NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 25, 2019
FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Bruce E. Albright, 218-354-7710

"BRRWD Holds Annual Meeting"

On January 14, 2019, the Board of Managers, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), held their annual meeting. The meeting included election of the 2019 officers: Jay A. Leitch, President, Clay County; Peter V. Fjestad, Vice President, Otter Tail County; Mark T. Anderson, Treasurer, Clay County; John E. Hanson, Secretary, Becker County. The Board discussed the Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI) 2019 engineering consultant proposal. President Leitch appointed Managers Anderson and Fjestad to work with him to review the contract. The Board agreed to consider the contract at their 1/28/19 meeting. Vogel Law Firm was hired regarding the 2019 legal services. Joel Carlson, Legal Research/Government Affairs, was rehired as the BRRWD's Lobbyist. Harold J. Rotunda, Certified Public Accountant, was hired to do the 2018 audit. Midwest Bank was designated as the BRRWD's prime fiduciary, as well as any other banks within the District, as the need arises.

The Board also met with a large group of landowners involved with the Fargo-Moorhead Diversion, including representatives from the City of Moorhead and Clay County. The wanted to discuss the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) recent decision to grant a permit to the Diversion Authority for their project. Several landowners gave testimony about the hardships they will experience if the Diversion project is constructed. They urged the Managers to join with the Richland/Wilkin Joint Powers Authority and the Cities of Wolverton and Comstock in filing a request for a contested case hearing regarding the decision. After hearing comments from the public, the Board went into Executive Session to consider contesting the DNR permit with their Attorney, Tami Norgard, Vogel Law Firm. Following the Executive Session, President Leitch called for a voice vote on a motion to file a request for a contested case hearing. The motion passed on a 3 to 2 vote. On advice from Attorney Norgard regarding a potential conflict of interest, Manager Mark Anderson abstained from voting under protest because he lives and farms in the project area.

Other business included:

- Approved the 12/31/18 annual financial reports, including the project account balance sheet, administrative disbursements, summary of income, and the accounts receivable report. Total 2018 income was $4,375,346.85, and administrative expenses totaled $361,988.21. The 2018 Accounts Receivable totals $2,303,889, including delinquent taxes and ongoing grant agreements. Cash on hand at the end of the year was $2,643,764.51. The office also prepared a worksheet showing the individual account financial activities for 2018 and then allocated an administrative fee (1%) based on the amount of the expenses for each account ($33,953.38). After average account balances for the year were calculated, accounts with a negative average were charged interest at the rate of 4% (bank loan rate), and accounts with positive balances were allocated interest, including the 2018 bank account interest income ($22,426.57). The 2018 year-end transfers from the Minnesota Statutes Annotated 103D.905, Subd. 3, account ($553,439.47) were completed for several programs/projects that do not have assessment areas or other means of revenue. A final 12/31/18 balance sheet was prepared, reflecting the interest allocations/account transfers. The Board also approved the current 1/14/19 financial reports. Income since 1/01/19 was $225 from HEI for office rent. Cash on hand is $2,643,989.51, and 2019 Accounts Receivable totals $4,838,369. The Board approved the payment of bills totaling $237,934.62.

- Approved an after-the-fact permit to Brian Holt to install a 30" dia. culvert in a new waterway crossing in the SE¼, Section 19, Tansem Township, Clay County, to provide access from one side of his property to the north without driving his equipment on Trunk Highway No. 34.
• Reviewed a drainage complaint from a landowner in Section 18, Parke Township, Clay County, who is concerned that a United States Fish and Wildlife Service wetland restoration project on Pheasants Forever property in Section 7, Parke Township, might cause water to back up onto his property. It appears that no BRRWD permit was obtained for the project. The BRRWD is waiting for a response from the Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District.

• Discussed a drainage complaint from last fall regarding a blocked culvert in 120th ST between Sections 12 and 13, Wolverton Township, Wilkin County. Fill was packed into the north end of the culvert to match the road slope. A Manager field review was conducted, and BRRWD Administrator Bruce Albright worked with the landowner who put in the plug to unblock the culvert. The landowner had concerns about the condition of the south road ditch along 120th ST. HEI was authorized to conduct a survey, and more survey data will be needed this spring. Albright will work with the Wilkin County Highway Department.

• Reviewed a drainage concern in Section 13, Audubon Township, Becker County, where a landowner is mining black dirt out of a low area next to the county road and is planning to work with his neighbor to install tile to drain water away from the wetland to a road culvert. The Becker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has determined that according to the Wetlands Conservation Act, this area may be a wetland and that there could be limitations as to how much material he can remove. The tiling plan could also be considered a possible violation. Albright will contact the landowner.

• Authorized Albright to sign an amended Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Targeted Watershed Grant contract for Project No. 79, Wolverton Creek Restoration. Language was added to the Grant Workplan to include a land purchase in Section 10, Wolverton Township. The original grant agreement also had the wrong expiration date, so the grant was amended to reflect the correct date of 6/30/20. The new agreement also extends the grant funding to include the next two project phases.

The Blilie/Bixby land purchase agreement is moving forward. Blilie recently provided his abstract to Vogel Law Firm, who has prepared and forwarded the draft purchase agreement to the BRRWD for the acquisition of his two parcels. The transaction is expected to close in the next few weeks for the agreed upon price of $150,000. As soon as the BRRWD acquires the property, we will work with BWSR and the Wilkin SWCD to enroll 3 small fields and an area along the Creek into Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Subsequently, the BRRWD will enter into a purchase agreement with Bixby for the 2.2-acre parcel and a contract for deed for the 17-acre parcel.

The Board also discussed the status of the Wolverton Creek Restoration. Phase 1 is still under construction with the contract deadline extended until 6/30/19. The Area DNR Fisheries office granted our request for a variance next spring to work in the protected waters during the spawning season, so the contractor can start as soon as conditions permit. One temporary Phase 1 easement still needs to be signed. Phase 2 easements have been mailed to the landowners, and a few of them have been signed. Staff will contact the landowners who haven’t signed. Staff will also start the Phase 3 easements (Clay County portion) process in the next month so the Clay SWCD can start working with those landowners on their CREP signups. Phase 2 bid opening could be scheduled sometime in March/April with the expectation that this project could be completed in 2019.

• Approved the Final Order for Project No. 78, Clay/Wilkin Judicial Ditch No. 1-Partial Improvement. This action begins the 30-day appeal period.
• Discussed potential candidates for the BRRWD's Advisory Committee. The Managers will forward their recommendations for Committee members to Albright, who will contact the individuals.

• Noted that the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts Legislative Reception and Day at the Capitol will be held February 20-21, 2019, at the Double Tree Hotel, St. Paul.

The Board of Managers, BRRWD, will hold their next regular meeting on Monday, January 28, 2019, 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.