in order to maintain their economic viability. Fargo is concerned that they will not have enough water to meet the needs of their growing population, and this lack of water will constrain their growth.⁵

The river also has the potential to devastate these areas through a major flood such as the Flood of 1997. This one event cost upwards of \$5 billion in the United States and Canada. Neither country can afford another expensive flood.⁶ While the Red River Basin is an important urban area for both states and the province, agriculture is also an important part of the economy, as much of the land-use in the area is for agricultural purposes. This area includes gardens, mixed farming, livestock production, and grain and sugar beet farming.⁷ Flooding of the river is a major concern of farming, as a flood can destroy their livelihoods.

Economics cannot be separated from the river in the Red River basin, yet this is not the only reason stakeholders are coming together to protect the river. Even though much of the natural ecology of the area has been altered by farming and urban development, there is still concern about protecting what remains of the aquatic ecosystem. For instance the mainstem of the Red River is recognized as a "trophy catfish fishery" in the region.⁸

Ecosystem Stresses

Another reason for the extensive transboundary cooperation in this particular basin is the fact that there are a number of immediate stresses on the river that are affecting the overall economy. The major threats to the integrity of the Red River ecosystem include soil erosion, flooding, land use and water quality. There is not specific concern for individual threatened and endangered species, but rather a more general concern about the larger natural resource issues which are tied closely to the economic vitality of the region.

Soil erosion can be severe because the terrain is completely flat and lacks natural barriers to hold in this vital resource. Both wind and water strip the land of its soil, causing major problems for farmers in the basin. In addition to the loss of topsoil, there is a major concern about possible contamination of water in the region. “Sediment loading, feedlots, agricultural chemicals, urban runoff, animal holding/management areas, septic systems, and hazardous waste” as well as “abandoned wells, industrial development, land use on sensitive groundwater areas, gravel mining, underground storage tanks, and landfills” all pose a threat to the quality of water in the basin.⁹ General land use is another stress on the ecosystem, as many important wetlands were converted to agricultural land in years past. While some believe these should be reverted to their original condition, others feel this would harm the region economically and is therefore not feasible.

This destruction of wetlands through agricultural conversion contributes to another major concern in the region, which is flooding.¹⁰ The financially devastating flood of 1997 led to a number of efforts to reduce the risk of flooding throughout the basin. While regular flooding is a natural event in the Red River Basin, large floods like the one in 1997 can be harmful not only to the economy of the region but to the natural system as well. In order to decrease the possibility of another major flood, humans have taken a number of actions. The attempts to mitigate the flood risks negatively impacted the ecosystem. “Ecologically, the habitat of the riverine system has been reduced substantially from historic conditions through such actions as channelization, diking, and damming. Land use changes have increased sediment transport.... The numbers and types of plant and animal species have been markedly reduced, with some species threatened, endangered, or gone from the region entirely.”¹¹

Not only are the actions to reduce flooding risks harmful to the ecology of the Red River Basin, but flooding itself is a major threat to the integrity of the ecosystem. The 1997 flood led to a number of immediate environmental issues for the basin including releases of hazardous waste, agricultural chemicals, and untreated sewage into the river as well as a concern for invasive species entering the system due to “break out flows.” When flooding occurs, rivers that are not usually connected meet, such as the Mississippi and Hudson Bay drainage systems, and can transfer biota and other species, causing devastating problems in both ecosystems.¹² In order to tackle these difficult problems, the many different jurisdictions had to find a way to come together and coordinate their efforts.

Historical Cooperation in the Watershed

Binational activity in the Red River Basin has a long history. Both Canada and the U.S. are committed to transboundary cooperation in the Red River Basin because the issues in the basin affect both sides. Both Canadian and American cities are at risk for flooding and must deal with long-term water supply and water quality issues. The city of Winnipeg, Canada for instance was spared damage in 1997 but does not have an adequate infrastructure to protect against future flooding.¹³ The city of Fargo, North Dakota is concerned about long-term water supply because it is growing quickly.¹⁴ Both of these cities need to cooperate with the rest of the basin in order to deal with their specific water concern.

The first binational concern for this basin occurred in 1948 when the Canadian and U.S. governments requested that the International Joint Commission (IJC) look into water use and apportionment issues in the region. At this time the IJC established the International Souris-Red Rivers Engineering Board to consider “water development and management activities in the basin.”¹⁵ Since the 1950s the IJC has issued a number of reports on flooding, water supply and storage issues, water levels, water development projects such as irrigation and recreation, and water quality concerns in the Red River drainage basin.¹⁶ In 1969 the IJC established the International Red River Pollution Board after the two governments requested the Commission consider “the extent and causes of pollution of the Red River at the boundary and to recommend remedial measures.”¹⁷ Membership of the Red River Pollution Board included state, provincial and federal agency officials. Since the 1970s, this Board has monitored and worked to improve water quality in the basin.

Significant Milestones

- 1948** – IJC established the International Souris-Red Rivers Engineers Board
- 1969** – IJC established International Red River Pollution Board
- 1997** – Major Flood
- 1997** – Formation of the Red River Basin Board
- 2000** – IJC combines its boards in the Red into the International Red River Board
- 2000** – Red River Basin Board hires an executive director.

The work of the IJC in the Red River Basin has been important in setting the stage for transboundary cooperation on many levels. According to an IJC official, “we have helped build the base for binational cooperation and helped develop the relationships across the border at the working level.”¹⁸ The long-term presence of the IJC in the region illustrates the commitment of both nations to transboundary management. It also provides continuity in the basin that has not been matched by any other group simply due to the fact that they have been active here for so many years.¹⁹

The IJC is not the only historical presence in the basin. Regular flooding throughout the region highlights the importance of cooperation across the border. The importance of these events is clear, as many efforts in the basin began just after a flood event that raised awareness throughout the region. For instance citizens in the basin started the

International Coalition for Land and Water Stewardship (TIC) in the early 1980s in response to the floods of 1979. This group is a non-profit organization that tries to educate the entire basin on water issues. TIC and other citizen, government, and non-profit organizations in the Red River Basin are always binational because what happens one side of the border can change the risks of flooding on the other.²⁰

The Flood of 1997

1997 brought economic and ecological devastation to much of the Red River Basin. The flood affected both nations and crippled much of the region. This event led to a number of changes in the binational management of the Red River Basin, in many ways strengthening the commitment that was already there but also increasing the importance of cooperation.

This increased commitment to cooperation by both nations was clear from the actions of the IJC, who became even more involved in the region in late 1997. The two federal governments asked the Commission to do an extensive study concerning the reasons for the flood, its implications, as well as ways to reduce the risks of flooding throughout the basin. In order to complete this study, the IJC created the International Red River Task Force. This group included federal officials from both nations, officials from state and provincial agencies as well as academics from both countries. The Task Force had the very specific mission of the study and disbanded after completing its study and offering recommendations to the IJC in November 2000. The final report included twenty-eight recommendations that require action by the IJC Boards as well as all levels of government in the region. These recommendations stress the importance of transboundary cooperation in the basin. The Task Force's report explains, "there also is a need for basin-wide binational institutional arrangements to deal with the transboundary issues that will arise, and the Commission finds that this need for a binational approach is generally accepted within the basin."²¹

In order to begin to implement the recommendations of the Task Force effectively and efficiently, the IJC combined its Boards in the Red River Basin. The Souris-Red Rivers Engineering Board and the International Red River Pollution Board became a single board that is now called the International Red River Board (IRRB). IJC believes this will "ensure a more ecosystemic approach to transboundary water issues and [will help] to achieve operational efficiencies in the conduct of IJC responsibilities."²² Creation of the IRRB is not completely a result of the 1997 flood, as the IJC had already been considering consolidating Boards in a number of different watersheds along the border. In the late 1990s, the IJC re-evaluated its role in many basins along the border in response to a request from the two governments. This evaluation revealed the need to take a more holistic approach to management in each watershed. According to the Public Information Officer in the Washington D.C. office of the IJC, "these combined Boards in general will keep their existing responsibilities but will also try to integrate concerns related to water levels to those related to water quality and will serve as sort of a sounding board or informal ombudsman for any concerns that crop up in the basin."²³ The concern from the flood pushed this process along more quickly in the Red River Basin than in many other basins along the border.²⁴

Like the IJC combined boards in the St. Croix and Souris River basins, the International Red River Board will continue to carry out the functions of the original two IJC Boards but will also take on a few more responsibilities. The IRRB will have a number of duties that come from the work of the IJC's Task Force after the 1997 flood. The combined board will work to implement many of the recommendations of the Task Force in order to reduce flood risk throughout the basin and will monitor work on all of the recommendations.²⁵ The IJC is currently defining the goals and objectives of its International Red River Board, but the proposed directive states that the mandate of the board "is to assist the Commission in preventing and resolving transboundary disputes regarding the waters and aquatic ecosystem of the Red River and its tributaries and aquifers. This will be accomplished through the application of best available science and knowledge of the aquatic ecosystem of the basin and an awareness of the needs, expectations and capabilities of residents of the Red River basin."²⁶

The 1997 flood led to a number of other efforts besides those of the IJC. For example the International Flood Mitigation Initiative for the Red River Basin (IFMI) came out of the 1997 flood. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) started IFMI in order to reduce the future risks of flooding in the basin. This group completed its report in November 2000 and does not plan to have a lasting presence in the basin.²⁷

APPROACH TO TRANSBOUNDARY MANAGEMENT

While IJC plays an important role in the Red River Basin, it is certainly not the only transboundary group in the basin. IJC was the first binational actor in the watershed, but throughout the years there have been a variety of nonprofits groups, trade organizations, and government led initiatives surrounding the Red River. While all of these groups have done important work and helped improve cooperation between the two nations, there has never been a single group to coordinate all efforts in the region and to act as a leader, mediator, and voice of the concerns of the local people. The Red River Basin Board (R2B2 or the Board) was founded in 1997 in an attempt to fill this void. While there continues to be a web of transboundary activity in the region, the Red River Basin Board hopes to facilitate coordination among transboundary efforts to improve overall management of the Red River and to ensure discussion of local concerns by providing a forum in which these issues can be raised.

Formation of the Red River Basin Board

Despite the activities of the IJC and other transboundary efforts, there was a great deal of frustration in the basin in the early 1990s. According to an official of the North Dakota Water Commission, by 1996 there was a feeling that "something need[ed] to drive water management at the local level across jurisdictional boundaries.... There was the need for a basin-wide comprehensive plan in how water would be managed in the future."²⁸

While many would see this water management plan as the responsibility of different government entities throughout the basin, residents were frustrated by the "government's inability to get solutions implemented"²⁹ and believed it was time for another group to

come up with a comprehensive plan that dealt with all water related issues, especially issues of flooding and adequate supplies.

While flooding has been a recent concern in this area, having an adequate water supply for the entire region is the more long-term issue. For instance, the city of Fargo is growing quickly and is beginning to look for water from other basins in order to support its expected population twenty-five to thirty years from now. Issues of water apportionment and moving water into the Red basin from other basins are very contentious throughout the region. According to the Mayor of Fargo, “one of the reasons for this organization is to try to deal with those kinds of issues [moving water into the basin to support Fargo] and concerns in a format where people can sit down and talk rather than in an angry confrontation.”³⁰ No forum existed to effectively deal with issues that crossed local, state and national boundaries.

With these concerns in mind, an organization called TIC, the International Coalition for Land and Water Stewardship in the Red River Basin, held a water summit in 1996. TIC is a nonprofit organization that focuses on education and raising public awareness about issues in the region. This group does not have the ability to lobby due to its nonprofit status and could not become the leader that was needed in the basin.³¹ Out of this 1996 water summit came the Red River Basin Board (R2B2 or the Board), an international grassroots organization whose mission is “to create and implement a comprehensive management plan for the Red River Basin. The Board also facilitates the resolution of interjurisdictional issues.”³² The Board hoped to provide a forum for dealing with contentious issues, such as diverting water from other rivers into the Red River Basin, as well as considering an overall plan for water management in the basin.

Stakeholder Involvement

In order to fulfill its mission, R2B2 brought together a diverse group of individuals who represented varying local interests. The group maintained the importance of being a grassroots organization rather than another layer in the complex bureaucracy in the region. The Board includes extensive local representations as the members “represent local basin cities, counties, rural municipalities, watershed Boards, water resource districts, joint power Boards, First Nations, and other local interests.”³³ Many of the members of R2B2 who represent local concerns are elected officials and are therefore responsive to the needs of the basin residents.

However, it is not enough to rely on these individuals to represent local interests. There have been a large number of organizations in the Red

Principal Transboundary Actors: Red River Basin Board Membership

- Current Chair – Mayor of Fargo
- At-large Members from Minnesota, North Dakota, and Manitoba
- County Representatives from MN and ND
- First Nation/Tribal Representatives
- Governor’s Appointees from MN, ND, and SD
- Premier’s Appointee from Manitoba
- Representatives of Red River Cities from Manitoba, MN, ND
- Representatives from Manitoba Rural Municipalities and Water Cooperative
- Representatives of SD, ND, MN Watersheds
- Federal Representatives

River Basin over the years, and there is a great deal of confusion among the locals about these different groups. According to a R2B2 staff member, “There is a general belief that there are just too many organizations in the basin. It is often confusing as to which role each organization plays, and there is concern about duplication of efforts.”³⁴ In order to combat this confusion and establish itself as a leader in the basin, the Board made a concerted effort to make sure the public understood its role in the basin and had input into the activities of R2B2. The process by which the Board is setting its goals is a clear example of the efforts it has gone through to gain public input. Draft goals were taken to the public for comment through a series of face-to-face public forums. This has been a lengthy process, but the Board gained invaluable comments from the public and also used these forums as an opportunity to educate the public about its role in the basin. These sessions are now complete and the goals and objectives will soon be finalized.³⁵

Involving the local community was vital to the success of the Red River Basin Board, but this was not the only necessary factor for success. While the R2B2 wanted to be a grassroots organization, there was an understanding that they would benefit from the involvement of stakeholders at different levels and could not ignore the many government actors in the basin,³⁶ as these officials made decisions that affected the entire region and had knowledge and expertise that would help R2B2.³⁷ While including these experts in the activities of the Board was important, it was equally important to gain participants who wanted to be involved in R2B2. The fact that all Board members are volunteers and want to participate in this transboundary effort makes working together easier.³⁸ Many of these volunteers are officials of the local, state, provincial or federal governments. Many of the most active Board and committee members are employees of different government organizations. According to a Canadian Board member, “they do rely a lot on government agencies to do the work of the Board... I represent the Manitoba government on the Board, so I can bring to the table the resources of the Water Resources Branch where I work.”³⁹ Not only do government officials do a good deal of work through committees, but government has also been essential in terms of funding. The primary source of funding for R2B2 has been the three states and the provincial government, and now they are looking to more local governments for financial support for their future activities.⁴⁰

While R2B2 did bring in state and provincial stakeholders from the beginning,⁴¹ the Board has only recently added members to represent the two federal governments. According to the current chair, “One of the founding reasons [for the Board] was to have grassroots participation – that is the reason why there are local mayors, county commissioners, and water boards.... There were a lot of organizations and a lot of interests that were actually kept off of the initial Board. That was an area of criticism by some people, so we have tried to address that partly by having some environmental representatives from both Canada and the U.S. and also someone from the federal governments of both nations.”⁴² While early on there was a hope that this would be a bottom up effort and there was no need for federal involvement, now the R2B2 Board members feel that including representatives of the two federal governments will only improve communication and coordination. According to the Chair of the Red River Basin Board, “I don’t think it will really be an impediment because ultimately we have to

deal with those federal agencies anyway.”⁴³ The Board members understand that they cannot have a successful effort if they do not involve all of the necessary stakeholders in the process. According to an active committee member, “The biggest thing is to make sure you have buy-in by all the parties at multiple levels.”⁴⁴ It remains to be seen what affect the new Board members will have on the dynamic of the group, but it is clear that the Board cannot be effective in the basin if it is not respected by a wide variety of interests.

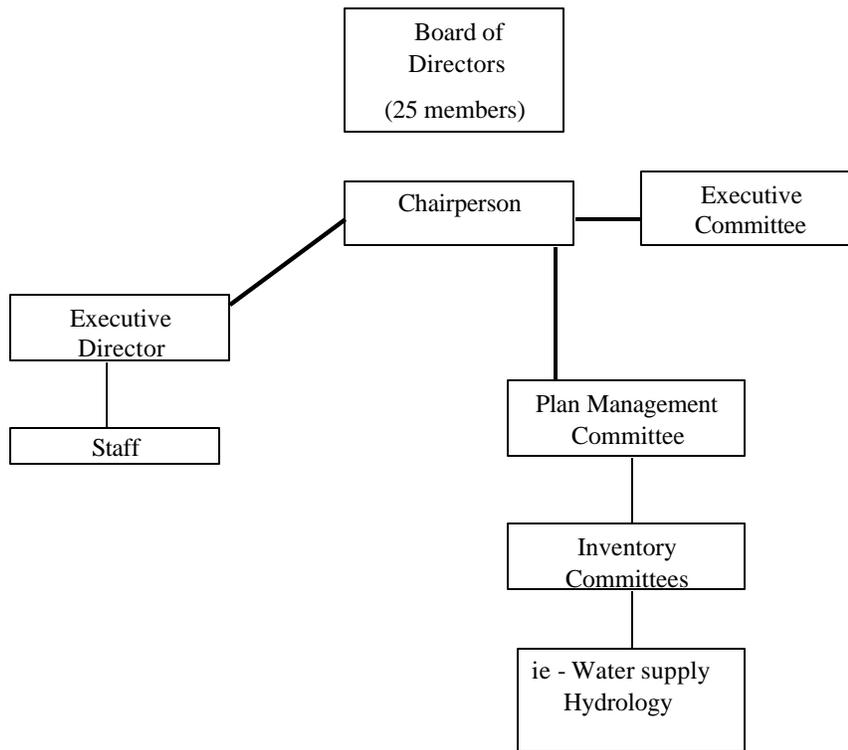
Organizational Structure of R2B2

While R2B2 started as a local, grassroots organizations, in order to carry out its activities, there must be a formal organizational structure. The Red River Basin Board’s main decision-making body is the Board of Directors. This group meets monthly to make decisions on issues that are brought to it by the committees. There is a central standing committee called the Plan Management Committee that sorts through what to take to the Board. The Plan Management Committee is made up of the chairs of all of the smaller committees that deal with very specific issues such as water quality, drainage, water supply, etc.⁴⁵ These smaller groups are made up of people who really understand the specific, technical issues. While this fact makes them more efficient, the R2B2 chair believes it can also be difficult for the Board because “We lose a little bit in the communication process when they are doing a lot of the detailed work and reports are being made to the Board.”⁴⁶

While R2B2 has been able to bring stakeholders together from all over the basin to do the work of the Board, there have been a number of barriers to working cooperatively. It is often not difficult to bring the parties to the table but actually agreeing on an issue can be nearly impossible because there is such a wide range of opinions in basin. The Board tries to deal with the fact that there are so many divergent views by working by consensus. They do not go forward on a project unless all Board members are comfortable.⁴⁷

The use of consensus is also necessary because R2B2 has no formal decision making authority in the basin but can only try to influence the decision makers, such as the different state and provincial governments. According to the Mayor of Fargo, “All we can do it try to persuade and cajole and influence.”⁴⁸ The Red River Basin Board works on a consensus basis and tries to influence the decision makers in the basin by showing a unified front on an issue.⁴⁹ Working this way has been a challenge for the Board because this often means avoiding controversial issues. According to a Board Member, “There is no consensus agreement on support or non-support for certain issues, so we sort of avoid them because everyone knows they will not go forward.”⁵⁰ This can be frustrating for some members of the organization, as R2B2 has not tackled what many stakeholders believe to be the most important issues in the basin.

Red River Basin Board



While the Board members cannot resolve all controversies and do not have formal decision making authority, R2B2 is respected and has become quite influential in the basin. Groups with potential projects are now approaching the Board for an official endorsement because they believe this will help move the project forward and will help secure funding. According to the coordinator of the North Ottawa Impoundment Project, “Having an international organization such as the Red River Basin Board supporting a project such as this is a great ally to have.”⁵¹

Since the Board members and committee members are all volunteers and cannot devote all of their time to this organization, R2B2 created a small staff to help with the administrative duties of the Board, logistical issues, etc. R2B2 only hired an executive director to run this staff in the last year. The lack of a leader was a criticism of the Board, as they needed more structure and someone to be the spokesperson of the Board.⁵² According to an active R2B2 member, “Not having an executive director made it difficult for the Board to establish an identity for itself amongst the communities. The Board needed a point man who could be out there representing them on a day in and day out basis.”⁵³ The addition of an executive director has been positive for the organization. Even though it is grassroots oriented, a formal structure is necessary for the Board to accomplish its long-term goals of “implementing a comprehensive water management plan for the basin... and providing a forum for resolving interjurisdictional issues.”⁵⁴

The current structure was not the one that R2B2 started with but has evolved with the organization. The original structure involved sector-based committees, such as a group to

represent agriculture interests. This structure fell apart due to a lack of interest in certain committees and too many different voices in other committees. This never really made it off of the ground and was changed quickly, so the committees reflected issues, such as water quality, instead of interests, such as agriculture.⁵⁵ The new committees have been very effective, as they include representatives of each of the jurisdictions.⁵⁶ The committees provide opportunities for officials from different jurisdictions to interact and form relationships. This opens lines of communication that were not available before the creation of R2B2.⁵⁷ According to a Board member, creating these personal relationships is vital to a successful transboundary effort. “People have gotten more comfortable with each other over the years. I think some of the suspicion, if not eliminated, is not as evident. There is more comfort in knowing where the other person is coming from.”⁵⁸ Understanding other points of view helps stakeholders compromise and manage for the needs of all residents of the basin rather than just their narrow interests.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

While the Red River Basin Board is only four years old, they have accomplished a great deal in the basin. To this point their accomplishments are more process oriented than ecological, but there is the hope that ecological accomplishments will follow soon. Just bringing the very different jurisdictional interests together and sustaining a dialogue is a huge accomplishment. According to one Board member, “Our greatest accomplishment is surviving this long.”⁵⁹ Other Board members echoed this sentiment by citing the fact that they have not only opened lines of communication but are keeping these avenues open as a major accomplishment. According to the current chairmen, “One accomplishment is just sitting down and talking about it [basin issues] with everybody there.”⁶⁰ There is an understanding that bringing people together is the first step towards collaboration and that it takes time to build the trust that is necessary to reach a consensus.⁶¹

While getting the right people to the table is important, R2B2 has also started to define who it is and what its role will be in the basin. There are many groups in the area and R2B2 has to identify its niche in the region. They have begun this process by defining their guiding principles and goals and objectives. Many Board members identified these visionary documents as major accomplishments of the group.⁶²

Beyond these administrative type accomplishments, the Board has played an important role in the basin of gathering information about the ecosystem. The inventory groups just completed reports that document the resources throughout the entire basin. According to an official from the North Dakota State Water Commission, “Those will prove to be a very valuable tool for water managers long into the future.”⁶³ Comprehensive information that cuts across jurisdictions has not been available in the past, as each state or locality gathered and kept its own data. This information is essential to managing the basin as a single system.

A final accomplishment of the R2B2 is assisting with the implementation and funding of new projects throughout the basin. The Board endorses projects that it believes fall within the guiding principles. These endorsements have proven to be very powerful and have helped projects such as the North Ottawa Impoundment Project gain funding.⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

While there continues to be a web of transboundary activity in the Red River Basin, the Red River Basin Board is slowly establishing itself as a leader in the region. This grassroots, international organization is beginning to play a central role in coordinating activities throughout the basin. The increased recognition of the role of R2B2 in the region is clear from a recent invitation by the IJC to the R2B2 Chair to become a member of the IJC International Red River Board.⁶⁵ Adding the R2B2 Chair to the IJC Board is important because it both raises the legitimacy of the Red River Basin Board and formalizes the interaction between these two important transboundary groups. The IJC is recognizing the importance of local input into its boards and understands that IJC boards can no longer just include federal, state and provincial level governmental officials. While the work of both organizations is vital to improving the overall management of the Red River Basin, increased cooperation between these groups will lead to even better results for the basin and the local residents.

Lessons Learned

The experience of the Red River Basin Board illustrates a number of lessons about transboundary resource management in general.

- **Individuals play a vital role in facilitating transboundary collaboration.** R2B2 depends upon the work of volunteers, as much of the activities of the Board are accomplished by the active participants who have other jobs but are committed to the mission of R2B2. Many of the actions of the Board evolved out of relationships among Board members.
- **Gaining public understanding and involvement can improve cross-border collaboration.** In order to facilitate collaboration within the basin, R2B2 made a concerted effort to explain its activities to the residents of the basin as well as to gain input from the grassroots on what issues needed to be addressed. Gaining public involvement helped increase the profile and legitimacy of the Board in the basin.
- **Efforts can build on an existing transboundary infrastructure.** The presence of the IJC in the basin acted as an example of transboundary management. Following this example, R2B2 was a binational organization from the very beginning.
- **Government officials can be an important resource.** The Board has a small staff and relies heavily upon its participants to maintain the transboundary

effort. Much of the work of R2B2 is done in-kind by employees of government agencies in the basin.

- **An organizational structure can help sustain a transboundary effort.** While R2B2 is a grassroots organization, a formal structure and dedicated staff help the group facilitate collaboration. Hiring an executive director provided a major boost to the organization, as he has helped R2B2 identify its role in the basin.
- **Opening new lines of communication may facilitate transboundary cooperation.** Before working on specific issues, R2B2 had to facilitate communication among the different jurisdictions responsible for management of the basin. Now that these different jurisdictions are communicating, officials are able to tackle specific issues and problems within the basin.
- **A transboundary effort may benefit from having a single, unifying goal.** R2B2 worked for a year and a half to reach consensus on its guiding principles because this is the basis for all of their activities. This foundation will help facilitate transboundary collaboration across jurisdictions.
- **An effort can benefit from diverse representation.** An early criticism of R2B2 was its tendency to exclude certain groups. It is now becoming more inclusive and hopes this will improve its legitimacy and effectiveness throughout the region.
- **Individuals with a capacity to work for the common good of the Board will help sustain a transboundary effort.** R2B2 is effective because the Board members understand the greater needs of the watershed and do not advocate for their individual jurisdictional interests.
- **Transboundary collaboration takes a great deal of patience and understanding.** Transboundary collaboration takes time and cannot be forced. Any international group must establish a sound process before they can turn to the substantive issues at hand. A stable process provides a forum in which to deal with these difficult issues.

Interview Contacts

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- **Quentin Fairbanks**, R2B2 Board Member, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians
- **Bruce Furness**, Mayor, Fargo, North Dakota
- **Lee Klapprodt**, R2B2 Committee Member, ND State Water Commission
- **Joe Roeschlein**, North Ottawa Impoundment Project Coordinator, Bios de Sioux Watershed District
- **Angela Whitney**, Staff Planner, Red River Basin Board
- **Larry Whitney**, R2B2 Board Member, Manitoba Department of Natural Resources

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