

## Visit the Sand Hill River Watershed District!

The board of managers meets the first Tuesday of every month at 8 AM at the district office located at 219 North Mill. Minutes are posted on our web-site.



# 2019 Annual Report

### FOR MORE INFORMATION. CONTACT US

 PO Box 584  
Fertile, MN 56540

 218.945.3204

 [april.swenby@sandhillwatershed.org](mailto:april.swenby@sandhillwatershed.org)  
[www.sandhillwatershed.org](http://www.sandhillwatershed.org)



Long time Administrator Daniel Wilkens retires after 40 years of dedicated service to the district. April Swenby begins new role as Administrator.

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The district continues their efforts towards water quality and fish passage by partnering with the Mn DNR & the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

*Pg 03*

The district moved forward with improving Ditch #80. Construction started later than anticipated, but progress was made towards completion.

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## The district introduces April Swenby as Administrator

January 1, 2019 marked the first day transitioning Administrators. Daniel Wilkens, who was with the district since the late 70's, retired and April Swenby, who began her career with the district in 2001 as the Administrative Assistant, began her role as Administrator.

Swenby came to this district in her new role with 17 1/2 years of watershed experience. With only two employees staffed by the district, Swenby was able to gain experience and knowledge in every facet of the district's endeavors. While her diverse education is primarily accounting, software, and marketing, her hands on - work experience as the Administrative Assistant prepared the district well for the transition of Administrators.

"The network of people I have built over the past 18 years has proven to be a valuable asset to future successes of the district. The relationships with partnering agencies such as the MnDNR, Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR), and the local SWCD's (Soil, Water and Conservation Districts) are immeasurable tools that the district uses to move the goals and missions forward. The goals of the district have always been drainage, but along with drainage, water quality increasingly moves into the spotlight. Relationships with partnering agencies are a necessity for local government units, and I have invested 18 years towards nurturing those relationships."



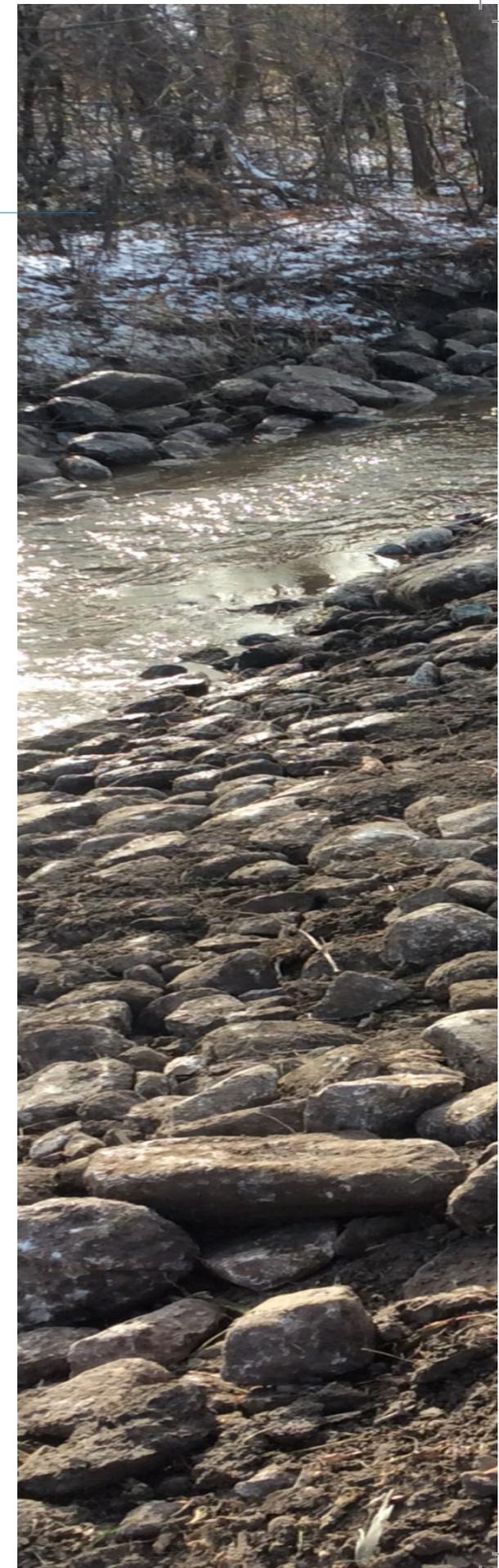
**" Dan Wilkens has left me with big shoes to fill. He has also left the district with a recipe for success and has promised to assist in the transition during his retirement. Working by his side for nearly 20 years has given me a great start for continuing the goals and missions of the district."**

**April Swenby**

## 2019 YEAR IN REVIEW

- The redetermination of benefits was completed for the Sand Hill River Watershed District Project # 5.
- The Sand Hill River Watershed District hired an architect to draft building plans with the goal of ensuring that the district office meets handicapped accessibility guidelines.
- The district utilized the Fertile-Beltrami School by hiring a service learning student to perform entry level tasks at the district office.
- In February 2019, the district adopted revised Rules and Regulations. The adopted Rules can be found on the district web-site.
- The managers revised the "Beaver Bounty Program", increasing the bounty to \$75 per beaver for participating townships.
- An on-line permit application process was implemented.
- The district opened a money market fund in August of 2019. As a result, average interest earnings increased by 8 times.
- Manager compensation rates increased from \$75 to \$125 per meeting.
- Various internal documents were created such as a travel policy, a manager compensation policy, and by-laws. The personnel policy was revised.
- Managers approved updating the district GIS mapping system.
- The district has completed Review Point No. 2 and Review Point No. 3, both of which are currently out for NRCS review. These review points will provide the Purpose and Need for the project and a summary of affected resources in the watershed. The SHRWD is currently evaluating alternatives to meet the project purpose.
- Thirty-one permits were received.

In addition to maintaining legal ditch systems and general drainage operations, the district's prioritized goals for 2020 include the completion of Ditch #80, multiple clean water fund grant applications, Kittleson Creek outlet, Sand Hill Lake Dam modifications, additional rock riffles in the Sand Hill River, and the Carlson Coulee tree snagging efforts.





Wright Construction began the work in November of 2019 and completed the project entirely before December of 2019.

Tree snagging efforts along the coulee are planned for 2020 by Kraulik Excavating.

## CARLSON COULEE

The Carlson Coulee Project was a component of the Targeted Watershed Grant received by the SHRWD and East Polk SWCD that has a goal of reducing contaminant loading on impaired reaches of the Sand Hill River (as identified by the MPCA's 2014 303(d) list of Impaired Waters).

The Carlson Coulee historically had channel incision and erosion along its outlet into the Sand Hill River. The project installed riprap grade stabilization along steep reaches of Carlson Coulee, and also removal of fallen trees adjacent to the channel.

Pollution reduction estimates for sediment (TSS) are 332.3 tons per year and 382.2 pounds per year of phosphorus. The project consists of 20 rock riffle structures.

Wright Construction was awarded installation of the rock riffles and completed installation in November of 2019.

Timber removal along the coulee has been awarded Kraulik Excavating and is anticipated to be completed in early 2020.

## ABOUT THE DISTRICT

The Sand Hill River Watershed District, founded in 1975, encompasses approximately 495 square miles that drain to the Sand Hill River and the Red River. The District encompasses portions of Polk, Norman, and Mahnommen counties in northwestern Minnesota. Municipalities within the District include Fosston, Winger, Fertile, Nielsville, and Climax.

### THE TOPOGRAPHY & LAND USE

The Sand Hill River Watershed District is characterized by rolling topography in the eastern and central portions of the District, flattening further to the west. There are many small lakes in the middle of the District between Fertile and Winger. These basins tend to be non-contributing or have poorly developed outlets. The primary land use for the District is agriculture.

## BACK IN TIME HISTORY

The Sand Hill River in its natural state passed north of the City of Beltrami in a poorly defined channel and dispersed into marshes which extended westerly for over ten miles before reappearing as a river which flowed into the Red River of the North by Bygland.

In an effort to confine the Sand Hill River in a fixed channel, two state ditches were constructed during 1894-1898, substantially along the course now occupied by the present channel.

The improvements were not adequate and additional construction was completed in 1917.

As drainage and flood problems persisted, the Corp of Engineers began a study of the river in 1942. As a result the Sand Hill Drainage and Conservancy Board was established by an order of the District Court of Polk County, State of Minnesota, on the 18th day of May, 1949 to carry out the Corps project to improve the main channel. The overall purpose of the Board was for "flood control and improvement of the Sand Hill River channel." Construction work was completed in the fall of 1954. The process to establish the Sand Hill River Watershed District was a Court Hearing at Crookston, MN on August 28, 1974. The place of business of the Sand Hill River Watershed District was determined to be at Fertile, MN. The duties and responsibilities of the old Sand Hill River Drainage and Conservancy Board were given to the new District on May 28, 1975 in accordance with the Minnesota Watershed Act.

## MEET OUR MANAGERS



JJ Hamre, Secretary  
Beltrami, MN



Clayton Bartz, Treasurer  
McIntosh, MN



Stuart Christian, Chair  
Erskine, MN



Dan Vesledahl, Vice-Chair  
Winger, MN



Roger Hanson, Manager  
Beltrami, MN

The district thanks Roger Hanson for his service of over 40 years to the district. Hanson retired December 31, 2019. Craig Engelstad, Fertile, MN native, has been appointed to serve beginning January 1, 2020.



# FISH PASSAGE

In 2015 the district was awarded the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) Funding Opportunity grant. Enhancements were made on the channel West of Fertile, MN. Construction for the original fish passage restoration portion that was completed in prior years held costs were well below estimates.

The district continues to move forward and fish passage will be restored at two additional sites in the Sand Hill River watershed with the unspent funds.

The first barrier is the roadcrossing on Kittleson Creek, a tributary to the Sand Hill River (West of Fertile, MN). This culvert is nearly perched and velocities exceed the swimming limits for most species at normal flows. This restoration would replace the culvert with a structure more appropriately sized for the creek and at a lower elevation to accommodate fish passage. The second barrier is a dam on Sand Hill Lake. The dam will be removed and replaced with rock arch rapids to allow fish passage upstream into Sand Hill Lake.

Both of these crossings are upstream of the dams that were modified for fish passage in 2017. Restoration of fish passage at these two sites would expand the number of restored acres and river miles in the watershed. Numerous fish passage restoration projects have been conducted in the Red River basin, with almost immediate positive impacts to fish communities.

The projects were awarded in 2019 and construction is planned for 2020.



## RIVER CLEAN UP

Funds were available for Conservation Corps crew labor only, on projects with the purpose of protecting, enhancing and restoring water quality in lakes, rivers and streams and/or protecting groundwater and drinking water sources from degradation. Project proposals were to demonstrate measurable outputs to achieve water quality objectives through the implementation of best management practices. In 2018, for the 2nd year in a row, the district was notified that they were the recipient of this grant.

As a result, phase 2 of the river clean up efforts began in July of 2019. A crew of AmeriCorps members ages 18 to 25, based in Fergus Falls, removed fallen trees, garbage and cleared areas along a 6.3 mile stretch of the Sand Hill River between Rindahl and Polk County Highway 1. Multiple underwater beaver dams were broken up and removed along with tree snags and garbage debris such as tires and contaminants from human littering.



## DITCH #80 IMPROVEMENT

Polk County Ditch 80 provides an outlet for approximately 4.2 square miles. The existing ditch consists of approximately 3.5 miles of open channel, and has over 45 feet of vertical fall. Flows frequently break out of the drainage area, and flow overland, impacting the adjacent Maple Creek. Landowners submitted a petition to the SHRWD to investigate improving the system and adding laterals to control break out flows.

In anticipation of the petition for Ditch 80, the SHRWD applied for funding through the Multipurpose Drainage Management Program, which is part of the Clean Water Fund administered by BWSR. The SHRWD was successful in securing funding for the installation of side inlet pipes along the ditch channel.

These practices will reduce the contribution of sediment into the ditch system, and also reduce the costs required by the benefitting landowners.

During the 2019 construction season, Davidson Construction performed ditch excavation starting from the outlet of Polk County Ditch 80 into Maple

Creek, to ¼ mile east of 200th Ave. SW (1.8 miles in length). Lateral 1, which is in the middle of section 26, was excavated from Polk County Ditch 80 to 390th St. SW (0.5 miles to the south). Lateral 2, which is located on the east side of 200th Ave SW and the south side of 390th St. SW, was excavated from Polk County Ditch 80 to 390th St. SW (0.5 miles to the south). Temporary erosion control rock checks were placed in the bottom of the ditch just upstream of 200th Ave. SW, halfway between 200th Ave. SW and County Road 48, upstream of County Road 48, and at the outlet of Polk County Ditch 80. Several riprap drop structures and side inlets were also installed.

Due to getting a late start on construction in 2019, the improvements will be completed next spring. Davidson Construction will complete channel excavation on Polk County Ditch 80 (approximately 1.75 miles remain) and Lateral 2 (approximately 1.0 miles remain). Remaining construction items include spreading topsoil, seeding all disturbed areas, installing riprap drop structures and installing side inlets. Lastly, gravel will be added at the junction of 190th Ave. SW and 390th St SW to lessen the occurrence of water overtopping the road.