Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District

Quarterly News & Updates

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Greetings Friends and Neighbors!

The Isanti SWCD is publishing this Quarterly e-Newsletter to:

- **Help keep you informed of what is happening locally that affects the health of natural resources in Isanti County;**
- **Increase your understanding of what the SWCD does and how you can get involved in conservation;**
- **Keep you informed on how Clean Water Fund tax amendment dollars are being spent locally.**

If you have any questions, please give us a call: 763-689-3271

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Follow us on Facebook for more updates!

Blue Lake Alum Treatment Complete: What to Expect

This past fall, Blue Lake received an alum treatment to address high phosphorus levels in the lake. This was the second dose of the alum treatment, and it marked the culmination of years of effort by the Isanti SWCD and Blue Lake Improvement District (BLID) to protect Blue Lake's water quality. Now, those recreating on Blue Lake might notice some changes to the lake, including cleaner and clearer water.

Diagnostics taken on Blue Lake indicated it was at risk of becoming an impaired water body due to an excess of phosphorus in the lake, which fuels algae blooms. An alum treatment was identified as the best step to protect the lake after numerous conservation projects were installed around the lake. Alum is a safe and widely studied tool used in lake restoration projects that works by binding with phosphorus in the water. It then creates a barrier that prevents phosphorus in the sediment from re-entering the water and feeding algae. Boaters could resume using the lake as soon as the treatment was applied and saw improved water clarity immediately.

After the initial treatment in 2022, water monitoring showed Blue Lake positively responded to the alum treatment by improving transparency and reducing phosphorus levels. With the full treatment now complete, more monitoring will be done to track long-term water quality. If results continue to follow the expected trends, Blue Lake can expect improved clarity for years to come and reduced risk of algae blooms during the summer.

The Blue Lake Improvement District and Isanti SWCD are not stopping their efforts to protect the lake at the alum treatment. They are continuing to install conservation projects in the surrounding area that help prevent pollutants from entering the lake. Projects include rain gardens, shoreline restorations, and agricultural practices like reduced tillage and cover crops. Landowners interested in conservation practices should contact the Isanti SWCD to learn more about available cost-share opportunities. Continuing to reduce pollutants entering the lake will strengthen the alum treatment and create lasting lake health.

The SWCD and BLID also ask boaters to be mindful of their wake. Although alum was applied in areas of the lake deeper than 20 feet, studies show that wake boats can disturb the lake bottom even at those depths due to their powerful design. When this happens, it can damage the protective alum layer and reduce the treatment's effectiveness. If you own a wake boat and enjoy time on Blue Lake, please reduce your wake to protect the lake or consider visiting other waterbodies.

Thanks to the commitment of residents and the support of a Clean Water Fund grant, Blue Lake is on a path to long-term clarity. This year, visitors can expect cleaner water, improved conditions for recreation, and a lake that is healthier than it has been in years.

Events

Protecting Your Woods Workshop
WHERE: Prairie Restorations Inc., Princeton Garden Center (31646 128 St., Princeton, MN 55371)
WHEN: Saturday, June 14th, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Topics will include:

- Emerald Ash Borer (EAB): What it means for your woods with Rachael Dube, Forest Health Specialist with the MN DNR
- Buckthorn Control: Identifying and managing this invasive threat
- Timber Harvesting 101: Understanding the process and getting started
- Tree & Shrub Selection: Choosing the right species for your goals

Hosted in partnership with the Rum River Watershed Partnership. Please RSVP to Molly Clyne at 320-983-2160 or **molly.clyne@millelacsswcd.org**. Space is limited.

Explore the Advantages of Native Plants
WHERE: Cambridge Library (111 Dellwood St N, Cambridge)
WHEN: June 11th, 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Join the SWCD on June 11th, from 10 AM to 1 PM at the Cambridge Library, to explore the many advantages of native flowers. There will be hands on activities, prizes, and resources to help you get started adding native plants to your garden. This event will be held in the lobby on the main level of the Cambridge Library. It is open house style, so please stop in whenever it is convenient for you between 10am and 1pm!

Forestry Open House
WHERE: Sunken Ship Brewery (32273 124th St, Princeton, MN 55371)
WHEN: Thursday, July 10th, 4:00pm - 7:00pm

Stop by anytime between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on July 10th to get your tree and woodland questions answered by forestry professionals! Staff will be available to talk with you about forest management, tree health, land protection options, and cost-share programs.

This free, drop-in event is open to the public and hosted by the Mille Lacs SWCD and Isanti SWCD.

Nitrate Clinic Success

This spring, the Isanti SWCD hosted a free nitrate testing clinic, offering residents an easy way to check their drinking water for nitrate contamination. Nitrates are odorless, tasteless, and can pose health risks, particularly for young children and with long-term exposure. The Minnesota Department of Health recommends that private wells be tested for nitrates annually, which is why the Isanti SWCD offered this free service.

Nearly 100 residents brought in samples from their private drinking wells. Of those, about 5% showed elevated nitrate levels. The majority of results were close to zero, an encouraging sign for local groundwater quality.

Due to the strong turnout and positive feedback, the Isanti SWCD plans to offer the clinic again next spring.

Soil Health Mentors Wanted

The Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District is looking for local farmers to serve as Soil Health Mentors in a new peer-to-peer mentoring program. This is a great opportunity for experienced producers to help others adopt practices that improve soil health and water quality while getting paid for their time.

Mentors will be contracted for 60 - 100 hours over one year and will support other growers by walking fields, offering guidance, and sharing personal experiences with practices like cover crops, no-till, strip-till, and split nutrient applications. Mentors may also help the SWCD plan programming for workshops and connect farmers with local conservation programs and resources.

This is a low-commitment and flexible position that makes a big impact. Mentors must have general liability insurance and be comfortable engaging with others by phone and in person.

Contact the Isanti SWCD at 763-689-3271 to learn more.

Drones and Carbon Markets at the Agriculture Lunch and Learn

There was a fantastic turnout at the Agriculture Lunch and Learn! A big thank you to everyone who joined to learn and connect.

At the event, Bear Bouwman presented on the use of drones in seeding and spraying and we

had the opportunity to inspect a drone firsthand. We also heard from representatives of Indigo Ag, RegenConnect, and ESMC, who shared valuable information about their carbon market programs and the opportunities available for farmers to get involved. The conversation continued over a delicious fried chicken lunch, where we had the chance to engage with our local farmers.

The Isanti SWCD hosts an Agriculture Lunch and Learn every March. Looking forward to seeing everyone again next year!

Cost-Share Available for Woodland Stewardship Plans

The Isanti SWCD has cost-share for private forests landowners to have Woodland Stewardship Plans written. These plans provide valuable insights into the tree species on your property, how to protect and enhance your woodlands, and strategies for long-term forest management. They can also help you qualify for reduced property taxes.

The cost-share reimbursement rate is $240, plus an additional $8 per acre. Funding is limited to properties within the Rum River Watershed and is made possible through the Rum River Watershed Partnership.

To get started, contact Douglas Page at the Isanti SWCD at 763-689-3271 or Douglas.Page@mn.nacdnet.net.

2025 Tree Sale

This May we had our annual tree sale and handed out nearly 20,000 trees! These seedlings will be planted throughout Isanti County to strengthen our forests, provide habitat for wildlife, and protect our lakes and rivers. Thank you to everyone that purchased trees!

Our tree sale typically opens around the new year. If you missed the species you wanted this year, check our website around the new year to place your order.

SWCDs Visit the Capitol

Tiffany Determan, Isanti SWCD Manager, and SWCD Supervisors Al Koczur and Franklin Curtis, along with SWCDs from across the state recently discussed the importance of Soil and Water Conservation Districts with State Representatives during the SWCD legislative day at the Minesota State Capitol. We sat down with several elected officials to share how we are protecting and improving natural resources in Isanti County. These meetings help strengthen our partnership with legislators, and we are greatful to each of them that take time our of their schedule to meet with us.

The first picture is of Tiffany Determan and Senator Andrew Matthews (Senate District 27). The second photos is Sherburne SWCD staff, Mille Lacs SWCD board members, and SWCD supervisors Al Koczur and Frankiln Curtis with Representative Bryan Lawrence (District 27B).

Problems with Ice Ridges?

The Lower St. Croix Watershed has created a helpful fact sheet about ice ridges. Ice ridges can form when cracks develop in the ice, and water from above or below fills in, causing the ice sheet to expand. As air temperatures warm, the ice continues to expand until it eventually pushes up onto the shoreline.
Click here to view the fact sheet.

Funding for Well Sealing

We still have funding available to cost-share sealing an abandoned well! But hurry, this funding will end in June. Our program will reimburse landowners up to 60% of the total cost of sealing a well.

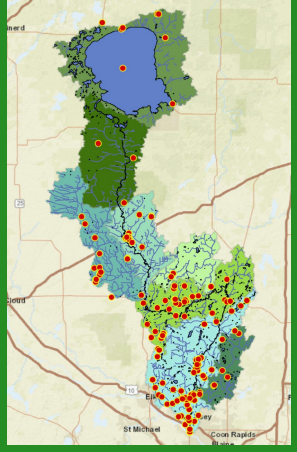
Unsealed, abandoned wells act as a channel for pollutants to enter our groundwater. By sealing your well, you are protecting your vital drinking water resource. Sealing abandoned wells is also a requirement by the Minnesota Department of Health when property titles are transferred. Taking action to seal unused wells now could save you time when it comes time to sell your home.

To get started, contact Lydia Godfrey with the Isanti SWCD by emailing Lgodfrey@isantiSWCD.org or calling our office at 763-689-3271.

Rum River Watershed Partnership Project Map

The Rum River Watershed Partnership created a map to showcase all of the conservation projects installed throughout the watershed. The Rum River Watershed covers nearly 80% of Isanti County, excluding the southeastern portion. Significant project funding in Isanti County comes from the Rum River Watershed Partnership, which is supported by a grant from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. With this funding,

we've implemented 320 acres of cover crops, completed four shoreline restorations on Blue Lake, restored two wetlands that benefit Green Lake, and hired a full-time shared Land Protection Specialist.



View Project Map

Isanti SWCD Annual Report

2024 was a busy year for Isanti SWCD. **Click here** to read our annual report and learn about our accomplishments towards our conservation programs and priorities.

We have great things planned for 2025, including having a new tree planter available to rent, building upon our Isanti County farmer-led group, a lakeshore restoration on Florence Lake, a rain garden on Skogman Lake, and a wetland restoration to protect Green Lake.

Read the Report

Contact Details

Call Us
763-689-3271

Office
110 Buchanan Street North Cambridge, MN 55008

Email Us
Send Email

Website: www.isantiswcd.org

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