

AUGUST 2013

CONNECTED

NEWS FOR MISSISSIPPI RIVER-WINONA WATERSHED CITIZENS

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FAVORITE PLACES:

Dry Run Creek

It's hard to believe that Dry Run, now teeming with plant and animal life, was a dry creek bed just 40 years ago.

Imagine a spring-fed stream now flowing that was dry 40 years ago. Imagine that stream now supports reintroduced native brook trout and one of the most diverse groups of macro-invertebrates known in southeastern Minnesota. You don't have to imagine! Dry Run, seen from Inspiration Point, is such a place. It is one of my favorite areas in the Whitewater Watershed. Dry Run, within Whitewater State Park, was named early in the park's history when it did not flow. Today, because the water table has risen due to better land use practices in its watershed, this tributary of Trout Run Creek is fed by several springs. From Inspiration Point you can also see a part of the park that is quite ecologically healthy, with old growth forest and a wide variety of rare plants and animals. I encourage you to visit this place that is very special to me.

– Dave Palmquist, Retired Whitewater State Park Naturalist



The Pickerel Frog is a species of special concern in Minnesota that only lives along the southeast's streams with limestone/dolomite outcrops like Dry Run.

Where do you go to rejuvenate and enjoy the beauty of our watershed? Send your photo of a favorite place and description of not more than 150 words to whitewaterwatershed@gmail.com.

TAKE ON A PROJECT!

Be a Stream Monitor

More volunteers are needed to test water temperature, stream transparency, precipitation and stream stage in our watershed. Go to pca.state.mn.us and search "citizen stream monitoring" to learn more, or call Jake Overgaard at 507-457-6445.

LEARN SOMETHING!

Life in Running Waters: River and Stream Biology in the Midwest United States

10 to 12 noon Thursdays, September 5, 12, 19 and 26.

Adults are invited to learn about the biology of our streams in four two-hour sessions at Winona State University. Call 507.457.5565 to register.

Crystal Springs Hatchery Tour

10 to 11:30 a.m. August 24

Learn how trout are raised at Crystal Springs Trout Hatchery, near Whitewater State Park. Meet at Whitewater State Park Visitor Center, with transportation to get to the hatchery. Registration is required; call 507-932-3007, ext. 226 or e-mail sara.grover@state.mn.us.

I Can Fish! Trout Fishing at Whitewater State Park | Meet at South Picnic Area

10:30 to noon Sundays, August 25 and September 1

Rods, reels and tackle are provided to introduce trout fishing to inexperienced anglers, families and youth groups. Youngsters must come with an adult. Bring your own worms. Fishing licenses and trout stamps are not required.

Whitewater State Park is three miles south of Elba on State Highway 74.

IN THE WATERSHED

Citizen Volunteers Track Water Quality In Area Wells

To learn more about drinking water quality in southeast Minnesota and to develop a model program for volunteer water nitrate assessment, a one-of-a-kind project was launched in Olmsted, Winona, Wabasha and six more counties in 2007. This Volunteer Nitrate Monitoring Network, led by Southeast Minnesota Water Resources Board and powered by volunteers, collected and evaluated water samples from 675 wells in 2008 and 2009—four in every township of the nine counties. Annual surveys continued through 2012.

Randomly selected volunteers received a packet by mail, drew a test, froze a sample, then mailed it to researchers. In 2009, 21% of wells tested in Winona County showed nitrate levels exceeding the State Health Risk Limit of 10 parts per million, with 8% in Olmsted County and 25% in Wabasha County.

92% of the 405 participants who returned surveys said they will participate again. A 2013 project phase will add chloride, fluoride and sulfate testing. Learn more from the Minnesota Department of Health at 651-201-4700.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER - WINONA WATERSHED PROJECT

City of WINONA

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This newsletter is published jointly by the City of Winona and the Whitewater Joint Powers Board, with funding from the City of Winona and the Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment, administered by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

If you prefer to receive this publication electronically, send your request to whitewaterwatershed@gmail.com.

WATERSHED NEIGHBORS

FROM THE LIST OF PLANTS DONATED BY CHESTER WOODS TO EYOTA

3 Plants For Wet Mesic Prairie

- Cream Wild Indigo
- Meadow Blazing Star
- Nodding Blue Marigold



Creative, Practical Vision

In Eyota, a Park Board's View Of Community Includes Natural Places For People & Storm Water Management



AT LEFT: Eyota City Clerk Marlis Knowlton pauses at the edge of a naturalized wetland in West Side Park. ABOVE: Perennial plantings in Eyota's Summerfield Park garden capture storm water and make a great place to play!

Iris Neumann has a funeral to attend and can't stay long, but she spreads clearly written notes, project records and a rain garden design sketch on the table. The Eyota resident smiles, then graciously introduces two City projects in which she's had a hand.

On Eyota's north side, Summerfield Park is situated at the blunt end of Summerfield Drive NE in a relatively new neighborhood development. The well-kept "pocket park" is a popular place for neighborhood kids, but in 2010 was hot and open. Eyeing clay-based soils and standing water, the Park Board decided to install a rain garden to hold and filter nitrates from excess runoff and create a more beautiful environment. Ms. Neumann developed a plan, then with contractors, Park Board members and the park's next-door neighbor Dianne Schmidt, the garden was graded, planted, and mulched.

A prairie restoration in Eyota's West Side Park began when Park Board members saw opportunity in a wet, low place in the park's sprawling lawns. That seasonally soggy spot is the source of the South Branch of the Whitewater River—a collecting place for runoff from roads and nearby farm fields that begins to flow just across the road from the park. Determined to give the stream a cleaner start, the Board developed a prairie restoration plan in 2006, then spent two years ridding the site of existing vegetation. In 2008, with leadership by Tom Eckdahl, manager of nearby Chester Woods County Park, the prairie was planted with hand-collected seed from Chester Woods' prairie and Winona County's Prairie Moon Nursery. Now, five years and several burns later, the prairie is a thick, natural area that filters nitrates and other pollutants from water and attracts both birds and people.

Marlis Knowlton, City Clerk, says Eyota has runoff issues because its prairie landscape includes a surprising amount of clay. As the City looks to resolve persistent water issues, these two projects may inspire larger scale work at the source of the Whitewater River's South Branch.

Investing In the Future

Lynn & Karen Zabel's New Freestall Barn Will Improve Herd Health & Manure Management, Make Way For Next Generation



ABOVE: East of the Zabel's current farm buildings, in a triangular area between the Great River Ridge State Trail and 530th Street, fill is put into place for the new barn. TOP RIGHT: Karen Zabel gives a moment to an affectionate cat. BOTTOM RIGHT: Not shy!

On a hot July afternoon Karen Zabel pauses from her daily chores to look over the site where a freestall barn will stand in a matter of weeks. The site was a pasture before excavators hauled and leveled fill to make way for the new three-row, 11,696-square-foot structure. The barn will stand next to existing buildings in a triangular area between The Great River Ridge State Trail, Minnesota Highway 42 and 530th Street. Just east of the site, land slopes toward a culvert where water drains under MN Highway 42 to a flowage that feeds the North Fork of the Whitewater River. New storage containment will keep manure out of the rain, simplify some routine tasks, and greatly reduce the likelihood of runoff.

The tight space available to the Zabels made siting the barn a challenge. They were creative and worked with Wabasha County, Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources, excavator Bennett & Sons, and builder KBS Companies to develop a plan that respects easements related to waterways, the trail, and roads.

Lynn and Karen made the decision to build the barn when son, Elliott, made it clear he'll farm the family's home place. "We all have a story," says Karen, "and my husband's is tied to this place." Elliott's, it seems, is, too. And Karen, who came to Minnesota from Toronto years ago, can't imagine living anywhere else.

The Zabel family's commitment and kind regard for each other exist alongside a strong work ethic and disciplines on the farm. Everything has its place. Equipment is well-kept. An agronomist is part of the team, soil is sampled, and fertilizer application is monitored because water quality is a priority. The Zabels carefully research and make thoughtful business decisions, and this barn is no exception. It will benefit the family—and people downstream—for a long time.

Intelligent planning, love for their home place, and a desire to evolve their farm for son Elliott inspired the Zabels to take a big step forward at a time when they could step back. The new freestall barn for their dairy herd is designed to benefit their family, their herd and people downstream.



FROM THE ZABELS

3 Tips for Farm Construction

- Expect the unexpected! Plan well in advance to allow time for project approvals.
- When building a structure for cattle, carefully consider options for herd care, manure management and runoff during construction.
- Choose construction partners with whom you have good relationships and mutual respect.

ONE THING YOU CAN DO

Capture Water Where It Falls

To protect drinking water, streams, soil and places where we love to be outdoors, the best thing we can do is keep water where it falls. We want it to soak in, not run off.

In natural areas rain and melting snow soak in and slowly move downward to replenish ground water. Where there's hard surface, water quickly moves chemicals, soil, sand and trash to storm sewers, ditches and streams.

Look at your home. Where does water go? The more hard surface you have, the more pollution you cause. It's fact, but the fix is easy. Dig a shallow basin in a low place at least 10 feet from your house. If it's on a hill, make a small earthen lip on the lower side to hold water. Plant perennials in it. Aim a downspout at it.

This is a rain garden—a recessed area that holds water so it sinks in. Flowers add interest and their roots absorb more water, but they're not essential.

A rain garden works like the terraces, grass waterways, contour strips and perennial plantings farmers put in fields to prevent erosion. It holds water just long enough to prevent runoff and pollution.



Above: Eyota Mayor Tyrel Clark built a rain garden in his yard to catch and filter water that moves through a draw in his neighborhood. It keeps polluted runoff from entering the Whitewater's South Branch.

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program

As a pilot watershed, Whitewater farmers will accelerate voluntary action statewide

On June 10, 2013, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the Whitewater River Watershed will help pilot a new, voluntary water stewardship project for farmers.

The program is receiving \$6.5 million in federal funds, plus \$3 million from Minnesota's Legacy Amendment to begin the program. Four watersheds in nine counties are pilots.

"There's a reason why Minnesota is the first state for this effort," Vilsack said. "Minnesota has a history of producers who care deeply about the land and water, and your state also understands and appreciates the economic opportunity connected both to agriculture and outdoor recreation."

Minnesota's Ag Water Quality Certification Program is designed to accelerate voluntary adoption of agricultural practices that enhance water quality. Farmers adopt certain practices.



In exchange, they are exempt from new regulations for 10-years.

Such practices might include adopting drainage methods that conserve water, installing waterways or buffers, implementing tillage methods that minimize erosion, constructing biofilters, or planting cover crops.

Vilsack described the program as a new approach to regulation—a "completely different relationship" and historic

Four watersheds are helping to develop the Ag Water Certification Program—Whitewater River, Middle Sauk River, Whiskey Creek and Elm Creek.

Learn more about this collaborative project at: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/waterprotection/awqcprogram.aspx>

opportunity to change the way we farm. Landowners will be given resources to invest in best practices and certified by the state to be in compliance.

Olmsted County Commissioner, farmer and Whitewater Watershed Joint Powers Board Chair Matt Flynn said he sees the Whitewater and other pilot watersheds becoming a showcase.

"It's an honor to be one of the pilots and represent the state. Hopefully the local farmers will take pride in it," Flynn said.

Minnesota Assistant Agriculture Commissioner Matt Wohlman traveled to Whitewater State Park to meet with Flynn and other Whitewater Watershed Joint Powers Board members on June 20. The goal, he said, is to start work in pilot watersheds immediately, to begin

certifying producers this fall. Initial success will be measured by how many farmers participate.

Farmers in pilot watersheds will have a hand in crafting a program that is expected to become a national model.

"Water quality gets solved at the local level, when communities recognize the common goal of bringing local expertise and practice to the table," said EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson at the program's launch in January 2012.

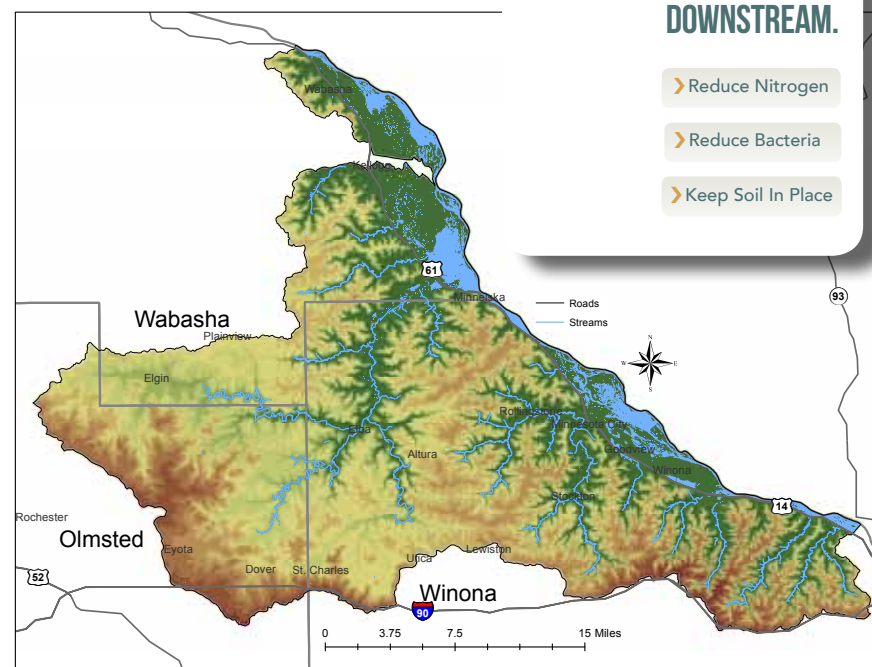
"It's clear this is a collaborative process and that's important. Water quality isn't only about lakes and streams that run through any state...Clean water, along with healthy lands and air are the raw materials of an agricultural economy, and are essential to its success." ❖

MISSISSIPPI RIVER-WINONA WATERSHED

It's home to all of us.

EVERYTHING WE DO IN THIS WATERSHED IMPACTS OUR IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS AND ALL LIVING THINGS DOWNSTREAM.

- Reduce Nitrogen
- Reduce Bacteria
- Keep Soil In Place



“ We know farmers have made great strides already in conserving and protecting water resources. We believe development of this voluntary program by the State of Minnesota recognizes their important work and encourages them to continue the progress. I want to thank the agricultural community for the benefits you'll bring here and the leadership lesson you'll bring our country. ”

— Lisa Jackson, EPA Administrator

