



Draft rules for CRWD set for review process

Watershed's board of managers, other local government units studying proposal

AUSTIN, Minn. – Tuesday, Dec. 14 – Proposed rules, including a permitting program, for helping the Cedar River Watershed District reduce future flooding and improve water quality are ready for review by local government units in four counties.

Government officials at the township, city and county levels in Dodge, Freeborn, Mower and Steele counties are reviewing the CRWD's draft rules submitted recently following months of work by a Rules Advisory Committee of citizens from various sectors. The current process will involve public meetings and take several months to complete before going to the CRWD board of managers for a final public hearing and approval likely in March.

Members of the CRWD's Board of Managers and CRWD staff will discuss the draft rules during a workshop meeting at 4 p.m. Wednesday. The topic also is on the CRWD board's agenda for its 7 p.m. regular meeting following the work session.

Local governments have until Jan. 7 to submit comments regarding the proposed rules, which have been drafted to address the CRWD's top priorities of reducing stormwater flows as well as protecting and improving water quality. General public feedback also is encouraged.

State and local officials formed the CRWD in April 2007 in response to the Cedar River watershed's top worst-known floods that occurred in 2000 and 2004. Overall the Cedar River Watershed District has experienced its four worst-known floods in the past decade – 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2010.

All watershed districts in Minnesota are required to have a watershed management plan and rules in place under state law.

The proposed rules cover several areas, including stormwater, flood plain, water body alterations, erosion control and enforcement.

Under the draft rules, for example, a drainage project can't create any increase in flowage capacity compared to the original structure or conditions. Improvements must not increase downstream flooding, and the project's applicant must demonstrate that.

One of the objectives in the CRWD's watershed management plan is to create rules regarding flood control and rate control that prevent the district's current flood conditions from worsening.

"We consider the rules as helping to keep the status quo in the watershed," said Bev Nordby, the CRWD administrator.

The district's rules are intended to fill gaps in existing federal, state and local regulations, Nordby said. They are not meant to duplicate existing regulations, she added.

A permit program is needed to help ensure the wise development and conservation of the CRWD's water resources under the district's watershed management plan, Nordby said.

Who: Cedar River Watershed District's Board of Managers.

What: Regular meeting that will include an update on the watershed's proposed rules that are ready for public review and comment, including from local government units in Mower, Freeborn, Dodge and Steele counties.

Where: Ruby Rupner Auditorium, Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, Austin.

When: 7 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 15.

Why: Formed in April 2007 by the state of Minnesota, the CRWD has a watershed management plan that needs rules and a permitting program.

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The CRWD board plans to have another workshop in January on the rules after staff members receive comments from local government units. Draft rules then will be sent to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources for a 60-day review.

On March 16, the CRWD board hopes to have a final public hearing and vote on approval of the rules.

Under the draft rules, the CRWD staff will have enforcement options for those who violate a rule or a permit issued under a CRWD rule. The enforcement process is expected to be education first, notification second and then, if necessary, enforcement.

CRWD managers intend to coordinate administration of the district's rules – once approved – with all interested federal, state and local government units and agencies that have jurisdiction in the watershed district. All local government units will need to submit proposed ordinances relating to drainage, flood plains, shoreland or any other water/land use topic to the district for review and comment.

CRWD staff are working on public-information materials about the rules that are easy to understand and not overwhelming to citizens, Nordby said.

Copies of the draft rules are available at the Mower County Soil & Water Conservation District office in Austin or online at the CRWD's website – www.cedarriverwd.org.

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