



Flood mitigation, wetland restoration set to start *CRWD, DNR to work Wed. on former farm site along Cedar River*

AUSTIN, Minn. – Tuesday, May 24 – Six years ago, Ron Skjeveland decided the chronic problems caused by repetitive flooding were too much to keep his cozy farmstead along the Cedar River in south Austin.

Following record flooding in 2004, Skjeveland started a process to convert his country home and cropland back to a natural setting as part of the Austin area’s ongoing flood-mitigation efforts along the Cedar River. Mower County acquired Skjeveland’s property – located south of the former Sheriffs Youth Ranch – under its flood-protection program and later transferred the property to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

On Wednesday afternoon, the Cedar River Watershed District, along with the DNR, will begin work related to turning the Skjeveland property into a wetland restoration site – one aspect of an overall project for the land.

Most of the restoration already has taken place at the site – the house is gone, buildings have been leveled and the crop ground has been converted to natural vegetation. This week’s work will focus on restoring the property to its historic conditions as a wildlife sanctuary along the Cedar River.

“The site’s natural features have come a long way,” said Justin Hanson, resource specialist for the CRWD. “But it’s the floodplain protection that has the Cedar River Watershed District excited about completing the project.”

While this work is a big step in the project, it won’t be the last. The DNR Trails and Waterways Division also has been working with CRWD staff on eventually creating an access site at the former Skjeveland property for canoeing and fishing opportunities on the Cedar River. It will be the third DNR canoe-access site created since the 2004 flood using flood-mitigated property on the Cedar River.

Just under 30 acres in size, the site has low-lying land with a history of being susceptible to flooding and the soil erosion that comes with that, Hanson said. The land produced good crops, but often flooded. These factors made the site attractive for a wetland restoration and floodplain protection project, he said.

DNR officials will manage the property as an Aquatic Management Area. Under the AMA umbrella, the DNR will work to protect the site’s biologic life and use the wetland restoration as a “filter” for sediment and unwanted chemicals to get trapped before reaching the river. The land also is open to public bow hunting.

The CRWD is a local government unit that was created in 2007 to reduce flooding and improve water quality within the Cedar River Watershed.

Who: Cedar River Watershed District and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

What: Working together on wetland restoration and flood protection work on a former farmstead in south Austin.

When: Wednesday afternoon, May 25.

Where: Go south on 4th Street Southeast and turn right onto 23rd Avenue Southeast. Drive to road’s end.

Why: The public site will offer a wildlife habitat, help with water quality, reduce soil erosion and eventually feature a canoe-access site.

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