
2016 Annual Activity Report of the Yellow Medicine River Watershed District



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Mission

The mission of the Yellow Medicine River Watershed District (YMRWD) is to provide an organized means for proper management and protection of the water resources in the Yellow Medicine River Watershed. The YMRWD has three core functions outside of administration: (1) Serve as the drainage authority for systems under its jurisdiction, (2) Provide a regulatory framework that permits a variety of activities that complement the flood reduction and water quality goals of the district, and (3) carry out activities of the watershed management plan.

Current and Future Goals

For 2016, the YMRWD set out to improve its permitting process, serve as an effective drainage authority, and complete three major projects: the One Watershed One Plan, the Terrain Analysis Project, and an Organizational Effectiveness Study. All of these goals were met.

For 2017, the YMRWD plans to adopt the One Watershed One Plan and begin implementation of the efforts outlined in the plan. The YMRWD will lead efforts between plan partners. As a drainage authority, they plan to complete the construction of the Lincoln County Ditch 38 Project and finish the design of the Lincoln County Ditch 39 Improvement Project. As far as the permitting program, they would like to build on the gains made in 2016 and start to look at whether a rules revision would further streamline and improve the program.

One Watershed, One Plan

The Yellow Medicine One Watershed One Plan project began in 2014 as one of five pilot projects across Minnesota that set out to align watershed planning along watershed boundaries and move away from county planning boundaries. It was hoped that the plan could be completed by the end of 2015, but unforeseen delays pushed the planning process into 2016. Project partners signed an extension to the One Watershed One Plan Memorandum of Agreement in order to continue the planning efforts. The plan was completed, went out for public comment in May and was approved by the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources on December 14, 2016.

Yellow Medicine Terrain Analysis

The Yellow Medicine Terrain Analysis Project began in 2014 and was completed in 2016. Funding for the project was assisted by a grant from the Board of Water and Soil Resources. The project allowed more accurate watershed delineations, making project targeting and design more accurate and reliable. The majority of the work was completed by Minnesota State University (MSU), Mankato's Water Resources Center.

In 2016, the MSU staff offered three training sessions to area technicians that taught them how to work with the data now available, specifically how to identify where water quality improvement projects could be located on the landscape. By the end of the year, all data was processed and maps were provided for every section of land in the watershed with locations identified for where the following projects would be ideal: wetland restorations, grassed waterways, water and sediment control basins, buffers, soil health practices, etc.

Project: Organizational Effectiveness Study

In late 2015, the YMRWD received a grant from the Performance Review and Assessment Program to hire a consultant to take a look into the organization and assess overall performance and make recommendations on how it could improve. The study took into account feedback from partners via a survey, a review of district records, and an evaluation of benchmark criteria set for all watershed districts. The study found several areas of growth that could be considered that included the following:

- District Rules – Since they have not been updated in years, the YMRWD would benefit from going through a thorough revision process
- Monitoring Program – A monitoring program was deemed important, but one does not exist. It was, however included as a component of the One Watershed One Plan.
- Education and Outreach – Very little activity takes place to communicate with citizens. Putting together a formal plan with monthly activities was recommended and was also included as a component of the One Watershed One Plan.
- Administrative Policies – It was recommended to review the personnel policy handbook and update it since it has not been done in many years.

A preliminary timeline of activities was proposed as part of the report.

Drainage Authority Work

During 2016, eleven ditch systems were under the jurisdiction of the watershed district. Nine are permanently managed by the district and two were temporarily under the jurisdiction of the district while undergoing an improvement project. Major activity included the following:

- Watershed Ditch 4 – all deteriorate public outlets were replaced (38 total)
- Watershed Ditch 5 – all deteriorate public outlets were replaced (11 total)
- Lincoln County Ditch 38 – project engineering was completed and the project moved into the final public hearing stage by the end of the year
- Lincoln County Ditch 39 – an improvement project petition was received and the engineering and viewing of the properties began

In addition to maintenance and improvement work, there was one buffer violation that was handled. Staff also assisted the DNR with mapping of the public ditch systems for the buffer mapping project.

Regulatory Program: Drainage Permitting

72 tiling and drainage permits were viewed and approved in 2016, down from 75 in 2015. In 2016, the board transitioned from having managers review permits in the field to turning the permit review responsibility over to the administrator, a licensed engineer. By the end of the year, a review checklist was approved by the board and authorization was given to the administrator to approve permits that met all conditions of the checklist rather than sending every permit request to the board of managers. This checklist improved the rigor of the review process and allowed permit approvals to be made in a timelier manner.

Cost Share Projects

The YMRWD was active in the following projects in 2016:

- Cost share payments were approved for two projects: \$2500 for a grade stabilization project in Lake Stay Township Section 3 and \$2500 for construction of a small dam/impoundment in Nordland Township Section 34.

- Annual inspections were completed and maintenance was order as needed for the following impoundments: Fales -VanHyfte, Porter Dam, Sonstegard- Telste, and Hauschild -Thange.
- A streambank stabilization project was designed for the Judicial Ditch 69 outlet into Cottonwood Lake. Permits were secured and the project was awarded by the Lyon Soil and Water Conservation District for 2017 construction.

Appreciation

This concludes the 2016 annual report of the Yellow Medicine River Watershed District. The Yellow Medicine River Watershed District Board of Managers and staff would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the support given to our organization, by the various county offices and personnel, as well as the Commissioners of Lyon, Lincoln, and Yellow Medicine Counties. We appreciate the opportunity to work with each of you, in meeting the goals of the Watershed District, in our efforts to successfully manage and monitor the waters of the Yellow Medicine River Watershed.

Respectfully submitted,

John Boulton

John Boulton, 2016 YMRWD Secretary