



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
St. Paul District

Information Paper

Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration: Section 1135, Lower Otter Tail River Wilkin County, Minnesota



Lower Otter Tail River – Corps of Engineers drop structure, 2014.

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Location/Description

The study area is located in a rural setting in Wilkin County just to the east of Breckenridge, Minnesota, approximately 180 miles northwest of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Otter Tail River is located in the upper portion of the Red River Valley watershed.

A major reach of the river upstream of Breckenridge, Minnesota, was the subject of a flood control project constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the early 1950's. It involved straightening, cleaning enlarging the river for drainage improvement to local agriculture. The overall length of the river in this reach was reduced from 18 miles to 11 miles as a result of the project. The straightened channel decreased channel length, increased channel grade, increased channel conveyance, increased bank erosion, and reduced the flood profiles in the lower Otter Tail River watershed.

Approximately 60 years after construction the Lower Otter Tail River is characterized by unstable banks, excessive sediment loading, and degraded in-stream

and riparian habitats.

Status

The Buffalo Red River Watershed District requested a study on December 14, 2015. In April 2016 the St. Paul District received \$50,000 to initiate a feasibility study. A Federal interest determination was made August 2016. A Feasibility Cost Share Agreement must be executed between the Corps and the watershed district before work on the feasibility study can begin.

The feasibility study will evaluate an array of alternatives designed to improve the ecosystem habitat within the previously straightened portion of the Lower Otter Tail River, and will identify the alternative which produces the most National Ecosystem Restoration benefits.

Potential alternatives include the construction of rock riffles structures to create diversified river pools and the reconnection of river meanders that were cut off as part of the project completed in the 1950s.

Authority

The study is being conducted under the authority of Section 1135 of the 1986 Water Resources Development Act, as amended.

Fiscal

The first \$100,000 of study costs are Federally-funded. The remaining study costs will be split 50-50 between the Federal government and the non-Federal sponsors. The design and construction costs are cost shared with the Federal government being responsible for up to 75 percent of total costs, while the remaining costs are funded by the non-Federal sponsor. The total Federal contribution is limited to \$10 million. The lands, easements, rights-of-way, relocations and disposal areas necessary for construction, operation and maintenance of the project are the responsibility of the local sponsor.

Federal funds allocated to date \$50,000