



SAND HILL RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

ANNUAL REPORT

20



24

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2024 HIGHLIGHTS



Project 17 Outlet Stabilization

In 2021, a Board of Water and Soil Resources Project and Practices grant was received to install six rock riffle structures and two side inlets. Gladen Construction was the low bidder in the amount of \$214,474.44. The project was completed the end of October of 2024. This focuses on stopping the progression of side slope failures & will assist with slowing the continuation of further downcutting. The installation of two side inlets were strategically placed where flows have a history of down cutting the channel. See Page 9



Union Lake Pumping

In 2024, Zebra Mussels were discovered in Union Lake, which ultimately affects the MN DNR permit for pumping. The pump project is a MN 103D watershed project. The district is exploring alternatives with their technical engineering team that will meet MnDNR permitting requirements for pumping during high water. The district has also been notified of inconsistencies in the benefit area for the project and they are evaluating solutions to an equitable benefit area.



SH Ditch Redetermination

During the winter of 2024, the board took several months learning about the process for redetermining benefits on the Sand Hill Ditch, learned about costs associated with the process, and learned about the viewers role in the process. This also entailed coordination with Polk County in relation to their public ditch systems. In July the board hosted a learning session and invited over 2600 landowners that have contributing acres or who may receive protection to/from the Sand Hill Ditch to educate them and solicit feedback for moving forward. Presentations were given by H2Over Viewers and John Kolb from Rinke-Noonan and are posted on the district web-site. In December of 2024, the SHRWD board moved to redetermine the benefits of the Sand Hill Ditch. See Page 6 & 7



Vesledahl Legal Ditch

MnDot agreed to sign a petition for a legal ditch. \$30,000 +/- is available to use towards the establishment. A landowner meeting held in March 2024 to keep the landowners informed and the meeting footage is on the district web-site for those unable to attend. A few landowners are considering a petition and are discerning.

DITCH MAINTENANCE

Annual Ditch Inspections are performed by staff and recorded for the permanent record. In addition to routine spraying the following was addressed in 2024:

KEY INDICATOR	ACTIVITY / PROJECT	DATA / OUTCOME
Project # 17	In March of 2024, a landowner meeting was held to obtain feedback for a large cleaning effort. Three hundred landowners were invited.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans and specs for repair Bid opening 10/24 Project awarded to Gladen Construction Project repair began late fall 2024
FEMA - SH Ditch	The district's appeal on the denial for FEMA repair funds on the Sand Hill Ditch, was granted in the amount of \$1.7 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Team active Developing alternatives for mitigation/improvements An extension will likely need to be applied for
Project 12 & 13	Ditch inspections indicated a cleaning was necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quotes were received from local contractors Cleanings completed this fall
HSEM Funding 2023 State Disaster Declaration	Five sites were identified as damaged during the 2023 flooding. Some will be repaired in 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Team active Developing alternatives for mitigation An extension will likely need to be applied for
Project 11	Trees growing in Ditch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked with the landowner to have the trees removed
Good Steward Mailing	Some landowners do not mow, spray, or maintain the buffer or the side slopes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An educational mailer was sent to landowners about the cost savings & drainage benefits with regular maintenance
SH Ditch	Reis Township Culvert failure (Section 23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contractor hired to replace culvert and rip rap to prevent future damage

ADMINISTRATIVE BUDGET

2024

Income	
HOMESTEAD/AG CREDIT (HACA)	3,400.00
INTEREST INCOME	35,000.00
MISC INCOME	200.00
TAX LEVY INCOME	250,000.00
Total Income	288,600.00
Expense	
EMPLOYEE TRAVEL EXPENSES	8,000.00
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS	46,800.00
WEB-SITE	3,000.00
MISC	200.00
MEETING EXPENSE	2,100.00
BUILDING MAINTENANCE/OCCUPANCY	13,000.00
COMPUTER EXPENSE	10,000.00
DUES-MEMBERSHIP	3,500.00
EDUCATION	4,000.00
FURNITURE-EQUIP	15,000.00
MANAGER EXPENSE	20,000.00
OFFICE OPERATIONS	18,000.00
PAYROLL EXPENSES	116,000.00
PAYROLL TAXES	8,000.00
PROF SERVICES	20,000.00
PUBLICITY	1,000.00
Total Expense	288,600.00

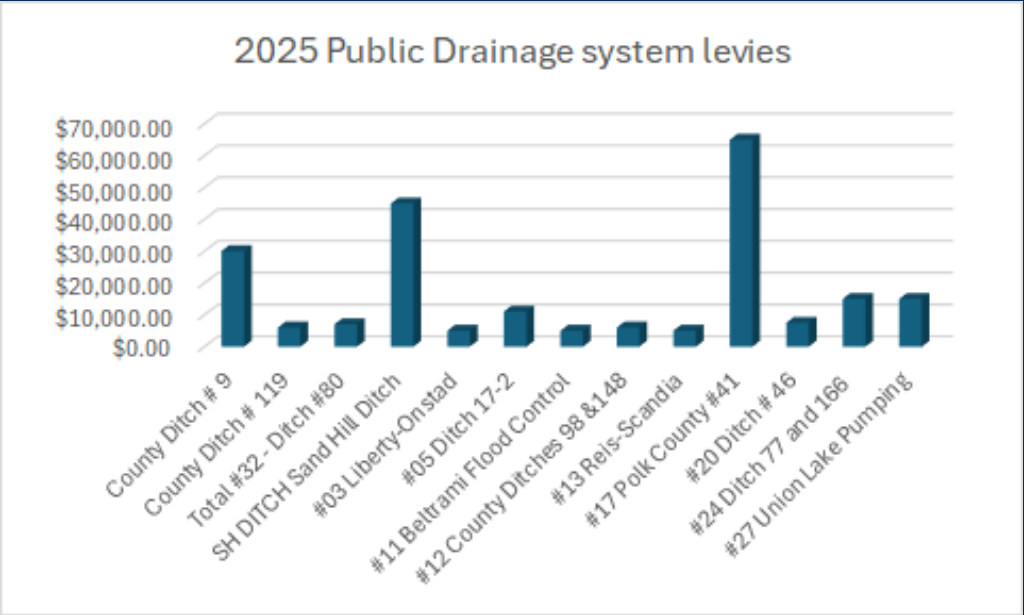
In addition to the Administrative budget, the district uses MSA 103D.905 Subd 3 in coordination with Polk County who petitioned the district to levy for the following endeavors:

- Water Quality (\$125,866.75)
- Water Management & Retention (\$125,866.75)
- Studies and Agency Support (\$100,000)

The use of this levy replaces the Red River Watershed Management ad velorum levy that was implemented prior to 2018.

Each year staff is responsible for performing ditch inspections and reporting to the board the needs. Staff is responsible for developing recommendations to the board, keeping in mind any upcoming needs, outstanding payments and MN Statutory requirements relating to total benefits of each system. As usual, in 2024, the district thoroughly evaluated each system, and the following levies were set for 2025.

2025 DITCH LEVIES



DRAINAGE LAW RESOURCES

The Minnesota Public Drainage Manual (MPDM)
<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/Minnesota-Public-Drainage-Manual>

MN Statute 103E Drainage
<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/103E>

Drainage Work Group
<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/drainage-work-group>

100%

All inspection reports are available by request by contacting the district office.



Redetermining Benefits for the Sand Hill Ditch: An Equitable and More Sustainable Approach

The Sand Hill Ditch is an integral part of the water management system within the Sand Hill River Watershed District (SHRWD). To ensure that the system operates effectively and that maintenance costs are shared equitably among landowners, SHRWD is currently undergoing the process of a Redetermination of Benefits (ROB) on the legal ditch known as the Sand Hill Ditch. This process is a key part of ensuring that financial assessments are fair, up-to-date, and sustainable for everyone involved.

What is the Redetermination of Benefits?

The Redetermination of Benefits is the process of reassessing the benefits each landowner receives from the ditch system. These benefits can include improved drainage, reduced flood risks, and enhanced agricultural productivity. Over time, land values and water flow patterns change, which may make the original benefit assessments no longer reflective of the current situation. The goal of this process is to update those assessments, ensuring that each landowner is contributing fairly to the maintenance and improvement of the system.

Why is the Sand Hill Ditch Being Redetermined?

The Sand Hill Ditch serves a large area, and as land use, water flow, and property values change, the original assessments may no longer be accurate. Some issues have emerged over time regarding the fairness of assessments, particularly for adjacent properties and properties closest to the system. These inconsistencies have led to calls for an updated review to ensure that landowners pay a fair share of the costs associated with maintaining and improving the ditch system. The process of redetermining benefits is a necessary step to maintain the long-term sustainability and fairness of the Sand Hill Ditch.

Why is the Redetermination Important?

1. **Fairness for Landowners:** One of the main objectives of the redetermination process is to ensure that all landowners pay their fair share. This means landowners who benefit most from the ditch system will contribute accordingly, while those who benefit less will have lower assessments.
2. **Sustainability of the System:** Accurate benefit assessments ensure that the Sand Hill Ditch can continue to be maintained and improved over time, without placing an undue financial burden on landowners or the district.
3. **Cost Savings:** By updating the benefit assessments, the district can more efficiently allocate resources and potentially reduce long-term costs. This could result in savings for landowners while ensuring that the ditch system remains effective.
4. **Increased Transparency:** This process provides an opportunity for landowners to be involved, ask questions, and voice concerns. By ensuring transparency, SHRWD aims to build trust and foster collaboration among all stakeholders.



Redetermination - What to expect

In December 2024, the SHRWD board appointed H2Over Viewers to carry out the Redetermination of Benefits (ROB) for the Sand Hill Ditch. The decision to appoint viewers follows extensive discussion about the best approach for reassessing the benefits of the ditch system. In the past, SHRWD has relied on appointed viewers—individuals tasked with evaluating and determining the benefits for landowners. Given the complexity and broad geographical scope of the Sand Hill Ditch, SHRWD chose to move forward with this method for its efficiency and proven track record in drainage assessments.

H2Over Viewers, as experts in drainage systems, will work to ensure that the updated assessments are fair, accurate, and reflective of current land values and use. The goal is to ensure that landowners are contributing fairly based on the actual benefits they receive from the system. This step marks a critical point in the redetermination process, ensuring that all stakeholders have an equitable role in maintaining the long-term viability of the Sand Hill Ditch.

The Benefits of Redetermination for the Sand Hill Ditch

The Sand Hill Ditch is critical for managing water runoff, preventing flooding, and maintaining healthy ecosystems across the watershed. Updating the benefit assessments will:

- Ensure that all landowners contribute fairly based on their actual benefits from the ditch system.
- Improve financial sustainability for the system, ensuring that funds are properly allocated for future maintenance and improvement projects.
- Promote a transparent, collaborative process where landowners can engage with SHRWD and provide input on the changes.

Looking Ahead

As the Sand Hill Ditch redetermination moves forward, SHRWD is committed to working closely with landowners, experts, and local stakeholders to ensure that the process is fair, efficient, and beneficial for all involved. Public outreach will be key, and landowners will be encouraged to stay engaged and informed throughout the process.

This redetermination is a critical part of ensuring that the Sand Hill Ditch remains a vital and effective resource for managing water across the watershed for years to come



ONE WATERSHED ONE PLAN

Approval and Finalization of the Sand Hill River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan



Scan me for the
full plan!



In 2024, the Sand Hill River Watershed District (SHRWD) celebrated the official approval and finalization of the Sand Hill River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. This plan outlines the district's strategies for protecting and improving water quality, managing stormwater, and addressing environmental challenges within the watershed.

The approval of this comprehensive plan marks a significant milestone for SHRWD, ensuring that future water management practices are well-coordinated and sustainable. It provides a detailed framework for managing the river's ecosystem, supporting agricultural landowners, and enhancing the health of the watershed overall.

One of the key outcomes of this plan is the allocation of implementation dollars for the upcoming biennium. SHRWD and partners are set to receive substantial funding from the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment, which will be used to execute the projects outlined in the plan. These funds will support a variety of initiatives, including habitat restoration, erosion control, water quality improvement, and infrastructure upgrades. The implementation dollars will be crucial for addressing long-term challenges and ensuring the watershed's resilience against climate change and other environmental pressures.

With the finalization of the Sand Hill River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, effective for a ten-year period until January 24, 2034, the SHRWD is poised to move forward with strategic, impactful projects that will protect the watershed for generations to come. The plan can be found on the district web-site.



Building Stronger Partnerships: SHRWD's Collaboration with Local Stakeholders and Funding Partners

The Sand Hill River Watershed District (SHRWD) has long recognized the importance of collaboration in managing and improving its drainage systems. By working closely with local stakeholders, regional partners, and funding agencies, SHRWD has been able to secure essential resources and implement successful projects along the Sand Hill Ditch.

One of the key strategies for SHRWD has been fostering strong partnerships with local governments, landowners, and organizations. These collaborations ensure that the projects reflect the needs of the community while also securing financial support. Through strategic alliances, SHRWD has been able to leverage state, federal, and local funding programs, helping to offset the cost of maintenance, repairs, and improvements along the Sand Hill Ditch.



For example, through its partnerships, SHRWD has accessed funds that have supported significant infrastructure upgrades and environmental protection initiatives. These collaborations not only enhance the functionality of the drainage systems but also help to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience against flooding.

By continuing to build and strengthen these partnerships, SHRWD can efficiently tackle future challenges, improve water management, and ensure that projects along the Sand Hill Ditch benefit both the environment and the landowners who rely on these systems. Collaboration remains at the heart of SHRWD's success, driving meaningful outcomes for the entire watershed region.

Over the past several years, landowners west of Beltrami have been closely monitoring flows and spring outbreaks along the Sand Hill River channel. They have asked the watershed district investigate outbreaks that they have noted as unusual during spring events. The events noted by landowners appear to occur after the installation of the rock arch rapids (after 2018). Since 2018, several severe spring floods along the Sand Hill River have resulted in breakout flows west of Beltrami. Several of these events, including the spring 2023 flood, appear to have been exacerbated due to significant snow and ice plugging in Scandia and Hubbard Townships as flood flows arrived.

The Sand Hill River Watershed District has implemented the Sand Hill River Ecosystem Restoration Project Team. The Sand Hill River Watershed District (District) Board of Managers has tasked the Project Team to develop and analyze alternatives to address the flood issues along the Sand Hill River.

MOEN EROSION CONTROL

AT THE OUTLET OF PROJECT #17



In 2024, the Sand Hill River Watershed District (SHRWD) successfully completed the Moen Erosion Control Project, a vital initiative aimed at stabilizing eroding banks at the outlet of Project #17. This project was essential for preserving the banks integrity, preventing further soil loss, and maintaining water quality.

The project focused on vulnerable areas where erosion had compromised the side slopes. SHRWD implemented a combination of structural measures, like riprap, and natural solutions, including planting native vegetation to help stabilize the soil. These efforts not only prevent erosion but also improve the river ecosystem by supporting biodiversity and providing habitat for local wildlife.

FUNDING

Funding for the project came from the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) through its Multipurpose Drainage Management program, along with support from local landowners and environmental agencies. With these resources, SHRWD was able to conduct necessary repairs, reduce sediment runoff, and enhance water flow.

PROJECT BENEFITS

The Moen Erosion Control Project has significantly reduced erosion, improved water quality, and strengthened the river's resilience. By working collaboratively with local stakeholders, SHRWD has ensured that the Sand Hill River remains a healthy and sustainable resource for the community and the environment.

Grant Description

This competitive grant program funds multipurpose drainage management practices, targeting critical pollution source areas to reduce erosion and sedimentation, reduce peak flows and flooding, and improve water quality, while protecting drainage system efficiency and reducing drainage system maintenance for priority Chapter 103E drainage systems. Practices include eligible on-field, on-farm, and on-drainage system practices within the benefited area or the watershed of a Priority Chapter 103E Drainage System.

FOCUS FOR 2025

What's up and coming for 2025? In addition to the daily operations such as ditch maintenance, permitting regulations and oversight, and financial operations, the district is prioritizing the following for 2025:



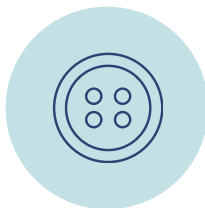
01 — SH River Ecosystem Restoration

A huge effort is being launched to develop alternatives to address flooding, water quality, & habitat along the Sand Hill Ditch. With \$1.7 million in FEMA repair funds, it is necessary to investigate all alternatives to address issues. Additionally, an MPCA Climate resiliency grant was awarded in 2024, along with the use of Flood Damage Reduction Work Group Funds, and One Watershed One Plan dollars for the analysis of the area. A Project Team consisting of landowners, townships, agency representatives, and a technical team is actively learning about the area to present a recommendation for resolution to the board of managers. These efforts are constantly changing with new ideas evolving and new data always being presented. Project Team efforts can be found on the district web-site.



02 — Partnering Agency Dedication

Staff relies on dedicated partners and will continue to foster the relationships with water management partners such as the Red River Basin Commission, the Flood Damage Reduction Work Group, Mn Watersheds, the Red River Watershed Management Board, the Drainage Work Group, Red River Retention Authority, other Red River Valley Watershed Districts and local government units (SWCD's, county's, etc.) and our state elected legislative officials. April Swenby, the district Administrator was appointed in 2024 to serve on the board of directors for the International Water Institute.



03 — Buttoning Up

Two repair items on the Sand Hill Ditch (Scandia Twp. and Liberty Twp.) and one along Project #17 did not get completed this year and are on the docket for next year (partially paid for with HSEM funds). There are two areas where the purchase of buffer easements will take place on Project #17. The boundary along 102 will be sealed up as per the new boundary revision. Affordable alternatives for the Union Lake Pumping project that meet the MnDNR permit requirements that avoid downstream transmission will be a high priority.

BUILDING PROJECT

After six years of investigating, learning, and exploring and modifying alternatives and plans, the board of managers entered into a contract with Schmitz Builders in Red Lake Falls to add onto the historic (1914 Bank) Sand Hill River Watershed District building to achieve their goal of being ADA compliant. Here are some highlights of the district plans:



ACCESSIBILITY

- 100% accessible and ADA compliant
 - two main floor bathrooms
 - entrance & parking
 - doors



HVAC

Improvements in existing structure

- HVAC improvements
- Remodel for connectivity between the old structure and the new



FUTURE INCOME

Two additional offices

- Option to rent office space
- Opportunity to share resources (copiers, phones, computers, servers, or even staff)

A complete set of the plans is available at the district office. The completion date is scheduled for July of 2025, and the managers are committed to hosting an open house for the public.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

- The Beaver Bounty Program was revised and increased to \$100 per beaver. Townships are asked to pay \$10 per beaver and the district pays \$90 per beaver.
- The boundary between the Red Lake Watershed District and the Sand Hill River Watershed District was revised. The district maps were updated on the district web-site to reflect the new boundary.
- Legislative updates to Mn Statute that affect watersheds were addressed and are being implemented.
- Seventeen drainage permits were received for 2024.
- The district will celebrate their 50th Anniversary in the spring of 2025!

**We thank you for your continued support
for our efforts! You contribute to the
success of the SHRWD.**

Contact

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**Board managers are appointed by the Polk
County Board of Commissioners annually.**

Managers serving in 2024 include:

Stuart Christian, Chairman
Don Andringa - Vice Chairman
Shawn Brekke - Secretary
Clayton Bartz - Treasurer
Craig Engelstad - Manager