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**Winter of 2007**

# River Watcher

High Island Creek & Rush River  
Watersheds Implementation Project

**NEWSLETTER**

Vol. 3 Issue 4

## NEW COORDINATOR

Greetings to all of you from Sibley County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). My name is Ronald Otto and I am the new coordinator for the High Island Creek and Rush River Watersheds Implementation Project. I began my duties as the half-time coordinator on January 8<sup>th</sup>. The other half of my time is spent working as the coordinator for the Sibley County Water Plan.

For those of you that don't know me, I was born and raised in the Gaylord area. I farmed with my dad for many years and after his retirement continued to farm by myself. The farm consisted of crops and dairy. When none of my children seemed interested in the dairy part of the farm I decided to quit and work off the farm. My wife, son and I continue to live on the farm. We love it in the country and hope to stay there well into the future. My wife and I have another son and two daughters who are all married.

Since I started working here I have been getting familiar with all the various conservation programs that are offered through the SWCD office, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Administration (FSA). This is a big task but it will help me accomplish the goal of this position. The goal is to clean up the water and environment in Sibley County and surrounding areas.

If you have any questions about the programs offered through the High Island Creek & Rush River Watersheds Implementation Project and other conservation agencies or just need information stop in or call the office in Gaylord. I am located in the USDA Service Building at 111 6<sup>th</sup> Street next to the Casey's gas station. You can reach me at 507-237-5435 ext. 105 or by e-mail at [ron.otto@mn.nacdn.net](mailto:ron.otto@mn.nacdn.net).



**Ron Otto, HI & RR Project Coordinator**



**High Island Creek**

### COST – SHARE AVAILIABLE FOR:

- ✓ Open tile intake alternative (rock title & slotted riser) structures or removal of the structure,
- ✓ Cover crops for late canning ground and sugar beet fields,
- ✓ Structural practices (water & 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. More information on page 5.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### SHALLOW LAKES FORUM IV –

*Assessing, Managing & Restoring Shallow Lakes*

This year's Forum will build on the foundation of the prior three forums and focus on the assessment, management and restoration of Minnesota's shallow lakes and the concerns of the increasing numbers of lakeshore residents living on shallow lakes.

#### Program Objectives

1. Participants will understand shallow lakes as different from other lakes.
2. Participants will appreciate the unique challenges confronting Minnesota's shallow lakes.
3. Participants will have knowledge of how to get started with assessing, managing and restoring shallow lakes

**Date:** April 4, 2007

**Location:** Holiday Inn, St. Cloud

**Cost:** \$40.00 – pre-registration paid in full by March 21s or \$60.00 afterwards

**Contact:** Diane Wiley, Water Resources Center  
Minnesota State University, Mankato  
184 Trafton Science Center, South  
Mankato, MN 56001  
507-389-5492

### MANURE STORAGE SYSTEMS Workshop

Manure storage systems are a critical component in manure management. This course will provide participants with critical information needed to design and inspect manure storage systems. System design information will include site investigation, critical design components, and construction issues. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MCPA) staff will be presenting information on critical regulatory issues.

**Date:** April 11 & 12, 2007

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

**Location:** Country Inn & Suites, 1900 Premier Drive  
in Mankato

**Cost:** \$160 for the 2-day event

**Sponsor:** MN Extension Service

**Contact:** David Schmidt, Extension Educator  
612-625-4262

[schmi071@umn.edu](mailto:schmi071@umn.edu)

*The University of Minnesota Extension Service is committed to delivering high-quality, relevant educational programs and information to Minnesota citizens and communities.*

### "NEWS FROM THE WATER RESOURCES CENTER (WRC)"

Work on the HIC & RR Fecal Coliform Bacteria TMDL or Total Maximum Daily Load Study continues to move ahead. A draft report will be ready for public review in the near future. As part of this process a public informational meeting will be held in the watersheds to present the conclusions of the study. Time will be set aside at the meeting to work on an implementation plan for reducing excessive levels of fecal coliform bacteria in the rivers and ditches.

Three key activities will be a major focus in the implementation plan:

- ✓ Reduce feedlot runoff through manure storage basins and other low-cost fixes like gutter systems and diversions.
- ✓ Manure management plans for feedlots ranging from 100 to 900 animal units. It could also include composting structures.
- ✓ Septic upgrades for noncompliant septic systems.



**Small group session at the MN River Summit**

The WRC builds partnerships to provide: objective water resource management tools and policy, experiential learning opportunities for students, and cost effective applied research.

- Research & Data Collection
- Planning & Coordination
- Technical Assistance
- Training & Outreach

**Contact:** Minnesota State University, Mankato;  
184 Trafton Science Center South; Mankato, MN  
56001; 507-389-5492.

## **Friends of High Island/Rush River Hold Fund Raiser and Plan Projects and Actions**

By Scott Sparlin, Watershed Initiative Coordinator,  
Friends of the Minnesota Valley

Friends of High Island/Rush River held its first annual Mid-Winter Bash at the Gaylord Legion in Gaylord January 13<sup>th</sup>. The grass-roots group collected prizes from throughout the area and conducted a raffle with donations from a number of organizations and businesses. Friends of the Minnesota Valley, the umbrella organization for the group, pledged to match up to at least \$4000 for the event. In the end after paying for expenses over \$5000 was raised at the event, which will be matched and compiled with other funds that have been raised over the past 2 years.

Revenues raised will be used will be used for projects designed to improve water quality and to leverage other dollars for projects in the High Island and Rush River Watersheds. Presently the group has a priority focus on High Island Lake Watershed, but projects are being planned for all parts of the two watersheds where unique opportunities are being sought out. As an example, at this time dollars are available in the High Island Lake Watershed for anyone wishing to take advantage of the Clean Water Partnership money administered through the county that is available for rock tile inlets. This would make the conversion from an open intake basically free in that area. Along with that, a three-acre rain garden in New Auburn will be constructed this year with the possibility of several more. This is being done to avoid the negative

**High  
Island  
Lake**



environmental affects that storm sewer systems have on surface water, in this case High Island Lake. The City of New Auburn, being located right on High Island Lake is situated in a very sensitive area for the rapid introduction of pollutants from citywide runoff through the present storm water system and ditches. Bolten and Menk Engineering Co. have developed plans that will utilize rain gardens to deal with New Auburn storm water as opposed to a conventional system, which provides a direct flush of water carrying pollutants to the lake.

With citizen's input over the course of the next year or so, a plan and system will be developed that examines current water quality improvement strategies which are presently being undertaken in the two watersheds. We will then begin to prioritize actions that need special attention, assistance or enhancement. We will then be soliciting partnerships with other organizations throughout the two watersheds in an attempt to accelerate water quality improvements and recreational opportunities. This will be done not only by implementing projects but through policy as well.

## **“Buffer Strips Along Our Ditches and Streams”**

By Ron Otto, Project Coordinator

Buffer strips along the ditches and streams, have shown, that with them in place, the water quality has improved. Sedimentation into the water is greatly reduced. Other nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus have a chance to be filtered out before entering the water.

Sibley County has had a one rod (16.5 feet) easement on all new or improved ditches since 1977. This is property that had an easement recorded when the ditch was dug or was a major improvement to one that was already there. The land had grasses planted to it and should not be cropped. The watershed districts are monitoring these easements to see if the land in this strip is being left in grass.

Everyone who has a ditch or stream running in or along their property is being encouraged to begin using the buffer strips. This would be voluntary on the ditches that don't have the easement on them. There are some incentives for doing this if you would like to sign up for them. If you are thinking about doing this you have to have cropping history and the minimum width would be thirty feet to a maximum of 150 feet.

For more information on buffer strips contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District office at: Sibley Co: 507-237-5435 ext. 105; Renville Co: 320-523-1559 ext. 3; McLeod County: 320-864-5176 ext. 3 or Nicollet Co: 507-931-2550 ext. 3



**An example of a filter strip**

## “ONE PERSONS VIEW OF THE MINNESOTA RIVER – MARY MUELLER”

On January 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> over 180 people gathered from across the Minnesota River Watershed for an extended conversation about changing the course of Minnesota’s namesake river and tributaries. The discussion centered on what has been accomplished – to celebrate success, to share understanding of efforts to improve water quality, and to explore ways of leveraging these efforts to make their total impact more powerful.

Mary Mueller lives in rural Winthrop and is the owner of a prairie restoration business – Mueller’s Habitat Restoration – that plans and seeds prairie and wetland restorations. She operates a farm with portions of the land enrolled in RIM, CRP and CREP conservation program efforts. Mary serves on the Legislative Citizen Commission of MN Resources.

*What is my image of the Minnesota River today? Canoeing is good; I don’t necessary want to wade in the rivers. Our rivers have become glorified drainage ditches and conduits of the water. Even though the more major rivers have become major drainage systems they do provide a lot of habitat for wildlife. I’m concerned about the amount of water transported on our rivers during spring melt and storm runoff and the negative impact it is having on the stream banks.*

*Today, I still see the negative impact of increased drainage. I also see the positive benefits of increased buffering and wetland restorations are having to the rivers. Add in the recreational benefits and protection of upstream areas we are seeing more positive impacts on the rivers.*

*Ten years from now I am worried about the river in terms of the Ethanol debate and whether we go strictly to a corn on corn production or utilize native grasses to produce this product.*

*The most successful thing I have been involved with for the Minnesota River has been CREP. The beauty of this program was the high number of enrolled perpetual easements and how it has allowed long term benefits and not your typical flash-in-the-pan product. The program concentrated on the buffers and wetland restorations which have powerful long term benefits. The public will get what it paid for and it shows both good public policy as well as environmental benefits.*

*The individual watershed projects and the amount of work and financial means that have gone into improving water quality in watersheds like the Blue Earth, High Island Creek, etc. The Minnesota River Watershed as a whole recognized this is where the work needed to be done and it has become a model for other watersheds in the state.*

*I’m interested in the physical makeup of the MN River Watershed and how land uses change as you move downstream. I want to return to a more healthy system both in terms of being able to use the rivers for*



**Mary Mueller at the MN River Summit**

*recreational uses like fishing, physical contact and others, along with what we deliver to the greater system including the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico. As a society we have to look at how we impact downstream especially in terms of water movement and flooding. I don’t think the public has a perception of the urgency when it comes to the Minnesota River. People are too caught up in the day to day issues to think about long term sustainability of our rivers and natural ecosystems. It is the out of sight out of mind mentality unless they are directing using the rivers for fishing and other activities.*

*Today there are a lot of pressure on people both on the home front and work place. If it doesn’t affect you directly and personally you don’t think about it. I don’t know how much more public awareness will be able to ease this lack of urgency attitude.*

*A lot of time and effort has been spent restoring all of our farmland into native prairie and wetlands by utilizing conservation programs and wetland mitigations. We went the extra mile by utilizing quality seed and not just the basic packages offered by government agencies. There is my work with local landowners to enroll their property into CREP and other conservation programs. In my seed business I have followed my own personal actions of using better plant mixes for my clients to provide better habitat for wildlife. I have also done a lot of volunteer work with schools and community organizations like 4-H clubs to talk about the benefits of restoring wetlands and other conservation programs on habitat and financially for the landowner.*

*The Minnesota River is a treasure that we don’t fully recognize even today. We need to improve the water quality to make it the treasure it can be and the place people care about. Today our society isn’t spending enough time in the outdoors and this shows in how we sometimes act in our personal choices. People forget how close the Minnesota River is in terms of where we live and how you can spend a Sunday afternoon enjoying the many opportunities it offers without traveling far.*

## 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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Gaylord, MN 55334**

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**DRIVE GREEN, DRIVE THRIFTY:**

- Cut the number of miles you drive by combining errands. Link one errand after another is that the engine remains warm and thus operates more fuel-efficiently than it does with cold starts.
- If you carpool or telecommute one day a week, you'll cut your weekly commute by 20%.
- Observe the speed limit. Gas mileage normally decreases rapidly above 60 mph; as a rule, each 5 mph over 60 adds 20 cents per gallon to your gas costs.
- In the summer, fill your gas tank in the morning or evening, when it's cooler. This reduces the amount of harmful vapors and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) released into the air. VOCs contribute to ground-level ozone or smog.
- Idling your vehicle gives you zero miles per gallon. There is no reason to idle a 1994 or newer gasoline or diesel-powered vehicle for more than a minute, even in a Minnesota winter. Idling increases engine wear, wastes fuel, and emits more pollution.
- Accelerate gradually. Jackrabbit starts use 50% more gasoline than smooth gradual starts.
- Keep your tires at the correct pressure. Underinflated tires can reduce your gas mileage by 3% (wasting about 9 cents per gallon).
- Keep your car in tune. An out-of-tune engine can waste around 12 cents per gallon of gas, much more if you drive with a major maintenance problem.

MPCA - Minnesota Environment – Summer 2006

High Island Lake  
Conservation Club  
Cities of Arlington,  
New Auburn,  
Gaylord, Winthrop,  
Gibbon &  
Lafayette  
U.S. Geological  
Survey  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife  
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Minnesota Board  
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Chapters  
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Green Isle  
Sportsmen Club  
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League

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