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To: Senator Ernie Otten, Lead Co-Chair
Representative Mike Derby, Co-Chair

CC: Russell Olson, Auditor General
Jim Terwilliger, Commissioner

From: Hunter Roberts, Secretary

Date: November 1, 2025

Subject: Final Report on HB 1256 – An Act to make an appropriation for the cleanup of the Big Sioux Watershed and River and to declare an emergency

The Joint Committee on Appropriations' April 23, 2021, letter of intent directed the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) to develop a management plan for the Big Sioux Watershed and River and to submit a progress report to the Committee by November 1 each year until the funds have been expended. This will be the final progress report as all appropriated funds have been spent, and HB 1256 will be repealed effective December 31, 2025.

Item 1: Progress and Updates on the Management Plan:

The Riparian Buffer Initiative (RBI) is a voluntary, working-lands program administered by the South Dakota Department of Agriculture & Natural Resources (DANR). Its primary goal is to improve water quality, reduce nonpoint-source pollution (sediment, nitrogen, phosphorus, and bacteria), stabilize streambanks, and deliver ecological benefits through the establishment of vegetated buffer zones along waterways — all while maintaining land productivity and generating value for participating landowners.

The RBI program offers financial and cost-share incentives to landowners who adopt or maintain riparian buffers ranging from 50 to 120 feet in width, with defined restrictions on mowing, harvesting, and grazing during critical timeframes to protect water quality.

When launching RBI, targeted outreach and direct mailings were critical for raising awareness and generating landowner interest. The success of the program has been strongly supported by a broad partnership network. Nonpoint Source Watershed Project Coordinators, GFP Private Lands Biologists, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologists, NRCS staff, and the Ducks Unlimited Agronomist have all provided essential outreach and one-on-one assistance to landowners throughout the enrollment process.

In 2023, the RBI program expanded to include support for animal waste management systems (AWMS) and allowed stacking with the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). These additions increased the program's impact. Stacking with CRP and CREP not only increases the financial return for landowners but also enhances water quality benefits — allowing DANR to achieve greater conservation outcomes with a more efficient use of RBI funding.

Item 2: Enumeration of approved projects and respective amount of funding each project received from this legislation as well as other fund sources:

HB 1256 allocation resulted in the enrollment of two AWMS and 67 buffer projects. The enrolled buffers totaled 436,184 linear feet or 83 miles of riparian buffers in the Big Sioux River watershed. This equates to 1,218.69 acres of protected buffers. These 67 projects spent a total of $2,910,750.60 of HB 1256 funds.

Two AWMS were enrolled covering a total of 690 animals (350 animals in one, and 340 in the other). The AWMS projects spent a total of $89,249.40 of HB 1256 funds.

Please the attached pages for Figures 1-4 (before/after pictures of buffers) and the map of projects funded by HB 1256.

Item 3: The impact each project had on reducing pollution:

Pollution reductions from the 67 buffers:
Nitrogen-6,414.99 lbs/year
Phosphorus-1,484.02 lbs/year
Sediment-953.47 tons/year

Pollution reductions from the two AWMS are:
Nitrogen-3,079 lbs/year
Phosphorus-308 lbs/year
Sediment-8.26 tons/year
Bacteria-1.7432E+13 Colony Forming Unit/year

A colony forming unit (CFU) is a measurement used to estimate the number of viable (living) bacteria or fungal cells in a sample.

Item 4: Documentation of the sampling and metrics used in the pollution assessment:

Pollution reductions are calculated using EPA's Pollution Load Estimation Tool (PLET) model. This is the standard model used to report nonpoint source pollution for all the watershed projects in the State. In addition, DANR continues to collect water quality samples throughout the Big Sioux River Watershed to document water quality conditions.

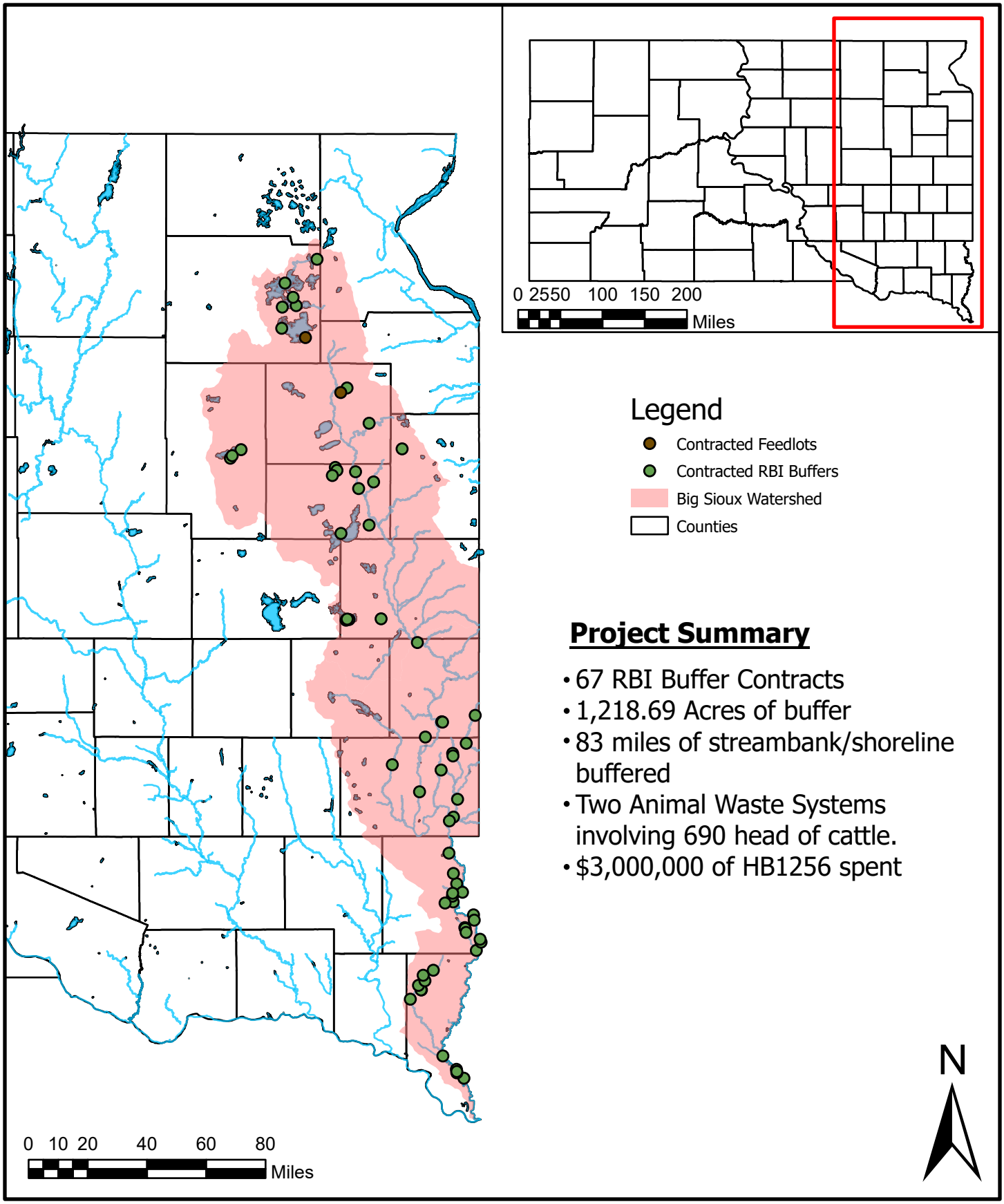
Figure 1: April 17, 2024, Unnamed Tributary to Big Sioux River

Figure 2: July 11, 2025, Unnamed Tributary to Big Sioux River

Figure 3: 2023 Blue Dog Lake

Figure 4: 2024 Blue Dog Lake

HB 1256 RBI Project Map



Project Summary

- 67 RBI Buffer Contracts
- 1,218.69 Acres of buffer
- 83 miles of streambank/shoreline buffered
- Two Animal Waste Systems involving 690 head of cattle.
- $3,000,000 of HB1256 spent