

# Sandhill River Watershed

2015 Annual Report



## 2015 Local Highlights

- EAST POLK SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT IS PLANNING TO SUBMIT THREE TARGETED WATERSHED GRANTS TO THE DISTRICT WITH ENGINEERING RESOURCE ASSISTANCE FROM HOUSTON ENGINEERING.
- WE CURRENTLY ARE 70% COMPLETE OF PHASE II IN THE TMDL PROCESS.
- HOUSTON ENGINEERING PRESENTED A PLAN SHEET FOR THE SHEET PILE STRUCTURE ON THE OUTLET OF THE BREKKE POND TO PREVENT FREEZE UP DURING THE WINTER POTATO WASHING SEASON. THREE QUOTES WERE RECEIVED AND IT WAS AWARDED TO TIM CROMPTON EXCAVATING, INC. FOR \$19,000.
- THE DISTRICT DEVELOPED A RIGHT OF WAY POLICY AND LETTERS WERE MAILED TO ALL LANDOWNERS. A TOTAL OF 105 ROW SIGNS WERE INSTALLED BY 3D SPECIALTIES. WE NOW HAVE ROW MARKERS EVERY 1/4 MILE.
- THE DISTRICT COORDINATED WITH MN DNR TO DEVELOP ACCURATE FLOOD PLAIN MAPS ALONG STRETCHES OF THE SAND HILL RIVER FOR FEMA.
- AN INFORMATIONAL MEETING WAS HELD ON DITCH #80 ON THE PROCESS FOR OBTAINING A PETITION FOR AN IMPROVEMENT PROJECT. DITCHES 9, 119 AND PROJECT 5 HELD INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS FOR REDETERMINATION OF BENEFITS TO ADDRESS FILTER STRIP REQUIREMENTS.
- THE DISTRICT CONTINUES TO SUPPORT THE SEDIMENT BASIN PROGRAM. THERE WERE 52 WATER AND SEDIMENT CONTROL BASINS INSTALLED AT A TOTAL COST OF \$361,267.00. THAT INCLUDES COST-SHARE FROM CLEAN WATER FUNDS, SHRWD, AND LANDOWNERS.
- THIRTY-THREE PERMITS WERE BROUGHT BEFORE THE BOARD.



## Scott Balstad

Scott Balstad farms corn, wheat, beans, potatoes, and beets in rural Fosston with his father and brothers. Scott joined the watershed in 2010 and looks forward to doing his part to participate in water conservation.



## Bill Brekke

Robert Brekke Jr. and his wife Heidi farm near Nielsville, MN. He has been a Sand Hill River Watershed District manager since 1999 and will continue to "help water move".



## Stuart Christian

Stuart Christian is self-employed at TDS in Fertile, MN. Manager Christian has been involved in the Sand Hill River Watershed District since 1999 and enjoys working with public issues and meeting with civic leaders.



## Roger Hanson

Roger Hanson and his wife Shirley farm near Beltrami, MN. Hanson has been involved in the Sand Hill River Watershed District since 1978. Hanson says serving a community need makes being a Sand Hill Watershed representative worth while and enjoys being able to work



## Phillip Swenson

Phillip Swenson farms Southeast of Fertile and during the off season drives school bus for the Fertile-Beltrami School district. He began as a watershed manager in 2012 and is looking forward to improving water quality and being involved in drainage issues in the district.

# Climax Ring Dike

## Phase I completed

The MN DNR granted an extension of funding that would allow for project completion by December 2015. The district will continue to coordinate with the MN DNR on the paper work to complete the project.

Advertisement for bids began mid-December of 2014 and Bid Opening was held Thursday January 15 and the project was awarded to Gladen Construction for \$775,001.35. The Engineer's cost Estimate was \$890,000. A portion of Phase 2 storm sewer work (\$60,000) has been incorporated into Phase 1 work. By the end of

2015, Phase I of the ring dike was complete.

The Phase 2 levee and storm sewer project work will remain idle pending 2015 state FDR funding determination, and construction planned for 2016.

### Nielsville Ring Dike

Bonding funds request for \$400,000 to do the road raise in concert with MN DOT in 2016 were not granted. The district will try next session to obtain these funds. If the grant is received, it will save tearing up the concrete and replacing it at a later date.



## 2015 Watershed District Employee of the Year

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) announced our very own Daniel Wilkens as the 2015 Outstanding Watershed District Employee of the Year.

"Dan's leadership is evident in the work of Sand Hill Watershed District," BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke said. "He has demonstrated a long standing commitment to the Red River Basin and the work he's done has impacts that extend throughout the state."



On November 4, 2008, Minnesota voters approved the Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment to the constitution to:

- protect drinking water sources;
- protect, enhance, and restore wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game, and wildlife habitat;
- preserve arts and cultural heritage;
- support parks and trails;
- and protect, enhance, and restore lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater.

The West Polk SWCD was awarded \$475,000 through the Clean Water Fund for construction of the riffles downstream of USCOE drop structures. In addition, West Polk SWCD has received an

ENBRIDGE grant in the amount of \$100,000 to put towards the project and can be used towards the local match for the project. Construction is expected in 2016.

## Lessard Sams Funds Corp Drop Structures

The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) Funding Opportunity grant criteria has changed and it is expected that only two drop structures with a possibility of three, will be completed due to cost increases from 5% grade to 3% grade, which will increase the amount of rock

required. The MN DNR is preparing an application to request additional funds from the LSOHC to complete the remaining two drop structures, and any riffles not completed with the Clean Water Fund Project. The Funding request is for \$1,451,900 and was awarded.



Bids were opened for construction of the rapids at drop structures 1, 2, and 3. The US Army Corp. plans to award to Spruce

Valley Construction as a low bidder in the amount of \$1,574,835.00.

Construction is planned for 2016 in coordination with the Rock Riffles Project mentioned above.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE RIVER WATCH PROGRAM, CONTACT DANNY HALVORSON OF THE INTERNATIONAL WATER INSTITUTE AT [DANNY@IWINST.ORG](mailto:DANNY@IWINST.ORG) OR AT 218-280-0515.

## Win-E-Mac River Watch Team Kayaks Sand Hill River

TWISTS AND TURNS AND TALL GRASS WERE PART OF A RECENT KAYAK EXPERIENCE ON THE SAND HILL RIVER FOR THE WIN-E-MAC RIVER WATCH TEAM. PADDLING FROM THE US HIGHWAY 59 BRIDGE JUST SOUTH OF WINGER TO THE MAHNOMEN COUNTY LINE GAVE THE TEAM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE OF THE SAND HILL RIVER THAN THEIR USUAL VIEW FROM BRIDGE CROSSINGS WHERE THEY TAKE MONTHLY WATER QUALITY MEASUREMENTS. RECENT RAINS PROVIDED GOOD FLOW AND HIGH ENOUGH WATER TO SLIDE OVER TWO BEAVER DAMS ENCOUNTERED ALONG THE WAY.

THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME KAYAKING FOR SEVERAL OF THE TEAM MEMBERS AND FIRST TIME PADDLING ON THE SAND HILL RIVER FOR ALL FIVE OF THE STUDENTS. THE OPPORTUNITY WAS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE RIVER EXPLORERS PROGRAM, AN ACTIVITY COORDINATED BY THE INTERNATIONAL WATER INSTITUTE TO GET STUDENTS OUT TO SEE WHAT CONDITIONS ARE LIKE ON THE RIVERS THAT THEY MONITOR THROUGH THE RIVER WATCH PROGRAM. IN ADDITION TO THE PRESENCE OF BEAVER, WATERFOWL WAS FLUSHED UP ALONG THE RIVER CORRIDOR AND SIGHTINGS OR EVIDENCE ALSO INCLUDED GREAT BLUE HERON, DEER, MUSSELS, AND SONGBIRDS.

WIN-E-MAC WAS ONE OF THE ORIGINAL FOUR SCHOOLS ALONG THE SAND HILL RIVER THAT HELPED START THE RED RIVER BASIN RIVER WATCH PROGRAM BACK IN 1995. BASED ON 20 YEARS OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH THE PROGRAM, THERE HAVE BEEN NO CHANGES IN WATER QUALITY OF THE SAND HILL RIVER. THE FURTHEST UPSTREAM SITE THAT THE TEAM MONITORS SOUTH OF MCINTOSH HAS MAINTAINED GOOD WATER CLARITY, BUT CLARITY AS MEASURED BY TURBIDITY HAS GOTTEN MUCH HIGHER AT THREE SITES THAT ARE MONITORED DOWNSTREAM IN THE WINGER AREA. ON THE DAY THE TEAM PADDLED, JULY 24TH,

THEY HAD MONITORED THEIR SITES EARLIER IN THE DAY WITH THE UPSTREAM SITE HAVING A TURBIDITY LEVEL OF 5.66 VERSUS A LEVEL OF 53, NEARLY 10 TIMES HIGHER, AT THEIR FURTHEST DOWNSTREAM MONITORING LOCATION. ANYTHING ABOVE 25 IS CONSIDERED TO NOT MEET MINNESOTA WATER QUALITY STANDARDS.

THIS PATTERN OF HIGHER TURBIDITY (LESS CLARITY) STARTED IN 2006 AND IS STILL OCCURRING. NO SINGLE CAUSE FOR THIS HIGHER TURBIDITY CAN BE CONCLUSIVELY IDENTIFIED, BUT LAND USE IS GENERALLY A FACTOR. SOME COMBINATION OF FACTORS INCLUDE LAND IN THIS AREA COMING OUT OF THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM AND BACK INTO CROP PRODUCTION, MORE ROW CROPS SUCH AS CORN AND SOYBEANS, AND MORE EFFICIENT SURFACE AND TILE DRAINAGE CHANGING THE VOLUME AND TIMING OF FLOW. SOIL TYPE AND STEEPER SLOPES UP- LAND OF THE SAND HILL RIVER IN THIS AREA ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO THE EROSION CONDITIONS.

LANDOWNERS HAVE BEEN ADDRESSING THE NEED TO KEEP THEIR VALUABLE TOPSOIL IN THEIR FIELDS THROUGH INSTALLATION OF SEDIMENT BASINS TO CAPTURE THE SOIL. THE EAST POLK SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT AND SAND HILL RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT HAVE BEEN ASSISTING WITH INSTALLATION OF THESE BASINS THROUGH ENGINEERING AND COST SHARE ASSISTANCE TO LANDOWNERS. IF ALL GOES WELL, THE WIN-E-MAC RIVER WATCH TEAM WILL START SEEING TURBIDITY LEVELS GO BACK DOWN AS THESE SEDIMENT BASINS TAKE EFFECT. IN THE MEANTIME, THE TEAM IS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE PADDLING POTENTIAL OF THE SAND HILL RIVER AND LOOKS FORWARD TO FURTHER KAYAK EXPLORATIONS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND "THEIR" RIVER AND SHARE THEIR OBSERVATIONS WITH LOCAL RESOURCE MANAGERS.