

**SunWise Program – U.S. EPA**

The SunWise Program is an environmental and health education program that aims to teach the public how to protect themselves from overexposure to the sun through the use of classroom-, school-, and community-based components. Check out the web site at:

<http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/>

**An Outdoors Adventure the Kids Won't Grouse About – Conservation Minnesota**

"The grouse would do their dance at the same time for a minute or so and then they would all stop and sit quietly or walk around slowly. Then, all of a sudden they would begin to dance and make their motorboat noise in unison again. We guessed that they were doing this in response to sounds that the females were making, but we didn't know for sure." -- Kristin Eggerling

*Last week, Conservation Minnesota Board member Kristin Eggerling of Hallock took her two boys and husband out on an early-morning mission to see the courtship ritual of Minnesota's once-abundant sharptail grouse. We liked her story so much we wanted to share it with you.*

While I had heard about dancing prairie chickens for years, it wasn't until this spring that I read that male sharp-tailed grouse also dance as a part of their mating ritual. I have always been curious about the prairie chicken dance so I decided to go and see the sharp-tailed grouse do their thing since they live right near us.

Lake Bronson State Park is about 15 miles from where I live in Hallock and I'd read that you could book a blind through the park even though the blind is actually located on private property. I called on Monday, made the reservation for Wednesday (May 6) and was told that Pete, the Assistant Park Manager, would be emailing me the next day with the time, the directions and other relevant information I would need to know.

The next day I got the email from Pete with the necessary information and he asked if I was bringing my husband and sons along with me. He told me that he had brought his young, preschool aged daughter out and it was quite an experience...So, later that evening during supper I asked if they would be interested in joining me. The 8 year old who we call Nature Boy was immediately interested.

"I'm going," he said, full of excitement. It was not a surprise that the eleven-year-old was not interested. He is what we call a technology-addicted basketball boy with little interest in the outdoors. He said, "I think I'd rather watch a video of it." I consulted with my husband and he decided that he could make it work into his schedule. Thankfully, Basketball Boy didn't put up much of a fight when I told him that it would be a family affair.

Nature Boy

Basketball Boy

The instant we walked out the door the sound of birds singing filled the air. It made me wonder what we must miss out on outdoors while we sleep. As we drove to Lake Bronson, we noticed that fog was hovering just above the ground, which gave the morning a magical feeling. I was concerned that the fog could make it difficult for us to see the show but I was so enthralled by the beauty of it that I couldn't seem to make myself mind. The information had told us that temperature had little effect on the dancing behavior, but that the main deterrents were precipitation and wind. It was calm but not exactly clear.

[Visit our website](#) to read the rest of Kristin's story and get more info about grouse habitat.

### **Bell ringer days relaying a quiet message**

By: [Tom Cherveney](#), West Central Tribune

WATSON — Venus and a crescent moon hold court in a star-filled sky, and a red blush on the horizon gives promise of day break to come.

Venus and a crescent moon dominate the pre-dawn sky, but already the prairie is alive with the mating songs of birds. Dave Trauba, manager of the Lac qui Parle refuge, makes early morning runs to listen for the booming calls of male prairie chickens to monitor how the re-introduced birds are doing. In each of the last three years, he has heard fewer prairie chickens.

Dave Trauba is already out of the pickup truck, miles from home and surrounded in all directions by open grasslands. He listens. There is a wild chorus of bird song greeting the coming of day, and as the inhabitants announce their presence he jots down notes. He is taking roll call.

In the next two hours he will make a series of stops along remote, gravel roads in the area around Lac qui Parle and Marsh Lakes. He will be treated to everything from a visit by a curious short-eared owl and the flight of a flustered marbled godwit, to the squawks of countless pheasants and steady babble of distant geese.

He listens only for the puff-cheeked, whoops and the occasional cackles and whoops of the prairie chicken on their spring booming grounds.

It's what he calls a "bell ringer" day, or one of those rare April days when not even a whisper of wind is stirring and sound can carry for miles. During much of April and early May he takes advantage of every bell ringer day to make this circuit and listen, all for a purpose.

Trauba, the manager of the Lac qui Parle wildlife refuge for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, is part of an effort to re-introduce prairie chickens to a project area. It stretches along the Minnesota River Valley from the Lac qui Parle refuge to the Big Stone National Wildlife refuge. The Chippewa and Plover Prairies, as well as protected grasslands that are part of wildlife and waterfowl production areas, are being managed with the goal of helping the birds re-establish themselves.

Prairie chickens were once so numerous on Minnesota's western grasslands that hunters filled wagons with their harvest, he pointed out. But as the grasslands disappeared, so did the birds. By the late 1940s the distinctive boom of the prairie chickens was no longer a part of the spring chorus on the prairie.

They returned in 1999, when an eight-year project got underway to re-introduce the birds to the area. There is a viable population of native prairie chickens in northwestern Minnesota. Dr. John Toepfer, one of the country's leading researchers on prairie chickens, and his assistants trapped the birds at night and made red eye runs to Lac qui Parle to release them.

The transplanting stopped three years ago, and ever since the birds have been on their own. Their numbers here are declining. "We're not getting the reproduction (needed)," said Trauba.

His early-morning roll calls over the last few years have shown a steady decline in the population of male prairie chickens and the booming grounds on which they perform their courtship rituals for females. This year he could confirm no more than six or possibly seven booming grounds in a project area that once held a certain 11.

There are now only 35 to 45 males in the project area, down from over 60 males last year and more than 90 two years earlier. Some of the birds still carry bands, indicating that the habitat has been suitable to sustain the released birds. The lack of reproduction is due mainly to the colorful, but non-native game bird whose frequent squawking can't be ignored.

Pheasants practice what is known as "parasitism." They employ the same notorious tactic of the cowbird, and lay their eggs in the nests of prairie chickens. The dynamics of parasitism in the project area isn't fully understood, but the evidence is clear. Trauba and others working on the project have found many prairie chicken nests holding pheasant eggs.

On behalf of the prairie chickens, the Minnesota DNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private organizations have worked to provide healthy, native prairie and grasslands absent of trees and "predator perches" in the project area.

The marbled godwits and pintail ducks that Trauba finds nesting in the area are proof of the success of the effort.

The same habitat that benefits prairie chickens benefits pheasants, too. The grassland habitat has also attracted sharp-tail grouse back to the area. Sharp-tail grouse were native here and actually dominated much of the western Minnesota grasslands before prairie chicken populations exploded during the early years of European settlement.

Trauba said the sharp-tail grouse breed and mix with the prairie chickens. There are now offspring or hybrid birds in the project area. His morning listening sessions include keeping a keen ear for the hooting and cooing sounds that sharp-tail grouse make; they are more difficult to discern than the booming of the male prairie chicken.

The sharp-tail's return has complicated the dynamics of the prairie chicken project, but the "smoking gun" for their decline is unquestionably the parasitism by pheasants, he said. The importance of what happens here goes well beyond returning the music and beauty of the prairie chicken to the Upper Minnesota River Valley.

The long-term goal is to develop a patchwork of grasslands re-connecting the area with the native population of prairie chickens in the northwestern part of the state. The hope is to allow the birds from both populations to connect and mix; it would diversify the population and prevent the genetic isolation of the birds.

Trauba said another goal in establishing a second, viable population in Minnesota is for the same reason we have second string players on football teams. There is always the risk that a calamitous series of events —an outbreak of disease and harsh winters — could threaten the population of prairie chickens in one area. Having two locations improves the overall survival odds for the species, he explained.

He has not yet given up hope. And ultimately, what we learn may prove as important as whether or not this stocking of prairie chickens takes hold. We may gain new insights into what it takes to make a successful re-introduction, or we might better appreciate how critical it is to protect the native populations that do remain, he pointed out.

He volunteers his early morning listening hours to the project, and they come at a time of year when he sees long, hard days. But Trauba said he will continue this spring time ritual for as long as it takes, or until he hears the last bird booming.

## **Listening for prairie chickens - Dave Trauba listening for prairie chickens in Watson**

(click play to listen)      [Dave Trauba listening for prairie chickens in Watson](#)

It's all about listening, and lots of practice has allowed Trauba to discern the sounds of prairie chickens from the many other bird songs of the spring mating season. The research requires that he rise early on work days that will be long, but Trauba said he has never regretted getting up. The pleasure of hearing and seeing the spring prairie come to life makes it all worthwhile. Look at slide show with sounds: <http://www.wctrib.com/event/slideshows/id/58/>

## **Minnesota Environmental Partnership Meeting – Jeff Brand**

Hello Friends - You are invited to attend an end-of-session meeting on Thursday, May 28th at the Elks Nature Center in Mankato, Minnesota from 6:30-8:00 pm! What worked? What passed? What do we need to work on for next session? I'll spend a little time discussing the end of regular session - you are encouraged to ask questions and make comments! Also, we are blessed to have presenter Bob Tammen travel down from Northeastern Minnesota to talk to us on an important issue - sulfide mining in Minnesota. Tammen has worked in the mines for 15 years and will talk about the differences between sulfide mining and iron ore mining. Since the new mining operation(s) might become active in the North Shore region later this year, we have a serious concern that this new type of mining could seriously endanger Lake Superior and the BWCAW. Add Thursday, May 28th, 6:30 pm, to your calendar now to learn more about Minnesota Environmental Partnership's proposed legislation to encourage Safe Mines to Protect our Water. Refreshments will be served. To RSVP call Jeff Brand @ 934-4821 or email [jeffbrand@MEPartnership.org](mailto:jeffbrand@MEPartnership.org)

## **Photo Contest – Chippewa River Watershed Project**

The Chippewa River Watershed Project is sponsoring its 3rd Annual photo contest and seeking photos that feature the Chippewa River Watershed. The winning photos will be published in a 2010 calendar and will be featured on our website and various publications. The "Best in Show" winner will have their winning photo professionally matted and framed. Photos can be submitted digitally or as traditional paper photos. Photos must be taken in the Chippewa River Watershed and should include a feature a river or other water/water quality theme. Photos should be taken within the last five years. Registration Forms MUST accompany photos to be eligible for the contest. Photo submissions are due to the Chippewa River Watershed Project by September 1, 2009. Contact Jennifer for more information at 320-269-2139 ext 120 or email [jennifer.hoffman@rcdnet.net](mailto:jennifer.hoffman@rcdnet.net)

## **MPCA NEEDS LOCAL VOLUNTEERS TO MONITOR LAKES**

St. Paul, Minn. -- Now that spring has come to Minnesota, are you looking forward to spending time on your favorite lake this summer? Can't wait to put your boat or canoe into the water for the first time? Steve Merten has been waiting to get back on the water all winter long -- and he has an important reason to do so.

As a volunteer in the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) Citizen Lake Monitoring Program (CLMP), Merten monitors Half Moon Lake in Hennepin County, taking notes of the water's physical condition and recreational suitability. He is one of nearly 1,300 volunteers who participate in the CLMP.

Merten understands the importance of his volunteerism. "As a high school science teacher, I have been teaching students about the hidden life of a lake - the 'below the surface' world that is so closely connected to everything that happens above the lake," he said. "Looking at a lake's turbidity gives some great clues to its health and the effects the surrounding world has had on that body of water."

Merten, an avid fisherman and canoeist, likes the program because it lets the users of the lake become owners of more than just the recreation it offers. "Watching my little lake go from crystal

clear in spring to fairly cloudy makes me want to know the cause, and to be able to judge if the change is a natural cycle tied to the seasons, or if it is warning of problems upstream," Merten said.

Monitoring is a simple and relatively quick process. Volunteers visit a designated spot on one or more lakes weekly, where they measure the clarity of the water with a Secchi disk. A Secchi disk is a white, 8-inch, metal disk that is lowered into the water until it can no longer be seen. The depth, measured by markings on the rope, is a useful indicator of the lake's relative water quality.

Other volunteers like Merten are needed to monitor water quality in Minnesota's 12,200 lakes during the summer months. Monitoring data gathered by volunteers provides valuable information about the current health of Minnesota's waters. Johanna Schussler, CLMP program coordinator, said that the MPCA is always looking for volunteers and that there are many lakes throughout the state that don't currently have a CLMP volunteer.

While volunteers are needed statewide, the MPCA will also be looking for more lake volunteers in specific watersheds to supplement the data that the agency and other local partners will be collecting. Those watersheds include: Big Fork River, Bois de Sioux River, Buffalo River, Cedar River, Chippewa River, Crow Wing River, Grand Marais Creek, Mississippi River (St. Cloud and Winona), Minnesota River (Granite Falls), Shell Rock River, St. Croix River (Stillwater) and the St. Louis River. A list of specific lakes that need volunteers is available at [www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/wq-s1-52.pdf](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/wq-s1-52.pdf).

The MPCA provides volunteers with everything needed to be a monitor (although lake volunteers need access to a boat or canoe). More information about the volunteer monitoring programs is available on the MPCA's Web site at [www.pca.state.mn.us/cmp](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/cmp) or by calling 1-800-657-3864.

### **MPCA RECOMMENDS "NO DRUGS DOWN THE DRAIN"**

St. Paul -- The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) recommends that citizens avoid disposing of expired or unwanted medications by sending them down the drain. Instead, the MPCA urges citizens to discard these substances in the trash, after taking steps to prevent children, animals and others from coming into contact with them.

Traditional disposal by sending medications down the drain may unintentionally harm fish and wildlife. Recent studies have found medications, or the materials that make up drugs, in Minnesota waters. Some medications, such as hormones and antidepressants, include endocrine disrupting compounds (EDCs), which interfere with the reproduction and normal growth of many aquatic species, such as frogs and fish.

Before placing medications in the trash, citizens should take the following steps to prevent accidental or intentional ingestion of these substances:

- Keep the medication in its original container. Leave content and safety information clearly visible, but scratch out the patient's name or cover it with permanent marker.
- Modify the contents to discourage consumption. Add a small amount of water or vinegar to pills or capsules to partially dissolve them. Add table salt, flour or a powdered spice to liquids.
- Seal and conceal the medication container. Tape the lid shut with duct tape and place the container inside a non-transparent piece of trash, such as an empty margarine tub. Do not conceal medications in food.
- Discard the container in the garbage, not in the recycle bin.

The MPCA Web site provides additional disposal information at [www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/hhw/pharmaceuticals.html](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/hhw/pharmaceuticals.html). Citizens may also contact their county solid waste officer or household hazardous waste program for alternative disposal methods.

Medications enter the wastewater system either through excretion by humans or through disposal of unused or expired quantities down a toilet or drain. From there the wastewater flows to a

treatment system, which uses many processes to clean up the water, though many are not designed to remove manmade medications. In Minnesota, the majority of treated wastewater discharges to a lake, river or stream.

Thus, one way to reduce the amount of medications in Minnesota's waterways is to reduce the amount disposed of down the drain.

Prompted by concerns about the effect of medications on treatment facilities and the environment, the MPCA recently advised permitted wastewater-treatment plants across the state to not accept certain pharmaceuticals for disposal. In addition, the MPCA is working with hospitals and associations representing generators of pharmaceuticals as well as federal, state and local agencies to develop legal, reasonable and feasible disposal methods. Additional information is available for hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities and others that handle prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications or veterinary medicines. A fact sheet, titled, "Managing Waste from Health Care Providers," is also available on the MPCA Web site at [www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/w-hw3-34.pdf](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/w-hw3-34.pdf).

Studies are underway and will continue for many years to address this issue of international scope. The MPCA will share additional information as it becomes available.

### **Minnesota Conservation Funding Guide**

This web site allows people to search practice and payment information for over 50 conservation practices. The guide includes general information on the timing of opportunities to enroll in each program, plus contact information to find out when the next funding opportunity will occur: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/funding.htm>

### **Events:**

May 26<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday) is a **Community Conversation – “Would Mankato Benefit from a Co-op?”** from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Elk's Nature Center, Mankato. During the past couple of years, conversation around the topic at hand has happened over coffee, in the grocery store line and as people of like minds and preferences cross paths. Meetings held recently have determined that there is a strong community interest in exploring the possibilities. Join interested community members the last Tuesday of each month and keep moving this question into action mode.

June 16<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday) is the **Cottonwood River Canoe Trip** hosted by the Redwood Cottonwood Rivers Control Area (RCRCA). The trip will start at the canoe access on County Road 11 and paddled into Flandrau State Park in New Ulm. For more information, [http://www.rcrca.com/canoe\\_trip\\_home.htm](http://www.rcrca.com/canoe_trip_home.htm)

June 18<sup>th</sup> (Thursday) is the **Redwood River Canoe Trip** hosted by the Redwood Cottonwood Rivers Control Area (RCRCA). The paddle will go from County Road 6 into Redwood Lake at Redwood Falls. Meet at Perk's Place to be driven out to the put-in point. For more information, [http://www.rcrca.com/canoe\\_trip\\_home.htm](http://www.rcrca.com/canoe_trip_home.htm)

**Check out additional upcoming events and workshops on the Minnesota River Calendar at:** <http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/calendar/index.html>

### **Water Quality Articles:**

[Three dairy producers say they like their low-cost parlors](#) (Agri News). All the parlors were low cost to build and increased milking efficiency.

[Getting serious about slipping out of oil's clutches](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Investments in lean-energy manufacturing, products and oil replacements will give our economy a sustainable boost.

[U. Minnesota students building house powered entirely by sun](#) (Twin Cities Daily Planet). After 15 months of planning, University of Minnesota students are finally getting to fire up their drills and saws to begin construction on a fully functioning house powered exclusively by the sun.

[Minnesota environment gets some stimulus](#) (MinnPost). The U.S. Department of the Interior has released details of where its stimulus money is headed, and there are a few Minnesota projects on an \$11 million list, plus more money from projects that cross state lines.

[The predator pursued](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). John Hart squatted in a muddy pasture and examined the carcass in front of him. The wounds on the eviscerated calf, and the tracks all around it, left no mystery about what had happened.

[Farmers see organic benefits](#) (Rochester Post Bulletin). In a greenhouse with light rain drumming the milky plastic, Ruth Bonow and Diane Leutgeb Munson hurried to repot green peppers and eggplants.

[Organic farmers raise quality of dirt on their farm](#) (Rochester Post Bulletin). Spring had warmed the land enough that Sandy Dietz could at long last return to her field to feel the cool, moist, life-giving soil on her fingers.

[As money flows from Legacy Amendment, Minnesotans will see new jobs](#) (MinnPost). The Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment never was envisioned as a jobs engine when it was crafted years ago, but pumping \$481 million into those areas in the next two years could bring some welcome ripple effects across Minnesota.

[Giving money for nothing?](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). A \$44 million deal with UPM Blandin would ensure that its acreage would remain open for recreational use, supporters say.

[Minnesota ready to kick some ash borer](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Plans to track down the Asian bug and impose quarantines are starting, but efforts might be futile.

[House, Senate approve outdoors and arts program](#) (National Public Radio). Hundreds of millions of dollars in sales tax proceeds will soon be available for improving hunting and fishing areas, water quality, parks and trails, and arts and history in Minnesota. The Legislature overwhelmingly approved a plan for spending the money last night.

[Boaters beware: State checking for zebra mussels](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Boaters beware: Beginning this weekend, officials will be out in force trying to prevent the spread of invasive zebra mussels from Lake Mille Lacs, Prior Lake in Scott County and Rice Lake near Brainerd.

*The real conflict of the beach is not between sea and shore, for theirs is only a lover's quarrel, but between man and nature. On the beach, nature has achieved a dynamic equilibrium that is alien to man and his static sense of equilibrium. Once a line has been established, whether it be a shoreline or a property line, man unreasonably expects to stay put. – G. Soucie, 1973*

**The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (Watershed Alliance) is an organized network of citizens, public agencies, and private organizations dedicated to communicating the benefits of an ecology healthy Minnesota River Watershed to others and are actively working towards its improvement and protection. We meet four times a year and encourage landowners and recreational users of the river to be part of the effort. For more information on the Watershed Alliance: <http://www.watershedalliance.blogspot.com>**



Please register at the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance's bulletin board at <http://mail.mnsu.edu/mailman/listinfo/mrwa> to receive regular updates on what is happening in the Minnesota River Watershed.

Thanks,

Scott

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