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Spring of 2006

River Watcher

High Island Creek & Rush River
Watersheds Implementation Project

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 3 Issue 1



The Rush River near it's outlet in the MN River

"Good News for Rush River Watershed"

After the completion of a two-year diagnostic study and over a year of waiting for word from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Rush River Watershed Project has officially moved into the implementation phase. It will be coordinated in conjunction with the High Island Creek Watershed Implementation Project, another Phase II program.

The project's primary focus will now shift from identifying water quality problems to reducing excessive levels of sediment and nutrients in the watershed's streams, lakes and ditches. This will be accomplished through citizen involvement, educational efforts and targeting a diverse selection of Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the watershed.

Today we are seeing a greater concern among citizens and conservation agencies to provide both an economic viability for the community and also balance it with the restoration and protection of water quality. People want to have safe drinking water, enjoy a diverse selection of recreational opportunities and be able to make a living without negatively affecting our water resources.

Over the next three years residents in the Rush River Watershed will be able to take advantage of cost-share, incentive payments and low-interest loans for the following BMPs:

- ✓ Open tile intake alternative (rock tile & slotted riser) structures or removal of the structure,
- ✓ Cover crops for late canning ground and sugar beet fields,
- ✓ Structural practices (water and sediment control basins, terraces, and grade control structures),
- ✓ Vegetative practices (wetland restorations, filter strips, riparian buffers and grassed waterways),
- ✓ Upgrades for noncompliant septic systems, through a low-interest loan,
- ✓ Manure & Nutrient Management Planning Workshops for feedlots from 100 to 999 animal units in size. (For more information see page 4.)

The project staff and sponsors are excited to be moving into the implementation phase and working directly with the watershed residents on improving, restoring and protecting our natural resources. This will only be accomplished through the efforts of everyone working, playing and living in the Rush River Watershed. If you are interested in any of these BMPs or have a question about the project please give us a call at **507-237-5435 ext. 3**. - *Scott Kudelka, Watershed Coordinator*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Important Dates:

- **Manure & Nutrient Management Planning Workshop: March 21st** (Tuesday) at the Sibley County Courthouse 10 am to 2 pm
- **General CRP Signup: March 27th – April 14th.** Contact your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to make an offer (see article below).
- **Shallow Lakes Forum III: April 5th & 6th**
 - Willmar Conference Center
 - Contact MSUM Water Resource Center at 507-389-5492
- **Project Bluestem Educator Workshop: May 5th**
 - Brownston Community Center from 9 am to 4 pm
 - Contact: MN Extension Service at 507-379-3524
- **RR & HI Fecal Coliform Bacteria TMDL Open Houses & Well Water Testing Clinics:**
 - June 9th: at Sibley County Courthouse (Gaylord) from 7:30 to 1 pm
 - June 12th: at J.R. Brown Interpretive Center (Henderson) from 7:30 to 1 pm
 - June 12th: at Stewart Community Center from 3 pm to 7 pm

“Lake Titloe Public Open House”

The Lake Titloe Beautification will be hosting a public open house to talk about the type of conservation programs available to residents in this watershed. Learn about Continuous CRP, Environmental Quality Incentive Program, and other incentive or cost-share programs available for Best Management Practices.

Date: March 30th (Thursday)

Time: 7 pm (refreshments will be served)

Location: Gaylord City Hall



Lake Titloe is around 850 acres located on the north edge of Gaylord and one of the many shallow lakes found in this area.

“Conservation Reserve Program – General Signup from March 27th through April 14th”

This voluntary Farm Service Administration (FSA) program is available to agricultural producers to help them safeguard environmentally sensitive land and protect water quality.

Overview:

- Land must have a cropping history (specific years are set by FSA) or certain marginal pastureland.
- FSA provides CRP participants with annual rental payments based on soil rental rates.
- Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.
- Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). It covers five environmental factors – wildlife, water, soil, air and enduring benefits – plus cost. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all other offers and selections made from that ranking.

Contacts:

- Sibley County: 507-237-5435 ext. 2
- Nicollet County: 507-931-2550 ext. 2
- McLeod County: 320-864-5178 ext.2

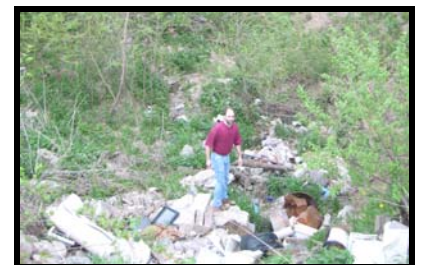
“Sibley County solid waste fund cleans up long-time dump site”

A cooperative effort between Sibley County and Kelso Township cleaned up an estimated 40-50-year dump site located in the Rush River Watershed. Illegal dump sites are an environmental concern that can impair surface waters.

Items cleaned out of the dump site included iron, tires, appliances, vehicle parts and tires. Out of a dozen or so dump sites located in eastern Sibley County, the Kelso dump site was considered the worst by the Sibley County Environmental Services.

The clean up was funded through the \$18 per home solid waste fee that is placed on the real estate taxes by the county. According to Sibley County Environmental Services, the clean up was projected to cost \$7,500. One additional dump site in the county will be cleaned up this summer.

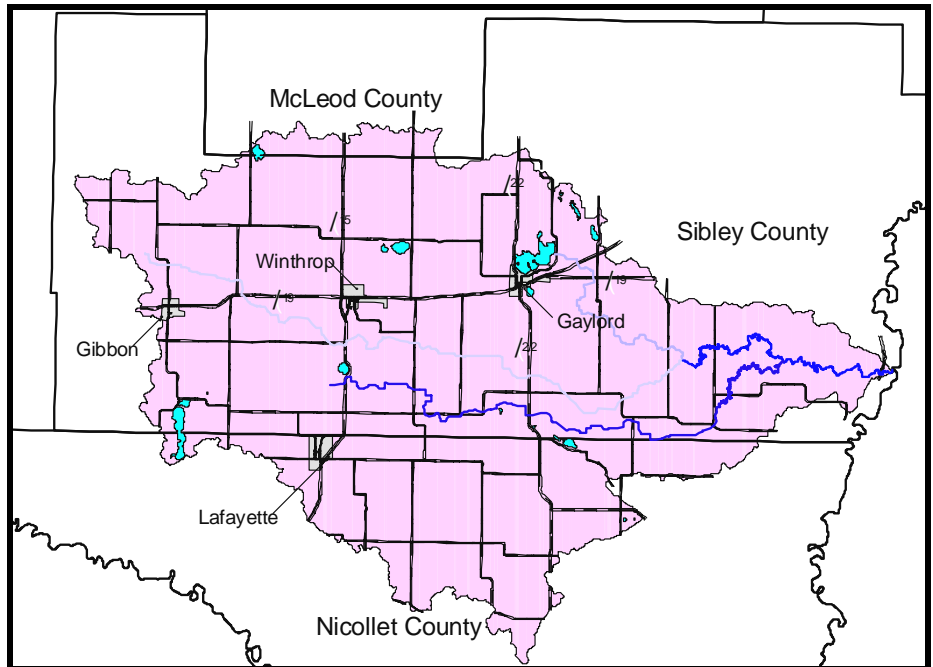
Illegal dump sites are a hazard for wildlife, water quality and other environmental factors.



RUSH RIVER WATERSHED

FACTS:

- **Location:** Lower Minnesota Watershed
- **Size:** 257,775 acres in:
 - Sibley (74% of area)
 - Nicollet (24%)
 - McLeod (2%)
- **Land Use:**
 - 90.1% agriculture
 - Less than 2% is Grassland
 - 1.7% wetlands
 - Less than 1% in conservation cover
- **Population:** 9,010 (estimated)
 - 55% (4,983) live in municipal areas,
 - 45% (4,027) live in rural areas



WATER QUALITY CONCERNS:

Fecal Coliform Bacteria, Total Phosphorus, Total Suspended Solids and Nitrate+Nitrite-Nitrogen are four pollutants affecting the water quality and health of the Rush River. Excessive streamflow and destructive flooding are also important issues to residents in the Rush River Watershed. Changes in the crop types, draining of wetlands and an ongoing expansion of the agricultural drainage system has extensively modified the Rush River.

This rural watershed is characterized by mostly level or slightly rolling land of highly agricultural productivity. Steep ravines and fairly heavy forested areas dominate the eastern portion of the watershed, as the Rush River flows into the MN River Valley.

- **Fecal Coliform Bacteria:** the South Branch is listed as impaired on the 303d list. All monitoring sites in the watershed consistently exceed the surface water standard of 200 organisms per 100 ml of water. Applied manure and noncompliant septic systems are likely the major sources of Fecal Coliform Bacteria in the Rush River.
- **Total Phosphorus (TP):** a significant concern with the Lower MN River Basin listed on the 303d list for dissolved oxygen (DO). Excessive TP levels (found at the Rush River Outlet) contribute to these low DO levels. The majority of the TP load is sediment bound in origin, a result of excessive soil erosion in the steeply sloped eastern portion of the watershed.

- **Total Suspended Solids (TSS):** a major concern with the Rush River Outlet ranked as one of the most impaired in the MN River Basin for TSS Flow Weighted Mean Concentrations (FWMC). Monitoring data revealed the major source of TSS is a result of the steeply sloped eastern portion of the watershed.
- **Nitrate+Nitrite-Nitrogen (N02+N03-N):** another major concern, with high concentrations recorded throughout the watershed. It's FWMC ranked near the highest for all sites monitored in the MN River Basin in 2003 and 2004. The majority of the N02+N03-N load is a result of an extensively ditched and tilled, flat upland portion of the watershed.

The Rush River flows through the scenic Rush River Park near the community of Henderson



"Low Interest Loans available for upgrading of Noncompliant Septic Systems"

Owners of an Individual Sewage Treatment System (ISTS) are eligible for low-interest loans to upgrade their non-conforming septic systems. This low-interest loan program is available to watershed residents for the next three years.

To Be Eligible:

- It must serve a residential, non-commercial property located in the High Island Watershed.
- Applicant must be a property owner of a non-conforming septic system:
 - ✓ Discharge to the surface,
 - ✓ Tiled to drainage or road ditch,
 - ✓ Discharge to cesspool, seep-age pits or dry wells,
 - ✓ Less than a 2-foot separation to seasonally saturated soil,
 - ✓ Lack of a system,
 - ✓ Does not meet setbacks to existing well.

Not Eligible:

- ✓ Refinancing a previously installed system,
- ✓ Septic for new homes,
- ✓ Non-residential property,
- ✓ Project started before design and loan approval,
- ✓ Under court order to repair system.

Contact Information:

- **Sibley County:** Scott Kudelka
Sibley SWCD office
P.O. Box 161; 111 6th Street
Gaylord, MN 55334
507-237-5435 ext. 103
- **Nicollet County:** Tina Rosenstein
Environmental Services Office
501 South Minnesota Avenue
St. Peter, MN 56082
507-934-0254
- **McLeod County:** Mark Hiles
Environmental Services Office
830 11th Street East, Suite 110
Glencoe, MN 55336
320-864-1482

- **Annual interest rate is 3%**
- **Loans will be repaid with 10 years or less and in level principal amounts.**
- **No income restriction.**

"Cost Share & Incentive Monies available for Best Management Practices"

A variety of cost-share and incentive monies are available to producers looking to implement conservation practices in the High Island Watershed. Practices include Open Tile Intake Alternatives, Structural Practices, Cover Crops for Canning Ground & Sugar Beet fields, and Vegetative Practices.

Open Tile Intake Alternatives: cost-share monies are available for the following options:

1. Removal of the intake
2. Removal of intake & replacement with denser pattern tiling
3. Removal of intake & replacement with a rock inlet
4. Installation of a slotted riser

75% cost-share for removal of structure or installation of Rock Tile Intake, with a cap of \$300 per intake. Cost of Slotted Riser Intake is paid.

Cover Crops for Canning Ground & Sugar Beet Fields: incentive payment of \$10 - \$12 per acre will be offered for producers planting a cover crop after the harvest of canning crops (fall harvest) and sugar beets.

Structural Practices: an additional 25% cost-share will be offered for those projects being funded through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Practices will include Water & Sediment Control Basins, Terraces, Diversions and Grade Control Structures.

Vegetative Practices: filter strips, riparian buffers and grassed waterways installed under the USDA's Continuous CRP program might be eligible for an incentive payment depending on length of contract.

Farmable Wetland Program: producers can restore up to 10 acres of wetlands and 15 acres of buffer land on cropland. For each acre receiving CRP payments; a landowner might be eligible for an up-front incentive payment depending on length of contract.

CP23A Wetland Restoration: this new program allows producers to restore large wetland complexes and playa lakes that are located outside the recognized 100-year floodplain. There is no size requirement, just a 4 to 1 buffer to wetland ratio. Landowners are eligible for an up-front incentive payment: \$100 per acre for a 10-year contract and \$150 per acre for 15 years.

“RUSH RIVER EXPLORED”

Gaylord Sportsmen have exciting trip over, on and under water.

In May of 1919 members of the Gaylord Game Protective League floated down the Rush River from Lake Titloe to a few miles shy of the outlet into the Minnesota River. The following article appeared in the Gaylord Hub on May 16, 1919.

Last Sunday the long planned trip down the Rush River was made by the official exploring party of the Gaylord Branch of the Game Protective League. Two boats, each carrying two explorers, constituted the flotilla that left the municipal wharf at the Park at the break of dawn. The two miles across Lake Titloe was negotiated in record time, the boats were hauled over the dam and started on the long trip down the winding course of the river. This was not the only dam. They grew numerous before the day was over, but of that later. No obstacles except low hanging barb wire fences, overflowed farm bridges and schools of upward bound carp were encountered until the party got down into Kelso. There the stream drops rapidly down into a deep valley flanked by cut banks and high bluffs. Then the real pleasure began. The warmer atmosphere was evidenced by the greater advanced stage of vegetation on the banks, - flowers, leaves and grasses being a week ahead of those on the upper level places. As the trip progressed the scenery became truly magnificent. Here the river ran along a sheer wall of perhaps 60 or 80 feet in height, there it would flow through low banks of the second bench with overhanging trees and vines; again would sweep in a wide curve through some park like amphitheatre to emerge upon a plunging course over rapid between great boulders and over shining gravel bars. The rapids were especially pretty, the white water and the flying spray making a fit subject for a movie scene. At frequent intervals a giant tree uprooted had fallen across the stream, sometimes allowing space enough for the boats to go underneath the trunk, and again effectively barring passage so that it was necessary to either lift the boat over or land and portage around. These portages were frequent through the east half of Kelso and Henderson township so were the gravel bars. And in exactly the same proportion, - the dams (verbal). But no matter what the difficulties there was compensating enjoyable phases to make up. At one particular difficult place where the river plunged down a steep series of rapids, just at the foot an enormous tree blocked passage. The boats negotiated the rapids, plunging straight through, but one of them was turned sideways and carried up against the tree under which the water had washed a hole about ten feet deep. The water plunged over the side of the boat, which filled and sank in less time it takes to tell.

Two sweaters, two coats, two canteens, three boat racks, a camera and corn cob pipe parted company from the boat and started on the down stream course on their own. All were corralled by quick work except one sweater which never did come up out of the depths. The occupants of the boat had leaped into the tree and congratulated themselves on not getting wet, but to get the boat out it was necessary to get into the water waist deep, use an axe and a rope and the combined muscles of the party, as the current had wedged the craft down solid.

The river winds and turns so frequently that in many places a loop of a mile or more brought the party back to nearly the same place. The day waned all too fast and approaching darkness found the party still a few miles from the Minnesota river. As the valley filled with shadows and twilight melted into night the party landed, climbed the great bluffs until a farm house was reached on the Henderson – LeSueur road, and the gentleman persuaded to transport the weary, wet and by now chilly explorers to the city of Henderson. At the latter place a reception committee headed by Chief Toastmaster Joe Enkhaus had been waiting all afternoon to entertain the travelers. When they arrived the committee had disbanded, all but Joe. He thawed out the party at the city power house, and as Booney Herrman crowded on an extra fire, all were soon in normal condition. Fritz Schauer then personally escorted the party to Gaylord in his big Ford, where they arrived at 2:02 a.m.

It was a fine trip, but a tough one, and if someone will only straighten the river out, remove the log jams, and take out about ten thousand large troublesome boulders the explorers will try it again. Until then they will content themselves with boating between the park dock and Maass' Island. Those composing the party were Irving Koch, Edwin Schmidt, Deputy Sheriff Louis Fenske and Atty. C.H. MacKenzie.

The Gaylord Game Protective League is still an active organization today, although exploring parties have not been utilized for many years. The club owns and operates a beautiful park on the east shore of Lake Titloe, which is used for trap-shooting, camping, and community events. The club also owns 64 acres of shoreland on Lake Titloe and 18 acres of shoreland on Mud Lake; both properties being devoted to wildlife habitat. Gaylord GPL is an active sponsor and partner with other local sportsmen's groups.

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Pheasants Forever – Sibley & McLeod Co. Chapters
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Gaylord Protective League

Household Hazards:

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines household products as flammable, combustible, toxic, explosive/reactive, or corrosive.
- Americans produce 1.6 million tons of household hazardous waste every year (Earth's 911 2000).
- Products like brake fluid, antifreeze, pool chemicals and varnishes can be very dangerous if not stored, used, or disposed of properly.
- Nail polishes/removers, moth balls, charcoal lighter fluid, and fluorescent lights can also cause significant damage to humans, vegetation, wildlife and other environmental resources.
- Problems usually arise when these chemicals leak and/or spill from their containers. If the spill interacts with other chemicals, toxic gases can form or even explode. Another significant problem can occur when these spills take place outside, in driveways or lawns. A simple rain can sweep these chemicals into larger water bodies or groundwater – polluting healthy areas and damaging the ecosystems that depend on them.
- An average home stores an estimated 100 pounds of household hazardous waste (Earth's 911 2000).
- Limit the amount of household hazardous waste stored in and around the house to reduce the risk of accidents in your home and the environment around it.

This newsletter is sponsored by the High Island Creek Watershed Implementation Project (HICWIP). This publication is issued quarterly and is funded through the Clean Water Partnership grant program from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and various local and state organizations. HICWIP is an equal opportunity organization and employer. Questions and comments can be directed to: Scott Kudelka
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