



Ditch Retrofits are Good News for the Red River

August 2014 Snapshots



Pictured top to bottom, Ditch #9, #32 and #33 after side inlet and buffer strip installation.

For many of us, ditches are a nondescript part of the landscape, but the reality is that ditches serve a vital drainage function on land throughout the state. While they do a great job in helping channel water off the land, sometimes they take sediment with them, which can cause problems. In Clay County, the Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD) is partnering with local landowners and using a Clean Water Fund (CWF) grant to retrofit three of the county's ditches to help keep that sediment on the land.

The three ditches, #9, #32, and #33, have a combined length of 16 miles and a combined watershed area of 22 sections. The ditches outlet directly into the Red River of the North, which provides 86% of the City of Moorhead's residents with water. The Red River is already listed as impaired for turbidity because of sediment in runoff, and those higher levels of sediment load increase treatment costs for that drinking water.

The BRRWD retrofit installed side inlet sediment controls and buffer strips along the entire length of all three ditch systems. These practices will keep an estimated annual 2,900 tons of sediment on the fields along the ditches instead of traveling downstream to the City of Moorhead and other areas. The retrofitting will move the Red River toward its water quality goals and should also help Moorhead reduce its water treatment costs.

Recognizing the need for a fix, the BRRWD partnered with the ditches' local landowners, and matched the CWF grant with \$190,000 in local matching funds to get the job done. Equally impressive, these conservation practices were installed in the ditch systems well before they were required. Thanks to their hard work and commitment, the buffers and side inlets are now part of the legal ditch systems. As a result, the Red River of the North has improved water quality, and landowners have reduced the maintenance costs of the systems. That's a win for everyone involved.

