

# Sand Hill River Watershed Annual Report

2009

January - December

The Sand Hill River in its natural state passed north of the City of Beltrami in a poorly defined channel and dispersed into marshes which extended westerly for over ten miles before reappearing as a river which flowed into the Red River of the North. In an effort to confine the Sand Hill River in a fixed channel, two state ditches were constructed during 1894-1898, substantially along the course now occupied by the present channel. The improvements were not adequate and additional construction was completed in 1917.

As drainage and flood problems persisted, the Corp of Engineers began a study of the river in 1942. As a result the Sand Hill Drainage and Conservancy Board was established by an order of the District Court of Polk County, State of Minnesota, on the 18th day of May, 1949 to carry out the Corps project to improve the main channel. The overall purpose of the Board was for "flood control and improvement of the Sand Hill River channel." Construction work was completed in the fall of 1954.

The process to establish the Sand Hill River Watershed District was a Court Hearing at Crookston, MN on August 28, 1974. The place of business of the Sand Hill River Watershed District was determined to be at Fertile, MN. The duties and responsibilities of the old Sand Hill River Drainage and Conservancy Board were given to the new District on May 28, 1975 in accordance with the Minnesota Watershed Act.

In 1976 the Sand Hill River Watershed District signed a joint powers agreement with six other watershed districts to form an organization now known as the Red River Watershed Management board. In 1980 the Buffalo Red Watershed District joined and in 1994, Boise De Sioux also joined.

On March 8, 1978 the Sand Hill River Watershed adopted the Rules and Regulations pursuant to Minnesota Statutes. They were later amended on October 3, 1978.

The District's south boundaries were hydrologically determined and established at a hearing at the Fertile Community Center June 26, 1984. The north boundaries were established from the old Sand Hill Drainage & Conservancy District. The District encompasses 475 square miles, almost wholly in the south part of Polk County, with a small part in Mahnomen and Norman County. The area includes the entire drainage basin of the Sand Hill River.

The average width of the basin is 8 miles and it is approximately 55 miles long. The Sand Hill River originates in Sand Hill Lake, located about four miles south of the City of Fosston and outlets two miles west of Climax into the Red River of the North. Elevation at the eastern end of the watershed is nearly 1,350 feet above sea level with an elevation of 850 feet at the western end.



Approximately 90 percent of the land in the District is used for agricultural or agriculturally related purposes. The watershed can be divided into three areas as follows:

a.) West End: This is the Red River Valley area, which was the bed of Glacial Lake Agassiz. It is nearly level and almost all cultivated. It extends easterly from the Red River of the North to a point about 6 miles west of the City of Fertile.

b.) Central Region: This area is located from 6 miles west of the City of Fertile to a point about 3 miles east of the City with a major drop of nearly 300 feet in elevation from east to west. This area has considerable wetlands, gravel ridges and scrub tree growth.

c.) East End: The upper reaches of the watershed are glacial in origin and its soils support agricultural uses. It is mostly gently rolling terrain with numerous potholes, the majority of which have been drained.

**F**ifty-six permits were brought before the board in 2009.

**T**he Sand Hill Restoration project has been placed on hold due to EPA requirements. The district will continue the project when a negotiation is made with EPA.

**T**he Project Team continued to meet and discussed the area of the Garden Slough. They are developing a Purpose and Needs statement that will satisfy the USACOE permitting process. Time is of the essence as Norman County is rebuilding the road along Garden Slough.

**H**ouston Engineering continues to work on the district's overall plan.

## Sand Hill Advisory Committee

**John Balstad-Fosston  
Helmer Homme-Winger  
David Johnstad-Beltrami  
Steve Taylor-Fertile  
Scott Tollefson-Beltrami  
Roger Ulseth-Crookston  
DeWayne Engelstad-Nielsville  
Jan McWilliam-Winger  
Rory Hamre-Beltrami  
Rich Johnson-Fosston  
Allen Stromstad-Beltrami  
Jim Todahl-Fertile  
Steven Vesledahl-Winger  
Douglas Burd-Nielsville  
Craig Bunes-Fertile  
Jeff Voeller-Climax  
Jessica Voeller - Riverwatch Student  
Joey Gieseke - Riverwatch Student**

**The Sand Hill Advisory Committee meets once a year, or as directed by the board of managers. The committee consists of interested citizens from around the region to help advise the watershed district managers on areas of interest.**

## Sand Hill Board of Managers



**Gordon Sonstelie, Stuart Christian, Roger Hanson, Bill Brekke, Harold Vig**

**Chairman Harold Vig—Fosston  
Vice-Chair Roger Hanson—Beltrami  
Secretary Gordon Sonstelie—Erskine  
Treasurer Stuart Christian—Erskine  
Manager Bill Brekke Jr. — Nielsville**

## Sand Hill Watershed Staff



**Daniel Wilkens  
Administrator  
shrwd@gvtel.com**

**April Swenby  
Administrative - Assistant  
april.sandhill@gvtel.com**



## Project #24

In January of 2009, the district received a draft petition for an improvement project via Attorney Swanson. By September of 2009, the petition was accepted and the project proceeded forward. The district has consulted with Houton Engineering to prepare a preliminary engineers report.

Project #24 consists of improving approximately 15 miles of legal ditch system which will provide landowners with better drainage, greatly improving water quality exiting the system.

### Grants, Grants, Grants

- The district was awarded a drainage records modernization grant.
- A grant was applied for via DNR fisheries on the district's behalf to complete the Fish Passage project, and the application was denied. It is proposed the project will cost 3.5 million dollars to complete. The project is designed to satisfy the DNR requirements. Colin Peterson's office has placed this project on "high priority".
- Of the four applicants eligible for NRCS ring dike funding three applicants proceeded with preliminary alignments. The ring dikes are scheduled for construction in 2010. In addition to the landowner ring dikes, the City of Nielsville and the City of Climax are also exploring the possibility of city ring dikes through the MN recovery program.



Bryan Paradis, LID Chairman

**"We thank the district for their cooperation in aiding the LID with our screen efforts."**

### Sand Hill Cost shares with Union Lake Screen Project

The district revisited their decision made in November of 2008 to coordinate funding the screen project. Originally, the district agreed to cost share up to \$85,000. The



### SWCD Cost Share

This is the second year that the district has assisted the SWCD in funding erosion control projects such as sediment basins.

Each year the district has allotted \$50,000 for these types of projects.

LID has since refined the construction costs at \$500,000 and requested additional funding. The district again agreed to fund their original commitment of \$85,000. The project costs are currently at \$500,000. The County has agreed to assist the LID with \$40,000. The remainder costs will be assessed to the Lake Improvement District.

Construction of screen and pump were implemented and considered a success to stop the spread of Eurasian Mill Foil.

Gary Lee, East Polk SWCD

**"Without the districts aid, these projects would never be built."**