

LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT NEWS

what you should know about your water resources

District acquires airport land and new water management duties

After a series of public hearings last spring, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) authorized the incorporation of 3,500 acres of the Metropolitan Airport Commission (MAC) into two watershed districts: 3,000 to the Lower Minnesota Watershed District (LMRWD), and 500 to the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD). BWSR's order also divided between the two districts water-management-oversight responsibility for more than 550 additional acres of federal and state lands abutting the airport and along the Highway 62 corridor.

These federal and state properties belong to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (DOT), the Bureau of Mines, and several defense agencies, including the Air Force and Army reserves and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

None of the 4,000-acres-plus now in the two watershed districts had previously been under a formal water-management authority.

The hearings began after MCWD petitioned BWSR early in 2000 to allow it to incorporate additional land, including areas to be affected by upgrading the highways 62 and 55 intersection. MCWD was concerned, among other things, that this road work would threaten the historic Camp Coldwater spring

near Highway 55.

The LMRWD then petitioned BWSR to place in its jurisdiction those MAC and federal lands which drain mainly to the Minnesota River, a move necessitated by continuing major construction at the airport.

According to BWSR board conservationist Doug Snyder, one current airport project could have significant consequences. In an Environmental Impact Statement he reviewed in 1999, Snyder says, MAC was talking "about rerouting some water and creating, with the addition of the north-south runway, an enormous amount of new impervious surface, which meant a great deal more stormwater would be coming down into the lower Minnesota River, because that's the only way it can flow."

Snyder says the MAC does seem to be perpetually building. "But they will run out of space over the next ten years, and it will be interesting to see how they will handle the additional stormwater from increased impervious surfaces and other issues like the glycol used to de-ice planes."

Both watershed districts will need to include their new MAC and other lands in amended water-management plans, which must be submitted in draft form by May 2001 and finalized by one year later. District Administrator Kevin Bigalke

says the Lower Minn is now drafting its amended plan, which will certainly address airport issues like the increase in impervious surfaces and the threat that glycol might pose to water quality.

This is not to say the MAC has been sitting on its water-management laurels. In 1998 MAC contracted with Liesch Associates engineering firm to develop a provisional water-management plan. Current MAC plans include adding two new retention ponds to mitigate increased runoff from the new runway and capture total suspended solids and total phosphorus.

At present, there's only one retention pond, according to MAC Director of Airside Development Gary Warren — "in a flume area near the SuperAmerica site. All the flow gets to that point from the majority of the airport and then discharges under Highway 5."

As for the glycol issue, Warren says there are two de-icing pads in place at the end of runways, and more coming. Airlines use these pads to recover and then recycle glycol used in de-icing planes. ❖



A great blue heron nabs a crappie in an open midwinter marsh in the Minn. Valley Natl. Wildlife Refuge. Photo: Scott W. Sharkey.

In this issue

Lower Minn. River remapped	2
District co-sponsors river tour	2
Administrator named	3
New officers chosen	3
Administrator's View	4



This aerial photo shows the Minnesota River Valley in the vicinity of the National Wildlife Refuge. I-35 is on the west, Hennepin Cty. 77 on the east. Long Meadow Lake is north of the Minn. River, and Black Dog Lake is south. Photo: US Geological Survey.

District helps fund first study of Lower Minnesota River floodplain in almost 30 years

A lot of water has flowed down the Lower Minnesota since the early 1970s, and the river channel is not what it used to be — what with scouring and sediment deposition, among other forces. Nor has life above the channel and on the banks remained the same, considering new bridges and other development.

So it's about time for the first study since 1973 of the Lower Minnesota River floodplain. This study has been commissioned and is being paid for by two joint projects: one between the District and the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the other between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) and the Army Corps of Engineers (COE).

At a cost of about \$125,000, these two joint projects will produce new maps of the river from Carver Rapids to its confluence with the Mississippi — a distance of 36 river miles — in order to help local communities conduct zoning and planning activities, including new Flood Insurance Studies, and determine what new development can occur along the shores. The District is especially interested in the new study as an aid in analyzing land use and water resources for its water-management plan.

How will the new maps be produced? The

COE has scanned the '73 maps and furnished digitized base maps to the USGS. The USGS will acquire new data from: 1) an analysis of aerial photographs of the river between 1972 and 1996, and 2) a survey of the same river cross-sections used in the early study, but this time with the aid of Global Positioning Satellite and acoustic Doppler (“essentially a very fancy fish finder,” says the USGS’s Thomas Winterstein).

With these new data, the USGS will prepare a new base map. The COE will do a hydraulic analysis, plotting the new 100-year floodplain. Finally, the USGS will use this analysis,

and related data, to prepare “an accurate, finished map,” says the COE’s Wayne Koerner, “with everything lined up in true georeferencing position.” ❖

District & Joint Powers Board co-host summer river tours

On July 13, 2000, the Lower Minn and the Minnesota River Joint Powers Board (MRJPB) joined forces to host two summer tours of the Minnesota River as it flows through the metro area. The tours were part of the board’s summer conference, an annual event held in Chaska on July 12–13 this year, and in different locations throughout the Minnesota River basin in other years. On July 12, participants took part in a land-based field trip which highlighted efforts made by local units of government, non-profit organizations, and state agencies to improve the Minnesota River.

On July 13, board conference attendees took the Minnesota River tour aboard the *Jonathan Paddleford* paddle-wheeler, while Lower Minn constituents boarded a barge towed by L&S Marine. Both tours highlighted the numerous natural resources of the Lower Minnesota River Valley and

A bow-mounted Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler is used to survey the Minnesota River near Jordan, April 2000. Photo: USGS.





This July, the District co-sponsored two river tours with the Minnesota River Joint Powers Board. The tours highlighted the river's natural resources and its place in our economic life. Attendees are shown here boarding the barge used for one of the tours. Photo: Wallace Neal.

showed the Minnesota River as a working river.

Attendees heard presentations from various city, state, and federal agency staff on projects occurring in the District — including stream bank stabilization, wetland creation and restoration for stormwater management, and the ongoing habitat and wildlife management efforts of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Clint Gergen of Cenex Harvest States gave those on the barge an interesting presentation on the working barges of the river and what they mean to the agricultural community. Gergen said that one barge transports as much grain as 15 jumbo rail cars or 60 semi trucks and that the Cenex Harvest States terminal loaded 1,181 barges in 1998, when it marked its one-billionth bushel of grain.

Cenex Harvest States is one of several



companies that depend upon the river for transportation; others include Cargill, US Salt, Bunge Corporation, and Richards Oil. With all of its natural resources, the Minnesota River is also truly a working river. ❖

District administrator hired

Kevin Bigalke has been hired as the District's full-time administrator and first employee. Bigalke will be responsible for implementing the watershed district's water-resource-management plan.

He comes to the watershed district from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, where he was the lead watershed coordinator for the Metro Trout Stream Watershed Protection Initiative, dealing with trout stream resource issues within the District.

Before his stint with the MnDNR, Bigalke got to know the river by working as a water quality specialist with the tri-county Brown-Nicollet-Cottonwood Water Quality Joint Powers Board in St. Peter, Minn. He was responsible for obtaining grants, developing work plans, and implementing monitoring and restoration projects in tributary watersheds to the Minnesota River in the three counties.

Bigalke graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn. with a degree in biology and is now working

towards a master's degree in public administration and urban and regional planning from Minnesota State University-Mankato. ❖



New Dakota County representative Ron Kraemer joined the board in January 2000.

New manager appointed and officers elected

In January 2000, Ron Kraemer joined the District's Board of Managers as the Dakota County representative, replacing former VP Eugene DePalma, who retired in 1999. Serving a three-year term, Kraemer says he has always been involved in local government and has an interest in protecting the environment, especially the Minnesota River. He sees this as an opportunity to combine his interests in local government and natural resources. Kraemer will be serving as assistant treasurer for 2001.

At their August 16 meeting, the Board elected officers. Terry Schwalbe, Carver County, was re-elected president; Wallace Neal, Hennepin County, previously secretary, was elected vice president. Edward Schlampp, Hennepin County, remains board treasurer. Glenda Spiotta, Scott County, was elected board secretary, and Ron Kraemer took Spiotta's place as assistant treasurer. ❖

A muskrat snoozes atop its lodge on a spring afternoon in the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: Scott W. Sharkey.

Administrator's view

By Kevin D. Bigalke

Welcome to the *Administrator's View* — a new feature in the *News* as of this issue and a regular feature in the future.



In each *View*, I'll share my thoughts with you on a different topic or topics relating to the Lower Minnesota River Watershed or the Minnesota River Basin as a whole.

As Administrator, I plan to expand the District's public outreach and education efforts. This will occur in a number of ways.

First, I hope to make the *News* a more regular publication. Initially, I plan to produce a new edition semi-annually; eventually, it should become a quarterly. The newsletter provides the District an opportunity not only to highlight some of our activities and projects but also to recognize individuals, cities, and others that are contributing to the protection and enhancement of the Minnesota River.

Other efforts to expand the District's public outreach and education efforts will include the development of a Watershed District website, an educational display, and a revitalized citizens' advisory committee.

Through the *View*, I hope to provide you with intriguing topics and issues that will get

you thinking about the importance of the Minnesota River and the unique resources and opportunities the river provides to the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

I look forward to working with you to achieve a healthy Minnesota River. ❖

Monitoring equipment installed at Assumption Creek

The District and the Minnesota DNR teamed up this May to install, and pay for, monitoring equipment at Assumption Creek near the old seminary property.

The MnDNR is conducting the ongoing monitoring of the site. The monitoring station will collect continuous data on stream water level, dissolved oxygen, air and water temperature, and precipitation. MnDNR staff also will be collecting stream flow data. The information collected will provide base line information on the conditions of Assumption Creek. By establishing a base line of information, the Watershed District and DNR can make better decisions on how the stream should be managed. These data will also help determine measures that might improve the condition of the creek and the watershed.

Board of Managers

- Terry L. Schwalbe President
- Wallace E. Neal, Jr. Vice President
- Glenda D. Spiotta Secretary
- Edward A. Schlampp Treasurer
- Ron Kraemer Asst. Treasurer
- Bruce D. Malkerson Attorney
- Lawrence E. Samstad Engineer
- Kevin Bigalke Administrator

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Monthly meetings, open to the public, are usually held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at the Scott County Government Center in the County Commissioner chambers. Phone the number above for confirmation.

Editorial & graphics

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