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Fall 2020

Newsletter

Cost-share Opportunities in the Long Prairie Watershed

The Douglas SWCD has applied for and received two grants that will allow for more cost -share opportunities in the county. These grants both target the Long Prairie Watershed within Douglas County and can be used for both Agricultural or Shoreline projects. The requirements are that it must address a resource concern such as erosion. Currently the interest and demand has been so high for the shoreline cost-share that those grant funds have been depleted, but don't let that deter you from acquiring info about agricultural practices! These projects can include but are not limited to cover crops, ag. waste projects,

alternative tile intakes, erosion control structures in fields, grassed waterways and gully fixes. For more information on other cost-share opportunities throughout the county please call or set up an appointment to see if your project is eligible! Just like all other cost share opportunities, this is available on a first come first serve basis and **will only cover** <u>up to 75%</u>.



The map below is the Long Prairie Watershed grant area within the county.



Intorducing the Long Prairie Watershed - Part 2

A series of watershed articles disseminated by the Long Prairie Watershed Collaboration of Todd, Douglas, Morrison, Wadena, East and West Otter Tail Counties In our previous article Part 1, we defined the term watershed. In this article we introduce one of the up & coming, focus watersheds in our six county area.

The Long Prairie River is not what it used to be. This is primarily due to changes in land use that have occurred within the watershed over the past 200 years. The Long Prairie River is 96 miles long. It originates at Lake Carlos in the eastern portion of Douglas County and meanders through gentle rolling hills, flat meadows and wildlife landscapes merging with the Crow Wing River two miles



south of Motley, MN in Morrison County. Until the 1860's, the watershed landscape was covered by areas of grass-land intermittent with dense forests of huge towering white pines and hardwood stands of oak and maple. So dense in fact were these forests that it is said that the community of Clotho was settled at its location in Todd County because the forests any further west were impenetrable. Wetlands dotted the riparian land-scape as fill between the forests and grasslands. The river and surrounding watershed were early territory of the Ojibwa and Dakota Nations offering excellent hunting and fishing grounds and an extensive water transportation system which included the tributaries of Dismal, Spruce, Eagle, Moran, Turtle, and Fish Trap creeks. The watershed was utilized for these purposes but less likely inhabited by the tribes because the river represented a war divide between the two nations. In the 1847 Chippewa treaties, the region west of the river was ceded by the Chippewa Nation for the anticipated displacement of the Menominee tribe and the region east of the river for the Winnebago tribe during the Indian Removal Act effecting these two Wisconsin area tribes with the passage of Wisconsin into statehood. The Menominee never came to the area, but the Winnebago tribe prospered along with white settlements so successfully that the area at Venewitz Creek south of where Long Prairie now lies was reputed to be more populous than the city of St. Paul at the time. The settlement was abandoned during the 1962 Dakota up rise.

In the 1860's, the forests within the watershed were heavily mined by settlers with axes. The water-shed, once



comprised of more than 65% forestland, was nearly decimated of trees by the 1890's. Eagle, Moran, Fish Trap, and Turtle Creeks were deep and wide enough at that time that the creeks could power mills. Logs were floated down creek to join the drives in the Long Prairie River to the Mississippi. As the riparian forests and their stabilizing tree roots disappeared, the sandy soils along the banks of the Long Prairie River were left exposed and unprotected. Tons of soil sediment eroded and washed into the river banks. The creeks and river narrowed and slowed to a point non-navigable by boat. Imagine it! Between Long Prairie and Motley, there were once flatboats and even a steam boat puffing its way up and down the river carrying supplies to

settlements and homes. Today, the Long Prairie River remains a very shallow and slow moving seasonal canoe route for amateur recreationalists.

Currently, the Long Prairie River Watershed is approximately 20% forested due largely to reforestation efforts that occurred in the 1990's. 47% of the watershed area is used for cultivated crops such as potatoes, soybeans, corn, and alfalfa; 8% is in grasslands or pastures; 18% wetlands, floodplain meadows, and surface waters, and 7% as development for homes, urban areas, and municipality use.

The Long Prairie Watershed covers 883 square miles with 220 lakes greater than 10 acres and 965 miles of streams and rivers. The watershed spans six different counties including Douglas, Todd, Morrison, Wadena, East and West Otter Tail. Remember in Part 1 of this series we learned that the boundary of a watershed is *a connection of all points marking the farthest reaches of land in which all contributing waters fall and flow*,

in this example, those land reaches contribute to the Long Prairie River. Therefore, even though the Long Prairie River does not necessarily flow through Wadena and East and West Otter Tail Counties, small sections of their landscape topography, streams and creeks do contribute water to the Long Prairie River.



The Long Prairie River remains a valuable water resource. People and animals that live within its watershed depend heavily on the river for a variety of uses. Uses include aquatic life, recreational activity such as swimming, canoeing, and fishing, industrial consumption, agriculture, irrigation, and wildlife support. The river serves as a sport fishery for Northern Pike and Walleye and also boasts crops of small and largemouth bass. It provides habitat for Painted Turtles, the Horned Lark, the Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagles, several species of owl and hawks, numerous songbirds, deer, mink, muskrat, otter, wild turkey, grouse and pheasants, just to name a few. The Blanding's Turtle is a threatened reptile species within the watershed. Lakes provide swimming, boating and other recreational and aesthetic enjoyment to its users. The Long Prairie River is designated as a Department of Natural Resources' Water Route for canoeists beginning at Lake Carlos State Park, passing the Lions' Westside Park and Rest Area and along the Long Prairie Wildlife Management Area north of Browerville before merging with the Crow Wing River in Morrison County. There are 4 carry-in access points for small boats along the water route.



As you have read, impairments for the Long Prairie River began nearly 200 years ago, and slowly the watershed is redefining itself. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency MPCA) still lists 7 streams and 6 areas of the Long Prairie River and 10 lakes within the watershed as impaired. Over time, as people realize the value to their properties of maintaining forested areas and deep rooted vegetation along shoreland and riparian zones of the river, more tree ground, hay and grass-land buffers are being established. However, cultivated land and shoreland development remain a threat through nutrient runoff, wind and water erosion. Environmentally sensitive land practices including less impervious surface areas and increased buffering zones will help filter out pollutants

and stabilize soils. The MPCA continues protection efforts with food and meat processing plants, industrial wastes, city sewage treatment ponds, and city stormwater mitigation plans that contribute **point source** pollutants to the river. *Point sources* are single, easily identifiable sources of pollution. To the 41,867

individuals living, farming, or recreating within the watershed, you are the *nonpoint* pollution contributors. *Nonpoint sources* are potential sources of pollution caused by multiple or layered interactions of land use systems. Your contributions, individually, may be smaller, but cumulatively, they add up to rally municipalities and industries with point source pollutant discharges to the Long Prairie River.



Luckily, there are serious plans in development to help communities further protect their local water resources and watersheds. Tune in to our next article **Rural Dictionary**– **Acronym of the Year**: – *Part 3* to learn more about One Watershed, One Plans (1W1P) and some current resource concerns for the Long Prairie Watershed.

If you missed part one or are interested in reading the other parts. Check them out on the SWCD website under watershed updates.

Education and Outreach

The education and outreach the district staff hosts was put on abrupt hold this year due to the COVID-19 outbreak. All events, activities, seminars, and presentations were canceled or rescheduled for a later date. That includes the Kids' Groundwater Festival (First time in 28 years), Our Farms... Our Future - Managing and Maintaining Healthy Soils seminar workshop, educational/school sessions, June Nitrate Clinic, Area II and State Envirothon, kids poster contest and many more. We look forward to starting these activities back up when we are able!

Buffers and Beyond

The Board of Soil and Water Resources (BSWR) is introducing a series of factsheets called "Building Better Buffers". The goal of these factsheets is to provide information and to help provide landowners in the area, the option to improve and maintain existing buffers. These factsheets will include information on: "Buffers for Clean Water", "Buffers for Wildlife", "Forested Buffers", "Alternative Practices", and "Buffer Maintenance". For more information contact the office or check out the BWSR website: <u>https://bwsr.state.mn.us/building-better-buffers</u>. Over all the compliance for buffers on public waters in the state is estimated at 99% and the public ditches is right behind at 98%. Douglas SWCD staff are still making checks around the county to ensure everyone is in compliance before enforcement takes place. For other questions related to buffers, give the office a call!

No-Till Drills Available

Douglas SWCD has purchased a second 10' haybuster no-till drill to rent out. These drills work well for seeding native grasses, pasture mixes, hay mixes, alfalfa, soybeans, and small grain. The rental rate is \$9.00 per acre (\$100 minimum) in Douglas County, and \$11 per acre (\$150 minimum plus an additional \$150 delivery fee) out of county. The SWCD will deliver the drill, calibrate it for your seed and pick it up when you are finished. Call the SWCD to reserve one of the drills.

Trees!

Douglas SWCD has sold trees for conservation practices for over 45 years, and once again we were able to fulfill that service. This year we sold 26,300 bareroot and potted trees. Staff spent all spring working on tree plans, plantings, and fabric/tree tube installation. There was a total of 22 plantings which consisted of 5,400 trees, 8,000 feet of fabric and 370 tree tubes installed. Tree pickup day looked a bit differently this year; with a drive through style pickup. There were social distancing rules that were followed closely by customers and staff. Staff hand delivered and loaded trees in the vehicle which allowed for a no contact pickup.

<u>Rain Gardens</u>

A rain garden is an outdoor space that is designed to collect run off that can cause erosion. Rain gardens are typically made up of native shrubs, grasses and flowers that are planted in a small depression, which is generally formed on a natural slope. It is designed to temporarily hold and soak in rain water runoff that flows from rooftops, driveways, patios, lawns or other impervious structures. Douglas SWCD has been working on designing and helping landowners around the county put in rain gardens. If interested in rain gardens, or curious about how they can make a difference on your property, reach out to the Douglas SWCD today! There is cost-share available if in the targeted area (map on cover for reference).

Nitrate Clinic

Douglas SWCD once again will be holding a FREE nitrate water testing clinic on August 25, 2020 from 9 am - 4 pm. This year due to COVID –19 and our building being closed to the public, the nitrate clinic will be held out at the **Douglas SWCD Tree Shed**. Instead of holding two nitrate clinics during the summer, staff decided to switch it up and hold one in the late summer, and another during the late fall/winter months.

Tree Shed Address: 800 Northside Drive. Alexandria, MN 56308

How to collect samples: run your cold tap for five to ten minutes then collect about one cup of water in a plastic baggie (double bag) or clean jar. Keep the water cool until arrival. You can collect the water anytime within one day of the nitrate analysis (if you are going to the local office right after work, you can collect the sample in the morning and keep it cool all day until you arrive).

Continuing on with an organic dairy

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BSWR) featured some of Douglas County's organic dairy farmers this past month; Ben Wagner and Jack Schouweiler. Jack is getting into dairy farming as Ben prepares for an eventual retirement. NRCS assistance with a new manure storage system and expanded rotational grazing is part of what's making it possible for Schouweiler to gradually take over the operation as he learns from Wagner. Jack has been working as a farm hand on the Wagner farm since he was 16. He has helped implement many ideas new to the farm such as naming all the cattle. Currently the cattle get to graze outside every day and eventually will be milked in a parlor-style barn on the farm Jack is renting from Ben's brother. They've also worked with a Douglas SWCD's based Chippewa Watershed conservation planner through NRCS and BWSR's Watershed Conservation Planning Initiative.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Update

CLEAR30 is the first USDA pilot program to offer 30-year signup that will offer farmers and landowners an opportunity to enroll in a 30-year CRP contract. This program is available for farmers and landowners with expiring water-quality practice CRP contracts in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay Regions.

CRP has other opportunities with deadlines fast approaching. **August 21, 2020** is the deadline for CRP continuous sign up, CLEAR30 and the CRP Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP). With the SHIPP program, Producers have an option to have a three, four, or five year CRP Contract to establish cover crops on less productive cropland in exchange for payments. Participants must plant the lowest practical cost perennial cover for a conservation use which will help improve the Soil productivity health on a farm for generations and increase the bottom line for the farmer.

If interested in the CRP program, or if you have questions, please call the office and one of our technicians would be more than happy to assist you!

Food Plot, Native Grass and Forb Seed Mixes

The Douglas SWCD has food plot seed available for landowners. Two different deer mixes are available, a perennial mix and an annual mix. The perennial mix includes Alsike Clover, Lanino Clover, Medium Red Clover, White Dutch Clover, and Chicory. The annual mix includes Forage Peas, Radish, Turnips, and Haybet Barley. There is also has a Pheasant/Turkey mix containing Wildlife Sunflower, Wildlife Grain Sorghum, FSG Pearl Millet, and Sugar Graze II Sorghum Sudangrass. Each mix is packaged in one acre bags. Food plots are important to retain wildlife in your area after crops are harvested in the fall and to provide food for wildlife throughout the winter.

Native grass and forb (flowers) seed mixes are available to landowners for conservation practices. SWCD Staff will work with landowners on what type of seed mix is required for the practice they are enrolling into. Typically we have set mixes for the different practices, but we can work with landowners on custom mixes if desired. Native grass and forb plantings provide optimum habitat for wildlife and their deep root systems make them effective with erosion control.

Mark your Calendars!

August 10 - SWCD Board Meeting (7:30 AM)

August 15 - Starry Trek—Search for Starry Stonewart and other aquatic invasive species in our Minnesota Lakes

August 17 - Volunteer Lake Monitoring - Cooler drop off day

August 21 - Continuous CRP deadline

August 21 - Deadline to submit an offer for CRP Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP)

August 25 - Free Nitrate Testing Clinic at the SWCD Tree Building (9:00 AM - 4 PM)

September 7 - SWCD Office Closed (Labor Day)

September 11 - SWCD Board Meeting (7:30 AM)

September 21 - Volunteer Lake Monitoring - Cooler drop off day



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