



Restoration Complete: Checking in on Manston Slough

May 2015 Snapshots



Wilkin County's Manston Slough was once a lush, 2,500 acre shallow wetland complex, home to waterfowl and aquatic species. That all began to change in the late 1800s with construction of State Ditch 15, which began to drain the area. After ditch construction was completed, over 75% of the historic wetland basin was converted to cropland and remained that way through the 20th century.

Efforts to farm the basin were thwarted over years by continued water flow from upstream, flat topography and slow drainage. Over the years, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Minnesota DNR (DNR) started acquiring property in the drained basin with hopes that someday the area could be restored.



An aerial view of the Manston Slough.

Roughly 10 years ago, the Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD) led a group of agencies, including the DNR, USFWS, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), the Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation District, the Wilkin County Commissioners, Ducks Unlimited (DU), and local landowners in the pursuit of an appropriate, feasible, and lasting plan to restore the historic basin. The proposed project was so significant that in 2003, then-Governor Tim Pawlenty named the Manston Slough Restoration project as one of his Clean Water Cabinet Pilots.

After a study of the project area, the partners concluded that the project should restore natural wetlands, provide increased habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife, improve water quality, provide important ground water recharge to the Buffalo River aquifer, and provide flood damage reduction to downstream residents and infrastructure.

Before construction could begin, the partners had to gain support from local landowners, road authorities, and secure over \$6 million in funding from a variety of grants, agencies, and landowners. Over \$1 million in funding was secured through BWSR and the DNR. In 2013, with funding, permits, and 1,615 acres of easements secured, construction finally began. Work on the project was completed last fall, with just some minor seeding and cleanup remaining to complete this spring.

The project restored approximately 1,150 acres of wetlands. In addition, the NRCS secured permanent Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) easements on 2,053 acres in and around the project perimeter, at an estimated cost of \$3.3 million, which will help protect and improve the quality of the wetlands. A number of best practices have been implemented to help the new resource thrive, including structures that manage water flow to protect both aquatic life and vegetative growth.

"One of the most remarkable things about this restoration is how so many agencies came together to make this multi-purpose project a reality," BRRWD Administrator Bruce Albright said. "It's a model we hope to use successfully again in the future."