

Whisky Creek, Barnesville Township, Restoration Hearing Minutes

Monday May 4, 2026

Managers Present: Peter Fjestad; Catherine Affield; William Davis; Curtis Stubstad; Gerald Van Amburg Troy Larson.

Managers Absent: William Steffl.

Staff Present: Kristine Goeden, Administrator; Matthew Schlauderaff, Watershed Specialist.

Consultants Present: Bennett Uhler, Engineer, Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI).

Others Attending: Craig Andvik; John Thompson; Daniel Swenson; Pete Thompson; Kelly Peppel; Dan Berg; Jerry Tenderholt; Roy Gilbertson; Teresa Gilbertson; Ken Just; David Grommesh; Tim Thompson; Gary Smith; Kenny Krebs; Diane Copple; Floyd Copple; Steven Thompson; Frank Schindler; Judy Shulstad; Stuart Shulstad; Jamie Wheelright; Keith Ernst; Inez Settlemeyer; Greg Settlemeyer; Allen Lenz; Greg Grommesh; Todd Thompson; Tim Friederichs; Bonnie Kuhlmann; Roger Minch; Brent Butenhoff; Caleb Otto; Kenneth Otto; Brian Ellefson; Jenny Mongeau, Clay County Commission; Jess Shulstad (remote).

President Fjestad called meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Goeden stated this is the Final Hearing for the establishment of Project No. 86 – Whisky Creek, Barnesville Township, Restoration. Project proposes to restore 5.2 miles of channel in Sections 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23, Barnesville Township, Clay County. Goeden asked everyone present to sign in for the record and invited all to provide comment following a presentation. Goeden noted after the Hearing Board of Managers will consider an Order to establish Project No. 86 – Whisky Creek, Barnesville Township, Restoration. If an Order is approved there is a 30-day appeal period. If no appeals are received landowners will be paid damages and project will be put out for bid.

Uhler provided information on the proposed project. Whisky Creek has a drainage area of 40 square miles in Clay, Wilkin, and Otter Tail Counties. Proposed project is along Clay County Ditch No. 34 in Sections 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23, Barnesville Township, Clay County. Current problems on Whisky Creek include channel erosion, spoil bank failure, breakout flows causing soil erosion and flooding adjacent to channel, degraded condition of ditch, and water quality concerns.

Project proposes to reroute Clay County Ditch No. 34. Clay County Ditch No. 34 was constructed in 1915, which straightened the historic Whisky Creek Channel. BRRWD filed petition to reroute Clay County Ditch No. 34 on March 9, 2026 to facilitate the implementation of Whisky Creek, Barnesville Township, Restoration. Proposed project will maintain drainage benefits to benefiting landowners of Clay County Ditch No. 34.

Project proposes to construct a two-stage channel which will restore 6.4 miles of Whisky Creek. Project proposes to install approximately 22 side inlet structures and approximately 13 rock riffle structures. These will be approximately 200 acres of enhanced or expanded buffers. Project proposes to improve natural waterway drainage and improve water quality by reducing sediment and nutrient loading to the channel. Restored channel will have a width of 20 to 23 feet and a channel depth of 4 feet. Valley width varies from 100 to 600 feet. Side inlet locations have been estimated using Stream Power Index (SPI) and will be verified using field survey, aerial photo review, and working with landowners. Each rock riffle will have a 0.75 foot drop across each structure.

Proposed project designed to not cause downstream impacts. Smaller rain events will be contained within the channel and spoil piles. Existing breakout flows will be maintained by lowering spoil piles at certain locations. Inundation times will be decreased by creating a more efficient channel.

At a previous landowner meeting, there was concern about the capacity of the bridge at 120th Street. HEI completed modeling which showed 120th Street overtops north of the bridge before the bridge along Whisky Creek reaches capacity.

Project estimated to cost \$4,600,000.00. BRRWD acquired \$3,700,000.00 from Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF). \$400,000.00 is proposed to be funded through the proposed water management district (wmd) and \$500,000.00 is proposed to be funded through BRRWD district-wide funding.

BRRWD proposes to acquire temporary and permanent easements through project Order. BRRWD hired Natwick Appraisals to determine land value. All landowners were presented appraisal reports and easement values.

BRRWD has obtained Section 404 permit from United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). BRRWD is working with Clay Soil and Water Conservation District to obtain approval through the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) and Clay County to obtain a Land Alteration Permit. If contract awarded, BRRWD will obtain Construction Stormwater Permit through Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

Development of the wmd uses existing land use compared to pre-settlement conditions, soil type, change in runoff, and non-contributing land to determine assessment values. The maximum annual assessment for the proposed project is \$39,864.00. Board of Managers would annually determine the assessment at their budget hearing. The annual cost per acre ranges from \$0.00 to \$2.59 for conservation and farmed land. Non-contributing land is considered in the parcel assessment calculation. Funds can be used for construction and maintenance of proposed Whisky Creek, Barnesville Township Restoration.

Members of the public were invited to provide comment.

Peppel appeared on behalf of Barnesville Township. Peppel noted there are two Township Roads that cross the project area. The Township requested BRRWD address the failing culverts on 140th and 120th Streets. Uhler noted road authorities are responsible for bridges and culverts. Schindler noted the Township had to repair a large hole on 140th Street that appeared during the 2025 beet harvest. Barnesville Township officials worry proposed project will increase pressure on road infrastructure. Uhler stated Township could work with Clay County to apply for state bridge funds. Uhler noted breakout flows overflow to north before bridge at 120th Street is at capacity. Uhler also confirmed that the dike will be lowered by the road so all relief valves in the system will be maintained.

Ellefson requested Board of Managers consider controlling flow upstream of project area east of Barnesville. Ellefson stated the County Road washes out at 160th Street when major runoff comes out of Barnesville. He questioned if culverts were sized appropriately. He noted the footprint of Barnesville has been expanded and water coming out of town is not controlled.

Friederichs discussed concerns with water retention area in Section 21 Humboldt Township. Friederichs stated water runs out of retention area into Whisky Creek at County Road 25. Uhler stated this is not a watershed project.

Lenz stated road ditches should be used to regulate water. Lenz expressed concerns about additional runoff from tiling and questioned if system would be able to handle additional tiling in 10 years. Uhler stated project is designed using the base flow which includes flows from existing tile. Project is designed using best available information and designed adequately for conditions. Lenz stated State of Minnesota should pay assessment for water flowing through road ditch.

G. Settlemeyer discussed concerns with trees in Whisky Creek in Section 20, Humboldt Township. G. Settlemeyer stated land has become holding area for water. Uhler stated there is no watershed project in this area and BRRWD does not have easements to complete work in this area. Uhler also stated assessments are based on amount of runoff per parcel.

Friederichs discussed concerns with water retention area in Section 21 Humboldt Township. Friederichs stated water runs out of retention area into Whisky Creek at County Road 25. Van Amburg stated this was a federal project. Friederichs also stated the rock drop structures are washed out on Stony Creek. Uhler stated BRRWD would review and complete maintenance as needed.

R. Gilbertson expressed concerns with impacts easement would have on the value and future use of his property. Wheelright expressed concerns with project impacts to Gilbertson's property.

Minch requested review of land in Section 17, Barnesville Township. He believed land drains north to Stony Creek instead of south to Whisky Creek. Uhler stated property would be reviewed.

D. Grommesh stated he owns property in Section 22, Barnesville Township. His land has bank erosion and there are breakout flows that cause problems. Grommesh stated project will help stabilize slopes and state he thought proposed project was an opportunity to fix problems on the channel.

Tim Thompson stated he owns land downstream of proposed project area. He also owns land downstream of the Stony Creek project. Tim Thompson asked if additional work will be completed downstream. Uhler stated landowner downstream can ask Board of Managers to investigate if a project should be completed. Tim Thompson stated rock dams on Whisky Creek East Tributary project do not work and he has problems with a water retention area. Tim Thompson stated he thinks the proposed project has merit, however, he had concerns with water management and maintenance of existing structures. Uhler noted landowners should notify staff if a repair is needed.

Otto stated he owns land where Stony Creek and Hay Creek meet. He stated he feels Stony Creek project opened a funnel and did not do anything to help downstream landowners. He believes water gets to outlet faster than it did before the project. Uhler noted BRRWD projects are landowner driven. Projects are designed to not cause impacts downstream.

Stubstad spoke as a landowner. He stated he likes the project and thinks something needs to be done along Clay County Ditch No. 34. Stubstad noted he has abstained from all decisions related to the proposed project and will continue to do so.

Proposed project will be discussed at next regular Board Meeting scheduled for Monday May 11, 2026.

President Fjestad adjourned meeting at 8:21 PM.

/s/ William Davis
Secretary