Wright County wetland restoration offers flood protection and habitat, aids local road projects

A large-scale wetland restoration project in Wright County's Corrina Township completed through the state's Local Government Road Wetland Replacement Program (LGRWRP) will offer flood protection, drainage and habitat benefits in addition to generating wetland banking credits.

Located roughly 2 miles northwest of Maple Lake, the project involved restoring seven individual wetlands totaling 50 acres, plus 68 acres of upland habitat. Its primary purpose was to restore wetlands and associated uplands to generate wetland banking credits for the LGRWRP. Conservation easements were secured from three neighboring landowners through the state's wetland banking program, allowing the restoration to move forward.

Under Minnesota's Wetland Conservation Act (WCA), wetlands that are filled or drained must be replaced through a process called wetland mitigation. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) oversees the LGRWRP, which develops wetland mitigation banking credits by restoring previously drained or filled wetlands and adjacent uplands. These credits are used to offset impacts to wetlands that occur when local road authorities — such as counties, cities or townships — repair, restore or replace public roads.

"The Local Government Road Wetland Replacement Program is an important tool for local governments because it allows road related infrastructure projects to move forward while ensuring wetlands are restored, offsetting the loss of these valuable natural resources as part of the road impacts," said Dennis Rodacker, BWSR wetland mitigation supervisor. "The LGRWRP takes that burden off local road authorities, providing high-quality wetland replacement much more efficiently."

Aerial photos show the project area before **(top)** *and after more than 50 acres of wetlands and 68 acres of upland habitat were restored as part of a Local Government Road Wetland Replacement Program project in Wright County. The restoration involved three landowners.*
Photo Credits: Wright SWCD

As part of the project's development and implementation, landowners worked with BWSR and Wright County to petition the local drainage authority to abandon 3,267 feet of subsurface drainage tile that is part of Wright County Ditch 20 (CD 20). In addition, approximately 18,000 feet of private subsurface tile was abandoned as part of the site restoration.

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> — Andrew Grean, Wright SWCD

“The old concrete tile as part of the public drainage system was starting to fail, and the landowners chose abandonment for the upper portion of this drainage system and restoration of these wetlands rather than the costly installation of new tile as part of a system repair,” said BWSR Senior Water Resources Engineer Tom Wenzel, who oversaw project design and construction.

“These restored wetlands can now store and slowly release into the downstream drainage system runoff from about 304 acres of primarily agricultural land. In addition to the water quality and flood control benefits, the project also provides indirect drainage benefits to adjoining areas and downstream lands that are part of the CD 20 public drainage system. Per the design, the main wetland within the site can provide about 74 acre-feet (an acre-foot measures how much water it takes to cover 1 acre 1 foot deep) of detention storage as a result of a 24-hour, 100-year storm event.”

An outlet structure was installed as part of the wetland restoration work. Construction began in July 2024 and concluded in October.
Photo Credit: BWSR

Wright Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Senior Wetland Resource Conservationist Andrew Grean said the project offers a solution to local drainage issues.

“A number of landowners had expressed frustration over crop damages resulting from a failing section of CD 20,” Grean said. “Before going down the path of repairing the system, we wanted to make sure the affected landowners were aware of other options. We viewed restoration through the LGRWRP program as an option to compensate the landowners, remove a section of failing tile from the CD 20 system, and improve water quality and drainage efficiency downstream.”

SWCD staff helped landowners apply for project funding. They worked with the drainage authority and partnered with BWSR to coordinate survey work, easement acquisition and project implementation.

“There is no doubt that this restoration will improve water quality downstream,” Grean said. “CD 20 eventually ends up in Locke Lake and the Mississippi River shortly after that. Not only is Locke Lake impaired for nutrients, it sees drastic fluctuations in water levels. Getting large-scale restorations in these watersheds complements the other conservation projects we help get on the ground. Although the driving force behind these restorations is the generation of credits for LGRWRP, the secondary benefits for water quality and storage are significant.”

Construction began in July 2024 and wrapped up in October. The $1.17 million total cost included easement acquisition, project construction and native vegetation establishment. Wenzel said BWSR staff and SWCD staff will closely monitor the project for the next five years to help document success and support the release of qualifying wetland credits.

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.