

Farming method helps land . . . and wildlife

By Doug Smith, Minneapolis Star Tribune (October 18, 2011)

MONTEVIDEO, MINN. -- Even in mid-October, the little farm near the Minnesota River Valley is a stark oasis of lush green surrounded by a landscape of black plowed fields or tawny corn ready for harvesting.

"This is what our land used to look like," said Audrey Arner, pointing to a jet-black plowed field of harvested soybeans that borders her property.

The difference is night and day. And that's the difference in how Arner and her husband Richard Handeen farm compared to their neighbors. They don't plow their 240 acres, or plant row crops such as soybeans and corn. They long ago converted their land to perennial grasses, where they raise and sell grass-fed beef cattle. Some 7,000 trees and 42 species of shrubs have been planted in a matrix of treelines, sheltering the land and animals from wind, snow and erosion, and providing wildlife with habitat and food.

"The habitat on the farm provides us with an income, but it also benefits wildlife," said Handeen, whose parents and grandparents worked the farm.

For the rest of the article: <http://www.startribune.com/sports/outdoors/132097553.html>

Farm drainage choking Lake Pepin, Gulf of Mexico

By Josephine Marcotty, Minneapolis Star Tribune (October 19, 2011)

A comprehensive new study pinpoints agriculture -- specifically, half a century of artificial field drainage -- as the primary force behind the massive runoff of sediment that is adding pollution to the Mississippi River and threatening the future of Lake Pepin.

The study, presented Wednesday at a conference in St. Paul, identifies with new precision the sources of sediment that is slowly filling in Lake Pepin, one of the state's recreational jewels, and coursing down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, where it contributes to a massive "dead zone" that cannot sustain aquatic life.

Scientists said it's the latest in a growing body of evidence indicating that transformation of the land from prairie and wetlands to corn and soybeans -- not, as some have argued, more rain and natural erosion -- has accelerated the rate of sedimentation.

"It's the weight of the evidence," said Peter Wilcock, a geography professor from Johns Hopkins University.

For the entire article, <http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/wellness/132212533.html>

Friends of the Minnesota Valley 2011 Annual Dinner

You are cordially invited to attend the Friends of the Minnesota Valley 2011 Annual Dinner on November 16th (Wednesday) to hear the keynote speaker Warren Formo, Executive Director of the Minnesota Agricultural Water Resource Center (MAWRC) talk about "Innovations in Agriculture: Producers & Water Quality."

The dinner begins at 5:30 pm with a cash bar and social and will take place at the Minnesota Valley Country Club (6300 Auto Club Road) in Bloomington. The MAWRC is comprised of a coalition of 15 producer groups.

Mr. Formo and the MAWRC are engaged in efforts to promote farming practices that bring safe, healthy and affordable food to the dinner table while protecting soil and water resources and contributing to the

economic strength of the community. Learn about Farming Today, Discovery Farms, Nutrient Management, and more.

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

River Revival DVD Free to Schools

Here's a great opportunity for your students to learn about the Minnesota River Basin and the people who are striving to protect and restore the state's namesake river. This 48-minute video documentary - *River Revival: Working Together to Save the Minnesota River* - is now available free of charge to schools and other institutions of learning.

River Revival tells the story of people and organizations working together to address the water quality challenges facing the Minnesota River. Through the seasons and throughout the basin, the documentary examines the river's many pollution problems and highlights the efforts of people from all walks of life – academics, farmers, natural resource professionals, anglers, homeowners, students, paddlers, politicians, and citizen activists – to restore the river. The documentary is divided into six parts to help facilitate a classroom presentation.

The program content is appropriate for upper elementary students and older. Topics focusing on the Minnesota River Basin include its geologic history, citizen activism, environmental education, sewage and stormwater treatment, agriculture, fish and fishing, the restoration of 100,000 acres of floodplain to its natural purpose, and the establishment of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

River Revival is a production of the [Water Resources Center](#) at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Funding was provided by a diverse group of nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies. It premiered in prime time June 12, 2011, on KARE 11 TV, and is hosted by renowned outdoors advocate Ron Schara of the *Minnesota Bound* TV show.

Established in 1987, the Water Resources Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato, is a regional center for environmental research and information exchange. The WRC program is strengthened by its diversity of partnerships with nonprofit organizations, government agencies, schools and individual citizens all working on behalf of the Minnesota River Basin. One of the WRC's missions is to gather, interpret, and distribute data of environmental significance to help citizens enhance the quality of regional lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater.

The free DVDs are made possible through generous contributions by [Barr Engineering](#), the [Friends of the Minnesota Valley](#), and the [Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter](#). The offer is available only while supplies last. The documentary is also available online at the WRC's [Minnesota River Basin Data Center](#).

To order your copy, email scott.kudelka@mnsu.edu. Enter "River Revival DVD" in the Subject line and include your name and job title, and your organization's name and mailing address.

Whooping cranes sighted in south-central Minnesota

The Department of Natural Resources reports rare whooping cranes have been sighted in Rice and Le Sueur counties in south-central Minnesota.

DNR regional nongame wildlife specialist Lisa Gelvin-Innvaer said the reports are exciting because so few whooping cranes exist in the wild.

Gelvin-Innvaer says the whooping crane is a critically imperiled North American species. In 1940, there were only 16 whooping cranes left in the world. The Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership started a new flock in Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin and trained the birds to migrate along their normal route between Wisconsin and coastal Florida.

Gelvin-Innvaer says the pair sighted recently could be part of that flock.

Hunters are asked to be careful this fall and not mistake a whooping crane for other migratory waterfowl.

The Importance of Regulation on Health, Jobs and the Environment

Posted by: Paul Austin

There's been a lot of shouting lately. At Tea Parties. On Wall Street. And a lot of all the talk from the far extremes of both sides seems to be about regulations. Rules. When we were kids, we had to follow rules. Raise your hand. Don't eat the paste. Stuff like that. And, ok, some are silly. There's the one about cars and trolleys must pass a horse by more than 20 feet. Actually, there may be some wisdom to that one.

Other needed regulations, however, are in danger of being repealed. Laws we need to prevent people from getting sick. Regulations hold companies to standards that keep them operating so that the public remains healthy and safe. The Environmental Protection Agency, for example, writes regulations that pertain to clean air, water, and land. Some members of Congress are [trying to reduce the authority of the EPA](#) to regulate mercury and clear air standards. They have voted a total 168 times this year alone to minimize clean air and water laws.

Some lawmakers claim that regulations cost jobs, but it's quite the opposite. There are landfill operators and builders who keep our drinking water safe from contamination and people who design new technology or scrubbers at power plants. The result of these newly created jobs is a safer public that is spared the damages of environmental clean up, liability lawsuits, and health-care costs.

The new EPA rules that regulate emissions from coal-fired power plants alone, for example, could save 34,000 people from premature deaths a year, [according to Grist](#). That's one statistic especially important to parents of kids with respiratory illnesses.

Not to mention, with the new rules, sulfur dioxide emissions will be reduced by 73 percent, which could result in \$280 billion less in healthcare costs per year. Americans enjoy a clear economic benefit from having regulations in place, as well as the health benefit associated with them. Now that's something to shout about.

Officials urge proper disposal of medications, drugs

by [Stephanie Hemphill](#), Minnesota Public Radio (October 19, 2011)

St. Paul, Minn. — A public education campaign is underway to encourage proper disposal of expired or unwanted medications. Water treatment plants can't neutralize drugs that are flushed down the drain. Scientists suspect that both over-the-counter drugs and prescription medications may be harming fish and other aquatic life.

In addition to the environmental concern, it's important to keep drugs away from pets and other people, said Julie Johnson of the Minnesota Pharmacists Association.

"What they're recommending people do is mix any icky material with the drugs -- sawdust, kitty litter, coffee grounds — that makes the medication less appealing, renders it unusable, do all this and put it in a plastic bag and put it in the trash."

In addition, Johnson recommends using the occasional take-back events organized by police departments or other authorities. Several organizations in Minnesota are teaming up to raise public awareness about how to dispose of medicines properly.

The 'Minnesota Cover Crops Decision Tool' Launched on Web

Interest in cover crops has been increasing in the Midwest in the last few years. Field days, workshops, and multi-day conferences on the topic are being held around the region. Educational events, research, on-farm demonstrations, and utilization can be found right here in Minnesota. Cover cropping is still

somewhat of an enigma, however, and many agronomic questions exist. That is where the Minnesota Cover Crops Decision Tool comes in.

The web-based Cover Crops Decision Tool is an initiative of the Midwest Cover Crop Council (MCCC) which consists of eight Midwestern states and one Canadian province. MCCC wants to “consolidate cover crop information, by state, to help farmers make cover crop selections at the county level.” Grant funding was received and a spreadsheet and website format developed for this purpose. Each member state has, or will, develop a team of cover crop experts to review and refine information from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) handbook, “Managing Cover Crops Profitably.” This publication is a gold mine of cover crop information, but is not specific to any one area of the United States. The information and rankings found in the Cover Crops Decision Tool is each individual team’s consensus based on the SARE publication, other literature, research results, and on-farm experience.

Work on the Minnesota Cover Crops Decision Tool started in January 2011 with the organization of the Minnesota Cover Crop Decision Tool Team. Team members were chosen from the following groups: University of Minnesota Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, North Central Region - SARE, Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Rural Advantage, University of Minnesota researchers, and farmers. Decision Tool developers and Michigan State University Extension Educators, Dr. Dean Baas and Ms. Victoria Ackroyd, worked with the Minnesota team throughout the process. Information and rankings were compiled and an internal review of the Decision Tool was completed by August 2011. The team’s efforts culminated in the Internet launching of the Minnesota Cover Crops Decision Tool on October 19, 2011.

A series of drop-down lists allows the Decision Tool user to get as specific as his or her county, drainage conditions, and cropping history. Three additional drop-down menus allow the user to choose specific priorities; these priorities are the top outcomes the farmer is hoping to receive from the use of the cover crops. Information sheets can then be printed for each individual cover crop or mixture.

Minnesota Cover Crop Decision Tool ‘how to’ presentations will be held in the upcoming months. The first such presentation will be October 27, 2011, during the Cover Crop Workshop and Field Day at University of Minnesota’s Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton, Minnesota. This event will be held from 10:00am to 12:30pm and there is no cost to attend.

For more information on the Midwest Cover Crops Council, funding for the Cover Crops Decision Tool, and the Decision Tool itself, see the MCCC website at <http://www.mccc.msu.edu/>.

MPCA releases 3 watershed monitoring and assessment reports

St. Paul, Minn. — The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) recently released watershed monitoring and assessment reports for the Little Fork, Pomme de Terre, and Sauk River watersheds.

With dollars provided by the Clean Water Fund (from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment), the MPCA currently conducts and oversees a variety of surface-water-monitoring activities that support its mission of helping Minnesotans protect the environment. To be successful in preventing and addressing problems, good information is needed about the status of Minnesota’s waters, potential and actual threats, options for addressing the threats, and data on how effective management actions have been. The MPCA’s monitoring efforts are focused on providing that critical information. These three reports are the first of about 80 that will be produced during the next decade for all of Minnesota’s major watersheds.

Comprehensive monitoring of the Pomme de Terre River Watershed began in 2007, and of the Little Fork and Sauk River watersheds in 2008. The focus for all three was to characterize the fish, macroinvertebrate, habitat and water chemistry of the river and streams in the watershed and water chemistry in lakes. Conditions in the Little Fork Watershed were found to be quite good, while more problems were discovered in the Sauk and Pomme de Terre watersheds.

To view the full reports, visit the watersheds’ page on the MPCA website:

- [Little Fork River Watershed](#)

- [Pomme de Terre River Watershed](#)
- [Sauk River Watershed](#)

Events:

November 1st (Tuesday) is the **Quarterly Meeting of the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance** from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at Ridgewater College in Hutchinson. The meeting is sponsored by the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) office in Montevideo. The meeting begins at 6 p.m. with a social hour to give participants time to interact with each other and share stories and concerns about what is happening in their part of the Minnesota River Watershed. At 7 p.m. the formal part of the meeting starts, with the group striving to wrap up all discussion by 9 o'clock. For more information, <http://watershedalliance.blogspot.com/>

November 4th (Friday) is the **Showing of the documentary: *Rain in a Dry Land*** at the Treaty Site History Center in St. Peter. How do you measure the distance from an African village to an American city? What does it mean to be a refugee in today's "global village"? *Rain in a Dry Land* provides eye-opening answers as it chronicles the fortunes of two Somali Bantu families moved to the U.S. Admission is free. Sponsored by St. Peter Public Schools, Nicollet County Historical Society, River Rock Coffee and St. Peter Food Co-op. For more information, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/documentaryfilmseries.pdf>. Please contact 507-934-2160 or jessica@nchsmn.org for details.

November 5th (Saturday) is the workshop: **"Claim the Commons We're in it Together"** at the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Mankato (170 Good Counsel Drive) sponsored by the Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry. In this conference you will learn more about the commons, explore the dangers it is facing, understand our part in protecting it, and find ways to claim and protect it for all. Claiming the commons can instill us with a new vision of politics, culture and community. A new vision of the power we have together. For more information, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/commonsworkshop.pdf>

December 1st (Thursday) is the **Showing of the documentary: *Reel Injun*** at the Treaty Site History Center in St. Peter. Hollywood has made over 4000 films about Native people; over 100 years of movies defining how Indians are seen by the world. *Reel Injun* takes an entertaining and insightful look at the Hollywood Indian, exploring the portrayal of North American Natives through the history of cinema. Admission is free. Sponsored by St. Peter Public Schools, Nicollet County Historical Society, River Rock Coffee and St. Peter Food Co-op. For more information, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/documentaryfilmseries.pdf>. Please contact 507-934-2160 or jessica@nchsmn.org for details.

January 5th (Thursday) is the **Showing of the documentary: *Okie Noodling*** at the Treaty Site History Center in St. Peter. For centuries, a unique breed of fishermen has been catching monster catfish with their bare hands in the rivers and lakes of Oklahoma. Today, the tradition of "noodling" still has Okie anglers hooked. Admission is free. Sponsored by St. Peter Public Schools, Nicollet County Historical Society, River Rock Coffee and St. Peter Food Co-op. For more information, <http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/kudels/documentaryfilmseries.pdf>. Please contact 507-934-2160 or jessica@nchsmn.org for details.

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

Environmental/Conservation Articles:

[Pheasant hunting's future linked to waning grassland protection program](#) (Alexandria Echo Press). Like a black Labrador past its prime, one of the nation's premier grassland conservation programs is covering less ground these days.

[Minnesotans drawn to North Dakota's siren song of prosperity](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Companies, workers benefit from prosperity of our oil-rich neighbor.

[If we can't find the carp, maybe the robots can](#) (St. Paul Pioneer Press). Common carp have beset North America for more than a century - turning once-clear lakes, wetlands and rivers into muddy waters.

[More Minnesota cities ban driveway sealer cited as pollutant](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Asphalt-based sealants are safer than coal-tar products, MPCA says.

[Wetlands give boost to local EDA](#) (Fairmont Sentinel). Wetland banking is turning out to be a bit of a cash cow for Fairmont's Economic Development Authority.

[Some Republicans want arts amendment money for Vikings stadium](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). A Republican leader says some of his colleagues in the Minnesota Legislature are considering a plan that would rely on a portion of the state's Legacy funds to pay for a new Vikings Stadium.

[Walz tours area conservation program sites](#) (Austin Post-Bulletin). Congressman Tim Walz wants to make sure southern Minnesota gets its fair share.

[City council closer to easing requirements on solar panel installations](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). City council members in St Paul are a step closer to approving zoning ordinance amendments that will make for an easier process to installing solar panels easier.

[EPA says it will draw rules for disposal of wastewater generated by hydraulic fracturing](#) (Associated Press). Federal environmental regulators signaled Thursday they want to increase oversight of the natural gas extraction industry, announcing they will develop national standards for the disposal of polluted wastewaters generated by a drilling technique known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

[Political battle could follow discovery of invasive carp DNA in Twin Cities](#) (Minnesota Public Radio). A National Park Service biologist says testing by an Indiana lab has confirmed that invasive silver carp have swum up the Mississippi River as far as Lock and Dam No. 1.

[Dayton aims to make government 'better'](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). The governor, who wants to make government run "faster, better and more efficiently," may have found common ground with GOP.

[Bancroft polar trek will focus on water](#) (Minneapolis Star Tribune). Adventurer says 2012 South Pole expedition will teach youth about the global need for fresh water.

I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me. – Isaac Newton

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>

Thanks,

Scott

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