



SAND HILL RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

2020 **ANNUAL REPORT**



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 Beltrami, 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

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Retrospect: A Look Back at Last Year

- Fifty-nine permits were presented to the board for approval.
- The district entered into a Cooperative Purchase Venture with the MN Department of Administration. As a member, the district can purchase goods and services under contracts established by the State of Minnesota.
- The district completed formal plans ready for contractor bidding for adding onto the district office, making them one step closer to being ADA accessible. Due to building material prices, the managers have placed the bidding on hold.
- All district legal systems were sprayed for cattails in 2020 via helicopter. This is a new method of management that the district is trying.
- Dan Vesledahl did not seek reappointment. The Polk County Commissioners voted to appoint Don Andriga to serve as a board manager beginning in 2021.
- For the first time since the project was transferred to the district, the pump for Union Lake was used to control the lake levels on Union Lake/Sarah.
- The district continued its efforts by researching alternatives for storage using the RCPP Planning grant.
- The district entered into an agreement with the MnDNR to repair slope damages and culvert washouts, likely caused from as a consequence of removing the 1st dam west of Fertile.
- Repairs were made on Project 5, Ditch #9, Project #17 and the Sand Hill Ditch
- The Carlson Coulee was finalized and marked as complete in 2020 with the removal of the timber.



Carlson Coulee - Project Close out in 2020

COMING SOON! ONE WATERSHED ONE PLAN

We have come a long way in the district, we are looking forward to completing the 1 Watershed 1 Plan effort soon. There are still several issues related to channel incision, sediment and nutrient loading, and flood concerns in the district. We are fortunate in the district to have such a strong working relationship with our county SWCDs, and the 1 Watershed 1 Plan will allow us to formalize the working relationship and prioritize our efforts for the benefit of our taxpayers.

ADMINISTRATOR'S MESSAGE

The end of 2020 marked my 2nd year as Administrator. Many projects were in the works when I took this position. The year 2020 we were busy wrapping up unfinished construction projects from 2019, I am looking forward to new projects I can manage from start to finish in 2021.

The board of managers have created defined policies for moving forward and formal changes have been made. These new policies will be helpful with the direction I am to lead the district towards achieving their watershed management goals.

April Swenby





DITCH 80

The improvements started in 2019, but due to a late start they were completed in the spring of 2020. Davidson Construction completed channel excavation on Polk County Ditch 80 (approximately 1.75 miles remained) and Lateral 2 (approximately 1.0 miles remained). It was finished off by spreading topsoil, seeding all disturbed areas, installing riprap drop structures and installing side inlets.



IMPROVEMENT

Polk County Ditch 80 provides an outlet for approximately 4.2 square miles. Before the improvement, the ditch consisted of approximately 3.5 miles of open channel, and had over 45 feet of vertical fall.



PROJECT

Flows frequently broke 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.



SAND HILL LAKE DAM

BEFORE



DURING



AFTER

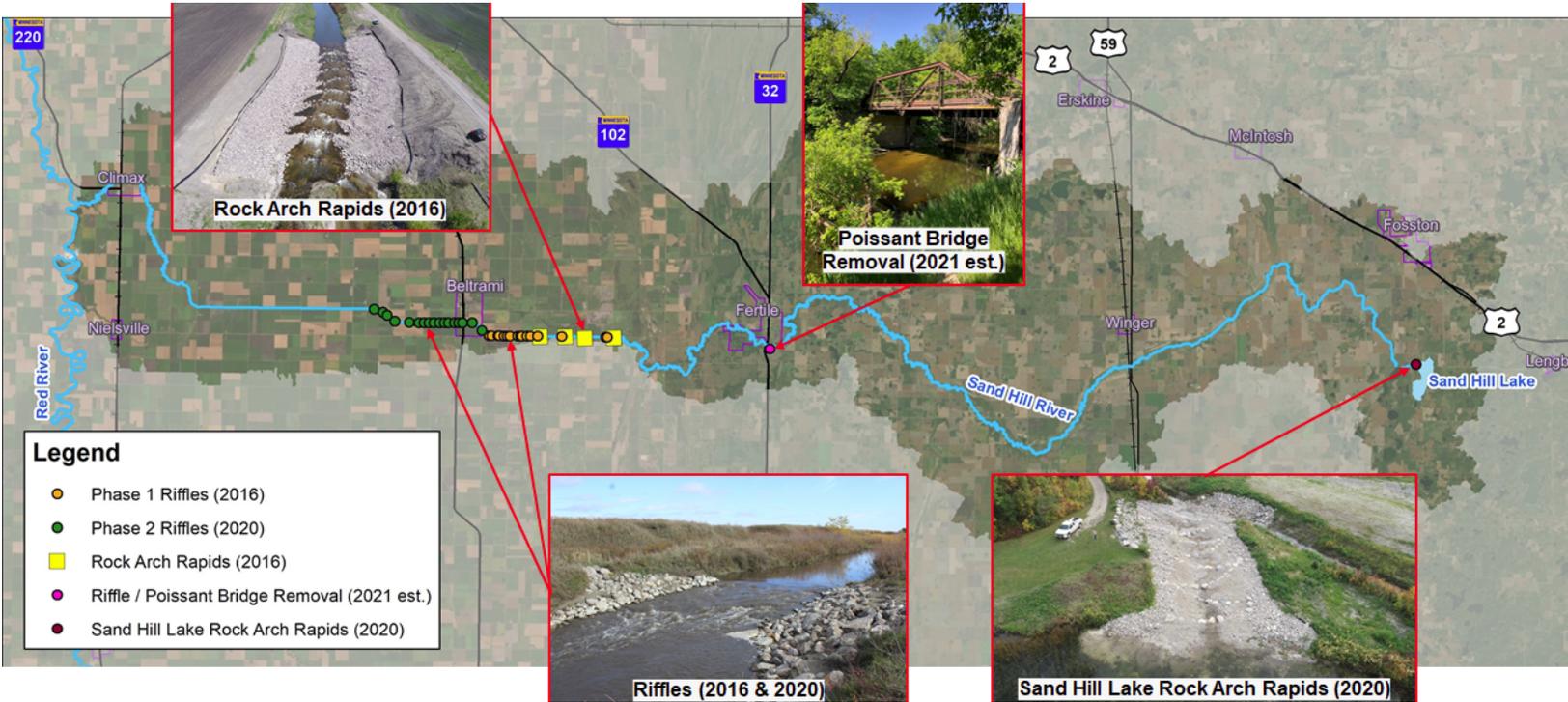


The existing dam constructed in 1987 from was made from steel sheet pile. The sheet pile began shifting and heaving, causing inconsistent lake elevations. The sheet pile was cut several times with a torch to control lake elevations, but wasn't successful. The dam created fish barrier, prohibiting fish migration upstream into Sand Hill Lake.

With financial support from Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, a total of 8 rock weirs were installed within the rock arch fish passage, creating several pools for the migrating fish to rest. The meandering low flow channel revised the proposed slope from 4.6% down to 3%, which the DNR has discovered is preferred to facilitate fish passage. Class 5 riprap was also installed within Polk County No. 83, to help stabilize the ditch slope and prevent future erosion issues.

Fish began migrating into Sand Hill Lake in early March, shortly after project completion.

FISH PASSAGE ENHANCEMENTS



The district's enhancements began in 2016. This project consists of installation of 24 rock riffles and 9 rock arch rapids and retrofitting all 4 concrete drop structures with rock rapids. The project provides grade stabilization and fish passage across over 9 miles of channelized portions of the Sand Hill River in western Polk County.

The project results in significantly reducing thousands of tons of sediment from being deposited downstream, as well as restoring fish passage and habitat for game fish species such as walleye, catfish, bass, and northern pike.

In 2020, the district completed their efforts by removing the dam at Sand Hill Lake (featured on Page 4). The district will continue in 2021 with the removal of a bridge, concrete wing walls and abutments over the Sand Hill River. The district plans to replace with a rock riffle for grade control and fish passage,



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HONORING ROGER HANSON

On February 27, 2020, the Sand Hill River Watershed District board of managers honored Roger Hanson, who served as a board manager for more than 40 years. Roger, the son of Ivel and Mabel Hanson, grew up on a farm West of Beltrami. He married Shirley (Hoffe) in 1959 and they share two children.

In the early 1960s the Hansons separated from their Red River Valley roots. As a graduate of MSU and with a master's degree from NDSU, Roger continued to pursue his career in education. After living and teaching in junior high schools in multiple locations, some as far away as Montana, the couple and their children moved back to Minnesota in 1976. The Hansons made their home on the family farmstead just west of Beltrami and began farming. Roger retired from farming in 2012.

Having been no stranger to agriculture and the drastic impacts of poor drainage and limited best management practices, he accepted an appointment to the Sand Hill River Watershed District board of managers in 1978. Hanson said he wanted to serve as a manager to help offer solutions for others regarding water management.

Dan Wilkens said, "We worked side by side for over 40 years. During that time and thousands of meetings, I always valued his opinion. We handled conflicts as a team well and believe me, with water management there are plenty of opinions! Roger and I started as colleagues, transitioned to a boss/employee relationship in 1999, and now I call him my friend." Wilkens, former Sand Hill administrator of the Sand Hill River Watershed District, also began his service to the watershed district at the time of its origination in the late 1970s.

Since 1978, Hanson has seen many projects come to fruition. When asked about his most memorable projects Hanson said, "I am most proud of the work on the west end of the district. The drainage before our legal ditch systems was so poor and it has much improved. The landowners in the west had no drainage before and the effects were devastating." Hanson said he looks back upon his time as a manager and estimates he's attended thousands of meetings.

April Swenby, who has worked for the district for over 18 years and is the current district administrator, said, "In my time with the district, many board managers have served. Roger provided continuity to our board given the longevity of his term. He was unique because he has always set the tone, and he didn't even know it."

"His tone was always respectful, conservative and wise," Swenby continued. "His character will be hard to replace and his presence serving as a manager was valued." Swenby said Hanson never over-powered a discussion, never brought self-serving motives to the table and picked his battles well, making his voice one to be respected by all of his colleagues. "He truly served all the residents of the Sand Hill River Watershed District well and fairly," Swenby said.



Stuart Christian, chairman of the Sand Hill River Watershed District and board manager since 1999, presented Hanson a plaque honoring his years of dedication. Christian recalled fondly their time spent together over the past 21 years. "Roger, I have always respected you and have admired your integrity. Your method of handling conflicts and difficult situations is unique. You have represented us well," Christian told Hanson. He elaborated by saying that "Roger had a way of communicating that never let on what his true opinion was leaving him more open to listening to other people's perspectives first before offering his own. Often, Hanson's opinion was never shared until a decision was being made to ensure that every vote was fair. It was an honor to work by his side for many years." On December 31, 2019, Hanson retired as a board manager of the Sand Hill River Watershed District.

The Sand Hill River Watershed District formally recognizes Hanson as an instrumental force since 1978 towards the mission and direction of the Sand Hill River Watershed District. The district highlights special recognition for always serving as a dedicated board manager on behalf of the residents of the Sand Hill River Watershed District with a fair, balanced and conservative perspective. "Not only did the district honor Hanson's years of service, they say thank you, for 40 years of excellence in public service," Swenby concluded.

MEET OUR BOARD

Sand Hill River Watershed District | County Commissioner Appointed | Public Servants



STUART CHRISTIAN

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. Christian serves as the Board Chairman.



DAN VESLEDAHL

Manager Vesledahl serves as the Vice-Chair. He began his service in 2018 and completed his service December 31, 2020. His colleagues thank him for his time as a board manager and appreciated his well thought out responses and actions.



CLAYTON BARTZ

As a former FSA committee member, Bartz has worked on many farm regulations which has also included wetlands. On the Sand Hill River Watershed board he enjoys working on water quality and other issues. He began his first term in 2018 and is the Treasurer.



JJ HAMRE

JJ believes water is an important part of our lives and affects us all in some way or another. As a member of the watershed he hopes to learn ways to improve water quality, drainage and flood prevention. JJ Began his service in 2017 and is the Secretary.



CRAIG ENGELSTAD

Engelstad began his first term as a manger in 2020 and looks forward to learning the ins and outs of the watershed board. Engelstad says serving a community need makes being a Sand Hill Watershed representative worth while and enjoys being able to work in an area of interest.