

HENDERSON INDEPENDENT

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Discussions between Henderson and Le Sueur continue as they work toward dissolving MRVPUC.

They're back!

Trumpeter swans Sylvian and Sylvan have been spotted in the area. P. 8



Hot on the ice

Four Bulldogs boys hockey players earned Big South Conference honors. P.16

Wet welcome to Henderson

By Rachel Wittrock
Independent staff

Anyone who has lived in Henderson for any length of time is familiar with the frequency in which it floods. Last year, flooding closed roads into the city twice, but the amount of water that began pouring onto the roads last Tuesday, March 19 is one for the record books.

Right now, Highways 19, 93 and County Road 6 remain closed as water is covering all three roads. Highway 93 into Le Sueur is also closed due to flooding.

According to the National Weather Service, four of the 10 historic crests for the Minnesota River at Henderson occurred in the past decade. Henderson will add a new record (and bump one set in 2010) to the top 10 as the



PHOTO BY RACHEL WITTRICK

Henderson's welcome sign on Highway 93 won't be seen by many travelers for a while. The water levels quickly rose last week, and the water reached the flood gates by Friday, March 22. Highway 93 was flooded as far as the eye can see.

FLOODING
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Pump House improvement

With the recent flooding, the city council is considering improvements to the Henderson Pump House. P. 7

Flood party

Planning has begun to make the most of a wet situation with an April 5 flood party. P. 15

Boys basketball

Burke Nesbit and Dominic Drent received Minnesota River Conference All-Conference honors, and Tyler Pengilly received honorable mention. P. 16

Henderson City Council

MRVPUC deal on table, details unknown

Communities continue sorting through JPA, work towards dissolution

Troy Koester
Independent staff

The saga of "what will happen to the Minnesota River Valley Public Utilities Commission (MRVPUC)" continues, based on a brief discussion at the March 20 Henderson City Council meeting.

The City has been working to sift through the details of the Joint Powers agreement that is MRVPUC, formed in 2005 as the body that would oversee the operation of the Waste Water Treatment Facility that serves Henderson and Le Sueur.

Late last fall, the city of Le Sueur resolved to terminate the

agreement. The commission was originally set up for 30 years, but could be terminated at any time with the consent of both parties.

While Le Sueur's Jan. 1, 2019 target date has come and gone, negotiations have continued between the communities to try to make sense of dissolving the partnership, leaving the city of Henderson as a paying customer.

According to Henderson officials, including sitting city council members Robyn Geldner, Jim Wartman and Randy Tiegs who represent Henderson on MRVPUC with three members of the Le Sueur City Council, Henderson has presented an offer to

MRVPUC, the details of which were not disclosed.

Some of Henderson's concerns include its user rates, and getting fair value for surrendering its share of the assets.

Le Sueur City Administrator Jasper Kruggel said there are identifiable cost savings through dissolution of MRVPUC, include redundant insurances, financial services, fiscal agent fees and administrative costs.

Henderson Mayor Paul Menne and the council have supported dissolving MRVPUC "under favorable conditions for Henderson."

Henderson has made 10 of 19

payments towards the \$3.7 million it borrowed against the construction of the plant and two lift stations that help transfer the waste from under the Minnesota River to the treatment facility. It has nine payments left, each around \$230,000. The loan will expire in 2027.

Revenues for the payments come from a monthly \$40 surcharge on each of Henderson's water and sewer customers, and a one-time \$2,500 special assessment to each commercial and residential owner.

The city also pays MRVPUC monthly for operations and maintenance. Revenues are generated

on monthly bills based on gallons used/rate.

The city expressed that if the usage rate would remain favorable as a customer, the deal could benefit Henderson residents, as it starts to explore options for its waste treatment in coming years.



FLOODING

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Minnesota River crested at 738.52 feet on Sunday, March 24 at 1:15 a.m., good enough for the sixth-highest record.

Flood stage in Henderson is anything higher than 732 feet, with a moderate flood stage occurring at 736 feet and major flood stage at 739.5 feet. The record to date is 740.08 feet set on Sept. 28, 2010, followed by 739.65 feet on both June 24, 2014 and April 11, 1965, and 739.5 feet on June 23, 1993.

“One of the things I have learned from being around folks in Henderson is each of these floods seem to have a little different personality,” said Jed Falgren, operations manager for MnDOT District 7.

Falgren said they were not expecting to see this level of warm-up, which combined with two days of rain, caused all of the snow to quickly melt. Falgren said they also experienced ice jams on the Minnesota River that had a big impact.

In St. Peter, the river rose two feet within about a four-hour period, “which on the Minnesota River is kind of unprecedented,” Falgren said.

However, Falgren said they have been incredibly lucky to not have any rainfall events in the past 10 days.

“Compared to the moisture we were seeing mid-January to March, if we continued on that path ... I am just glad we didn’t,” Falgren said.

Charlie Niesen, owner of Char-



PHOTO BY DAN TOWNSEND

The city of Henderson has become a peninsula as flood waters from the Minnesota River have blocked entry into town along Highways 19, 93 and County Road 6. The flood waters are not expected to drop until sometime in April.

lie Niesen’s bar in downtown Henderson, said flooding has caused business to drop, as “it is a long way to get here.”

His own commute has gotten much longer. A regular four-minute commute to work is now closer to 30 minutes with traffic closed on Highway 19.

“It came up fast — I have never seen it come up that fast,” said Niesen, who has owned the Henderson bar for 26 years.

Local and area residents will have a bit of a wait before water levels drop and roads reopen. According to the National Weather Service model, the Minnesota River at Henderson is only projected to drop about a foot between now and April 1, to 737 feet.

The Minnesota River near Morton is projected to set a new record by the end of the week, and eventually that will make its way down the river to Henderson.

Falgren is hopeful that there will be minimal damage to the roads when flood waters do recede. He expects to see some damage to the north side of the Rush River bridge to the roadway, but said the bridge itself appears to be in fine shape.

Falgren also said that there is not a lot of current on Highway 93, except around Rush River, so he expects limited damage aside from debris and reshaping the

shoulders of the road.

This past Saturday, MnDOT crews worked hard to clear out a significant log jam upstream of the Rush River bridge. Although they cannot yet haul away the logs, Falgren said removing them from the water will keep them from eroding under the bridge.

Keep an eye on the *Henderson Independent* Facebook page for ongoing coverage of the flood stage.



PHOTO BY BARB/ART STRAUB

The scene of Highway 8 going from Highway 169 to Le Sueur.



PHOTO BY RACHEL WITTRICK

County Road 6 outside of Henderson is also closed due to flooding.



PHOTO BY LON BERBERICH

Minnesota Department of Transportation crews worked hard on Saturday to remove a log jam upstream of the Rush River bridge.