

## Interview with Mike McKay

Lake Pepin

May 14, 2013

Voices of the River - Oral History Project

by [Anne Queenan](#)

The project has been made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008.

Administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.



It is also supported by matched donations made to Clean Up the River Environment (CURE).



AQ: Let's start with you telling me your name and where we are.

MM: I'm Mike McKay, and we're right at the mouth of Lake Pepin on our first nice day of May.

AQ: Tell me just a little bit about your family heritage and what brought you to Minnesota.

MM: Well I actually came to Minnesota from Michigan when my dad transferred for a job, right after my grade school. So I started high school in Minnesota and professionally left for a while, but made sure I got back to Minnesota. Cretin High School in St. Paul.

AQ: Tell us a little bit about the years when you first moved here and your impressions?

MM: A little bit unique. We moved to Minnesota, we moved to Minneapolis and I lived on Lake Nokomis, but I ended up going to St. Paul Cretin and it was a military school back then, all boy military school. So I guess I had a different perspective. But I always loved Minnesota and I had a group of friends in Minneapolis and St. Paul, so I think it worked out to my advantage.

AQ: When you think about the movement to clean up the Minnesota River, when do you think that started?

MM: Well, the actual cleanup part, probably very late in the game. I think about maybe ten years ago, living on Lake Pepin, I became aware that I could already visualize and chronicle some changes that was happening to the lake. And I thought that was very curious that you could do it at that kind of speed, 'cause even most things, especially naturally, doesn't move that quickly. And so about five, six years ago, a small group of us that lived on Lake Pepin got together and decided to figure out exactly what was happening. So in that sense, I'm probably very late to the game. But I spent a year literally trying to chronicle what was happening, what was truly happening to the lake and it got me more, deeper and deeper involved and it moved us to eventually actually start our group called, Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance. And it's truly a citizen group.

AQ: When you think about movement to clean up the Minnesota River, when did it begin for you? And what did you perceive your role to be?

MM: I probably, to be fair, wasn't aware of a movement. I think on a personal note, it's probably been at least ten years where I could visually chronicle some changes in the lake, and that alone was a little bit disturbing because something that changes over nature shouldn't be that apparent or that quick in that kind of a timeline. It brought a small group of us that lived real close here to the mouth of Lake Pepin to ask the question what truly is happening to us, what's happening. Probably unaware of all the science and all the resources that have been asking the same question and doing the research and doing the work of finding out. We had to bring ourselves up to speed of what was happening.

AQ: So what did you learn?

MM: Well eventually what you learn is that the sediment issue that we've been noticing is a result of what's happening in the Minnesota River Basin. And so that just obviously complicated matters, because the fix was that we all have a role and a part in this; the fix for us, or for Lake Pepin, is things that have to change up in the Minnesota River Basin.

AQ: Can you tell me a little bit about what you see your role in this story as being?

MM: Well ultimately, if we are going to be a small part of effecting some change, we need to get some things to change on the Minnesota River Basin, and we wanted to use actual facts and science to accomplish that. We totally understand that Mother Nature itself is working or has a role in this, but what we know or what they say is that under normal, natural circumstance, Lake Pepin will fill up in a time span of a little over three thousand years. But at the pace we're going now, that number is somewhere between 300 and 320 years. So man has a lot to do with this and we need the help of those living in the Minnesota River Basin.

AQ: What is happening to Lake Pepin?

MM: What I've learned, well, interestingly enough, when we got heavily involved in let's say five years ago, the thinking that a big portion of it, over 30 percent, (inaudible). And it actually has changed a little bit with the fields have, that number has not grown, however, with the tiling and some of the other practices, and how fast they get the water off of their property, most of the sediment that's ending up in Lake Pepin is from the bluffs and the stream banks. (Inaudible), water, the actual flow, think of it as a garden hose, has increased to a point that it's taking the stream banks and the river bank with it.

MM: What happens is it comes (inaudible) pretty much down Lake Pepin, the Mississippi River here and the Minnesota River and the Mississippi River and (inaudible). It pretty comes down the Minnesota River and the Mississippi River and then at Lake Pepin we get (inaudible), the first time that that opens up and so the sediment starts settling and that's why it's filling up. It's the first chance that the sediment has to settle. And of course that changes, not only does it fill in, but it changes the aquatic plant life, which affects both the birds and the fish that eat off of that.

AQ: How did things progress from your first observation to your current efforts?

MM: Yeah, in the beginning it was all about what is happening and is there anything we can do about it? Are we going to have to live with the prospect of someday this being just a channel for shipping and the more we got to know what the sources were, we realized that it would require an education process. And hopefully we've educated ourselves to a point where we can start talking to the people that might be able to ??? things to change. I think in a very short time we've done some good. We didn't start out to have a group or start a (inaudible), but at the end of the day, there wasn't anybody we felt that was ??? for Lake Pepin, specifically ??? for Lake Pepin. There's a lot of water groups, a lot of people doing a lot of good work, but in a sense, Lake Pepin was a small part of an overall scheme and yet it's a special place and interesting enough, probably the most researched lake in the country, definitely Minnesota. And my personal thinking is if we could get it right on Lake Pepin, everything that's involved in

fixing Lake Pepin, we could go a long way in fixing most of the waters in Minnesota. So it's bigger than Lake Pepin, but even if it wasn't, Lake Pepin is a tool that Minnesota would be sad to be without.

AQ: Can you tell us about what it means to Red Wing (inaudible).

MM: When we first started, a lot had to do with educating all the people that lived on both side of the lake, on Minnesota and Wisconsin, on what was happening to the lake. Interesting enough, a lot of people were struggling with some issues, some of towns along Wisconsin, (inaudible) their entryways into their towns because they just couldn't keep up. But so many people didn't really know what was happening to them. So that was kind of the first mission, the first thing that I think, it was slowly creeping up (inaudible) what they would wake up to one day. So that was a big piece of it. We've gravitated to that education of the locals if you will, because we truly are a citizen group, to actually (inaudible) and effect change. We had to also start educating and dialoguing with the people up river. And that's kind for a couple years been a big part of our efforts and we think people look a little bit different there, and we've partnered up with people on the river, CURE and the other group that we found (inaudible) with the AG people and some of the....

MM: We've moved from the education of our local people to starting to educate with the people upriver. And we ended up meeting with several AG people, some of the officials up in the Minnesota River Basin, we've met with them and had dinners and broke bread with them. They come down here toward the lake and we showed them our hospitality here. We met them as one on one, as small groups, and that kind of continued to grow and we've had several meetings and repeat meetings and a lot more people are involved. We've had a similar arrangement where some of the government officials, county level, we brought our county level people together with their county level people, again, had them down here, had a return trip up there, people that are involved and can be involved with the water issue.

AQ: Do you call this the Friendship Tour? What do you call these efforts?

MM: Well we did. The series of meetings originally with the landowners, I guess you'd say that we purposely left out most of the agencies and some of the typical and started talking one on one and I guess it was deemed the Friendship Tour. And that continued to go on and over a couple years, and it's still happening in different forms right now. And it grew to the point where we had county officials from both downstream and upstream meet and come to Red Wing area or the Lake Pepin area, and then we'd go up and visit them and did tour their facilities and their farms and saw some of the efforts that were being made.

AQ: What happens when that kind of exchange goes on?

MM: The friendship tours started basically with citizens and landowners and property owners, people that were interested in Lake Pepin, somewhere probably about 2010 I believe or 2011. And we did that back and forth over six, seven eight different get-togethers in various forms. Then we brought some county officials, same thing, where we brought county officials from the Lake Pepin area to (inaudible) down here, and then we went and visited with them up there. And then we've expanded basically to the target is anybody that has a true interest in the water is involved. We progressed to different projects and other (inaudible). We've done, if you will, a lot of data mining and put a lot of the factual stuff by county and the Minnesota River Basin, and the idea there is it becomes a resource for somebody's looking to get some kind of benchmark on where their county's at at any one time. And the efforts that have been involved, if they're, hopefully that have been done. It recognizes the people that are pretty far along in their water plans or the ones that aren't have a place to go where they don't have to reinvent the wheel. Some of the best practices, it's going to change county by county because Mother Nature didn't deal them an even hand and so what works in Blue Earth may not work in Redwood Falls, but it's coming together and I think it's a tool that's being used by agencies, by individual landowners, by county commissioners and that's what we intended.

MM: Well the St. Croix Research Center does a lot of the Lake Pepin stuff. In fact, most of it, and Shawn's latest one on the AG ultimately affects Lake Pepin a lot. His sediment issue, most latest thorough scientific paper on the sediment on the Minnesota River is done out of the St. Croix Research Center. Shawn is one of the scientists at the research center and he's Dan Engstrom's right hand man, if you will.

MM: What's amazing about the data mining, the information that's out there we're grabbing from everywhere, AG, we've got the CRP information by county, we've got, the DNR had a wealth of information that wasn't readily available or easily sourced. Of course the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency had (inaudible). What you found is that if you were looking for something it wasn't really available, so we're bringing that stuff together, doing visuals that people can relate to. So hopefully this isn't a scientific paper you're reading and you're ??? in five minutes. We're doing it in such a way that you really can find out what's happening in your county and ultimately start sharing information between counties and counties about what's working and not working, what's most effective. And it's really going after the exchange of best practices and what could be done.

AQ: Are you finding that landowners, you're doing this because you appreciate how a landowner might want that information?

MM: Yeah, and hopefully we're doing it in such a way that they trust the information that's in front of them. We're not making editorial statements; we're saying these are the facts, this is what's happening here or there and maybe you find

something that they did ??? next to you, or you find out that the counties that surround you have pretty current and relevant water plans that maybe your county doesn't and you might start asking questions why that is. Or if you're one of the county commissioners that maybe was getting resistance or didn't know where to start, you have help. You can call your peer at a county that's been through it all and then they may have developed a template for you and then you can drive on from them.

AQ: Can you tell us a little bit about the various agencies and organizations that are involved in your work and your relationships with them?

MM: They all play a role of sorts. Probably the most helpful for me, when I was trying to get up to speed in learning, probably most of the resources, overall resources reside in the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. I've had a couple people within that agency that were real mentors to me. I also had the local DNR (inaudible). Ken xxx, the local DNR here had a real true interest and one of the things I guess I should say, when I started here, I wondered how reluctant or how helpful the agency would be because we were an outside group, if you will, we were a true citizens group, and I'm not sure, I wasn't sure what that would mean. I was quite surprised, frankly, how embraced we were, whether it was when dealing with even the Army Corps of Engineers, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the DNR. I think what I found is that some of these agencies get so large and you find that they're true professionals, but they also get stymied, because their agency itself is so large or they've got new heads of the agencies, and maybe the priorities have shifted. And they do shift, even depending on who's holding office at the time. And so they're frustrated and one of the things I learned during this learning period was frankly the power of a true citizen effort. Even some of the NGOs that have been around a while, I wouldn't say they're on automatic pilot, but you kind of know what their positions are and their branded, if you will. And I think the fact that in a sense that we were a pure citizen group and nobody's making their living off of this effort, and we make an effort to make sure we kind of dial the emotions out of it and deal with the facts and science, have helped us move fairly quickly to a place at the table.

AQ: Who are the citizens and what brings them to this effort?

MM: Interesting, if they're a member of the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance, they're interested in Lake Pepin, or maybe the water in general. Most of them live around Lake Pepin, in the four or five towns that are on the Wisconsin side and then the ones, the Lake City, the Red Wing, the Bay City, Maiden Rocks, Stockholm, Pepin, Wabeshaw. So that's who makes it up but you'll be surprised, I'm surprised, how many people from Rochester, because they vacation here, or they have places here or they're used to coming here. And the Twin Cities even; of course you've got the sailors that love Lake Pepin, and it's a real true, and I think because of our approach and the fact that you have boaters, you have recreational, you've got sportsmen, you've got conservationists, you've got

everybody, you've got the officials from the different cities, it's made up of a real wide variety of people with interests, but Lake Pepin is the draw, is the key.

AQ: What does Lake Pepin mean to you?

MM: I think probably what's most effective is when people understand that it's actually threatened and literally could disappear in 300 years or so, they can't imagine that. Especially people who have been, who got attached to Lake Pepin and know what that is. It is, even in geological terms, it's something very unique. As I mentioned earlier, it's probably one of the most researched and documented lakes there is, just for the value of science alone it's been quite a laboratory for them. But anybody who recreates or has seen it, it's just, even if you just love to drive around, which many people do, you know it's very unique, very unique to Minnesota and you could take the Mississippi all the way down to New Orleans and probably not match Lake Pepin.

AQ: When they think about what's happening to Lake Pepin, what would it mean?

MM: Well it would certainly impact business. The people that fish, the people that supply the fish, the people that have the restaurants and the antique stores and the art stores, the marinas, it would most definitely and obviously affect them. But I think it's bigger than that. I think the notion though that Lake Pepin would look quite a bit different in a hundred years, 150 years, that's just (inaudible) anything close to what it is now, and I think it's frightening.

AQ: Personally for you, what has life become like for you?

MM: I personally have been here a little over 20 years and of course, I love it, and I've been very fortunate. I live very close to where we are right now. But I guess I don't want to be that parochial, but once you're here, you can't get it out of your blood. I mean I've traveled extensively in the United States, quite a bit around the world, and this is where I choose to live. So it is unique and all four seasons are wonderful.

AQ: What are you most proud of?

MM: Well the thing that I think we've been most effective is in a very short period of time, I think we've brought the issue of what's happening to Lake Pepin to the consciousness of a lot of people around here. Then we had exported that and have started that same dialogue with the people upriver that could help us and help alleviate the situation, or at least put together some of the best practices or some of the fixes that need to be in place. And starting to develop tools that will accelerate that even more. So probably the thing that we're most please about is how far we've come in a fairly short period of time. We've got people that we're working with up the river that are doing significant things.

AQ: Like what?

MM: Well, you've got people that we originally talked to that are reaching out and talking to their communities and telling them what the issues are maybe what's the most graceful and the fastest way to a win-win sort of fix, versus some of the highly emotional alternatives that have basically stopped progress.

AQ: Can you give me some examples?

MM: I think what happens is I think what we call upstream get very defensive when they see the articles in the paper, or they feel they're on the defensive or they're being blamed for things that they don't feel that they're totally responsible for, maybe they don't even totally understand. A lot of first reactions are to say no, that's not right, they challenge the science or challenge at least a portion of it. But at the end of the day, it all ends up in a big stall. I think if you can work together, I think first of all, the things that can get fixed. I'm a big believer that the ??? breeds success and if they're able to ??? working on things that can work, that are to both of your advantages, then you can take on the little trickier issues and frankly, they'll more than contribute to the solutions.

AQ: Can you tell me what some of the examples of solutions might be to help this be kind of a win-win and who are the players?

MM: Well, the real issue for us on the sediment issue for example, is the water is coming down at such a rate now that it's got to be held up in different ways. And it ultimately gets down to some of the property owners, or the majority of the property owners to kind of slow that water down. There are technologies available now with how to drain that. We understand that a lot of the properties are drained or tiled and that we're not going to go back and it's a fact of life right now. But there's some technologies that can hold that water longer, a resource by the way that ultimately is going to be valuable to them, and if we can slow the water rate down, hold it on the property for a while, given the choice of crops making a difference there. So that's a big example of what could be done and some of the things that have to happen.

AQ: Can you tell me a little bit about (inaudible). How does your work dovetail with the landowner in these efforts, who's independent and ??? and voluntary solutions?

MM: Well, I don't think anybody likes to be dictated to, and I think farmers have especially a reputation of being independent and feel that they probably know what's best for their land. I think they truly believe and I think it's probably true in a lot of cases, they truly believe they're good conservationists. And there's evidence to that. I mean people I've met are fourth generation farmers on that land and they have their sons and daughters at their hip and they fully intend for some of them to carry that on. So I'm convinced they do have what they believe

is a long term interest in their land. They've got to know, we're kind of the same way. We feel that our personal land is just as precious and our surroundings are just as precious as theirs. I think the job is to understand that in their thinking about what is best for their land, that long term what is best for their land is people doing the right thing so that they still can continue on that land and do it in such a way that yes, the fifth, sixth, seventh generation can be, and that they don't want to be dictated to of how they're going to do that land, or how they're going to treat that land or what they're going to do, but in fact, if damage is being done to other people, they're probably at the end of the day going to have to maybe do some things that they don't feel is the best thing for their land. So they should probably have a say in how we, what the fixes are, and that's what we're going for and getting them moving to help us move towards some of the things that can be done to rectify the situation.

AQ: Are you seeing movement there?

MM: I'm an optimist and I know a lot of people are a little discouraged right now, but I am. There's very definitely more people leading the charge than there were, and I truly believe that the vast majority of people will do the right thing. No matter where, there's some bad actors, and eventually it'll take the stick for the bad actors. But those bad actors are just as embarrassing to the upriver people as the bad actors down here. And it's the middle or the majority of people and frankly, I do think it's on their radar screen now. I think they know that the status quo can't continue, and I think their best interests will tell them that they have more to win by being part of the solution than fighting it.

AQ: What do you think or know about the TMDLs?

MM: I'm very familiar. In fact, the largest TMDL, other than the Chesapeake Bay to date, was what used to be called the Lake Pepin TMDL, now is called the South Metro TMDL. The process itself is horribly long and the challenges are. The good news is the EPA has made, going back to the Clean Water Act, back in the 70's, has mandated that all impaired waters be documented. The good part is that we are in the first ten percent of documented impaired waters. So they've got that part down. We have finally gotten the Lake Pepin or the South Metro TMDL finished, or finished in the sense that it's teed up and the standards are set and however, the big test is performance, what they're going to do to do the fixes. And that still has to be developed. But so far, it's already been at least a six-year project or more to get to this point. So I personally think they need more of a sense of urgency to, we've done all the documentation, all the research, all the monitoring, looking at all the different scenarios that could be done, selected them, now it's time to actually act and go for the fixes.

AQ: Where do you see things going from here?

MM: I think the people on the Minnesota River are a lot more aware of what the effects have been. Again, it's not, I believe that we're all dealing with what originally is unintended consequences. I think most of the people were actually employing at the time the best practices in agriculture by tiling all their land, getting the water off so they could plant and harvest. And that, they have some of the best farmland in the world in part of that area, and they were all doing, they were all practicing best practices then. So what we're dealing with is now, those unintended consequences. But we're smarter now; we know what's happening to us, so we have to do something to, and there are things that can be done, but we have to do things differently or employ the next sets of technology so that we can mitigate some of the consequences of running the water off of the farmland as fast as we have.

AQ: Are you learning anything about all the people in the entire arena, everyone who's involved in this situation?

MM: I think maybe too slow for most of us, but I personally feel it's happening faster than people are giving it credit for because we might be on the front end of this. And maybe call it focus. What I do feel is things are coming into focus more for a bigger portion of the people. Again, I do think there is this area that for a while most people were unaware and then there was the automatic defense thing where hey, it's not us, why are you pointing fingers at us? Or look at the metro or look at you guys, what are you guys doing in your own backyard? And it's all fair, but when science tells you that 80 plus percent or more of the sediment is coming from the Minnesota River Basin, we know that maybe nature would contribute normally maybe a third of that, this is a manmade problem. A big portion of this is manmade problem. I think we're to the fact that people are starting to appreciate the value of that. And even water itself has become an important issue. We just went through a drought. We have these extreme highs and extreme lows in the floods, but at the end of the day, we know that raw water is kind of a precious commodity. People are gelling around that I think, and I think finally people are realizing we all have a role in water, where it was so automatic before. Maybe I'm speaking more for myself, but I do think that focus is coming in clearer to a lot more people and that's what gives me hope that they're going to pay more attention to it.

AQ: Is there anything that you would like to talk about as being a frustration?

MM: Oh personally the biggest frustration I have is time. Everything seems to move very slow. I've worked closely in this capacity and other capacities with some of the agencies who this is a big part of their vision or mission and job to do, and it just, it's a very complicated issue, everybody has to be, when you get the EPA, MPCA, DNR involved, there's just the process itself almost builds in a lot of time. And then all the other state governments and local governments. But it's the speed that people can move or can't move at that's probably the most frustrating for me. That said, I think I've seen some change even in the last six years, and I

guess that's what keeps you going. And in my mind, if things can continue to accelerate like that, I think things might happen a little faster than we're all used to.

AQ: And what's driving that?

MM: Again I think the knowledge base, and I think we've gone through some of the process. And I also think we will have to agree learning the same lessons. I think there are shortcuts available and I don't mean shortcuts in the sense that you're cutting into the end product, but shortcuts in the process of getting there. We talked about TMDLs earlier, how long it takes and really questioning how effective they've been or how they actually get to the nut of it, starting the fixes. I think you may even see changes there where the TMDL becomes almost a thing of the past and there's other fixes that can move a lot faster that people on all sides want to move faster and put in place. And I think even some of the agencies understand that and are going to be willing to resource some of that and contribute their expertise to.

AQ: Do you see any change happening on the agency side?

MM: Yeah, I think when people are spending this kind of effort and the resources, the money, time, people, they expect some results, and I think there's a big move toward accountability. It's no longer just good enough to go through the process and say this is what we've done. they're going to say hey, what are the effects of this? this is the money we spent; this is the time we spent on it; we want to see something happen.

AQ: Can you tell me a little bit about, you've got a tool there that measures county by county. There are people on the agency side and a lot of effort are going a little bit more watershed based. Do you have any thoughts about that?

MM: I'm a big believer that it probably should be watershed based and as local as you can make it, 'cause they're the people that probably have the best idea how to fix things too. I think one of the biggest fears that, for example that AG may have is that you get this one size fits all solutions. Not going to happen; that's not the way it works. You can have a couple farms a mile or two away and they would have to address their issues quite differently, let alone county by county or throughout the state. So the more local you can get, the more watershed specific you can get is the right solution in my eyes.

AQ: Are there any specific landowner examples that you've learned that really kind of stayed with you or any examples of change?

MM: I probably won't do (inaudible) is when a guy put down a demonstration.

MM: Probably the most striking thing I've seen in my travels, and I won't name names really, but a good example is we were at a farm, very young farmer, I don't know how young 'cause he had more than two kids running around, but that's part of what I was going to say. And he believe was the third generation farmer and he spent time telling us what he has changed on his farm, why he has changed his farm, keeping the business afloat and adjusting to that. But also, he was worried about if he was doing the right thing for the land that he has been entrusted with and that he fully intends to entrust into one or several of his children. But he was giving a display on technology that would go at the end of his drain pipes that he'd be able to hold that water over a certain period of time and then release it when it was most advantageous, and retain that water. And he had a demo and he was employing that technology. So here's a guy who inherited this farm. It would kill these guys to not do the right thing and lose the farm, lose the business, not give his family the same opportunity. So it tells you that the long term thinking is there for their (inaudible). We have to just, I think they just have to be convinced that doing the right things from a conservation standpoint is in their long term best interest and I think they will.

AQ: Your story about the young farmer makes me think about your tool, your website that has some information in there like conservation reserve program and other federal and state programs for Minnesota (inaudible). You measure in those counties how someone like that, that person could go about putting into practice some of these best practices or some of these programs. What about the funding from a business, a man who's trying to keep the business going? What are some of the considerations for someone who wants to do the right thing and there's many of them I'm sure. They have to know about where and how to get support financially and keep their business afloat.

MM: I think what we fully intend for the Scorecard to do is evolve to a point where we document the best practices for the guy who's putting this retainer technology at the end of his drains or his tile system, will tell his story, let him give the facts of what he's done, and how he resourced it and what help he's gotten if any. In his case, he is getting some help. And I think we hopefully, people can see what's been done and how it's been done and judge what the paybacks are for them and first of all, if it's something that would fit their particular situation. 'Cause there's other ways of doing it, but you give enough examples of people that have done the installs, how they financed them, what help or what agencies or what even county assistance were available. You put that out there and then hopefully, they can use the same resource if they think this is the right thing for them.

AQ: So all that information is available for an individual person who's thinking about making those changes ?

MM: That's exactly where we want to go with their Scorecard, to provide that information, but the

issue is it's a fairly confusing matrix of programs that are out there and people almost give up, or there are so many other contingencies strapped to the programs that farmers feel they have to sign away. So what we want to do is identify the ones that are working or that are attractive to farmers, find out why, find out what's working and what programs they feel are beneficial.

AQ: From the point of view of the one person who's trying to figure it out, to make the right decisions, how do they find out how to do it, where to get, (inaudible).

MM: I don't know that I'm the final word on where the best source, but hopefully, when we're done with our scorecard, we'll put a matrix of things available to them. But that won't be the end all. It kind of goes county by county, but the AG organizations, the Bowers, sometimes you find that key person within the counties are different. It's not necessarily the same official position, but most counties or a lot of counties have a go-to person that can lay out the program of what the best program or programs that are available to them so the farm can sort of choose which ones might be. And it's going to be based on really what kind of project or what he's looking for. You might be dealing with different government programs, so that's really a tough question because as a farm owner myself, I get inundated by different programs and a lot of them you wouldn't be interested in because you're signing different rights away. And that's usually, and it's almost like the topic du jour, whatever they're trying to promote in that particular couple year stretch is kind of what they emphasize, and that may or may not be what that particular farmer is interested in. But if somebody's ditch and drainage issues, there's programs sitting out there and there's different technologies that are being tested that there's some funds, especially if they're on the front end of that, there's some funds available to offset the total cost.

AQ: So if somebody's trying to support that landowner, where do your efforts fit in?

MM: First of all, these guys kind of know more than, they know better than we do in a lot of cases, most cases. They're pretty well informed and they are good businessmen. If you're running a successful farm today, you're a good businessman because you're navigating lots of stuff. So I don't think they need us to, for the most part, point them to where the money is. Now some newer things where some of these new technologies, but even then, they can get there pretty fast. So I don't know that I would tee us up as the source to go to 'cause they can get there faster through other ways. Their informal network is amazing, in fact, better than most. There's also, they've got county agencies they can go to and get there in a hurry. So I don't want to promote ourselves as the source for that.

AQ: What do you want to promote yourself?

MM: Nothing, I think we're a go-to source of information about the state of the lake.

MM: I believe that we're probably a good go-to source for information on what the state of the lake is and things that are affecting the lake, and hopefully present the science and some of the facts in such a way that they're understandable for people who really want to kind of know what's going on, that can use those facts to do something about the situation.