NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 21, 2018
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"BRRWD Accepts Bufferstrip Reports"

At their meeting held on Monday, February 12, 2018, at 7:00 PM in Barnesville, the Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), accepted the Damages Statements for Clay County Ditch (C.D.) Nos. 5, 10, 22, 23, 28, and 59. The statements reflect the acreage amount, payment rate, and total landowner payments, needed to install the new permanent right-of-way (R/W) along the ditch systems. The ditch R/W payment rates are based on the County’s assessed land values. For any land above the crown of the ditch slope, the payment rate will be the full county assessed value, and the payment rate for land between the crown of the ditch and the existing ditch non-crop R/W will be paid for at 10% of the assessed value. The Board also authorized the staff to schedule the ditch system hearings as soon as possible to comply with the 2015 Minnesota Buffer Law, which requires the incremental implementation of one-rod (16.5’) vegetated bufferstrips on all legal ditch systems by 11/01/18. The BRRWD has opted to hold group hearings for related county ditch systems to complete the hearing process for our 90-plus ditch systems by the noted deadline. This process includes the publication of the hearing notices three weeks prior to the hearing, distribution of hearing notices to all affected landowners, preparation of Property Owners’ Statements, and the actual R/W payment and establishment.

Other business included:

- Approved the BRRWD’s monthly financial report. Cash on hand is $2,083,376.91. Administrative disbursements for the year are $29,139.26. Current 2018 accounts receivable totals $6,206,459. Our total income for the year is $94,677.64. Income since the 01/08/18 meeting was $94,451.63: County property/ditch delinquent tax collections from Becker ($3,651.91), Clay ($15,131.25), Otter Tail ($934.15), and Wilkin ($12,206.57); Wilkin County for 2015 Buffer Initiative Aid ($33,283) and C.D. No. 3 seeding and driveway payment error ($16,891.55); the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB) for Mediation Project Team 1st Quarter 2018 expenses ($8,709.21) and the E.J. Stellmach Trust for a R/W payment error reimbursement ($2,526.46). The balance of the income came from bank account interest and Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI) office rent. The Board approved the payment of bills totaling $274,520.70.

- Approved permits to Arvig Enterprises, Inc. for the installation of fiber optic lines for high speed internet service using directional boring or vibratory plow in road R/Ws in Becker and Clay Counties, subject to our standard utility disclaimer. The Board postponed action on permits for the Fergus Falls Fish & Game Club, pending Manager field review; Shawn Norman, pending ditch system hearings; and Breckenridge Public Utilities, pending receipt and further discussion of their project plans.

- Noted that Albright and available Managers will meet with the Clay County Board of Commissioners on 2/20/18 to present the 2018 tax levy petitions in accordance with Minnesota Statutes Annotated (M.S.A.) 103D.905, Subd. 3.

- Noted that Harold J. Rotunda, CPA, has begun the BRRWD’s 2017 financial audit.

- Noted that Albright has contacted Clay, Becker, and Wilkin Counties regarding reimbursement for our share of the riparian aid funding from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), associated with the 2015 Buffer Initiative. Wilkin County has paid in full for 2017, but we are still waiting for the other Counties.
• Discussed funding options for the Wolverton Creek Restoration Phase 1 easement acquisitions. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council approved our request to use Reinvest In Minnesota rates for the easement process. Plans are to have made progress on acquiring the Phase 1 easements by the first meeting in March and to schedule a bid letting for April.

• Noted that the petitioners for Project No. 78, Clay/Wilkin Judicial Ditch No. 1 Diversion have decided to submit a revised petition for a ditch improvement. According to Drainage Law, the landowners will be able to roll over the current project development costs and bonding into the alternative project (M.S.A. 103E.055). The revised petition is ready to distribute for signatures. Once the petition is filed and approved, Erik S. Jones, Engineer, HEI, will prepare the Preliminary Engineer’s Report, and the Board can schedule the preliminary hearing.

• Noted that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has certified the west levee, associated with Project No. 49, Oakport Flood Mitigation, effective 6/15/18, which includes time for publication and a 30-day comment period. The Board discussed possible management measures to improve a wetland on the north side of Wall ST NW, which is not meeting specified success criteria for mitigation. HEI has prepared a plan to rehabilitate the site.

• Discussed the cost/benefit analysis for the Stony Creek Comprehensive Project. Jones plans to have the report ready for the 3/12/18 BRRWD meeting.

• Noted that the One Watershed, One Plan Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is being circulated among the four Counties and SWCDs for review and signature. The goal is to have the MOA signed by the end of February, so that it can be submitted to BWSR, who will then release funds to start the planning process. Albright and Manager Fjestad are scheduled to meet with the Otter Tail County Commissioners on 2/13/18.

• Noted that the Upper Red River Total Maximum Daily Load and Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies Study have finally been completed. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has scheduled a kickoff meeting with the BRRWD on Monday, March 5, 2018, at 1:00 PM in our Barnesville office to start the next round of monitoring studies for the Buffalo River and Upper Red River watersheds in 2019-2020.

• Noted that the Assistant Administrator Hiring Committee hopes to have a report and recommendations for the 3/12/18 Board meeting.

• Noted that the RRWMB and the Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group are holding their 20th Annual Joint Conference on March 21-22, 2018, at the Courtyard by Marriott, Moorhead, MN.

• Noted that the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts Legislative Breakfast is scheduled for March 7-8, 2018, at the Embassy Suites, St. Paul. Invitations have been sent to our local legislators.

The Board of Managers, BRRWD, will hold their next regular meeting on Monday, February 26, 2018, at 7:00 PM in the BRRWD Office, located at 1303 4th AVE NE, Barnesville, MN. All meetings are open to the public. For more information about the BRRWD, please visit our website at www.brrwd.org.