

# County Public Ditch System and Watershed District

Within Beltrami County there are approximately 1050 miles of public drainage ditches. The Highway Department assists in the inspection and maintenance of this system.

## Background

In the early and mid-1900's County Ditches were constructed to drain land; to increase its productivity, to increase land available for development and for the production of crops. Swamps and wetlands were ditched and meandering streams were deepened and straightened to facilitate better drainage. The result is a relatively straight, lineal system of open channels that connects and follows naturally low lying areas and drainage ways.

County Ditches are often assumed to be owned by County governments however, County Ditches are actually privately owned, publicly managed ditches. The property owners within each ditch's watershed are collective owners of the ditch and are responsible for all costs of ditch management.

## County Government Role

The State Drainage Law, Minnesota Statute, Chapter 103E, known as the Drainage Code, determines how privately-owned County Ditches are managed. As prescribed in the Drainage Code, the Beltrami County Board of Commissioners acts as the Ditch Authority and is responsible for drainage management and oversight.

There are two ditch systems that are located in both Beltrami and Marshall County. In these systems, both Counties act as the Ditch Authority and the ditch is called a Joint Ditch instead of a County Ditch.

Sometimes the term Judicial Ditch is used to describe a ditch system. In these cases the Ditch was initiated in a court action with management subsequently turned over to the Ditch Authority by the Court.

The Red Lake Watershed District has also been given responsibility to act as Ditch Authority over ditch systems built under their authority or otherwise acquired from other governmental jurisdictions. The Watershed District covers northwestern Minnesota in all of or parts of the following Counties: Beltrami, Red Lake, Pennington, Mahnomen, Polk, Itasca, Marshall, Clearwater, Roseau, and Koochiching. It covers an area of approximately 5,990 square miles. See the Red Lake Watershed website for more information, its functions and responsibilities: <http://www.redlakewatershed.org/>

## Ditch Procedures

See a manual at <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/Minnesota-Public-Drainage-Manual> for guidance on the process and procedures used in the management of the public ditch system.