



Washington Conservation District Conservation Connections

FALL 2014

Helping Pollinators and Our Water

The Washington Conservation District (WCD) and its partners keep pollinators in mind when designing and implementing projects throughout the county. While most projects start off with water quality improvement as the primary goal, many result in increased habitat for bees, butterflies and other pollinators.



Each year, WCD provides design and funding assistance for priority projects and we currently have grant funding for converting large turf grass areas into prairies in locations along the St. Croix River. The State's Clean Water Fund is providing the majority of

the support, with local watershed districts serving as key partners.

"Turf grass is virtually a desert in pollinator habitat terms," said WCD's Andy Schilling. "We are pleased to report that several acres have been converted from turf to diverse prairie, with over seven acres in the planning stage." Replacing turf with native prairie plantings greatly reduces stormwater runoff, eliminates dependency on fertilizer and provides excellent pollinator habitat.

Shoreline buffers and raingardens also offer havens for pollinators, with many different flowering plants throughout the season – wild bergamot, prairie clovers, joe-pye weed, dogwoods and blazingstars to name a few. Buffers and raingardens have the further benefits of being located near sources of water and providing nesting sites – either in open soil or in treelines and shrub massings.



DO YOUR PART FOR POLLINATORS

Interested in improving pollinator habitat on your property? Check out the new Pollinator Toolbox website, part of the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR) Pollinator Initiative: <http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/practices/pollinator/index.html>; and the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation: <http://www.xerces.org/>.

Both websites contain great resources on site selection and recommended pollinator-friendly plants, pesticide sensitivity information, maintenance expectations and much more!

DID YOU KNOW?

BIRDS AND THE BEES LIKE THE TREES!

We've all seen bees and butterflies in our gardens, but did you know that trees are important for pollinators as well? Flowering trees like American linden (basswood), cherry and junberry provide high quality nectar for native bees and honeybees, and they bloom in the spring when most Minnesota gardens are just getting started.

Trees also offer food for birds, but not always in the ways you might expect. While some birds will eat fruits and berries that grow on trees, many more eat larval insects. Of the six tree species offered in our "Bird Packet," bur oak and white oak attract 518 species of larval insects; black cherry, chokecherry and wild plum attract 429 species; and white pine attracts 191. Other animals that feed on native insects supported by trees include frogs, toads, lizards, bats, foxes, raccoons and bears. See the enclosed form for details on ordering trees.

STAFF UPDATE



WCD is pleased to announce that two seasonal staff members are now full time water monitoring technicians! Shelby Emerson, a 2014 UW-Stevens Point graduate with a triple major in Water Resources, Biology and Psychology, spent last

summer working as a watercraft inspector at the public boat landings of Washington County. Aaron DeRusha, also a UW-Stevens Point graduate, has a degree in Watershed Management and a minor in GIS. He worked as a research intern at St. Croix Watershed Research Station and as a permit inspector/water monitoring technician at Rice Creek Watershed District. Both are avid outdoor enthusiasts – a good thing, since much of their work will involve monitoring the county's lakes!

Turtle Tunnel Provides a Safe Passage

The WCD and Washington County are working together to improve habitat for turtles, as well as other reptiles and amphibians, in Big Marine Park Reserve.

A special turtle tunnel, just installed under Hwy 4, is one of the most attention-getting aspects of the effort. Part of a \$50,000 research project funded by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Herpetological Society, the tunnel is designed to provide turtles with a safe passage in the spring when they move from their wintering homes beneath the ice near Big Marine Lake to their nesting areas in the wetlands south of the highway.

Northern Washington County, including Big Marine Park Reserve, is one of the few places in the state where Blanding's turtles still roam.

While many kinds of turtles are expected to use the tunnel, local biologists are especially interested in protecting Blanding's turtles because of their threatened species status. Blanding's turtles rely on a mixture of intact wetlands, lakes, grasslands and sandy, rocky open areas for breeding and nesting. Northern Washington County, including Big Marine Park Reserve, contains this special mix of habitat types and, therefore, is one of the few places in the state where Blanding's turtles still roam. Other reptiles of conservation concern in the park include snapping turtles and the eastern fox snake.

Washington County public works installed the tunnel and guidance fencing, which are both manufactured by ACO Wildlife. The tunnel has holes at the top to allow in air and sunlight – and a camera to document use.

A group of volunteers inspects the fence and tunnel for herptiles – check out the results at www.herpmapper.org.



The turtle tunnel camera has documented at least four turtles along with woodchuck, ermine, skink, frog, snake, raccoon, mice, and a cat. We have seen a significant decrease in roadkill since the tunnel was installed.

Washington Conservation District (WCD) Board of Supervisors

Bob Rosenquist, District 1
Jim Levitt, District 2
John Rheingerger, District 3
Louise Smallidge, District 4
George Weyer, District 5

Office Staff

Call us at 651-330-8220 or visit the staff page of our website – www.mnwcd.org – for e-mail addresses.

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Mike Isensee, Watershed Specialist, Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization Administrator, ext 22
Karen Kill, Water Resource Specialist, ext 26
Brown's Creek Watershed District Administrator

PROVIDING QUALITY TECHNICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR THE
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455 Hayward Avenue North, Oakdale, MN 55128 / 651-330-8220 / www.mnwcd.org

OUTSTANDING CONSERVATIONIST: BLUEBERRY FIELDS

Blueberry Fields of Stillwater is a great model for building a business rooted in sustainable practices. Owner-operators Bev and Mike O'Connor have completed a number of Best Management Practices to improve habitat and water quality on their land.

With help from the Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District cost share program and technical assistance from the WCD, the O'Connors planted one-acre of their property with native prairie plants. This improvement benefits water quality by stabilizing large areas of soil and enhancing groundwater recharge – and it also provides the natural food source for the all-important pollinators of the blueberry plants.

Also with design assistance from the WCD, the O'Connors installed a bee nesting rock garden to encourage the establishment of local, natural pollinators in the area.

These projects, along with many additional conservation efforts, make the O'Connors true leaders – and a terrific source of local, sustainably raised blueberries!



WCD's Board and partners visited Blueberry Fields for a conservation tour. From left, Natural Resource Conservation Service's Michelle Wohlers; WCD Board members Louise Smallidge, Bob Rosenquist, John Rheinberger and George Weyer; and Blueberry Fields owners Bev and Mike O'Connor.



HORSE WORKSHOP

Mark your calendars for our horse workshop, January 27, 2015 at Hooley Hall, starting at 5:30 p.m. with a light supper. Come and hear about hay bags for feeding, how to fit a saddle, and how to wrap a horse's leg. Call or email to reserve your spot, 651.330.8220.24 or wendy.griffin@mnwcd.org.

It's Tree Sale Order Time!

See inside for your WCD tree sale order form — and great information about pollinators, trees and more.



WCD Board Vice President John Rheinberger (left) hands a bundle of trees to Stillwater city council person and Washington County Parks facilities manager Mike Polehna.



Washington Conservation District
455 Hayward Avenue North
Oakdale, MN 55128

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1200+ Conservation Projects and Counting

Every year, eight separate watershed management organizations complete around 200 habitat and water improvement projects in Washington County.

Tracking and inspecting those projects can be a lot of work and to increase efficiency, WCD recently collaborated with Washington County and several of our Watershed Organization partners to develop a new web-based tool.

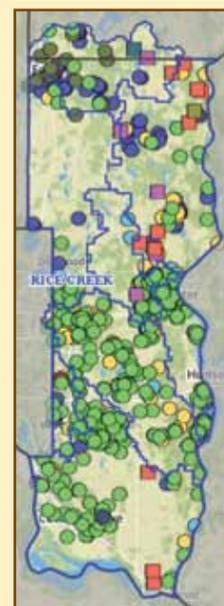
“Currently, there are data points for more than 1,200 voluntary urban and rural conservation projects installed in Washington County since 2005 – a real accomplishment,” said Jay Riggs, District Manager. Permitted projects will be added to the database in the future. There are also an additional 400 points on the map representing people who have attended educational workshops since 2006.

Partners use the tool to track projects required by permits as well as those that landowners complete voluntarily with WCD's help. Base layers for the conservation project map include terrain, satellite imagery and air photos.

Along with the on-line map, WCD field staff are now able to use hand held tablets to record property information during site visits, take photos and develop inspection reports. Back at the office, they can search the database by practice, inspection date, project type and property ID. The system can also calculate pollution load reductions to lakes and rivers in the county by using a spreadsheet developed by the Board of Water and Soil Resources.

Explore conservation improvement projects in the county

Check out the new tracking tool at <http://www.mapfeeder.net/wcdbmp>. You can select which types of practices you wish to see mapped: urban projects (circles) rural projects (squares) or education initiatives (triangles). You can also click on the data points to see vital statistics about each project.



NEW PARKING LOT MODELS A GREEN APPROACH

WCD's new office in Oakdale drains toward Battle Creek Lake within the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District. As good watershed stewards, we are making a number of improvements to the property.

One project, pictured on the right, is designed to manage stormwater by installing a green “overflow” parking area, which is pervious and provides a place for rain and snowmelt to seep into the ground. In addition to the green overflow parking lot WCD is also installing a bioretention basin and native plantings to manage stormwater flowing off the parking lot. Construction is wrapping up in fall 2014 with native plantings to be installed in Spring 2015.

