

Flood project funds fall far short of needs in northwest Minnesota



Newfolden among communities that could benefit from \$15 million of undesignated funding in the DNR's Flood Hazard Mitigation Program.



A construction crew works on a project to replace a series of culverts on a railroad crossing over the Middle River with a bridge near Newfolden, Minnesota, in the winter of 2023. The work marks the first component of a flood control project to remove part of the city of Newfolden from the 100-year floodplain. The second component of the project requires funding from the Minnesota Legislature before work can begin. Contributed/Morteza Maher



By [Brad Dokken](#)

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GRAND FORKS — Watershed managers in northwest Minnesota are hoping \$15 million of undesignated funding in the Department of Natural Resources' Flood Hazard Mitigation Program budget can help with projects in the Red River Basin.

According to Rob Sip, executive director of the Red River Watershed Management Board — commonly known as the Red Board, for short — lawmakers allocated just over \$49.7 million to the DNR Flood Hazard Mitigation Program during the 2023 legislative session.

That's the largest amount in several years, Sip says, but unfortunately, the Red Board is only getting \$5 million for projects throughout the Red River Basin.

Seven watershed districts — Bois de Sioux, Joe River, Middle-Snake-Tamarac, Red Lake, Roseau River, Two Rivers and Wild Rice — are members of the Red Board.

"We were asking for \$73 million, so it's a little bit short," Sip said. That's where the undesignated \$15 million comes into play.

"We're hoping to have a chance at some of that, and we're not sure how the DNR is going to roll that out yet," Sip said. "So, there's just a lot to know yet about that undesignated \$15 million."

Among the communities that could benefit is Newfolden, Minnesota, where completion of a flood control project is crucial to getting several homes and businesses on the east side of town removed from the 100-year floodplain.

According to Morteza Maher, administrator of the Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers Watershed District in Warren, Minnesota, a request for \$6.5 million had been made to the Legislature to offset costs for the \$8.3 million project.

With only \$5 million available for flood control projects in the entire Red River Basin, any funding for Newfolden would fall far short of what's needed. However, if Newfolden could receive some of the \$15 million that hasn't been designated, the project could perhaps be completed in phases, Maher said.

Already, the Canadian Pacific Kansas City Railway — formerly the Canadian Pacific Railway — has completed the first component of the project, replacing a series of culverts at a railroad crossing on the Middle River with a bridge to remove the bottleneck of water on the east side of Newfolden during flood events.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is set for later this month, Maher said.

Still to be funded is construction of a 396-acre impoundment north of Newfolden to temporarily store water during flood events and keep overland flooding from Judicial Ditch 21 out of Newfolden.

Maher says he's been in contact with DNR staff and is hopeful at least some funding will be available from the unallocated \$15 million.

Between the DNR Flood Hazard Mitigation Program and additional projects funded in the bonding bill, state lawmakers allocated between \$82 million and \$86 million for flood mitigation projects across the state during this year's legislative session, Sip said. That's the largest amount

in “probably 15 to 20 years,” he said, but it’s difficult to say why projects in the Red River Basin didn’t receive more than they did.

As a result, the Red Board will now have to prioritize projects, regardless of how much of the \$15 million — if any — is ultimately available, Sip said.

“The need for state dollars definitely is there for flood mitigation,” he said. “I don’t know why it’s so hard to fund these projects, but it is.”