Division of Ecological & Water Resources
Region 4 (Southern Region)
21371 Highway 15 South
New Ulm, MN 56073

December 12, 2025

Board of Managers
Buffalo Creek Watershed District
PO Box 55
Glencoe, MN 55336

Subject: Final Engineer's Report for Improvement of Judicial Ditch No. 15 Branch M37, Renville County.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the proposed Judicial Ditch No. 15 Branch M37 improvement project located in Renville County. This letter constitutes the Commissioner's Final Advisory Report in accordance with Minnesota Statutes §103E.301 on behalf of the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

As required under Minnesota Statutes 103E.301, the DNR finds:

1. The detailed survey report is complete, and the plan appears to conform to the general requirements of Minnesota Statutes §103E.

2. The detailed survey report is an acceptable plan to drain the property affected.

3. The Commissioner does not approve or disapprove the plan. We do recommend that the Drainage Authority ensure the project is consistent with the South Fork Crow River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.

4. The proposed drainage appears to be of public benefit or utility under the environmental, land use, and multipurpose water management criteria in section 103E.015, Subd. 1.

5. The commissioner determines that a soil survey is not required for this project.

Discussion of the Improvement

In the FER, the improvement information and scope of work for installing the new tile lines were thoroughly explained. However, no information was provided detailing what is to be done with the existing infrastructure, other than that it "be discontinued". DNR has concerns that, unless measures are taken to ensure that the existing tile is rendered inoperable, the model. Please include detailed information explaining the proposed method(s) for rendering the existing infrastructure inoperable.

Alternative Solutions - Wetland Restoration

- Wetland restoration is discussed as a project alternative in the FER but dismissed due to cost. The report determined 67 acre-feet of water storage is required, and this storage need was evaluated as restored wetlands one foot in depth. Restorations with greater design depth could substantially reduce the overall footprint and the corresponding land cost associated with acquisition. For future projects, DNR suggests considering wetland design elements that extend beyond 1 ft in depth, as this change can drastically reduce the land acquisition requirements for wetland restoration projects, with multiple benefits that extend well beyond mitigation of hydrologic impacts.
- A more robust analysis incorporating more significant wetland depth, varying basin bathymetry, and multiple smaller restoration locations based on site-specific conditions could highlight the benefits of mitigating any increased peak flows or duration while providing additional benefits ranging from habitat improvement to flood damage reduction potential. Furthermore, evaluating multiple scenarios with varying wetland alignments, sizes, and depths may identify less extensive wetland restoration options that can accept drainage water while still providing significant benefits. A varied approach to wetland restoration could significantly reduce land acquisition costs by decreasing the wetland footprint, making restoration a more competitive and feasible option than an improvement. After evaluation, these scenarios may show that wetland restoration is a viable option and alleviate the need to increase the size of the tile system. We suggest considering alternative analyses incorporating these strategies to explore this possibility further.

Other Considerations/Alternative Measures

- Within the Alternative Measures section on page 10, it states that alternative measures identified within the Renville County Water Management Plan and Buffalo Creek Watershed District Water Management Plan have been considered; however, it excludes the most current and applicable watershed plan. The South Fork Crow River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (SFC CWMP), approved in March 2024, has since replaced these historic plans. It is recommended that this section be updated to reflect the most current watershed plan(s) active in this watershed area.

  -Hydraulic Impacts - DNR appreciates that flow duration clarifications were provided in Table 6 on page 13 of this FER report. The HydroCAD graphs shown for the proposed conditions in Exhibit 6 indicate a sharp drop off in flow towards the end of the descending limb of the graph for all storm

events. It is unusual to see an abrupt reduction in flow characteristics like this. Can this be explained, and/or were assumptions made within the model that account for this sudden drop in discharge?

- Also on page 13, the narrative states that this project area is not located within a Drinking Water Supply Management Area; however, per the MN Department of Health's Source Water Protection Web Map Viewer, this project area is situated in the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and St. Cloud Priority B Drinking Water Supply Management Area. Also, the narrative notes that waters from this project eventually drain to the Minnesota River and ultimately to the Mississippi River. While water eventually makes its way to the Mississippi River, it does not flow through the Minnesota River. This project area is within the Buffalo Creek watershed, which outlets to the South Fork of the Crow River, then to the Crow River, and finally to the Mississippi River.

Please send the response to this letter and/or revised FER, meeting minutes, Finding of Fact, and any Order issued by the Drainage Authority regarding this proposed improvement to the DNR when they become available. In addition, please note that our agency continues to support the use of off-channel storage solutions, such as wetland restoration or similar water retention basins or impoundments, to help reduce flooding and erosion, and, in some cases, provide natural resource and ecological enhancements. The Drainage Authority should continue to pursue opportunities to retain surface water runoff within its existing drainage systems whenever and wherever possible.

Thank you for consideration of this report. Please submit the above-noted documents or any questions about this letter to the Regional Drainage email: Region4Drainage.dnr@state.mn.us.

Sincerely,

Ethan Jenzen Digitally signed by Ethan Jenzen
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DNR Region 4 Drainage