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PINE RIVER Watershed Alliance

NEWSLETTER

COMMENTS FROM The Chair

November, 2023

Another year has passed. Next year will be the 20th Anniversary of the Pine River Watershed Alliance. Thanks for your support over all these years and thanks to all the Board members who have done the work.

The 1W1P continues to provide funding and projects for protecting the watershed. We have received funding for the last 4 years and the amount we get will increase next year. The projects are focused on shoreland protection, stormwater control and land management focused at agriculture. Progress in these areas has been great.

The 319-grant money is focused on the Whitefish Lake Watershed, a sub-watershed of the Pine River. The monies here are focused at better understanding the nutrient loading of the Whitefish Chain. The testing relates to finding locations after rain events that generate the largest nutrient loading impact. The problem with the testing this year was lack of rain fall which limited the data.

The second Phase of the Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan (WRAP) is starting. This statewide program evaluates all 81 watersheds in the state on a ten-year cycle. This is the start of the second cycle for the Pine River Watershed and the testing done this time will tell us if some of the projects from Phase 1, like Willow and Arvig Creek were successful.

Our efforts at working with the Agricultural community continue and our partnership with Grassland 2.0 out of the University of Wisconsin I am looking forward to expanded efforts. Efforts like grazing management seminars are being well attended and the interest in the producer community has grown. An important step is integrating local beef production into our local supply chain. There are challenges like providing certified livestock processing facilities and developing a supply chain and these are being addressed. These efforts are directed at building our community.

As we reach 20 years it is important to remember we are a volunteer organization that works because of your support and those who volunteer their time to do the work. I need each of you who read this to challenge yourselves and ask can I participate. We need new Board members. We always need the contribution, but we also need new members to work on the Board. This area will remain as beautiful as it is only with your efforts.

Ron Meyer
Board Chair
Pine River Watershed Alliance

PINE RIVER WATERSHED
Harmonizing people, water, forests, and the economy in a place to renew your spirit.

Spectacular Buffer on Ruth Lake

Dan and Amy Brennan converted some of their lawn to a shoreline buffer on Ruth Lake. They installed native grasses and pollinator-friendly plants including: Black-eyed Susan, Prairie Blazing Star, Wild Bergamot, Smooth Penstemon, Great Blue Lobelia and Swamp Milkweed.

Dan and Amy shared the results of the project, "The buffer has established very well (see photos). It is planted within an irrigation zone so has received sufficient water despite this summer's drought. Even though it was planted mid-summer, a number of the plants bloomed and we have observed pollinators such as Monarch butterflies, bees and other butterfly species enjoying the plants. The buffer did not have any issues with weeds."

Their photos show the progress this summer from site preparation to a beautiful flower garden later in the season.

Site preparation killed existing turf grass.

Plants were installed with a protective layer of mulch to block weeds. A border marks the transition between grass and the native plants on the shoreline.

At the end of the summer, the plants are thriving and the Black-eyed Susans are blooming.

Share or Read, This & Similar Articles at The Blog: https://www.landandwaters.org/post/spectacular-buffer-on-ruth-lake

Emily Mine Information Group: *EMIG Advocates – Call to Action*

Looking for advocates to become more engaged! Please connect to receive email updates and share your expertise. Email: emilymineinfogroup@gmail.com

When you write a letter or email, please email us a copy and let us know if it is OK to share publicly or within the group. We at EMIG find your letters very inspiring, and would love to share more of them. If you are able to gather any information, please share it with us.

What can I do this year?

Write to your elected representatives in government. Tell them how water protection should be a priority. Tell them that the mining laws must be updated. Tell them about your life in Northern Minnesota and how you have built it away from mining and that you and your neighbors are not miners and would not benefit from a mining operation in your community, in fact it would put you in physical danger from pollutants, it would threaten the water in our lakes, it may destroy the recreational economy we enjoy, and it would tank our property values.

Contact your representatives as often as you can manage, we recommend setting a calendar event quarterly, and mailing in a physical letter when you can. They represent you and need to know where you stand on these issues.

Consider it an exercise in gratitude for the peaceful nature and clean water we now enjoy.

Thanks as always for being and engaged and informed citizen!

"Our mission is to evaluate and disseminate information regarding the risks and benefits of the proposed Emily manganese mine to support economic opportunities in a manner consistent with sound natural resource conservation and community health."

Remain Informed on Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/EmilyMineInformationGroup

To Learn More:
https://mnlakesandrivers.org/emily-mining-group-providing-information-on-proposed-manganese-mine-in-cass-county

Dung Beetles and Clean Water

On a warm afternoon in western Cass County, a small group of ranchers, farmers, and interested citizens gathered to walk the pastures of Stattleman Angus Ranch and dig through dung pats, affectionately referred to as "meadow muffins" by Dr. Roger Moon, retired veterinary entomologist from the University of Minnesota, who led the event.

We were looking for the elusive dung beetle, which it turns out can be incredibly fast. Dung beetles, Dr. Moon explained, break down the dung pats by transferring manure underground to nests where they lay eggs. Their young then feed on the dung after the eggs hatch. Once transported underground, nutrients from the dung are more available for plant growth and less likely to run off to surface waters.

Tom Kuschel and Ivan Reinke search for dung beetles on Stattleman Angus Ranch, a grass-based cattle operation. Thomas Stattleman is a third-generation rancher who is doing what his grandfather did before him, using adaptive grazing practices to protect soil health and increase pasture productivity. This picture was taken on August twenty fourth, in the middle of a severe drought, the third in three years. Cattle had been rotated off the paddock within the last week.

Another important role dung beetles play is to create tunnels in the dug pats that allow for air exchange. Often the first insects to enter a dung pat, the tunnels they create help to dry the manure pat, making them less favorable breeding sites for biting flies that can stress cattle and cause disease. These holes also serve to allow other insects to enter the dung pat, including beneficial insects that feed on the fly larvae.

Once the dung has begun to dry out, worms and other macro-organisms move in to further break down these delicious meadow muffins. Though dung beetles only make up a small percentage of the total organisms in a dung pat, they play a vital role in the desiccation process. With a healthy dung beetle population, manure pats are often broken down within weeks, with little visible left on the ground.

There are some thirty species of dung beetles that are found in Minnesota. They played an important role in building the most diverse and abundant ecosystems, the prairies and savannas that once dominated much of the midwestern landscape. Dr. Moon gave practical advice on how we can help establish and maintain healthy dung beetle populations on our farms and ranches. Through proper grazing and using basic best management practices when vaccinating and deworming livestock, we can support the meadow muffin ecosystem, improve soil health, and protect clean water.

Cass County, near Longville, Nora Woodworth

The dung beetle field day was hosted by the Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council, a network group of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota. It was sponsored by Grassland 2.0 and supported by Happy Dancing Turtle, Cass and Crow Wing SWCD, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

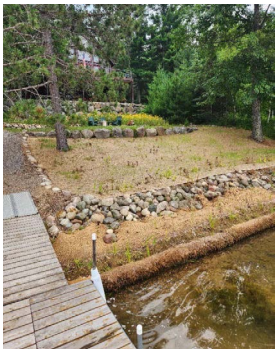
For more on Dung Beetles go to: https://www.happydancingturtle.org/post/digging-into-the-lives-of-dung-beetles

Pine River Watershed Based (1W1P) *via Adam Maleski, Crow Wing Soil & Water Conservation District*

Phase 2 Allocation: $482,142 (Ends 12/31/24)
Total Spent: $228,893.11 Total Encumbered: $143,116.98 Wrapping up, most project money has been allocated.

Phase 2 Highlights:
- Purchased a 10 ft Truax no-till drill.
- Developing 38 forest stewardship plans for 3,184 acres.
- Completed 1 tree planting and 1 goat grazing buckthorn project.
- Completed 190 acres of cover crops and rotational grazing.
- Installed or in the process of completing 9 shoreline restoration or raingarden projects.
  - Lakes: 1 Pelican, 1 Ada, 1 Roosevelt, 2 Ruth, 2 Ossiwinamakee, 2 Lower Whitefish
- Hosted 3 chloride smart salting and 1 septic training.
- Collected additional data for the Whitefish bathtub model.

Phase 3 Allocation: $634,178 (Ends 12/31/26) (NEW FUNDING)
Funding pools:
- Chlorides Training: $5,000
- Grant Administration: $20,000
- Marketing/Supplies: $9,000
- Pasture Management: $45,000
- Private Forest Management: $45,000
- Project Development: $30,000
- Shoreline Buffers/raingardens: $65,381
- Technical Assistance: $50,000
- Crosslake Phase III: $215,000
- Streambank Restoration Project: $125,000
- Whitefish Feasibility Study (Bathtub Model Analysis): $25,000



For more Information: https://www.crowwing.gov/1476/One-Watershed-One-Plan-1W1P

Federal 319 Grant Update *via Adam Maleski, Crow Wing Soil & Water Conservation District*

Grant Allocation: $320,705.50 (Ends 12/31/25)
Total Spent: $131,454.71
Grant Highlights:
- Installed 3 raingardens on HWY 66 near Simonson Lumber, Crosslake Fire Department, and Old Log Landing Church.
- Hosted 1 SSTS training (30 participants), another training in 2024.
- Developing 6 forest stewardship plans.
- 5 shoreline restoration/raingarden projects.
- Crow Wing County has sealed 7 unused or abandoned wells.
- Meeting with the small cities and resorts to talk about chloride use.

We have remaining funding for forest stewardship plans and forestry practices. Otherwise, funding has been allocated.

SMALL GRANTS!

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A PRESERVATION TRUST

SHORELINE EROSION? • PLANTING NATIVE FLOWERS? • REQUIRE A STORMWATER PLAN? • APPLY:

www.prwa.us

Up to **$18,000 of grants** to be awarded for proposals that fit one or more of the following priorities:
- Enhance and protect surface and aquifer water quality in the Pine River Watershed.
- Support sustainable riparian land management practices.
- Protect habitat for native plants and animals.

Application period is Dec 1, 2023–March 1, 2024

Questions? Contact Ron Meyer at **rnsmeyer@tds.net**

Kabekona Watershed: A Success Story – Northern Waters Land Trust

One of the strong PRWA partnerships is with The Northern Waters Land Trust. They've recently celebrated an accomplishment of reaching 75% protection of Kabekona Lake Watershed. "Kabekona Lake is a cold-water haven in Hubbard County, characterized by its spring-fed waters nourished by the Kabekona River, Gulch Creek, and Sucker Brook and flows into Kabekona Bay of Leech Lake. Conservation of Kabekona Lake's watershed is pivotal for preserving the conditions required by tullibee and other cold-water species unique to northern Minnesota.

The watershed, covering 97 square miles (62,000 acres), plays a crucial role in the health of the lake. A watershed's protection is paramount in maintaining water quality and habitat, and the goal was set at ensuring at least 75% of its area was in a protected status to safeguard it from future disturbances. The 75% protection level helps keep a lake healthy for wildlife and more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

To read the whole story visit: https://northernwaterslandtrust.org/conservation-projects/kabekona-watershed-a-success-story

ATV trail reroute and ditch remediation in Emily, MN Update & Warm Welcome to PRWA's Newest Board Member!

ATVs have become bigger, heavier, more powerful, and much more numerous. Recreational use of highway road ditches by ATVs increasingly causes problems because Right-Of-Way (ROW) design, maintenance, regulations, and enforcement have not kept pace with current & projected use. Most road ditches were originally designed to slow down, filter, and absorb runoff so that watershed impact will be minimal. Destruction of permanent vegetation and damage to ROW grade leads to many issues – specifically including contaminated runoff into important components of the watershed (wetlands, streams, rivers, lakes).

Little Emily Lake in NE Crow Wing County was suffering such damage due to being adjacent to a heavily used Grant-In-Aid ATV trail along State Trunk Highway 6 (STH6). It was common for large areas of the lake to turn brown during runoff events, and a huge amount of material from a very long STH6 ROW drainage into the lake obviously was being lost and deposited in the lake as sediment. Continued use of this trail section clearly was unsustainable without major (and very costly) design changes.

This section of ATV trail was administered by the Over The Hills Gang (OTHG) ATV club, in cooperation with state and county partners. The OTHG ATV club, led by then-president Perry May, had made a preliminary proposal in mid-2021 to reroute a 2-mile section of trail away from STH6 & Little Emily Lake using existing alternate routes. Adjacent property owner Kirk Soldner became aware of this proposal and began working closely with Mr. May and other stakeholders to refine it and build sufficiently broad support to implement it.

The proposal ultimately had three main components – immediate closure to stop further degradation, ATV trail reroute, and STH6 ditch remediation. After several months of work, support had been enlisted from the following (among others):

- OTHG ATV club board, Cass county partner, DNR Parks & Trails partner
- Majority of adjacent property owners
- RALALA, PRWA, Crow Wing SWCD board
- Emily City Council and Crooked Lake town board
- State Senator & State Representative (at that time)
- MNDOT (who has default jurisdiction of state highway ROW)
- Enforcement officials (primarily DNR & City of Emily)

Kirk Soldner, New Board member

Kirk grew up in the Emily area in the 1960's & 1970's. He spent a lot of time on and around surrounding lakes & wetlands, and studied several during an advanced biology / limnology class in high school. He moved to the Twin Cities area in 1984 after obtaining a degree in Electrical Engineering. However he always kept equipment at his parent's place in Emily for forest management and recreation, spending the equivalent of several weeks there every year to maintain & improve the property. Kirk and his wife Cathy eventually purchased Kirk's home place from his parents, along with two adjacent 40 acre tracts that include wetlands, and they reside there part-time. Since retiring from paid engineering work he has increasingly focused on private forest management and environmental issues which have been lifelong priorities. He is a longtime member of the American Tree Farm System and has been a MN Regional Tree Farmer of the year, and manages his property as a Forest Steward. His approach is somewhat atypical because he does all the work himself – including tree planting & seasonal maintenance & periodic timber harvest to promote natural regeneration. Kirk is committed to work with the land to get good outcomes, considering how different areas fit into an overall ecosystem and thinking ahead many decades. His environmental stewardship activities include managing 80 acres of marginal farmland in the Battle Lake area (half of Cathy's home place) with focus on erosion control and creating habitat diversity.

PINE RIVER
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Become a member. Donate. It all helps.

The Pine River Watershed Alliance is supported by grants, memberships, and contributions from residents and friends of the watershed, not by tax money. Your membership and gifts will help protect area land, lakes, rivers and streams for future generations. *Thank you!*

NEW!!! Online Membership is now available! prwa.us/shop.
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