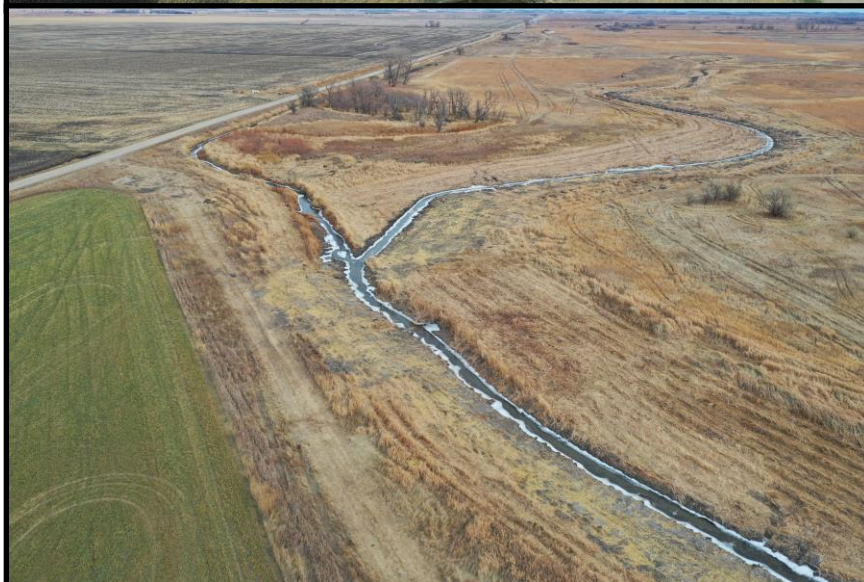




BUFFALO – RED RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



1303 4th Ave. NE
Barnesville, MN 56514
Phone: 218-789-3100
www.brrwd.org

Office Hours:
Monday-Thursday
8:00 AM-4:30 PM
Friday
8:00 AM-2:30 PM

Buffalo-Red River Watershed District

History

BRRWD, originally named South Buffalo Watershed District, was established on August 31, 1960. The District encompassed approximately 344 square miles in Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin Counties (primarily the South Branch of the Buffalo River watershed). Following a severe summer flood in 1975, it became apparent that the District needed to include all land contributing runoff to the Buffalo River to address flooding in the watershed. By Order on September 17, 1976, the State of Minnesota expanded the District and changed the name to Buffalo-Red River Watershed District. The Order expanded representation on the Board of Managers to five Managers. In 2011, Wilkin and Otter Tail Counties petitioned Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to expand BRRWD to include lands between the south border of BRRWD and Bois de Sioux Watershed District. The State of Minnesota expanded BRRWD to its current size by Order on April 25, 2012. The Order expanded representation on the Board to include seven Managers: three from Clay County, two from Wilkin County, one from Becker County, and one from Otter Tail County.



Today, BRRWD covers an area of approximately 1,780 square miles in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin Counties. The principal watercourse is the Buffalo River, located in parts of Becker and Clay Counties. The South Branch of the Buffalo River is a tributary to the Buffalo River in parts of Clay, Wilkin, and Otter Tail Counties. Tributaries to the South Branch include Stony Creek, Hay Creek, Whisky Creek, and Deerhorn Creek. Other major tributaries to the Buffalo River include Hay Creek, east of Hawley, and Becker C.D. No. 15, north of Audubon. Direct tributaries to the Red River of the North include Wolverton Creek in Wilkin and Clay Counties; Whiskey Creek in Wilkin County; and the Otter Tail River in Otter Tail and Wilkin Counties.

Buffalo-Red River Watershed District is committed to serving the residents of the District to provide efficient management of our water resources.

Mission Statement

To alleviate flooding and to manage water resources of the District in a manner that best protects this valuable resource.



Goals

- Reduce or alleviate damage caused by floodwaters.
- Administer and maintain drainage systems.
- Develop programs and projects that will help to sustain an adequate supply of high-quality surface and groundwater for public and private use.
- Protect and/or improve water quality of the surface and groundwater resources.
- Cooperate and support viable projects that have the purpose of reducing erosion.
- Actively pursue a program of erosion control and sediment management within all ditch systems.
- Promote maintenance of biotic diversity.
- Incorporate recreational opportunities into District projects whenever feasible.
- Maximize potential cooperative opportunities available with all government levels.
- Endeavor to keep all residents informed of its duties, authorities, activities, and projects.
- Endeavor to inform and educate residents about water and soil resource issues and the importance of protecting these crucial resources.



2024 in Review

January

- **Annual Meeting** – Held Annual Meeting.
- **Legal Services** – Approved proposal from Vogel Law Firm for 2024-2025 legal services.
- **Engineering Services** – Approved proposal from Houston Engineering Inc. for 2024-2025 engineering services.
- **Citizen Advisory Committee** – Appointed Citizen Advisory Committee Members.
- **Upper South Branch Buffalo River Restoration** – Submitted grant application to Great Plains Fish Habitat Partnership.
- **Cost Share for Culverts through Township Roads on Public Drainage Systems Policy** – Approved Cost Share for Culverts through Township Roads on Public Drainage Systems Policy.
- **Flood Damage Reduction Workgroup** – Approved participation in 5-Year Monitoring Program for Wolverton Creek Restoration.
- **2023 Annual Report** – Approved 2023 Annual Report.
- **Employee Handbook** – Approved updates to Employee Handbook.
- **Red River Basin Commission Annual Conference** – Attended by Manager Fjestad, Affield, and Stubstad.

February

- **Whisky Creek Project** – Approved Temporary Easement Rate for Repair.
- **Upper Buffalo River Restoration** – Approved Deadline for Landowners to Enroll in Reinvest in Minnesota and Approved Temporary Easement Payment Rates.
- **South Branch Buffalo River Watershed – Phase 2** – Approved Clean Water Fund Grant Agreement.
- **Lower Otter Tail River Restoration** – Approved Clean Water Fund Grant Agreement for Head-cut Stabilization.
- **Watershed Based Implementation Fund** – Approved Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2024
- **All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV)** – Approve purchase of ATV and trailer.
- **2023 Audit** – Engaged Brady Martz & Associates, PC to complete the 2023 Audit.

March

- **Clay County Ditch No. 10** – Held landowner informational meeting to discuss slope failures.
- **South Branch Buffalo River Restoration** – Approved Change Order No. 1 with Minnesota Native Landscapes for \$5,791.26.
- **Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project** – Held landowner meeting.
- **Flood Damage Reduction Workgroup** – Approved up to 33 percent match on Floodplain Mapping work completed in BRRWD by Red River Water Management Board and Flood Damage Reduction Workgroup, if they receive funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- **Salary Program** – Approved updated salary program.
- **Minnesota Watersheds Legislative Event** – Attended by Manager Fjestad.
- **Flood Damager Reduction Workgroup & Red River Watershed Management Board Annual Joint Conference** – Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, and Van Amburg.

April

- **City of Georgetown Flood Protection** – Authorized Natwick Appraisals to determine land acquisition rates.
- **South Branch Buffalo River Restoration** – Held landowner informational meeting, hired In Situ Archaeological Consulting to complete archaeological survey for Phase 2.
- **Whisky Creek Tributaries** – Awarded contract for repair to ACM, LLM for \$192,826.70.
- **Clay County Ditch No. 41, Snakey Creek Outlet Repair** - Awarded contract for to Tunheim Construction, LLC for \$306,100.00.
- **Water Quality Monitoring** – Signed contract with International Water Institute for up to \$30,950.00.
- **Citizen Advisory Committee**—Held Annual Meeting.

May

- **City of Wolverton Flood Protection** – Hired Crown Appraisals, Inc. to determine land acquisition rates; held landowner meeting.
- **Clay County Ditch No. 22** – Appointed Viewers for Redetermination of Benefits.
- **Clay County Ditch No. 23** – Appointed Viewers for Redetermination of Benefits.
- **2025 Benefits** – Approved Staff Benefits for 2025.
- **Copier Lease Renewal** – Approved renewal of copier lease.
- **Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)**—Approved providing Wilkin SWCD \$25,000.00 for their one-year cover crop program.

2024 in Review

June

- **Turtle Lake Outlet Modification** – Authorized Update of Viewers Report as outlined in 2013 Order.
- **Glyndon East Tributary** – Authorized purchase of easement of approximately 1.5 acres of land along project.
- **City of Georgetown Flood Mitigation Protection** – Approved payment rates for easement acquisition.
- **Otter Tail County Ditch No. 64** – Entered into Memorandum of Agreement with United States Fish and Wildlife Service.
- **Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot (HELP) Grant** – Submitted grant application.
- **Audit Report**—Accepted Audit Report conducted by Brady Martz & Associates.
- **River Keepers**—Approved assessing \$65,000.00 on their behalf for 2024.
- **Minnesota Watersheds Summer Tour**—Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, and Hanson.

July

- **Whisky Creek and South Tributary** – Approved Environmental Assessment Worksheet submittal.
- **Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project** – Held landowner meeting.
- **Employee Handbook** – Approved updates to Employee Handbook.
- **Retirement of Manager Hanson** – Manager Hanson announced retirement from Board of Managers.

August

- **Oakport Flood Mitigation Project** – Approved agreement to allow Harvest Hope Farm to graze sheep on Oakport Prairie.
- **State Conservation Reserve Program Incentive Grant** – Approved signing grant agreement.
- **City of Georgetown Flood Protection** – Held landowner meeting.
- **Budget Hearing**—Held 2025 Budget Hearing.
- **Project Tour**— Hosted Project Tour.

September

- **Whisky Creek and South Tributary** – Approved Environmental Assessment Worksheet Finding of Fact.
- **Stony Creek Restoration** – Approved Change Order No. 3 with ACM, LLC for \$23,918.58.
- **Glyndon East Tributary Restoration** – Approved Change Order No. 2 with States Borders Construction, Inc. for \$70,617.50.
- **Clay County Ditch No. 41 Outlet/Snakey Creek** – Approved contract extension to October 15, 2024.
- **Audit** – Approved Agreement with Brady, Martz and Associates for audit services for 2024-2026.
- **Wilkin County SWCD** – Approved up to \$25,000.00 contribution for conservation marketing.

October

- **South Branch Buffalo River Restoration** – Approved contract extension to June 1, 2025.

November

- **Lower Otter Tail River Restoration** – Authorized Funding Agreement with Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation District for Reinvest in Minnesota easement acquisition.
- **Upper Buffalo River Restoration** – Authorized Environmental Assessment Worksheet and Permitting.
- **Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project** – Approved contract extension to September 1, 2025.
- **Clay County Ditch No. 23** – Amend Viewer Appointment.
- **Concordia College** – Authorized professor in Departments of Biology and Environmental & Sustainability Studies to complete long-term monitoring of stream restorations.

December

- **City of Georgetown Flood Mitigation** – Approved Resolution No. 24-001 to initiate establishment of Project No. 83 – City of Georgetown Flood Mitigation Project.
- **City of Wolverton Flood Mitigation** – Approved Resolution No. 24-002 to initiate establishment of Project No. 84 – City of Wolverton Flood Mitigation Project.
- **Clay County Ditch No. 33** – Authorized acquisition of additional right-of-way for outlet repair.
- **Minnesota Watersheds Annual Conference** – Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, and Stubstad.

2024 Highlights

Board Meetings

BRRWD held their monthly Board Meeting on the second Monday of each month unless the second Monday of the month fell on a holiday when the BRRWD office is closed. In 2024, BRRWD held 12 Board Meetings. The annual meeting was held on January 8 and the budget hearing was held on August 12.

January 8
February 12
March 11
April 8
May 13
June 10
July 8
August 12
September 9
October 14
November 12
December 9

Informational Meetings and Hearings

In 2024, BRRWD held 6 Informational Meetings and 1 Hearings.

Clay County Ditch No. 10 – Informational Meeting, March
Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project – Informational Meeting, March and July
South Branch Buffalo River Restoration – Informational Meeting, April
City of Wolverton Flood Protection – Informational Meeting, May
City of Georgetown Flood Protection – Informational Meeting, August
2025 Budget – Hearing, August

Permits

Permit Applications: 124
Permits Brought to Board: 120
Permits Withdrawn: 0
Permits Approved: 119
Permits Denied: 1

Drainage Repairs

Board of Managers approved 34 repairs on public drainage systems regulated under Minnesota Statute 103E.

Board Education

January: Red River Basin Commission Annual Conference, Moorhead, MN – Attended by Manager Fjestad, Affield, and Stubstad
March: Minnesota Watersheds Legislative Event, St. Paul, MN – Attended by Manager Fjestad
March: Flood Damager Reduction Workgroup & Red River Watershed Management Board Annual Joint Conference, Moorhead, MN – Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, and Van Amburg
April: Citizen Advisory Committee, Barnesville, MN – Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, and Davis
June: Minnesota Watersheds Summer Tour, St. Paul, MN – Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, and Hanson
August: BRRWD Project Tour, Barnesville, MN – Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, and Stubstad
December: Minnesota Watersheds Annual Conference, Nisswa, MN – Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, and Stubstad

2024 Project Highlights



Legend

- DNR Public Waters
- BRRWD Public Drainage Systems
- Glyndon East Tributary
- Stony Creek
- Whiskey Creek
- Upper South Branch Buffalo River
- Lower Otter Tail River
- Upper Buffalo River
- Whisky Creek
- City of Wolverton Flood Protection
- City of Georgetown Flood Protection
- Oakport Flood Protection

N

0 2 4 8 12 16 Miles

Project Highlights

Glyndon East Tributary Restoration

The Glyndon East Tributary is a tributary to the Buffalo River located in Clay County. The Glyndon East Tributary subwatershed is approximately 9.5 square miles. The stream has a total length of 9.2 river miles starting at MN State Highway 9 and extending downstream to the Buffalo River.

Project proposes to improve channel conveyance for agricultural drainage and lagoon discharge from the City of Glyndon, improve water quality, restore conveyance through historic meanders, and improve wildlife habitat.

The hearing to establish the Glyndon East Tributary Restoration as a project was held in May 2022. With the approval of the Findings and Order, temporary and permanent easements were acquired for construction and long-term maintenance of the project. Contract was awarded to States Borders Construction, Inc. in November 2022. Construction commenced in May 2023 and continued through 2024. Contract is expected to close in 2025 once vegetation is established.



Glyndon East Tributary Restoration under construction.

Stony Creek Restoration

Stony Creek is a tributary to the South Branch Buffalo River in Clay County. The Stony Creek subwatershed is approximately 131 square miles.

Project proposes to restore 4 miles of channel, construct setback levees, install sediment BMPs, and establish buffers along the channel. Project proposes to address agricultural flooding, sedimentation in the channel, poor water quality, and improve habitat.

In February 2023, BRRWD hired Natwick Appraisals to determine land values for acquisition of permanent easements. A Final Hearing was held in June 2023. With the approval of the Findings and Order, easements were acquired for construction and long-term maintenance of the project. Contract was awarded to ACM, LLC in August 2023. Construction commenced in September 2023 and continued through 2024. Contract is expected to close in 2025 once vegetation is established.



Stony Creek Restoration before construction.



Stony Creek Restoration after construction.

Project Highlights

Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project

Whiskey Creek is a tributary of the Red River of the North located in Wilkin County, MN. Whiskey Creek is one of many natural waterways within the BRRWD that has poor water quality due to agricultural practices and channel bank erosion. Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project is a multi-phase project, restoring the channel in Sections 5, 8, 9, 10, and 15, Connelly Township, Sections 19, 29, 30, 31, and 32, Nordick Township, and Section 24 McCauleyville Township.

Project proposes to improve water quality, promote stable stream conditions, improve aquatic and wildlife habitat, and provide significant flood damage reduction.

A hearing was held April 2021 to establish the Whiskey Creek Enhancement Restoration as a watershed project. Contract for Phase 1 was awarded to Ehlert Excavating, Inc. in June 2021. Construction of Phase 1 was completed in November 2021. Ehlert Excavating, Inc. completed Phase 2 of construction in September 2022. In 2023, BRRWD began acquiring permanent easement for Phases 1 and 2 and acquired temporary easements for Phases 3 and 4. Contract for Phase 3 was awarded to Ehlert Excavating, Inc. in April 2023 and construction began in June 2023. In August 2023, Contract with Ehlert Excavating, Inc. was extended to include Phase 4. Phase 4 construction continued through 2024. Contract expected to close in 2025 once vegetation is established.



Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project after construction.

South Branch Buffalo River Restoration Project

South Branch Buffalo River is a tributary to the Buffalo River, located in Wilkin and Clay Counties. Phase 1 of South Branch Buffalo River Restoration is located in Sections 9, 10, and 11, Manston Township, Wilkin County. The project has a subwatershed of approximately 27 square miles.

There are two legal public drainage ditches located within the South Branch Buffalo River—Phase 1 subwatershed: Wilkin County Ditch No. 44 Lateral A and Wilkin County Ditch No. 44 Lateral B. Phase 1 will reroute Wilkin County Ditch No. 44 Lateral A in Sections 9, 10, and 11, Manston Township back into the historic channel.

In 2021, Board of Managers accepted the Engineer's Report, began acquiring project funding, and completed the Environmental Assessment Worksheet. The hearing to reroute and partially abandon Wilkin County Ditch No. 44 was held in February 2022. Construction contract for Phase 1 was awarded to Minnesota Native Landscapes in June 2022. Construction commenced in September 2022 and continued through 2024. Contract is expected to close in 2025 once vegetation is established.



South Branch Buffalo River Restoration after construction.

Project Highlights

Lower Otter Tail River Restoration

Otter Tail River watershed encompasses approximately 1,952 square miles of drainage from Clearwater, Becker, Otter Tail, and Wilkin Counties. The river outlets in the City of Breckenridge, MN, where its confluence with the Bois de Sioux River forms the headwaters of the Red River of the North. For planning and resource purposes, the expansive watershed area has been broken into upper and lower portions. The lower portions extends from the outlet of the river in Breckenridge to the Orwell reservoir in Otter Tail County.

Project proposes to restore the Lower Otter Tail River by reconnecting oxbows to remainder the channel. This project will improve water quality and wildlife habitat.

In February 2022, an informational meeting was held with landowners. In May 2022, the Findings from the Environmental Assessment Worksheet was approved. Fall 2022 BRRWD continued outreach efforts to landowners. In 2023, BRRWD worked with Wilkin SWCD on landowner outreach and finalized design for Phase 1. In 2024, BRRWD continued to coordinate outreach to landowners. Phase 1 expected to commence in 2025.



Straightened portion of Lower Otter Tail River Restoration before construction.

Upper Buffalo River Restoration

Buffalo River watershed encompasses approximately 1,100 square miles in Becker, Clay, Wilkin, and Otter Tail Counties. Upper Buffalo River Restoration is located in the most upper reaches of the Buffalo River beginning west of US Highway 59 approximately 3.5 miles north of the City of Callaway, MN and continuing downstream to Becker County Road 105. The drainage area to the proposed project is approximately 93 square miles.

Project proposes to restore approximately 9 miles of river between Buffalo Lake and Becker County Ditch No. 15. This project will reduce erosion and incision in the stream, improve water quality, foster stable stream conditions, improve drainage, and improve wildlife habitat.

In November 2023, BRRWD held an informational meeting and hired Natwick Appraisals to determine rates for land acquisition. BRRWD continued project design and landowner outreach in 2024. Construction is expected to commence in 2025.



Upper Buffalo River Restoration before construction.

Project Highlights

City of Wolverton Flood Protection

BRRWD will design, construct, operate, and maintain a flood protection project for the City of Wolverton to provide the City with 100-year FEMA Accredited Flood Protection with funding provided by the Metro Flood Diversion Authority (MFDA).

In 2022, BRRWD signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the MFDA to support project. Houston Engineering, Inc. completed survey work to inform project design. BRRWD met with the City to begin project development. BRRWD continued coordinating with landowners, City, Railroad, and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) and finalize levee design in 2023 and 2024. In 2024, BRRWD hired Crown Appraisals, Inc to determine land values for easement acquisition. BRRWD also held a landowner meeting to discuss project design. BRRWD established City of Wolverton Flood Mitigation Project by resolution in December 2024. Land acquisition is expected to commence in 2025.



Map of City of Wolverton Levee

City of Georgetown Flood Protection

BRRWD will design, construct, operate, and maintain a flood protection project for the City of Georgetown to provide the City with 100-year FEMA Accredited Flood Protection with funding provided by MFDA.

In 2022, BRRWD signed the MOU with the MFDA to support project. Houston Engineering, Inc. completed survey work to inform project design. In 2023, BRRWD continued coordinating with landowners, City, Railroad, and MNDOT and finalize levee design. In 2024, BRRWD hired Natwick Appraisals to determine land values for easement acquisition. BRRWD also held a landowner meeting to discuss project design. BRRWD established City of Georgetown Flood Mitigation Project by resolution in December 2024. Land acquisition expected to commence in 2025.



Map of City of Georgetown Levee

Project Highlights

Whisky Creek & South Tributary Restoration

Landowners along Whisky Creek in Barnesville and Alliance Townships, Clay County expressed concerns about flooding. Board of Managers completed survey to design project to address concerns. In 2024, BRRWD completed the Environmental Assessment Worksheet and approved a negative decision for an Environmental Impact Statement.

In 2025, BRRWD plans to continue working on project design and looking for project funding.



Whisky Creek before construction.

Oakport Flood Mitigation

The spring flood of 1997 was devastating for the entire Red River Basin. In the Oakport project area, over 150 homes were damaged, and over 200 homes isolated from public safety and services. Similar events in 1969, 2000, and 2001 prompted the Oakport residents to seek permanent flood control. In November 2002, the Township asked the BRRWD to develop a project in accordance with Watershed Law. BRRWD began construction of the \$36 million project in 2008. The seven phases of the project were completed in 2016.

In 2021, BRRWD began discussions with the City of Moorhead to transfer the project area to the City. In 2022 an agreement was drafted and BRRWD and the City began addressing items to complete prior to the transfer. BRRWD continued to work on the transfer in 2024.



Oakport Levee.

Project Tour

August 2024 - BRRWD hosted a project tour. Tour stopped at Glyndon East Tributary Restoration, Clay County Ditch No. 41 Outlet Repair/ Snakey Creek, Stony Creek Restoration, and Whisky Creek and South Tributary.



Glyndon East Tributary Restoration



Clay County Ditch NO. 41 Outlet Repair/ Snakey Creek.



Whisky Creek South Tributary.



Pictured from Left: Managers Stubstad, Fjestad, and Affield at Stony Creek.



Stony Creek Restoration.

Board of Managers



Peter Fjestad—Board President
Otter Tail County
Term Expires: August 21, 2027



Catherine Affield—Vice President
Wilkin County
Term Expires: August 31, 2025



John Hanson—Secretary
Becker County
Term Expires: August 31, 2024



William Davis—Manager
Clay County
Term Expires: August 31, 2027



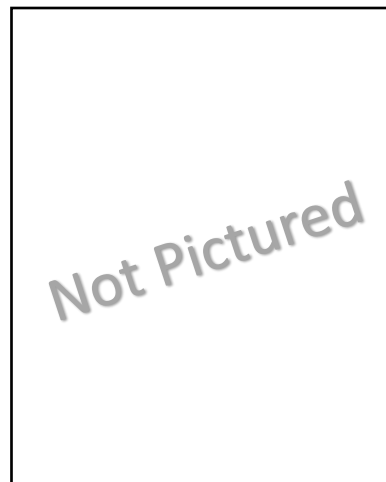
Troy Larson—Treasurer
Wilkin County
Term Expires: August 31, 2027



Gerry Van Amburg—Manager
Clay County
Term Expires: August 21, 2026



Curtis Stubstad—Manager
Clay County
Term Expired: August 31, 2026



Todd Andresen—Manager
Becker County
Term Expired: August 31, 2027