Heron Lake Watershed District Budget

The Heron Lake Watershed District (HLWD) budget outlines the annual financial plan for project implementation, surface water monitoring, education events, and general operations. The budget is structured with a responsible, long-term management perspective based upon the HLWD Watershed Management Plan.

The HLWD general operating levy is funded through local property taxes. We work hard to be accountable to our residents, as well as state and local governments. The annual plan and budget, annual audit, and monthly treasurer’s reports can be found on the HLWD website. The annual financial newsletter is published as another avenue for financial transparency.

The Budget Process

The HLWD is required by statute to follow a public process to review and adopt the annual budget. The HLWD Treasurer and District Administrator work together to create a draft budget that is submitted to the board of managers for review. In July, the HLWD adopts a preliminary budget and levy. In August, a public hearing is held to solicit input from watershed residents. After the hearing, a final budget is adopted.

How Are Your Tax Dollars Being Spent?

The chart below shows the breakdown of expenditures based upon the 2017 audit of the HLWD. The expenditures include the general operating levy, grants, and public drainage systems.

Best Management Practices (BMP) Implementation funds consist of the actual costs associated with “on-the-ground” BMPs. These include cost-share dollars, engineering, travel, and vehicle maintenance. Monitoring is made up of water sample analysis, shipping, and supplies. Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) category reflects grant funds to cover the Watershed Coordinator’s wages and benefits. General operations consist of board members’ wages, office expenses, legal fees, dues, and financial audits. Education includes any endeavor that builds awareness of the water quality problems within the watershed. Staff time is allocated in each category according to the percentage of time spent.

The expenditures for Public Drainage were a result of the improvement process for Nobles County Ditch (CD) 12, Jackson County Judicial (JD) #30, JD #30 Branch A-1, JD #30 Branch A-1 Lateral, Jackson County JD #31, and HLWD Projects 2, 4, 84-4A, and 6. The ditch systems reimburse the HLWD for these costs.

2017 Expenditures

Total dollars spent: $654,486

Continued on Page 2
Proposed 2019 General Operating Levy

The chart on the right shows the breakdown for the proposed 2019 general operating levy.

The general operating levy for all watershed districts is set by Minnesota statute. The ad valorem tax levy may not exceed 0.048 percent of estimated market value, or $250,000, whichever is less. The HLWD general operating levy of $250,000 has remained unchanged for the last twelve years.

Implementation and Education Undertakings

Efforts to reduce nonpoint source pollution in the Heron Lake watershed are crucial. Personal contact is made with landowners to offer technical assistance and information about available funding. The HLWD works cooperatively with agency partners and private citizens to complete projects. This is done to maximize the benefits of the efforts and available resources while providing the best possible avenues to address the environmental, educational, economic, and agricultural needs of the watershed, its communities, and its residents.

The HLWD’s general operating funds are limited in comparison to what is needed for implementation and education. The HLWD actively pursues outside funding. A brief description of current grant and loan programs follows.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Clean Water Partnership (CWP) Program

The HLWD was awarded funds through the CWP program for the West Fork Des Moines River (WFDMR) Targeting and Prioritizing Endeavor. Point and non-point source pollution, intensive tillage, non-compliant septic systems, feedlots, and urban stormwater runoff are prevalent throughout the WFDMR watershed. The Prioritize, Target, and Measure Application (PTMApp) that is the result of the grant effort will be invaluable in assisting local units of government within the watershed to identify the most cost-effective best management practices (BMPs) and the best locations for pollution reduction. This information will be used in grant applications and watershed planning efforts.

Locating the sources of sediment, phosphorus, and bacteria is integral to reducing the effect they have on a water body. Houston Engineering, Inc. (HEI) was hired to complete the WFDMR Targeting and Prioritizing Endeavor. This resulted in a set of data that identifies locations for the most cost-effective implementation of BMPs for all identified priority resources. This project included measuring water quality benefits from both existing conservation efforts and future targeted opportunities to implement BMPs. It also provides an estimate of the likely reduction that can be achieved through implementation of suitable practices at priority resources. The grant ended June 30, 2018. The tool is available for use throughout the WFDMR watershed by contacting the HLWD.

MPCA Major Watershed Project

As the lead organization for the WFDMR Major Watershed Project (MWP) Phase II Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS) development, the
HLWD believes that sound working relationships between Local Government Units (LGUs), citizens, and state government is imperative. The main objective of this grant effort was community involvement. This was done through development of a Citizen Council, four community events, one government leaders’ event, a Facebook page, poster and citizen values survey, water quality sampling with the Prairie Ecology Bus Center (PEBC), and Local Work Group (LWG) meetings. The information gathered from these activities will be used to develop the WRAPS Report being written by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). The grant ended on June 30, 2018. The WRAPS report is scheduled to be completed at the end of 2019 or early 2020.

**Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)**

Jerry and Nancy Ackermann were awarded a grant from the MDA for Cover Crop Effects on Soil Temperature and Soil Moisture. This grant effort will help determine if cover crops can help regulate soil moisture and temperature so water can infiltration during wet conditions and hold water during drought conditions and avoid extreme temperatures that degrade soil quality. It will also help determine if cover crops can be a tool to help crops become more effective at nutrient uptake. With the cost of inputs increasing and water quality declining, this type of project will help southwest Minnesota farmers in their farming operations and also help improve water quality in local streams. Project partners will hold a field day at the end of the grant period. HLWD staff is assisting with reporting.

**MPCA CWP Low Interest Loan Program**

The HLWD has approximately $300,000 available in low interest loan funds. Qualifying landowners can borrow up to $15,000 for a septic system replacement. A lien is assessed to the borrower’s property and is repaid over seven years with an interest rate of 3 ½ percent. Loan funds will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis and are only available through July of 2019. Landowners or contractors must contact the HLWD office before construction begins to qualify.

**Clean Water Fund (CWF)/Minnesota Conservation Corps (MCC)**

Through the CWF the HLWD utilized the services of the MCC. Through this effort, a streambank stabilization project was done in Nobles County using the cedar revetment method. Cedar revetments help stabilize slumping banks to reduce future streambank erosion. Cedar revetments trap sediment to rebuild the streambanks, reduce sediment moving through streams, and improve water quality. Maintenance was also conducted on a shoreline project within the City of Fulda.

**Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) Grant**

Through this CPL grant, the HLWD will complete a 62-acre wetland enhancement project within the Toe WMA in rural Jackson County, a property used predominantly for public hunting and outdoor recreation. The project’s primary goal is to ensure that the 62-acre wetland complex maintains adequate water levels to support wildlife habitat.

**HLWD Cover Crop Research Plots**

At the recommendation of the Cover Crop Steering Committee, the HLWD is implementing cover crop side-by-side field trials along with annual field days for five years. 2018 is the second year of this effort. The project includes four farm sites in Nobles, Jackson, and Murray Counties, and one mile south of Cottonwood County. Samples from the four fields will be taken each year for five years. The purpose is to provide long-term, local data about cover crop management. One field day will be held each year. Research findings and field days will be open to the public. This effort is funded through the HLWD general operating levy.
Help Reduce Water Pollution!
Projects and programs funded through the HLWD are voluntary. We need your help in order to make these efforts successful. Please contact Catherine Wegehaupt at 507-376-9150 extension 111 or send an email to catherine.wegehaupt@noblesswcd.org or contact the HLWD at 507-793-2462 or send an email to jvoit@hlwdonline.org. We cannot achieve success without your willingness to participate in water pollution-reducing efforts.

What’s Happening?
- August 28, 2018 – HLWD Budget Hearing – 8:00 p.m. at the HLWD Community Center
- August 28, 2018 – HLWD Board meeting – immediately following the budget hearing at the HLWD Community Center

Our Mission
The mission of the HLWD is to protect and improve the water resources within its boundaries by supporting watershed residents through the use of education and financial programs.