

MAWRC Monthly

- March 2017



Des Moines Water Works Lawsuit Dismissed

Earlier this month Federal Judge Leonard Strand dismissed all claims brought by the Des Moines Water Works against drainage districts in Sac, Buena Vista and Calhoun Counties.

Iowa ag leaders applauded the decision, noting that the lawsuit has diverted attention from efforts already underway to reduce nutrient losses.

Read a summary of the case from the Iowa State University Center for Agricultural Law and Taxation here- <https://www.calt.iastate.edu/blogpost/why-federal-court-dismissed-dmww-lawsuit>.

Buffer Discussion Continues

As the deadlines for buffer establishment approach, farmers and local SWCD technicians continue to gather information on implementation under the current law. Meanwhile, legislators are grappling with proposals to further clarify requirements and implementation details of the new buffer requirements.

The Board of Water and Soil Resources continues to develop guidance for landowners and local government units, particularly in the areas of enforcement and validation of alternative practices, a list of conservation practices that could be implemented in lieu of buffers under the current law.

Legislative proposals include funding provided to counties and watershed districts for implementation, reduction of buffer requirements on some public waters to 16.5 feet, and delaying deadlines. At this point it is unclear what the final language will contain. Landowners should stay in contact with their local SWCD and farm group representatives to stay informed of this evolving issue.

Also this month, an op-ed from state agency leaders applauds Minnesota farmers and landowners for their tremendous efforts in getting buffers in place, noting that about 75% of counties have more than 60% of necessary buffers in place.



Long Term Sediment Research Project in South Central Minnesota Concludes

The Collaborative for Sediment Source Reduction (CSSR) in the Greater Blue Earth River Basin project was a five-year effort to evaluate strategies for reducing sediment making its way into the Minnesota River via the Blue Earth River. The goal of the project was to incorporate the best available science to develop a decision-making model to reduce sediment pollution through a strategy that is effective, cost-efficient, fair and supported by all stakeholders.

Through a series of nine meetings, stakeholders considered various sediment sources, sediment delivery mechanisms and actions that may reduce sediment transport downstream. Sediment sources were categorized into three primary areas- uplands, ravines and bluffs- each with its own associated reduction strategies.

Overall, the primary sediment reduction target identified by the project was reducing peak flows. This could potentially be accomplished by increasing temporary water storage through strategic wetland restorations, settling ponds, drainage design and increasing the water holding capabilities of soils. These practices provide the greatest benefit when water management can apply the principal of “catch and release,” in contrast to catch and hold strategies. The water holding capacity of soils can be improved by increasing infiltration, often associated with reduced tillage intensity and higher organic matter levels, along with increasing soil health by reducing the duration of saturated soil conditions, often associated with improved drainage.

One example of a multi-faceted project that could potentially address peak flows and sediment levels came to fruition in parallel to the CSSR project. Led by a group of local landowners, with the support of professional engineers and funding from the Legislative- Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), changes were made to Blue Earth County Ditch 57 that enhanced crop production through improved tile drainage, helped protect city infrastructure, and provided increased water quality treatment of drainage water. You can find more information about this project, including monitoring data, here- <http://www.is-grp.com/project/blue-earth-county-ditch-no-57/>.

The MAWRC is a non-profit research and education corporation comprised of 24 agricultural organizations working together to address water issues. For more information, go to www.mawrc.org.

