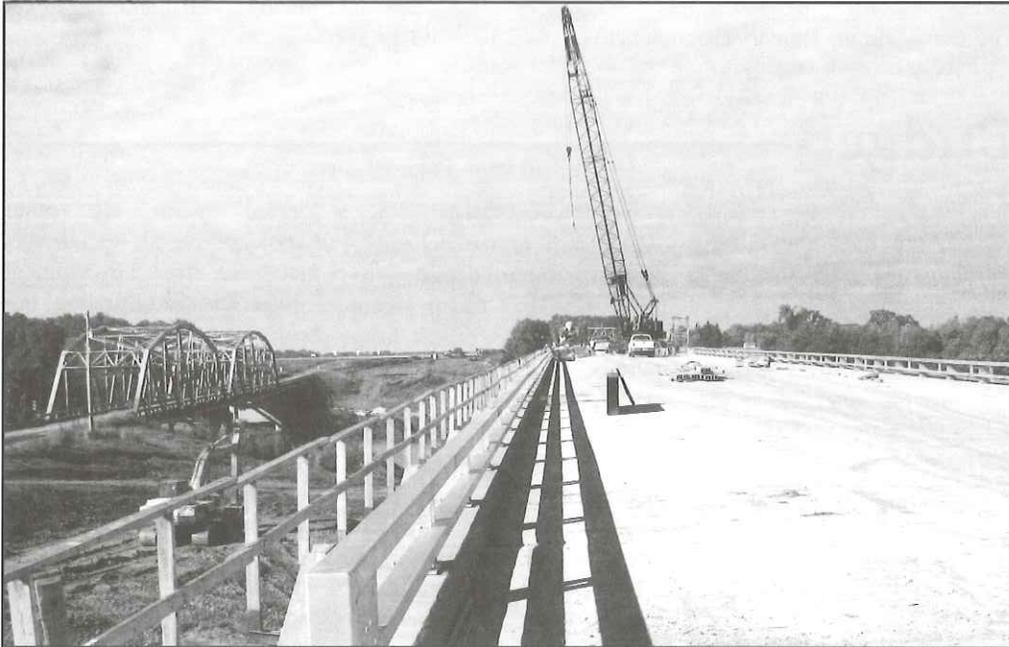


Polk County *Newsletter*

Fall 2010



New bridge dwarfs the old structure

New Thompson Bridge opening set

The new Thompson Bridge over the Red River was to be opened to traffic — as required in the construction contract — on Friday, Oct. 1.

“That’s the day that the detour signs will come down and the bridge opened to traffic,” Richard Sanders, Polk County engineer, has stated.

While the new bridge was to be put into use on Oct. 1, it was uncertain a week earlier if all of the approach work would be completed. “If the two sub-contractors don’t get their work done, we’ll use gravel approaches to the bridge on both sides of the river through the beet harvest,” he says. “The contract calls for a \$2,500 per day fine to be assessed if the work isn’t completed by Oct. 1. The important thing is to get the new bridge into service as soon as possible.”

Regardless of the approach work issue, officials from Polk and Grand Forks counties had invited

state and federal officials — and the public — to join them for an opening event planned for 1:30 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 1. The program for the event is in the process of being developed. The opening event will stop traffic for a few minutes.

Located midway between East Grand Forks and Climax, the bridge connects Polk County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 9 in Minnesota with Grand Forks County Road 7 in North Dakota. Some 1,100 vehicles a day regularly cross the river there.

Sliding down the banks

The old bridge was determined to be hydraulically, structurally and geometrically deficient. Regularly flooded during the spring run-off periods, it had been literally sliding down the riverbank on one, if not both sides of the river for several years. The old crossing was closed to the public in

See THOMPSON BRIDGE, Page 6

Preliminary budget calls for 1.67% hike in tax levy

The Polk County Board of Commissioners has adopted a “preliminary” budget for 2011 that will require a 1.6784 percent increase in the levy to pay for the \$18,897,119 of operational expenses that are dependent upon local property taxes.

The preliminary budget, which was required by Sept. 15, can be reduced but cannot be increased when the final budget is set in December.

Reduction not likely

While a reduction is possible, it is more likely that there will be no change when the final budget is set.

The property tax-dependent levy of \$18,897,119 million listed above compares to the \$18,585,185 that was levied for operations in 2010.

The 1.6784 percent levy increase, which matches the base levy limit that was set for Polk County by the State of Minnesota, will generate about \$312,000. This new revenue will pay for much of the about \$400,000 in additional personnel costs to be incurred in 2011, including the \$50 a month increase in the cafeteria

See BUDGET, Page 2

Be sure to vote on Nov. 2

In race to determine new sheriff

Erdman, Juve advance to General Election ballot

Polk County Sheriff candidates Sgt. Barb Erdman and Patrolman Jim Juve finished first and second, respectively, in the only contest in the Primary Election. They now advance to the General Election on Nov. 2.

Sheriff Mark LeTexier is not seeking re-election after serving two four-year terms.

The only other county race on the General Election ballot will be in the Fourth Commissioner District where

three-term incumbent Warren Affeldt, rural Fosston, has competition from McIntosh Mayor Bruce Haaven.

Both County Attorney Greg Widseth, Crookston, and Second District Commissioner Warren Strandell, East Grand Forks, are unopposed for re-election.

In the Primary Election held on Aug. 10, Erdman of Crookston, polled 2,259 votes

(63 percent). Juve, who is based in Fosston, received 745 votes (21 percent). Finishing third was Patrolman Trent Stahlecker, Crookston. He received 557 votes (16 percent).

All three candidates are current member of the Sheriff's Department, Erdman for 23 years, Juve for five years, and Stahlecker for 12 years.

Total property valuation increases to \$3.335 billion

As determined by the Polk County assessor for the purpose of assessing property taxes that will be payable in 2011, the valuation of real estate in the County now totals \$3,335,114,300.

This new total amount of valuation represents an increase of \$268,104,000 over 2010, or more than 8%.

- Of the new total valuation amount, 57.4% is for tillable agricultural lands.
- 29.7% is for residential properties in cities.
- Seasonal recreational properties account for 5.4%.
- Commercial properties account for 3.7%.
- Industrial properties for 2.1%.
- Building sites (rural homes and garages on 1 acre) account for 4.0% of the total.
- All other, 1.9%.

New construction accounted for \$19,592,400 of the total valuation increase. The balance of the increase is the result of the re-valuation of existing properties.

Budget

Continued from Page 1

benefits plan, the step increases that are built into salary schedules and some other more minor adjustments.

The new wage agreements developed earlier this year do not provide cost of living salary increases for 2010 or for 2011.

(See wage negotiations on Page 10)

The 2011 budget includes the expectation that the county will receive the \$1,417,633 in County Program Aid (CPA) that it has been certified to receive. It also includes about \$350,000 in interest income, a \$276,865 refund from the county's insurance carrier, and \$328,452 in other income.

Unallotment factor

Should an unallotment of some part of the county's certified amount of CPA occur, adjustments will be required.

Overall when budgets are finalized, Polk County operations in 2011 will require about \$59 million.

This figure includes state and federal aids, operational support and grants that the county receives to provide and maintain programs, and services that it is required to provide by state and federal law. The vast majority of these programs are

located with all other

located with all other Crookston-based social services in the Government Center. The "Pro Building" has been vacated and shut down thus eliminating the expense of having to heat and otherwise maintain it.

located with all other Crookston-based social services in the Government Center. The "Pro Building" has been vacated and shut down thus eliminating the expense of having to heat and otherwise maintain it.

The upper floor of the Government Center became available for re-use when District Court and Court Administration moved to the new Polk County Justice Center more than two years ago.

One-stop service

The new Taxpayer Service Center allows persons to pay their taxes, record documents, check property values, and more in a single stop. The Center has staff from the Auditor-Treasurer, Assessor and Recorder's offices

A lingering issue that is expected to be taken care of yet this year is the demolition and removal of the tax-forfeited Wayne Hotel. Efforts to save the three-story building located in downtown Crookston and convert it into a 24-unit, income-based housing facility have not been successful. With the interior floors now collapsing, the building has been determined to be unsafe for anyone to enter it.

Project completed

In addition to trying to maintain current operations and protect jobs as much as possible, the county has been able to complete a project in the Government Center where the upper floor has been remodeled for use by Social Services and space on the first floor (parking lot level) has been used to create a Taxpayer Service Center.

The Income Maintenance and Child Support units of Social Services, which had been located on the 110-year-old Professional Center, are now



Taxpayer Service Center has single stop counter

Taxpayer Service Center gets it done in one stop

The newly created Taxpayer Services Center in the Polk County Government Center is an office at which county residents can record property and other documents, check on their property values, pay their property taxes and more all in a single stop.

Supervised by Michelle Snyder, the Taxpayer Service Center is made up of a blend of county employees from the Auditor-Treasurer, the Assessor and the Recorder departments.

These employees are being cross-trained to deal with a number of transactions and issues as they work to become more customer-friendly in the delivery services.

When complex issues need to be addressed, the comingled staff is complemented by those more specialized, including Auditor-Treasurer Gerald Amiot, Assessor Rob Wagner and Recorder Michelle Cote.

The center is located in the former Auditor-Treasurer's office on the first floor (parking lot level) of the Government Center.

Hired in May

Snyder, an accountant who has extensive business experience, was hired in May to supervise the Center. The supervisor position was developed through a restructuring of the former



Michelle Snyder

deputy auditor position that had been held by Vickie Hughes before she retired on Dec. 31, 2009.

Hughes, who was a specialist in the area of tax computation, had worked for Polk County for 38 years.

"The team has been very helpful and friendly," Snyder says of the new office and her position. "They have been teaching me a lot about county government as we work at developing a strong taxpayer services center. Things are going very well and I'm enjoying it. I'm really pleased to be here."

A native of New Ulm, Minn., Snyder graduated from Hastings, Minn., High School in 1979 after

her family had moved there. She earned a B.S. degree in accounting from Winona State University in 1983 and worked in various positions for Bremer Bank for 19 years. She met her husband, Jim, while with Bremer. They moved to Crookston in 1985.

Snyder has also worked at State Workforce Centers in Crookston and Thief River Falls. For the past six and one-half

years, she had been a senior accountant at Arctic Cat in Thief River Falls.

She and Jim, who is president/marketing manager at Bremer Bank in Crookston, have two grown children. Jacob is an environmental field technician for Polk County Environmental Services and Megan is a marketing content analyst at Digi-Key in Thief River Falls.

Montague's honored for their service to community

Polk County Commissioner Bill Montague and his wife, Carol, were recently honored as "Experienced Americans" for their many years of business, personal and civic involvements and accomplishments in Crookston.

Before joining the County Board in 2001 as the commissioner from the Third District, Montague served as a Crookston volunteer firefighter for 32 years and as a member of the Crookston Police Reserve for more than 30 years.

The Montague's owned and operated Montague Flower Shop for 37 years before selling the business in 2003. They also

owned Willow & Ivy for five years before selling it in 2002.

Carol has been the piano accompanist for music groups in the Crookston Schools for many years and is the organist at First Presbyterian Church where she sings in the choir and plays in the bell choir. She also accompanies Bill, a soloist, who has sung at many weddings and funerals over the years.

Both Bill and Carol (Pester) are natives of Crookston. They were married in 1964. Bill attended both the University of Minnesota and the University of North Dakota before graduating from a floral school short course in Denver

Former summer intern named 4-H coordinator

Emily Espersen, who grew up on a family dairy farm near Brainerd, Minn., and earned a bachelors degree in animal science at the University of Minnesota-Crookston this year, became the new Polk County 4-H Youth Development coordinator in May.

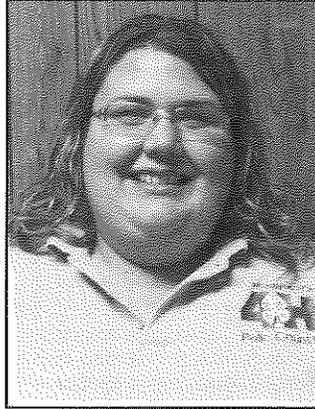
Espersen had previously worked as the summer 4-H intern in preparation for the 2009 Polk County Fair.

"The bonds that I developed with the youth and volunteers then were priceless. When the program coordinator position became vacant (following the resignation of Aaron Rongen in March), I was eager to apply and thrilled to be appointed," she says.

"I'm very excited about this opportunity and look forward to strengthening the county's 4-H program by working with our youth, 4-H families and the volunteer workers." The energetic Espersen was on the job as the program coordinator for the Polk County Fair this summer.

She joined 4-H when in sixth grade, mainly to show cattle, but quickly learned that the program had much more to offer.

She is a graduate of Brainerd High School, and was the president of her 4-H club, worked as a 4-H ambassador, and even took part in the National Dairy Conference. She was also an active member of The National FFA Organization, and served



Emily Espersen

as a county dairy princess for three years.

In the program coordinator position, Espersen works under 4-H Youth Development Extension Educator Karyn Santl, Roseau, who following the retirement of Bob Quinlan, assumed the programmatic and leadership responsibilities for four additional northwestern Minnesota counties, including Polk.

Quinlan completed 34 years with the Extension Service in May. Donna Rae Carlson continues as the support specialist at the McIntosh Extension Office.

The Polk County 4-H Program coordinator is a 32-hour position. Espersen will not be in the office on Wednesdays and will adopt her schedule to accommodate evening and weekend events and activities.

Agassiz Trail cited for construction, design

The Agassiz Recreational Trail was one of seven trails in the nation honored for their construction and design of projects at a Capitol Hill ceremony during National Outdoors Week in a Washington, D.C., in June.

The achievement award was presented by the Coalition for Recreational Trails organization in recognition of outstanding use of Recreational Trails Program funds.

Built on abandoned railroad grade in Polk, Norman and Clay counties, the multi-use trail runs through Fertile, Twin Valley and Ulen as it parallels State Highway 32.

The trail was developed through a joint powers agreement. Gordie Gudvangen, Fertile, is the trail administrator and also one of three directors-at-large on the Board of Managers of the Agassiz Recreation Trail.

Peterson: Law protects downstream communities

Communities and residents along the Red River of the North, who fear that they might be negatively affected by the proposed Fargo-Moorhead Diversion project, need not be overly concerned, according to Congressman Collin Peterson.

Speaking at a meeting of local government officials and residents in East Grand Forks on Aug. 26, Peterson said, "Under federal law, the Corps (of Engineers) can't build a project that puts more water on other people. It won't happen."

In addition to alleviating downstream concerns about new threats to their properties and livelihoods, Peterson used the meeting to promote construction of water retention projects that would reduce run-off into the Red

River. Financing for retention efforts capable of storing 1 million acre-feet of water, he said, could include \$500 million — at \$50 million a year over 10 years — as a part of the next Farm Bill.

In the plan, watershed districts and the states of Minnesota and North Dakota would be obligated to match the federal dollars. The \$1 billion investment in flood controls and measures, he said, could build from 400 to 500 smaller projects in the two states.

The plan, as outlined by the Congressman, would also include draining down wetlands in the fall, increasing lake levels in the spring, using a scaled down version of the waffle plan, and ag land tiling that would store water underground.

New Polk County Plat Book available

The new, full-color Polk County Plat Book is available for sale in the Taxpayer Service Center (former Auditor-Treasurer's Office) at the Polk County Government Center in Crookston.

Printed in an 8½ by 11-inch format, the book sells for \$35 plus tax. The previous plat book was published in 1999.

Polk County Attorney's Office Activity Summary Jan.-June 2010

Felony & Gross Misdemeanors	
Complaints prepared	189
Sentencing hearings	191
Committed to state prison	31
Probation violation hearings	256
Committed to state prison	14
Total committed to prison	45
Jury trials	2/1
Cases with convictions	2/0
Misdemeanors	
Guilty pleas	66
Trials	2
Appeals	
Polk County Attorney Office	4
Minnesota Attorney Gen. Office	0
Juvenile Cases	
Delinquency petitions	21
Child in need of protective services (CHIPS) petitions	30
Delinquency hearings	171
EJJ probation	0
CHIPS hearings	117
County Welfare	
Commitment petitions*	11
Commitment hearings	30
Guardianship petitions	10
Guardianship hearings	10
* Mentally ill and/or inebriate	
Child Support	
Child support hearings	90
Paternity hearings	143

Demo of Wayne now in planning

The Polk County Board is expected to award a contract soon for the demolition of the Wayne Hotel with the building to be down and gone by late November or early December.

Requirements in the removal bid package that were developed under contract by the Widseth Smith Nolting & Associates (WSN) engineering firm in Crookston include meeting regulations dealing with possible health and environmental issues and that historical documentation is met.

The process of advertising for bids for the demolition and removal of the building, located in downtown Crookston, was initiated in early September.

A walk-through and inspection of the property by 16 interested bidders was held Sept. 16-17. Bids were to be opened on Sept. 28. A contract is expected to be awarded in early October.

Funding failed

The County Board's decision to move forward with demolition of the three-story building follows failure in a third try at getting outside funding for an organization to convert the hotel into 24 income-based housing units.

With restoration — as opposed to demolition — in its best financial interests, the county had agreed more than a year ago to provide a deferred 30-year, interest-free loan of \$250,000 to assist in a restoration project. The cost of demolition had been estimated at that amount several years earlier.

Constructed in the 1890s, the condition of the once majestic hotel — also known as The Palace Hotel — has deteriorated significantly in recent years... to the point where several interior floors have collapsed.

It has been vacant since 1996. Polk County inherited the legal obligation to serve as caretaker of the property for the State of Minnesota when the building tax-forfeited on Sept. 3, 2003.

Space reallocated

Situation returning to normal as Government Center work ends

The turmoil that has dominated the Polk County Government Center — and affected a few other county office buildings, too — during the past year and a half is over.

The last of the Social Service Department employees, who were without an office home during the remodeling project, have now moved into their new, permanent quarters.

Those “refugees” were forced into temporary workstations when their former home, the Professional Center building, was closed down before new space in a restructured Government Center could be made ready for them.

All in one building

All Crookston-based social services are now housed on the first and third floors of the Government Center.

Also a part of the project was the remodeling of the second floor (parking lot floor level) of the Government Center to allow for creation of the new Taxpayer Services Center.

This office provides a convenient, one-stop location for many of the services that previously required separate stops at the offices of the Auditor-Treasurer, Assessor or Recorder. The work on this floor also included the development of a new License Center.

Reallocation of space in the Government Center building was begun after Polk County District Court, the district judges, and court administration moved to the new Polk County Justice Center/Northwest Regional Corrections Center facility in early 2008.

With their departure, the entire third floor of the Government Center was left open for another use.

Temporary locations

But before that space could be remodeled for use by Social Services, the 34 workers in that department who had been working in the 110-year-old Professional Center had to be moved to temporary work settings.

Of those 34, 10 members of the Child Support Unit were moved to the second floor of the Justice Center. Also relocated to the Justice Center were the family based service providers and a couple of social workers who went to the District Court's Liaison Room.

The others — income maintenance workers and social workers — were squeezed into various locations. A few went to the Polk County Human Service Center in East Grand Forks. A couple of others went to the Polk County Social Service office in Fosston. The rest, about 17 or 18, were jammed into every conceivable spot on the first (lower) floor of

Government Center.

Short-term space

The Pro Building, located in the block northeast of the Government Center, was purchased by Polk County in 1992 to provide short-term office space for the Income Maintenance and Child Support units of the Social Services Department, the County Attorney's office, Minnesota Public Defenders unit, Polk County Probation Services and Migrant Health.

Twelve years later in 2004 issues involving safety, fire and other building code regulations, age, heating and cooling inefficiencies and its overall general condition triggered a decision by the County Board to close the building when it couldn't justify spending a lot of money to update a building that had such a limited future.

The Board noted then that the building, which had been built as a hospital and later served as St. Vincent's Nursing Home, had not been designed to serve as an office building, was very expensive to maintain and that the time had come for it to be replaced.

Different options

Initially, the replacement process involved the possible acquisition and remodeling of the former Crookston Central High School building. When the possibility of spending more than \$4.5 million to remodel that already 50-year-old building proved unwise, an addition to the Courthouse (now Government Center) was considered.

That proposal was shelved, too, when it became obvious that the growing shortage of jail beds wasn't just a spike in the numbers that would go away. With that realization, the plan to construct the Polk County Justice Center and Northwest Regional Corrections Center facility moved forward.

In addition to Polk County District Court and Court Administration, the Justice Center portion of the new building located in southwest Crookston, also houses the Polk County Attorney's Office, the Minnesota public defenders unit, and the administrative offices of Tri-County Community Corrections (TCCC) and its Probation Services division.

TCCC also operates the Northwest Regional Corrections Center jail.

All of the agencies involved in the court and corrections process are now under one roof in a highly efficient setting. The future of the Pro Building is likely that it will be removed and the land made available for redevelopment.

Buseth becomes new jail nurse

Stephanie Buseth joined the staff of Polk County Public Health on Aug. 24 to become the new fulltime jail nurse at the Northwest Regional Corrections Center in Crookston.

A registered nurse with over 30 years of experience in a variety of nursing experiences, Buseth became the jail nurse as a part of several duty assignment changes within Public Health.

The internal changes began when Jocelyn Haaven, who had worked in long-term care and case management, resigned to take a supervisory

position at the Altru Clinic in Grand Forks.

Doreen Narlock, who had done family home visitation, health promotion and part-time jail nursing, then moved into Haaven's former position.

Angel Korynta, who had been the fulltime jail nurse for the past two years, moved to Narlock's former position.

A native of Williston, Buseth earned her registered nurse designation at the Trinity Hospital School of Nursing in Minot, N.D., in 1980.

She has worked in long-term care, renal dialysis, served as coordinator of the Healthy

Start Community program for reducing infant mortality among Native Americans at Trenton, N.D., and worked in medical-surgery, nursery, post partum and intensive care units as a part of hospital nursing.

Buseth and her husband, Oliver, moved to East Grand Forks earlier this year when he took a position as a licensed drug and alcohol counselor at Glenmore Recovery Center in Crookston.

Tri-County Community Corrections, which operates the jail, contracts with Public Health to provide the nursing service for the facility.



Stephanie Buseth

Thompson Bridge

Continued from Page 1

early September to accommodate the realignment of the approach roads leading to the new bridge.

The Robert R. Schroeder Construction Co. of Glenwood, Minn., has completed construction of the bridge. The two sub-contractors are the firms that had not completed building the roads leading to the new bridge last week.

Virtually all of the cost of the project is covered by almost \$7.2 million in the American Taxpayer Recovery Act (the federal economic stimulus program) funding that was allocated for the bridge.

When right-of-way, approach roadwork, engineering and other costs are considered, Polk County's local requirement will total about \$600,000. That amount is more than \$400,000 less than what was initially anticipated, according to Sanders.

The local requirement money will come from the county's share of state road aid dollars that are collected through the gas tax. Grand Forks County also has a local requirement share for costs on its side of the river.

Polk had lead role

In the fall of 2007, at the suggestion of Sanders and Grand Forks County Engineer Richard Onstad, the two counties — with Polk County in the lead role — began working to have a plan in place in the event that federal money would become available ahead of the scheduled 2012 replacement date.

With soil borings done and design work all but completed by structural engineers at the Widseth Smith Nolting engineering firm in Alexandria, Minn., the project was essentially "shovel ready" when the stimulus funding became available.

"It was our intention to have a plan on the shelf and ready so that we could move ahead as fast as possible if federal money were to become available," Sanders says. "We had positioned ourselves

for replacement in 2012 but, if new money became available, we wanted to be ready to do it sooner and it worked out."

3 feet above 1997 crest

The new \$7.4 million, "high and dry" bridge has a deck elevation that is 13 feet higher than that of the old structure. Its deck is three feet above the level at which the Red River peaked during the flood of the century in 1997. The bridge has a curb-to-curb width of 40 feet that will provide for much safer conditions, especially for farm equipment and truck traffic. The old bridge, which has only a 24-foot wide deck and only 16 feet of vertical clearance, had a rating of only 34.10 (on a scale to 100) when inspected in the fall of 2006.

The new 12-span steel and concrete beam structure has a total length of 1,209 feet. Because of the instability of the Red River Valley soils, it has been constructed so that it can be adjusted to accommodate soil movements that occur.

The sub-structure of the old bridge experienced major movement on the North Dakota side of the river during the summer of 2004. Following a resetting of the west truss then, the bridge moved back to within an inch of the 2004 position in just two years. The subsequent resetting that was required in 2006 resulted in damage to a jacking plate that precluded future adjustments.

Approaches realigned

Approximately 7,900 feet of approach reconstruction was needed to transition existing roadways to the new bridge. The new bridge has been constructed approximately 200 feet downstream from the existing bridge.

The new alignment removes the vertical curve present in the old crossing and meets a design speed of 55 mph, which matches the regulatory speed for the roadway.

As a part of the contract, the old bridge, constructed in 1940, is to be removed yet this fall.

Summer road projects now completed

Summer has come and gone and the 2010 construction season is complete. Projects completed this year were:

Thompson Bridge (CSAH 9) over Red River and approaches.

CSAH 57 from Trunk Highway 75 to CSAH 13 — grade widen and bituminous surface.

CSAH 58 from CR 225 to CR 238 (concrete portion) — crack and overlay.

This work was completed using state gas tax funds, American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds and bridge bonding funds.

We also had some major flood damage this spring and completed all the needed repairs with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Federal Highway Way Administration (FHWA) disaster funds.

This year was the second year that we did not replace any township bridges. We have several bridge plans submitted and approved but they are awaiting funding.

If townships have bridges that are structurally deficient, hydraulically deficient, or functionally obsolete (too narrow for today's equipment), they should call in and talk with us and we can look at surveying and replacing them. — **Richard Sanders, Polk County engineer**

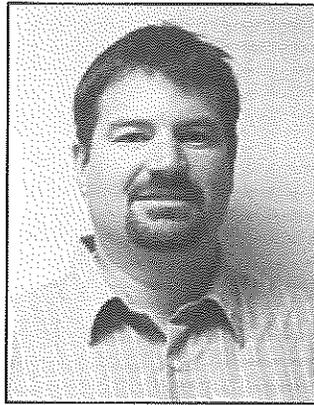
After trial period, Solid Waste Department is merged into Environmental Services

The Polk County Solid Waste Department has been merged into Polk County Environmental Services.

The operational change eliminates the "interim" Solid Waste Department administrator title given to Jon Steiner when the one-year trial merger was begun in late January 2010. He now permanently heads Solid Waste Department activities under the umbrella of the Environmental Services Department that he has headed since 1998.

All under one office

The advantage of the merger is that Environmental Services now administers all areas of solid waste disposal and planning, recycling, and household hazardous waste. The merger maximizes operational efficiencies and compliments



Jon Steiner

programs.

The Environmental Services Department also includes Planning and Zoning.

The organizational change follows the Jan. 31, retirement of Willard "Bill" Wilson, who had been facilities manager of

the Waste to Energy Incinerator in Fosston since it was constructed in 1988. Wilson had also supervised the other areas of the Solid Waste Department.

Although originally organized as a single department, Environmental Services and Solid Waste had operated separately since the mid-1990s.

The Solid Waste Department is comprised of 24 employees who staff the Waste-to-Energy Incinerator and Materials Recovery Facility located in Fosston, along with the municipal solid waste, demolition and ash landfills located near Gently.

Larson promoted

In a restructuring of operations, Chief Combustion Operator Ron Larson has been promoted to facility opera-

tions manager for both the Incinerator and Material Recovery Facility. Larson has been a Solid Waste Department employee since the Incinerator was constructed. "His knowledge, expertise and leadership made him the ideal person to assume this role," according to Steiner.

In Crookston office

Seven Environmental Services employees are based in Crookston. They staff the Planning & Zoning, Solid Waste Planning, Transfer Station, Recycling, and Household Hazardous Waste functions.

"The process of departmental merger will be ongoing as Polk County looks to take advantage of opportunities that benefit the overall program," according to Steiner.

SOLID WASTE PROGRAM UPDATES

Beneficial Use Determination: Polk County has received formal approval from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) for it to use the waste combustor ash from the Incinerator in the construction of county roads. Previously, single demonstration projects needed MPCA approval for use of this ash. Attaining the MPCA Beneficial Use Determination eliminates the need to seek approval to use ash in individual road construction projects and promises to save Polk County from incurring future ash landfill disposal area construction costs. Earlier this summer, a six-mile stretch of county road was constructed using approximately one year's worth of incinerator ash.

Incinerator stack tests: Polk County's Air Permit to operate the Incinerator requires a periodic performance stack test to ensure that pollution control equipment at the Incinerator is operating properly. Due to Polk County's superior performance on the last stack test performed, the Incinerator was allowed to comply with a three-year stack test schedule. In April 2010, Polk County was again required to complete a performance stack test. Due to the hard work of all staff at Polk County's Solid Waste facilities, Polk County was once again able to demonstrate the facility's compliance with air permit emission standards.

Electronic Waste Collection Program:

Polk County has again secured a contract to recycle residential electronic waste for the balance of 2010. The contract allows Polk County to accept residential televisions, computer monitors, hard drives and laptops at no charge to county residents. This is the third year of the Minnesota electronic waste recycling program and disposal ban.

Landfill Permit renewal: Polk County has submitted an application to the MPCA for renewal of its permit to operate the Polk County Landfill near Gently. Permits for landfills are good for five years and then must be renewed. No major changes to the landfill design are anticipated for this permit renewal, based upon current rate of waste delivery.

Industrial Stormwater Permits: The MPCA recently received a General Permit for industrial stormwater for the State of Minnesota. The Industrial Stormwater Permit requirements found in the General Permit were intended to apply to select industrial activities. Among those activities, solid waste transfer stations, recycling centers, landfills and incinerators were targeted. Various modifications to these facility operations are required to be made within 12 months of the General Permit effective dates. These changes will impact how waste is collected, handled, processed, stored and disposed of at these facilities.

Steam contracts: The Incinerator sells the steam generated from the combustion of solid waste to three food-processing companies located in the Fosston Industrial Park. The steam customers — Minnesota Dehydrated Vegetables, SunOpta Ingredients and Specialty Products — are able to use this source of "green energy" to help meet their energy demands. The revenue generated from the sale of steam is used to off-set the cost to operate and maintain the Incinerator. The existing steam contracts expire at the end of 2010. Steam contracts for 2011-2013 are being offered to these valued steam customers.

Recycling contracts: Polk County contracts with the Occupational Development Center (ODC) to staff and operate its recycling centers in Crookston and Fosston. The ODC has worked under contract with Polk County to perform recycling activities since the mid-1990s. The existing recycling contract will expire at the end of 2010. Polk County is exploring options to contract with the ODC for recycling services for 2011. However, due to declining tonnages, escalating costs and infrastructure changes Polk County is evaluating various recycling program alternatives. — **Jon Steiner, administrator, Polk County Environmental Services**

Mid-week timing proved very lucky

June tornado rips up County Park Campground

Park Host Jim Wenger and a friend were in his camper at the Polk County Park on Maple Lake when it hit... the June 17 tornado that tore up dozens of mature trees and destroyed 20 new aluminum boat docks and shore ramps.

A number camper units and privately owned boats and pontoons that had been tied up to the docks were also damaged or destroyed, some ending up in the trees of the twisted mess that was left behind.

The owner of the Mentor C Store died that day from injuries received when his convenience store was destroyed. Two people who were working in the store were injured and hospitalized in Crookston and Grand Forks.

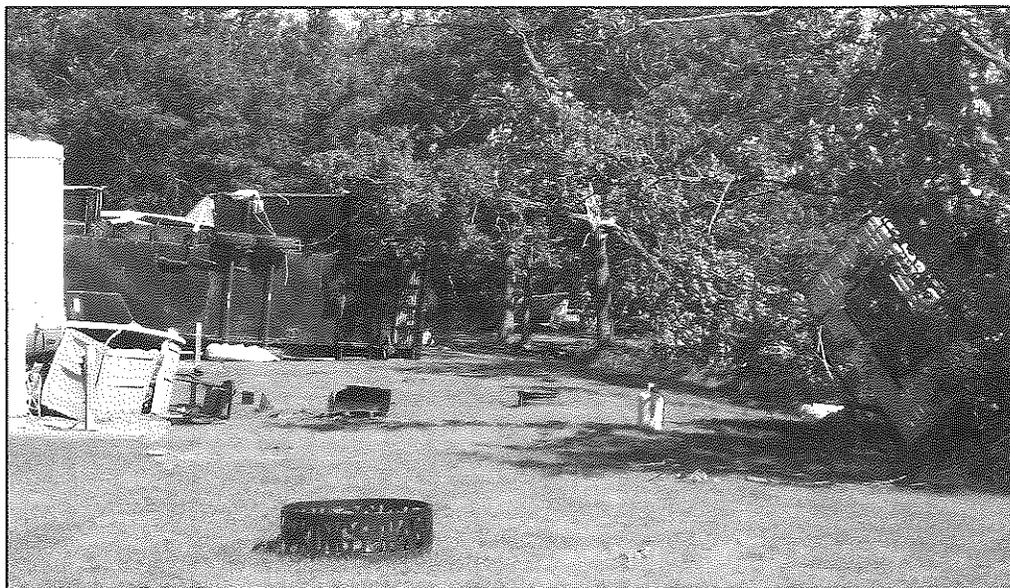
No one at the campground was seriously injured.

Watching weather on TV

"Actually, we were watching the weather on TV at the time," Wenger says of the storm. "Outside of what (weatherman) Hutch Johnson was saying, we had no indication that a storm was coming at us. That is, we had no warning until we heard what sounded like a freight train."

The Wenger camper escaped serious damage. Several other units parked in the campground for the summer weren't nearly as fortunate.

"There were probably only about seven people in the campground at the time," Wenger says. "No one was seriously injured, although one woman went for a little ride when her tent was picked up just as she was getting into it. It was fortunate that the storm hit on a Thursday. Had it happened on a Friday, Saturday or a Sunday, the situation could have been a lot



Storm damage included ripped up trees, overturned campers and boats

worse. The campground would have been full."

Storm shelter used

Several campers had time to reach the storm shelter in the lower level of the bathhouse that was built just a year ago.

The \$50,000 in docks that were destroyed, along with a light on the bathhouse, have been replaced by FEMA funds. The mess is cleaned up and, minus a lot of mature shade trees, all is back in place, according to Wenger.

The lack of any warning that day occurred for several reasons, including that the Instant Alert Plus warning system was not working.

"Unfortunately, the company that provides the service was having problems with the system that day," Nancy Shafer, deputy director of Polk County Emergency Management, relates. "The system was quickly restored but it wasn't working at the one time when we really

needed it. We weren't able to activate it that day."

The warning system is designed to provide instant and accurate information about weather events and other emergency situations through automated messages that are sent to home, business or work telephones; to cell phones; and/or to e-mail addresses. To receive the messages, persons need only register for the free service.

Established through a business partnership between the Polk County Sheriff's Department and Honeywell Business Solutions, the alert service is funded by 9-1-1 monies. It is tested on the first Wednesday of each month.

Sign-up link

The web link for sign-up is: <https://iaplus.honeywell.com/PolkCountyAlert>.

Residents need to create a user name, password and PIN (personal identification number) as a part of registering.

Persons, who do not have e-mail, who would like assistance in getting registered or who might desire a presentation for their group or organization, can call Shafer at 218-470-8275. Shafer is the director of Polk County's 9-1-1 Dispatch Center.

In addition to county residents, persons, who do not live in the county but have properties on the lakes or stay in the campground can, register for the program.

County vets receive \$4.8 million

The Polk County Veteran Service office assisted county veterans in receiving more than \$4,827,000 in compensation and pension benefits during 2009, Veterans Service Director Les Goodwin has announced.

That total amounts to an increase of \$527,000 over 2008. Over the past 10 years, the compensation total is up more than double from \$2,407,039 received by county veterans in 2000.

Montague heads Social Service

Polk County Commissioner Bill Montague, Crookston, is the new chair of the Polk County Social Service Board. He assumed the position on July 20 when he succeeded Commissioner Warren Affeldt, Fosston.

Commissioner Craig Bunes, Crookston, is the new vice chair and will become chair in July 2011.

Lay-Board Member Cathy Gutterud, Lengby, is the new secretary of the board. The secretary

position alternates annually between the two lay-board members, Gutterud and Paula Waters, Crookston.

In addition to the five county commissioners, the make-up of the Social Services Board includes the two lay-board members.

Gutterud's reappointment to the board for another two-year term was recently approved by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Time is right to look at how business might be done

Changes in the works as County looks to future

Some changes are likely in the works — others are under way or have already been made — in the way that Polk County government is organized and will operate in the years ahead.

"The County Board is always looking at ways to be more efficient in the way that the county operates," this year's Board Chair Warren Strandell notes in explaining why Springsted, Incorporated was recently engaged to analyze how the county does its business. A public sector advisor, the St. Paul firm provides strategies and options for project funding and the management of government organizations.

The assessment was not meant to address specific problems or to promote definite changes in how things are done but instead was initiated to seek out new efficiencies... how things might be done better and possibly at a lower cost.

Timing is right

"The aging of some key county staff," Strandell says, "makes this a good time to look at how things are done and how some re-organization might serve us better. Just because things have been done a certain way for years and years, doesn't make them the best way to do things in today's world.

"As a county, we need to be looking at meeting future needs in the most efficient ways possible," he says. "It is all about controlling costs, while still providing needed services at a time when decisions about funding, which translates to taxation, are so critical."

Changes underway

Two changes were in progress prior to the assessment provided by Springsted.

One of those changes involved the merger of the Solid Waste Department (the Waste-to-Energy Incinerator and Materials Recovery Facility at Fosston along with the municipal solid waste, demolition and ash landfills near Gently) into Polk County Environmental Services. The second change created the Taxpayer Service Center in the Government Center.

The move to bring the Solid Waste Department under the umbrella of Environmental Services was begun in late January following the retirement of Willard "Bill" Wilson, who had headed up the solid waste operations since the incinerator was opened in 1988.

Merger finalized

The merger was made permanent in mid-summer several months ahead of the completion of the 12-month trial period.

The Taxpayer Service Center was created as a part of the remodeling of the Government Center after District Court

and Court Administration moved to the new Polk County Justice Center two plus years ago.

With staff from the offices of the Auditor-Treasurer, Assessor and Recorder departments, the Taxpayer Service Center provides services previously performed with visits to those separate offices.

Also in the remodeling project, all of the Crookston-based social services are now located in the Government Center. This has allowed for the closure of the Professional Center, which had become impractical to maintain.

Advertising has also begun for additional staffing for the Information Technology (IT) staff, which has been operating with two people.

The critical need for additional IT staffing was noted by department heads, who made it known during a recent meeting with commissioners that when a computer system is down nothing gets done. That situation, they said, happens far too often. They noted that the demand on the IT staff has become so great that problems aren't being addressed nearly as quickly as needed.

County administrator

Likely to be completed by later this year is a possible upgrading of the county coordinator position to that of a county administrator.

The expected change could involve a change in the role of current Coordinator John Schmalenberg. As administrator, he would have additional authority over day-to-day operations of the county.

Statewide, 43 counties now have administrators as opposed to coordinators. Another 10 counties have finance directors, finance managers, or others with responsibilities in the financial area who work under county administrators.

Some smaller counties don't have either a coordinator or an administrator.

Job description

A job description for a county administrator position is being developed. Advantages of having a county administrator instead of a coordinator include that many decisions can be made on a more timely basis. It also establishes that the administrator is the operations manager for the county the person empowered to carry out the directions of the County Board.

A revised organizational chart that will outline who reports to who is also in the works. Other changes are likely to be made in the months ahead as new efficiencies are sought and options, including several that were noted in the Springsted report, are further investigated and considered.

Maps Available

Polk County maps showing the street and avenue locations in the rural addressing system are available at the Highway Department and Auditor-Treasurer's Office.

The cost is \$2 each.

County Board Meeting Times

8:30 a.m. on the 1st Tuesday
of the month
1:20 p.m. on the 3rd Tuesday
of the month
8:30 a.m. on the 4th Tuesday
of the month

**All meetings are
open to the public**

County Commissioners

Dist. 1 — Craig Bunes
Dist. 2 — Warren Strandell, chair
Dist. 3 — Bill Montague
Dist. 4 — Warren Affeldt, v. chair
Dist. 5 — Don Diedrich

About new septic rules: We're still waiting

Changes to the long-standing Minnesota Septic System Rules (referred to as SSTS Rules) were made at the state level in 2008. Counties were required to adopt those changes in their local zoning ordinances by February 2010.

Although the deadline has come and gone, the controversy surrounding that mandate remains.

Polk County, along with several of our neighboring counties, informed the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) at the end of 2009 that it would not adopt the SSTS Rules as required due to the increased cost to construct compliant systems and unnecessary administrative requirements to implement and enforce those rules.

By the deadline to adopt the SSTS Rules,

roughly 75 percent of counties did not adopt the SSTS Rules. The specific reasons that many of these counties declined to adopt the SSTS Rules varied from county to county.

Taken up by legislature

With little progress made in resolving the matter, the issue spilled into the 2010 legislative session.

Local legislators took up the issue and reset the deadline for counties to adopt the SSTS Rules to accommodate a newly formed committee tasked with identifying and resolving many of those underlying issues.

The MPCA has since begun engaging many of these counties in an effort to identify the barriers to adoption of the SSTS Rules.

The committee formed out of the 2010 legislative session will begin its work after the

conclusion of the 2010 construction season.

Will enforce current rules

For now, Polk County will continue to implement and enforce those SSTS Rules currently found in the Polk County Zoning Ordinance in our effort to protect Polk County's surface and groundwater resources. Going forward, Polk County will work with our neighboring counties and the MPCA to find an acceptable solution to the SSTS Rule issues.

For more information about the septic system program in Polk County, or to inquire about permits for septic systems or land use permits, please contact Polk County Planning & Zoning at 281-5700 or 1-800-482-6804. — **Jon Steiner, administrator, Polk County Environmental Services**

No 'cost of living' hikes in new wage contracts

The first two years of the new wage agreements that have been approved by the six organized Polk County employee groups do not include cost of living salary adjustments.

While there are no salary increases for 2010 and 2011, the agreements provide for a "re-opener" of negotiations in 2012, the third year of the contracts.

The "no wage increase" feature in the first two years demonstrates that employees recognize the budget problems that are being faced by the county as the result of lost revenues and the County Program Aid (CPA) reductions that have been made by the State of

Minnesota.

The State of Minnesota has its own bigger budget problems.

The provisions of the new wage agreements also apply to those county employees who are not organized and to department heads and supervisors. The 102 employees in the Social Services Department are not organized.

The agreements provide for a \$65 per month increase in the county's cafeteria benefits plan in 2010. This wage package improvement covered the increase in the cost of the basic health insurance policy. With the increase, the total monthly contribution by the county for the cafeteria benefits plan in

2010 is \$615. The agreements provide for a \$50 per month increase in the cafeteria plan for 2011.

There were other minor wage package improvements in the different agreements, including expansion of the time that qualifies for after hours pay, adjustments for uniform expense and/or a one-time cash payment for employees who do not qualify for after hours pay or wear uniforms.

Commissioners Bill Montague and Don Diedrich represented the County Board in the negotiations.

The organized employee bargaining groups and number of members in each are:

- American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees — 66 office and public health nurse workers.

- International Union of Operating Engineers ("the 49ers")-Maintenance Division — 21 Highway Department maintenance workers.

- 49ers-Engineering Division — 11 Highway Department engineers.

- 49ers-Solid Waste Division — 29 Transfer Station and Incinerator workers.

- Law Enforcement Labor Services (LELS), Local 216 — 8 dispatchers in the Sheriff's Department, and Local 57 — 21 Sheriff's Department deputies.



Report Welfare Fraud

People who give false information or withhold facts in order to receive Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) aid, food stamps, general assistance, childcare or medical assistance may be guilty of fraud.

You may wish to report: Persons not reporting income; Incorrect reporting of persons living in the home; Misuse of food stamps or Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards; Falsifying of information on aid applications; Unreported property and assets; Persons receiving dual benefits (from more than one state)

What you should report: **Who** — The name of the person; **What** — Fraud suspected; **When** — Date of occurrence; **Where** — Address of person

Call the Polk County Sheriff's Office:
1-218-281-0431

or the toll free
Minnesota Welfare Fraud Hotline
1-800-627-9977

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

You may remain anonymous

Polk Co. wins award for child abuse prevention

Polk County is one of 21 counties in Minnesota presented with the Blue Ribbon Award for leadership in the ongoing effort to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The award was presented by Circle of Parents at the annual Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota Conference in St. Cloud in April. Circle of Parents is a state organization based in St. Paul that works to prevent child abuse.

Also recognized at the conference was Sarah Reese, a Polk County Public Health nurse and a Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) coordinator.

Reese received the Jerry O'Konski Award for volunteers who have made significant contributions to the effort to prevent child abuse.

A member of the Polk County Child Abuse Advisory Board since January of 2007, Reese was asked to serve as its chairperson and has headed activities that have increased awareness of child abuse/violence and positive parenting skills through programs and activities conducted throughout the year.

Polk County was recognized for the Blue Ribbon Award as a result of the work performed by the Parents Helping Parents Advisory Team, the Polk County Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) and the Polk County Public Health and Social Services departments in collaborating with various non-profit organizations, health care providers and numerous volunteers.

In 2009, the CAPC held a second "Gala for Girls" event that brings girls in grades K-6 out for an evening with their father, grandfather or other adult male role model.

It also held extensive Child Abuse Prevention month activities with the theme Today's Children, Tomorrow's Future: Everyone Can Do "I Thing" to Make Polk County More Peaceful.

Other activities included a widely distributed "Wear Blue Day" challenge flyer, "Month of the Child" activities featuring "The Wubbulous World of Dr. Seuss (Wacky Wednesday)," and "The Wubbulous World of Dr. Seuss" Family Festival.



Sarah Reese

It also included extensive publicizing of CAPC activities on all local media, distribution of information packets to schools and day care providers, large Blue Ribbon Signs displayed in three communities, public library displays with parenting materials, distribution of Parents Helping Parents bookmarks at preschool screenings, and Wakanheza Project training for areas in Polk County.

Other projects throughout the year were the "Kool-Aid Cool Down" in July during which information about how to deal with

stressful parenting situations was distributed, Turn Off the Violence Month in October when the third annual Walk Against Violence was held, a Gift of Time Project in December that focused on dealing with stress during the holidays, a booth at National Night Out, and Wakanheza Project activities that included presentations to two county agencies, one business and the Crookston Chamber of Commerce.

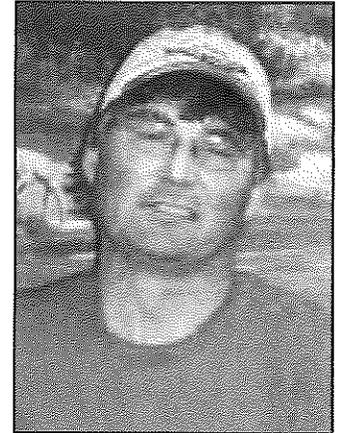
Reese was instrumental in many of projects and awareness campaigns. She served on the Child Abuse Prevention Month Blue Ribbon campaign and worked to create a new project that specifically involved business in promoting the message.

She also served on the "Turn Off the Violence" month campaign, the Gift of Time and Kool-Aid Cool Down projects, and was instrumental in creating, organizing and implementing the annual Gala for Girls project.

As one of three regional SHIP coordinators, Reese is currently serving an eight-county area in a statewide effort to create sustainable, systemic change that supports healthy choices. This posi-

tion is funded by a two-year State Health Improvement Program (SHIP) grant.

For more information about the Polk County Child Abuse Prevention Advisory Board, contact Sue Thompson (218-281-3385 or email sthompson@pcphealth.org).



Scott Balstad

Balstad joins Sand Hill Water Board

Scott Balstad, Fosston, has been appointed to the Sand Hill River Watershed Board of Managers to complete the unexpired term of the late Gordon Sonsteli.

The appointment, which was made by the Polk County Board, is through May 17, 2012.

Sonsteli, who had served on the Sand Hill Board for eight years, died unexpectedly on April 3. He had been reappointed to a three-year term on the board in 2009.

A farmer, Balstad had been recommended for the appointment by the Sand Hill Advisory Board on which he served. He continues to also serve on the Advisory Board of the Wild Rice River Watershed and of the East Polk County Soil & Water Conservation District.

Balstad and his wife, Marlys, have two daughters, Sydney, 13, and Katlyn, 10.



As chair of the Polk County Child Abuse Advisory Board, Sue Thompson, a Polk County Public Health community facilitator, accepted the Blue Ribbon Award for Polk County at the Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota Conference held in April at St. Cloud. At left is James M. Hmurovich, president and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse America, who was the keynote speaker. Also representing Polk County at the conference were Sarah Reese, Karen Brekken, Amy Zabinski and Jenipher Weber. Reese received the Minnesota Circle of Parents' Gerry O'Konski Volunteer Award.

Polk County

Tillable AG Land Value Changes per Township

2010 Assessment

No Changes for Waste Land (\$250/acre), Non-Tillable (\$900/acre), and Wildlife (\$900/acre)

All Wetland Land stays at \$500/acre

All WRP Land stays at \$500/acre

Shaded Area: State 20% Increase (2006)

Add State Increase to Local Effort and Year:

Examples: Reis 2005 +15% Local and 5% State Increases
Eden 2006 +25% Local AND +20% State Increase

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