Hawk Creek Headlines

Hawk Creek Watershed Project • 500 East DePue Avenue • Olivia MN • 56277 • (320) 523-3672

Fall 2002

Special Points of Interest

- Funding available for conservation
- Park Profile
- Lawn Care
- Eagle Lake Association
- Kid's Corner
- Mound Septic Systems
- Citizen Monitor Network

Only after the last tree has been cut down, only after the last river has been poisoned, and only after the last fish has been caught, only then will you find that money cannot be eaten. - *Cree Indian Prophecy*

Inside this issue:

Hawk Creek Watershed Project Funds Conservation Efforts

The Hawk Creek Watershed Project work area covers 623,424 acres (974.1 square miles) of land and is located in Renville, Chippewa, and Kandiyohi Counties. It is unique among the other major watersheds of the Minnesota River in that it is comprised of a main tributary (Hawk Creek) and several other streams that flow directly into the Minnesota River. The Hawk Creek Watershed Project includes several smaller streams including Chetomba, Beaver, Sacred Heart, Middle, Timms, Brafee's, Smith and Palmer Creeks. Hawk Creek originates at Eagle Lake north of Willmar, MN and flows approximately 65 miles to its mouth at the Minnesota River near Granite Falls, MN.

From 1999 to 2001 a diagnostic study was conducted to determine the pollution levels and to see if there was a need for attention. The study showed excessive levels of sediment, phosphorus, and nitrates. Bacteria is also a concern in some reaches of the watershed. These pollutants come from a wide variety of sources including: stormwater run-off, agricultural land run-off, wastewater treatment plants, livestock manure, failing septic systems, industrial and processing plants. Another issue is water quantity. Frequent flooding occurs all too often. "*Everyone*" who lives, works, plays, or passes through the watershed has an impact. We are all a part of the problem and we are all a part of the solution!

The Hawk Creek Watershed Project works very closely with the SWCD/NRCS offices in the three counties. We work together by spreading out resources to complete conservation projects. These two agencies complete the surveys and designs when needed. The mission is to provide financial incentives to landowners to correct and prevent pollution problems. We do that through cost-share programs to make these projects cost-effective and reasonable. These projects are approved by a Local Work Group and are cost-shared from 50 to 75% and in a few cases even more. Staying one step ahead of regulation is our motto!

The Hawk Creek Project has cost-shared on a number of conservation projects ranging from sediment retention blocks, terraces, waterways, side inlets, wetland restorations, nutrient and manure management plans, ag waste facilities, and abandoned wells. The cost-share money was a grant from Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. They provide grants for projects because it is a better strategy than enforcement. The $256,000 cost-share funds have recently been spent or encumbered. These funds went to complete over $829,746 worth of conservation projects. In 2001 alone, the conservation projects completed are expected to reduce sediment reaching the Minnesota River by 87,079 tons and phosphorus by 100,053 pounds over the life span of the projects. That's enough soil to fill 8,700 dump trucks and enough phosphorus to fertilize 2500 acres of corn!! These figures are for only the projects we are aware of. We realize there are more conservation measures that farmers do on their own and have for many years! These projects follow the Project's long-term goal which is *improving the water quality/quantity issues in the watershed while also promoting a healthy agricultural, industrial and recreation-based economy for the region.*

"Green Corridors" Offers Financial Incentives

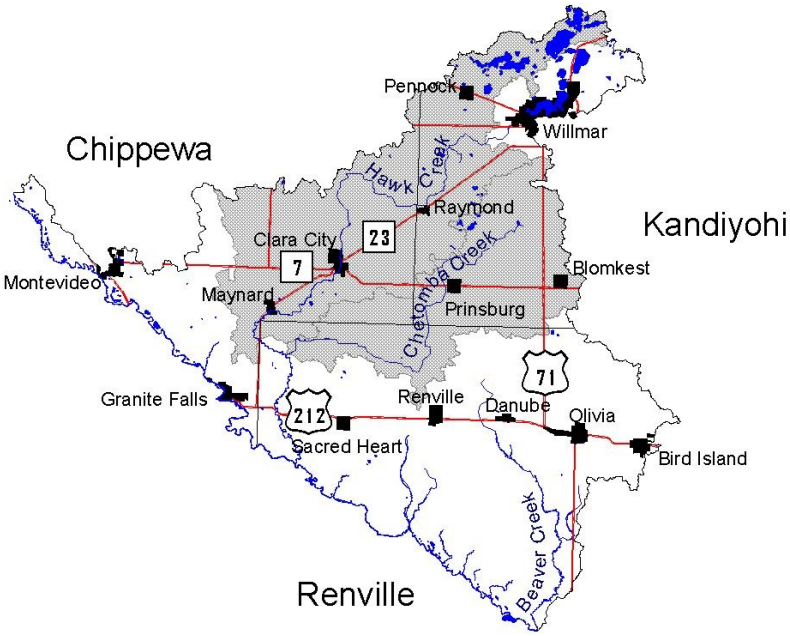
The Hawk Creek Watershed has identified Chetomba Creek and Middle Hawk Creek subwatershed as a high priority area for conservation practices. Extensive water testing indicated that this area was a concern due to the high levels of sediment, phosphorus, and nitrates. The Hawk Creek Watershed Project received grant funds for conservation projects to create a "green corridor" within the high priority area as noted on the map. Grant funds are available for the following conservation practices:

• **A strong buffer strip initiative** is found to be critical. A one-time $80-$120 per acre bonus payment will be provided to landowners who enroll buffer strips into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

• **Side inlet/drop inlet pipes** installed in place of a ditch bank washout will reduce the velocity of surface water and allow sediment to settle out in the farm field without sacrificing the crop. These structures would reduce the need for costly ditch cleanouts by up to 60% while improving water quality. The Project will cost-share ditch bank stabilization structures at 50% not to exceed $1,000.

• **Alternative surface drainage systems and tile intake protection practices** reduces the amount of sediment that is delivered to a ditch system or watercourse. The Project will cost-share these structures at 75% not to exceed $500 per project.

For more information on the "green corridors" grant program or cost-share assistance available outside the priority area, please contact the Hawk Creek Watershed Project at (320) 523-3672.



The highlighted area in the Hawk Creek Watershed Project Area is the Priority area for the "Green Corridors" funding. If you live outside the priority area please check with Hawk Creek Watershed Project to see if other cost-share assistance is available.

Don't "P" on Your Lawn!

Did you know you do not have to live directly on a lake, river, or stream to affect the quality of the water? Did you ever stop and think about where your used water actually goes? Where does the excess water from your yard go when the snow melts or after a rain event? The water that does not soak into the ground ends up in our lakes, rivers, and streams either by storm drains, tile, or open ditches.

One particular pollution problem we have in our water courses is high levels of phosphorus (P). Phosphorus promotes algal blooms in lakes and rivers.

YOU CAN HELP!!! If you fertilize your lawn, use phosphorus free fertilizer. Soil tests show that established lawns "rarely" need phosphorus. Phosphorus is needed in establishing new grass. P does nothing for making your lawn green and lush. If your lawn does not need it, it can't use it, and it runs off only to pollute the lakes and rivers that you recreate on!

For more information please call the Hawk Creek Watershed Project at (320) 523-3672.

Park Profile: Robbins Island Park

The headwaters for the Hawk Creek Watershed are located in the Lakes Region of Kandiyohi County. Located in this region is the 55-acre Robbins Island Park. This park is located between Foot and Willmar Lakes in the City of Willmar. Robbins Island Park was created in 1940 and has the following features:

- Seven picnic shelters
- Playground equipment
- Nature trails
- Swimming Beach
- Boat Ramps
- Volleyball and Softball Areas
- Cross-Country Ski Trails

For more information on Robbins Island Park, please call the Community Education and Recreation at (320) 235-3739.

Meet the Staff

Amanda Smith joined the Hawk Creek Staff this September as the Water Quality Outreach Technician. Amanda's duties are to monitor water quality, report data, and promote education through newsletters, brochures, post cards, and school visits. Amanda also creates maps in ArcView GIS and assists in grant writing.

The Hawk Creek Watershed Staff is also composed of Loren Engelby, Project Coordinator and Dean Dambroten, Watershed Planner and Field Technician. Loren is responsible for overseeing and assisting project technicians with landowner contacts and educational activities. He is also responsible for project reports and securing additional funding. Dean works with landowners to implement Best Management Practices in the watershed. Amanda, Loren, and Dean can be contacted at (320) 523-3672.

Pictured from Left to Right: Loren Engelby Amanda Smith, and Dean Dambroten.

Special Recognition for Eagle Lake Association

By: Loren Engelby

This past summer I have attended a few of the Eagle Lake Association meetings. I am very impressed with the energy and enthusiasm of this group. This group is genuinely interested in protecting and improving the water quality of this once pristine lake. According to historical records, in 1910 Eagle Lake was the cleanest in the County.

The Association is active in education and management that has a positive impact on water quality. The promotion of phosphate free lawn fertilizer is one of many efforts. The Association members also host a "leaf pick-up" day in October. Members pick up bags of leaves from lakeshore residents to keep leaves out of the lake. Leaves, lawn clippings, and ash from burn piles contribute to the phosphorus levels in the lake. Eagle Lake Association also monitors the water quality throughout the summer months. Last summer the Hawk Creek Watershed donated $1,000 to their water monitoring efforts. The staff and citizens of the Hawk Creek Watershed applaud the efforts of the Association. We are proud of this unique partnership and look forward to working together with them in the future. For more information about the Eagle Lake Association, call Jeff Pattison, President, at (320) 235-3774.

KID'S CORNER: Wonderful Wetlands!

Wetlands are exactly what they sound like: land that is wet. Wetlands can be found everywhere and called many different names. For example, they are called "swamps" in the South and "prairie potholes" here in the Midwest.

There are many types of wetlands. Wetlands can have open water all year or only have water part of the year. Some wetlands you can't even see the water, but when you walk out in the field water squishes all around your feet. These wetlands are known as "wet meadows."

Wetlands must have three things to be called a "wetland." They must have wet soils known as "hydric" soils. They also must have plants that like water known as "hydrophytes." (An example of a hydrophyte is a cattail.) Finally, water must be in the area all or part of the year to make the area a wetland.

Wetlands are important to our environment. They clean our water, slow down flooding, and provide a home for animals and plants.

Wetlands are home to many animals and plants. Can you find the following in the list in the seek-and-find?

FROG FISH GOOSE EAGLE CRANE
DUCK DRAGONFLY CATTAIL BEAVER
MUSKRAT SEDGE DEER TURTLE

F	I	S	H	S	E	D	G	E
R	G	M	C	R	A	N	E	A
O	S	T	U	R	T	L	E	G
G	O	O	S	E	B	Y	C	L
C	R	A	N	E	D	V	A	E
L	A	T	R	O	U	I	T	M
F	D	N	R	W	C	K	T	W
C	E	M	U	S	K	R	A	T
B	E	A	V	E	R	H	I	J
D	R	A	G	O	N	F	L	Y

From a Different Perspective

"Winterize your lawn," the big sign outside the garden store commanded. I've fed it, watered it, mowed it, raked it and watched a lot of it die anyway. We constantly battle dandelions and violets that thrive naturally, so we can grow grass that must be nursed through an annual four-step chemical dependency.

Imagine the conversation The Creator might have with St. Francis about this "winterization":

"St. Francis you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there in the Midwest? What happened to the dandelions and violets I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no -maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil and withstand drought. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracted butterflies, honeybees, and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But all I see are these green rectangles."

"It's the tribes that settled there, Lord: The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers 'weeds' and went to great extent to kill them and replace them with grass."

"Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?"

"Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn."

"The spring rains and cool weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy."

"Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it, sometimes twice a week."

"They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?"

"Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags."

"They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?"

"No, Sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away."

"Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?"

"Yes, Sir."

"These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work."

"You aren't going believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it."

"What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life."

"You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and have them hauled away."

"No! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and keep the soil moist and loose?"

"After throwing away your leaves, they go out and buy something they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves."

"And where do they get this mulch?"

"They cut down trees and grind them up."

"Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?"

"*Dumb and Dumber*, Lord. It's a real stupid movie about…"

"Never mind I think I just heard the whole story."

Author Unknown

Did You Know. . .

- Minnesota has 11,842 lakes that are over 10 acres in size.
- Minnesota has more shoreline than California, Florida, and Hawaii combined.
- There are 6,564 rivers and streams in Minnesota that stretch over 92,000 miles.
- Minnesota is from a Dakota Sioux Indian word that means "cloudy water" or "sky water" and refers to local rivers.
- Wetlands present in Minnesota in 1850 18.6 million acres.
- Wetlands present in Minnesota in 1990 7.5 million acres.

Applause for Citizen Monitors!

The Hawk Creek Watershed Project's Citizen Monitor Network has completed another successful monitoring season. The Network is composed of several citizens who volunteer to monitor rainfall and/or transparency throughout the watershed. This Network is important to the Watershed Project because they provide data from various locations throughout the watershed on a weekly to a daily basis.

The following 27 residents of the watershed are members of the Network:
Jackie Ast, Mark Erickson, Dariel and Gwen Grove, Erik Hoff, Virginia Homme, Perry Slagter, Harriet Link, Don Korstad, Norbert and Katherine Schroeer, Tom Schuerer Jr., Greg Erickson, Randy Feiferick, Brett Nordby, Lowell Bratsch, John Sietsema, Donald Knott, Wayne Knott, Molly Scheinfurter, Chris and Steve Hetting, Sam Hettig, Ron Hanson, Marge Hegna, Kim Malmquist, and Melanie Boike.

The Hawk Creek Watershed Project would like to extend its gratitude to these individuals who show interest in monitoring water quality and quantity. If you are interested in joining this Network and monitoring for rainfall and/or transparency, then please call Amanda Smith at (320) 523-3763. Once again, thank you members of the Citizen Network!!

Other Points of Interest

The Hawk Creek Watershed Project has been full of activity this year. The Project was recently awarded the Minnesota Association of RC&D Councils "Outstanding Work Group of the Year" award. This work group consists of the Local Work Group and the project staff.

The Project also finished a successful monitoring season on six sites throughout the Hawk Creek Watershed. The data is currently being compiled, so look for the results in the next newsletter.

The Hawk Creek Watershed Project is planning on having a display at the Ag Show in Willmar in March. Look for us there and stop by to learn more about the Project.

Everyone is always invited to attend our monthly meetings. At these meetings we go more in-depth on projects and programs. We always appreciate citizen input. Please call for time of the next meeting held at the Clara City Community Center in December.

Septic Mounds: Not to be Feared

Just because your toilet flushes, does not mean that your septic system is properly working. Poor wastewater treatment can lead to growth of bacteria, viruses and disease causing pathogens in drinking water, increase algal blooms in lakes and rivers, and allow synthetic cleaning products to enter groundwater. Improper treatment can cause high levels of Nitrates in drinking water. Nitrate affects the ability of an infant's blood to carry oxygen, a condition called methemoglobinemia (blue-baby syndrome.)

Proper sewage treatment reduces health risks to humans and prevents groundwater contamination. Plumbing, septic tank, and the soil treatment system, also known as the drainfield, are the three main components in a septic system.

Trenches and mounds are two types of soil treatment systems. When water tables are near the surface or soil isn't permeable to accept water into the drainfield, then mounds are necessary. A sewage treatment mound is an elevated soil treatment system. A mound is made with clean sand to provide adequate separation between the wastewater, soil surface, and the water table. A mound is then layered with topsoil and planted with grass.

Many people fear mound systems. According to a local contractor, the lift stations and related equipment are much more reliable than 5 or 10 years ago. A mound can also be landscaped. Permanent vegetation on the mound decreases erosion of the topsoil. It is important to use plants that prefer dry soils to prevent roots from interfering with the septic system. Also, <u>never</u> plant trees and shrubs on or near the mound. The roots of these plants will harm the sewage treatment system.

The Hawk Creek Watershed has received $530,000 for a low interest Septic System Loan Program. Individuals can apply for the 3% loan to upgrade their septic system. The Program is administered through the County Auditor. Once approved, loan payments are made at the same time as property taxes. The loans can be made for up to 10 years and can be transferred to new owners if the property is sold prior to repayment. Call us for more information.

Contact Us!

We love to hear from the public! Please contact us at (320) 523-3672 to have questions answered or for more information on the Hawk Creek Watershed Project. Our address is: Hawk Creek Watershed Project
Renville County Courthouse, Lower Level
500 East DePue Avenue
Olivia, MN 56277

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Information for Every Individual!

If you **Farm** in the watershed, then there is information on *financial incentives* for conservation programs, Phosphorus, and septic mound systems.

If you are a **Resident** in the watershed, then there is information on parks, septic systems, lake associations and lawn maintenance.

You may wonder **what is a watershed** and do **I really live in one**? A watershed is an area of land where rainfall and snowmelt drain into a particular stream, river, ditch, wetland or lake. Many people don't think that they live in the Hawk Creek Watershed. After all, they don't live on Hawk Creek or even close to it. The Watershed is unique in that it doesn't have just one lake or river draining the entire watershed. Instead, the Hawk Creek Watershed Project Area has 2 major creeks– Beaver and Hawk. It also has approximately twenty different streams that drain right into the Minnesota River. The watershed also has about a dozen lakes in the northern reaches. To find your location in the watershed, then

Open up the newsletter to Page 2 to see a map of the Hawk Creek Watershed Project Area!