



# **STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2014-2017**



**Buffalo-Red River Watershed District**

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## Description

### Description of Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD)

The BRRWD consists of four counties including Clay, Becker, Otter Tail and Wilkin, encompassing nineteen municipalities. The organization became fully operational in July, 1978 after approval of its first Overall Plan. The mission of BRRWD is:

*“to alleviate flooding and to manage the water resources in the District in a manner that best protects the natural resources.”*

### Planning Background

The **BRRWD** has been functioning well since its formation. Given the recent addition of new land area to the watershed, it is timely to take a deeper look at internal operations and develop a strategic plan. Bruce Albright, Administrator, and Gerry Van Amburg, Chairman, initiated the planning process and guided it through its completion. Donna Rae Scheffert, President of Leadership Tools consulting firm was hired as the consultant.

Scheffert facilitated input through written assessments, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, review of relevant data, facilitation of a work session with staff and Managers, and facilitation of a strategic session with advisory members, partners and peers from other Districts; she also drafted the strategic plan. The input into and development of the plan took place from January to May, 2014.

**This strategic plan is intended to supplement the revised Watershed Management Plan (RWMP) which is the guiding document of the BRRWD.**

## Background and History

BRRWD exists to provide public value to residents of the area, state, and nation through implementing projects and programs. Collective benefits arise from what the organization does, can do, or should do.

The impetus for forming a watershed District was to be able to obtain funding and to implement projects to address water quality/quantity issues. Between 2001 and 2013 a total of \$70,100,970 was obtained from a number of sources for administration and implementation of programs and projects. The Watershed District contracts with Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI) for administration, administrative support, and technical expertise including engineering, surveying and more. Many important gains have been realized within the watershed under the direction of the Board of Managers and with staffing through HEI.

The District has experienced steady growth, increasing revenue by 450% between 2001 and 2013. Staff has been consistent, with the administrator in place for 33 years, and the resident secretary for 14 years. In April of 2012, the Buffalo-Red Watershed District (BRRWD) was expanded through the addition of nearly 400 square mile area located in Wilkin and Otter Tail counties. As a result of the expansion in area, the number of Managers on the Watershed District Board increased from five to seven. There has been no corresponding increase in District staff.

As the Chairman states,

***“ We have never engaged in a strategic planning effort, except some in-house efforts quite a few years ago. We have grown and changed dramatically since that time. We have been a two-person staff operation for many years, while the amount of work has increased tremendously. During 2013, through lengthy discussions involving the Board of Managers and the watershed District staff, it has become apparent that the BRRWD is in need of an analysis of current District operations and a strategic plan for future operations. ”***

The BRRWD Managers and staff desire to improve their operational effectiveness and overall performance. They received a grant for cost share from the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR) and commissioned a consultant to provide an ‘outside’ objective view and recommendations resulting in a strategic plan to guide operations.

## Work Priorities

Excellent progress has been made in several areas since the founding of BRRWD. The work priorities of the watershed are directed through the WMP, revised in 2010. Several large projects will be wrapping up in the near future including Manston Slough Restoration, and Oakport and Georgetown Levees. Several other current projects include: the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP); The Buffalo River and Upper Red River Watershed TDML; studies/WRAPS; Sediment Modeling, Various Lake Outlet Systems; drainage system improvements and more.

Ongoing programs include permitting for a wide variety of construction activities that affect water resources and overseeing public drainage. Four issues within the watershed were identified by the majority of participants at the planning session.

Soil Erosion and Water Quality	Water Holding	Adequate Drainage	Water Quality
Farmland	Distributed retention/detention  Flood damage reduction	Tiling Ag drainage Ditches	Lakes and streams

## Strategic Goals

The primary goals resulting from the management analysis and strategic planning are:

1. Get more things done in the expanded District in a timely and efficient manner with additional staff and by implementing office systems innovations **(Program/Project Management)**
2. Put a structure in place for work continuation when current employees transition away from BRRWD; and insure that the Managers are ready for the transition and to lead with new staff **(Leadership Transitions)**
3. Ensure the Board and Administrator are working together toward a shared future vision that includes attention to all aspects of personnel management and organizational development **(Shared Responsibility for District Management)**
4. Prioritize new projects by involving the Board and partners while drawing upon the vast information within the comprehensive WMP **(Prioritization of Projects)**

## Management Basics

High performing organizations have commonalities beyond a good plan and great personnel to carry it out. Seven attributes comprise essential management elements. Managers and staff were given a written, anonymous worksheet to rate some the management basics. Below are the average responses from the greatest strength to the lowest rated element (low=1 and high =10).

Greatest Strength	Strengths	Mid-Points	Lowest Rated
1. Clear sense of who we are as an organization (7.5)	2. The right employees with knowledge and skills (6.7) 3. Strong leadership that guides us (6.66)	4. High level of satisfaction (6.2) 5. Leadership that shares power (6.2) 6. Strong vision and compelling sense of direction (6.1)	7. Right systems in place to deliver our products and services in a timely and cost effective manner (5.3)

Comments:

- *“Some of the Managers view the BRRWD as a business that should be making money; others see it as a public service organization”*
- *“Current employees are capable and knowledgeable, but understaffed”*
- *“Glad we are doing strategic planning”*
- *“We are, as a group, a fairly new Board”*

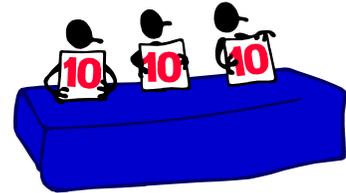
Once the strategic plan has been implemented the recommendation is to aim for each element to be rated in the upper 75% or to receive an average rating of 7.5 on the rating scale of 1=low to 10=high

## Operational Strengths and Weaknesses

A management analysis of a large organization is complex, with some strengths and weaknesses expected to be found given demands and resource constraints. In strategic planning the snapshot in time view is intended to highlight certain areas to be given more time, attention, or resources for optimal performance as well as name primary strengths to continue to invest in to stay strong.

### Primary Strengths

- Capable, experienced administrator and staff with a strong work ethic
- Committed, informed Managers including a healthy mix of gender and experience (long-timers and newcomers on the Board)
- Credibility and positive reputation amongst peers, policy makers, state agency, and landowners for watershed District leaders and staff
- New 'state of the art' building with the latest technology capability, more office space, and meeting space that is professional and comfortable
- Ability to get large projects implemented and improve natural resources in the District through securing adequate resources, forming partnerships, and leveraging expertise



### Comments:

- *"Current employees are capable and knowledgeable"*
- *"If I could clone any watershed in the state it would be this one."*
- *"I have served on many Boards and this is a healthy Board."*
- *"Finally have a better permitting process"*
- *Believe we are one of the premier Watershed Districts in MN-look to us for the trial to when they want to bring new projects/processes into Districts*
- *"Watershed concept works well. Allows Board to deal with wide array of issues-water quality & quantity"*
- *"Board members have a willingness to be involved and to take the lead"*
- *"We have good working relationships with fellow LGU's & agencies"*

## Main Weaknesses



- **Program/Project Management** – it has been a struggle to get everything needed done in the expanded District in a timely manner with the current number of staff. Given the additional new area, expansion of core services needed (e.g., miles of drainage, number of permits); it appears that a focus on program and project management is necessary.
  - *“The District clearly requires additional employees to do the necessary work.”*
  - *“Staff shortage means we continue to use existing methods.”*
  - *“Make greater use of resources we have available (such as technology) to save time and expense.”*
- **Leadership Transitions** – put a structure and people in place for work continuation for when current employees transition away from BRRWD and insure that the Managers are ready for the transition and to lead with new staff when they come on Board.
  - *“Weakness: we rely too heavily on Bruce to keep us informed”*
  - *“We are very dependent upon Bruce; and Julie too. Without them – problems!”*
- **District Management** – if, and when the District wants to hire their administrative staff, and/or some or all staff independently from HEI, the Board and administrator need to do their homework and be working together toward a shared future vision that includes attention to all aspects of personnel management and organizational development
  - *“One concern I have is that we depend so much upon the administrator-if we suddenly lost the administrator, the Managers would have a very difficult time.”*
  - *“Outgrowing Houston?”*
- **Project Prioritization** – given that the three huge, long-term projects are nearing completion, there is a need for a process to involve key stakeholders including the Managers and partners in determining new projects.
  - *“We are ending a decade of large scale projects and emergencies. Wrapping up 3 projects – Where is our next big project and where is the money? “*

## BRRWD Strategic Action Plan

The strategic goals are:

1. Get more things done in the expanded District in a timely manner with additional staff and by implementing office systems innovations (**Program/Project Management**)
2. Put a structure in place for work continuation when current employees transition away from BRRWD; and insure that the Managers are ready for the transition and to lead with new staff (**Leadership Transitions**)
3. Ensure the Board and administrator are working together toward a shared future vision that includes attention to all aspects of personnel management and organizational development (**Shared Responsibility for District Management**)
4. Prioritize new projects by involving the Board and partners while drawing upon the vast information within the comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (**Prioritization of Projects**)

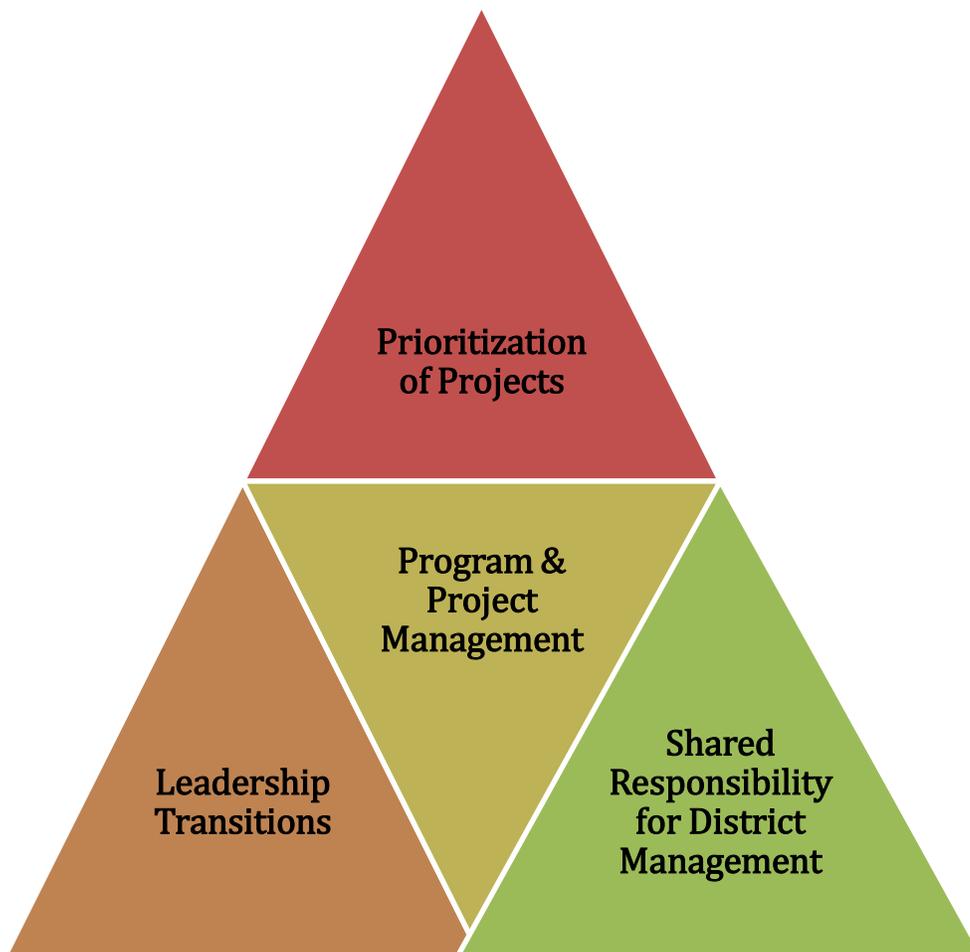


Figure 1 Strategy for Strengthening BRRWD

This section summarizes how to strengthen BRRWD with the anticipated major activities to make progress toward each goal.

### Prioritization of Projects

Goal	Prioritization of Projects Summary of Activity
<p>Prioritize new projects by involving the Board and partners while drawing upon the vast information within the comprehensive RWMP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Determine process to prioritize next set of projects once the main ones currently underway are completed</li> <li>B. Tap funding sources to provide resources for projects               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Farm Bill – retention, detention, water quality, soil erosion</li> <li>○ Clean Water Funding</li> <li>○ Funding to add retention</li> <li>○ Red River Management Board, if desired</li> </ul> </li> <li>C. Develop the ‘One Watershed – One Plan’ to help prioritize, coordinate, and communicate shared direction</li> <li>D. Ongoing discussion with Board and staff about the role, if any, of the watershed District in current and emerging issues (e.g., Fargo-Moorhead Diversion, lakeshore water quality, invasive aquatic species, etc.)</li> </ul>

## Leadership Transitions

Goal	Leadership Transitions Summary of Activity
<p>Put a structure in place for work continuation when current employees transition away from BRRWD; and insure that the Managers are ready for the transition and to lead with new staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Capitalize on Administrator Bruce’s knowledge, relationships and credibility – encourage Bruce to make a long-range plan (recognizing for high performers the last five years can be the most influential years); do the tough stuff and leave an intentional legacy.</li> <li>B. Review, ratify and use the draft Succession Plan in a timely manner when a staff transition is pending (begin process a minimum of six months in advance of administrator leaving)</li> <li>C. Hiring new administrator – when needed, this person will be influential for transition into the next generation of BRRWD</li> <li>D. Hiring of watershed staff – if desired, when timely and needed, at least ten FTE may be required to fulfill obligations and mission if BRRWD decides to manage its own staff vs. contracting with HEI</li> </ul>

## Shared Responsibility for District Management

Goal	Shared Responsibility for District Management Summary of Activity
<p>Ensure the Board and administrator are working together toward a shared future vision that includes attention to all aspects of personnel management and organizational development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Board and staff get onto 'same page' regarding the Strategic Plan and priorities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Authorize decisions and actions after management analysis</li> <li>b. Link strategic plan and priorities to regular meetings to systematically focus on and make progress on immediate, mid-term, and long-term areas by including a check-in about strategic plan progress at regular meetings</li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Each year, clarify annual goals and expectations between Board and administrator for the coming year</li> <li>C. Board of Managers – update by-laws and refine other operating procedures including minutes, agenda's for meetings, use of consent agenda, and protocol for periodic work sessions</li> <li>D. Watershed self-administration vs. HEI administration contract– if and when desired, get ready in order to implement self-administration when staffing transition occurs</li> <li>E. Acquiring technical expertise – if and when desired, revision of scope and role of HEI</li> <li>F. Program expansion – if and when desired discuss and purposefully roll-out additional strategies (e.g., educational components; communications and/or public relations campaign)</li> <li>G. Rules updating – revise and/or develop new rules, seek public comment and get approval for an updated set of rules</li> </ul>

## Programs and Project Management

Goal	Programs and Project Management Summary of Activity
<p>Get more things done in the expanded District in a timely manner with additional staff and by implementing office systems innovations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. <u>Hire additional staff through HEI to be on-site at District Office</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Identify and secure time from someone, preferably involved now who could be given more administrative responsibilities (share some of Bruce's workload)</li> <li>b. Hire office staff through HEI (share some of Julie's workload)</li> </ul> </li>   <li>B. <u>Administrator Bruce finishes up tasks that are already underway and/or overdue</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Major projects are moved ahead</li> <li>b. Processes and planning for expanded (new) District area (per BWSR)</li> <li>c. Records system (complete after move)</li> <li>d. Annual reports – 2012, 2013, etc.</li> </ul> </li>   <li>C. <u>Office systems improvement</u> – create a modernization plan and implement new innovations on an ongoing basis (e.g., project management software for tracking, M-Files, digital records, i-Cloud)</li> </ul>

## Fiscal Overview

The financial matters of the District are sound. The most recent audit shows no problems. A comparison with other Watershed Districts showed that BRRWD is spending a smaller portion of their total budget on Administrative expenses. Therefore, the strategic action recommendation to hire additional staff was made.

No other financial modeling was done to link the strategic actions to their potential costs. This will need to be done as each element of the strategic plan is implemented.

### Buffalo-Red River Watershed District

#### Total Revenue/Expenditures January 30, 2014

	General Levy		ADMIN		%
	Revenue	Expenditures	Revenue	Expenditures	
2001	\$ 2,022,222	\$ 2,678,034	\$ 115,000	\$ 224,214	1.95
2002	\$ 2,168,898	\$ 1,899,915	\$ 125,000	\$ 226,575	1.81
2003	\$ 893,704	\$ 2,247,577	\$ 250,000	\$ 207,426	0.83
2004	\$ 1,456,783	\$ 1,638,717	\$ 250,000	\$ 233,478	0.93
2005	\$ 1,318,174	\$ 1,918,703	\$ 250,000	\$ 237,044	0.95
2006	\$ 3,503,636	\$ 3,517,947	\$ 250,000	\$ 255,410	1.02
2007	\$ 5,354,263	\$ 5,007,278	\$ 250,000	\$ 262,537	1.05
2008	\$ 4,325,757	\$ 3,544,445	\$ 250,000	\$ 299,889	1.20
2009	\$ 10,325,469	\$ 8,732,269	\$ 250,000	\$ 303,642	1.21
2010	\$ 14,092,374	\$ 14,871,541	\$ 250,000	\$ 311,009	1.24
2011	\$ 7,246,474	\$ 8,829,942	\$ 250,000	\$ 303,067	1.21
2012	\$ 8,303,302	\$ 6,022,850	\$ 250,000	\$ 337,305	1.35
2013	\$ 9,089,914	\$ 7,924,996	\$ 250,000	\$ 366,188	1.46
<b>TOTAL</b>	\$ 70,100,970	\$ 68,834,214			

## Credits

### Leaders of the Strategic Planning Process

- ❖ Bruce Albright, Administrator
- ❖ Gerald Van Amburg, Chairman of Board of Managers

Note: These two very busy people who took on the task of strategic planning leadership ended up doing 'double duty' along with their other normal leadership roles. They secured external funds, developed the scope of work, led the process in a timely manner, involved stakeholders and advisors, and spent hours finding documents and reviewing draft products from the consultant.

### Board of Managers

- ❖ Gerald Van Amburg
- ❖ Catherine L. Affield
- ❖ Peter V. Fjestad
- ❖ John E. Hanson
- ❖ Breanna L. Kobiela
- ❖ Troy E. Larson
- ❖ Curtis M. Nelson

***Buffalo-Red River Watershed  
District (BRRWD)***

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Note: The Managers provided invaluable insight and ideas through written assessments, graciously gave a personal interview, and participated in two additional half-day meetings as a part of this strategic planning process.

### BRRWD Staff

Bruce E. Albright, Administrator  
Erik S. Jones, Engineer, Houston Engineering  
Julie Jerger, Resident Secretary

### Consultant

- ❖ Donna Rae Scheffert, President, Leadership Tools  
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