

# Successful Construction Season Leads Into 2025 Legislative Session

By Kimberly Cook

Red River Valley Water Supply Project (RRVWSP) construction wrapped up in mid-November with the most pipe installed in one construction season. Crews from Oscar Renda Contracting, Carstensen Contracting Inc., and Garney Construction were blessed with an exceptionally mild fall without any snowfall until late November.

“Despite receiving 30 inches of rain this year, the contractors prevailed over the wet conditions. Previous experience with groundwater issues allowed the crews to put into practice what we’ve learned over the past couple years,” says Kip Kovar, deputy program manager for RRVWSP Engineering. “This is the most efficient construction season to date, and we saw the most pipe installed since construction began on the 72-inch transmission pipeline.”

RRVWSP co-sponsors Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (Garrison Diversion) and Lake Agassiz Water Authority (LAWA) are preparing to support the project during North Dakota’s upcoming legislative session which begins on January 7, 2025.

Representatives will request \$221 million in the Department of Water Resources budget to fund the 2025-2027 work plan. During the 2023 session, state lawmakers approved legislative intent for the RRVWSP totaling \$953 million in future funding.





“We are grateful to the legislature for previously providing legislative intent for the Red River Valley Water Supply Project. Having state support provides peace of mind to the project’s end users. Thank you to legislators for supporting this project to ensure it is constructed in a timely manner,” says Merri Mooridian, deputy program manager of RRVWSP administration.

For the 2023–2025 biennium, RRVWSP received \$180 million in the Department of Water Resources Budget. Local users provided \$61.5 million and \$4.5 million came from the Municipal Rural and Industrial (MR&I) Program. The funding allowed the RRVWSP team to complete the design of the transmission pipeline, bid and award several construction contracts, move construction forward, and provide financial planning and studies for RRVWSP end users. Before the end of the biennium on June 30, engineers will complete the design of RRVWSP facilities such as the water treatment plant. Eighty percent of the easements needed for the project have been acquired as of December 2024.

“Construction crews made a lot of progress this year and we’re in a great place with design. We’re hoping to keep the momentum going into 2025 and beyond, with continued funding from the state,” Garrison Diversion General Manager Duane DeKrey says.

“The Red River Valley can go from flooding to drought conditions in a matter of months. We can’t prevent the next drought from happening, but we can be prepared. With large dollar figures already committed, it is crucially important to get the project completed within the 10-year construction timeframe, to maximize our investment and mitigate the economic effects of moderate and severe

drought conditions with this emergency and supplemental water supply.” Grand Forks Mayor and LAWA Vice Chair Brandon Bochenski says.

This year, Garney Construction completed the pipe installation on Contract 5B east of Carrington. The contractor will return in 2025 to complete land restoration, structure build out, hydrostatic testing, and soil haul off. Oscar Renda made progress on the 5C contract which includes approximately eight miles of pipeline and three major trenchless crossings east of Carrington, in Foster County. Carstensen Contracting Inc. also made progress on the 5D contract which involves 10 miles of pipeline and a trenchless crossing of Pipestem Creek in western Foster County and eastern Wells County. Currently, 18 miles of the 125-mile buried pipeline are in the ground.

In December, Carstensen was awarded Contract 6A for \$52,258,500, which is their second contract in the RRVWSP. The contract includes construction of a 7.1-mile transmission pipeline from the James River to Eastman Township in Foster County, as well as two 96-inch-diameter trenchless highway crossings and one 96-inch-diameter trenchless wetland crossing.

Construction on 6A is scheduled to begin in the spring. The remaining portions of contracts 5C, 5D and land restoration will resume in 2025, as soon as weather permits. When the RRVWSP transmission pipeline is complete, it will span from the McClusky Canal to the discharge structure, which empties into the Sheyenne River about six miles south of Cooperstown. The RRVWSP is projected to serve nearly half of North Dakota’s population, from the central part of the state to the eastern side.



# Carrington, Cooperstown, Valley City, and McLean Sheridan Rural Water District Join RRVWSP

The RRVWSP user base is growing as the cities of Carrington, Cooperstown and Valley City, as well as the McLean-Sheridan Rural Water District, recently signed memorandums of commitment to join the RRVWSP.

Tom Erdmann is the mayor of Carrington and the city's representative on the LAWA board of directors. LAWA is a co-sponsor of the RRVWSP, alongside Garrison Diversion, which is headquartered in Carrington.

"Our aquifer is presently a tremendous asset to our community. The Red River Valley water supply, in addition to our excellent Carrington aquifer, will help us during drought conditions," Erdmann says. "Additionally, we project a potential need for industrial water in the event we could become a site for another value-added processing plant. Carrington is located in the center of the state with excellent infrastructure running through our community with access to the two major railroads, an unrestricted highway system, and all the amenities that another value-added agriculture processing plant might be looking for."

The city of Carrington nominated for 0.50 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water. In addition to the future economic development opportunities the RRVWSP will provide, Carrington already benefits from an economic boost due to construction activities in Foster County. The 2024 construction season brought more than 100 workers to live and work in the city.

"We have seen a substantial increase in our sales tax collection. We presently have a 2% local sales tax that generated \$1.08 million in 2023. As of the first 10 months of 2024, we are \$184,000 ahead of last year's record sales tax collection. We are seeing an immediate impact from the construction activities on the pipeline," Erdmann says. "In addition to the construction activities, there are engineers on the site who live here in Carrington, and Garrison Diversion has added employees due to the workload associated with the project."

Valley City nominated for 2 cubic feet per second (cfs) from the RRVWSP. Valley City Mayor Dave Carlsrud is also its representative on the LAWA board of directors. He says participation in the RRVWSP is essentially an insurance policy for residents and businesses.

"We have been blessed with our aquifers so far. But we



don't know what would happen during a drought. The Red River Valley Water Supply Project is insurance for us," Carlsrud says. "Joining provides peace of mind, especially for elected officials because we have to answer the tough questions if Valley City doesn't have enough water. This is the right thing to do for the next generation."

Beyond the need for an emergency supply of water, Carlsrud says access to a supplemental water supply is valuable for economic development because it will make it easier for Valley City to recruit new businesses.

Cooperstown City Auditor Christine Olson says with the RRVWSP transmission pipeline's proximity so close to Cooperstown, it only makes sense to participate. The city nominated for 0.20 cfs.

"Participation ensures a water source for the future as well as allowing for future growth, whether commercial or residential," Olson explains. She says joining the RRVWSP will, "allow the opportunity to say 'yes' should a high-water using industry want to locate in Cooperstown."

McLean-Sheridan Rural Water District Manager Ann Broussard says the district's board of directors made the decision to participate in the RRVWSP primarily due to potential economic development initiatives that are being considered in the service area. A number of these potential initiatives would need large volumes of water. "If McLean-Sheridan Rural Water were to add only one or two bulk users to our system, the financial benefits to our existing customers would be significant. Growth in our water sales helps stabilize water rates for everyone served by our system, now and in the future," Broussard explains.

The four water providers join the city of Fargo, which will serve West Fargo and Cass Rural Water, as well as Grand Forks, which will provide service to East Grand Forks, Minn. Both Hillsboro and Mayville have also signed an MOC.