



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

July 8, 2026

Board of Managers
High Island Watershed District
2700 S Broadway
New Ulm, MN 56073

Subject: Final Engineer's Report (FER) for Improvement of Judicial Ditch No. 11 Lateral H2 & H3, Renville County.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the proposed Judicial Ditch No. 11 Lateral H2 & H3 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 Lower Minnesota River West 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 on the Improvement

- The improvement information and scope of work details replacing existing tile with new tile installation; however, limited information was provided within the Technical Specifications stipulating what is to be done with the existing infrastructure. Please include detailed information explaining the method(s) proposed to render the existing infrastructure inoperable, and therefore not providing additional capacity not reflected in the Final Engineers Report (FER).
- The DNR was provided with the Preliminary Engineers Report on February 11, 2026, however, was not notified of a scheduled preliminary hearing, which prevented the commissioner from submitting the DNR Advisory Report in time for the hearing. Minnesota Statute 103E.255 requires that the Advisory Report is filed before the date of the preliminary hearing, which cannot be met without proper notice. Please notify the DNR when preliminary hearings are scheduled so Advisory Reports can be supplied, and this requirement is adhered to.
- The Final Engineer's Report included storm event information in regard to change in discharge within Table 4 (page 11) however, no additional information or analysis regarding discharge volume, duration, and velocity nor hydrographs were submitted. Please note that analysis of these calculations and model outputs is vital in determining whether the model reasonably represents the existing and proposed project conditions cannot be assessed without further model information.
- For the DNR to provide accurate and relevant reviews of improvement reports, future reports must include the following information:
 - o Detailed modeling information such as existing and proposed system routing schematics with subcatchments, conveyances, storage nodes, outlets, and identifying locations of overland flow.
 - o Flow/volume/velocity summaries at critical locations, and representative upstream/downstream hydrographs.
 - o Description of modeling assumptions including but not limited to runoff routing methods, overflow discharge definition, storage definition, roughness values, and any simplifying assumptions built into the model.
- Cumulative Impacts
 - o While it is reasoned within the FER that the increases to outlet flow rates are not significant when compared to the downstream watershed for the various storm events, this justification does not account for cumulative impacts to downstream receiving waters. While the increased peak flow from the 399-acre drainage area may be relatively small compared with the larger upstream and downstream drainage areas, the concern is that a combined effect of incremental increases could meaningfully alter downstream hydrology, channel stability, and flood characteristics over time. This cumulative impact issue is not resolved by comparing one project's flow contribution to the watershed as a whole. Acknowledgment by the Drainage Authority of how incremental increases can collectively affect the system, and how individual projects can mitigate them, should be considered for responsible long-term drainage management.

Alternative Solutions

Wetland Restoration

- We appreciate the evaluation of wetland restorations in this report and encourage the continued inclusion of robust analysis including incorporating varying wetland depths and types based on site-specific conditions, particularly in the upper portion of the watershed. Additionally, it is recommended that wetland restoration not be viewed solely as an all-or-none alternative scenario as this does not evaluate scenarios where partial and/or smaller wetland restorations may be utilized to accept drainage water. Utilizing multiple wetland restorations could significantly reduce land acquisition costs by decreasing the wetland footprint, therefore making restoration a more competitive and feasible option than an improvement. These scenarios, after an evaluation, may potentially show wetland restoration is a viable option and alleviate the need to increase the size of the tile system.

Other Considerations

Alternative Measures

- Within the Alternative Measures section on page 8, the report states that alternative measures identified within the Renville County Water Management Plan and High Island Watershed District Water Management Plan have been considered, however excludes the most current and applicable watershed plan. The Lower Minnesota River West Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (LMRW CWMP), approved in 2023, has since replaced some of these historic plans. It is recommended this section be updated to reflect the most current watershed plan(s) active in this watershed area.

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,



Katie Wigen, EWR R4 North District Manager (acting)

EC:

Haley Byron, DNR, Regional Environmental Assessment Ecologist

Alan Gleisner, DNR, Area Hydrologist

Ryan Fleming, DNR, Drainage Engineer

Al Kerber, High Island Watershed District, Ditch Inspector

Dean Zimmerli, High Island Watershed District, Attorney

Shaun Luker, Bolton & Menk, Inc Project Engineer

Jordan Bengston, Bolton & Menk, Inc. Project Engineer

Seth Sparks, Renville County, Drainage System Manager

Kale Van Bruggen, Rinke Noonan

Rita Weaver, BWSR, Chief Engineer

DNR Region 4 Drainage