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Spring of 2007

River Watcher

High Island Creek & Rush River
Watersheds Implementation Project

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 4 Issue 1

RESTORE A WETLAND – IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

Wetlands are more than smelly, mosquito-producing bodies of water that we drain indiscriminately. From the time of the first European settlers, wetlands have been seen as an obstacle in the progress of building farms and communities. Over time wetlands were drained and filled in for agricultural production, building of roads and also aesthetic reasons. Of the 18.6 million acres of wetlands Minnesota had in 1850, almost half have been lost.

A wetland is classified as having mostly wet soil, saturated with water either above or just below the surface and covered with plants that have adapted to wet conditions. Minnesota features a variety of wetland types, with some even appearing to be dry most of the year. Today we continue to lose wetlands despite our knowledge of how many benefits these bodies of water provide for our society.

WETLAND BENEFITS:

We need this so-called transition zone between dry land and water (streams, rivers, lakes and coastlands) to prevent flooding, provide habitat for wildlife, reduce erosion and improve water quality.

- ☑ Improve water quality by breaking down, removing, using or retaining nutrients, organic waste and sediment carried by runoff from the surrounding landscape.
- ☑ Reduce severity of floods downstream by retaining water and releasing it during drier periods.
- ☑ Protect stream banks and shorelines from erosion.
- ☑ Recharge groundwater, potentially reducing water shortages during dry spells. Wetlands “soak up” water during and after a rainy spell.
- ☑ Provide fish and wildlife – including numerous rare and endangered species – food habitat, breeding grounds, and resting areas.
- ☑ Increase opportunities for recreation – bird watching, waterfowl hunting, and photography – & outdoor education.
- ☑ Provide food and other products – such as commercial fish and shellfish – for human use. Other wetland-reliant products include cranberries, blueberries, wild rice, medicines, pelts and timber.



WETLAND RESTORATION PROGRAMS:

- The Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program. Contact your local FSA office.
- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service provides cost-share for their Partners for Wildlife Wetland Restoration Program – call 952-858-0714.
- For more information on wetland restoration programs call your local SWCD office or go to page 5.

LIMITED FUNDING OPPORTUNITY:

If you have land in the High Island Creek Watershed this is the time to put in a conservation practice – like restoring a wetland – or replacing an out-of-compliance septic system.

Funds for the High Island Creek Watershed Project need to be dedicated to a practice or project before June 30th or it will need to be sent back to the state. Call Ron Otto at the Sibley SWCD about potential conservation practices at 507-237-5435 ext. 105

UPCOMING EVENTS / PROGRAMS

LIVING GREEN EXPO

Benefit from a healthy, sustainable life

This free, annual event provides information and products to help Minnesotans improve the environmental and social impacts of their day-to-day living. The Expo features over 200 exhibitors of products, services, and information, along with over 60 workshops on a variety of sustainability and green living topics. Expo attractions include music, art, food, demonstrations, and activities for youth and children.

Dates: May 5 & 6, 2007

Time: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days

Location: Grandstand Building at the Minnesota Fair Grounds in St. Paul

Cost: free admission

Mission:

The Living Green Expo is a family-friendly event offering products and educational resources to inspire people to lead healthier and more sustainable lives that improve our environment and quality of life. The Expo is working to create a world for future generations in which:

- Business operations and products are redesigned to interface benignly with the natural world,
- Environmental values are integrated into economic and social systems and into people's lives,
- Healthy ecosystems and sustainable communities exist.

ENVIRONMENTAL ECOLOGY PROGRAM

Students will observe nature as it is meant to be – wildlife embracing their habitat, flourishing plants, trees and wetlands. An interactive slide presentation will focus on wildlife of the Minnesota River Valley and their effective use of camouflage. Students will be able to touch some of the natural artifacts (deer antlers, beaver pelts, turtle shells, etc.) collected in the Minnesota River Watershed.

Ron Bolduan is a well known photographer, naturalist and speaker from New Ulm. Ron developed this educational program to highlight the benefits of restoring critical, sensitive land for improving water quality and wildlife aspects.

- Part one focuses on resident wildlife, including a 'camo critter hunt' study of nature's effective use of camouflage and track identification.
- Part two is a hands-on presentation of natural artifacts ranging from shed antlers to beaver pelts to turtle shells.

This environmental education program is being offered through the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (MinnRivWA) for students of all ages by appointment.

Contact Information for Ron Bolduan:

- Phone: 507-354-8367
- E-mail: boldriv@newulmtel.net
- Web Site: www.experinecenate.com

"NEWS FROM THE WATER RESOURCES CENTER at MSU MANKATO"

Monitoring season started two weeks earlier due to warmer than usual temperatures and rising water levels from a rapid snowmelt. Normally we begin sampling rivers on April 1st and run through to end of September. This year we pulled our first water quality samples on March 19th. In a typical season, we try to take between 25 and 30 samples a year depending on moisture conditions and storm intensity.

The water flow or cfs (cubic feet per second) turned out to be about the same as last year for most of the sites. Flows reached a second peak with the heavy rains a week later. During this time of the year we typically see high levels of sediment in the water, along with phosphorus.

As part of a contract with Sibley County, the Water Resources Center (WRC) is collecting samples at a number of long-term monitoring sites in the High Island Creek and Rush River watersheds. These sites help track how the implementation of conservation practices affects water quality. We monitor for parameters like Total Suspended Solids, Nitrate + Nitrite Nitrogen, Total Phosphorus and E Coli.

High water flow from ravines below High Island Creek County Park at beginning of April



We will also continue producing the "River Talk" newsletter for the project and develop a web site for the High Island Creek Watershed. This web site will be run in conjunction with the one on Rush River and located on the Minnesota River Basin Data Center web site. Once online, visitors will find information on implementation practices, water quality data and a virtual tour of the watershed.

Work on the Fecal Coliform Bacteria TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) study is reaching its conclusion and will be submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the near future. After it has been approved, High Island Creek and Rush River will be eligible for additional funds.

LEGISLATION WOULD TRY TO RECLAIM GAYLORD LAKE

By Mark Fischenich
Mankato Free Press



Gaylord – State Representative Terry Morrow didn't see Gaylord's Lake Titloe in its prime, back when it was reportedly called a "gem on the prairie," and there was a swimming hole and occasionally a sailboat or two.

But Morrow said he could see a reflection of Titloe's previous beauty when he listened to Gaylord natives.

"Talking to older residents who have lived in Gaylord all their lives, you'd see a wistful look in their eye about the way the lake once was," said Morrow, DFL-St. Peter.

Jim Swanson, chairman of the Lake Titloe Committee, said the body of water was already in serious decline when he moved to a house two blocks from the lake 17 years ago. Even then, though, the lake was much more attractive than it is now – at least to ducks and geese.

"In the fall, we couldn't sleep in the morning because of the duck hunters," Swanson said. "Now, you might hear one or two pops the whole season."

It's still relatively big at 842 acres, but Lake Titloe's water ecosystem is a mess. The lake once had deep spots that reached 20 feet. Now, sediment has filled it in to a fairly uniform 4-foot depth. Levels of pollution are high. Algae blooms are a common problem.

"It used to be a nice recreational lake for the people," Swanson said. "But they won't put their feet in it now."

Swanson and other members of the Lake Titloe Committee have been trying to work with the city, its residents and farmers from the lake's watershed to bring the lake back. Although they've made some progress, they're hoping the state can help them generate some momentum for what's a long-term and somewhat monumental task.

Morrow and Senator Kathy Sheran, DFL-Mankato, are seeking legislative approval for nearly \$500,000 in state funding to energize the cleanup of the increasingly polluted Sibley County lake. As much money as that is, it won't get the job done.

"This bill is really a starting point," Sheran said. "These can be pretty expensive projects."

Part of the reason is there's not just one problem to solve. Lake Titloe is being polluted by failing septic systems at homes in its large watershed and by farm chemicals draining through field tile.

It's being harmed by pollutants that flow from farm fields cultivated to the very edge of ditches – ditches that ultimately drain into the lake. And lawn chemicals are entering the lake because part of Gaylord's storm-sewer system discharges directly into Titloe.

The legislation sponsored by Sheran and Morrow will begin to address several of those problems. The pollutants arriving at the lake through its inlet could be reduced by holding ponds that would allow some of the sediment to settle out of the water. The bill would provide the city with \$150,000 to design the holding ponds.

There's another \$325,000 to help Gaylord cover the cost of diverting storm water from the lake to different holding ponds south of town.

And there's \$15,000 to purchase tile covers that slow down the rate of flow from rain-drenched fields, allowing some of the polluted sediment to settle out of the water before it enters the tile and moves on to the lake. Even with the covers, the fields drain quickly and well, Swanson said. The covers just keep the land from eroding and polluting water in the process.

Used by permission from the Mankato Free Press.

STATUS OF LAKE TITLOE BILL:

According to State Representative Terry Morrow, things are still progressing with the Lake Titloe Clean-up Bill in the legislature. "It's very rewarding to have the members of the House Capital Investment Committee recognize the value of this project and include it in their final bill," said Morrow. "We are now in the third inning with regard to this project; I expect we will take another big step forward later this week when the final bill is approved on the House floor."

Morrow gives most of the credit to the residents of Gaylord, who have worked diligently for years to clean up Lake Titloe and restore some of the beauty the lake was known for. "The Lake Titloe Committee has done a great job and is to be commended for all of its hard work," said Morrow. "I'm very happy to be able to do my part in helping to restore this community treasure."

The bonding package allocated a total of \$165 thousand in a grant to the city of Gaylord for watershed improvements. One appropriation would provide \$150,000 for the pre-design and design of holding ponds upstream in the Lake Titloe Watershed. The City would work in partnership with Sibley County and the Soil and Water Conservation District to plan the best method of improve water quality in the watershed.

The second appropriation to the City of Gaylord would provide \$15,000 to be used to install open tile intake alternatives like rock tile inlets and slotted risers. These BMPs will limit soil erosion and chemicals from entering Lake Titloe.

REDUCE STORMWATER POLLUTION:

Spring has finally arrived in Minnesota and with it comes a steady flow of moisture as water runs off our roofs, grasses, streets and other objects on the way to our lakes and rivers. Some of this water will bring along pollutants, nutrients, soil, organic matter and other undesirable materials. All of us have seen it in the form of oil on top of parking lots, soil eroding off our fields and algae blooming in our lakes.

There are many things we can do to prevent some of this pollution from reaching our valuable water bodies. Many communities have embraced spring community cleanups, including Arlington and Gaylord. We also have a variety of local, state and federal conservation programs to help with the loss of soil, nutrients and other substances from the landscape. As an individual, there is a wide range of opportunities to embrace for improving, restoring and protecting our rivers and lakes.

REDUCING OUR IMPACT:

- Properly maintain your septic system and pump the tank every three years depending on use. Replace all out-of-compliance septic systems.
- Wash your vehicle in a facility treating and recycling its wastewater.
- Fix engine leaks and dispose of used auto fluids at drop-off points.
- Avoid applying excess fertilizers and pesticides on lawns and gardens. Consider organic methods for lawn and garden care. Keep in mind that excess organic fertilizer will harm the environment as well.

- Don't over water your lawn. Consider using a soaker hose instead of a sprinkler.
- Collect rainwater in barrels or tanks to use for watering your plants or yard during dry periods.
- Plant a rain garden with native plants and flowers to handle runoff from any permeable surfaces, including roofs and roadways.



Rain Gardens have become a common sight

- Reduce household water and chemical use at home and work. By reducing the quantity and contamination of household water will improve the effectiveness of septic and municipal treatment systems.
- Pick up pet animal waste to either compost or dispose of it properly.
- Install permeable pavers for the driveway, walkways and other hard surfaces.
- Clean up any spills of oil, fuel, and other harmful fluids that can be picked up by stormwater.

Check out the U.S. EPA web site:

TILE INLET ALTERNATIVES

By Ron Otto
Sibley County Water Planner/Coordinator

Spring is fast approaching and with that comes spring fieldwork and planting. Before getting into the spring rush you may want to think about installing some alternative inlet structures where you now have open intakes. With the larger equipment that is being used today it is hard to plant around those intakes. Two of the alternatives that are being used are dense pattern tiling and rock tile inlets. A slotted riser could also be used if you feel that the above alternatives would not work. Removing the intake completely may be another solution.

A slotted riser gives the sediment time to settle out of the water before entering the tile line. Rock tile inlets have .75-1.5 inch rock placed above the tile so there is nothing protruding from the ground to be driven around. Dense pattern tiling is a closer spacing of tile in place of using open intakes.

There are cost-share monies available for the following practices;

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

There is 75% cost-share for removal of the structure, installation of rock tile intake or dense pattern tiling. The cost of a slotted riser will be paid entirely with cost-share funds.

If you have any questions about the tile inlet alternatives stop in or give me a call at Sibley SWCD 111 6th St. Gaylord (507) 237-5435 ext. 105.



Low Interest Loans available for upgrading of Noncompliant Septic Systems"

Sign up for loan now before funding runs out. All non-Conforming septic systems are eligible under this program. This low-interest loan program is available at a 3% interest rate for a ten year period.

To Be Eligible:

- It must serve a residential, non-commercial property located in either 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:** Ron Otto
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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 CO:** Roger Berggren
Environmental Services Office
830 11th Street East, Suite 110
Glencoe, MN 55336
320-864-1214
- **Renville County:** Diane Mitchell
Water Management Office
County Office Building
410 East DePue Avenue
Olivia, MN 56277
320-523-3760

"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 High Island Creek & Rush River watersheds. 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.

**HIGH ISLAND CREEK & RUSH RIVER
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Electronic and Electrical Products Waste:

As of July 1, 2006, Minnesota residents can no longer put CRT-containing televisions and computer monitors in the trash, according to state law. Televisions and computer monitors are hazardous because they contain up to eight pounds of lead and can cause an environmental problem if discarded with regular garbage.

Minnesota residents can take advantage of the expanding number of recycling options for old electronic equipment including community collection events, retailers and manufacturers. Recyclers most often charge a fee to handle monitors and televisions.

To see a list of collection events and recyclers, visit www.moea.state.mn.us/plugin/recyclers-household.cfm or call your community solid-waste administrator.

Prevent and reduce waste:

- **Lease equipment:** users do not assume ownership of product in a lease arrangement.
- **Avoid "gadgets:"** electronic versions of traditional household appliances and tools may not actually be an improvement, may be more costly, and may wear out faster.
- **Identify durable products:** when shopping for electronic and electrical items, review the product's repair history and consumer reliability ratings.
- **Repair instead of replacing:** repairing an electronic or electrical item may be cheaper than replacing it.
- **Buy upgradeable gear:** some products can be upgraded by replacing a single component instead of the entire unit.

High Island Lake
Conservation Club
Cities of Arlington,
New Auburn,
Gaylord, Winthrop,
Gibbon &
Lafayette
U.S. Geological
Survey
U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Service
Minnesota Board
of Water & Soil
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Minnesota
Department of
Natural Resources
Coalition for a
Clean Minnesota
River
Pheasants Forever
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Chapters
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Green Isle
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League

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