



ROSEAU RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT: HAY CREEK/NORLAND PROJECT

Spring flooding is a perennial problem for residents of the Roseau River Watershed District. A little more than a decade ago when the Roseau River reached record levels, the area was devastated - the City of Roseau alone experienced an estimated \$100 million in damages.

The Roseau River Watershed District purchased land for a flood control project in Norland Township before the flood. But construction of the Hay Creek/Norland project didn't begin until several years later. The project goal: store 9,500 acre-feet of water off-channel to help reduce downstream peak flows and backwater flood stages affecting the city. The \$10.8 million project was fully operational in the spring of 2013.

"The Hay Creek/Norland project also has natural resource enhancement goals," said Tracy Halstengard, Roseau River Watershed District Administrator "restoring prairies and wetlands - and improving water quality and migratory bird habitat."

Halstengard and Roseau River Watershed District technician Torin McCormack toured the 5-square mile project on a cold and windy morning in late October 2013. They went out to take a look at the natural resource enhancements.

They liked what they saw.

"This spring we learned



Hay Creek/Norland Pre-Construction



Hay Creek/Norland Post-Construction

that we can use water levels to encourage native plants and at the same time, control invasive plants," said McCormack.

"Storing floodwater in the impoundment's south half inadvertently resulted in improved germination of native plants," McCormack explained. "And it also stressed the invasive reed canary grass so much that it didn't put out seed."

McCormack stood on the outlet structure and pointed to the north of Judicial Ditch 61, which divides the impound-

ment. It's easy to see what he's talking about: reed canary grass, cattails and willow are thriving to the north. To the south, where they were inundated with floodwaters for 35 days, it's clear they're not doing as well.

Further down the dike by the County Ditch 18 outlet structure, McCormack got out of his truck and walked to the edge of the borrow pit pools. Along the way he pointed out the native plants moving in along the edge of the water: wild millet,

smartweed, sloughgrass and plantain. "Food for sparrows and ducks," said McCormack.

Prior to project construction, the land produced grass seed, wheat, hay and seed oil. Some of it was enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This land use supported low plant diversity and provided little or no wetland habitat.

Fast-forward to the spring of 2013. This flood-prone farmland has been transformed into to a haven for wildlife.

The Norland project supports diverse plant communities ranging from alder thickets to shallow open-water wetlands and a few deep-water pools. The richness of plant and animal species is a testament to the health of these habitats.

McCormack spotted a dozen or so ducks, the last of the season, feeding along the edge of the borrow pits: Lesser Scaup, Blue-winged Teal, Mallards and Wood Ducks. They also flushed several Sharp-tailed Grouse along the way.

McCormack got out of the truck again, this time at the northwest corner of the impoundment - to point out a huge nest in a nearby tree. "This Bald Eagle nest was active all year," said McCormack. Nesting Bald Eagles is confirmation that there's plenty of raptor food at the impoundment.

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WATERSHED DISTRICT DEVELOPMENTS

WILD RICE WD

The Wild Rice WD reported on the status of Goose Prairie Marsh. A draft operating plan for the potential project was developed by the MDNR and reviewed by the Project Team. A hydraulic analysis will be completed to determine bounce and how quickly it can be drawn down. A determination will be made on whether a crossing on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service land can be relocated prior to the October 30, 2013 Project Team meeting.

EVENTS

The next scheduled meeting of the RRWMB will be held at the Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) office, 1405 Prairie Parkway, Suite 311, West Fargo, ND on Tuesday, November 19, 2013 starting at 9:30 a.m.

“During spring and fall migration this place is like Christmas for bird-watchers,” said McCormack. The number of individual birds and variety of species is incredible: pelicans, swans, geese, ducks, grebes, herons and bitterns, Sandhill Cranes, grassland songbirds, hawks and owls.

The Norland impoundment is also a great place to see northern rarities during the winter, McCormack said. Depending on the food availability and weather in the tundra and boreal forests, it’s not uncommon to see crossbills, redpolls, northern finches, Bohemian Waxwings, Northern Hawk-owls, Snowy Owls and Great Gray Owls.

“Last winter, we had a lot of Great Grays. You could

see them lined-up along the dike. They also used the outlet structures as hunting perches,” said McCormack. “They’re amazing to watch.”

The impoundment is open to birdwatchers year-round, except during the firearm deer-hunting season said Halstengard.

If you go, be sure to call first, to be sure the weather’s good and the roads are passable. You can also check out what’s been spotted on line: www.facebook.com/Roseau-River-Watershed-District.

The Hay Creek/Norland Impoundment Project was funded by the State of Minnesota, the Red River Watershed Management Board and the Roseau River Watershed District.

RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

At its regularly scheduled October meeting, the RRWMB:

- Received a report from RRWMB Administrator Naomi Erickson that the 16th Joint Annual Conference has been scheduled for Tuesday, March 25, 2014 - Wednesday, March 26, 2014. Please note that the Legislative Reception & Day at the Capitol will be conducted the week prior on Wednesday, March 19, 2014 to Thursday, March 20, 2014 at the St. Paul Kelly Inn.
- Received an announcement from Red River Retention Authority Executive Director P. Downs that a facility has been selected to co-locate the offices of the RRBC, IWI, RRRA, NRCS, River Keepers, and the NDSWC. The new office is located at 1120 28th Ave North, Fargo, ND.
- Received a report from Project Coordinator Ron Harnack that there are three vacant positions on the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). He encouraged individual watershed districts to select possible candidates and notify BWSR in order to maintain representation from the Red River basin.
- Heard a report from Chuck Fritz, Director - International Water Institute on the status of the North Dakota River Watch Program. The program has been funded and currently initial contacts are being conducted to seek five schools in the Red River basin to commit to participating in River Watch activities in 2014 and 2015.
- Received a report from Red River Coordinator Dan Thul regarding the draft recommendations for Tile Drainage Systems that were developed by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Following discussion, the Board of Managers requested the member watershed districts to review the recommendations and forward any comments or suggestions to Dan Thul prior to the November board meeting.

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