

The Clearwater SWCD Conservator



Volume 3, Issue 2

Summer 2012

Clearwater
SWCD...

- Provides **information** to residents doing conservation projects along lakes, rivers & wetlands
- Offers **cost sharing** on conservation projects that prevent erosion & protect water quality
- Brings **conservation dollars** to local farmers, lakeshore owners, contractors & other county residents

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Preserving a Minnesota Pastime: Water Quality means Quality Fishing

By Nathan Nordlund, Program Technician, Clearwater SWCD

Like many Minnesotans, I enjoy spending much of my free time chasing fish on some of the many area lakes with which we are blessed. I recently ventured out on one of my favorite haunts to try and find a few 'eyes for the frying pan. As I began the first drift I recalled the stringers full of walleyes from excursions past.

Reaching the end of my drift, on what I hoped would be "Walleye Lane," I retrieved the Canadian crawler unscathed. My first attempt to locate actively feeding fish had not produced any of the table fare I pursued. Maybe the fish had already transitioned from their springtime grounds.

With a change in location and the sun dropping beyond the leafy horizon I again sent my bait in pursuit of a hungry walleye. Watching the sonar unit closely I noticed the occasional fish suspended just off the bottom and clouds of what seemed to be baitfish nearby. Many of the lakes in our area are *mesotrophic*, which means they have a medium level of nutrients. This makes them the ideal habitat to produce a good number and diversity of fish species. The water I was fishing was exactly the



Great water quality must be preserved and not taken for granted.

environment needed to supply plenty of forage for the walleye I was after.

As I continued the methodical drift, paying close attention to the line with my finger, I contemplated what made this fishery what it is. I quickly

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Clearwater SWCD Wins Over \$40,000 in State Grants

The Clearwater Soil and Water Conservation District recently won over \$40,000 in competitive Clean Water Fund grants from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. District Manager Kathy Rasch comments, "Winning these grants allows us to ensure that future generations inherit the clean, clear waters they deserve."

The largest share of these funds goes to improve water quality in the Lost River and Pine Lake areas.

The first element serves agricultural producers near the

Lost River. The grant provides assistance to restore a significant section of compromised riverbank. The grant also funds cost sharing for landowners to install specialized culverts, called *side water inlets*, on fields adjacent to eligible streams and ditches. These simple structures allow for field drainage while reducing gullies. Producers and communities save time and money when side water inlets keep soil out of ditches and other waterbodies downstream.

The other component of this grant funds protection of Pine Lake water quality. Cost

sharing will be available to homeowners to protect their lots using naturalized shoreline buffers with native wildflowers, grasses, shrubs and trees. For those sites needing more protection rock rip rap or landscaping logs may be installed. These practices stabilize vulnerable shoreline, filter out pollutants and reduce the erosion that otherwise harms a lake's health.

Interested Lost River area producers and Pine Lake landowners should call the SWCD at 694-6845 to take advantage of these volunteer conservation opportunities.

Conservation at Work: Clearwater SWCD recently sold over 24,000 trees to area residents. That's almost 3 trees for every person in our district! Planting trees makes a great investment in clean air and pure water for the next generation. Sales also support other conservation projects in our county.

The Problem of *All Too* Common Buckthorn

By Brooke Knick, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician



Buckthorn leaf with distinct curved vein pattern

Recently I asked a forester exactly how big a problem Common Buckthorn is. In response he showed me a single buckthorn that had been planted in his yard years ago as an ornamental tree. Nearby, he revealed a solid-green wall of buckthorn. These 'volunteer' trees choked out existing native plants and even killed a Hawthorn tree!

Imported from Europe in the 1800s, well-meaning people planted buckthorn in shelterbelts, wildlife plantings and hedges. In the years since then its destructive spread now makes buckthorn an unwelcome species.

Aggressively Invasive

In fact, its current classification as a restricted noxious weed in Minnesota means that it is illegal to import, sell or transport buckthorn plants or even parts of plants.

Buckthorn spreads as birds and wildlife eat buckthorn berries, transport the seeds to new sites and fertilize them with droppings. As a laxative, these seeds deliver no nutritional value to the wildlife. Even worse, the deposited seeds remain viable for up to 6 years.

As wildlife assists buckthorn's aggressive spread, it is now common in Minnesota woodlots, fence rows, ditches and abandoned farmsteads. In town I've seen it under spruce trees, in weedy hedges and along river banks.

Once established, buckthorn produces a chemical that kills off native vegetation. This is especially harmful on riverbanks that are prone to wash-outs. With no other vegetation rooting into an unsteady bank, soil can be easily washed away, leading to a bank collapse.

Buckthorn Identification

The most distinctive characteristic of buckthorn is its oval-shaped leaf with veins curving toward its tip (see

photo). Plants leaf out early in spring and retain their leaves well into winter. Leaves do not even change color before they are shed.

Buckthorn can be a multi-stemmed shrub or a small tree



Thorns located at the ends of twigs between the last two leaves

up to 20 feet tall. Common buckthorn has thorns at the ends of most twigs between the leaves (see photo). Only female plants produce the glossy black berries. Buckthorn looks similar to dogwood,

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The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Conservation at Work: For more details on buckthorn go to: <http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/MN/797Buckthorn.pdf> If you are asking yourself, "Is this plant a weed?" Visit the U of M Extension website at: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/> Navigate through the menu for lots of useful information.

Environmental Services Applies for SSTS Grant

By Mike Stenseng,
Clearwater County
Environmental Services
Office

The Clearwater County Environmental Services Office has submitted an application to receive Local SSTS Fix-up Funds. If successful, the funds will be used to upgrade eligible *Subsurface Treatment Systems* (SSTS), also known as **septic systems**. For an SSTS to be eligible there must be a Notice of Noncompliance issued that

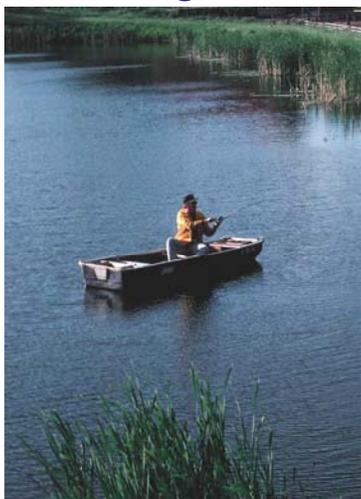
certifies the septic system as an Imminent Public Health Threat or Failing to Protect Groundwater. Funds would be available only be used for homesteaded, low income, single family homes.

These funds are being made available through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) under the Clean Water Legacy Act (Minn. Stat. ch 114D) for the purpose of protecting ground and surface water from impacts resulting from the improper design, installation

and/or operation of Subsurface Treatment Systems. If awarded the grant, the County will have until June 30, 2014 to utilize the funds and return any remaining amount to the State.

Remember to keep an eye out for an update in the next newsletter where more details will be provided should the County be successful in obtaining the grant. Or call Environmental Services at 694-6183 for more information.

Quality Fishing, continued from page 1

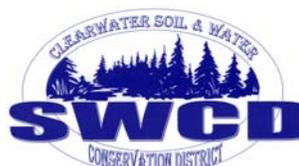


Native aquatic plants filter runoff and provide habitat and food for fish in area lakes.

realized that it was simply having good water quality. All the key habitat components: food, cover, oxygen and cool water are all dependent on the presence of good water quality.

The delicate balance of this fishery and many like it can be easily altered by our actions. Unfortunately it is easiest to tip the scales in the wrong direction. The decisions we make, even ever so small, can collectively impact a body of water quickly. Taking simple steps such as maintaining septic systems, minimizing the use of phosphorus fertilizers, disposing of lawn and pet wastes properly and maintaining natural landscapes around water bodies helps to ensure our lakes remain the quality fisheries that they are.

Thump...thump. Finally, I felt the sensation I was waiting for! There was a sign of life at the end of my line and I was convinced by the steady movement that it was a walleye that had glommed onto my bait. As the line steadily unraveled from my open bale, I excitedly anticipated the fight that would ensue. What a privilege to enjoy such a body of water blessed with good water quality!



Conservation at Work: In just the past two years, Clearwater SWCD projects have prevented **67 pounds of damaging phosphorus** from polluting our county's waters. A **single pound** of phosphorus can result in **hundreds of pounds of algae** in local lakes. Reducing phosphorus means clearer waters and more fish!

5 Tips for a **GREENER** Lawn

5. Set your mower to its highest setting.

Taller lawns conserve water, staying green longer—even during droughts! Set your mower to leave grass at least 3 inches high. Then enjoy a beautiful lawn instead of a dry, yellowed one.

4. Don't bother with bagging.

Grass clippings are a natural mulch. Leaving them on your lawn returns nutrients to the soil. This mulch holds moisture, reducing the need for watering. Just be sure clippings are in the yard, not in the street where they wash into storm sewers, harming local waters.

3. Don't fertilize the driveway, patio or street.

Fertilizers accidentally applied to hard surfaces just flow into local waterways with the next rainfall. Chemicals that benefit your lawn hurt water and fish. Apply any fertilizers carefully and sweep any excess back into the yard.

2. Use only phosphorus-free lawn fertilizers—those that have "0" as the middle number.

Runoff from phosphorus fertilizers causes serious harm to our lakes and rivers. Most lawns do not even need added phosphorus. In Minnesota it is illegal to apply phosphorus to established lawns unless tests indicate a deficiency.

1. Install a rain garden using native plants.

A rain garden is simply a shallow depression where rain and snow melt water collects. Installing native plants with deep root systems will filter runoff in the rain garden, protecting rivers and streams. In addition, the resiliency of native perennials creates beauty for years to come.

For more information on how to keep a lawn that's both healthy and beautiful, check out <http://tinyurl.com/LawnTips>

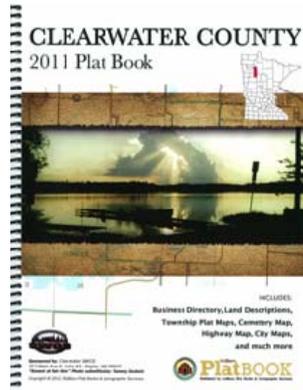


Did you know that rain runoff from a yard full of dog waste will pollute nearby waters and encourage algae growth? Remember to scoop and bag pet waste promptly and dispose of it appropriately.



Buy a new plat book today!
It makes a perfect gift for the person who has *(almost)* everything.

Clearwater SWCD carries the newest full color plat book edition available, published in 2011. Stop by our office today to purchase a book for only \$28.00.



Clearwater Soil and Water Conservation District

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Our mission is simple - to promote the wise use and improvement of our county resources, in order that future generations will inherit an economically viable county that has made wise choices in resource management.

SWCD Staff Spotlight

Nathan Nordlund is the Program Technician for the Clearwater Soil and Water Conservation District. Born and raised in Clearbrook, he graduated from UND with a B.S. degree in fisheries and wildlife biology. An avid outdoorsman since childhood, he can be found outside with his own young children hunting, fishing or just enjoying nature every month of the year. He is happy to share information with local residents that merges conservation with fish and wildlife habitat improvement.



Conservation at Work: Over the last two years Clearwater SWCD projects have kept **67.5 tons of harmful sediment** from washing into our county's lakes, rivers and wetlands. That's **135,000 pounds of dirt and other contaminants** that's staying on the land where it belongs. **Wow!**

Invasive Buckthorn, continued from page 2

plum, cherry and especially chokecherry, so it is important to positively identify it.

Buckthorn Control

Cutting and pulling works with very young buckthorns. But when the buckthorn is the size of a large bush or small tree, it should be cut down to the ground and treated with herbicide. Untreated stumps may resprout.

After removal, stems and branches without berries can be left on site. If berries are present, the plants should be burned to prevent the spread of seeds. Areas treated for buckthorn should be monitored because a new crop of buckthorn can re-grow from old seeds.

Assistance Available

NRCS offers financial assistance for buckthorn control on **non cropland**

acres through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Other assistance may be available through the Clearwater County Soil and Water Conservation District. For further information, please contact the SWCD/NRCS office at 218-694-6584 ext. 3.

Removing buckthorn can be a time-consuming chore, but letting buckthorn thrive can be a bank-consuming disaster.