

Healthy Waters



Healthy Waters Series: #7

Healthy Waters for the Future: It's Up to You!

Where in the scheme of things do you fit in? Are you more comfortable doing things at home, in your neighborhood, at the community level or are you one that likes to get involved in the “Big Picture”? Everyone fits into one of those categories and that’s where you should start and take that first step to get involved in your watershed.

This is the last article of the Healthy Waters Series written for the Leech Lake River Watershed Restoration and Protection Project (WRAP) sponsored by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and its partners. Previous articles included Water Quality, Links between Healthy Forests and Lake Quality, the Effects of Water Quality on Fish, Wildlife and Plants, Connections between Surface Water and Ground Water, Climate Change Effects on Healthy Waters and Sustainable Communities. These are all areas that are interconnected with watersheds and in this case the Leech Lake River watershed.

The MPCA has taken on the task of assessing the 81 major watersheds of Minnesota on a 10-year rotational basis. The steps of this new Watershed Approach are as follows: Step 1: Monitor and gather data and information. Step 2: Assess the data: Waters not meeting water quality standards are listed as impaired waters with further work needing to be done to restore them. Step 3: Establish implementation strategies to meet standards. A Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study is completed for any impaired waters and a plan is established to meet water quality standards. Step 4: Implement water quality restoration and protection activities, including permitting activities with programs and actions directed at potential sources of pollution. The goal is to complete Steps 1-3 within four years of initiation of the WRAP project and Step 4 would start the fifth year.

This is year two of the 10 year process on the Leech Lake WRAP. Data is still being collected from 18 lake and river sites within the watershed. The preliminary results of the pre-assessed data shows the overall condition of the Leech Lake watershed appears to be good. Forty three (43) different species of fish were sampled with the most diverse fish communities existing in the Leech Lake River and Boy River. Formal assessments of the collected data will occur during the early spring of 2014 with possible impairments being determined. The MPCA report for the Leech Lake WRAP should be completed by the spring of 2015.

This Leech Lake watershed covers approximately 854,659 acres and includes parts of Beltrami, Cass and Hubbard counties. From the previous articles the main threats to this watershed are increased pressure from development and subsequent loss of shoreline and aquatic habitat, demands for more safe and clean drinking water, and the reduction of forested lands for development which reduces ground cover. This watershed area covers a diverse and complex system that will only be maintained if we work to protect the quality of the land and its waters into the future.

Now it is up to you. How does the average citizen become involved in a big 10-year MPCA study? The work begins at home. It is everyone's responsibility to try to do the best things for the land and waters. Be aware of what you apply to your lawns; don't use phosphate fertilizers. Create buffer areas along shorelines of lakes. Leave as much cover on the land as possible to help hold the soil and reduce erosion. Install gutter systems on your homes and run the water from your roof into rain barrels to be used for watering your gardens or create rain gardens to allow the water to infiltrate into the soil.

On a neighborhood/ community level watch for workshops and classes on septic system care, lawn care and best management practices for your home. Check with your local agencies and organizations for projects and trainings they may offer. This WRAP is centered on Civic Engagement which means you, the public, being involved every step of the way. For those Big Picture people watch the newspapers and listen to the radio for Leech Lake WRAP Civic Engagement sessions, updates and input meetings. The data collection is finishing and now the work begins on the problem areas as well as efforts to keep our "clean waters clean." You are encouraged to get involved. This is your watershed—the place you live, work, and play. Please take the time to get to know it, appreciate it and keep it healthy now and for years and generations to come.

Local contacts are: John Ringle, Watershed Coordinator at Cass County Environmental services, at john.ringle@co.cass.mn.us or 218-547-7256, Julie Kingsley, Hubbard Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Manager, at Julie.kingsley@mn.nacdnet.net or 218-732-0121.

This article was written by Julie Kingsley, Hubbard SWCD District Manager, on behalf of the Civic Engagement Team of the Leech Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Project.

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