

Public Statement

JD 14 Final Hearing

To establish this drainage project as proposed, the drainage authority must determine that it is practicable and of public benefit after carefully considering the environmental impacts. It has been over a century ago that our ancestors first installed public drainage systems to increase the row crop productivity of the northern Great Plains. Now 120 years later, we are on the verge of making similar landscape management decisions based upon the principle that our community benefits from such drainage practices. Name one thing we do today in a similar fashion as over 100 years ago. Environmentally sound agricultural practices like using cover crops, now exist to accomplish the drainage goals we seek today. Such practices serve our agricultural and ecological needs on a local and national watershed scale far better than the older drainage methods utilized by our farming forefathers. If our mission is to protect and improve our water resources, why are we continuing to add additional capacities to the drainage systems we know led to the substantial water quality degradation we see today. The Gulf of Mexico hypoxic or “dead zone” is an unnatural detriment to our society only made worse by drainage projects that do not take into consideration the incredible value of clean water. Not only is water vitally important for our survival but, it is also vital for the survival of future generations. The well-being of our grandchildren and great-grandchildren is our responsibility. Therefore, it is not of public benefit to continue to destroy the water resources that are becoming increasingly scarce due to exponentially growing populations and their associated greater resource needs.

In addition to the detrimental environmental and public impacts of this and similar drainage projects, private landowners will bear a heavy financial burden. Extra inputs in the form of tax assessments decrease revenues for farmers and landowners. This is especially critical in the volatile farm economy which has become the norm today.

Now you may be thinking that this project is too small to matter, let me reassure you, it does indeed matter. Water from JD 14 enters JD 30 which flows to Heron Lake which flows to the West Fork Des Moines, then to the Des Moines, on to the Mississippi and eventually the Gulf hypoxic zone. Making it part of a huge problem! In other words, this project as proposed is impracticable and of little to no public benefit. If we are to do what's right and truly protect and improve water quality for the future of humanity, we must start small. As an alternative, I would suggest cleaning the existing ditch while replacing tile in disrepair with a pipe of the same size. This would minimize water quality impacts while still improving the overall efficiency of the drainage system. Money saved on this and other projects could then be utilized to incorporate more sustainable agricultural practices that not only increased yield but also accomplish our water management goals. Lastly, DNR/BWSR concerns insufficiently addressed!