
2023 ANNUAL REPORT LAC QUI PARLE-YELLOW BANK WATERSHED DISTRICT



Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed District
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BOARD OF MANAGERS AND STAFF

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The Board held 12 monthly meetings with ZOOM option and held 3 special Watershed meetings in 2023.

ADVISORY BOARD

Ron Antony, Yellow Medicine County Commissioner
Joseph Drietz, Lincoln County Commissioner
Stacey Tufto, Lac qui Parle County Commissioner
Darwyn Bach, Yellow Medicine SWCD Supervisor
Dale Sterzinger, Lincoln County SWCD
Rhyan Schicker, Lac qui Parle County SWCD
Harvey Swenson, Lac qui Parle County Ag Producer
Nate Ludvigson, Lac qui Parle County Contractor
Roger Ellefson, LQP Pheasants Forever/Local Surveyor

The Advisory Board held their annual meeting on December 13, 2023, special meeting #646.1.

Mission

To serve as a partner in water planning and management with the State Agencies, Counties, Cities, and Soil & Water Conservation Districts and assist with the management of water quality and quantity within the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed boundaries.

History

The Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed District was established on April 19, 1971. The purpose of the District was to aid local citizens who had requested help in controlling flooding in the Watershed. Much cross-over flooding had occurred over farm land between sub-watersheds and had been identified as the highest priority need for the new district to address.

The District as it currently exists consists of approximately 1,712 square miles with 976 in Minnesota and the remaining 736 in South Dakota. Approximately 74% of the land surface is located in Lac qui Parle County, 19% in Yellow Medicine County, and 7% in Lincoln County.

The Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed District starts out at Lake Hendricks in Lincoln County. The Lac qui Parle River flows northeastward through Yellow Medicine and Lac qui Parle Counties before entering the Minnesota River near Watson into Lac qui Parle Lake. In the first 60 miles of drainage, the elevation drops more than a thousand feet from the Prairie Coteau. Major tributaries of the Lac qui Parle are the Florida, Canby, and Ten Mile Creek Watersheds. The Yellow Bank River Watershed is to the north side of the Lac qui Parle River Watershed. The river has two main branches, the North and South Forks, which join in Yellow Bank Township, Lac qui Parle County. From that point the river flows almost due North and discharges into the Minnesota River south of Odessa.

The original Watershed District Plan was established, as required by law, in October 1972. The second update of the 10-year management plan was approved by BWSR in 2009. In 2019, the Watershed District requested and was granted a 5-year extension to their plan in order to finish WRAPS and work towards One Watershed One Planning. In December, 2022 BWSR approved the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank One Watershed One Plan (1W1P).

The Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed District currently is governed by Minnesota Statutes 103D, which provides a broader scope for a local unit of government to manage quality and quantity of water within the hydrological boundaries.

District Staff

The District maintains one full-time Administrator, Trudy Hastad, who has been the Administrator since 2007 and was the District secretary prior to becoming Administrator. The District employs a full-time Coordinator, Eric Stahl, hired in September of 2023, and he helps with grant writing, 1W1P, and the WCA representative for LQP County. The WS Board is the LGU for WCA in Lac qui Parle County. The District employs a full-time ditch inspector, Jared Roiland, to help manage the watershed ditches and also the 86 Lac qui Parle County Ditch systems along with the buffer programs. His salary is reimbursed by Lac qui Parle County. The District employs a full-time park manager, Ethan Kack, to manage Stone Hill Park/Del Clark Lake which was created when the Canby Creek Dams were completed in the late 1980's. Park sales are used to provide the salary for this position. In the fall of 2021, Lac qui Parle County approached the Watershed District to oversee the County Environmental Office which includes the County Planning & Zoning, Feedlot Program, HHW/Recycling, Passports, & Demo-Landfill. The District hired a full-time employee, Abby VanKempen, to oversee Planning & Zoning, Feedlots, SSTS, & passports specific for Lac qui Parle County with salary reimbursed by the County. In the fall of 2022, the Watershed hired Jennifer Schuelke to help with HHW, recycling, transfer station, & passports for Lac qui Parle County. Lac qui Parle County also pays for this position. The Watershed also hired a full-time employee, Cindy Brehmer, to assist with the Lac qui Parle County Ditch financials and records and as a backup for Watershed financials. The majority of this position is paid for by Lac qui Parle County.

2023 Budget

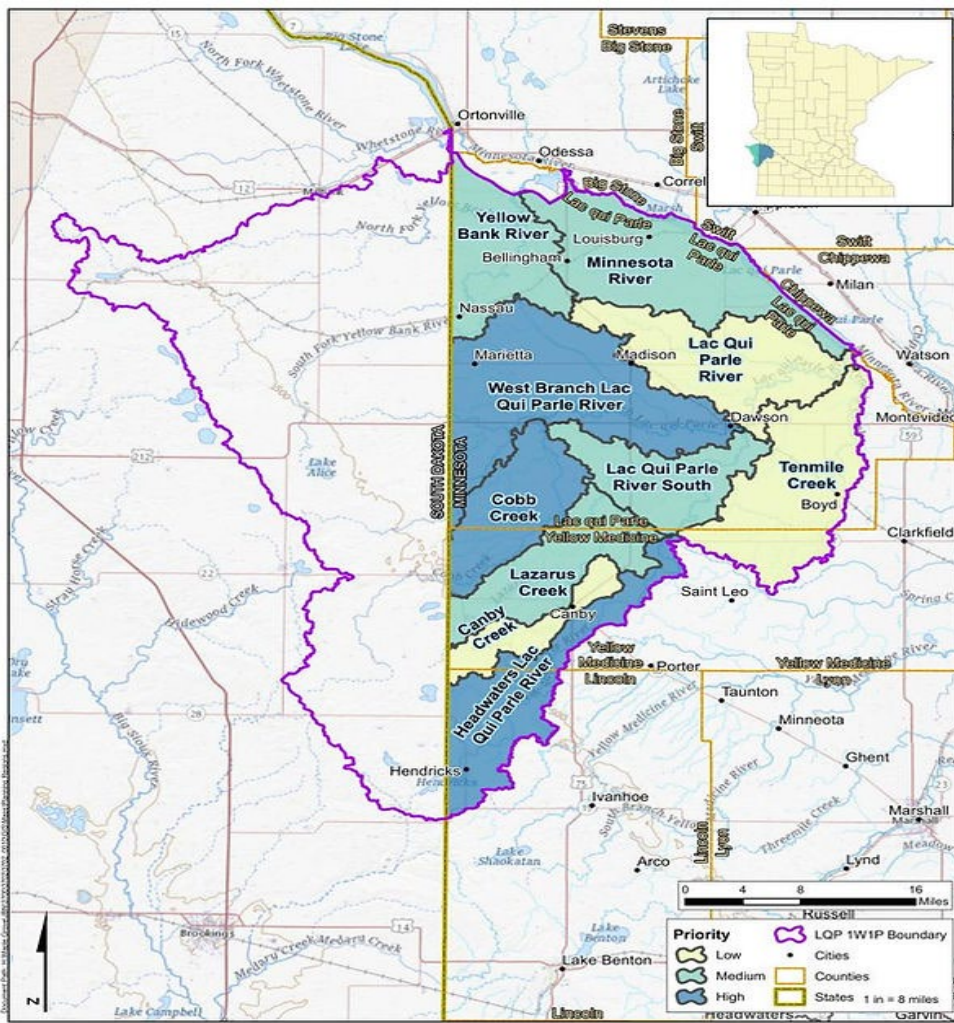
A hearing for the 2023 proposed operating budget was held on September 6, 2022 during the regular Board meeting #631. Five people were present for the hearing. The proposed budget was presented and a levy amount of \$290,000 was proposed of which \$250,000 via MN Statute 103D.905 Sub. 3, and \$40,000 via MN Statute 103D.905 Sub 9 (1). There were five people present at the hearing with no opposition to the levy or budget as presented, so the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed Managers approved the 2023 levy of \$290,000 along with the proposed budget.

1W1P

BWSR approved the 1W1P on February 23, 2023. A workplan was developed and approved and contracts were signed. We were awarded \$623,429 dollars and we received the first 50% of the implementation grant C23-0006 in June. The SWCD's have been working with the landowners and have encumbered the majority of the funds. In 2023, we approved nine contracts. Six practices were installed in the fall of 2023, with 3 of them paid in the fall of 2023 and 3 in January of 2024. The SWCD also applied for supplemental WBIF funds. This will be awarded in early 2024 and if we are approved, we will use this funding for additional projects.

In June, the Watershed District asked for an extension of the planning grant as there were funds that were not spent. We wanted to use these dollars to contract with Houston Engineering to produce plan maps with the priority areas showing the section numbers, townships, & Counties. We also asked them to locate and map water storage area's using GIS, along with MS4Front tracking software (in process). This extension was granted by BWSR. We hope to be able to close the planning grant by June 2024.

Planning regions: Yellow is low priority; green medium priority, blue high priority



SSTS Loan Program

The Watershed was approved for a new CWP loan fund of \$750,000 from MPCA for SSTS loans in August, 2022. The loan repayment is for 7 years at a 3% interest rate collected as a special assessment on property taxes. From August to December 2022 we upgraded three failing septic systems with a total of 14 lbs./year phosphorus load reductions, 66lbs./year nitrogen load reduction, and 159 lbs sediment load reduction. In 2023, we upgraded seven failing septic systems using these grant dollars for 29 lbs/year of phosphorus load reduction, 245lbs/year nitrogen load reduction, & 355 lbs./year sediment load reduction. In 2023, we sent out seven approval letters, seven maintenance reminders, & seven septic system ownership guides. The beginning of 2023 showed slower applicants due to staff turnover in the office.

Florida Creek Restoration

Staff have been working with DNR and local partners to apply for an application to restore Florida Creek to its original channel. DNR Fisheries provided \$30,000 to conduct initial engineering to design a funding application. In 2022, the Watershed Board approved a resolution for the Watershed to act as project sponsor and fiscal agent for this project. In 2023, the DNR contacted the Watershed that the DNR would probably be the fiscal agent but will work closely with the Watershed & SWCD for local contact on this project. Hopefully construction will start in 2024.

Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed Drainage Authority Work

The Watershed Board of Managers is the drainage authority responsible for eleven ditch systems, with nine being in Lac qui Parle and two in Lincoln County. Inspections were held on four of the ditch systems in 2023.

The Lac qui Parle CD #42 improvement project construction began in January of 2021. The project had a long punch list of items needing attention with little to no response from the contractor. After many meetings, it was declared that the contractor would not be returning to the project due to problems within their company. In the fall of 2022, the Watershed Board in consultation with their attorney, contractor attorney, bond attorney agreed it was prudent to call in the contractor's bond. The bond was called in and the Watershed board of managers and staff worked closely with the attorney's, engineer's, & bond company to correct and complete this improvement project. In 2023, the Watershed Board hired a new contractor to complete the necessary repairs on the project. This was completed in the fall of 2023, the project was televised, and the final repairs were completed in December 2023. The final hearing should be conducted in early 2024.

The Br 3 CD #4 improvement project was constructed in early summer 2022. The contractor completed some minor corrections on the system after being televised and the final hearing was held in the spring of 2023 and closed out.

Watershed Ditch #11 and WS #32 were sprayed for trees. Watershed Ditch #92 had two crossings washed out in the spring flood and applied for FEMA funding for the repairs. These were repaired in the fall of 2023.

We also hired Wilde Air Service to spray dams R-6 and Lazarus Creek for noxious weeds.

Lac qui Parle County Ditch Maintenance Work

Lac qui Parle County has contracted with the Watershed District since 2007 to do the maintenance of their 86 County ditch systems. Staff sent out 50 work orders for maintenance in 2023 with 29 of them completed. We are having a hard time getting contractors to do maintenance work. We have had many discussions with the LQP drainage committee on this topic with no easy answers.

We had 13 ditch systems that qualified for FEMA assistance due to the spring flooding event. All but one site has currently been repaired. FEMA is resisting paying for five of the sites so we will appeal this process. We feel we will get four of the five sites funded.

Staff sprayed 27 County ditch systems for trees this summer and early fall. We are talking to the drainage committee to hire this done next year due to the amount of time this takes.

We completed redetermination of benefits on 17 ditch systems in 2023. Staff sent out 1200 letters to landowners to inform them of the 2024 ditch assessments and gave them the option to pay with no interest if paid in 2023, otherwise would be spread on their property tax statement as a special assessment for three years with 6% interest. We received approximately 87% prepays.

We held consolidation hearings on CD#84, Lateral A & B, CD #13 and Laterals A-M, CD #18 and Lateral A, CD #27 and Br 11 CD #27. These were approved by the Drainage Board. Staff continue to record all repairs and legal proceedings into Drainage DB and keep up to date on all trainings.

A drainage committee consisting of two LQP Commissioners, Auditor, County Administrator, WS staff, and one WS manager meet monthly to stay informed on drainage concerns.

Regulatory Program: Drainage Permitting

The Watershed District requires landowners to obtain a permit from the District prior to the start of planned drainage/cleanout projects. These permits are good for one year. In 2023, the Board approved 223 permits. There were 186 in LQP, 33 in Yellow Medicine, and 4 in Lincoln County. These permits were for private main tile, seepage tile, ditch cleanouts, culvert replacements, 638 projects, pumps, terracing, & alternative intake replacements. The Watershed also reviews all of the LQP permits for WCA. The Board is talking about updating our rules in 2024 and would like to have the permits good for two years as contractors are busy and hard to get them to complete smaller projects.

In 2023, the Watershed also cost-shared tree removal in the river in section 25, Providence Township and section 19, Mehurin Township. These were two large cottonwood tree's that were causing back up of water on neighboring property.

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

The Watershed Board of Managers are the LGU for the WCA in Lac qui Parle County. Staff & LGU reviewed 186 drainage permit applications for wetland impacts with 24 exemptions used with cropping history, 14 exemptions for private drainage maintenance, 25 exemptions for assessed benefits to a County Ditch, and 126 non-impact wetlands. Two applications were denied for the landowner to fill out a joint application notice (boundary/type and no loss applications). Staff investigated four possible violation sites for restoration or clarification purposes, 2 were deemed no violations and 2 were consistent with violations. One violation was due to current restoration orders and one the review process is ongoing. Staff worked with a landowner on a possible bank site, but then the plan did not take off due to land being put up for auction.

Buffer Enforcement

The Watershed District staff had no buffer strip violations on the Watershed Ditches noted in 2023.

LQP County Buffer Enforcement:

Lac qui Parle County contracts with the Watershed to oversee the County Buffer enforcement. Staff worked closely with SWCD and sent one administrative penalty order to a landowner. The landowner worked with SWCD to get the parcel into compliance. The month of October we held radio ads to remind landowners of the importance of the buffer and to remind their tillage people to not till up the buffer. SWCD is now offering cost-share for buffer enhancements including but not limited to: buffer creation along private ditches, seeding enhancements to alfalfa, forage mixtures or more diverse seed mixes. Riparian plantings along public waterways would also be considered, as would any other creative ideas to help "build better buffers".

Nuisance Beaver Program

In 2023, the Watershed District continued its program to pay a bounty on nuisance beavers. The Watershed paid bounty on 170 nuisance beaver and cost-shared one dam removal.

Del Clark Lake/Stone Hill Park



Stone Hill Park/Del Clark Lake was formed in the late 1980's with the Canby Creek Structures that protect the City of Canby from flooding. The park currently has 69 campsites. Area A has 33 sites with 28 of them being seasonal spots and 5 spots open for weekend/week campers. Area B has 6 spots open for weekend/week campers and the Glenn is used for seasonal spots. There are five spots available in the overflow. Del Clark Lake is a favorite spot for swimming and fishing.

The Watershed District hires a manager to oversee the park. In 2023, Ron Fjerkenstad retired as park manager after serving for 23 years. We had a retirement party for him at the park in June. In June, Ethan Kack took over as the new park manager. The park house needed some attention so the flooring was replaced throughout the house, the basement finished, rooms painted, and gutters put on the house. There had not been any upkeep to the house since 2010 when it was built.

In January 2023 the 5th annual fireman/sportsman club fishing tournament was held on Del Clark Lake. They host a 2-hour tourney and a 24-hour tourney. This has become a very popular event with over 750 people attending. The 4th of July parade around the campground, slip-in-slide, and fireworks display attracts many visitors over the July 4th holiday. Many people utilize the park trails and enjoy the new playground equipment built in 2022. One exciting new addition to the park in 2023 is on-line registration for camping. The park remains a popular place to camp and visit.

Annual Canoe/Kayak Trip

The annual canoe/kayak trip was held on June 9, 2023. We had 26 paddlers for this event. We started at the LQP County Park and ended at the CR #31 bridge just west of the Lac qui Parle Village. We picked up the paddlers and took them back to the park shelter for a light lunch and to retrieve their vehicles. We had great weather, although the water in the river had dropped so they had to portage their kayak/canoe in one spot.

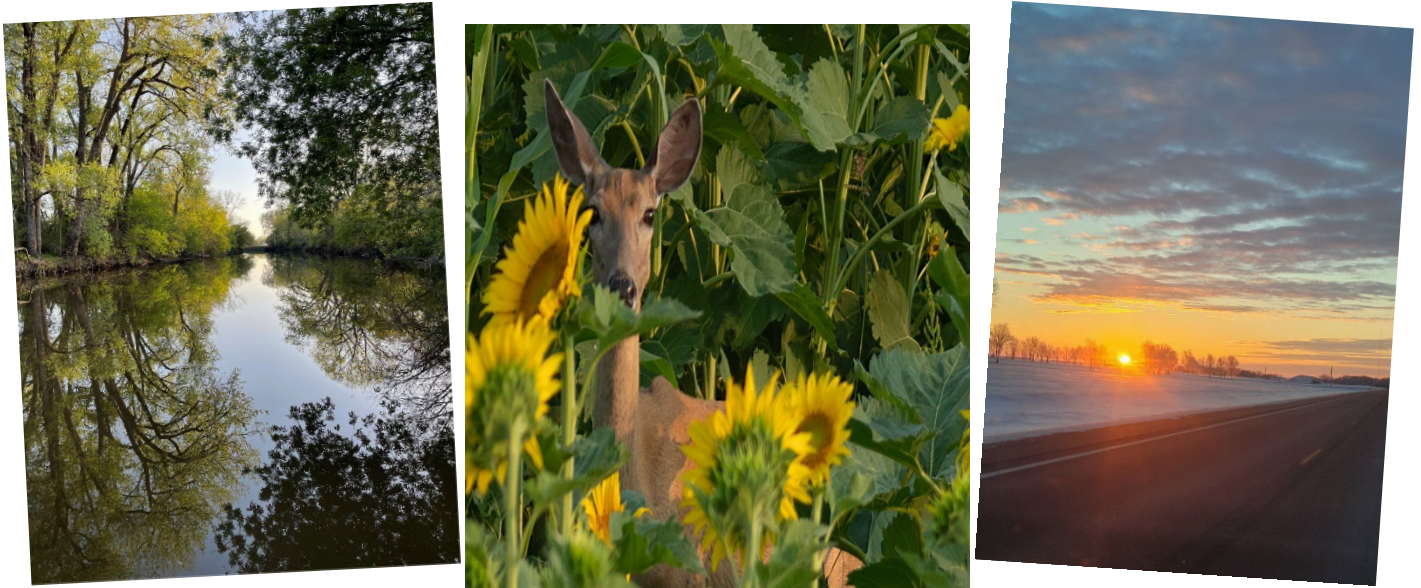


Earth Day Event

In 2023 the Watershed District again sponsored a coloring contest for an Earth Day activity. The event was advertised on the radio, and the coloring sheets were available at the local grocery stores in the Watershed District for pickup. The event was for ages up to twelve years old. Winners for each age category were awarded a DQ gift certificate.

Annual Photo Contest

The Watershed Board approved holding the annual photo contest in 2023 and approved making of a 2024 calendar with the photos. The pictures have to be taken in the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed District and the staff ask to use the rights to the pictures for future advertising and use in promoting the Watershed District. First place winner was Rebecca Ronning, 2nd place Carmen Fernholz, & 3rd place to Maria Croatt. Many of the photos are displayed on the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank website and were used to make the 2024 calendar.



No Child Left Inside Event

We applied for and were awarded a grant from DNR for “No Child Left Inside”. This event was held for 5th-8th grade students in our Watershed District to get them outside to experience and learn about our Watershed. This was a three-part series of events held the 2nd Wednesday of June, July, & August and was held at Stone Hill Park/Del Clark Lake. Our local partners that helped with this event were the SWCD’s, NRCS, & DNR.

Our June session was on hiking/plant identification, animal tracks and tracking, animal calling, animal pelt identification, and finished the day with a session on archery. We had approximately 25 students for this session. Curt Vacek, Area DNR Wildlife Supervisor helped with the animal calling, tracking, & pelts along with Quintin Peterson with SWCD. The area DNR game warden also spoke to the students about his job and duties. WS staff along with SWCD conducted the hiking & plant identification session, & WS staff, SWCD, & NRCS helped with the archery session. The students all got to take a buck/doe call home, along with an animal track identification paper. WS staff provided water & snacks between sessions. It was a very hot day, but the kids enjoyed it especially the archery session where they got to shoot at the targets.

The July session was on fish identification, history of Del Clark Lake & water experiments, and then they got to go fishing. Chris Domeier, DNR Fishiers conducted the session on fish identification with fish sampling of Del Clark Lake. The students really liked this session. WS manager Dave Craigmile presented the session on Del Clark Lake formation and conducted many different water experiments, and we ended the session with letting the students fish. The grant allowed us to purchase fishing rods. We had approximately 21 students for this session. WS staff provided the water & snacks between sessions.

The August session was an overnight camping session, AIS identification, micro/macro invertebrates, along with kayaking lessons, swimming, fishing, hiking, & star gazing. When the students arrived, we taught them tent setup & fire safety. When they had their tents set up and gear stowed, we went down to the lake for AIS identification, micro/macro invertebrates and kayak lessons. When we were just starting this part a big rain storm came through so we ran back to the picnic shelter and waited out the storm. We had approximately 22 students attend this session. A couple of students called their parents to come and pick them up as they were nervous with the rain. We played some games in the picnic

shelter and started supper. Once they finished supper the rain was over and it was a nice evening where we went back to the beach to resume kayaking, fishing, swimming. We then came back to campground and did smores and ended the evening with star gazing and lights out. In the morning we had breakfast pizza's, took the tents down, and the kids went home. With the DNR grant we were able to purchase 10 kayaks, 25 deer calls, 13 fishing rods, 10 life jackets, and 5 tents so we could hold this event another year if so desired. SWCD provided a bus for transportation which allowed more students to attend.



NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE EVENT PHOTO'S



Miscellaneous Watershed Items

2023 was another year of change for the Watershed District. Our long-standing board manager, Darrel Ellefson, retired after serving many years. The LQP Commissioners appointed Jon Olson to fill his unexpired term, and manager Michael Frank decided to quit, so Yellow Medicine Commissioners appointed Mike Knutson to fill his unexpired term. Along with that, our park manager, Ron Fjerkenstad retired after 23 years of service and the WS Board hired Ethan Kack as the new manager. Our office coordinator also turned in his notice in May so the Board hired Eric Stahl as his replacement in September.

The Watershed District continues to oversee the Lac qui Parle County Environmental Office. Staff issued 84 zoning permits, 10 conditional use permits, and 4 variance permits in 2023. Staff went on 18 feedlot inspections with 14 being compliance inspections, 1 complaint-based inspections, & 3 permit request/new feedlot inspections. Staff assisted with 102 new passports, & 72 renewals in 2023. We hosted a paper shredding event in April and collected 3,285 lbs of paper from LQP County residents. We began our special item collections in May and ended in October (2nd Saturday of the month) and collected 7,448 lbs Tv/Monitors, 2,791 lbs electronics, 154 lbs. appliances, 271 lbs tires, and 1,636 lbs fluorescents bulbs. We held two Household Hazardous Waste collections with a great turnout at each event. We started a rechargeable battery & cell phone collection in June and this is going well. We promoted the annual pesticide jug collection for the MN Dept of Ag in July. Staff also set up a booth at the County fair on recycling and reusing. Staff attended required trainings, & BWSR academy, Annual MAWD meeting, along with many other trainings in person and on-line.

CliftonAllenLarson conducted the 2023 Annual Watershed Audit.

Current and Future Goals

The District plans to work with local partners to implement the 1W1P, and look forward to continually working to increase conservation BMPs across the Watershed. We will continue working with local partners for the restoration of Florida Creek. Complete the Ditch improvement projects that are ongoing in the District. Work with landowners on water quality and quantity concerns. Continue to work closely with LQP County on managing the LQP County Environmental Services office.

The Watershed District Board of Managers and staff would like to express our appreciation for the support given to our organization by the various County offices and personnel, as well as the Commissioners of Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine, & Lincoln Counties. We appreciate the opportunity to work with each of you in meeting the goals of the Watershed District, in our efforts to successfully manage and monitor the waters of the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed District.

Prepared by Trudy Hastad, Administrator