
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The early European settlers, intent on promulgating agricultural conversion of the land in what is now the lower portions of the RLWD, were immediately confronted with the need for drainage of the land, especially in the flat western Lake Plain and northern Lake-Washed Till Plain. In its historic and natural condition, this area was subject to disastrous spring and summer floods that often ruined crops and destroyed roads, bridges and public utilities.

The drainage was very poor and sluggish, and there were extensive open marshes north of the Red Lakes. There were impassable peat bogs scattered throughout the eastern part of the watershed. Some of these shallow, level peat bogs are underlain by impervious layers of clay, which do not permit percolation. Some wet areas had natural drainage outlets, but they were generally clogged with fallen trees, brush and other debris. Elsewhere, natural drainage meandered through the area with inadequate slope, ineffective outlets or insufficient capacity to accommodate agriculture and settlement activity with the extensive floodplain.

The magnitude of this problem was recognized by the State Government, and in 1893, the State Legislature appropriated \$100,000.00 for drainage in the Red River Valley and created a drainage commission called the Red River Valley Drainage Commission. The commission spent \$182,500.00 in draining and converting wetlands for agriculture in the Red River Valley.

In 1901, the State Legislature created the State Drainage Commission. The commission ordered ditches surveyed in Beltrami, Marshall and Roseau counties. The Lost River Ditch in Beltrami and Polk counties and the New Solum Ditch in Marshall County were completed in 1902. Additional surveys of ditches in Polk and Red Lake counties were made in 1902. The Grand Marais Ditch in Polk County and the Emarville Ditch in Red Lake County were completed in 1903 and 1904, respectively.

The RLWD was preceded by a governmental unit, known as the Red Lake Drainage and Conservancy District, whose territory included approximately the same land.

The Red Lake Drainage and Conservancy District was ordered by the District Court of the 14th and 15th Judicial Districts on February 13, 1920. Little is known of the activities of the board following the organization. The original Conservancy District board became inactive and no successor board members were named following the original appointments. On January 10, 1946, the District Courts of the 14th and 15th Judicial Districts issued an Order whereby there were directors appointed for the Conservancy District. This reactivation was due

to contemplated projects on the Red Lake and Clearwater rivers. Under the Conservancy District, three major projects were completed. They were the dredging of the Clearwater River, the Red Lake River and the Lost River.

After many years of operation, the Board of Directors of the Red Lake Drainage and Conservancy District felt the RLWD could better function under the Minnesota Watershed Act. The board petitioned the District Court for the right to operate under Chapter 112, the Minnesota Watershed Act. A hearing was held in Thief River Falls. On January 25, 1969, the Conservancy District was authorized to operate under and to exercise all the rights and authorities contained in the Minnesota Watershed Act.

The board petitioned the Minnesota Water Resources Board on July 24, 1969, amended January 20, 1970, for a change of name, review of boundary and distribution of managers of the watershed district. A hearing on the matter was held in Thief River Falls on March 31, 1970 and in Kelliher on April 2, 1970. In their Order, the Water Resources Board stated that the principal place of business shall be at Thief River Falls, directed that a description of the land within the RLWD be written, stipulated that the Managers shall have seven members, specified the procedure by which county boards shall appoint subsequent managers and stated the terms of office for the Managers (Appendix 3). The Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians has no representation on the RLWD Board of Managers.

The Minnesota Watershed Act states that the Managers, together with an Advisory Committee, shall develop an Overall Plan for the management of water and other natural resources of the RLWD. The Overall Plan will guide the Managers in their work and can be amended as the need arises. The success of the Overall Plan will depend on the desire of the citizens in the RLWD to initiate action that will help to solve watershed problems.