



Agassiz Valley project offers more than just flood reduction

October 2013 Snapshots

Three years after the Agassiz Valley Water Resources Management project (Agassiz Valley project) became operational, the benefits have far surpassed what the project team could ever have imagined.

Constructed after three debilitating floods struck the city of Warren, Minnesota (1996-1997), the \$10.7 million project spans four square miles and services a drainage area of 32 square miles.

The project team started work on Agassiz Valley more than 10 years ago. The team was comprised of representatives from the Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers Watershed District, Board of Water and Soil Resources, Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Polk Soil and Water Conservation District, Marshall County, Agassiz Audubon Society and landowners.

"It took a long time, but we achieved our goals," said Danny Omdahl, the Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers Watershed District co-administrator.

"There's been a significant decrease in water, and downstream landowners, township officials and city employees say flood damage to farmland, roads and infrastructure has been significantly reduced."

While flood control has always been first and foremost, the project work team had other goals too: low flow augmentation, wetland prairie restoration, education and recreation, field research and maintaining the tax base.

The impoundment has stored water every year since it's been operational. "We've captured spring snowmelt and released it over time," Omdahl said. "The low flow augmentation keeps the Snake River from drying up in the later parts of the summer."

The Watershed District has also restored wet prairies, supported bird research and hosted more than 1,000 visitors each year. "They're coming for birding, canoeing and kayaking, photography, school visits and hunting," Omdahl said. "Nearly 400 people - from all over the United States - applied for permits to hunt at Agassiz Valley in 2011 and 2012."

And in 2012, an Associated Press news story about wildlife viewing opportunities at the impoundment put Agassiz Valley "on the map" as a nature destination in Minnesota.



Picture: University of North Dakota students conduct a bird survey at Agassiz Valley in 2012.

Since the project was operational in 2010, numerous public use activities have been encouraged, including:

Outdoor recreation activities

- birding and wildlife viewing (*In the summer of 2012, Agassiz Valley became a new site on the International Pine to Prairie Birding Trail*)
- Canoeing, kayaking, boating (electric motors only)
- Hiking and photography
- Hunting, fishing and horseback riding

On-going field science studies

- Bufflehead duck breeding survey
- Community Nest Watch Project: Kestrels, Martins and Bluebirds

Education programs and tours

- Guided tours for a variety of groups, including professional organizations, colleges, boy and girl scouts, schools, community groups and camps