JD 3 Public Statement

Hearing Date: 12/16/2019

The HLWD has collected years of water quality monitoring data that show our waters are plagued with excessive sentiment and nutrients. When outlining these issues, the HLWD states on their website that "these problems are a direct result of drainage and the resulting higher peak and base flows". Therefore, approval of this project would produce more of what we know has degraded our water quality for over a century.

I understand that we need drainage in this part of the country to farm successfully. However, we have reached a tipping point where we are asking that our land to be something that it is Not. What was once wet prairie and marshland will always be wet to a point. No matter how much we tile to force water off the land as fast as possible, soil type, weather and other important variables all trump our best efforts to increase yield with agricultural drainage.

After I read the preliminary engineers report, I was left wondering how an 8% reduction in flow rate to South Heron Lake was possibly calculated? This project calls for 44 different branches of existing tile to be replaced with lines that are twice or more in diameter. On average, the proposed tile is 116% larger than what currently exists in the system. This substantial increase in capacity means that the JD 3 output to South Heron Lake would be greater than what exists. Plans as is are to install one storage basin and a two-stage ditch with a calculated capacity of 20 acre-feet. There is no estimate given for the capacity of the first storage basin and I feel that these two practices alone are not enough to offset the increased flow of the proposed JD 3 improvements. Furthermore, using conservation practices to justify drainage improvements is extremely contradictory and unacceptable. We as conservation professionals well know that drainage is one of the main contributors to degradation of our water quality as it adds significantly to the sediment and nutrient loads of our lakes and streams.

The other side to this debate is financial. No one's bottom line in farming is getting any larger. Adding hundreds of dollars per acre in input costs in the form of tax assessments places financial burdens on our farmers and landowners. Many elderly folks especially depend upon farm rent as their only income. They simply cannot pass these extra costs onto farmers renting ground as they are also unable to afford any additional overhead. Furthermore, what type of yield increase per acre must we see to realize a profit on an investment which we will likely not pay for in our lifetimes? After running some numbers, I found that a $150 per acre assessment puts our farmers in the red considering the average corn price in the last 10 years on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) is only $3.65.

As such, sensible conservation and agricultural professionals do not approve of this project.

As farmers are struggling to make money, a $150 per acre assessment on 160 acres adds $24,000 to their annual input costs. Iowa State University Outreach and Extension estimates the 2019 cost of corn production per acre is equal to $603.23. This adds up to $120,516.80 in input costs with the $150 per acre assessment. In the past 10 years, the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) average corn price is $3.65. Assuming a 200 bushel per acre yield on 160 acres equals $116,800 in income. Inputs exceeding income means this proposed project puts our farmers in the red.