

CRWD awarded \$1.5 million grant

State funds approved today for program to improve Dobbins Creek's water quality

AUSTIN, Minn. – Wednesday, March 26, 2014 – A nearly \$2.1 million project aimed at restoring the water quality of Dobbins Creek, which feeds Austin's East Side Lake, is moving forward thanks to a \$1.5 million state grant approved today.

This morning, the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources officially approved the Targeted Watershed Demonstration Program grant requested by the Cedar River Watershed District for the Dobbins Creek Watershed. Funded by the state's Clean Water Fund, the grant requires a local match that mostly will come from \$200,000 committed over four years by the CRWD Board of Managers.

The CRWD, working through the Waterways Committee of Vision 2020, also has made a request for the balance of local matching funds — \$100,000 — from The Hormel Foundation. Federal funding for certain conservation practices used in the program and in-kind contributions for University of Minnesota students participating in the work will make up the rest of the project's total funding.

"This is a historic project for our watershed, and we all are very grateful for this vital funding that will help us make significant strides in our ongoing efforts to revive Dobbins Creek and the entire Cedar River Watershed," CRWD Administrator Bev Nordby said.

Mower County Soil & Water Conservation District, which is contracted to do the work of the CRWD, will team up with U of M students, allowing CRWD to implement a full suite of projects that can fit nearly any landscape, Nordby said.

Dobbins Creek – part of the much larger Cedar River Watershed – has two branches that converge in the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center in northeast Austin and, further downstream, has a large dam on it that forms East Side Lake before the creek enters the Cedar River in southeast Austin.

A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency report published in 2012 listed Dobbins Creek as impaired for aquatic life and turbidity, which relates to the water being muddy or cloudy. Work under the program – which seeks to achieve 15 percent of the pollutant reduction necessary to achieve the overall water-quality goal for Dobbins Creek – will address concerns related to impaired fish and macroinvertebrate communities within the Dobbins Creek Watershed as well as reduce the overall amount of sediment and nutrients entering the waterway.

Dobbins Creek Watershed totals more than 25,700 acres, with 71 percent of it used for intensively farmed row crop agricultural land. Most of that is prime farmland that continuously produces high grain yields.

"We have biological impairments similar to other corn/soybean-dominated watersheds in southern Minnesota," Nordby said, adding that land-use changes combined with increased rainfall have resulted in high stormwater flows within the watershed.

CRWD's grant application gained BWSR's funding approval for many reasons, including demonstrated local support for improving the waterways. Vision 2020 supported the CRWD in identifying local matching funds. In addition, the Vision 2020 Waterways committee has been engaged in activities to improve water quality and build community ties to the Cedar River, Dobbins Creek and other local streams.

Vision 2020 is honored to partner with CRWD to continue to revive the local waterways, said Laura Helle, Director of Vision Creation for Vision 2020.

"Our Waterways committee has been so impressed with the work that the CRWD has been doing," Helle said. "We know that change doesn't happen overnight. In the next few years, this large-scale project on Dobbins Creek will improve water quality downstream, including East Side Lake."

Who: Cedar River Watershed District.

What: Received official approval today for a \$1.5 million state grant toward a nearly \$2.1 million overall project.

Where: Dobbins Creek Watershed, which includes East Side Lake, runs northeast from Austin's east side out into the rural areas.

When: Four-year project starts this year.

Why: Need to restore Dobbins Creek, an important local waterway that is impaired for turbidity and aquatic life.

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CRWD has historic monitoring data to gauge pre-project water quality along with other analysis programming and modeling designed specifically for understanding the Dobbins Creek Watershed. This modeling led the CRWD a few years ago to identify the Dobbins Creek Watershed as a major source of Austin's flooding issues and significant contributor to downstream sedimentation due to its flash-flooding nature.

Under the new program, CRWD staff plan to take a "treatment train approach" that involves addressing upland field erosion; holding water and sediment before entering Dobbins Creek; treating nutrients between the fields and creek; stabilizing eroding streambanks; and restoring critical in-channel aquatic features that support aquatic life.

By taking a "treatment train approach," the projects will function in collaboration with each other and effectively provide the required treatment to reach the biological benefits required by the MPCA, Nordby said. A series of practices, she said, will be placed strategically in the headwaters to detain flows and manage erosive velocity throughout the landscape.

CRWD anticipates using a variety of practices, including detention areas; constructed wetland areas; water and sediment control basins; CRP filter strips; bioreactors; streambank stabilization; in-channel improvements; and riparian treatment to include saturated buffers.

Following this work, CRWD will continue to conduct annual water-quality monitoring for many years at the outlet of Dobbins Creek above East Side Lake. MPCA also plans in 2019 to do another round of intensive monitoring on the Cedar River Watershed, including Dobbins Creek.

About the Cedar River Watershed District

In April 2007, state and local officials formed the CRWD in response to the Cedar River Watershed's top, worst-known floods occurring in 2000 and 2004. The CRWD's top priorities are aimed at reducing flooding and improving water quality within the Cedar River Watershed. Promoting water recreation is another priority, with the CRWD leading an effort that in 2012 led to the State of Minnesota officially designating the Cedar River as a State Water Trail under the Department of Natural Resources program.

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