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**Summer of 2007**

# *River Watcher*

High Island Creek & Rush River  
Watersheds Implementation Project

**NEWSLETTER**

Vol. 4 Issue 2

## **FECAL COLIFORM BACTERIA TMDL UPDATE:**

The watersheds of High Island Creek and Rush River have recorded some of the highest fecal coliform bacteria concentrations in the Minnesota River Basin. As a result, most of the river stretches in the two watershed have been listed for Fecal Coliform Bacteria impairments. A Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study has been completed and the next stage is to implement a variety of conservation practices to reduce excessive levels of fecal coliform bacteria.

The Fecal Coliform Bacteria TMDL report includes recommendations for implementation activities including feedlot runoff reduction, manure management planning and dealing with non-conforming septic systems.

### **Feedlot Runoff Reduction:**

State rules for feedlot runoff control will reduce, but not eliminate bacteria transport to waters from open lots by October of 2010. The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) assists feedlots that have a high risk of runoff problems. This cost-share funding typically is spent for high cost fixes like manure storage basins. The local Soil and Water Conservation Service offices would like to see additional cost-share to improve feedlot facilities.

### **Manure Management Planning:**

One recommendation for applied manure implementation activities is to develop a set of economically viable BMPs for reducing bacteria transport in situations where injection/incorporation alone may lead to bacteria entering tile lines. These practices could include manure storage, fall timing of manure applications, composting, grass buffers, runoff and erosion control, careful timing of manure application to reduce the likelihood of rainfall within a few days after application. Other ideas include offering manure management education to feedlots with less than 300 animal units and for those with a small number of horses.

### **Non-Conforming Septic Systems:**

Septic system upgrades of non-compliant systems are occurring at a faster rate today due to county and watershed loan programs. Even with the increase, more effort needs to be done, especially with education activities and inventorying all the systems. One recommendation is to hire a full-time coordinator for the two watersheds to work on compliance and regulation issues. Other ideas include hosting demonstration projects, conducting dye tests and digging up tile lines for investigation purposes.

For more information on implementation activities for the Fecal Coliform Bacteria TMDL contact Sibley County SWCD at 507-237-5435 ext. 105.



### **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 August 31<sup>st</sup> 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

### ORGANIC FIELD DAY

Organic Field Day allows those interested in organic agriculture to connect with each other and to University of Minnesota researchers. Field tours and presentations will highlight current organic research at the University of Minnesota and practical organic production applications.

**Date:** Wednesday, July 11, 2007

**Time:** 7:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

**Location:** University of Minnesota Southwest Research & Outreach Center at 23669 130<sup>th</sup> Street, Lamberton, MN

**Cost:** Free and open to the public. A fee will be charged for lunch.

**For More Information:** 507-752-7372 or

<http://swroc.cfans.umn.edu>

#### Field Tours:

- Organic Soybean Variety Comparison
- Soybean Planting Rate and Date Trials
- Forage Effects on Soil Quality
- Organic Corn Breeding and Variety Trials
- Alternative Crop Rotations
- Organic Vegetable Variety Trials
- Approved Herbicide and Pesticide Trails
- Carbon Sequestration Research

**All Day:** Book Sale by Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Services (MOSES)

### FARMFEST 2007

Farmfest is an event rooted in tradition of agricultural and this tradition continues:

- That brings 35,000+ attendees to the event year after year
- That brings in over 500 local and leading companies in the farming industry
- Of timely educational forums highlighting topics relevant to the issues that today's farmer faces
- Of successful livestock and field demonstrations
- Of offering programs and entertainment for the entire family

**Dates:** August 7 – 9, 2007

**Time:** 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

**Location:** Gilfillan Estate, Redwood County, MN

**Cost:** \$7 per person; 18 and under are free

**For more information:** 1-800-827-8007 or

[www.farmshows.com/farm/ffst/index.po](http://www.farmshows.com/farm/ffst/index.po)

Check out the new "Outdoor Sports Extravaganza." This year's theme is conservation/habitat development and getting kids involved in the outdoors. Look for exhibits, forums and activities, including a kid's climbing wall.

### "NEWS FROM THE WATER RESOURCES CENTER at MSU MANKATO"

Where are things moving for the environment and water quality in the Minnesota River Watershed? There is a lot of excitement with the continued progress to restore, improve and protect this valuable resource. There is also concerns about the increased production of corn and the effect this could have on the Conservation Reserve Program.

No doubt this is an exciting time to be involved in the natural resource field. Even though legislation to provide permanent funding for the Clean Water Legacy Act didn't move forward for permanent funding, most leaders feel it's only a matter of time. The State Legislature did provide one-time money of \$49.7 million to test and clean-up our lakes and rivers.

A major of the watersheds in the Minnesota River Basin will have a chance to receive some of these funds because of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) projects, including High Island Creek and Rush River watersheds. The Fecal Coliform Bacteria TMDL report for the two watersheds has been revised after receiving comments from MPCA and will be submitted the U.S. EPA for their approval.



Vandalism is a constant issue we deal with when it comes to monitoring equipment. At the Buffalo Creek site near Henderson there has been at least one act of destruction every year for the last three years. We think it is tied to the building of a rock wall underneath the bridge to hold back water on the creek.

Unfortunately, because the rock wall interferes with our stream flow data collection we are forced to remove it each time. If you see something suspicious or know anything about vandalism at this site please give Sibley SWCD a call at 507-237-5435.

## BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

Ah summer, time to take the kids and dogs swimming to beat the heat. This annual activity is a tradition among people living in Minnesota and we usually do it without any thought to potentially harmful consequences. Unfortunately, in some drastic cases this could mean health risks for both humans and animals.

Anyone who has swum, fished, or paddled on a Minnesota lake knows algae is just part of enjoying the cool water, especially in late summer. A natural part of any aquatic environment, algae is normally harmless even when it turns the water green and smelly during so-called "blooms."

What most people don't realize is that under certain conditions a type of algae called "blue-green" algae will turn toxic and has caused the death of dogs, cattle and other animals. For humans it can mean a variety of reactions depending on whether it is by skin contact or ingesting water.



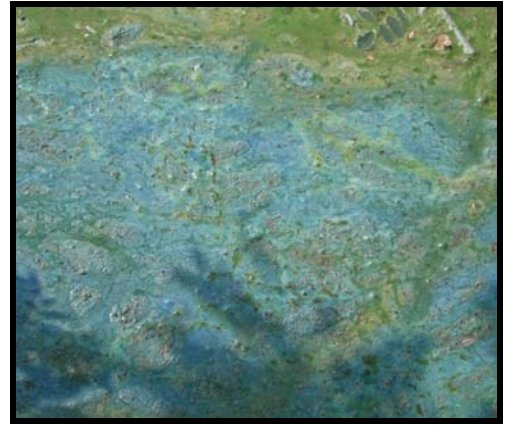
**Recently Lake Crystal near Mankato suffered a nasty blue-green algae bloom. Pat Baskfield of MPCA, said the algae clumped together on the surface is a definite sign to stay out of the water.**

Blue-green algae or cyanobacteria is found throughout Minnesota and thrives in warm, shallow, nutrient-rich lakes of central and southern Minnesota. As with all algae, blue-green algae usually explode during hot weather of late summer in nutrient rich water. Blue-green algae respond to excessive phosphorus and nitrogen just like the plants found in our fields and lawns.

Most people avoid water affected by toxic algae because of the unpleasant odor and nasty look of the water. If a person comes in contact by skin with blue-green it can cause rashes, nasal irritation, or other health effects. According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), "Swallowing or ingesting water with a blue-green algal bloom may cause symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, or nausea; headache, throat irritation, or muscle pain; and in severe cases paralysis or respiratory failure."

A couple of years ago out in Lake Benton four dogs died less than an hour to a couple of hours after drinking from the water. According to local residents, the lake didn't have a thick scum floating at the surface but the water looked like opaque green paint. "You could have taken it out and painted your house with it," said one man. He reported that his dog looked like it had been dipped in paint after coming out of the lake. Heart hemorrhage, liver damage, and other internal injuries were discovered from an autopsy of one dead dog.

**"The bluest blue-green algae I have ever seen, it was disgusting," reported Pat Baskfield of Lake Crystal. "There were kids 'boogie-boarding' in the lake. They thought it was kind of cool to go out in disgusting water."**



In 2004, water samples from Lake Crystal were sent to a qualified lab to test for algal toxin. The lab reported it was the highest they have seen except for a ditch down in Florida. One of the toxin's concentration was 350 times higher than the standard set by the World Health Organization for drinking water. This included the powerful liver toxin produced by the common blue-green algae called *Microcystis*.

The Minnesota Department of Health recommends people of all ages stay out of the water when blue-green algae is present and this goes for our pets. If you do happen to have contact with blue-green algae, the material should be washed off thoroughly, paying special attention to the swimsuit area. For your pets: wash off their coat to prevent the animal from ingesting the algae while self-cleaning. Contact a veterinarian immediately if your suspect your pet has become sick from the algae.

When it comes to eating fish from lakes affected by blue-green algal blooms, there are no confirmed reports of cyanobacteria toxin-related human health effects. There has been little research in this field. A few studies have shown toxins from blue-green algal blooms can accumulate in fish, particularly when the water contains high toxin levels.

All of us can help reduce potentially harmful blue-green algae blooms by starting in our backyard. Reduce or eliminate using fertilizer with phosphorus and nitrogen. In the fall mulch or compost your grass clippings and leaves. Establish a natural landscape by planting native plants like Big Bluestem. Upgrade and maintain your septic system. Finally, support land conservation by donating money to groups like Pheasants Forever and your local lake association.

### Contact Numbers:

- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, 651-296-6300
- Minnesota Department of Health, 651-215-6300
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 651-296-6157
- Minnesota Veterinary Medicine Association, 651-645-7533

### For more information:

- [www.pca.state.mn.us/water/clmp-toxicalgae.html](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/clmp-toxicalgae.html)
- <http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/backyard/shorelandmgmt/shallowlakes.pdf>

## WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

This is a voluntary program for people who want to develop or improve wildlife habitat on private lands. WHIP provides both technical assistance and cost sharing to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

### Nuts & Bolts of WHIP:

Landowners agree to prepare and implement a wildlife habitat development plan. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance for the establishment of fish and wildlife habitat development practices. Payments are to cost-share practice establishment only; WHIP does not provide rental income or easement purchase payments.

### The Plan:

Participants work with NRCS and other conservation partners to prepare a wildlife habitat development plan. The plan describes the landowner's goals for improving wildlife habitat, a list of practices, a installation schedule and steps for maintaining the habitat for the life of the agreement.



### Cost-Share Assistance:

NRCS provides technical assistance with cost-share payments to establish, maintain or replace wildlife habitat practices. Federal cost-share reimburses up to 75% of costs. State wildlife agencies or private organizations may provide additional funding or expertise to help complete the project. Generally the total cost share cannot exceed \$10,000 per contract.

The cost-share agreement normally lasts 5-10 years. Under the agreement, the landowner agrees to maintain the cost-share practices, allow NRCS to monitor the progress and practice effectiveness.

### Eligible:

Any landowner is eligible to participate. Almost any type of land may be eligible, including:

- Grassland
- Woodland and pastureland
- Wetlands
- Streams and riparian areas
- Agricultural or non-agricultural land

### Not Eligible:

Land currently enrolled in the Water Bank Program, Conservation Reserve Program or Wetlands Reserve Program. Land if it is used for mitigation to remedy violations or owned by the Federal Government.

### Contact Information:

Apply at your local NRCS office. Application for WHIP occurs on a continuous basis.

- Sibley NRCS at 507-237-5435 ext. 3
- McLeod NRCS at 320-864-5178 ext. 3
- Renville NRCS at 320-532-1550 ext. 3
- Nicollet NRCS at 507-931-2550 ext. 3

## SEPTIC SYSTEM FUNDS

By Ronald Otto,  
Sibley County Water Planner/Watershed Coordinator

The High Island Creek and Rush River watersheds still have many septic systems that are not compliant. The percentage of noncompliant systems is dropping but the watersheds are still a long way from total compliance. Studies have shown that noncompliant systems are a polluter to our surface water. Phosphorus in our lakes, streams and ditches is the major concern from septic systems.

The High Island Creek Watershed Phase II Implementation Project will be ending on August 31, 2007. A continuation request has been applied for but at this time I do not know if that will happen. This project has over \$350,000 in funds that can be used for loans on septic systems. These funds are in the form of low interest (3%) loans that are payable in semiannual amounts for 10 years. If the continuation request is not granted, home owners will have to find other funding for septic systems upgrades.

The Rush River Watershed Phase II Implementation Project has a different problem. It was funded in the spring of 2006 at \$95,000.00. At the

present time all of the funds have been used and a waiting list have been started for those wishing to use the loan program when they upgrade their septic systems. MPCA has assured me that there will be more funds in the near future. When more money is received for septic system upgrades I will contact all home owners that are on the waiting list. This project will not end until June 20, 2009.

When thinking about upgrading a septic system and how it is going to be financed; remember that the application for the loan has to be made before any construction begins. Contractors may get the building permit but the owner has to make application for the loan.

Stop in or call Sibley SWCD if you have any questions about septic system financing or if you want an application. The telephone number is (507) 237-5269 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  
Sibley SWCD office  
P.O. Box 161; 111 6<sup>th</sup> 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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  
Watersheds Implementation Project  
P.O. Box 161  
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**GREEN TRENDS TO WATCH**

Scientists, politicians and average folks alike are paying attention to global warming. That raises the question: How can individuals live responsibly, reducing carbon emissions that contribute to a potentially disastrous warming of the Earth? A Wayzata business called Live Green, Live Smart researched trends related to global warming. Here are changes it forecasts:

- Double flush toilets: One flush for fluids and a double flush button for solids will reduce water used for waste disposal. If mandated for new construction, it could save shrinking aquifers.
- Wind-powered electric generating turbines on college campuses: Alums are opting to donate so colleges can produce their own power.
- Offsetting greenhouse gas with a donation for a net-zero lifestyle: Politicians are buying carbon credits to pay for their energy consumption, and so are ordinary people. The idea is to donate money to organizations that invest it in eco-friendly projects to reduce greenhouse gasses.
- Green stores: Micro market retailers are helping consumers find everything from environmentally friendlier paints to those double-flush toilets.
- Fuels from garden and the wall socket: Ethanol, biodiesel and electric cars – fuel is changing. Soon more fuel will be grown on the family farm, made from waste byproducts.
- Lighting from fluorescents, LED and solar technologies.

St. Cloud Times

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  
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Pheasants Forever  
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Gaylord Protective  
League

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