



Ring Dikes and Buyouts in Norman County

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Norman County, Minnesota

Norman County, MN - The repetitive flooding of the Red River Valley has caused Norman County residents and local government officials to place a high priority on flood protection. Partnerships were formed to provide solutions to keep farmers in business and communities viable. The Wild Rice Watershed District (WRWD) has been working with rural residents, state agencies and FEMA on implementing a mitigation strategy of acquisition and ring dike construction.



Victims of flooding who were seeking solutions had to choose the best option for their circumstances: Sell the farmstead and relocate or build a ring dike encircling the house and farm buildings.

"Farming is a unique situation. We have lots of capitol invested in our buildings and place of business. It's hard to up and move to a different location in the case of a buyout. There's a lot to consider," said Gordon Ramstad of Ada. A ring dike encircles Ramstad's and his brother's homes, and the grain and machine storage, workshops and office that make up their farmstead.

Since 1997, 32 farm homes have been acquired and 36 ring dikes have been built around farmsteads in Norman County. Ring dike costs average \$30,000 for construction. Project costs are shared by the landowner, local government and the State of Minnesota. The state legislature has appropriated funding for the ring dike program since 1997. For each ring dike the state provides a cost share of 50%, with the Red River Watershed Management Board (a joint powers board of watershed districts) contributing 25% of the cost and the remaining 25% being evenly split between the landowner and the local watershed district.

"The ring dikes have reduced flooding damages substantially and brought a lot of security to rural residents," said Jerry Bennett, WRWD Administrator.

"When the rain first tested us in 2000, it was such a nice, secure feeling knowing the dike was there," said Gordon Ramstad. "In 2000 and 2001, I'm sure we would have had water in our yard if it hadn't been for the dike."

Dwight Heitman and his family also can sleep easier come the spring thaw. Heitman recalls spending wet spring nights patrolling his property for possible flooding, ready to call in help if rising floodwaters necessitated sandbagging around the house. With the help of the mitigation program, Heitman now has a ring dike fully two feet over the high water mark of 1997.

"It really puts your mind at ease," said Heitman. "In 2001 a lot of farms west of here had more floodwater than in 1997 and I still had three feet to go on my ring dike."

After all is said and done, the ring dikes have offered a feeling of security to these farmers and their families.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County (County-wide)**

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Minnesota**

County: **Norman County**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public/Private Partnership**
Hazard Type: **Flooding**
Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**
Activity/Project Start Date: **09/1997**
Activity/Project End Date: **01/2000**
Funding Source: **Mitigation Planning**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**
Non FEMA Cost:

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**
Federal Disaster #: **1175 , 04/08/1997**
Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**
Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**
Year First Tested: **2000**
Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.floodsmart.gov/>
Reference URL 2: <http://www.hsem.state.mn.us/>

Main Points

- Victims of flooding who were seeking solutions had to choose the best option for their circumstances: Sell the farmstead and relocate or build a ring dike encircling the house and farm buildings.
- Since 1997, 32 farm homes have been acquired and 36 ring dikes have been built around farmsteads in Norman County.
- With the help of the mitigation program, Heitman now has a ring dike fully two feet over the high water mark of 1997.



A farmer built a ring dike around his house and farm structures



One farm protected from floodwaters by a ring dike