NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 21, 2016
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"Local Watershed Looks at Project Fees"

At their regular meeting held on July 11, 2016, the Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), discussed the possible implementation of a fee to raise local funding needed for the Wolverton Creek Restoration Project. Recently, the BRRWD received a $2.8 million dollar Targeted Watershed Program grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). The BRRWD also has an application pending with the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council for $3 million dollars. The total estimated project cost is approximately $12 million dollars. Creation of a "water management district" via Minnesota Statues Annotated 103D.729 could be used to help raise the local match. The process is outlined in the BRRWD’s Revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP), which was approved by BWSR on June 23, 2010. The rate per acre could vary between $1.00 and $2.50.

Several methods could be used to collect the fee, including the run-off volume, the solid load contribution, a combination of the run-off volume and the solid load method, and the drainage area method. The process used to create water management districts includes eight steps. A hearing would have to be held with all affected landowners.

The BRRWD hopes to begin construction of Phase 1 in the spring of 2017. Phase 1 starts at the Clay-Wilkin county line and proceeds upstream to Wilkin County Road No. 30. The BRRWD intends to hold an informational meeting with the affected landowners in Phase 1 in the near future. Another potential source of funding is through the Natural Resources Conservation Service and their watershed restoration enhancement program. Individual landowners would need to sign up to qualify for the federal funding.

Other business included:

- Reviewed the BRRWD’s financial status. The past month, the BRRWD has collected $1,138,935.16. The current bank balance is $696,022.21. The line of credit at Midwest Bank has been paid off. Administrative expenses for the year total $180,563.65. The BRRWD’s accounts receivable report totals $7,052,016.54. BRRWD Administrator, Bruce Albright, noted that all counties have submitted their first-half tax payments except we are still waiting for the project/ditch systems payment from Clay County.

- Approval of permits to: Tom Arnhalt to straighten a natural waterway located in Sections 20 and 21, Manston Township, Wilkin County; CenturyLink to place fiber optic cable throughout Clay County; Red River Valley Cooperative Power Association to bore a three-phase high voltage power line cable through the Oakport flood control levee in the NE1/4, Section 17; and Brent Torkelson for tiling in the SE1/4, Section 11, Nilsen Township, Wilkin County.

- Approved a motion scheduling the 2017 annual budget hearing for Monday, August 22, 2016, at 9:00 PM at the Watershed Office in Barnesville. Notice of the budget hearing needs to be published in the local county newspapers.

- Discussed the status of a possible drainage project on the county line west of Trunk Highway (T.H.) No. 75, in Section 6, Wolverton Township, Wilkin County. The area has a long history of drainage problems. Historically, water from this area would have drained northwesterly to the Red River via a natural waterway. There are currently problems along the natural waterway including erosion and sedimentation. Landowners would like to divert the low flows west on the south side of the County Road directly into the Red River. After several meetings with the affected landowners this past winter, they decided to petition for a drainage ditch in accordance with Minnesota Drainage Law.
Several of the key landowners met with Administrator Albright, and they are now looking at installing the ditch on their own via the BRRWD’s permitting system. Some information will be developed for the affected parties so that they can approach the landowners in Section 6, Wolverton Township, to seek approval to do the work on their property.

- Discussed a drainage complaint over a tiling project installed in 2013 in the SW1/4, Section 21, Sunnyside Township, Wilkin County. Water from the tiling project needs to drain approximately 3.5 miles before reaching a grassed, natural waterway that drains directly into the Red River. Downstream landowners are concerned that the ditches along the water path are now full of cattails, saturated, and that their areas cannot handle the additional flows. The office will do more research on the complaint. The project and the outlet are now located within the Bois de Sioux Watershed District. Their office will be contacted to see what they know about the project and recent concerns.

- Noting that the next Mediation Project Team meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 18, 2016, at 7:00 PM in the Watershed Office. The Fall Tour is tentatively scheduled for September 8, 2016, and will begin at 1:30 PM at the Watershed Office.

- Reviewed preliminary plans for a possible subdivision that would be located in Sections 8 and 17, Hawley Township, Clay County. The proposed project needs to be presented to the Clay County Planning and Zoning Commission.

- Discussed the status of Project No. 77, Clay County Ditch (C.D.) No. 51-Proposed Lateral No. 3. Following the process outlined in Minnesota Drainage Law for the development of a new lateral, the Board made an order to construct the project on September 14, 2015. Following that order, an appeal/lawsuit was filed by Robert Norby via his attorney, Zenas Baer. The proposed project was to address drainage problems created by Norby when he installed illegal dikes in the NE1/4, Section 28, Kragnes Township. The project petitioner has recently purchased Norby’s property and plans to remove the dikes. If the project is not going to proceed, the BRRWD needs to figure out how to dismiss the project and collect the remaining account balance of approximately $10,000. The office will contact the BRRWD’s attorney, Tami L. Norgard, Vogel Law Firm, in this regard.

- Discussed the status of the Oakport Flood Mitigation Project. R.J. Zavoral & Sons, Inc. continues to make good progress. The Board approved Pay Request No. 4 in the amount of $656,044.35. A local party involved in Phase 4 who has been causing problems for the contractor has been sent a letter by our attorney indicating that if this harassment continues, she will be held liable for any additional costs/expenditures because of her actions.

- Noting that the contractor has temporarily left the worksite regarding the culvert installations on Clay C.D. No. 59. He expects to be back in the next several weeks to finish.

- Noting that R.J. Zavoral & Sons, Inc. plans to start work repairing the two slumping sites involved with Clay C.D. No. 10 in Morken and Kragnes Townships around August 1.

- Discussed submitting a 2017 BWSR Clean Water Fund competitive grant application for work on the South Branch of the Buffalo River east of T.H. No. 9. Applications are due August 8, 2016.

- Agreed to appoint Roger Haglund, Moorhead, to the BRRWD Citizen Advisory Committee.
• Reviewed recommendations from Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI) regarding a crossing on Hay Creek downstream of the Stinking Lake Project in the NW1/4, Section 36, Highland Grove Township, Clay County. The existing crossing, which consisted of two lines of 24" diameter corrugated metal pipe (CMP) has washed out. HEI is recommending that two lines of 73' x 55" x 30' CMP-A be installed. This would handle drawdown flows of 160 cubic feet per second from the dam. Estimated project cost is $10,000 to $15,000. The landowner will be contacted to see if he is interested in contributing to the project.

• Noting that the 2016 Minnesota Water Resources Conference will be held at the St. Paul RiverCentre on October 18-19. BRRWD Chairman, Gerald Van Amburg, suggested Managers attend.

• Reviewed a report from HEI regarding side inlets and bufferstrip installations on several Wilkin County ditches, including 13, 13-Lateral, 40, 41, 42, 43, and 44. Currently, the BRRWD has a grant that still has approximately $170,000 in it for work on the South Branch of the Buffalo River. Because these ditches drain into that river, the funding could be used to install side inlets and the required bufferstrips. We are also still working with the West Otter Tail and Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation Districts, who may have several projects that could also qualify for the funding.

• Noting that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District are sponsoring a free workshop titled 'Groundwater: Managing an Invisible Resource'. In our area, the closest workshop will be held in Thief River Falls on August 4, 2016, from 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM. For more information, please visit the BRRWD office.

• Noting that the office has furnished information to a landowner on Clay C.D. No. 33 regarding his 2016 assessment. The benefits for this ditch system were redetermined in 2015. Of course, the concerned landowner did not attend the hearing.

• Reviewed an updated list of the BRRWD Goals, which include short-term, intermediate, long-term, and high priority categories. Right now, the most immediate concern is finishing the RWMP. The draft RWMP is currently being reviewed by Albright, who set a goal of having his work done by September 1. Another issue that needs to be addressed is hiring of an Administrator Trainee that can work with Albright over the next several years before he retires.

• Noting that the BRRWD Board of Managers will work on the update of their Rules at the upcoming 07/25/16 meeting. The process will require furnishing the amended rules to a variety of counties and cities for their review/comment, as well as holding a hearing.

• Approved payment of bills totaling $1,018,542.30.

The next meeting of the Board of Managers, BRRWD, is scheduled for Monday, July 25, 2016, at 7:00 PM in the Watershed Office, located at 1303 4th AVE NE, Barnesville, MN 56514. All meetings are open to the public. For more information, please visit our website at www.brrwd.org.