

WATERSHED WEEKLY

MARCH 13, 2026

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BOARD MEETING

The Shell Rock River Watershed District Board of Managers hosted their monthly board meeting on March 10, 2026, at 8:30 AM. The meeting was recorded and uploaded to the District's website: www.shellrock.org. Agenda and minutes are also available.



DREDGING TO START THIS SPRING

At their meeting earlier this week, the Board of Managers of the Shell Rock River Watershed District approved motions that will commence final dredging of Fountain Lake, culminating the multi-year effort to improve water quality in Fountain Lake.

This final phase includes the removal of approximately 600,000 cubic yards of accumulated sediment from the Main Bay (East Basin), Bancroft Creek, and portions of Bancroft Bay. Active dredging is expected to begin this spring, and to take approximately two years to complete.

Upon completion, the Fountain Lake Restoration Project is expected to have removed between 1.7 and 1.8 million cubic yards of sediment from Fountain Lake. The sediment removal is a major step toward improving water quality and moving the Lake closer to delisting it from Minnesota's Impaired Waters List. The project also advances the goals outlined in the One Watershed, One Plan Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, developed with support from local and state partners.

The Watershed District began active dredging in 2018, utilizing \$7.5 million in state funding and \$9.5 million in local option sales tax funds. Leveraged funding allowed the District to complete the first two phases of dredging between 2018 and 2021, removing approximately 1.2 million cubic yards of accumulated sediment from West Main Bay, Edgewater Bay, and Dane's Bay.

"Today's actions represent the culmination of years of planning, funding coordination, and collaboration among local governments, state agencies, and community stakeholders working to restore and protect the health of Fountain Lake," said District Administrator Andy Henschel. "The District staff and Board of Managers are proud to be a part of this monumental project and excited for the community, who has provided overwhelming support throughout the project, to benefit from the positive impact it has and will continue to have for generations."

Additional details about project timelines and construction activities will be shared as they become available.



LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Administrator Andy Henschel and SRRWD Board managers continue to meet with legislators this week and have valuable conversations about permitting and the local sales tax renewal.

Under Minnesota state law, watershed districts do not have the authority to impose a local sales tax. Instead, a city or county must adopt a sales tax on behalf of a watershed district and dedicate the proceeds to water improvement projects.

In 2005, the City of Albert Lea, the Minnesota Legislature, and local voters approved a half-cent sales tax to support the Shell Rock River Watershed District. Sales tax revenue is often used as the required local match for state and federal grants. To date, this local investment has helped leverage nearly \$56 million in grant funding for watershed projects.

These funds have made major efforts possible, including the Fountain Lake dredging and channel restoration, the Albert Lea Lake Dam and Fish Barrier, the Pickerel Lake Dam and Reclamation, and many additional projects that improve water quality, habitat, conservation, and flood storage across the watershed.

This sales tax expired in February 2026. The City of Albert Lea will again ask the Minnesota Legislature for permission to place a half-cent sales tax question before voters in November. This would not be a new sales tax, but a continuation of the existing one. However, the City is proposing that future proceeds be divided, with half continuing to support the Shell Rock River Watershed District and half dedicated to City projects.

A common misconception involves the difference between a local option sales tax and a property tax. Most notably, a sales tax is paid by anyone making purchases locally – including visitors, commuters passing through, and shoppers from outside the area – which helps spread the cost beyond local property owners. Thank you for your continued support!



ADOPT A DRAIN

SRRWD staff, Leah Stadheim, reminds residents that snow is in the forecast. Be shovel ready! Snow can block grates and inlets, preventing water from entering the stormwater system. Regular snow removal is essential to keep these systems functioning properly.

The Adopt-a-Drain program is a fun and important way for people to help keep their community clean and protect local lakes and rivers. When it rains or snow melts, water flows into storm drains on streets and in neighborhoods. Unlike water from sinks and toilets, stormwater does not go to a treatment plant—it flows directly into nearby streams, rivers, and lakes. If trash, leaves, or pet waste are left near drains, they can wash into the water and cause pollution. By "adopting" a drain, residents can promise to safely check it, clear away litter, and make sure water can flow freely. This simple action helps prevent flooding, keeps waterways healthy for fish and wildlife, and shows how even small efforts can make a big difference for the environment.

The City of Albert Lea is offering an incentive for everyone who signs up and commits to keeping their drain clean. After signing up, please visit the Shell Rock River Watershed District office to pick up your 2026 compost permit!

Sign up at www.shellrock.org.



FREE FAMILY WEBINARS

Sessions start March 25

Learn about or sharpen your outdoor skills with these upcoming online webinars in our Minnesota outdoor skills and stewardship series. Each webinar begins at noon on Wednesdays and last less than an hour. These offerings are shorter than in-person opportunities, require no travel and fit into busy schedules.

Contact Benji Kohn for additional information at benjamin.kohn@state.mn.us or 651-259-5178.