

111 8th St., P.O. Box 207
Gaylord, MN 55334

Winter of 2009

Vol. 5 Issue 4

River Watcher

NEWSLETTER

High Island Creek & Rush River
Watersheds Implementation Projects



Outlet Structure of High Island Lake (11/17/2008)

Drawdown of High Island Lake

In the land of agriculture, lies the controversial and well known High Island Lake. In recent years, both water quality and quantity have presented a problem. This 1,340 acre shallow lake located in north central Sibley County has a familiar brown/green stain most likely caused by algae. The future has looked bright for this body of water since the drawdown began on October 31st, 2008.

Due to an outlet structure holding back water into the lake basin, a natural water cycle has not occurred on this lake for quite some time. On the flip side, a natural unaltered shallow lake has swings in climate and water levels between dry and wet years. It has been proven that

under these swings in conditions there comes an improvement in the ecological health of shallow lakes. Under these natural conditions, native aquatic plants have adapted and thrived. With the high water levels seen by High Island Lake, submergent and even emergent plants haven't been allowed to germinate and take root.

A re-establishment of rooted aquatic plants can do many positive things for a shallow lake. First off, when emergent plants such as bulrushes and cattails are in place they will absorb waves and stabilize sediments reducing shoreline erosion. On a lake like High Island, these waves from wind action can do a number on an exposed shoreline due to this lake's large size. With shoreline erosion, sediments get stirred up and re-suspend from the bottom, eventually blocking sunlight penetration. This is why it's common in rivers to have minimal to no aquatic plant survival. This turbid state can bring up a whole new set of problems. Another benefit from aquatic plants is that they use up and filter nutrients that would otherwise grow algae. Like a crop of corn, aquatic vegetation use these nutrients to flourish and sustain life. One more overlooked benefit from aquatic vegetation is that they provide food and a home for zooplankton. These tiny invertebrates feed heavily on phytoplankton (algae) leading to a clearer water state. The last and most obvious benefit is that aquatic plants provide essential fish and wildlife habitat, forming the basis of a lake's food web.

Last summer I had a chance to contact Lee Sundmark, DNR Area Fisheries Supervisor, on the status of High Island Lake. Lee noted that last June five trap nets were set to assess the winterkill from the 2007-2008 winter period.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Upcoming Events at the Ney Nature Center

Snow Shoe & Cross Country Ski Challenge

Sunday, February 15th, from 1-4:30 p.m.

Local Expert, Saturday Morning Coffee Series

Waterfowl Hike

Sunday, March 12th, at 2 p.m.

Non-Members - \$3.00 per individual, \$7.00 per family

Members - \$2.00 per individual, \$5.00 per family



Stakeholder Committee Meeting

Sibley County Service Center, Gaylord MN

For all of those landowners that would like to voice their opinion on the upcoming Fecal Coliform TMDL Implementation Plan, now is your chance. Come join us for a stakeholder meeting that will be held on **February 19th** and a follow up meeting on **March 4th, 2009**. Both meetings will be held from 12-2:00pm with lunch being provided. These meetings will become very important in the future as we put together our plan to reduce the high levels of bacteria in both the High Island Creek and the Rush River Watersheds.



Cost-share on Rain Barrels

The Rush River Watershed will be offering 75% cost-share on rain barrels for watershed residents who live or own homes in municipalities. A rain barrel is a system that collects and stores rainwater from a roof that would otherwise flow into our lakes and rivers via storm drains. By diverting water from storm drains, rain barrels help decrease the volume and impact of runoff on streams and other waterways. They can be used to slowly release collected rainwater into areas that can soak up the water, thereby reducing stormwater runoff and increasing groundwater recharge. The rainwater you store can also be used to water your lawn and garden during dry periods or can be used to wash your cars and windows.

The Rush River watershed will purchase the rain barrels in bulk to reduce costs. The project is estimating the cost of each rain barrel to be around \$150. This would mean that watershed residents would only have to pay around \$35 to \$40! Residents will be required to set up the rain barrel themselves. This program will be limiting residents to only one barrel per household. There are a limited number of barrels and will only be available by reservation. To reserve a barrel, please contact Brooke Patterson at 507-237-7409 or by email at the following address brookep@co.sibley.mn.us. If you do not live within a municipality, please spread the word to your family and friends about this program!

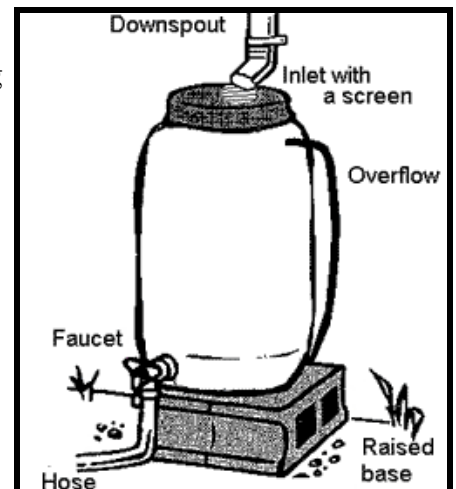
Want to learn more about rain barrels? Check out these links:

<http://www.lakesuperiorstreams.org/stormwater/toolkit/rainbarrels.html>

<http://www.yorkccd.org/xmisc/Newrainbarrel.pdf>

<http://rainbarrelguide.com/>

http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/publications/files/rain_barrels_guide.pdf





Photography Contest

The High Island Creek and Rush River watersheds are seeking scenic watershed photos for their 1st annual photography contest. We are calling on amateur photographers of any age to participate. Winning photographs will appear in a 2010 joint watershed calendar and on each watershed's website. Photographs may be of any size or color, but no digital alterations or significant enhancing is acceptable. Suggested categories include: scenic, recreational activities, effects of man, seasonal beauty, watershed ecology, conservation practices, environmental stewardship or historical landmarks.

No more than two photographs may be submitted by an individual. You do not need to live within the boundaries of either watershed to enter, but all photographs must be taken within the watersheds' boundaries on private or public lands. If you are unsure about whether your picture is located within either watershed, please give either watershed coordinator a call. All entries for the 2010 calendar must be received by November 1, 2009. Please feel free to email your photos earlier than the deadline.

The High Island Creek and Rush River watersheds reserve the non-exclusive right to use all photographs in publications, on their website or for conservation promotion purposes. Photos will be accredited in every publication. Winners will be required to sign a publicity release and permission to reprint the photos. Contestants must know the names and addresses of all identifiable persons in the photo.

Photographers are asked to email photos to either joelw@co.sibley.mn.us or brookep@co.sibley.mn.us.

Please include the following information in your email:

- Photographer's name, age, address and phone number
- Small picture description, including the general location of photograph
- Date of Photo (please remove timestamp)

Remember to always respect private property!



Sibley County Planning Several Dump Site Cleanups

Sibley County will continue cleaning up long-time illegal dump sites this summer, with cleanups planned in Jessenland and Henderson Townships. In a 2006 pilot project, Sibley County and Kelso Township cleaned up a 40 to 50 year old dump site located in the Rush River Watershed. In the summer of 2007, two more dump sites were also cleaned up in Kelso Township. These cleanups are funded through the solid waste fee that is placed on real estate taxes by the county. Many of the illegal dumps sites in Sibley County are located near ravines and along roads in the eastern portions of the county, due to their easy access and ability to hide trash.

Illegal dump sites are a serious environmental and community concern. Runoff and leaching of chemicals generated from illegal dump sites can contaminate surface water and groundwater. This runoff and leaching can affect public health, public safety and the health of aquatic habitats. Dumped trash can result in channel modification and flooding due to blocked drainage channels. Illegal dumping can also result in decreased property values. Do your part to dispose of your trash responsibly by checking with your local environmental services office on where to dispose or recycle items properly and on upcoming collection event dates.



(Continued from Page 1)

This type of survey not only shows what survived but also the status of the fish population. The species recovered are not your typical desired species. The top four catch rates were as follows: Black Bullhead (219/net), White Sucker (25/net), Orange Spotted Sunfish (15/net) and Common Carp (1/net). He mentioned that few fish were observed floating or washed up on shore, meaning that it was only a partial kill. Lee stated that this winter, if the water levels recede to the desired state, a complete freeze-out will occur depleting the levels of these unwanted fish species. The grubbing actions of these fish limit the growth of aquatic plants and re-suspend fine sediments.

Following a successful winterkill, the DNR will try to use High Island Lake as a rearing pond for Minnesota's most popular game fish, the walleye. With this strategy the DNR will go in during the spring and stock a lake with walleye fry in hopes to return and capture as many yearlings and fingerlings as they can using small trap nets in the following fall. They will then take those fish and stock them into another lake that has a better chance of survival with the purpose to sustain a healthy population. Due to High Island Lake's shallow fertile nature, the growth of these walleyes would be at an accelerated rate in comparison to a typical Northern Minnesota lake that would be deep and fairly sterile. The carry over walleyes that were not captured and transplanted would be available to harvest for the average fisherman like you or me. This type of management would produce a boom-bust fishery and will help control some of the unwanted species like Bullheads and Fathead Minnows.

Now that we have established what High Island Lake could become under the right circumstances, there is one thing to remember that was once said at a Friends of High Island meeting from Joel Anderson, DNR. "Unless major changes are made in land use practices within the watershed of a reclaimed or lowered lake, the lake and its fishery will eventually revert back to its old state it was previously in." It cannot be stressed enough that work should not be limited to just the lake but also on the land surrounding the watershed in order to make a long term change. Currently funding is available by the Clean Water Partnership for various BMP practices including wetland restorations, filter strips, open intake alternatives, structural practices, and septic system low interest loans. All of these would benefit High Island Lake and the surrounding watershed. With all this excitement of a cleaner, clearer, better lake in the next few years, a person will have to sit back in their boat seat after reeling in another walleye and think about all the people who made this happen and all the effort it took to get this far. I would personally like to thank all of those individuals and groups that have a continued passion towards the great resource High Island Lake is and can truly be.



Upstream of Outlet Structure looking towards High Island Lake



High Island Creek further downstream from the outlet

By Joel Wurscher

Low Interest Loans available for upgrading of Noncompliant Septic Systems

Owners of a Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) are eligible for low-interest loans to upgrade their non-conforming septic system. This low-interest loan program is available at a 3% interest rate for a ten year period.

To Be Eligible:

- It must serve a residential, non-commercial property located in either watershed.
- Applicant must be a property owner of a non-conforming septic system:
 - ✓ Discharge to the surface
 - ✓ Tiled to drainage or road ditch
 - ✓ Discharge to cesspool, seep-age pits or dry wells
 - ✓ Less than a 2-foot separation to seasonally saturated soil
 - ✓ Lack of a system
 - ✓ Does not meet setbacks to existing well

Not Eligible:

- ✓ Refinancing a previously installed system
- ✓ Septic for new homes
- ✓ Non-residential property
- ✓ Project started before design and loan approval
- ✓ Under court order to repair system

Contact Information:

- **Sibley County:** Ron Otto
Sibley SWCD office
111 6th Street, P.O. Box 161
Gaylord, MN 55334
507-237-5435 ext. 105
- **Nicollet County:** Sue Kretschmer
Environmental Services Office
501 South Minnesota Avenue
St. Peter, MN 56082
507-934-0250
- **McLeod CO:** Roger Berggren
Environmental Services Office
830 11th Street East, Suite 110
Glencoe, MN 55336
320-864-1214
- **Renville County:** Diane Mitchell
Water Management Office
County Office Building
410 East DePue Avenue
Olivia, MN 56277
320-523-3760

Cost Share & Incentive Monies Available for Best Management Practices

A variety of cost-share and incentive monies are available to producers looking to implement conservation practices in the High Island Creek & Rush River watersheds. Practices include Open Tile Intake Alternatives, Structural Practices, Cover Crops for Canning Ground & Sugar Beet fields and Vegetative Practices.

Open Tile Intake Alternatives: cost-share monies are available for the following options:

1. Removal of intake
2. Removal of intake & replacement with denser pattern tiling
3. Removal of intake & replacement with a rock inlet
4. Installation of a slotted riser

75% cost-share for removal of a structure or installation of a rock tile inlet, with a cap of \$300 per intake. Cost of Slotted Riser intake is paid.

Cover Crops for Canning Ground & Sugar Beet Fields: Incentive payment of \$10 per acre will be offered for producers planting a cover crop after the harvest of canning crops (fall harvest) and sugar beets.

Structural Practices: An additional 25% cost-share will be offered for those projects being funded through the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Practices will include Water & Sediment Control Basins, Terraces, Diversions and Grade Control Structures.

Vegetative Practices: Filter strips, riparian buffers and grassed waterways installed under the USDA's Continuous CRP program may be eligible for an incentive payment. An upfront one time incentive offer of \$15/acre/year equaling to \$150/acre for a 10 year contract and \$225/acre for a 15 year contract.

Wetland Restoration: This program allows producers to restore wetland complexes that are located outside the recognized 100-year floodplain. There is no size requirement, just a 4 to 1 buffer to wetland ratio. Landowners are eligible for an upfront incentive payment on top of CRP payments given by FSA.

Waste Management systems: Due to the potentially high cost of these systems, both Watersheds may provide up to 25% of funds for a specific project deemed highly beneficial for water quality.

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Watersheds Implementation Projects
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**HIGH ISLAND CREEK & RUSH RIVER
WATERSHEDS IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS**

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Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River
Pheasants Forever – Sibley & McLeod Co. Chapters
Conservation Partners of America

11 Ways to Conserve Energy

- Use compact fluorescent light bulbs.
- Replace old windows with energy efficient ones.
- Plant trees to shade your home.
- Shut off electrical items in the evening when you leave work.
- Install weather stripping around your doors and windows.
- Purchase appliances and office equipment with the energy star label.
- Wash clothes with warm or cold water instead of hot water.
- Unplug seldom used appliances.
- Turn off unneeded lights even when leaving the room for a short time.
- Clean the lint filter in your dryer after every load.
- Connect outdoor lights to a timer.

This newsletter is sponsored by the High Island Creek & Rush River Watershed Implementation Projects. This publication is issued quarterly and is funded through the Clean Water Partnership grant program from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and various local and state organizations. Both Projects are equal opportunity organizations and employers. Questions and comments can be directed to:

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