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CRWD to get \$1.7 million for major project initiative

Sparks, Poppe secure state bonding funds for water quality, flood reduction

AUSTIN, Minn. – Thursday, June 1, 2017 – Cedar River Watershed District recognized local legislators today for their help in securing \$1.7 million in state funding to support its 25-project initiative focused on water quality and reduced flooding.

CRWD staff also announced plans for the initiative's largest water-detention project in the headwaters of Dobbins Creek's north branch that, when completed likely in 2018, temporarily will hold stormwater from large rain events that cover about 50 acres – a larger area than Austin's East Side Lake.

At a project site overlooking Dobbins Creek's north branch, CRWD staff and board members thanked state Sen. Dan Sparks and Rep. Jeanne Poppe, both of Austin, for their work to get funding included in the new state bonding bill for the district's nearly \$8.4 million Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

"This is a huge boost for our ambitious initiative, and we're very grateful for the hard work Sen. Sparks and Rep. Poppe put into our request," CRWD administrator Justin Hanson said. "They truly understand the importance of conservation."

At the Anderson-Oelkers site, Sparks and Poppe viewed the first CIP project, which cost about \$50,000. It started last fall and is getting final touches – mulching and seeding – this week in Red Rock Township, southeast of Brownsdale.

In the past two years, Hanson has spoken numerous times with legislators about the CIP initiative and the need for state funding. The request was made in 2016 but that legislative session did not produce an approved bonding bill.

Gov. Mark Dayton on Tuesday signed a \$988 million bonding bill including it. CRWD plays an important role, Sparks said, in protecting residents from future floods and improving water quality.

"I look forward to seeing the results that this new \$1.7 million investment will bring to our district," Sparks said.

Poppe said it's important to keep moving forward on these specific projects. "Providing state bonding dollars advances the good work done by CRWD's staff and board," Poppe said. "They have a story to tell and an outcome to showcase. I'm pleased the state is a partner in this journey."

CRWD has a history of collaborating with Sparks and Poppe on local conservation and water-related projects, including funding through the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) program and gaining legislative approval in 2011 to designate the Cedar River as a State Water Trail.

The \$1.7 million in state funding significantly helps CRWD match – as promised – the \$3.2 million grant awarded in 2015 by The Hormel Foundation for CIP projects via a request from the local Vision 2020 Waterways Committee. The Hormel Foundation awarded CRWD the water-quality grant to use as leverage in obtaining other funding sources for the CIP initiative.

Overall, CRWD now has access to matching funds of up to \$3.8 million from state grants and a local project levy, Hanson said. CRWD will keep pursuing funding for the overall initiative, he said, and work to avoid needing to use all of the CIP's levy potential, which can raise up to \$1 million over 10 years.

CRWD project manager Cody Fox said the bonding funds are crucial to ensuring the district's CIP initiative can move forward with planning and construction without funding-related delays or uncertainty.

"This support is a huge relief," Fox said. "We now don't need to worry much about whether a CIP project will have funding or if construction plans will need to be delayed."

In the past two years, Fox has worked through numerous challenges in launching the CIP initiative – which is unique in Minnesota for its size and strategies – while also developing relationships with landowners and governmental officials involved with the permitting and design process.

This year, CRWD expects to complete three ravine stabilization projects along the Cedar River State Water Trail south of the City of Austin in Austin Township, Fox said. That will complete the CIP water-quality projects planned for south of Austin, he said; most of CIP's remaining projects will be focused on the North Branch of Dobbins Creek.

With the new funding, Fox said, he hopes to complete a half dozen projects in 2018 under CIP.

As for CIP's largest project – known as Dobbins 1 – CRWD staff are finalizing the permitting and landowner easements on the nearly \$1.5 million project – about that will build two retention structures or earthen dams along Dobbins Creek's north branch in Red Rock and Dexter townships. Construction could start late this fall but likely not until summer 2018, Fox said.

Once completed, Dobbins 1 will reduce stormwater flows in that area by 80 percent, keeping about 134 tons of sediment and 218 pounds of phosphorus per year out of Dobbins, Fox said.



State bonding funds for CRWD projects

Who: Cedar River Watershed District along with state Sen. Dan Sparks and Rep. Jeanne Poppe.
What: Announced \$1.7 million in state bonding for CRWD's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) projects for water quality and reduced flooding.
Where: At CRWD's first CIP project in Red Rock Township along Dobbins Creek's north branch.
When: Today (Thursday, June 1).
Why: CRWD needed state funding to match a \$3.2 million grant from The Hormel Foundation for CIP.

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CRWD's CIP initiative consists of the district's top 25 prioritized projects that range in size, complexity and location. They generally relate to detaining stormwater in storage structures build in upland or headwater farmland areas but also can include ravine stabilization and flood-risk reduction.

With water detention and treatment, a constructed basin or pond at a strategic location collects and treats stormwater runoff from drainage areas and release it at a slow, controlled rate to reduce flooding and erosion downstream as well as trap sediment and debris from entering nearby waterways.

Most of CIP's 25 projects are planned for upstream of Austin, with a majority currently targeted in the Dobbins Creek subwatershed, which is prone to flash flooding. Dobbins flows into the Cedar River in southeast Austin.

Strategic construction of upland storage structures helps CRWD staff slow water flows, keeping more soil and nutrients from entering local waterways. This also reduces flood damage to buildings, infrastructure and farm fields.

CIP projects aim to achieve 40 to 70 percent flow reductions on most individual sites as well as an 8 percent overall reduction at the confluence of Dobbins Creek and the Cedar River in southeast Austin. CRWD's long-term plan calls for a 20 percent reduction in flood flows.

This is the 10th anniversary year of the Cedar River Watershed District, which was formed in 2007 to address concerns with area flooding and water quality. CRWD's boundaries cover about 435 square miles, including portions of Mower, Dodge, Freeborn and Steele counties.

Cedar River Watershed District

In 2007, state and local officials formed the Cedar River Watershed District in response to the Cedar River Watershed's worst-known floods occurring in 2000 and 2004. CRWD's top priorities are aimed at reducing flooding and improving water quality within the Cedar River Watershed.



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