



CONTACT

Sheri Dankert, The Hormel Foundation, 507-437-9800

Justin Hanson, Cedar River Watershed District, 507-434-2603

Greta Anderson, Vision 2020 Waterways Committee, 507-438-2091

IMPROVED WATER IN THE WORKS

\$3.2 m Hormel Foundation grant launches historic watershed projects

Austin, Minn. – Wednesday, Aug. 26, 2015 – The Hormel Foundation is making a historic investment in Austin’s waterways with a \$3.2 million grant to the Cedar River Watershed District to accelerate water-quality improvements.

This funding — requested by the Austin Vision 2020 Waterways Committee — will cover half of a \$6.4 million plan over the next five years for the CRWD to lead 25 permanent projects on land almost entirely upstream from Austin along the Cedar River and Dobbins Creek to improve water quality and reduce flooding.

Landowner cooperation already has been secured on 13 of the 25 projects, which consist of 11 sites along the Cedar River (with four south of Austin) for ravine projects and 14 in the Dobbins Creek sub-watershed for storm water detention and flood-risk reduction structures.

“This is an exciting and important investment in our community’s future,” said Gary Ray, Chair of The Hormel Foundation. “These improvements will have a far-reaching impact on our waterways and provide a stronger safeguard against flooding. The Hormel Foundation is pleased to support these kinds of projects that will positively benefit our region and all of us who live and work here.”

Officials from The Hormel Foundation, CRWD and Vision 2020 Waterways gathered today with other local leaders to announce the major initiative in Austin’s Driesner Park at “The Point” – the confluence of Dobbins Creek and the Cedar River, which became a State Water Trail in 2012.

Dobbins Creek and the Cedar River each are listed by the state as “impaired” for aquatic life and turbidity, which relates to the water being muddy or cloudy. The plan announced today will reduce the level of flood flows, downstream erosion and storm water runoff from reaching waterways. It also will restore wetlands and stabilize river ravines.

Costs in the five-year Accelerated Results Plan include engineering, project management, construction and staffing. The other funding is expected to come from CRWD’s reserves and operating levy as well as from the State of Minnesota. The Hormel Foundation’s grant will increase the likelihood of CRWD being awarded highly competitive grants.

Formed in 2007, CRWD is a local government unit with a mission to reduce flooding and improve water quality in the Cedar River Watershed that covers about 435 square miles in a four-county area with a large majority of the land in Mower County.

CRWD is grateful for the exceptional support from The Hormel Foundation and Vision 2020, said Justin Hanson, CRWD's water resource specialist.

"This is the largest grant the CRWD has ever received, and we truly are excited to get started on our aggressive plan," Hanson said. "CRWD, along with other area entities, has made marked improvement in water quality over the past eight years but much work lies ahead to meet our community's goals."

In 2014, CRWD launched a nearly \$2.1 million innovative project to restore the water quality of Dobbins Creek with state agencies and University of Minnesota students. That project included a \$1.5 million state grant and \$100,000 grant from The Hormel Foundation. The CRWD recently won a \$500,000 federal grant through the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Taken together, the three projects will invest \$9 million into improving the quality of water in the area over the next five years.

At the request of Vision 2020 Waterways, CRWD created the new five-year plan to extend above and beyond its regular operations that have averaged about \$50,000 per year in capital projects. Project sites were determined through a hydro-engineering study funded by CRWD to determine areas in the watershed where investment would leverage the most results.

CRWD is ready to start construction on projects in spring 2016 under the new plan and will conduct extensive monitoring in the coming years to measure water-quality results.

Most of the sites are targeted in the Dobbins Creek subwatershed due to the flash-flooding nature of the creek. Two Dobbins Creek branches meet in Austin's Jay C. Hormel Nature Center before forming East Side Lake due to a dam.

CRWD studies have shown Dobbins to be a major contributor to Austin's flooding and downstream sedimentation. The new initiative's work will lay a strong foundation for the community's long-term goal of making East Side Lake a better recreational resource, Hanson said.

The Accelerated Results Plan was created in response to a request from the Vision 2020 Embrace and Maintain Our Waterways committee formed in 2012. The committee was impressed with the CRWD's work and began to inquire about what additional projects could be accomplished more quickly with more funding.

"We know the Cedar River and Dobbins Creek are some of our community's greatest, yet underutilized, assets," said Greta Anderson, Vision 2020 Waterways committee volunteer. "We are thrilled to have The Hormel Foundation's support of our request for such a large-scale effort to improve the waterways."

Vision 2020 Waterways also continues to work on numerous projects focused on building community ties to the Cedar River and other local waterways.

In 2012, CRWD successfully led an effort with support from State Sen. Dan Sparks and Rep. Jeanne Poppe to get the Cedar River designated as a State Water Trail under the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources program. Prior to that, CRWD also launched in 2010 a local Adopt-A-River volunteer initiative on the Cedar River in Mower County that has removed more than 1,100 tires and thousands of pounds of garbage and debris.

About the CRWD

- 434.7 square miles or 278,540 acres of mostly fertile farmland
- Parts of Mower, Freeborn, Dodge, Steele counties
- Tributaries Roberts, Wolf, Dobbins, Orchard, Woodbury and Rose Creeks
- Formed in 2007

- One of 43 watershed districts in Minnesota

- 2012 Department of Natural Resources Watershed District of the Year

- 2013 Izaak Walton League Watershed District of the Year

- Since 2007, spent \$418,500 on projects
- Since 2007, 1,512 tons of sediment held on the land
- Since 2007, 632 pounds of Phosphorus held on the land
- Highly coordinated with the Mower County Soil Water Conservation District

About The Hormel Foundation

A separate entity from Hormel Foods Corp., The Hormel Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization established in 1941 by Hormel Foods Corporation founder George A. Hormel and his son, Jay C. Hormel. Contributions from The Hormel Foundation directly benefit the Austin, Minn., area. The Hormel Foundation was reorganized in 1980 as a supporting organization under I.R.C. Section 509(a)(3). As a supporting organization, it is organized and operated for the benefit of those charitable or educational organizations represented on its board.

Downloadable files of Gary Ray's photo and The Hormel Foundation's logo are available online at: http://www.hi.umn.edu/images/section_leaders/Gary_Ray
