

SAND HILL ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT TEAM MEETING

Location: Sand Hill River Watershed District, Fertile, MN

Date: November 15, 2023

Time: 10:30AM - NOON



Participants

April Swenby (SHRWD), Brett Arne (BWSR), Craig Engelstad (SHRWD) James Page (Reis Township Landowner), Stuart Christian (SHRWD), Jeremiah Gudvangen (Liberty Township Supervisor), Karl Tollefson (Scandia Township Supervisor), Moriya Rufer (HEI), Zach Herrmann (HEI/SHRWD), John Voz (BWSR), Emily Hutchins (DNR), Todd Mosher (Reis Township Supervisor), Alex Engelstad (Liberty Township Landowner), JanaDee Fuchs (Interested Landowner), Scott Schroeder (MPCA-online), Stephanie Klamm (MnDNR-online), Mike Kelly (CWL Specialist - online), and Nathan Wallerstedt (USACE - online)

Meeting Summary

Project Team Process

The meeting began with an overview of the Project Team process. Moriya Rufer, the facilitator, presented that the Project Team is advisory to the Project Sponsor (Sand Hill River Watershed District). The Project Team can contain anyone who is a stakeholder, permitter, or potential funder of the project (state and federal agencies, townships, local governments, local landowners, etc). This Project Team has been working on data for three years, and over the next year will be meeting every few months to develop a project concept for the proposed project area.

Project Background

Zach Herrmann, the SHRWD District Engineer, presented information about the project location (Figure 1, Figure 2), the purpose and need, and potential funding options.



Figure 1. Project location.

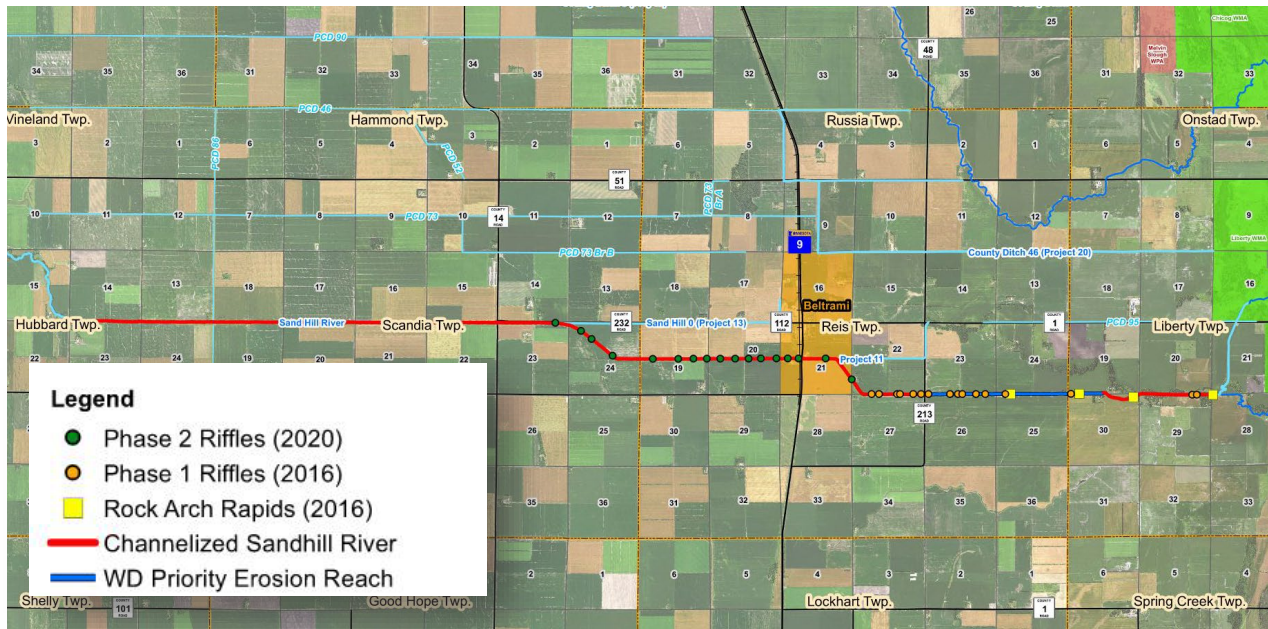


Figure 2. Project location and past projects.

The Sand Hill Ditch is a legal drainage system under the authority of the SHRWD (MN Statute 103E). Significant channel erosion and bank failure have occurred in the past 50 years. The erosion is encroaching on adjacent private lands and public infrastructure. Some projects have been implemented in the past 10 years, but a larger more comprehensive project is needed moving forward (Figure 2).

This project is larger than just a ditch repair, and this is why the SHRWD decided to form a Project Team to look at a larger multipurpose project that includes flood damage reduction, water quality, and natural resource enhancement benefits. There is local support for implementing a project to address erosion and sediment issues.

Draft Purpose:

- Minimize incidents of encroachment on private lands resulting from bank instabilities during flood events.
- Improve water quality in the Sand Hill River.
- Enhance fish and wildlife habitat.

Draft Need: *(To be refined with additional analysis)*

- The channel is significantly wider and deeper than originally constructed due to bank erosion, resulting in loss of adjacent private lands.
- 22,000 cubic yards of bank soil eroded during the 2022 flood event.
- Damages during recent floods (2020, 2022, 2023) in Hubbard, Scandia, Reis, and Liberty Townships.
- Turbidity impairments in the downstream Sand Hill River.
- Significant investments in fish passage have been completed within the channel, however limited floodplain habitat is present. Riparian floodplain habitat provides enhanced habitat for aquatic and terrestrial life.

Feedback from Meeting Attendees

The meeting attendees were favorable to a project in this location.

BWSR: Jon Voz offered that there is an opportunity for Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) funds for projects that provide habitat benefits such as birding and adding upland vegetative cover. Is there an opportunity to buy some of the road right-of-way to develop a habitat corridor?

Liberty and Reis Townships: Participants were concerned with road safety and the need for the road along the ditch to be drivable.

Scandia Township: Keep the river in the bank to reduce damages. Is there flood storage east? Would like to see decreased flow rates heading west.

Landowners: Land acquisition is favorable if they see a benefit, they are losing land anyway. They don't want to make it worse downstream.

Farmers: Would like to see the road continued in the mile that it's missing in Reis Township.

Path Forward

Complete Project Team Process

- Define Project Objectives
- Analyze Resources
- Develop and Analyze Conceptual Alternatives
- Select Alternative

Secure Project Funding *(Potential Sources Below)*

- Watershed Based Implementation Funds
- BWSR Clean Water Fund
- Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
- Sand Hill Ditch Funds (MN Statute 103E) – Local Match
- Others TBD...

Anticipated Outcomes *(Pending PT outcomes)*

- Increased Floodplain Storage
- Two-Stage Channel
- Stabilized Side Slopes
- Habitat Corridor Creation

The next meeting will be scheduled in 2-3 months.

Additional information

To see Project Team information such as past meeting minutes and studies, visit http://www.sandhillwatershed.org/Project_Team.html