Heron Lake Watershed District General Operating Levy

The Heron Lake Watershed District (HLWD) general operating levy outlines the annual financial plan for project implementation, surface water monitoring, education events, and general operations. This levy 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 2018 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 staff time to work on the Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies. 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 reestablishment of records process for HLWD Projects 4, 84-4A, and 6, as well as the improvement of Jackson County Judicial Ditch (JD) 19. The ditch systems reimburse the HLWD for these costs.

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Proposed 2020 Budget and General Operating Levy

The chart on the right shows the breakdown for the proposed 2020 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 thirteen years.

Implementation and Education Undertakings

Efforts to reduce water 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 Low Interest Loan Program

The HLWD has approximately $295,000 available in low interest loan funds through the MPCA. 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.

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 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 determine if cover crops can be a tool to assist crops to become more effective at nutrient uptake. With the cost of inputs increasing and water quality declining, this type of project will provide information for 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.
Department of Natural Resources Conservation Partners
Legacy (CPL) Grant
Through this CPL grant, the HLWD will complete a 62-acre wetland enhancement project within the Toe Wildlife Management Area 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.

Environmental Protection Agency Section 319 Grant for South Heron Lake (SHL)
The primary purpose of this project is to reduce phosphorus entering SHL. To accomplish this, the HLWD intends to restore and stabilize 4,100 feet of streambank in the Jackson County JD 3 system that outlets directly into SHL. In addition, one wetland restoration and nine alternative side inlets will be installed.

Clean Water Fund (CWF)
Efforts of this CWF grant funded through the Board of Water and Soil Resources will be focused on Jackson County JD 3. JD3 drains 52 percent of the SHL watershed, highlighting its importance in making meaningful progress toward water pollution reduction. The practices include eleven water and sediment control basins and a 10-acre storage and treatment wetland restoration, which are proven to cost-effectively reduce phosphorus.

Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (MCC)
This grant from MCC will assist with stabilizing one streambank site in Nobles County using a cedar revetment method. Maintenance will also be done on two different properties, both restored prairie. This year’s maintenance is to spot spray roughly 20 acres to control Canadian thistles and other invasive weeds.

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. 2019 is the third 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 education event 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, send an email to catherine.wegehaupt@noblessswcd.org, 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 20, 2019** – HLWD Budget Hearing – 8:00 p.m. at the Heron Lake Community Center
- **August 20, 2019** – HLWD Board meeting – immediately following the budget hearing at the Heron Lake Community Center

Contact us with your questions or concerns -
Telephone
507-793-2462;
Email
jvoit@hlwdonline.org.

Funding for this newsletter is provided by the HLWD through the general operating levy.

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.