



CRWD
CEDAR RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

2020 Annual Report

CRWD Board of Managers



Cedar River Watershed District's purpose is to reduce flooding and protect and improve water quality in the streams.

Board members (L-R): Mike Jones (Steele County); Jim Gebhardt (Mower); Mike Merten (Mower); Susan Olson (Mower); Jason Weis (Mower); Kevin Kiser (Dodge); and Steve Kraushaar (Freeborn).

Conservation continues during Covid in 2020



Justin Hanson
CRWD administrator

Covid-19's global pandemic caused significant loss and challenges in 2020.

Conservation locally, however, was not deterred.

Cedar River Watershed District continued making strong progress toward our goals of reduced flooding, improved water quality, enhanced wildlife habitat and increased water recreation.

In our watershed, it was obvious that recreational use

of our local waterways was possibly the highest it has been in many years. Boats and paddlers on East Side Lake. Groups paddling the Cedar River State Water Trail.

Meanwhile, CRWD built its biggest upland-storage project to date in the headwaters of Dobbins Creek, helping us surpass our five-year reduction goal for stormwater.

We also added hundreds of acres of cropland upstream

from Austin into the MN CREP state-federal program to make that land permanent native prairie and wetlands.

Much of this was in the watershed of Wolf Creek, which received 900 rainbow trout in spring 2020 for the first time from the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources at the request of CRWD staff.

It was a great success and will happen again in 2021.

We are reviving our river.

CRWD staff

CRWD staff an April 2020 virtual meeting during pandemic shutdown.

TOP: Larry Callahan, district tech; Jeanne Crump, office manager; Justin Hanson, administrator.

MIDDLE: Cody Fox, project manager; Paul Hunter, watershed conservationist; Tim Ruzek, outreach coordinator.

BOTTOM: Steve Lawler, resource specialist; James Fett, watershed tech; and Alex Block, precision ag associate.



DNR, CRWD stock trout in Wolf Creek

Anglers of all ages enjoyed a new, outdoor activity in 2020 thanks to the stocking of about 900 rainbow trout during spring in Austin's Wolf Creek, a Cedar River tributary.

In partnership with CRWD, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' fisheries division out of Waterville stocked rainbow trout twice — in April and May 2020 — at Austin's Todd Park. The rainbow trout came from the DNR's State Fish Hatchery in Lanesboro.

This new "put-and-take" fishery stemmed from CRWD watershed tech James Fett proposing a trout stocking in Wolf after two years of studying the creek's temperature.

DNR's fisheries division in Waterville stocked the trout.

CRWD received dozens of photos from the public of trout caught at Todd Park. The main complaint was the creek being over-fished.

"It's a huge success to have heard reports of trout being harvested throughout July when Wolf is at its warmest," said Fett, who caught several rainbows there during the April 18 opener with his wife, Pam.

MN DNR plans to offer a similar opportunity in 2021 at Wolf, the only Mower County stream stocked for trout by the DNR.



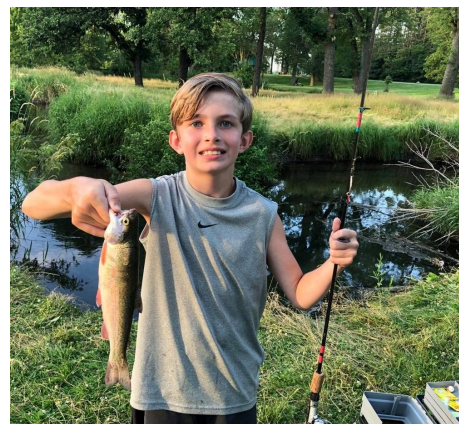
A rainbow trout in early May 2020 swims to the edge of a spring-fed pond that drains into Wolf Creek in Austin's Todd Park. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources stocked 900 rainbow trout in Todd Park in spring at the request of CRWD staff.



In April 2020, MN DNR stock rainbow trout in Todd Park's Wolf Creek.



CRWD's James Fett, who proposed trout in Wolf Creek, with one of the rainbows.



Talan Medgaarden, of Austin, with a rainbow from Wolf in summer 2020.

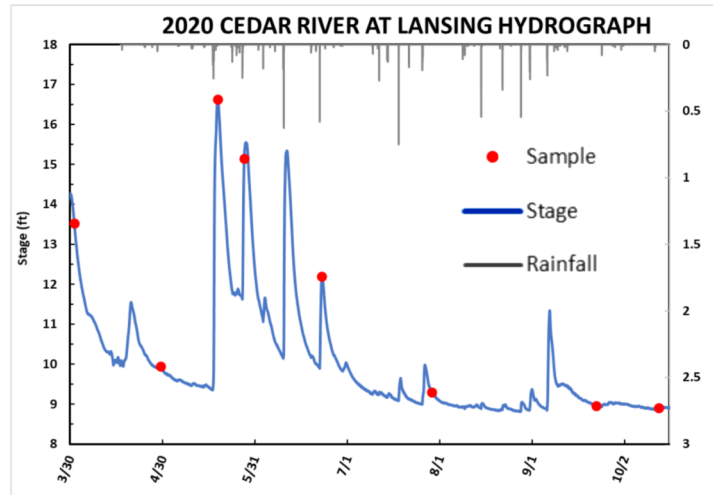
CRWD continues water-quality tests

CRWD finished another year of water sampling at 10 stream crossings in the watershed, starting east of Blooming Prairie and ending on Woodbury Creek near the Iowa border.

A monitoring site was added on Wolf Creek at 11th Street Northeast on the west end of Austin's Todd Park.

Staff sampled nine times at each site for total suspended solids; turbidity; total phosphorus; ortho phosphorus; nitrates; E. coli; temperature; dissolved oxygen; and conductivity.

In 2008, CRWD began testing water quality, a district priority with reducing floods. CRWD aims to see how water quality does over time; which streams bring the most pollutants to the Cedar; and which sub-watersheds should be targeted for conservation.



Graph showing water flow of the Cedar River at the Mower County Road 2 bridge — one of CRWD's sample sites — east of the village of Lansing.



CRWD's Larry Callahan collects water samples in May 2020 from Wolf Creek after a rain storm. The site was added in 2020 to CRWD's water-monitoring program.

DNR improves state water trail safety on Cedar



MN Dept. of Natural Resources installs a barrier float in April 2020 on the Cedar River State Water Trail to enhance boater safety above Austin's downtown dam.

Cedar mussels up



MN DNR mussel biologists walk upstream while transplanting native mussels October 2020 in the Cedar River downstream from Austin.

DNR transplants second round of native mussels

In 2019, 1,500 native mussels were placed in the Cedar River State Water Trail on Austin's south side going down to two other sites.

More than double that joined them in October 2020 at the same, three locations in what is hopefully the start of their revitalization along 21 river miles of the Cedar River along with its tributary streams. This stretch of river runs from Austin's downtown dam to the next dam in Otranto, Iowa.

Overall, the Cedar now has 5,230 newly added mussels.

Most of those were grown in Austin's East Side Lake (part of Dobbins Creek) by the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources in totes.

In fall 2020, MN DNR mussels biologists joined by a Minnesota Zoo colleague placed 3,730 black sandshell mussels in the Cedar River in nearly equal amounts at each site in Austin and Lyle townships.

"This really is about reviving the Cedar River and repopulating it with thousands of native mussels that will

bring all sorts of benefits to the river. Mussels are like the coral reefs of the river," said Madeline Pletta, a DNR mussels propagation biologist.

Pletta leads the mussels project started in 2016 in the Cedar River watershed – one of three chosen for this work by DNR's Center for Aquatic Mollusk Programs.

Mussels serve as filters in the river to support water quality, provide microhabitats for smaller aquatic creatures like invertebrates and stabilize the river bottom. DNR surveys, however, show the Cedar and other rivers in Minnesota's southern one-third no longer support their historical assemblages of mussel species.

Overall, DNR hopes to restore seven mussel species in the Cedar, Pletta said, and expects to use East Side Lake for many more years. The lake now hosts 3,726 native mussels of four types: 1,504 black sandshells; 1,578 mucketts; 635 threeridges; and nine spikes.



Tagged black sandshell



DNR in July 2020 check on native mussels growing in Austin's East Side Lake.



DNR and Minnesota Zoo transplant mussels in October 2020 in Austin's Cedar River.

Phase 1 done



Crews work July 1, 2020, to build CRWD's biggest, CIP upland-storage berm to date in the headwaters of Dobbins Creek's south branch.

CRWD fulfills pledge with initial CIP work

CRWD surpassed its five-year goal in 2020 for reducing peak flows of stormwater at the confluence of the Cedar River and Dobbins Creek in Austin.

Originally, CRWD set a goal of achieving an 8 percent reduction through the construction of its upland-storage structures mainly in the uplands of Dobbins Creek. These are part of CRWD's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

With the completion in 2020 of its largest CIP project to date, CRWD achieved at least a 10-percent peak flow reduction at the Cedar-Dobbins confluence.

This \$1.2 million project, Dexter 30-Dam 2, spans nearly 2,000 feet long with a 21-foot peak berm height and temporarily stores stormwater in the headwaters of Dobbins Creek's south branch.

Nearly 3,000 acres of mostly cropland overall now are controlled by 11 CIP projects in the Dobbins watershed that is prone to flash flooding. With that, a 10-year rain storm (roughly 4 inches of rain) – which floods some rural roads – would be about 1 foot lower at its peak downstream from Dobbins' north-south confluence in Austin's Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.

CRWD achieved this progress due to a \$3.2 million grant in 2015 from The Hormel Foundation that the district matched with \$3.4 million in state and local funds to build 14 projects overall, including three structures along the Cedar River State Water Trail south of Austin.

To learn more and view drone footage of CIP projects, visit www.cedarriverwd.org or find the YouTube channel



CRWD's Cody Fox checks the flow structure March 9, 2020, at Dobbins 1's upland berm during snowmelt in North Dobbins' headwaters.

Hormel Foundation continues support of water quality

Cedar River Watershed received another big dose of generosity in 2020 from The Hormel Foundation to improve water quality and reduce flooding.

The Hormel Foundation approved a \$500,000 grant request from the Cedar River Watershed District.



CRWD will match those funds mostly with money from the bonding bill passed in October 2020 by the state Legislature under the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources' flood-hazard mitigation program. State Sen. Dan Sparks and Rep. Jeanne

Poppe helped ensure that legislative support for CRWD.

In 2015, The Hormel Foundation granted \$3.2 million to CRWD to begin its five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to build upland-storage projects mainly in headwater areas. CRWD matched that grant with \$3.4 million in state and local funding.

With a \$1 million overall budget heading into the 2021, CRWD can work with landowners on potential CIP projects to continue the upland storage of stormwater in the headwaters of Dobbins Creek's south and north branches.

"Everyone in the Cedar River watershed can be very thankful for the significant, ongoing support of The Hormel Foundation."

Justin Hanson
CRWD administrator



Work progresses Aug. 3, 2020, at the Dexter 30-Dam 2 project site in the headwaters of the South Branch of Dobbins Creek.

Phase 1 (2016-2020) Capital Improvement Project



On time



On budget



Goals surpassed



Partnerships seal wells, update septics

Local and state partnerships helped make progress in 2020 below the surface to protect ground and surface water quality in the Cedar River Watershed.

Mower Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), in partnership with Austin Utilities and state agencies, now has sealed 20 unused wells in the Cedar River watershed.

Mower SWCD, which also performs the work of CRWD, and Austin Utilities paid cost-share for those projects depending on if the property received water from Austin Utilities. Cost-share is 50 percent of the cost to seal a well but capped at a \$1,000 cost-share payment.

Most funding for the cost-share payments came from grants provided by the Minnesota Department of Health and Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources. Contractors licensure with the state for well sealing must be used for sealing projects.

Efforts to seal unused wells throughout Mower County will continue in 2021 under cost-share initiatives.

In January 2020, the Mower County Board launched a septic initiative to complete the final phase of the county's long-running initiative to achieve septic compliance across the county. This led to record progress.

About 80 new septic systems were installed during 2020 in the Cedar River Watershed within Mower County. Overall, the county saw the installation of 128 systems.

Septic systems not in compliance likely are not removing pathogens, nutrients and chemicals from wastewater before it enters local groundwater, lakes and long-running initiative to achieve septic compliance countywide.

Mower SWCD assisted Mower County staff with outreach efforts related to the SSTS initiative, including a free workshop in January 2020 in Austin that drew about 100 homeowners and contractors to learn about septic systems and drinking-water wells.

In 2021, Mower SWCD will continue to support Mower County's outreach and education efforts as part of its SSTS initiative.



An area contractor installs a new subsurface sewage treatment system (SSTS) during the summer of 2020 in the Cedar River watershed.



Minnesota Department of Health offers extensive information and resources for those who own a well or are looking to properly seal a well.

1W1P budget, work plan ready for Cedar

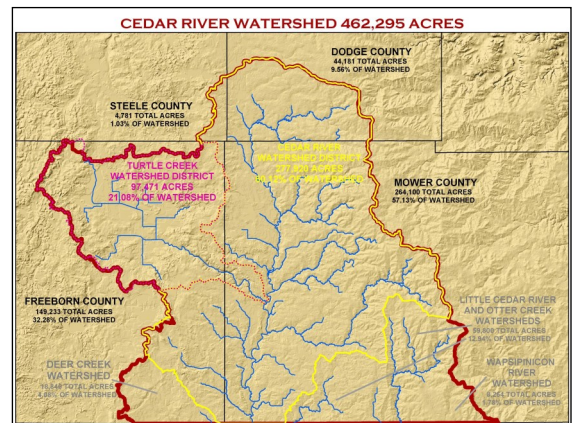
Partners worked in 2020 on creating a work plan for the Cedar-Wapsipinicon planning area as well as how to target and prioritize various projects.

As the next phase of the Cedar River One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) initiative, local partners and the Policy Committee worked virtually numerous times due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

With nearly \$600,000 in state funding over two years, Cedar-

Wapsi partners, including CRWD, worked on the plan for those funds and details of related programs, such as cost-share assistance for certain practices.

CRWD's boundaries are in the planning area with Turtle Creek Watershed District and the watersheds of the Little Cedar River, Otter Creek and Wapsipinicon River in Mower County and the Deer Creek watershed of southeast Freeborn County.





Mower SWCD staff plant prairie seeds on former cropland in June 2020 for a permanent restoration of prairie and wetlands on a MN CREP parcel in Red Rock Township near Roberts Creek, a Cedar River tributary, west of Brownsdale.

MN CREP grows in Cedar watershed

Permanent prairie continued to grow in 2020 where land was farmed for crops in the Cedar River Watershed.

CRWD staff under their role with the Mower Soil & Water Conservation District helped add 208 acres into the MN CREP program in Udolpho and Lansing townships. Those acres were part of five MN CREP applications funded in 2020 by the state-federal program.

Overall, more than 300 acres of former cropland have been or will be restored in 2021 to permanent, native prairie and wetlands in the Cedar River watershed since 2017 through MN CREP.

Under MN CREP, 100 percent of the costs for restoring cropland to wetlands and prairie is covered by the program, which obtains a perpetual easement in which landowners retain private ownership of enrolled acres. MN CREP aims to improve water quality and wildlife habitat through per-

manent conservation easements.

In 2020, Mower SWCD led the seeding of 75 acres along Roberts Creek in Red Rock Township and another 104 acres along Wolf Creek in Lansing Township, just north of Austin's Todd Park.

During fall 2020, Mower SWCD finalized an agreement with a family to enroll 104 acres of cropland into MN CREP for prairie and wetlands restoration. This land is just upstream of the 100-acre MN CREP parcel on Wolf Creek.

Mower County landowners are encouraged to contact CRWD-Mower SWCD to learn more about MN CREP, which places a focus on flood-prone or erosive acres.

Each MN CREP site gets seeded with a highly diverse mixture of native grasses and forbs that are beneficial to wildlife and pollinator habitat. This practice also prevents erosion while filtering surface and ground water.



Drone view (left) of 104 acres on Wolf Creek to be restored in 2021 via MN CREP. On right, crews in August 2020 restore 100 acres on Wolf, north of Austin.

2020 CRWD outreach



CRWD's Tim Ruzek and Kelly Bahl of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center launch a canoe on July 30, 2020, for a four-mile, guided youth trip down the Cedar River State Water Trail.



On Aug. 5, 2020, CRWD's Tim Ruzek gives a virtual/online presentation on Austin Mill Pond's history with help from CRWD staff (below) moving the event hosts and film crew from Hormel Historic Home and Mower County Historical Society.



Austin-based KSMQ public TV aired in October 2020 its Cedar River State Water Trail episode on its nationally recognized "Let's Go, Minnesota" series. KSMQ and CRWD produced the episode in June 2019.



KAAL-TV interviews CRWD outreach coordinator Tim Ruzek for a morning show in August 2020 about his effort to name the island at Austin Mill Pond after the late Lyman Baird, whose philanthropy and vision in the early 1900s led to the creation of the island and mill pond.

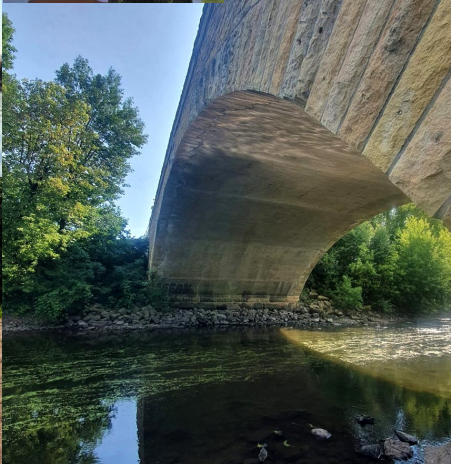


High schoolers with the Austin Positive Action Coalition canoe the Cedar River State Water Trail in October 2020 with help from CRWD and the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. They paddled nearly four miles from the DNR access site at Marcusen Park to the DNR's Riverwood Landing.





Cedar Scenes 2020



Volunteers help CRWD clean litter from waterways



Many thanks from the CRWD and watershed community for the dozens of volunteers in 2020 who removed hundreds of pounds of trash from the Cedar River State Water Trail, streams and adjacent parks. Those interested in cleanups or CRWD's Adopt-A-River should email:

tim@mowerdistrict.org

Sign up for CRWD's monthly e-newsletter
The Cedar Reader at: tim@mowerdistrict.org

Facebook

www.facebook.com/cedarriverwd

YouTube

Search for "Mower SWCD"

Medium

www.medium.com/@cedarmn

Website

www.cedarriverwd.org

Twitter

www.twitter.com/crwdmn

Instagram

www.instagram.com/crwdmn

2020 CRWD PERMIT SUMMARY

NUMBER OF PERMITS	PROJECT TYPE
2	BRIDGE REPLACEMENT
7	CULVERT REPLACEMENT
7	DITCH MAINTENANCE
NUMBER OF PERMITS	COUNTY
9	MOWER
4	DODGE
3	FREEBORN

Cedar River Watershed District

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