Recentlly, the Calvary Free Lutheran Confirmation class at Fosston participated in a project for the local Loaves and Fishes food shelf. They collected food during the month of February, then they gathered it all, along with using a Thrivent Action Team card making further purchases, and brought it all to the food shelf on Sunday, March 1. A total of 259 pounds of food was collected! Sandy Johnson gave them a tour and shared with them the purpose of the food shelf and who it reaches.

“We wrapped things up by praying for this effective outreach in our community and that all participants and volunteers would be blessed and encouraged,” says Pastor Alan Amason, “and then we headed to Dairy Queen!”

The Thirteen Towns Fosston residents living near Sand Hill Lake may have noticed some heavy construction equipment operating in the area this past winter. The Sand Hill River Watershed district has been working to enhance the river by replacing the dams with rocks designed to allow fish to move across the barrier, as well as allowing water to flow. To make these improvements, Sand Hill River Watershed (SHRW) has partnered with many agencies to restore connections from the Red River to critical habitats to help re-establish and maintain healthy, robust fish communities with greater resiliency to invasion by exotic species. Fish passage will be restored at two additional sites in the Sand Hill River watershed in 2020. The first barrier is the dam on Sand Hill Lake near Fosston. “We collaborated with the DNR (Department of Natural Resources) to improve fish passage on the river,” says April Swenby, Sand Hill Watershed Administrator. The dam is an impediment to fish passage; every year, migrating fish like yellow perch congregate near the dam but often have difficulty moving across it. The dam will be removed and replaced with rock arch rapids to allow fish passage upstream into Sand Hill Lake. The improved fish passage will enhance not just habitat but clean water as well. “I think the landowners are really going to like it,” April says.

The second barrier is the road crossing on Kittleson Creek, a tributary to the Sand Hill River, west of Fosston. This culvert is nearly perched and velocities exceed the swimming limits for most species at normal flows. This restoration would replace the culvert with a structure more appropriately sized for the creek and a lower elevation to accommodate fish passage. The SHRW partnered with the Minnesota DNR and used SHRW engineers “to make sure it suited the DNR regulations and what they like to see in habitat,” April says. “DNR has very specific guidelines for fish passage, so they were a huge partner. We’ve been doing improvements up and down the Sand Hill for years - all grant funded. The Sand Hill River has been greatly improved over the last six years.”

Both of these crossings are upstream of the dams that were modified for fish passage in 2017. Restoration of fish passage at these two sites will expand the number of restored acres and river miles in the watershed. Numerous fish passage restoration projects have been conducted in the Red River basin, with almost immediate positive impacts to fish communities. A fish passage project similar to the one for the Sand Hill River was conducted on the Wild Rice River, another major tributary to the Red River. Fish tissue surveys found a low head dam on the Wild Rice River blocked fish passage and impacted populations. Similar to findings on the Sand Hill River, large river fish species such as Channel Catfish, Freshwater Drum, Sauger, Smallmouth Bass, and Walleye were common below barriers but rarely found above the dam. Within one year of passage restoration at this dam, these large river species were common upstream of the dam, with channel catfish captured 70 river miles above the previous barrier. Restoration of fish passage on the Sand Hill River would likely yield similar results. A second component of this project will enhance stream habitat within a channelized segment of the Sand Hill River downstream of the four deep structures. The river channel in this reach is unstable and has down cut significantly, creating a simplified habitat lacking in diverse substrate and depth. Habitat will be enhanced by constructing rock riffles in the channel to reduce velocities, increase pool/riffle habitat and provide more diverse substrate. The enhanced habitat will likely be used by many fish species for spawning, juvenile, and year round deep cover.

Almost finished! The new rock arch rapids will keep the Sand Hill Lake level high, while also making it easier for migrating fish to cross into the lake.

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