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Todd SWCD Summer Newsletter

Conservation, Protection & Enhancement of Todd County's Natural Resources

Our Commitment

As your local Soil and Water Resource Conservation District (SWCD), we are committed to you, the citizens of Todd County, in the “conservation, protection, and enhancement of Todd County’s natural resources”.

Founded in 1965, Todd SWCD provides conservation leadership and educational, technical, and financial assistance to landowners, businesses, and local governments to proactively encourage a steady improvement in the use of natural resources. While housing what have been typically called “regulatory programs” under our roof, we are not a regulatory agency— instead,

we model and fully believe in accomplishment through voluntary collaboration with you, the citizens of Todd County.

Todd SWCD provides ongoing staff and supervisor training to maintain technical skills and the most up to date science based knowledge. This provides and maximizes trust and credibility with landowners and agencies, alike, ensuring the continued success of our collective on-the-ground efforts. At the same time, we listen to and highly regard your knowledge, skills, and input as owners and descendants of the land. We understand that all which is accomplished is because of you, the landowner,

and your willingness to install, implement, and experiment with best management practices on your property.

Along with our commitment to property owners, we continue to seek strategic partnerships with local committees, associations, and agencies to develop conservation on a broader scale.

Through grant applications, state cost-share, and other funding initiatives, we can achieve affordable conservation. Contact us today with your plans for a stronger Todd County.

320-732-2644

Todd Co. Historic Courthouse

1st Ave. S. Long Prairie, MN

Todd SWCD Staff: (320-732-2644)

District Manager, Deja Anton

Riparian and Shoreline Protection, Water Planning, AIS, Cost-share, Livestock Mgt. Planning, Feedlot Coordinator

Program Coordinator, Sarah Katterhagen

Well Sealing, AgBMP Loan Program, Farm Registration, & Administrative Office

Wetlands Specialist, Lew Noska

WCA, Drainage, Driveway/trail access, Buffers, & Ob Well Monitoring

Farm Technician, Kevin Brown

Field & Bank Erosion, Feedlots, Livestock Pipeline, Grazing & Exclusion Fencing

Farm Technician, Reba Van Beusekom

Feedlots, Soil Health, Pasture Management, & Ag Water Quality Certification

Regional Nutrient Mgt .Specialist, Tim Ebnet

Nutrient Management Planning, Manure Record Keeping, Manure Analysis, Cover Crops, Nutrient & Irrigation

Farm Bill Biologist, Luke Thoma

CREP, RIM, CRP, and other forms of land management

[Adam Ossefort, SWCDD Division Director](#)

2020 Todd SWCD Board of Supervisors -

L to R: Tom Williamson, Dale Katterhagen, Kenny Pesta, Dan Whitney, and Lee Buchholz



ON THE COVER: ROSS REIFFENBERGER, PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER FROM WEST CENTRAL TECHNICAL SERVICE AREA, DIRECTS THE PLACEMENT OF FOUR FOOT BOULDERS INTO J HOOKS IN THE LONG PRAIRIE RIVER. ROSS SPENT ENTIRE DAYS IN THE RIVER FOR OVER TWO WEEKS ASSISTING EQUIPMENT OPERATORS ON TWO SWCD RIVER PROJECTS IN VILLARD TWP. SOME BOULDERS HAD TO BE SET TWICE TO MEET THE PRECISE PLACEMENT AND DESIGN CRITERIA IN THE DESIGN PLAN. MID-MINN EXCAVATING SUCCESSFULLY EXECUTED THE WORK FOR BOTH THE MOTLEY CEMETERY AND SPRUCE ROAD STREAMBANK PROJECTS COMPLETED IN JUNE, 2020.

2020 Featured Project: It Takes A Village!



SWCD Streambank Project Safeguards Long Prairie River & Motley Area Heritage



**Greg Frisk, Secretary of Motley
Cemetery, and wife, Sherry**

It started with a phone call from Greg Frisk to the Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) back in 2017. The southwest portion of the cemetery was in danger of being washed away by the Long Prairie River in the near future. The cemetery's southerly

fence line is tangent to a bend in the river. Over the past several decades, the river has cut increasingly closer to the cemetery fence. With the seasonal high waters in recent springs and last fall, Greg's concern has been amplified.

The Soil and Water, while typically not in the business of cemetery rescue, knew the Long Prairie River was already impaired for Dissolved Oxygen (DO), altering the temperature and composition of the river's water. Dissolved oxygen impairments are typically in line with phosphorous born algae growth. Phosphorous is a natural component of the soil, with particularly high concentrations in the Motley area. The more sediment eroding to the river, the worse the impairment would become. It didn't take SWCD long to pinpoint the multiple benefits resulting from the adoption in of such a project.

Site visits were made and photographs taken by Todd SWCD technical staff, WCTSA surveys were completed by canoe and land, and engineer designs were drawn up with cost estimates. These costs were too high for the cemetery to tackle on their own. Cemetery budgets typically cover costs to mow and maintain the grounds and prepare for burials, not high-dollar streambank erosion projects.

The Soil and Water went back to the drawing board looking for partners who would have an interest in investing. Todd County Veterans' Administration stepped up to the plate. In 2018, presentations were made to Sourcewell to seek grant dollars to cover the Cemetery's portion of the costs. In the mean time, Todd SWCD applied for and was awarded a second grant from Minnesota Pollution Control in the spring of 2019! The DNR was contacted for review and permitting purposes. Fish and Wildlife also assessed the plans for potential impacts to fish and aquatic biota along the river. Planning & Zoning issued a riparian alternation permit.

With a thumbs up from the SWCD Board and all agencies involved, and with the financial commitments from Todd SWCD and the Veterans Administration, Mid-Minnesota Excavating began work on June 1, 2020. By June 8, the project was complete— all ~450 ft. of it. The pictures on the next few pages detail the project. Next time you are in the Motley area, swing down to Timberlane Drive, and visit the now stable Motley Cemetery. Or perhaps, take a canoe up the river! "Every single canoeist that has paddled this section has positively remarked on the project. This should have been done a long time ago," Frisk concluded.



2020 Featured Project: It Takes a Village!

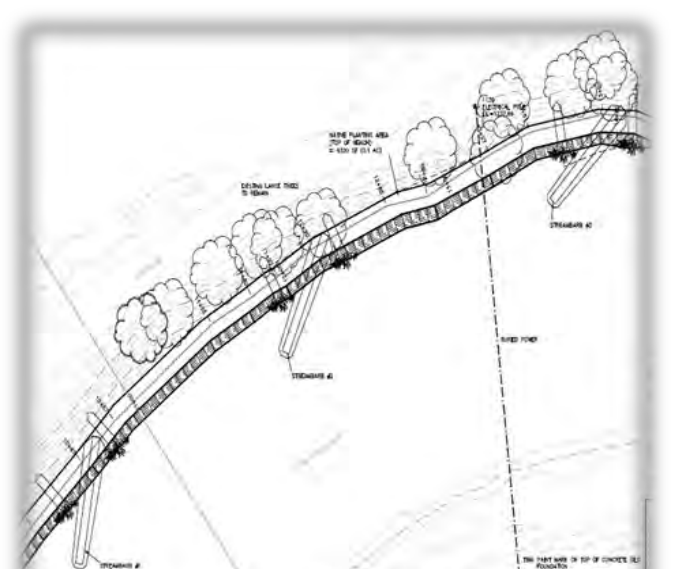
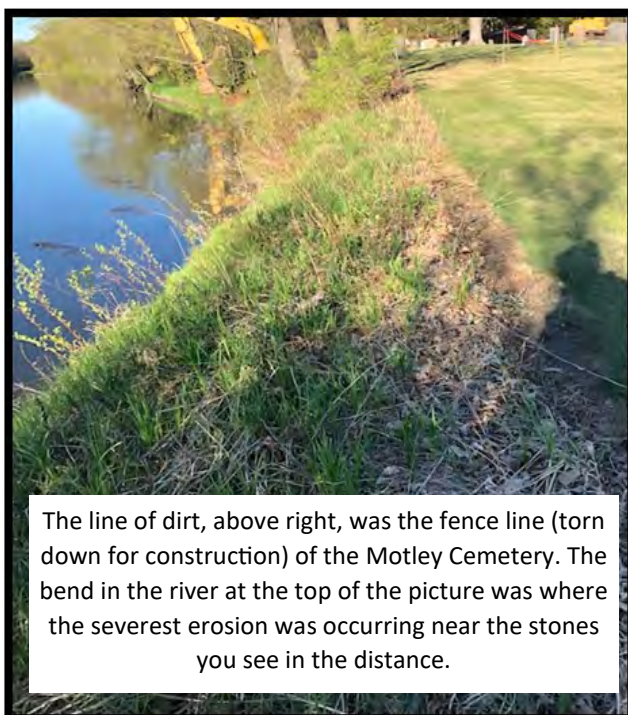
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Purpose: To prevent further destabilization of the river bank, erosion, sedimentation, unnatural channelization of the streambed, and turbidity altering the biota, habitats, and flow regime within the river. Additional protections for the integrity of historic burial locations and graves of local ancestry lying in close proximity to the destabilized area.

BEFORE



BEFORE



2020 Featured Project: It Takes a Village!

Continued from page 4

Purpose: To prevent further destabilization of the river bank, erosion, sedimentation, unnatural channelization of the streambed, and turbidity altering the biota, habitats, and flow regime within the river. Additional protections for the integrity of historic burial locations and graves of local ancestry lying in close proximity to the destabilized area.



Root wads with trunks 16 feet in length and sharpened at the end by chainsaw and pile driven into the bank like a nail gun. The root mass slows down water flowing adjacent to the bank.



Boulders of this size are pounded down into the stream base and into the river bank creating the J - Hooks. They are later covered with a rip rap rock material creating great wonderful nooks for fish habitat. The J- hooks divert water around and away from the river bank.

2020 Featured Project: It Takes a Village!

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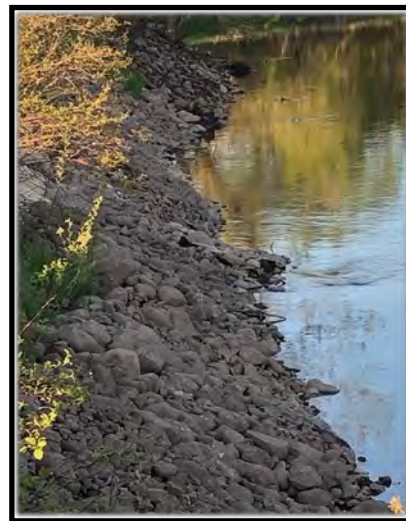
MID CONSTRUCTION



Purpose: To prevent further destabilization of the river bank, erosion, sedimentation, unnatural channelization of the streambed, and turbidity altering the biota, habitats, and flow regime within the river. Additional protections for the integrity of historic burial locations and graves of local ancestry lying in close proximity to the destabilized area.

AFTER

From sloughing banks, exposed tree roots and ever decreasing land area between the cemetery fence and river currents to stream barbs directing water flow to the center of the river, reinforced rock armor banks for ice jam protection and gentler elevation drops. The Motley Cemetery and river bank should be secure through our life time.



Upstream



AFTER



To the "Village", thank you!

- ◆ Greg Frisk, Secretary of the Motley Cemetery
- ◆ Pete Berscheit in conjunction w/ the Veterans' Administration
- ◆ Sourcewell, Staples, MN
- ◆ Tony Zetah, Mid- Minnesota Excavating
- ◆ Ross Reiffenberger, P.E.; Gary Borash; Luke Herkenhoff, WCTSA
- ◆ Mark Anderson, DNR
- ◆ Minnesota Fish and Wildlife
- ◆ Todd Soil and Water Board of Supervisors & Staff:
- ◆ Deja Anton
- ◆ Lew Noska
- ◆ Tim Stieber, Shannon Wettstein, } Past SWCD employees
- ◆ Danielle (Kuperus) Anderson }
- ◆ Minnesota Pollution Control Agency 319 Grant Leadership

Sealing Abandoned Wells

by Sarah Katterhagen, SWCD Program Coordinator

Well sealing is permanently closing a well that is no longer used or is deemed unsafe. State law requires abandoned wells in Minnesota to be sealed. Well sealing involves clearing debris from the well and filling it with grout. This must be done by a licensed contractor.

An unused well can act as a drain, allowing surface runoff, polluted water and improperly disposed of solid or other waste to contaminate groundwater. Sealing abandoned wells protects groundwater quality. It can also protect surface water quality in areas with spring fed streams, such as the karst landscape of southeastern Minnesota.

Well sealing is especially important in wellhead protection areas (areas that supply water to public wells and receive special attention from state and local agencies to prevent contamination of drinking water).

If you have an unused well on your property, contact Todd County Soil and Water to learn more about receiving cost share assistance to properly close your well at 320-732-2644.

<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/practices/wellseal.aspx>



Septic System Replacement Low Interest Loan Opportunity!



Todd County Planning and Zoning has received funds through the Clean Water Partnership for septic system replacements. The Clean Water Partnership provides loans to Local Governments to in turn provide low interest loans to local land owners for non-point source pollution reductions measures. These loans are currently available to Todd County residents for replacement of noncompliant, failing, or outdated septic systems. Loans will be issued on a first come, first serve basis to land owners that meet the criteria of the program. Eligibility is very simple, the land owner's property must have a value of 3 times the cost of the septic system and the land owner's property taxes must be paid up to date. In addition, there will be a \$100 application fee. At the time of application land owners must have a septic design and a bid for that system.

Land owners should contact our office to express interest in the program. Having a list of potential applicants allows us to gauge the work load for this program and also gauge the funding level needed. If all funds are exhausted during the loan period, additional funds can be applied for by Planning and Zoning. Having a waiting list of potential applicant provides justification for additional funding. Contact 320-732-4325, Adam Ossefoort, Division Director

Todd SWCD & Partners Vie for 1W1P Grant for the Long Prairie River

What Watershed are You?

a series of watershed articles disseminated by the

Long Prairie Watershed Collaboration of Todd, Douglas, Morrison, Wadena, East and West Otter Tail Counties

Like individual people, every **watershed** carries its own set of physical attributes, characteristics and boundaries. As a “citizen” is to its family, community, state, and country; a “watershed” is to the water resources of the county, state, nation, and world. Every decision and action made internally can result in a more profound impact outside of your person or watershed boundary.



What exactly is a watershed?

Every lake, river, place, and home on earth is found within a watershed. A watershed is made up of its topography and landscapes including fields, forests, hills, wetlands, neighborhoods and cities. A **watershed** is strictly a geographical area with its boundaries determined by the natural direction of water flow. We all know water flows downhill to the lowest point, but its direction of travel depends on

the path of least resistance and what physical features lie in its way. Originating as precipitation, water that is not evaporated or absorbed, weaves its way around the base of hills, through crevices in rocks and soil particulates, through ditches, dips, valleys, lakes, creeks, and streams, often for miles, to reach a larger river base. If precipitation falls on a hill, on which side of the hill it lands determines the direction the droplet will flow. A watershed is named after its largest receiving body of water of which merges to another often larger watershed. For example, the Long Prairie Watershed, an area covering large portions of Douglas, Todd, and Morrison Counties with smaller portions in East and West Otter Tail and Wadena counties, is named after the Long Prairie River which transports water beyond its watershed boundary to the Crow Wing River. The Crow Wing eventually merges with the great Mississippi River. A **watershed boundary** is a connection of all points marking the farthest reaches in which all contributing waters fall and flow.

There are 81 major watersheds in Minnesota. Each watershed is broken into smaller sub-watersheds draining to the littler creeks, ponds, lakes, and streams in the more localized region. There are 5600 sub-watersheds in Minnesota!

(continued on

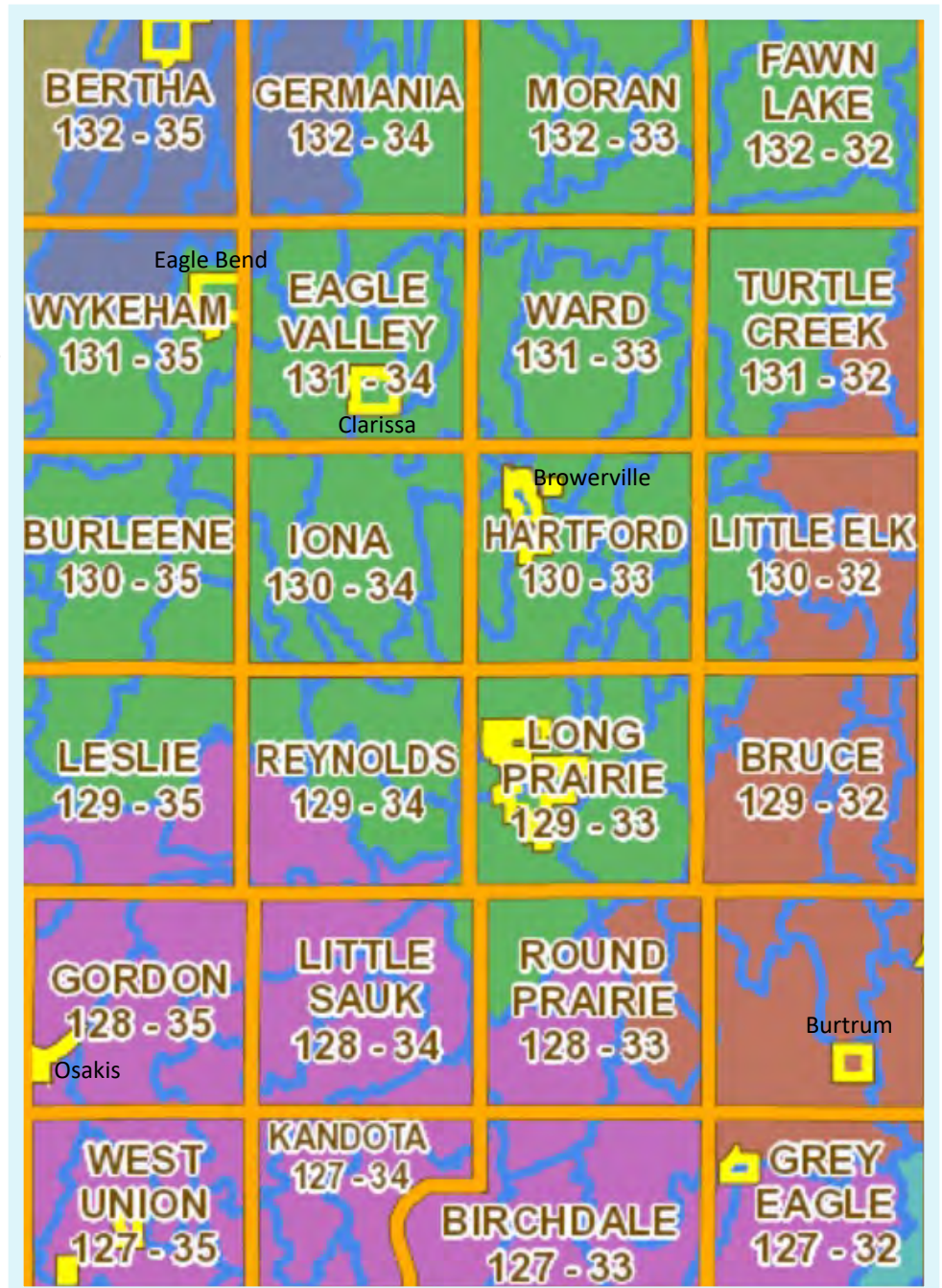
A group of related Major Watersheds merging to the same region of the country or state is often referred to as a basin. Similar to the nesting or stacking toys from Russia called Matryoshka dolls, a sub-watershed fits inside a major watershed which fits inside a basin. As you might imagine, hydrologists who study water and water patterns in depth, have a classification system breaking land areas into even smaller units called **HUCs**- an acronym that stands for Hydrologic Unit Code.

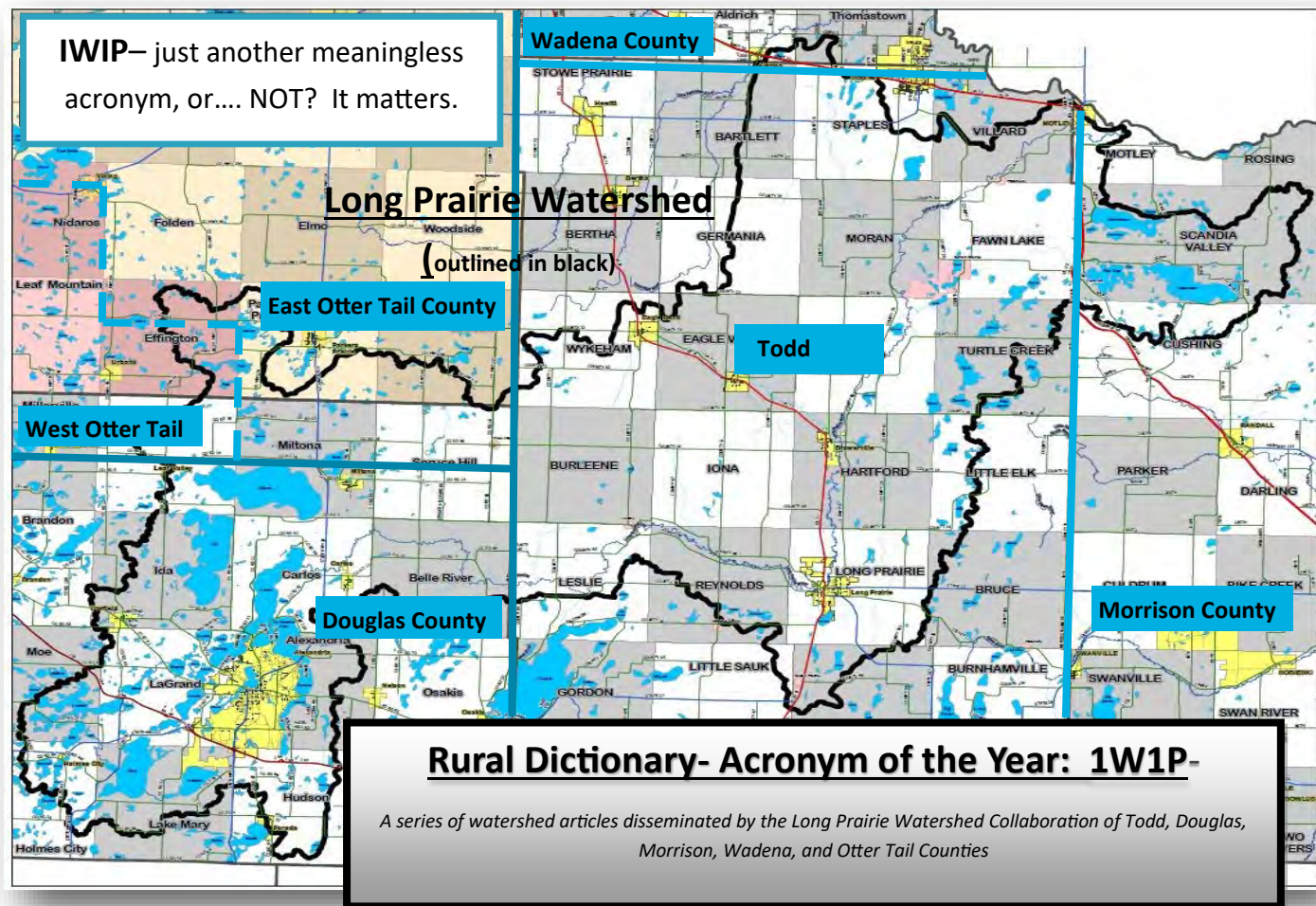


So what watershed are you?

Can you pinpoint your home watershed on the map? The blue boundaries show the smaller HUCs.

Todd County Major Watersheds





This article discusses new planning efforts across the state to protect natural resources within watersheds.

The acronym 1W1P stands for “One Watershed, One Plan”. This is a program put in place by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for the state of Minnesota. Its intent is to support local governments in developing plans to identify, prioritize, and target actions specific to the resource concerns within a major watershed boundary. Outcomes of these plans are required to be measurable and reportable to the state and general public.

In the past, each county had developed a watershed plan for protecting natural resources across their entire county. The way in which one county chose to prioritize and manage resource concerns could often be very different than the neighboring county’s plan. The individual county plans did not always align to most effectively address water resource concerns for any particular watershed. Realizing that most watersheds span across several county boundaries, there was a push to find a way to combine county plans. One Watershed, One Plans are collaborative efforts of counties to join their ideas into a common shared resource protection plan for each individual watershed.

Under the 1W1P, all counties, sharing a watershed, focus on preselected priority resource concerns within a specific time frame. Funding is allotted by the state for the installation of best management practices and land management solutions. The majority of this funding is to be put towards cost-share dollars for voluntary landowners in targeted areas who see the benefits of installing these practices on their property. The plans are currently designed to be ten year plans broken into incremental two year periods. At the end of each two year increment, plan objectives are reviewed and reported as a way to measure the effectiveness of implementation. Minor modifications to the plan can be made at this time if needed. New funding is also awarded at two year increments.

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Questions:

Who is involved in the 1W1P process?

- * Local SWCDs (Supervisors and staff...)
- * Counties (County Commissioners; Planning & Zoning...)
- * Other forms of local government (City & townships; existing watershed districts if present in the watershed boundary...)
- * Members of the local organizations (ag groups; lake associations,...)
- * Landowners (You!)
- * State and Federal partners (DNR, BWSR, MPCA, MDH ...)



Where do the funds for the 1W1Ps come from? Currently, the agencies are allocated funds from the state legislature and federal programs to protect Minnesota waters and natural resources. The majority of these funds are passed onto the local governing units in the form of grants. Many of these grants must be competitively applied for by your local government units. Of the competitive funds available, some counties get them while others lose out depending on the type of resource concern and quality of application. Grants that are awarded to local government units like SWCD's typically go out to property owners, farmers, and organizations wanting to implement practices for the betterment of the environment and quality of ownership. The One Watershed, One Plan Program is designed to more evenly disperse funds, with less competition, across those watersheds with plans in place.

Water quality concerns in the Sauk River Watershed often involve the Sauk River Watershed District. Is there a similar watershed district for the Long Prairie Watershed? No watershed district exists for the Long Prairie River Watershed. Water quality concerns for the Long Prairie Watershed usually involve the Soil and Water Conservation Districts from any of the six counties within the watershed boundaries.

What are the current identified areas of concern listed for the Long Prairie Watershed in particular? In studies completed in 2005, the MPCA has identified" six sections of the Long Prairie River having low dissolved oxygen levels. Seven additional creeks have been listed as "impaired" (failing to meet quality standards) within the watershed. The streams impaired for E. coli bacteria include Moran and Eagle Creek in Todd County and an unnamed tributary to Lake Miliona in Douglas County. Four creeks are listed for Biological impairments for aquatic life, fish, and macroinvertebrates: Harris Creek, Venewitz Creek, Spruce Creek and a second unnamed tributary to Lake Miliona. Ten impaired lakes in the Long Prairie Watershed include the lakes: *Echo, Fish, Jessie, Agnes, Henry, Winona, Crooked, Latimer, and Twin.*

To make gains on the current state of the watershed, it is suggested by the MPCA studies that local government units look at stream bank, riparian, wetland and shoreland restoration practices, correcting stormwater runoff concerns for developed and urban areas, and better management of agricultural acreage, particularly those acres in annual cultivation. This only touches on a few areas of need. The intention of the IWIP is to look at areas more purposefully, identify the cause to any given pollution stressor, and derive logical and practical solutions to address issues. It is important to note that even if you do not own land adjacent to a stream, lake or other body of water, that is impaired, how you manage your property today and in the future does impact the quality of water and natural resources around you. Your involvement and actions, good or bad, have a domino effect on the properties and environment surrounding you— eventually reaching, or becoming, an area of concern. It's simply the nature of watersheds.



Has a One Watershed, One Plan been developed for the Long Prairie Watershed?

No new plan is created at this time, but an application has been made involving all five counties to initiate this process. Please join us in our winter edition to learn about the progress of the One Watershed, One Plan for the Long Prairie Watershed.

BARN TALK:



The Brown & White of Farm Conservation

Cover Crops and Cocktails?

By Tim Ebnet, WCTSA Regional Nutrient Management Specialist

Cover crops, cover crops, cover crops. Seems like any farm magazine we pick up, a local field day that we may attend, or a website we may visit, mentions cover crops. Well folks, there is a good reason for that. Up here in the North Country, our growing season is short. The time after corn and soybean harvest to establish a cover crop is either too short or nonexistent. There are some options for that but for now, we will discuss the opportunity to establish a cover crop after small grain harvest. I already know what some of you are thinking: "I leave the volunteer grain grown in my field after harvest until a frost or until I till the soil to terminate it." If you are already doing that, great! That grain growth will help to soak up excess nutrients released by manure or soil organic matter. But if you want to take it to the next level, a cover crop mix is the answer. The reason behind a cover crop mix or a "cocktail" as some call it (bet I got your attention now), is multiple species of crops growing at once to provide food for above and below ground critters. It's a win-win deal. Above ground you have the opportunity to graze your cover crop and extend your pasture season. You may choose to put a flowering species in your mix to feed the pollinators. Below ground, the different roots exude food for soil microbes and bacteria that are working to convert organic matter to available nutrients. Think about this: one teaspoon of productive, healthy soil contains between 100 million to 1 billion bacteria. All those microbes and bacteria need to be fed. As you are prepping your combine for small grain harvest, take a second to think about cover crops. There is a reason behind all the attention they have been receiving lately.



CORONA VIRUS FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CFAP)



USDA is providing critical support to our nation's farmers and ranchers through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). CFAP provides vital financial assistance to producers of agricultural commodities with financial assistance that gives them the ability to absorb sales declines and increased marketing costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

FSA is accepting applications for CFAP from May 26, 2020, to August 28, 2020.

To be eligible for payments, a person or legal entity must either:

- have an average adjusted gross income of less than \$900,000 for tax years 2016, 2017, and 2018; or
- derive at least 75 percent of their adjusted gross income from farming, ranching, or forestry.

Eligible producers (person or legal entity) of specified agricultural commodities who have suffered a five percent-or-greater price decline as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and who face substantial marketing costs for inventories are eligible for CFAP payments. These specified commodities include certain specialty crops, non-specialty crops, wool, **dairy**, and **livestock**.

For a list of eligible commodities and payment criteria, visit farmers.gov/cfap.

MOST RECENT AG WATER CERTIFICATIONS



Photo credit, Reba Van Beusekom

Linda and Merle Wegner own one of the most recent Ag Water Quality Certified Farms In Todd County for the year 2020. Linda and Merle operate a vineyard along with managing other acreage in Long Prairie. Todd County has 29 certified farms covering over 8,000 acres. Call 320-732-2644 to get your farm certified in 2020.

LEMKE'S: 1st Ag Water Quality Certified Tree Farm in Todd County— One of Only Two Tree Farms to be Certified in MN!

By Reba Van Beusekom, Todd SWCD Ag Water Certification Technician



Robby and Misty Lemke have a Christmas Tree Farm on Ginseng Road in Todd County. They were delighted to hear that they could be considered for the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP). Up until recently, tree farms did not qualify for certification – but they do now! Lemke's Tree Farm site is now certified! They are the second Christmas Tree Farm in Minnesota to be certified, and the first tree farm in Todd County.

You may be asking what MAWQCP is... MAWQCP is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. There are also endorsements available to water quality certified producers: Soil Health, Integrated Pest Management, and Wildlife. Many conservation practices targeting water quality have benefits for other conservation goals, and the endorsements provide additional recognition to water quality certified producers who are going above and beyond to implement conservation on their farms.

FINAL Year for Osakis Area Farmers to take Advantage

- of \$\$\$; Farmers *Active* w/ Partridge River Grant; ●
- Last of 2018 EQIP Projects: Ag Waste, Little Elk TWP

HEADLINES

Bob Helle & contractors, Chad Shaw and son out of Henning wait for feedlot inspector to approve pit closure on the Partridge River.

CONSERVATION PROJECT *Sponsored by:*
TODD
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
SWCD

Little Elk 2018 EQIP Project Completed Summer of 2020

Linn Smith (above, right) of Bertha, happy to gain more tillable ground (below) after closing his pit, looks over excavation site with Jenny of Korblick Excavating.

For more information on cost-share, contact the SWCD @ **320-732-2644**

NRCS EQIP UPDATE: NO AG WASTE FACILITIES FUNDED for TODD COUNTY in 2020!!!



Representation of emotions of SWCD farm technicians and WCTSA Engineering upon hearing the news.

From 2014 to 2018, all of Todd's Ag Waste project applications to NRCS- EQIP were funded if the farmer chose to move forward. In the spring of 2019, for the first time in a 5 year run, Todd Soil & Water (SWCD) received the stunning news that *none* of the Ag waste applications were approved. As a double whammy in 2020, history repeated itself for a second year in a row. WHY?!!!

It was known that funding was getting more competitive with less dollars available, but this year's applications were very strong in priority resource concerns (close proximity to impaired lakes and rivers, on sensitive soils, etc.) ; young and new farmer qualifications were met often representing multi-generational farms with high participation rates in the Ag Water Quality Certification Program, and the engineering portions and the Nutrient Managements Plans were brought up to snuff- all "point garnering" qualities when it comes to ranking well on NRCS criteria lists.

For the past several weeks, the SWCD and West Technical Services (WCTSA) team have delved into the funding results to ask the difficult questions. Two of our neighboring counties (Douglas and Stearns) did receive EQIP funding for a few Ag Waste projects this year, so we made some phone calls, interviewed folks, did some research and compared notes. What we discovered came down to this:

The applications that were funded were dual applications, meaning not only were the farmers applying for Ag Waste funding, but they were looking for additional best management practice to install as well. For *some* examples: A farmer may have applied to put cultivated acreage under cover crops with their application for a stacking slab; OR a farm may have requested to plant marginal acreage into pollinator habitat and fix some field erosion on top of their application for a new manure pit; OR they may indicated interest to contract for field windbreaks and a roof over structure in their application. Not only did they look at their prime resource/management concern, but last fall, they went back in to NRCS to request assistance to look at the property as a whole- selecting additional practices to enhance the overall efficient management of their land.

What does this mean for future and current applicants? Given this new data, Todd SWCD , WCTSA engineering staff, and farmers must now evaluate the benefits of looking at farms from a more holistic standpoint. What other measures could be taken to improve farm efficiency and natural resource use for a specific acreage? Is the farmer willing to take the farm and, in suit, the resulting EQIP application to a new level? While funding is never guaranteed, applicants willing to do so run a much larger chance of getting funded in 2021. Being Ag Water Qualified, developing a nutrient management plan and an engineer designed solution still help, and owning a farm where a One Watershed, One Plan is in place will add a bang (SEE ONE WATERSHED INFORMATION ON PAGES 8- 11) but submitting a multi-faceted conservation application seems to be the trigger finger. If you're thinking "*Yea, I am willing to explore options*", please contact us as soon as possible at 320-732-2644 to help prepare your 2021 EQIP application.

SWCD Supervisor Sketch



When Kenny Pesta shared with us his intention to retire from the Soil and Water Board of Supervisors at the close of 2020 after 16 years of service, many a heart sunk and admittedly, a lump came to a couple of our throats. Since 2004, Kenny has been an active board member for the Todd Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) which includes sitting on committees such as the NRCS Local Work Group, the West Central Technical Area Service Area Group, and most recently as a support representative to the Red Eye One Watershed, One Plan. Kenny, at 83 years young, is one who actively listens but does not hesitate to speak up to represent the voice of his community or to disagree if he feels a decision may be made that isn't a good fit for the county or the mission of the SWCD. Staff decided its time to share a little Pesta philosophy before his retirement. We sat down with Kenny one Friday morning in June at the old Historic Courthouse here in Long Prairie.

Kenny, where were you born and raised? Can you tell us a little about your life? I was born on my parents' farm where my brother, "Jerry" now lives in Lona Township. My mom came from Norway and my dad came from Czechoslovakia. There were ten kids born total, eight brothers and two sisters. We raised cattle, hogs, chickens, and milked cows on the farm.

My parents were very good parents. We were raised to work hard, help one another and to get along. And most of the time we did, but on days when the brothers would argue, we were split up and sent in different directions- some were told to grab a box of staples and a hammer and go fix fence in one direction, and the others to cut thistles in the opposite direction. That ended the argument right there.

I remember as a very young boy, we had free range chickens and they would roost on the reel of the grain binder stored in one of the sheds. They made an awful mess below after a night of roosting and we kids were always instructed to clean up the mess. That bothered me and I decided to fix the problem. So I started digging post holes to put up a chicken fence. I just went out on my own and started digging. My Dad saw how determined I was to dig those holes.

Kenny Pesta



He told my older siblings to help me put up a fence. The chickens were enclosed in a fence from then on- no longer roosting in the shed, no more mess. We were raised to be that way- determined from a very young age, to work hard, and get the job done. It was a good way to be raised and a good life.

I grew up attending country school. We walked to school no matter the weather. Once I was older, I attended the school in Long Prairie. I worked at the Minneapolis Airport for a while after I was married to Jeannette. They offered to send me to Airmen training or engine school. I declined and returned to Todd County. I began working at the creamery in Clotho for years making butter. I enjoyed that very much. I also sold Surge milking equipment and Badger dairy equipment. Later, I sold real estate for about 20 years with a good friend, Jerry Adamek. He was a very, very good man- a truly great person. Throughout these years, I and four of my brothers went into farming together. Each of us played an important role in the farm management. We made decisions together. I and Jeanette also drove for Social Services transporting people in need to appointments.

“One thing you sometimes lose with progress and technology is a little bit of neighbor helping neighbor. People forget about each other.”



PESTA Continued

Kali Christensen and Barb Wessel kept us both very busy over the years in transporting. They are two very good women for this community. *(Though he has reduced his transportation services, Kenny still drives a few customers even now.)*

Besides Todd County, where have you traveled? I have had the opportunity to travel quite a bit through my work with Surge and Badger. I have been to the Bahamas, on a Caribbean Cruise, to Spain, Greece, Italy, and Hawaii on two different occasions. A few times both companies offered us a trips to the same locations at near the same time. Instead of going on both trips, we passed the opportunity along to some of the installation staff (those who actually installed the equipment) or office staff, and they were so appreciative. Once you have been to a place, why go back? Let someone else have a chance to go. They were darn good people, and deserved it. My parents always said, treat others the way you want to be treated, and all will turn out well for you. That is so true. Greed is the worst thing. Always be kind to one another. We were always lucky to have very good people working for us. Our secretaries were phenomenal.

I really like it here in Todd County. I no longer desire to travel outside of the country. I have seen enough. Everything I need and want is right here.

So after your travels, what have you found unique or special about Todd County? Todd County has always treated us well. You know I was raised here. When you are raised with like-minded people, its better. *(pause)* Deja, you are from away; do you like it in Todd County?

Deja: *You know, Kenny, I lived back East most of my life. I never felt truly at home until I landed here. Todd County is my home. I'm not sure, but maybe my grandparents raised our families with matching philosophies, so that allows me to fit in well with this area-- having been raised similar.*

Kenny: We were raised with neighbors helping neighbors. I feel very strongly about that philosophy. I like to help people. I don't ask for anything in return.

I'm retired, and I have the time. People stop in to our place, too. Take Kali, for example, she stops in to check on Jeannette *(Kenny's wife)* and I. She might bring a baked good or some fun news. It cheers a person up. Kali brought Jeannette flowers just last week. She is a great friend. And she is just one example. Each neighbor returns the favor in their own way and time. It's a good place to live.



When I was young, my family worked the “ring”. Do you know what that is? The ring was a ring of seven or eight neighbors who helped one another on each other's farms for threshing and silo filling. Of course, a lot of the work was done with horses back then but one neighbor had a tractor and he took really good care of it. The neighbors all worked the threshing machine together, and my Dad took really good care of it in between. We would work from farm to farm getting all the threshing work done for the season. Later, we would fill each other's silos. The neighbor women would join together and prepare a meal. It was a fine time.

When the new hospital was built here in town, so many people contributed to it to make it even better. That hospital has always taken good care of us with really great doctors, nurses, and other staff. Why go out of town when you have good doctors and nurses here?

Dr. Van Gorp. Dr. Eldidy. And, so many others, I can't name them all. They have taken really good care of the local people. Being neighborly, supporting the hospital, supporting your local businesses and community; that's a good thing to do.

I have always supported progress. One thing you sometimes lose with progress and technology though is a little bit of neighbor helping neighbor. People forget about each other.

What influenced you to run for Soil and Water Supervisor? I started as Supervisor in 2004; you can check the records. My family owns farms in Todd County. I have land in CRP and native seeding. I planted trees on my property each year. One spring (2003), I came in to buy trees at the tree sale. Sandy Rohr, she was a good manager, happened to mention that there was an election coming up. I liked the people in the office and had done some work with them. I received a lot of public support for running. I thought about it and decided to run. I was surprised to win. Long Prairie has been good to me all these years.

We have had a very solid board over the years. Dale Katterhagen and I have been friends for a long time. He is a good supervisor. Lee (Buchholz). Tom (Williamson). Norm (Krause- *former supervisor*), and now Dan (Whitney) - they are all very good supervisors.

I want to say a little something about Norm. He was a great board member and he has been missed. When he had something to say, he knew what he was talking about, and didn't take all day to say it. I really respect that in Norm.

2011 Supervisors. Krause, 2nd from left; Pesta, middle



I have enjoyed this Board very much, and the staff and managers. They are all great!

"I'd be remiss to fail to mention Ross Reiffenberger... and Dennis Fuchs... and Lew Noska, I want to honor him..."

What is the most important job of a Soil and Water Supervisor? You may be surprised to hear me say this, but it's listening. When you are talking, you are not learning a thing. To make a good decision, you need to hear it all- all sides. You need to weigh the pros and cons of each decision you make. You need to listen to your community, too. I am a firm believer in working for the community.

What are some notable accomplishments of the Todd Soil and Water Conservation District that you are most proud of under your tenure? Most recently, I am really proud of the Motley Cemetery project and the Villard Township project. Those are two of our biggest, most recent projects. There were so many key players that joined together to accomplish that Motley Cemetery project. It had a positive impact on many people and the environment- concerning the cemetery, its past and future, and the conservation of the river itself in that area for years to come. You can accomplish a lot when you do it together. And the pictures. Sharing the pictures tells the story. You do a good job telling the story, Deja.

I'd be remiss to fail to mention Ross Reiffenberger, P.E. and all the work he does for us and the landowners. He stood in the river for days to guide the contractors in completing the projects. (*He also dug trees off his own property to plant at the Villard site when they came up short of a certain species.*) The whole West Central Technical Service team is incredible.

West Central Technical Service Area Team: Gary Borash, Luke Herkenhoff, Ross Reiffenberger, P.E., Steve Linow



SWCD Supervisor Sketch



And Dennis Fuchs, he is a good man, a good leader, and takes area accomplishments to new levels. And you never hear him say a word about it. He doesn't have to beat his own chest. The work shows itself. Todd County is fortunate to be a part of Area II.

I also am really proud of the Feedlot Meeting. It has really come to be a big event that farmers look forward to. The information provided is not one sided- it tells the whole story from all angles. It's truly beneficial and brings the farming community together. It has gotten big over the past 6 years since you have been here, Deja. That's great!

All of our staff has been top notch! Lew Noska, I want to honor him. He works so well with the people and has made a really good impact to the wetland work here in Todd County. Our wetlands are important.

We are very lucky to have the staff we do. You are a good manager Deja. You model what is expected, and the staff respects that.

I also feel our pit closure work is super important right now. People do not realize what safety hazards old manure pits can be to children, pets, and neighbors. And if not taken care of over the years, the damage to groundwater can be very detrimental. The old pits, they need to be closed.

If you could offer final words of advice to our Soil and Water as we move forward, what would those be?

Keep good board members- those that listen more than talk. If you listen, the answers will come. My Dad always told us kids, "If you think you have something to say, say it to yourself first. After you say it to yourself, how it comes out, you may decide not to say it, after all." That is wise advice.

It is very important for the Board to support the staff. We have an excellent staff and a manager who all work very hard. The work required of them today is far more than what it used to be when I started. Compliment the staff often. They deserve to hear it.

And to the staff, continue to work together as a unit; report to your manager; keep each other informed. Don't try to tackle a challenge alone. You will accomplish so much more as a team than you ever will separately. Don't use the word "I", use "We".

"If you think you have something to say, say it to yourself first. After you say it to yourself, how it comes out, you may decide not to say it after all."

This is how I feel.

I really have enjoyed my role as SWCD Board Supervisor over the past 16 years. I am going to miss it. But.... (silence), it is time to pass it on.

As you read through this interview, you probably picked up Kenny's tendency to divert the discussion away from himself and pass accolades to others. Kenny is a humble, gracious, and deeply intelligent individual. He has provided solid and fair perspective. When he speaks, he has a purpose. His words have meaning. As a manager, I feel fortunate to have worked under him. I feel honored to have spent this one on one time with one of our senior Board Supervisors as we near the close of this chapter of the Todd SWCD Board. Afterwards, I took time to reflect on our current SWCD operations. His words have certainly opened my eyes to the changes over this past century and brought new perspective on how to tackle new challenges.

Kenny, there will be a huge hole in board operations when you leave in December and in the hearts of your staff. Your years of wisdom, advice, and decision making have made an impact on how we operate and on our philosophy in working with our community. Your values will remain in our minds and heart in the years to come. Thank you for your many years of service and guidance to the communities within Todd County, your district, and to the Soil and Water as a whole. ❤️



"This is my family, my everything. My wife Jeannette- she makes life 100%- my son, Richard (L), and younger son, Bryan (R). Together, they are my world." Kenny Pesta

Wildlife and Habitat Creation

Photo by Lew Noska

At Todd SWCD we are frequently asked "What do I have to do to get permission to dig a wildlife habitat pond?" There is not a simple "cover all" answer. If digging in upland, there are not many restrictions and the only paperwork needed would be an MPCA Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) if the exposed area is greater than one acre.

When looking at excavation in wetlands, we look at the type to determine what restrictions may apply or what paperwork may be necessary. For reference please see https://bwsr.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2018-12/WETLANDS_delin_Circular_39_MN.pdf for the different types of wetlands in MN. For Types 1,2,6, and 7 wetlands, obtaining permission to dig a wildlife habitat pond may be as simple as the landowner and contractor submitting a Landowner Statement and Contractor Responsibility Form (<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/wca-forms-and-templates>) along with a map of location. Size of the pond is not regulated provided all spoil from the project will be moved to an approved upland site and the pond is not deeper than 6.5'. For wetland Types 3,4, and 5 a Wetland Conservation Act Application is required for any excavation or filling and size of project is limited to one half acre. Also, for type 3,4 and 5 wetlands, MNDNR guidance and recommendations must be considered

(<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/excavatedponds/index.html>).

For further questions, help filling out forms and applications, or wetland type determinations please contact: Lew Noska at 320-732-2627.

NEW:

Valuable Weather Info for Farmers from Stations in Clarissa, Staples, & other nearby Locales Now a Click Away !

NDAWN has fully integrated our 12 weather stations into their website. You may ask what does that mean for us? It means our stations have access to all of the applications available on the NDAWN website such as Corn GDD, Crop Water Use, Soybean GDD, Wheat/Small Grain Disease Forecaster and the list goes on. Here is a link to the website:

<https://ndawn.ndsu.nodak.edu/>
(Info submitted by East Ottertail SWCD)

Weather Stations

- Becker
- **Clarissa**
- Hubbard
- Little Falls
- Ottertail
- Parkers Prairie
- Perham
- Pine Point
- Rice
- **Staples**
- Wadena
- Westport

Investment of a Lifetime

by Luke Thoma, Farm Bill Biologist



Luke Thoma, left, and Jim Waldorf, right, Todd County landowner, after signing Waldorf acreage to permanent easement

Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District would like to inform you of a program being offered throughout the county that enhances wildlife habitat, and permanently protects water quality. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), is a partnership program between the State of Minnesota's Board of Water and Soil Resources and USDA's Farm Service Agency. MN CREP is a voluntary state-federal program designed to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. The program is set to protect and restore up to 60,000 acres of marginal cropland across 54 southern and western Minnesota counties (including Todd), using filter strips, wetland restorations and wellhead protection areas.

Landowners who are accepted in MN CREP will enroll into the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for 15 years. At the same time, the land will be put into a permanent conservation easement through the state's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement program. The landowner will receive a lump sum payment up front through RIM and an annual payment over 15 years through CRP. RIM payments are based on a per township basis so be sure to stop in at your local USDA Service Center to find out more information on what your payment rate would be. Private ownership continues and the land is permanently restored for water quality and wildlife habitat benefits. Native plantings on those acres will filter surface and ground water, prevent erosion and provide critical habitat for countless grassland dependent species.

If you are interested in enrolling acres into MN CREP or want to learn more about the program, stop by your local USDA service center at: 607 9th street NE, Long Prairie, MN 56347 OR call: (320) 732-6618 Ext. 3

“ It was important for us to know that when we're gone, that it'll be the way it is now forever, and someone else can enjoy it.

— Rob Westby,
Otter Tail County
landowner



RE: 2020 ALGAL BLOOMS

Dear Friends of the Lakes,

We have received many calls this summer regarding lack of lake transparency, murky waters, little fish action, brown foam and muck washing up on shores, and large amounts of slime and varying algae types showing up in the lake. The citizens who have called in are from five different lakes across Todd County. We have done some site visits, contacted the DNR and the MPCA. The MPCA has started receiving calls from Pope County and the Metro area lakeshore owners and recreationists with the very same concerns. People are fearing for their lake's

health and want to know what is causing this issue!

Here is what has been gathered from the facts. Last year had one of the wettest falls on record. Waters were very high, wetlands filled to capacity, soils were saturated, ditches were full this spring, and ice-out was relatively early and rapid. As the waters receded (those that have), they carried with them an increase of more diverse nutrient rich, organic material and sediment. With this plethora of culture mediums, algal growth has exploded and new variations in algal types and hues have been dispersed throughout the water columns bringing out strange new colors. The water plants that normally coincide with the algal blooms may be temporarily delayed due to an early, cooler spring. As a result, the algae has proliferated reducing the sunlight's ability to reach to any depth in the waters. Fish and other aquatic animals are less visible and may be in a more lethargic state due to lower dissolved oxygen in the water, thus, less fish action. These early occurring blooms are not unlikely in stratified lakes but are more likely to occur in more shallow lakes with surrounding wetlands. Tannins released from the soils of overly saturated wetlands also produce a brown coloration in the water. While ugly, this is not toxic.



Common filamentous algae

Brown foam with a fishy, musty odor is naturally occurring. It is caused by wave action and wind mixing with organic compounds, thus oxygenating the water. White foam with a sweet or flowery scent is usually indicative of a pollutant (phosphorous detergents and soaps, for example). (<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/frequently-asked-questions-about-lakes>)

As temperatures warm this year, the algae may continue to bloom and possibly worsen. The hope is that the blooms will clear up some before the typical lake turn over in the end of July and the beginning of August. This is the time when we typically see an increase in algal blooms in the warmer, calm season in lakes with annual turnover. MPCA experts caution, this could be the year the lakes don't clear up. However, it doesn't mean it will be this way next year. Some callers have reported this never occurring in their lifetimes, in the long period they have owned their property, or in 40 years or more. These claims are true. This is not the typical lake response, but at this time, it is being described as a naturally occurring event.

According to Jordan Donatell, *Environmental Scientist/Water Quality Lead* (Water Quality Monitoring Unit Environmental Assessment and Outcomes Division, MPCA), "What is happening in the lakes in Todd and other counties is the biology of lakes responding to a natural climatic and environmental change or condition." While the majority of algal blooms are not dangerous, some can be. Blue-green algae identified as bright green and/or fluorescent in color with an oily sheen or a paint like appearance can be dangerous to humans and pets. This is algae originating as a cyanobacteria and is very harmful and difficult to discern as such. If you are skeptical at all about going in the water due to an algal bloom, it is always best to stay out. Here is a link leading you to the MPCA information page on dangerous algal blooms: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/blue-green-algae-and-harmful-algal-blooms>



We also are taking this opportunity to provide you the number to the MPCA Water Quality Hotline: **651-757-2822**. You are encouraged to share any increasing concerns with the MPCA by calling this number.

As always, Todd SWCD is proud to be your "go-to" source for ground-truthing and finding resources to assist with your interests and concerns. You represent our "eyes on the ground" as we seek to maintain and improve the water quality here in Todd County. Thank you. Take care everyone!

Deja C. Anton — Todd SWCD District Manager

Spreading Enthusiasm, Not AIS



Information produced and distributed by the Mississippi Headwaters Board

It didn't matter that he grew up in the Twin Cities, his heart was always at Little Birch Lake in southeastern Todd County, where he spent his summers. Larry Bebus has been an aquatic invasive species (AIS) inspector since Todd County began its official fight against AIS just five years ago.

He lived and worked in the Twin Cities until he and his wife were able to retire to the family cabin at Little Birch in 2012. "We tore down the cabin and built a year-round house," he said.



Larry Bebus inspects inside a boat at a public access in Todd Co.

Bebus not only cared about his lake, but he wanted to keep all the lakes clean for generations to come. After he took the DNR training to become an AIS inspector, he worked for three years for the Big Birch Lake Association inspecting and scheduling inspectors at the Little and Big Birch accesses.

For the last couple of years, Bebus has worked for companies having contracts with Todd County for inspection services. Currently employed by Waterguards LLC, he works closely with Deja Anton, district manager for the Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District.

"Larry is one of the most dedicated and qualified individuals for overall lake protection here in Todd County," Anton said.

It has taken some time, but fishermen are beginning to cooperate with inspections at boat accesses, according to Bebus. "They are beginning to understand that we aren't trying to follow them around or count their fish," said Bebus. "We just want to keep some things out of the lakes and from getting into other lakes."

Fighting AIS is an evolving campaign. Some of the non-native invaders have been in Minnesota for some time; others are relatively new on the scene. "People know about zebra mussels and milfoil and what they look like," he noted, "but starry stonewort presents another problem. It can start out small and become more dense than milfoil. You can't walk through it, swim through it or take a boat through it."



Anton said Todd County has about 15 inspectors working at the busiest accesses at the busiest times. "We have three priority levels so even the less active lakes receive inspection to help remind lake users that AIS can be found or transported to any water body if we are not careful," she said.

While lake associations and lake improvement districts are vested members of the AIS team, Anton's goal is to eventually include more resort owners. But she added that public engagement along with local input and planning have already made Todd County's AIS program successful.

Public involvement at this year's "Starry Trek" planned for Aug. 15 at Lake Osakis helps. This statewide event, hosted by Todd County AIS, the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, University of Minnesota Extension and the Minnesota DNR, is focused on searching for starry stonewort (and other invaders). If you are interested in participating in the Starry Trek program, visit www.StarryTrek.org.

"Without Larry's inspection expertise and countless hours he gives unpaid," said Anton, "I do not think the program would be where it is today. And what is most fun to watch is that his enthusiasm is spreading to others on various lakes throughout Todd County."

The spread of enthusiasm, rather than AIS, is Bebus's primary objective. "90% of people are on board," he said. "We need everyone on board."



Final
Event
Reminder



Starry Trek 2020

Saturday, August 15

9:00am to 1:30pm



Help search for
starry stonewort
and other invasive species!



Battle Point Park-, Lake Osakis
2 mi E of the city of Osakis on
MN Hwy 27, then 3 mi N in
CTY 37, then 2 mi W on
TWP Rd to E shore.



Free and
family friendly!



No experience
necessary

Local rendezvous location hosted by:

Todd County AIS Program

Registration now open at www.StarryTrek.org
Until August 6, 2020