

New London collaboration stretches grants



Kayakers paddle the Middle Fork River in New London. The city and the Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District are working to cut sediment and nutrient loading to reaches of the river with help from Clean Water Funds.

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Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District

Establishing a water management project allowed the ‘City on the Pond’ to build funds, augmenting Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District stormwater treatment projects made possible through Clean Water Fund grants from BWSR



“If you can find the gatekeepers who understand the city, its people, its connections, and share your vision with them, they are the answer to realizing that vision.”

— Jonathan Morales, MFCRWD program manager

Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District (MFCRWD) constituents made stormwater management and improved stormwater quality in the New London-Spicer area clear mandates from the start. Part of the district’s long-term stormwater strategy focuses on areas of current or projected development pressure in New London and Spicer.

In 2015, the watershed district received a Clean Water Fund Accelerated Implementation grant to conduct stormwater modeling for the

cities of Spicer and New London in Kandiyohi County. The study’s goal was to produce a prioritized list of urban stormwater practices that would be the most effective at reducing sediment and nutrient loading to reaches of the Crow River. Nest Lake, just downstream from New London, is impaired for nutrients.

The grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) allowed the district to hire Wenck Associates. The firm identified “hotspots” and developed a list of



Left: Neer Park in New London’s city center will benefit from Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District projects that filter urban stormwater. **Middle:** Fourth-graders from New London-Spicer explored an urban shoreline restoration. **Right:** A raingarden is slated to be installed this summer in New London’s Mill Pond Park. The project grew out of an accelerated implementation Clean Water Fund grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, and the Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District’s work with the city.

about 20 prioritized projects estimated to cost about \$1.8 million.

Morales presented the list of projects and their potential effects to the city councils for their feedback. He hoped to garner interest in installing some of the practices.

“In my first meeting with the city of New London, I was asked why we don’t just do all the projects. We talked about how to prioritize the projects,” Morales said.

Accelerated Implementation grants do not fund implementation. Their main purpose is to set up targeted future projects. The next step was to figure out how to fund installation. New London arrived at a collaborative solution.

Morales contacted New

London City Engineer Chuck DeWolf. Together, they devised a plan to schedule many of the priority projects in conjunction with the city’s planned street reconstruction. Coordinating with the city vs. retrofitting existing systems dramatically cut costs.

For example, the cost of one retrofit was estimated at \$120,000. Installing it as part of the street reconstruction brought that cost down to \$5,000.

“The city was going to be doing these street projects anyway. Rather than retrofitting, you are working with an existing hole in the ground. You can spread the budget a lot farther and get more projects accomplished with the same amount of funds, if you are working in

collaboration,” Morales said.

The MFCRWD Board of Managers used its statutory authority to establish a basic water management project to fund implementation. Establishing a project allows a watershed district to levy local taxes to pay for it. In this case, the city petitioned the district to establish a project. The project has been established for a 15-year period — starting 2016 — during which the funds will be available.

In 2019, the MFCRWD received additional funding, a \$160,250 Clean Water Fund grant from BWSR to install the Top 5 prioritized projects within the city of New London. Those include two iron-enhanced sand

filters, one rain garden, one infiltration trench and one tree trench.

While grant funding allows for speedier implementation, New London’s water management project allows funds to build up over time and practices to be installed over a longer period. Collaborating with the existing street reconstruction plan over 15 years gives the district and the city the flexibility to pursue construction when the best opportunities present themselves.

“What makes this all happen is the relationship with the city and the watershed district. They see the value in the projects and the collaboration,” Morales said.



Tree trenches were installed in New London.