

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Watershed Formalizes Request to Freeborn County for Assistance**

Albert Lea, MN – On March 7, 2017, the Shell Rock River Watershed District (SRRWD) Board of Managers voted to formalize a request to Freeborn County for assistance. According to Brett Behnke, District Administrator, “We’ve been discussing funding options with the County since July of last year. The support of the County in the form of this petition is a crucial next step in our ability to proceed with the Fountain Lake Restoration Project. We’re hopeful that the County will thoroughly review our request and agree that this option best serves our community.”

Motivated by overwhelming community support, the SRRWD has been preparing to dredge Fountain Lake since 2003. Through the implementation of projects in the tributary watershed (upstream) such as, carp removal, installation of fish barriers, renovating failed septic systems, installation of buffer strips on farm land and several other projects, the District is well positioned to dredge the lake with a greater environmental impact for the watershed in totality.

According to Andy Henschel, Director of Field Operations for the SRRWD, “The Fountain Lake Restoration Project is on track. The Confined Disposal Facility (CDF), the site that will receive the dredge spoils, will be ready in August. The (SRRWD) team and I are ready to proceed with the bidding portion of dredging Fountain Lake.”

A significant portion of the District’s funds for project completion are generated from the local option sales tax imposed within the City of Albert Lea. A large amount of these sales tax funds have been used to fund projects outside of city limits, but within Freeborn County, in preparation for complete watershed improvement. The SRRWD has leveraged \$14 million in sales tax dollars and received \$21.9 million in outside funds, a 156% match to the benefit of Freeborn County citizens and businesses. Added Behnke, “While the district has been proactive in obtaining millions of dollars in outside funding, a project of this size requires up-front funding alternatives.”

SRRWD Board Chairman, Dan DeBoer stated, “The SRRWD values our strong working relationship with Freeborn County and we look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts in improving our community. It’s time to dredge the lake.”

In a letter to Freeborn County Administrator John Kluever, dated February 28, 2017, Behnke states, “Clearly, this is a great time for us to reaffirm the strong working relationship between the SRRWD and Freeborn County that has developed over the years. As the municipality that appoints our Board of Managers, Freeborn County plays an integral role in the direction and success of our efforts. The fact that the lakes, streams, ditches, and natural resources that are under the purview of the SRRWD are located 100% within Freeborn County further solidifies the need for us to continue our collaborative efforts.”

The SRRWD was formed in 2003. The Freeborn County Board of Commissioners appoints seven managers to serve a three-year term to the SRRWD board. The District is governed by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), the state's soil and water conservation agency.