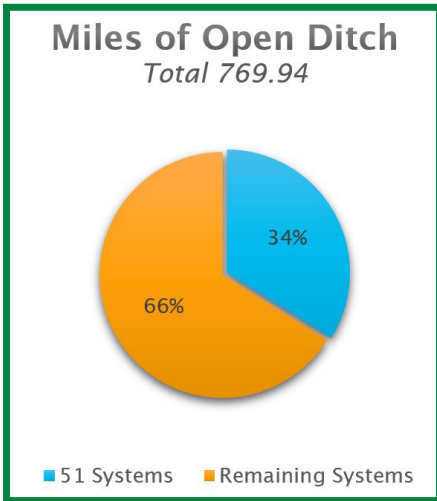


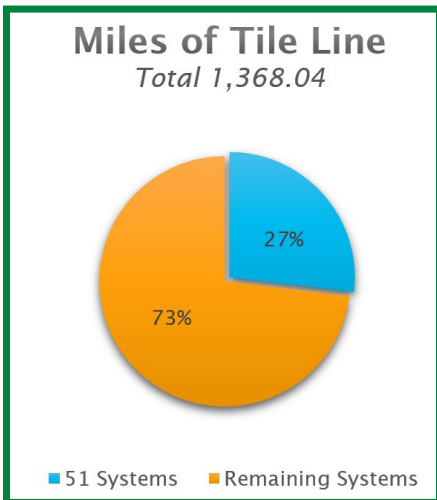


Renville County Ditch Systems: Redetermination of Drainage Benefits



Renville County has other distinct features, but it's agriculture that is front and center. With 987 square miles of land to manage, the Renville County Drainage Department has quite the task of providing administration and maintenance for 769.74 miles of open ditch lines

and 1,368.04 miles of drain tile. The main focus of the department, recently, can be summed up in one word - 'redeterminations.'



You have probably read/heard about the process or, if you're a landowner, you may have already attended hearings regarding your local ditch system. **Formally, Redetermination of Benefits involves 'viewers' (qualified individuals hired by the Drainage Authority) determining the benefits and**

damages for affected parcels and properties of a drainage system and the total value of benefits for the system.

Renville County currently has 151 Judicial and County Ditch Systems, though this number may decrease by combining systems during the redetermination process. In those 151 systems, the total cost of 'original' construction of all systems was around \$10.7 million. With just 51 systems being redetermined in the last 25 years, 34 of those coming last year in 2019, there is a big need and effort to redetermine the remaining systems.

Why is it important to perform a redetermination on a ditch system? First, sometimes benefit lands have not been updated for decades or even a century. When ditch systems are redetermined, the benefit numbers are signed into law, meaning those

numbers do not change until another redetermination is made. There are no inflation changes and the cost of a potential repair cannot exceed the total value of benefits on record. To emphasize the differences, for the current 51 systems that have been redetermined, the original construction cost was \$2.6 million. The current benefitted total, after redetermination, is around \$382 million.

Another aspect of redeterminations is buffer easements. Minnesota buffer law requires public ditches to have a 16.5 foot vegetative buffer along waterways to protect water quality. The process involves purchasing buffer easements from each individual system and assessing them back to the benefitted landowners of that system over the next five years. As of December 2019, there have been 198.97 acres of buffer easements purchased at a cost of approximately \$1.2 million from the 51 completed systems. An additional 802.30 acres of land needs to be purchased from those 51 systems, pending roughly \$6.4 million dollars in state funding to do so.

To assist landowners with the installation of buffers, the Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has Cost-Share funds available to install vegetative buffers to meet the Minnesota buffer law requirements. Seed mixes must be pre-approved by the SWCD before purchase to qualify. Cost-share rates are \$225 per acre for introduced mixed and \$300 per acre for native mixes.

With buffers as just a piece of the overall puzzle, redeterminations continue for Renville County into this year and beyond. The Drainage Department has plans for updates to their inspection process, access to benefit information, and publishing more public data after redeterminations. Additionally the department is scheduled to redetermine 53 more systems in 2020 and 2021, so stay tuned!

Questions? Contact Seth Sparks, Drainage Systems Manager, at 320-523-3746 or seths@renvillecountymn.com.

