

Roseau River Watershed District and MN DNR partner on flood damage reduction project

The Roseau River Watershed District (RRWD) and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) are partnering on a flood damage reduction project that will also enhance wildlife habitat over thousands of acres of public land on the Roseau River Wildlife Management Area in Roseau County.

Construction started in June to address discharge of water from the pools that too often coincides with peak flows of a given flood on the western portion of the Roseau River watershed. This discharge may result in damage to infrastructure and compromises various land uses such as agriculture near the river. It also contributes to transfer of flood waters from the Roseau River to the Two Rivers watershed in the area locally known as the Juneberry area (the “Big Swamp”), northwest of Greenbush.

The project includes installation of two new water control structures – one on Pool 2 and one on Pool 3, enhancement of an existing water conveyance channel on the west end of Pool 3, and development of a 1.9-mile-long outlet channel from the west end of Pool 3 to the Roseau River.

Unlike other areas of the state, the Roseau River WMA has relatively intact habitat that, on a landscape scale, will produce an abundance and diversity of wildlife when flooding is moderated through management.

The partnership

Developing the partnership was critical to the success of this project. The DNR contributed the land on the Roseau River WMA, and took the lead on environmental review and permitting for the project. WMA staff will operate the structures.

The RRWD applied for and administers the flood damage reduction grant, provided technical expertise in wetland delineation, project mitigation for wetland impacts and engineering throughout the project’s development. The RRWD also organized formal public hearings for the project as well as informal informational meeting.

Win-Win situation

Talk of the project was initiated in the early 2000s. The project team reconvened in 2009 when the Roseau River Watershed District and the DNR determined that there was enough common ground and interest to restart project discussions.

“The Roseau River WMA project is now in the construction phase after a successful second attempt to develop a flood reduction project and natural resources enhancement project,” said LeRoy Carriere, long-time watershed district board member.

The project followed the Red River mediation agreement project team process whereby agency and local concerns are addressed through the use of a consensus-based process to reach agreements for the solutions that meet the defined goals of the project. It will operate according to an operations plan agreed to by the project work team, which consisted of agency representatives, landowners and local government members.

“Using the project team process to move this project forward was important to reaching our goal of a final, constructed project,” said RRWD Board Chair Tony Wensloff. “Because all interested parties were at the table from the start, we were able to keep moving forward in the right direction.”

The project will reduce the peak flow on the Roseau River. Peak discharge from the pools to the river will now occur ahead of the peak flow period on the river. Water level fluctuations within the pools will be reduced and flooding will be moderated along the river in the Big Swamp. These changes will enhance the quality of existing wildlife habitat, combat invasive species competition with native vegetation, and improve wildlife production.

“The operating plan does not change the existing management strategy for wildlife habitat on Roseau River WMA,” Prachar said. “It simply allows a better chance for those strategies to succeed.”

For more information on the Roseau River Watershed District, visit www.roseauriverwd.com.

For more information on the state’s WMAs, visit dnr.state.mn.us/wmas.