

Forum on Agricultural Practices on Shoreland Areas

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will host a public forum on agricultural practices in shoreland areas on February (Monday) from 12 noon to 5 p.m. in the Redwood Area Community Center in Redwood Falls. Intended for farmers and producers, as well as agency officials and local government staff, the forum will provide an overview of current requirements for agricultural practices in shoreland areas and a discussion of how the rules might be improved. In addition to the DNR, representatives from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Board of Water and Soil Resources, and local representatives will be available to give presentations and answer questions.

For more information on the forum, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/swagshorelandforumflyer.pdf>

Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council Meeting

A meeting is going to be held on February 6th (Friday) from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Fort Snelling State Park Visitor Center to discuss developing a collaborative proposal to be submitted to the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council. This forum will cover conservation concerns and proposals related to those wildlife habitats not easily captured in one of the three groups covering wetland, prairie and forest.

For more information, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/lessardoutdoorheritagemeeting.pdf>

Big Stone II and the U.S. EPA

The proposed coal-fired plant Big Stone II was back in the news as the U.S. EPA objects to an air quality permit issued by South Dakota. According to the EPA, Big Stone II officials have 90 days to change their permit to satisfy regulations for air quality. In a letter to South Dakota authorities, EPA flagged a number of deficiencies in the air pollution permit – from inadequate analysis of some potential emissions to failure to establish adequate emission monitoring schedules.

More on this story:

- [Big Stone II a 3-year process](#) (Fergus Falls Daily Journal). The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) decision to grant transmission lines sought by Big Stone II utilities, including Fergus Falls-based Otter Tail Power Company, is based on what the PUC terms “an extraordinarily extensive case record that began with the filing of the petition in April, 2005.”
- [EPA files objections to coal-fired power plant](#) (West Central Tribune). South Dakota Public Utilities Commission Chairman Dusty Johnson says the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has filed objections to a state air quality permit granted for the proposed coal-fired Big Stone II power plant.
- [EPA overturns Big Stone II, environmental groups report](#) (MinnPost). Just a week after Minnesota’s PUC approved a major power transmission line in southwestern Minnesota as part of the Big Stone II coal-burning power plant proposal in South Dakota, the federal EPA has overturned South Dakota’s approval of the project, reports the Sierra Club and Clean Water Action, two groups that oppose the project.
- [Jill Burcum: EPA flexes its muscles](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). New EPA objections to the Big Stone II coal plant certainly suggest more scrutiny ahead for coal-fired utility projects under an Obama administration.

More on this story from Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)

In the first major coal plant decision since President Obama took Office, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has denied a permit for construction of the Big Stone II coal-fired power plant in South Dakota! The decision came down just a week after the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) approved a permit (with several conditions) for transmission lines for the plant, which many saw as the final hurdle in the path of the plant’s construction.

Observers believe that this ruling from the Obama Administration, made on the last possible day of review by the EPA, sends a strong message about the incoming administration's policies toward the future of coal energy. We believe this ruling will make it extremely difficult for Big Stone II to go forward, according to CURE Renewable Energy Consultant Duane Ninneman. With a new commitment to science and accountability at the Federal level, combined with the conditions placed on the plant by the Minnesota PUC, investors may finally give up on the Big Stone II plan.

This EPA decision makes it all the more important that we as a region work together to advance new approaches to securing our energy future. We invite everyone to sit down to discuss what our options are this coming **Thursday, January 29th**

- **in Milan from 10 to 3:30 at Kviteseid Lutheran Church and**
- **from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in Marshall, Minnesota at the Wesley United Methodist church.**
- For more information on CURE's upcoming energy dialogues call 1-877-269-2873 or visit <http://sites.google.com/a/cureriver.org/jan--29th-09-energy-events/>

New head of MPCA comes from within the ranks

Gov. Tim Pawlenty has promoted a deputy commissioner to lead the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Pawlenty's office says Paul Eger becomes MPCA commissioner immediately. He replaces Brad Moore, who left the agency in December for a private-sector job. Eger most recently served as deputy commissioner and has worked for the MPCA since 2002. Before that he was a committee administrator for the late Sen. Sam Solon, DFL-Duluth, and legislative assistant to Democratic Sen. James Metzen, who is now president of the Senate. (Minnesota Public Radio).

3rd Crop Producer Meetings in March

- **March 9, 2009 - 3rd Crop Producer Meeting** – "Rural Entrepreneurship"
Info: No Charge. 10am – 3pm, registration at 9:30. Knights of Columbus Hall, Fairmont, MN. Discussions on hazelnuts, marketing, fruit production/marketing, hunting lands, agri-tourism, tree farming, B&B management, and MN recreation trends.
Contact: Jill Sackett – Rural Advantage, U of M Extension – 507-238-5449
sacke032@umn.edu
- **March 23, 2009 - 3rd Crop Producer Meeting** – "Payment for Ecological Services"
Info: No Charge. 10am – 3pm, registration at 9:30. Knights of Columbus Hall, Fairmont, MN. Discussion on Carbon trading, water quality trading, MN Terrestrial Carbon Project, habitat, MN Project, cover crops and carbon, and EQIP.
Contact: Jill Sackett – Rural Advantage, U of M Extension – 507-238-5449
sacke032@umn.edu

The 3rd Annual Friends of High Island Mid Winter Bash

This event, which is located at the High Island Hideaway in New Auburn, will be held on Jan. 31st 2009. This event starts with social hour beginning at 5 pm, followed by the meal at 6pm. Program and entertainment starts at 6:45pm and finishes the night with a raffle starting at 8:30pm. Meal tickets are \$12.50 per person and raffle tickets are \$5 each. This fundraiser's proceeds go towards High Island Lake watershed improvements.

For more information contact Scott Sparlin at 507-276-2280 or yasure@lycos.com

Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance Annual Meeting

The Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA), would like to invite you our annual meeting to be held on February 11, at Farmamerica (near Waseca MN).

This meeting will review the current health of our rivers and watershed and look to the future pertaining to the constitutional clean water amendment. This amendment promises to bring millions of dollars into our area to improve the health of our rivers and lakes.

For more information, <http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/calendar/pdfs/gberbaannualmeeting09.pdf>

High Island Creek and Rush River Newsletter

Check out the latest addition of the River Watcher newsletter from the High Island Creek and Rush River Implementation Projects. The newsletter features stories on:

- Drawdown of High Island Lake,
- Cost-share on Rain Barrels,
- Photography Contest,
- Sibley County Planning Several Dump Site Cleanups

The newsletter can be found at:

<http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/major/lowmynn/subshed/hi/pdfs/winter2009.pdf>

Events:

January 28th (Wednesday) is the fourth **“Community Wealth” Lunch Talks** from 12 noon to 1:00 p.m. at the new Clean Up the River Environment (CURE) office on the main street (117 South 1st Street) of Montevideo. For more information, www.curemnriver.org

January 29th (Thursday) is the **Local Energy Security roundtable discussion** from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Wesley United Methodist Church (202 N. 4th Street) in Marshall. For more information, www.curemnriver.org

February 7th (Saturday) is the **17th Annual Meeting of CURE** from 5 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. (meal served at 6:30 p.m.) at the Hollywood Theater on Main Street in Montevideo. Keynote speakers are Dr. Carrie Jennings & Dr. Shawn Schottler talking about “The Real Dirt on the MN River.” For more information, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/cureannualmeeting.pdf>

February 9th (Monday) is a **3rd Crop Producer Meeting – “Biomass: Production and Uses”** from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall, Fairmont. Discussion will include biomass, bioenergy, and bio-based products. For more information: Jill Sackett. Rural Advantage, U of M Extension at 507-238-5449 or sacke032@umn.edu

February 19th (Thursday) is the **Chaska to York Factory in 49 Days presentation** at 7:00 p.m. in the meeting room of the New Ulm Public Library (17 N. Broadway St.). Sean Bloomfield and Colton Witte will talk about their adventure last summer paddling the entire Minnesota and Red rivers all the way to the Hudson Bay. For more information, <http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/calendar/pdfs/hudsonbay%20flyer.pdf>

February 23rd (Monday) is a **3rd Crop Producer Meeting – “Getting Fruity”** from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Fairmont. Discussion will include aronia, grape, Saskatoon, and apple production as well as starting a winery, bee keeping, and using high tunnels. For more information: Jill Sackett. Rural Advantage, U of M Extension at 507-238-5449 or sacke032@umn.edu

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

Water Quality Articles

[Bill Boyne: Country needs new national farm policy](#) (Rochester Post Bulletin). It is clear that wholesale revisions of the nation's farm policies and farm subsidy program are needed. If this can be done, there will be a long-term improvement in the nation's health, in soil quality, in the lives of small farmers and in the nation's economy.

[Central Minnesota DNR officials in the mainstream of biomass energy](#) (Minn Post). From turkey litter to wood waste, there's a lot of action in the biomass energy sector happening in central Minnesota.

[Minnesota River: water that keeps us alive](#) (Jordan Independent). Water keeps us alive. Literally. Our body is 70 percent water and the brain – an incredible 90 percent. While humans could live around a month without food, without water we may only last five to seven days.

[Don't have a green thumb? Try blue on for size](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Free workshops throughout the south metro will teach residents how to prevent pollution and fight mosquitoes with rain gardens.

[Local musicians want Legacy Amendment money](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). The Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment approved by Minnesota voters last November is expected to raise approximately \$55 to \$60 million a year for the arts. Artists and arts groups from every discipline are hoping to get a chunk of that money.

[Schwarzenegger asks Obama for tailpipe rules](#) (Associated Press). Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger isn't waiting to press the Obama administration on one of California's top priorities _ regulating greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles.

[Officials, administrators gather to share energy ideas](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). As local officials prepare for likely state budget cuts, many of them gathered in St. Cloud Thursday to exchange ideas on how to conserve energy and save money.

[Wind, 'the last crop to harvest,' grabs attention of more farmers across the area](#) (West Central Tribune). If attendance at the mid-winter seed corn meeting seems down, it might just be because everyone is at the wind power meeting instead.

[Economic downturn is so widespread, even the trash is dwindling](#) (Owatonna People's Press). It's not only the economy that's in decline. The amount of paper, plastic and scrap metal collected from residents in Steele County took a dive, too.

[Obama orders administration to ease way for states to impose tougher fuel-emission standards](#) (Associated Press). President Barack Obama took aim Monday at the lofty but long elusive goal of making the nation more energy independent, ordering reviews that could lead to tougher auto emission standards in states and higher pressure on automakers to produce more fuel-efficient cars.

[Save your money, body and planet](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Any chance you're looking to save a little cash, improve your health or protect the Earth this year? Many simple, everyday habits achieve all three at once.

[An 11th-hour move to shift habitat funds divides panel](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Some members of a legislative-citizens commission want lottery money used to create jobs.

[Dennis Anderson: Our state legislators still are not following the rules](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). LCCMR co-chairwoman Jean Wagenius and others tried to do an end run to divert funds targeted for the environment to a pet project.

[Letter: Remember what voters said on Nov. 4](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Amendment was meant to add to conservation funds, not substitute for them.

[Minneopa State Park gets needed restoration](#) (Mankato Free Press). If a cross-country skier gliding along a trail at Minneopa State Park last week was seeking peace and quiet, she could have been disappointed.

[Best Buy to expand electronics recycling to all stores](#) (MinnPost). Best Buy, based in Richfield, said today it will expand its electronics recycling program to all of its 1006 stores nationwide, starting next month.

[Council debates chicken issue](#) (Mankato Free Press). An effort to legalize backyard chickens inched forward Monday, as a narrow City Council majority set the plan on a path toward a public hearing.

[Obama's action gives clean car backers a boost](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). Minnesota environmentalists are cheering President Obama's decision to reconsider California's request to set strict standards to control greenhouse gas emissions from cars and light trucks.

[Leaders discuss funding priorities](#) (Pioneer Press). Minnesota's waterfowl and wetlands leaders are forging ahead with a new funding proposal to restore and buy more critical wetland habitat in the state.

Nature is full of genius, full of divinity; so that not a snowflake escapes its fashioning hand. – Henry David Thoreau

A river seems a magic thing. A magic, moving, living part of the very earth itself. – Laura Gilpin, The Rio Grande, 1949

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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