Inaugural cohort of WCD Master Water Stewards graduates in November

It’s 6:30pm on a Tuesday night and a small group is gathered inside the Scandia Pizzeria to hear neighbor Tom Furey talk about water quality in Bone Lake. Ten years ago, Bone Lake was considered to be one of the worst lakes in Washington County. The water was murky, phosphorus and algae levels were high, and the Metropolitan Council gave the lake an “F” on its annual report card. Now, thanks to several large projects led by the Comfort Lake – Forest Lake Watershed District (CLFLWD), the lake is on its way to better health and has inched up to a grade of C+.

When Furey bought a home on Bone Lake a few years ago, he wondered what he could do to help protect and improve the lake. He secured a cost-share grant from the CLFLWD and worked with WCD staff to retrofit his lakeshore landscaping. He also volunteered to join a new program — Master Water Stewards — that trains and empowers volunteers to work on water issues in their communities.

The Master Water Stewards program was developed by non-profit Freshwater as a way to help amplify the impact of conservation districts and watershed management organizations in Minnesota. This November, Washington Conservation District’s inaugural cohort of eight stewards will graduate and become certified.

Here’s a snapshot of each steward’s capstone project:

• **Marine on St. Croix**: John Goodwillie is working to develop a weed cooperative that could help local landowners manage invasive species such as buckthorn and garlic mustard.

• **Woodbury**: Joan Nichols and Susan Goebel created a planting plan and helped to design interpretive signs and lessons for two new outdoor classrooms at Lake and Middleton Schools. Nichols’ husband Nathan Zerbe developed a habitat improvement plan for Marah Creek Preserve and recruited volunteers to help remove buckthorn during the summer.

• **Lakeeland**: Sally Arneson worked with neighbors to plant native plants to reduce erosion from a roadside near the St. Croix River.

• **Cottage Grove**: Cole Williams restored a piece of shoreline property on the Mississippi River.

• **Scandia**: Tom Furey helped a neighbor to convert turf to native plantings on lakeshore property and organized a series of education events for people living on Bone Lake. In addition to helping local partners to stretch limited resources, the Master Water Stewards program offers area residents a meaningful way to make new friends and get involved in their communities. Since 2013, Freshwater has certified 360 stewards in the Twin Cities area. The program offers area residents a meaningful way to make new friends and get involved in their communities.

WANTED: Oriental Bittersweet

Oriental Bittersweet (Celastrus orbiculatus) is an Invasive Noxious Weed listed on the Minnesota Department of Agriculture Eradicate List and can be found many places around Washington County. This deciduous woody vine can climb up to 66 feet, allowing it to fully strangle mature trees and shrubs. It is often found near woods and at the edge of prairies. Oriental Bittersweet is very easy to identify in the fall and winter for its distinct fruit color. Fruit turn bright red with a yellow cap at its leaf axils along the branch. Oriental Bittersweet can easily be mistaken for its look-alike, American Bittersweet (Celastrus scandens), a native plant to Minnesota. To decipher which one is native, look for orange capsules at the terminal ends of branches. (Memory Trick: Yellow = Yell for Help and Orange = Ok.) If you find Oriental Bittersweet, contact WCD for a free site visit to learn about removal methods, and report it to EDD Map’s [eddmaps.org](http://eddmaps.org).

**Comparison of Invasive and Native Bittersweet Vine**

Photo by DWR Extension, Forest Invasive Species Program

**Oriental Bittersweet**

- Chinese Bittersweet
- Celastrus orbiculatus
- Fast growing and invasive
- Fruit turns bright red in fall
- Yellow caps at leaf axils
- Native to Asia

**American Bittersweet**

- Celastrus scandens
- Native to North America
- Fruit bright red in fall
- Yellow caps at leaf axils
- Found in woods

**Questions? Contact Jessica Thiel at 651-330-8220 x30 or jthiel@mnwcd.org. Or visit mnwcd.org/land/trees**

WCD Tree Sale 2019

The WCD Tree Sale has begun! We are now taking orders for the 2019 tree sale: either by ordering online or by filling out and returning the enclosed order form.

Each spring the Washington Conservation District holds a tree sale for county landowners to purchase high quality bare root seedlings at a low cost for urban and rural conservation purposes, such as windbreaks, reforestation, erosion control, and food and cover for wildlife. We have several varieties of trees that are native to Minnesota, including conifers, hardwoods, small trees, and shrubs. We also have varieties that are not native but work well in Washington County.

Trees come in bundles of 25 and cost $35. Pick-up will be at the end of April at the Washington County Fairgrounds.
Pam has been a local leader in conservation and a strong advocate for the St Croix River. She partnered with the Washington Conservation District and the Sustainable Farming Association to headline a Soil Health Café Chat in Marine on St Croix in spring 2018. She shared the ups and downs of her farming experience, provided participants with insight from her extensive soil health research, and led thoughtful conversation to gain feedback that will improve her current operation. Additionally, Pam hosted and led a cover crop field day in Scandia a few years ago to explain her challenges in establishing cover crops, the benefits she has seen in her soil quality and erosion issues, and her continued journey toward soil health.

Her participation in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) has brought knowledge and awareness of this program to other residents of Washington County. Pam has promoted the benefits of the program and shared her certification experience, which opened a door for other producers to communicate about conservation issues in their community and in their own backyards.

Pam also participates in the Scandia Farmers Market to sell her produce, honey, eggs, and flowers. She uses this opportunity and her involvement in many other aspects of her community, to engage in conversation about the important role of pollinators and local, sustainable farming.

Over the next two years, the Washington Conservation District will work with the City of Stillwater to pass a resolution for the protection of pollinators. Since that year, over 38 communities in Minnesota have committed to similar resolutions. Schneider and the Pollinator Friendly Alliance have enhanced pollinator habitat at three city parks and within a 1-acre butterfly sanctuary. Their newly created Pollinator Park in Stillwater hosts a nectar garden, bee lawn and prairie restoration. Additionally, Schneider continues to provide outreach and education opportunities, including the annual Best Practices for Pollinator Summit and the annual PolliNATION, a party with a purpose.

The Washington Conservation District collaborates on regional watershed plan for Lower St. Croix.

Washington Conservation District 453 Hayward Avenue North Oakdale, MN 55128

Working together to protect our water

Water plays an important role in our communities — from recreation to public health, tourism, and economic development. Within Washington County there are more than 250 lakes, dozens of streams, countless wetlands, and more than 60-miles of shoreline along the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers. In addition, 100% of our drinking water comes from aquifers below ground.

Over the next two years, the Washington Conservation District will work with 14 other local governments to create a shared watershed plan for lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater resources in the Lower St. Croix basin.

Known as “One Watershed, One Plan,” the project is part of a statewide initiative to align local and state efforts to create plans with prioritized, targeted, and measurable strategies to protect and restore the waters. Other government partners in developing the Lower St. Croix plan include counties, soil and water conservation districts, and watershed management organizations in Anoka, Chisago, Isanti, Pine, and Washington counties. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is helping to fund the process.

The goal of “One Watershed, One Plan” is to help local partners work together to avoid duplication or gaps, not to create a new layer of government. In Washington County, eight watershed organizations manage surface water resources within their boundaries and the county oversees a countywide Groundwater Plan. The planning process is led by a policy committee, composed of one official from each participating entity, and an advisory committee that includes one staff person from each entity, plus staff from state agencies and the Metropolitan Council. Diane Blake is participating on the policy committee for Washington Conservation District.

So far this year, project partners have gathered input from citizens and local community leaders through a series of workshops and an on-line survey. They have also compiled information from existing watershed plans and identified priority issues to include in the regional plan. Once adopted, the plan will guide watershed protection and restoration efforts in the region for the next 10 years.

"This collaborative effort will bring uniformity and efficiencies in how we manage our precious resources within the Lower St. Croix."

— Commissioner Miron

Laurie Schneider has worked tirelessly to educate and engage local government partners and the public in conservation projects that create and enhance pollinator habitat and provide multiple other benefits. As the executive director, she promotes the protection and restoration of pollinators to improve the environment and sustain our food supply through habitat creation, reducing pesticide use, public education & awareness, and advocacy.

In 2014, the Pollinator Friendly Alliance worked with the City of Stillwater to pass a resolution for the protection of pollinators. Since that year, over 38 communities in Minnesota have committed to similar resolutions. Schneider and the Pollinator Friendly Alliance have enhanced pollinator habitat at three city parks and within a 1-acre butterfly sanctuary. Their newly created Pollinator Park in Stillwater hosts a nectar garden, bee lawn and prairie restoration. Additionally, Schneider continues to provide outreach and education opportunities, including the annual Best Practices for Pollinator Summit and the annual PolliNATION, a party with a purpose.

The WCD has benefited by partnering with Laurie and the Pollinator Friendly Alliance on many of these endeavors.

Louise Smallidge is the longest-running member of the WCD Board of Supervisors and currently serves as the vice-chair. Her last term as board supervisor will end in December 2018.

During her time at the WCD, she was recognized with the 2007 MASWCD Outstanding Supervisor Award, and the WCD was honored with the 2009 Conservation District of the Year Award under her leadership. These honors reflect her responsible leadership and outstanding concern for conserving Minnesota’s soil and water resources.

As a farmers and landowners, Louise and her husband, Gene, practice what they preach. Their farm is a model for conservation practices in Washington County. They have implemented grassed waterways, rotational grazing, and conservation tillage, and were honored as the WCD Outstanding Conservationists in 1975.

Over the nearly 20 years Louise has served on the board, she has watched Washington County transition from mostly agricultural to rapidly developing. “I’m proud of the fact that the WCD was able to navigate that transition and grow,” she says. Louise is also proud of the strong relationships the WCD has built with the county and watershed management organizations over the years.

Thank you Louise for your many years of service and commitment to conservation!

Emily Gray Kastner, December 2013