

Cottonwood River Journal

Fall 2000
Volume 1, Issue 1

Cottonwood River Restoration Goals:

- To achieve the highest water quality attainable for ecoregion streams;
- To have watershed residents take an active role in enhancing and protecting the Cottonwood River; and,
- To develop the Cottonwood River as a major recreational resource within the Minnesota River Basin.



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What We're About

James Doering, RCRCA Executive Director

Welcome to the first edition of the Cottonwood River Journal. The purpose of this publication is to inform you of the restoration efforts, activities and available opportunities in the Cottonwood River Watershed.

The Cottonwood River Restoration Project was started in 1997. A MPCA Clean Water Partnership (CWP) Phase I Grant enabled a three-year diagnostic study of the Cottonwood River Watershed. From this three-year study, priority areas were selected from collected water-quality and land use data from throughout the watershed. An Implementation Plan was developed with input

from local county officials, SWCD's, RCRCA staff, watershed citizens and state and federal agencies. The three-year diagnostic study and implementation plan enabled a Clean Water Partnership Phase II

Grant application in the fall of 1999. As a result of that application, a grant of \$400,700 and a loan of \$370,000 were awarded to RCRCA to carry out the first three years of the six-year Implementation Plan, which started in 2000.

The Cottonwood River Restoration Project is starting out strong. The \$400,700 grant for the first three years will provide the education and technical support needed to accelerate the voluntary adoption of Best Management Practices. The \$370,000 of low interest loan dollars will be used for individual septic systems that are not in compliance and that are not associated with additions or new constructions. The low interest loans will be made available through your county in the spring of

2001. For more information, contact your County Environmental Officer.

With the aid of the 1999 Diagnostic Study/Implementation Plan for the Cottonwood River, partner SWCD's have applied for and received \$100,000 for the Cottonwood River Watershed to be used for BMP implementation. Contact your local SWCD office for more information.

Throughout this newsletter, you will find additional information on several programs, including the Conservation Reserve

Enhancement Program (CREP), and Best Management Practices (BMP's). I encourage landowners to consider these programs and other cost-sharing programs offered by their local SWCD's in the

management of the their operations.

A six-year time frame to clean up the Cottonwood River is very ambitious to say the least. The programs supported by the Cottonwood Restoration Project are voluntary based. Success of the Cottonwood River Restoration Project will be determined by participation from local watershed citizens. RCRCA is committed in continuing to obtain grant dollars that will enable conservation minded landowners and operators to incorporate changes to their homes and operations that will benefit both the Cottonwood River Watershed and their bottom line.

"Success of the Cottonwood River Restoration Project will be determined by participation from local watershed citizens."

Water Quality

Roseanne Kaseforth, RCRC Watershed Educator



Protecting water quality is the responsibility of everyone. Less than 1% of the earth's water is usable fresh water, so we all need to take part in keeping our water sources as clean as possible. Ways to protect water quality include learning more about your watershed and attending local planning and zoning meetings to make sure that decisions include water quality protection. Citizens can also take an active role in their school system. See if environmental and conservation issues are part of your child's curriculum; and if you have a private well as a water source, be sure to have it tested regularly to insure the health of you and your family.

Residents can also cut back on the amount of chemicals we use when cleaning the home, here are a few ideas to try.

Window Cleaner—2 Tbsp. vinegar in one quart of water and use newspapers rather than paper towels;

Furniture Polish—1 Tbsp. lemon oil in one pint mineral oil;

Drain Cleaner—pour boiling water down the drain and/or use a plunger or metal snake;

Air Freshener—boil a pot of lemon juice with whole cloves in it, OR boil a pot of water with 1 Tbsp. ground cinnamon in it.

Don't leave water quality up to others, take steps in insuring that our water is clean and around for future generations to enjoy.

To learn more about how you can conserve and protect our water contact Roseanne Kaseforth, Watershed Educator at 507-637-2142, ext. 4



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Stephanie McLain, RCRC Watershed Technician

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) began in 1998 in the Minnesota River Basin. This program is a "marriage" between the federally funded Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the state funded Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM). This program offers landowners a unique opportunity to improve the quality of water in the Minnesota River and its tributaries. Over the years, the Minnesota River has been touted as the most polluted river entering the Mississippi River north of St. Louis, Missouri. Most of the problem stems from agricultural runoff, especially from marginal lands.

The goal of CREP is to put conservation easements on 100,000 acres of land in the 37 county Minnesota River basin. Marginal land such as floodplain areas, riparian bottomlands, and drained or farmed wetlands are ideal areas to enter into CREP. In fact, any farmland adjacent to a body of water can be entered into CREP.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program consists of 15 years of guaranteed CRP payments plus a lump sum RIM payment.

Both of these payments are calculated based on the value of the land. Total payments range from \$2,000-\$2,600 per acre, depending on county soil rental rates. Cost-share to implement conservation practices is 100%, which means there is no cost to the landowner!!

Landowners of the Cottonwood River Watershed who are interested in voluntarily enrolling land into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program should contact their local Soil and Water Conservation District, Farm Service Agency, or District Conservationist. The CREP program expires on September 30, 2002, so enroll in CREP soon!

Director's Note: *Don't let the recent rule change for posting your land make you miss this opportunity. The truth is, it has always been and always will be your land. Posting it will protect your rights and promote conscientious recreation.*

CREP

*"Farm
the
Best . . .
Buffer
the
Rest"*

Programs Available to Lyon County Residents

Lyon SWCD

Low Interest Loans

The Lyon County Soil & Water Conservation District is again offering low interest loans to Lyon County residents to help in the costs of certain projects.

These loans are at a 3% interest rate with a 1/2% one time fee to the financial institution for handling the loan.

Projects include:

- Individual Septic System
- Conservation Tillage Equipment
- Ag Waste Management
- Manure Handling Equipment

For more information and to apply, contact the Lyon County SWCD at 507-537-0396, ext. 3.



Living Snow Fence Program

A living snow fence program could mean a large dollar return to you as well as winter benefits to your family and livestock. The benefits of a living snow fence include helping control blowing and drifting snow, that means less tax dollars paid to remove snow and easier access in winter for you, school buses, and emergency vehicles. Other bene-

fits include, crop production increase, wind protection and wildlife habitat.

Make sure you are part of this program. You may receive CRP payments for the land for 10-15 years! **These funds will only be available for this year and the spring of 2001.** Do not delay in contacting the Lyon County SWCD at 507-537-0396, ext. 3.

DNR Completes Survey of the Cottonwood River

Jason Neuman, RCRA Watershed Technician

Between August and September 1999, the DNR fisheries office in New Ulm conducted a series of surveys throughout the Cottonwood River covering areas of Lyon, Redwood, and Brown Counties. Prior to last summer's survey, the most recent survey of the entire Cottonwood River was completed in 1988.

Electrofishing, a specialized technique that temporarily stuns fish, was used to get an idea of the fish community within the Cottonwood River. The results of the 1999 survey are optimistic, revealing that the Cottonwood River supports a diverse assemblage of fish. Forty-four species were sampled in 1999, the largest number documented in any of the seven surveys dating back to 1948. There were three new species (white bass, gizzard shad, and log perch) added to the fish

community in the Cottonwood River. The increase in abundance and diversity of fishes appears to be at least partially due to re-

removal of the Flandrau Dam. Both gizzard shad and sauger were collected above the dam site for the first time in 1999. Walleye also appear to have increased in abundance compared to prior surveys with several stations yielding seven or eight fish each.

However, DNR fisheries specialists site that the Cottonwood River continues to suffer from degraded water quality related to surrounding land uses. A lack of deep pools, and fish habitat also limits game fish abundance.



Pictured is an electrofishing catch from a portion of the Cottonwood River and a stream shocker

Citizen-Stream Monitoring Program

Jason Neuman, RCRCA Watershed Technician

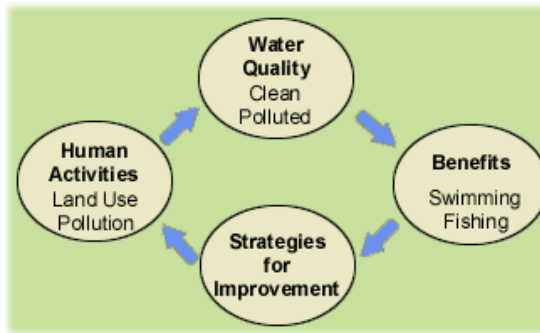
“Increased stream monitoring will help identify problems, develop strategies and prioritize activities for improving water quality, and track progress toward improvement.”

Minnesota streams are valued for recreation, aesthetic enjoyment, transportation, and as a source of clean water by many plants and animals... including humans!

For these reasons it is important to protect and improve the quality of our state's streams. A citizen-stream monitoring network (CSMN) in the Cottonwood River Watershed will increase our understanding of how human activities such as land use affects water quality. In turn, we will gain insight on how human activities affect water quality, such as swimming and fishing. Increased stream monitoring will help identify problems, develop strategies and prioritize activities for improving water quality, and track progress toward improvement.

What do CSMP volunteers do?

About once a week during the summer, volunteers visit an established spot on a nearby stream and measure the transparency, appearance, recreational suitability, stream stage and



precipitation.

How do I enroll in the program?

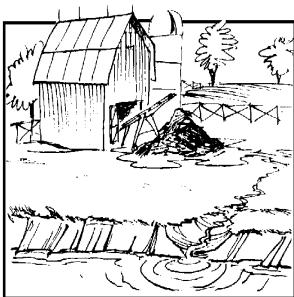
Currently, RCRCA is looking for citizen-stream monitors in priority areas of minor watersheds located throughout the Cottonwood River Watershed.

These priority areas include: Meadow Creek, Lone Tree Creek, Sleepy Eye Creek, Plum Creek, Pell Creek, Dutch Charely Creek, Highwater Creek, Dry Creek, Mound Creek, Coal Mine Creek, and the upper and lower portions of the Cottonwood River. Volunteers will receive a transparency tube, rain gauge, data sheets, instructions for taking measurements, and a copy of the annual report on stream conditions in their region.

Please call RCRCA at 507-637-2142, ext 4 for more information on becoming a volunteer for the Cottonwood River Citizen-Stream Monitoring Program.

Nutrient Management Grant

Stephanie Mc Lain, RCRCA Watershed Technician
& Marilyn Bernhardson, Redwood SWCD



Barnyard runoff . . . a source of nitrate pollution

Illustration courtesy of Environmental Resources Center, University of Wisconsin—Extension

Cottonwood and Redwood Counties recently received \$100,000 in 319 Grant Funds. The SWCD's plan to use the money for nutrient management in the Coteau streams and the Sleepy Eye Creek watersheds. Both counties are involved in the Clean Water Partnership with the Cottonwood River Restoration Project through RCRCA. In the Phase I Diagnostic study, it was determined that the Coteau streams and Sleepy Eye Creek had high nitrate problems and were designated as priority management areas.

The objective of this nutrient/manure manage-

ment grant will be to assist in reducing high nitrates in the two sub-watersheds, through the cooperation of landowners and agricultural professionals and government agencies.

As of now, the implementation of the grant is still in the planning stages. Those involved with the grant, met at the end of September to discuss and plan the grant's future and more information will be available in the next Cottonwood River Journal.

Brown County Rock Inlet Cost Share

Brown SWCD

The Brown Soil and Water Conservation District and Paul Davis, Brown County Water Planner have joined forces to establish a cost share program for the installation of Rock Tile Inlets.

An alternative to conventional inlets, the rock tile inlet design reduces suspended solids and nutrient loading while providing effective drainage. The design was adopted from Carver SWCD. They have installed many Rock Inlets over the past years and landowners are pleased with the performance.

Eligible landowners can install up to three cost shared Rock Tile Inlets. Cost share is not to exceed 75%. The District will take sign ups and the Brown County Water Planner will group them according to locations.

Group construction will allow the Cost Share funds to be maximized by eliminating excessive equipment mobilization charges.

Funding is limited and we encourage all Brown County landowners in the Cottonwood River Watershed and throughout the County to sign up before funding for this program is exhausted.

For more information and to sign up, please call Brown County SWCD at 507-794-2553.

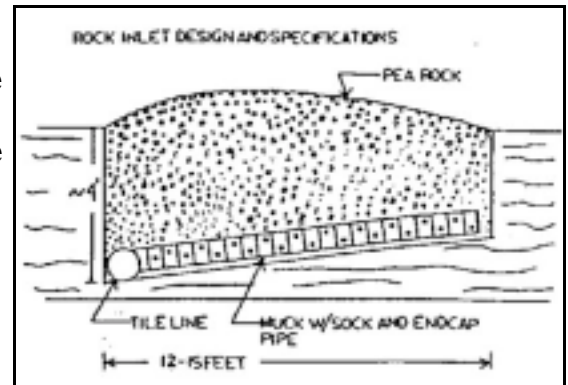
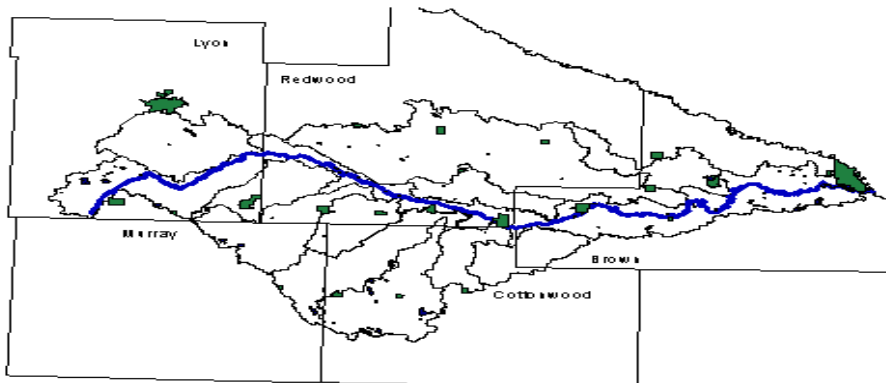


Illustration courtesy of Carver SWCD

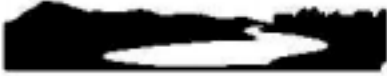
Cottonwood River Watershed Quick Facts

- The Cottonwood River Watershed includes parts of Brown, Cottonwood, Lyon, Murray and Redwood Counties.
- The Cottonwood River originates on the Coteau des Prairies near Balaton in Lyon County and flows 150 miles to its mouth at the Minnesota River in the city of New Ulm in Brown County.
- The watershed drains approximately 840,200 acres.
- Some major tributaries are Highwater/ Dutch Charley Creek, Plum Creek, Lone Tree Creek, Meadow Creek and Sleepy Eye Creek.
- The population of the watershed is 36,025.
- Early studies show an average of 55.7 tons of suspended sediment per square mile at the mouth of the Cottonwood River near New Ulm.



Watersheds . . .

***We are
in it
together!***



**REDWOOD-COTTONWOOD
RIVERS CONTROL AREA**

1241 East Bridge Street
Redwood Falls, MN 56283

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The Cottonwood River Journal

A PUBLICATION OF THE

REDWOOD-COTTONWOOD RIVERS CONTROL AREA

(RCRCA)

The *Cottonwood River Journal* is designed to provide information of citizens, agencies and organizations involved with RCRCA and the Cottonwood Restoration Project.

JAMES DOERING
Executive Director

ROSEANNE KASEFORTH
Etor/Watershed Educator

To receive *The Cottonwood River Journal* write:

RCRCA

1241 East Bridge Street
Redwood Falls, MN 56283
Phone: 507-637-2142, ext. 4
Fax: 507-637-2134
Email: rcrca@connect.com

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