



BUFFALO – RED RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT



2023

ANNUAL REPORT



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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 BWSR to expand BRRWD to include lands between the south border of BRRWD and Bois de Sioux Watershed District. The State of Minnesota expanded the 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.



Our District

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, Whiskey 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.

2023 in Review

January

- **Annual Meeting**—Held Annual Meeting.
- **Lobbyist Contract**—Signed contract with Joel Carlson Inc. for 2023-2024 lobbying services.
- **Red River Basin Commission Annual Conference**—Attended by Manager J. Hanson.

February

- **Clay County Ditch No. 17**—Held Hearing and approved Order to establish vegetated buffers.
- **Clay County Ditch No. 54**—Held Hearing and approved Order to establish vegetated buffers.
- **Stony Creek Restoration**—Accepted petition to reroute Clay County Ditch No. 31, appointed Bennett Uhler (Houston Engineering, Inc.) as Project Engineer, authorized permitting, and approved hiring Natwick Appraisals to determine land values.
- **Lower Otter Tail River Restoration**—Authorized permitting.
- **Otter Tail County Ditch No. 64 Wetland Restoration**—Approved continued partnership with Otter Tail County and USFWS for Clean Water Fund Grant and authorized Houston Engineering Inc to assist with determining pollution reductions for grant application.
- **International Water Institute, Stewardship Program**—Approved up to 10 percent match for Clean Water Fund application for program participation in BRRWD.
- **Minnesota Watersheds Legislative Briefing**— Attended by Managers Fjestad, and Van Amburg.

March

- **Stony Creek Restoration**—Accepted Engineer's Report and Findings of Fact.
- **Citizen Advisory Committee**—Held Annual Meeting.

April

- **Oakport Flood Mitigation**—Approved Wetland Credit Transfer to Satisfy Project Wetland Mitigation Requirements.
- **Stony Creek Restoration**—Approved Water Management District.
- **Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project**—Awarded Contract to Ehlert Excavating, Inc. for \$693,118.00.
- **Lower Otter Tail River Restoration**—Approved Funding Agreement with Metro Flood Diversion Authority.
- **Water Quality Monitoring**—Signed contract with International Water Institute for up to \$25,800.

May

- **Stony Creek Restoration**—Accepted Damage Statement and Set Hearing Date.
- **Hay Creek Water Management District (wmd)**—Accepted wmd and set Hearing Date.
- **Ring Dike Funding**—Authorized up to \$20,000.00 to provide landowners with preliminary design for potential ring dike funding and approved up to an equal 25 percent cost-share with landowners if funded by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
- **Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)**—Approved providing Wilkin SWCD \$25,000.00 for their one-year cover crop program and \$25,000.00 for technical assistance for conservation marketing.
- **River Keepers**—Approved assessing \$65,000.00 on their behalf for 2024.

June

- **Wilkin County Ditch No. 22**—Award Repair Contract John Riley Construction, Inc. for \$255,410.00.
- **Lower Otter Tail River Restoration**—Authorized Application Submittal to Clean Water Fund Grant.
- **Upper Buffalo River Restoration**—Accepted Engineer's Report.
- **Stony Creek Restoration**—Held Project Hearing.
- **Audit Report**—Accept Audit Report conducted by Brady Martz & Associates.
- **Project Team**—Held Meeting.
- **Minnesota Watersheds Summer Tour**—Attended by Managers Fjestad and J. Hanson.

July

- **Hay Creek Water Management District (wmd)**—Held Establishment Hearing, approved order to establish wmd.
- **Stony Creek Restoration**—Approved Order to Establish Project and wmd, passed resolution to accept \$400,000.00 from DNR Flood Hazard Mitigation Grant Program with 50 percent cost-share.
- **Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project**— Closed contract with Ehlert Excavating, Inc. for Phase 1 Construction.
- **Wilkin County Ditch No. 22**—Award Contract to John Riley Construction for repair of outlet structure.
- **Ditch Spraying**—Authorized spraying of trees, leafy spurge, and cattails on ditch systems as part of annual maintenance.
- **Viewer Recruitment**—Approved updated Viewer Compensation, authorized staff to recruit additional Viewers.
- **Flood Management Policy**—Approved Flood Management Policy and Outreach Plan.

2023 in Review

August

- **Wolverton Creek Restoration** – Set Hearing Date to Amend wmd.
- **Whiskey Creek Enhancement Project** – Added Phase 4 on to the Phase 3 contract with Ehlert Excavating, Inc. for \$1,879,963.50.
- **Stony Creek Restoration**—Award Contract to ACM, LLC for \$878,255.65.
- **Ganz Dam** – Added the removal of Ganz Dam to Glyndon East Tributary Restoration Contract for \$97,250.00.
- **Silver Lake Outlet**—Award Contract to Lyle Wilkens, INC. for \$244,388.00.
- **Lower Otter Tail River Restoration** – Submitted Clean Water Fund (CWF) Application for Head-cut Stabilization.
- **South Branch Buffalo River** – Submitted CWF Application for Upland Work in the Watershed.
- **Wilkin County Ditch No. 7** – Set Hearing Date for Authority to Use Ditch as an Outlet.
- **North Dakota State University, Advisory Committee** – Accepted Advisory Committee Role if Research Proposal titled “Partnership: Managing Vegetated Buffer Strips to Reduce Phosphorus Contributions from Agricultural Land in Cold Climate Regions” is funded.
- **Clay SWCD**—Approved providing Clay SWCD \$20,000.00 for technical assistance and engineering.
- **Budget Hearing**—Held 2024 Budget Hearing.
- **Project Tour**— Hosted Project Tour.
- **Senate Capital Investment Committee Tour**—Hosted Senate Capital Investment Committee.

September

- **Wilkin County Ditch No. 7** – Held Hearing for Authority to Use Ditch as Outlet.
- **Wolverton Creek Restoration** – Held Hearing and Approved Order to Amend wmd.
- **2024 Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) State Incentive Pilot Program** – Approved Role of Grant Administration and Fiscal Agent for Buffalo-Red River Watershed.
- **International Water Institute River of Dreams Funding Request** – Approved Funding Request of \$500.00 to support transportation of Barnesville Public Schools’ Fourth-grade Class to Participate in River of Dreams Program.

October

- **Wolverton Creek Restoration** – Amended Budget Resolution.
- **Upper Buffalo River Restoration** – Authorized 20 Percent Value of RIM Payment as Incentive to Landowners that opt into RIM Program, and Authorized Permitting.
- **Barnesville Township** – Authorized Project Design and Initiation of EAW.
- **Tile Outlet Marker Policy** – Approved Policy.
- **Viewer Recruitment** – Approved Viewer Training Program.
- **Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Water Storage Pilot Program** – Approved Participating in BWSR Water Storage Pilot Program.

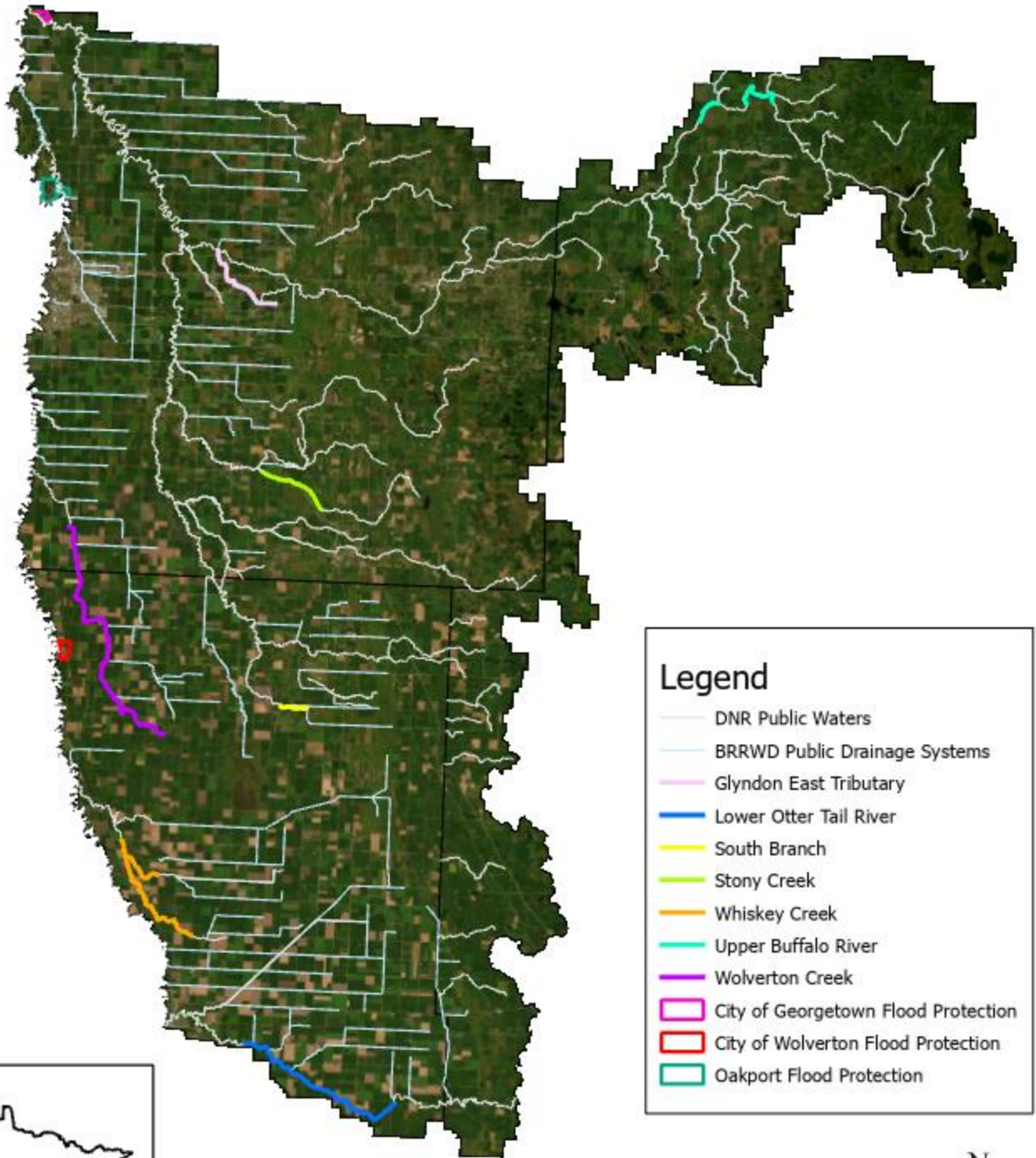
November

- **Clay County Ditch No. 41** – Authorized Permitting for Outlet Repair.
- **City of Wolverton Flood Protection** – Authorized Staff to Engage Crown Appraisals, Inc. to Determine Land Acquisition Rates.
- **Upper Buffalo River Restoration** – Held Informational Meeting and Approve Hiring Natwick Appraisals to Determine Land Acquisition Rates.
- **Minnesota Watersheds Annual Conference** – Attended by Managers Fjestad, Affield, J. Hanson, and Stubstad.

December

- **Upper Buffalo River Restoration** – Approved up to \$20,000.00 in Conservation Marketing Funding to Becker SWCD for Assistance Acquiring RIM Easements and Approved boundary for wmd.
- **Viewer Training** – Authorized Otter Tail and Wadena County Viewers to Attend Viewer Training Held at BRRWD Office.

2023 Project Highlights



Legend

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



0 2 4 8 12 16 Miles

Project Highlights:

Development and Implementation

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, 30, 31, and 32, Nordick Township, and Sections 13 and 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.



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 is expected to be completed in 2024.



Project Highlights:

Development and Implementation

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 awarded to States Borders Construction, Inc. in November 2022. Construction commenced in May 2023.



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 improved 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. Construction commenced in September 2023 and is expected to be completed in 2024.



Project Highlights:

Development and Implementation

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. Phase 1 expected to commence in 2024.



Upper Buffalo River Restoration

Buffalo River watershed encompasses approximately 1,100 square miles in Becker, Clay, Wilkin, and Otter Tail Counties. The river outlets to the Red River near Georgetown, MN. 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 2022, BRRWD held an informational meeting to continue gathering landowner input. Additional survey work was completed to aid in project development. In 2023, BRRWD continued to finalize project design. In November 2023, BRRWD held an informational meeting and hired Natwick Appraisals to determine rates for land acquisition.

Project Highlights: Development and Implementation

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 from 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.



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 from the 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 Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) and finalize levee design.



Project Updates

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. The BRRWD accepted the task, and construction of the \$36 million project started 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 2023.



Wolverton Creek Restoration

Wolverton Creek is a 23.5-mile long tributary to the Red River of the North located in Wilkin and Clay Counties. The watershed is approximately 104 square miles. Similar to other streams in the Red River Basin, Wolverton Creek was straightened, ditched, cleared, and snagged to improve drainage and agricultural production.

In the 1960s, landowners began asking the BRRWD to investigate the problems associated with Wolverton Creek. BRRWD partnered with the Clay and Wilkin SWCDs' to reduce erosion and sedimentation in Wolverton Creek. Watershed-wide solutions have been developed to address sedimentation, erosion, and habitat loss along Wolverton Creek and its tributaries including channel restoration, installation of side inlets and other sediment control BMPs, and installation of expanded bufferstrips along the creek.

Construction was completed in 2020. In 2022, BRRWD continued to finalize permanent easements. BRRWD continued to finalize land acquisition in 2023.



Events

Senate Capital Investment Committee

In August 2023, BRRWD presented Phase 2 of South Branch Buffalo River Restoration to the Senate Investment Committee. BRRWD requested funding for project design.



Pictured from Left: Bennett Uhler (Houston Engineering, Inc.); Senator Susan Pha; Senator Zaynab Mohamed; Senator D. Scott Dibble; Senator Karin Housley; Senator Jordan Rasmusson; Kristine Altrichter (BRRWD); Senator Sandra Pappas.

Project Tour

In August 2023, BRRWD hosted a project tour. Tour stopped at Phase 1 South Branch Buffalo River Restoration, Whiskey Creek, and Wolverton Creek.



Pictured from Left: Managers J. Hanson, Fjestad, Affield, Davis, M. Hanson, Van Amburg at South Branch Buffalo River Restoration

Board of Managers



Peter Fjestad—Board President
Otter Tail County
Term Expires: August 21, 2024



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



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



Troy Larson—Treasurer
Wilkin County
Term Expires: August 31, 2024



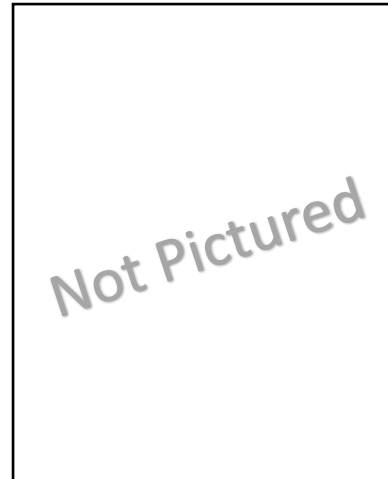
Gerry Van Amburg—Manager
Clay County
Term Expires: August 21, 2026



William Davis—Manager
Clay County
Term Expires: August 31, 2024



Mark Hanson—Manager
Clay County
Term Expired: August 31, 2023



Curt Stubstad—Manager
Clay County
Term Expires: August 31, 2026