

ON BOARD WITH THE WHETSTONE RIVER RESTORATION

After months of extensive research, meetings, discussions, and paperwork, the proposed plans for the Whetstone River Restoration Project have been completed and will be presented by the Upper Minnesota River Watershed District at a public hearing 7:00 pm on Monday, February 23 at the Ortonville Community Center located at 200 Monroe Avenue in Ortonville. The hearing will include a presentation of the project by Houston Engineering who was hired to do the initial study required to begin the process. There will also be reports from the DNR and BWSR and a time for public questions and comments before the actual motion by UMRWD to approve the project.

When the Whetstone River was diverted into Big Stone Lake in the 1930's, the goal was to supplement the water supply within the lake. Unfortunately, the diversion resulted in large amounts of silt and debris pouring into the lake - especially during spring melting and rains - and added to major flooding throughout the years (remembering 1997, 2001, 2010!). The diversion also altered the hydrologic regime within portions of both the Minnesota and Whetstone Rivers. The proposed project diverts a portion of the discharge from the Whetstone River entering Big Stone Lake and will restore the historic hydrologic connection to the Whetstone River whose old, historic channel joins the Minnesota River downstream from Big Stone Lake. It will also reestablish the downstream floodplain and floodplain wetlands along the lower Whetstone River to the beginning of the Minnesota River. In addition, floodplain areas of the Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge will receive ecological services restoration from increased flows.

This project is exciting as its benefits are numerous. It will aid in flood mitigation, should increase water clarity and lower silt accumulation. At present, especially when flooding occurs, the water flowing from the Whetstone into the south end of the lake not only brings in silt and debris but also negates any flushing of the same from the Minnesota River's flow from the north and out south end. Also, more water entering the Refuge would benefit wildlife in the area with increased natural water flow.

Of course, a major undertaking like this comes at a price. The estimated cost of the project is \$5,000,000 to be funded in part by a grant from the Clean Water Fund. A minimum of twenty-five percent of the project will be paid through bonds from the Upper Minnesota River Watershed District. The bonds will be repaid in part by donations from local entities and through an ad valorem tax levy.

Please mark your calendars for 7:00 pm on Monday, February 23rd and take time to be a part of this important project for the improvement of beautiful Big Stone Lake. For more details, please refer to the UMRWD website www.umrwd.org or stop in the District office at 211 2nd St. SE, Ortonville, MN. Many individuals, organizations and government entities have worked very hard to bring this project to fruition. Your interest and support would be much appreciated.