Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District

Quarterly News & Updates

November 2024 | Issue 18

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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Successful Alum Treatment on Blue Lake

This September, Blue Lake received a successful second and final alum treatment to protect the lake's water quality. The Isanti SWCD and the Blue Lake Improvement District have been working in partnership to protect the health of Blue Lake, which, without intervention, was at risk of joining the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's list of impaired waterbodies due to excess phosphorus. Their work has resulted in numerous conservation projects around the lake that, before the treatment, prevented 41 pounds of phosphorus from entering the lake each year. However, diagnostic studies showed these projects were not enough, and the next most cost-effective step was to perform an alum treatment on the lake, which would address phosphorus already present in the water. The treatment was applied to the lake in two doses, the first in 2022 and the second applied this fall, already showing improvement in the lake.

Alum is a widely studied, and safe, option for lake treatments to reduce the amount of phosphorus

present in the water. During the application, a barge injected a liquid form of alum into the water over the deepest portions of the lake. Alum works by forming a solid floc when in contact with water which binds with phosphorus so it cannot feed algae blooms as it settles to the lake bottom. To those that saw the treatment, this appeared as a temporary white trail that appeared behind the barge. A GPS tracker ensured precise application across the designated treatment area, with the barge making multiple trips to the boat access dock to refill with the alum solution. There are immediate benefits in water clarity from the alum binding with phosphorus and particulates as it sinks through the water. The floc then settles on the lake bottom where it forms a layer that acts as a blanket, so phosphorus released from the sediments cannot enter the water.

The success of this year's alum treatment is already evident, with improved water clarity and a continued reduction in phosphorus levels. Following the first treatment in 2022, Blue Lake saw a significant improvement in clarity, and phosphorus levels have remained lower since then. The completion of this second dose of alum will achieve 164% of the phosphorus reduction goal set by the Isanti SWCD to keep Blue Lake healthy! By reducing phosphorus, the alum treatment helps curb algae growth and maintains the lake's clear, pristine condition for years to come. With the completion of this treatment, Blue Lake is well on its way to staying off the impaired waterbodies list, securing its future as a clean and healthy lake for the community to enjoy.

Moving forward, the Isanti SWCD will continue to closely monitor Blue Lake's water quality while continuing their work to prevent pollution entering the lake. In partnership with the Blue Lake Improvement District, they will keep working to install conservation projects around the lake, such as rain gardens, shoreline restorations, cover crops, and more. These projects aim to further reduce phosphorus inputs from surrounding properties, complementing the alum treatment's internal phosphorus reduction.

Native Planting Provides Safety for Landowner and Blue Lake

When David Young and his fiancée, Erika Donner, purchased their property on Blue Lake in July 2023, they inherited more than a breathtaking view. The steep, grass-covered yard leading down to the water presented a challenge. "It was very dangerous to mow, and quite honestly, when we got done, it didn't look great," he admitted. The steep, sodded yard posed safety concerns, a tedious chore, and was contributing to runoff that impacted the lake. The couple began exploring alternatives, driven by a mix of practical and conservation-minded goals, and fortunately found assistance to turn their fussy grassed hill into a low-maintenance flowering native planting.

Their journey began with Erika's suggestion to replace the lawn with a native option shortly after they realized the challenge mowing the hill presented. "She said we should think about wildflowers or prairie grass," David explained. "It was more of a safety thing at first, but then we learned about the impact sod, runoff, and fertilization have on the lake." For David and Erika, ensuring the long-term health of their lake became a priority.

Their turning point came when they discovered in their lake's newsletter a shoreline restoration program offered by the Isanti SWCD. Unsure of what to expect, David called Todd, the contact listed in the article, and to his surprise, "Todd answered the phone. He literally answered the phone," David recalled with a laugh. "Not only that, he said, 'Can I be out there in two hours?'" The program provided funding and expertise that allowed them to take their vision further than they had imagined. The project included planting native wildflowers on the steep hill, and a small shoreline restoration with coir logs to prevent erosion right along the shoreline. "Our shoreline was already starting to erode in parts," David shared. "With that coir log, you see the waves come in, and they

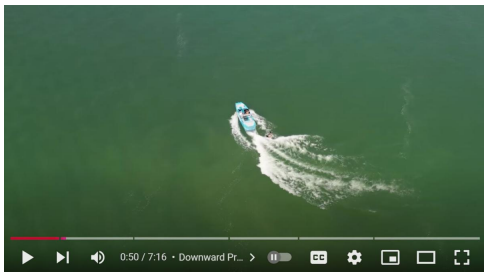
just stop. It's amazing." David and Erika are excited to have the extra protection for their shore and to see the native plants grow to their full size and provide stunning blooms each year. During the work, they also planted a no-mow fescue grass near the home to provide an area their dog can enjoy that provides more benefits to the lake than typical grass. Their efforts helped them create a sustainable, low-impact property while giving them more time to spend with family and less time mowing.

For David and Erika, this project is about more than just safety or appearance—it's a commitment to protecting what they value most. Before purchasing the home on Blue Lake, they spent their time living and recreating closer to the cities where they felt more disconnected from nature. Now, accessing a lake just steps from their backdoor, they realize the direct impact their actions have. David reflects, "But now, it felt like a much greater responsibility when I own this beautiful lot on Blue Lake that we have got to take care of it or its not going to be around."

Their journey from a hazardous lawn to a thriving lakeshore habitat highlights how individuals can make a real difference in their local environment. By turning a challenging situation into an opportunity for stewardship, David and Erika not only transformed their property but also strengthened their connection to the lake they love. "We absolutely love this place," David said. As they pour that love into the land, they will see the land give it right back through cleaner water, vibrant blooms and a place their family can enjoy for years to come.

Video Shows Impact of Wake Boats

A new video from the Wisconsin group Lakes at Stake visually shows the impact of wake boats on waterbodies. Watch the video to take a deep dive into how these boat's powerful propwash disrupts lake bottoms. The video features overhead footage of sediment plumes left behind by wake boats, underwater footage providing a stark before-and-after comparison, and an interesting story of discovered artifacts in a lake bed potentially uncovered from wake boat activity.



Watch the Video

Tree Sale Open Now!

Our tree sale is now open. You'll want to act fast, as we typically sell out of most varieties! This year, we have many exciting new options. Order pick-up day is Friday, May 2nd.

The best way to order is **through our website**, where you'll find the most up-to-date stock information. Please call or visit our office if you have questions or need assistance with your order.

Funding Available for Wetland Restorations

You can make a big difference by restoring a wetland on your property. Wetland restorations bring numerous environmental benefits, including capturing stormwater, providing wildlife habitat, mitigating flooding, replenishing groundwater, and trapping sediment and nutrients. Pictured below is a wetland restoration we installed off County Ditch 23 that will fill with water during storm events to capture sediment and nutrients. With this service, this wetland will capture 51 pounds of phosphorus and 17 tons of sediment from entering Green Lake every year. That is enough phosphorus to grow 25,500 pounds of algae and enough sediment to fill five hot tubs!

We are excited to announce that funding is available for wetland restoration projects in some parts of the county. Our cost-share program can cover up to 100% of the restoration costs, depending on location and funding availability, making it easier to undertake these important projects. Along with financial support, we offer expert technical assistance to guide you through every step of the process. Don't miss this opportunity to contribute to environmental conservation and enhance the natural beauty of your land. Contact us today to get started!

For Keith, Conservation and Economics Pay Off

Long before getting connected to state and federal conservation programs, Keith Stamm remembers learning about the benefits of hairy vetch. He planted it after a rye crop and became interested in growing his own nitrogen. In the extremely sandy soils of the Anoka Sand Plain, he learned that nitrogen grown through cover cropping stays fixed in the soil, making it readily available for the next planting, reducing the need for commercial fertilizer and protecting against erosion. This discovery – and many others over the years – helped Stamm become more efficient and self-sustaining on his 320-acre crop farm in Isanti County.

With more than four decades in agriculture – from raising dairy cows to operating a diverse grain rotation – Stamm enjoys figuring things out.

"I've done the same thing over and over and now it's time to have a little fun," he said.

Stamm's idea of fun turned him into a go-to expert on soil health practices in the area. For over a decade, Stamm and his loyal corgi have been planting cover crops on their grain fields. He practices no-till farming on a majority of his acres, which is certified through the Minnesota Agriculture Water Quality Incentives Program (MAWQIP), and employs a diverse crop rotation, including corn, soybeans, small grains, and occasional hay and alfalfa. Recently, Stamm has expanded the acreage where these principles are applied and earned the Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)'s Outstanding Conservationist award in 2023.

"I like working with Keith because I get to experiment with him and see what works and doesn't work," said Matthew Remer, conservation technician with the Isanti SWCD.

His next experiment? Growing his own seeds for cover crops to become more self-sustaining. For the first time this year, Stamm raised his own pea seed. While there's an economic upside to growing his own seeds, Stamm said he enjoys the process of researching and trying new things.

Read the rest of Keith's story here

Staff Attends BWSR Academy for Training

BWSR Academy is an annual, three-day training event tailored for conservation staff. This year, most of our team had the opportunity to attend. Organized by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), the academy offers a variety of classes and networking opportunities with professionals from across Minnesota. This in-person event fosters collaboration and partnership, enabling us to pool resources and work more efficiently. Our team has gained valuable tools and knowledge from these sessions, enhancing our ability to serve you better!

Public Education Page Added to Watershed Website

The Rum River Watershed Partnership has added a variety of educational resources to their website, hosted on the Mille Lacs SWCD site. These resources include materials for producers, lakeshore landowners, forestry landowners, and general conservation handouts, all available for public download.

Visit The Website

More Cost-Share Coming 2025 for Soil Health Practices

The Isanti SWCD will be launching an expanded soil health cost-share program in 2025. Funded by a combination of State and Federal funds, this program will work similarly to the federal cost-share and payment programs you may be familiar with, but on a much shorter timeframe, being able to go from application to payment within two months. Several soil health practices, as well as some forestry practices, are eligible. We are hoping to launch the program in March. Funds will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so make sure to contact the Isanti SWCD at 763-689-3271 for more information and to get on our (no commitment) interest list. Look out for a mailing with more information in December and an in-person event this winter!

Meet Our Newly Elected Board Member, Franklin Curtis

Franklin was elected to the Isanti SWCD's 5-member board during this year's general election. He will be sworn in at a County Board Meeting in January. Read on to learn more about him!

What motivated you to become a candidate for an Isanti Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisor? What relevant experience do you have?

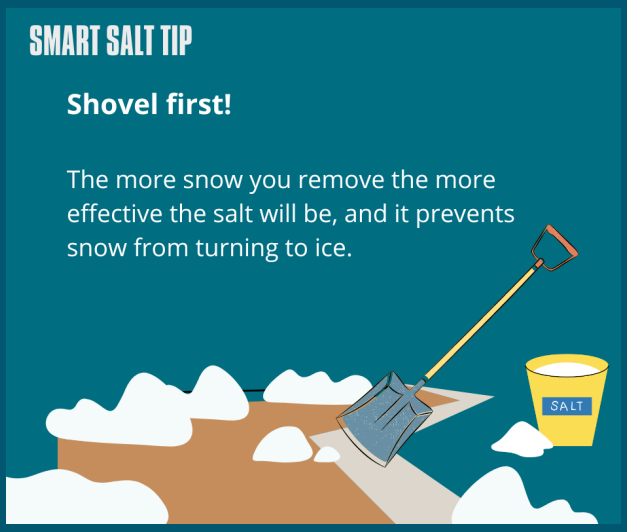
It was my son's idea that I ran. I got his first home seeded into native grasses and forbs, then did it again at his next home, which was more work. I have 30 acres near Green Lake and have about 30 species of native grasses and 150 of forbs, so I have done all these projects that made me want to get involved. I also have a background in this field. In 1969 I got a degree in biology, and I worked for a decade at Prairie Restorations. I have had some farming background, living on a farm for about ten years, too. I am interested in the value of conservation and understanding of the world, and the minutia is important.

Please explain what conservation ideas you have, or changes you intend to make, to ensure the sustainability of natural resources in your district.

I want to get more people involved. Everyone should be a teacher. I taught all of my seven children about conservation. But I don't want to come in with ideas contrary to what the community is working on. I want to get it all done. But for me, I can do what I can do and just encourage others to do the same.

Be Salt Smart!

Salt is a great tool to melt snow and ice in the winter, but it has become a source of water pollution in Minnesota. Salt kills fish and aquatic life, corrodes roads and bridges, and can harm wildlife. We currently have no practical technology to remove salt from waterbodies once it is in there. Therefore, preventing salt pollution is the best method. You can help by using only what you need and avoid using salt when it is colder than 15F and no longer melts ice.



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