



Cormorant Lakes Watershed District

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2024 Annual Report

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The Cormorant Lakes Watershed District (CLWD) was formed and approved by the State of Minnesota Water Resources Board (now the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources - BWSR) on August 22, 1966. The primary mission of the CLWD is to protect and enhance the quality of waters within its jurisdiction and to ensure that appropriate decisions are made concerning the management of streams, wetlands, lakes, groundwater, and related land resources, which affect these waters.

This report covers the primary activities for the year 2024.

Managers and officers were: Ellis Peterson - Chairman; Sam Blattenbauer - Secretary; Mike Foley – Treasurer; Tony Nistler-Manager & Jeffrey Moritz -Manager. Other associates were Liz Larson- Administrator, Colton Utecht (left employment Sept 2024) & Owen Reding (started October 2024) -Shoreland Technicians and Cy Abel - Inspector. Retained District Engineer Erik Jones.

The watershed held 30 meetings, including regular monthly, mid-month (as needed), special meetings and hearings during the year. 32 permits were approved during the year addressing shoreline repair (e.g. riprap, fill, and retaining wall), culvert replacement, tree removal, shoreline buffer re-establishment and other. Cormorant Lakes Watershed District requires no permit fee and provides an opportunity for the Managers to communicate with property owners.

The 2024 Estimated Market Value for the district is \$987,758,700 as compared to 815,308,600 in 2023. A general budget for 2024 of \$183,600 with a levy amount of \$103,200 was approved at a public hearing on September 5th, 2023. These funds were augmented by grant and reserve funds to support an approximate net zero change from the 2023 budget.

Projects and activities completed in 2024 included the following:

- The Watershed continued its support for prevention and control of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), through watercraft inspections and education. The Board has dedicated funds every year to programs within the District to support AIS prevention. \$5,000 was awarded to the Big Cormorant Aquatic Invasive Species boat inspections program. This program pays for boat inspectors to work at the public accesses to make sure boaters are complying with AIS prevention methods.
- The Upper Cormorant AIS management project, targeted at reducing curly leaf pondweed growth was renewed for 2024. This pilot project began in 2009. The program was paused for the 2023 year and resumed in 2024. The program was enhanced to include bog or weed removal with the funds. Each parcel on Upper Cormorant Lake is levied a \$250/per owner levy amount per year. The program's levy will continue until the end of 2026.
- The Cormorant Lakes Watershed District continued utilizing their new website. The website was updated with a slightly new format.
- Lake inspections continued, identifying issues of zoning compliance, runoff control, silt fencing and other needs to be addressed.
- Managers attended various Lake Association meetings held in June 2024. At some of the meetings, managers spoke on topics that the CLWD has been working on.
- Support for testing (Secchi disk, chlorophyll, and phosphorus) of CLWD lakes clarity and nutrient loading continued.
- The CLWD held two Advisory Committee meetings in order to get advice on various topics including: budgeting, dredging advice, district wide education, and permitting software.
- Minutes from 2024 meetings are posted on the CLWD website, www.clwd.org.
- Haga Kommer merged with Benson, Leitheiser and Soberg as our Accountant. Haga Kommer's CPA's completed the 2023 annual audit.
- Watercraft inspections were conducted on Big Cormorant Lake during the boating season in an effort to monitor and educate people using the public water access points and prevent the spread of invasive species. CLWD financially supported the program.

- The CLWD has been a part of the Ottertail Watershed. Meetings continued throughout the year. The CLWD Administrator is on the Technical Advisory Committee & Manager Jeff Moritz is on the Policy Committee.
- Lyle Hansen indicated that he will be retiring at the close of the 2023 year. Tony Nistler was appointed to continue in his role at the open of the new 2024 year. Tragically, Lyle Hansen and his wife, Barbs, both passed away in 2024. Both had been valuable Managers of the CLWD. Deepest condolences to their families.
- Inspector Cy Abel was no longer able to continue as an inspector for the remainder for the 2024 year. Managers and Staff did inspections in the summer of 2024.
- CLWD initiated meetings to learn more about permit software vendors. After review, CLWD signed up to develop an online permitting software system with Houston Engineering.
- CLWD was represented at the Cormorant Daze event held in Cormorant Village in August 2024. The booth had a lot of information from both CLWD & SWCD. As this was the first time we have been to a public event like this, we learned a few new things for next summer and plan to be involved in the next year.
- As part of the Otter Tail Watershed partner, we have a shared position with Becker SWCD and Pelican River Watershed District. In September, Colton Utecht left the position. After consideration, Owen Reding was hired by the partners to continue as Shoreland Technician. This position is mostly funded by Otter Tail Watershed funds. The position has been very valuable to the CLWD.
- CLWD was able to help implement a protection project on the Blue Water Bay Lake Association. The project was to stabilize the shoreline and channel along with reinforcing the road. Approximately 200 feet was completed in the Fall of 2024. The project was developed by Houston Engineering and supplemented by Otter Tail Watershed funds.
- The 2024 tree program continued. In the Spring of 2024, we gave out trees to members of our District. At the lake association meetings in June, our Managers spoke about our tree program and future plans to target lakes on a rotational basis. For the 2025, CLWD will be starting with the most at-risk lakes in the District, Middle & Upper.

Focus areas for 2025

- Blue Water Bay preservation project, continue with next phase(s).

- Continue the partnership with Lake Association members and Advisory committee members to share information and hear issues, successes and concerns.
- Continue education and support for efforts with respect to issues related to the Watershed.
- Implement new ideas for the tree program.
- Offer more engineering support to public on projects.
- Create more outreach content with the public.
- Attend Cormorant Daze on behalf of CLWD.
- Re-convene the Advisory Board. Request more input from Board.
- Attend Otter Tail Technical Advisory Committee & Policy Committee meetings.
- Maintain the public calendar on website.

Prepared by:

Liz Larson, Administrator

Respectfully submitted:

Sam Blattenbauer, Secretary