



Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Partnering for Water Quality

Minnesota - Land of 10,000 lakes.

Our lakes, waterways and wetlands are an important part of who we are and innovative steps are being taken every day to try to preserve their quality. Unusual alliances are being formed knowing the future of these natural resources are important to everyone.

Conservationists and sportsmen are two groups that haven't always seen eye to eye, yet partnerships between the two are effective in several areas which have resulted in successful lake and land preservation projects.

One such partnership has been created in Stearns County between Pheasants Forever (PF), the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Rice Lake Association (RLA), Koronis Lake Association (KLA), North Fork Crow River Watershed District (NFCRW) and USDA. Stearns SWCD Shoreland Specialist Greg Berg and Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist Jason Selvog have helped spearhead the project. The North Fork Crow River Watershed District, and Rice & Koronis Lake Associations were interested in stepping up their effort to preserve the watershed and incorporate shoreline restoration to the lakes. Berg and Selvog have been working closely with the two associations which are located about 30 miles south of St. Cloud. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) letters were sent to landowners in high priority areas explaining programs and benefits. "We just started the promotion part of the project. So far we have sent 33 letters and have had 10 landowners call us back for more information or site visits," says Selvog. "Nine of those ten landowners have enrolled in CRP for a total of 122 acres. A response we are pleased with," added Selvog.

A few landowners were interested in CRP whose property didn't qualify. Research is on-going to help find programs to accomplish the water quality practices needed. There are a number of other programs out there for landowners, Selvog says, "If you don't qualify for one, another may work for you." Landowners eligible to participate in CRP enroll by signing a 10-15 year contract and agree to establish a cover such as native grasses and wildflowers. In return, the landowner receives annual rental on the acreage enrolled (typically around \$74-\$110 per acre in Stearns County). "Buffer strips are one the most common practices in Stearns County. Buffers are established adjacent to rivers, streams, ditches and certain wetlands and planted to grasses, wildflowers or trees to help reduce sediment and nutrients from entering the water," says Selvog.

"Working with local groups is a great benefit because they have knowledge of where these programs are needed within their areas, and in many cases, have names of landowners that have already expressed interest", said Berg. "These partnerships allow us to pin point high priority areas within the county or watershed", said Berg

All programs and services of the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District are available without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status.