

## 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; and
- 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!

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Follow us on Facebook for more updates!



## Keith Stamm Recognized for Outstanding Work in Conservation

Congratulations to Keith Stamm, recipient of the 2023 Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District's Outstanding Conservationist Award! Each year, the Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), in partnership with the MN Association of SWCDs, recognizes an individual or organization for their outstanding accomplishments in implementing conservation practices and improving Minnesota's natural resources. This year, the Isanti SWCD board of supervisors voted unanimously to name Keith Stamm an Outstanding Conservationist in recognition of his proactive efforts in building and promoting Soil Health.

A few of Keith's great conservation efforts include:

- **Being an early adopter of the soil health principles.** Keith currently practices four of

the five soil health principles on a substantial portion of his property. These principles, nature's blueprint for a healthy ecosystem, include armoring the soil surface, minimizing soil disturbance, maintaining continual live plant cover, and increasing plant diversity. For over a decade, Keith, and his loyal Corgi, have been planting cover crops on their grain fields. Furthermore, they practice no-till farming on a majority of their acres and employ a diverse crop rotation, including corn, soybeans, small grains, and occasional hay and alfalfa. Recently, they have been expanding the acreage where these principles are applied.

- **Willing to try new things.** Keith isn't someone to jump into a new practice without research. He approached the SWCD earlier this year expressing interest in trying a variety of cover crop mixtures to provide valuable insights about the most suitable cover crops for the region for fellow farmers. Now, he is researching other cover cropping practices, such as seeding following his soybean rotation and exploring methods to harvest cover crop seeds, thus saving money.
- **Demonstrating remarkable community leadership.** He graciously offered to host the Isanti SWCD's 2023 Soil Health Field Day so farmers could learn, inspect his cover crop demonstration plots, and network with each other. Keith also agreed to participate in the SWCD's Farmer-Led Group to inform local programs.



The Isanti SWCD recognizes the time, effort, and money Keith and his wife Sandy have invested in improving soil health on the land that has been in the family for over 150 years. Their environmental work benefits more than the land they own, as many of their practices improve water quality. Their work also inspires and informs others to improve soil health.

The Isanti SWCD feels proud to name Keith Stamm as their 2023 outstanding conservationist. The award was presented to him in September at the Soil Health Field Day that was hosted on his farm. Pictured is Keith accepting the award at the event from Isanti SWCD board member Dave Medvecky. Many of his friends and close family were present to congratulate him on his hard work. Keith will also be recognized at the Outstanding Conservationist luncheon held in conjunction with the MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) 2023 Annual Convention on Wednesday, December 13th.

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## Farmers Come Together at Soil Health Field Day

This fall, we hosted our second annual Soil Health Field Day at Keith Stamm's farm field. It was our best turnout yet, with 43 farmers attending to learn about soil health. One of the highlights was watching a drone take flight to precisely seed cover crops. We also learned from the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition about the principles of soil health and how cover crops can benefit our soil. Then, Troy Salzer from the U of M Extension showed us how to do some simple field soil assessments to help us monitor soil health and make better management decisions. The participants also got to explore different cover crop mixes by walking through Keith's demonstration plots. At the end of the day, we surprised everyone by announcing that Keith Stamm had been selected as our annual Outstanding Conservationist Award winner!



Thank you to everyone who attended! It was a wonderful day of learning and networking with farmers. We hope you can join us again in the spring for our Agriculture Lunch and Learn!





## Tree Sale Opening Soon

Keep an eye out for the start of our annual tree sale! It will open in December. The best way to ensure you get the trees you want is by ordering online through our website.

This year, our tree pick-up day will be Friday, May 3rd from 9am - 7pm. If you need help ordering your trees, please visit or call our office.

## Rare Plants Found in Oxford Township Lakes

In August, we assisted the DNR in conducting a rare species survey on five of the small, natural environment lakes in Oxford Township. This survey informs us about the remarkable biodiversity in these natural environment lakes by telling us if there are any uncommon or rare species. These species are important indicators of the health and diversity of the lakes, and they may have unique adaptations or ecological roles.

To inspect the lakes, the DNR Aquatic Botanist, Courtney, our staff person Lydia, and a volunteer paddled kayaks around each of the Oxford Township lakes: Hoffman, Upper Birch, Lower Birch, Horseshoe, and Horseleg Lake. The team made note of each aquatic plant species to compile a comprehensive list for each lake. They also took live samples of any uncommon, rare, or under-reported aquatic plants they found. The samples will go to a herbarium, where they will stay forever to be available for future research and as a testament that these species were found in Oxford Township.



Multiple uncommon, under-reported, and even rare species were found during the aquatic plant survey. Due to DNR policy, we can't share exactly what or where these plants were found, but there were many exciting discoveries! One species found in multiple lakes has the potential to be very rare and is currently awaiting expert assessment in New York. Another species found in one of our lakes may be the first specimen ever collected in Minnesota! An emergent plant of special concern in Minnesota was collected, as well as another that hasn't been recorded in Isanti County before. A common thread among all the surveyed lakes was that they had a rich variety of aquatic plant species. Plant diversity is vital for maintaining the health of small lakes, and they provide a great ecosystem. The findings from the survey confirm that Oxford Township is home to multiple remarkably healthy and biodiverse lakes.

The data collected from the aquatic plant survey will help us understand how to protect these lakes long term. We hope the findings will also help raise awareness for these unique lakes we are lucky to have in Isanti County. As we continue to monitor these lakes, we will keep a close eye on their special plant communities and let you know what other treasures we find!

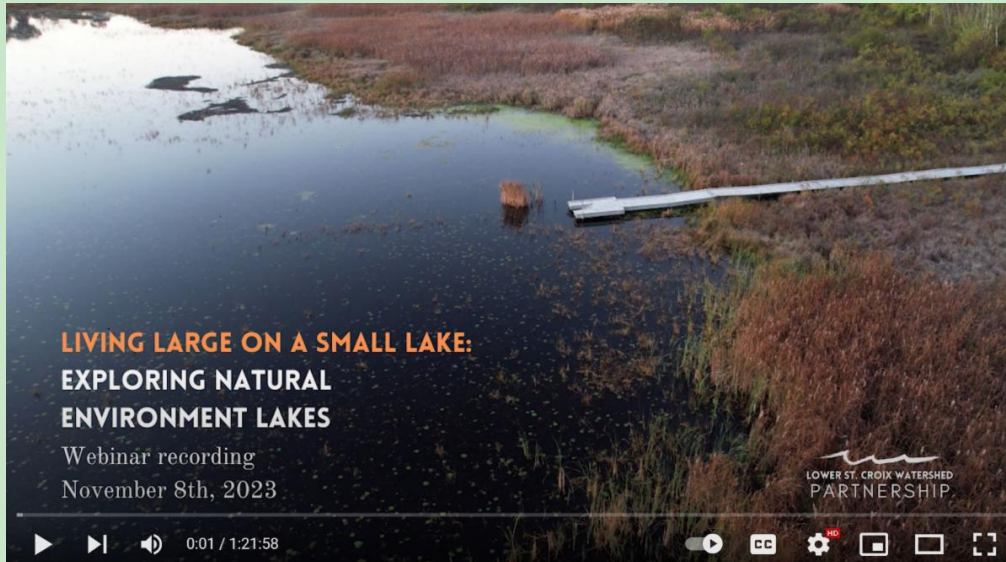
*Next year, the DNR aquatic botanist plans to return to Oxford Township to survey more small lakes where data still needs to be collected. Data has already been collected on East Twin, West Twin, Hoffman, Horseleg, Horseshoe, Upper Birch, and Lower Birch. If you live on another lake in the area and are willing to have our team and DNR staff go through your property to access the lake, please get in touch with us! Email Lydia at [Lgodfrey@isantiswcd.org](mailto:Lgodfrey@isantiswcd.org) or call 763-689-3271.*



We hosted a webinar in partnership with the Lower St Croix Watershed called Living Large on a Small Lake: Exploring Natural Environment Lakes. During the webinar, we learned what to expect living on a small lake, how they are different from recreational lakes, and how to improve their water quality. We also learned about the special regulations that exist for natural environment lakes. Our District Manager, Tiffany Determan, also spoke about the data we have collected on the small lakes in Oxford Township and our ongoing conservation efforts. In the end, we had time for a riveting Q&A session where we were able to answer many questions from small lake residents.

Good news: the webinar was recorded! Click the image below to watch it or visit:

[https://youtu.be/V\\_L1kkjp\\_fu?si=x57X4fT2Qt2pN1TS](https://youtu.be/V_L1kkjp_fu?si=x57X4fT2Qt2pN1TS)



## The Rum River's Treasures

The Rum River is home to unique treasures finally coming to the surface. This summer's drought has created low, clear water. Seizing this opportunity, a few locals are finding a myriad of historic items on the river bottom in Isanti County.

Cambridge area resident Jamie Schurbon, who also works on river improvement projects, reports that a few local teenagers have been scouring the river by canoe. River currents push their craft at just the right pace to allow a good scanning of the bottom for anything out of the ordinary. They can see up to five feet down, which isn't the norm for a river that often has the color of rum. Sightings include thousands of clam shells, rocks (some as big as refrigerators), and fish of all sorts (bass, northern, bluegill, redhorse suckers, and more). The real excitement is spotting something brown, aged, and not a natural shape.



When an item is spotted, they dive and retrieve it. Some artifacts are shallow enough to grab while standing on the river bottom. For deeper items, there is a dive with a snorkel and mask.

A few of the items found include...

- A 1950's Ford pickup tailgate.
- Four Weymann's smokeless tobacco ceramic jars from the early 1900's or maybe late 1800's. This company was the predecessor to Copenhagen. Why the jars were so abundant in the river is unknown.
- There's a Burnett's Cocaine bottle, likely from 1900-05. This product contained no opiates but instead was a hair treatment apparently trying to capitalize on the success of "coco-" named products like Coca-Cola.
- A small bottle emblazoned "Sperm Sewing Machine Oil." It dates from sometime before 1970, when sperm whale hunting was outlawed. Sperm whale oil production was huge in the



1850's, and it was expensive stuff.

- There's a glass Palmolive shampoo bottle from sometime between 1898 and 1916. Other assorted bottles without clear markings are in the mix.

Conspicuously rare was modern-day trash. It was present, of course, but seemingly outnumbered by historic relics. Items telling the story of the river's earlier history prior to European settlement were also not among the items reportedly found. But it's well understood that the Rum River was important for Native Americans, including acting as a travel-way. Today, the river is protected as one of seven Minnesota Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers, making it a place where paddlers can get a little sense of what it used to be like around many area waters.

Local governments along the Rum River and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe have identified the river itself as a treasure. They, including the Isanti SWCD, recently organized to protect and restore the Rum River watershed, which stretches from Mille Lacs Lake to the Anoka Dam. The "Rum River Watershed Partnership" (RRWP) has a 10-year plan to work across all lands draining to the river, streams, and priority lakes. The group includes five counties, eight soil and water conservation districts, and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. The waters flow across their jurisdictions, so a team effort on mutual priorities is needed.

One of the recently found river bottom treasures carried a message that might, in part, be a motto with which the Partnership could relate. It was a not-so-old private property sign covered in river sediment and slime. Cleaning revealed the words "we care about this land." As the treasure hunters found, what is on the land can end up in the river. With the efforts of the RRWP and others, clearer water in the Rum River watershed should become more common.

More information about the Rum River Watershed Partnership is available at [www.millelacsswcd.org](http://www.millelacsswcd.org) under "watershed plans."



## Funding For Projects on Green Lake

We are looking for willing landowners who want to install water quality projects on Green Lake! These projects help improve Green Lake by reducing algae blooms, improving fish and upland habitat, and minimizing erosion. Our program has funding to pay for up to 75% of the project's cost.

If you are interested, please speak to Todd Kulaf by emailing [Tkulaff@isantiswcd.org](mailto:Tkulaff@isantiswcd.org) or call 763-689-3271.

## Success Protecting Spectacle Lake

In 2019, Isanti SWCD, in partnership with the Spectacle Lake Association, secured funding to improve and protect Spectacle Lake. Since then, several Spectacle Lake homeowners have taken advantage of this opportunity to install projects that protect water quality. This year, we installed the final projects under the grant. Through this grant, we were able to:

- Install five rain gardens around the lake that will greatly reduce runoff from entering the lake. These gardens will also provide valuable pollinator habitat.
- Complete two hillside and shoreline restorations that prevent runoff and reduce sediment from eroding in the lake.
- Prevent 19.82 pounds of phosphorus from washing into the lake every year. This can prevent 9,910 pounds of algae from growing (one pound of phosphorus can result in 500 pounds of algae growth!)
- Install a rain garden at the popular Spectacle Lake public beach. Not only does the rain



garden trap a large volume of sediment and rainwater from the road, but it is also highly visible, increasing public interest in projects protecting the lake.

Through this work, we met our grant's total phosphorus reduction goal for Spectacle Lake and exceeded it! We had set a goal of reducing 13.7 pounds of total phosphorus but succeeded in reducing 19.82 pounds. This work got us 36% of the way to our overall protection goal for Spectacle Lake! In the coming years, we will complete more projects on the lake through the Rum River Watershed Partnership to continue protecting "the gem of Isanti County."

We are grateful for the Spectacle Lake Association, Wyanett Township, and the many landowners who partnered with us to install projects. If you live on Spectacle Lake and want to install a project, call us! We will add you to a list of interested landowners.

## Karen Shares Her Experience Partnering with the Isanti SWCD to Protect Spectacle Lake



Karen Miller used to have a problem with rainwater pooling on her lawn, killing the grass, and eventually running into Spectacle Lake. That was until she partnered with the Isanti SWCD to install two rain gardens on her property. Runoff is a common problem landowners face. Rainwater falls and cannot soak into the ground fast enough due to impervious surfaces, like concrete, or because it falls too quickly. It then runs over the landscape, picking up excess nutrients. It often ends up in our waterbodies, especially for those living on a lake. For this common problem enters an increasingly common solution- rain gardens.



Karen asserts she and her husband "are both environmentalists, so this kind of stuff has always been important to us." Previously, they had planted various native plants on their property's hillside. However, their green hillside was not enough to keep runoff from flowing down the hill into Spectacle Lake. That runoff carried sediment and phosphorus that can lead to algae blooms and put Spectacle Lake's beautiful water quality at risk. That's why when the Isanti SWCD received a grant from the Clean Water Land and Legacy Act, the Millers didn't hesitate to work with them to install a raingarden on their property.

Two rain gardens were installed on the Miller's property to collect the rain that came down their hill. Even though the first year was remarkably dry, Karen could still see a difference on her land. In the spring's snow melt, Karen said, "you could really see that it captured the water, and when we have had heavier rains, it captures it, and nothing is going down the hill anymore." The Miller's also used to see sand pilling up on rocks by their shoreline- a common sign of runoff. Now, their rain gardens capture all that sediment. In fact, every year, their project will prevent 616 pounds of sediment from entering Spectacle Lake. That's more than the average grizzly bear weighs!

Installing the rain gardens is not the end of Miller's dedication to protecting Spectacle Lake. Karen has been on the Spectacle Lake Association Board for years and now uses her project to educate others living around the lake. She invites neighbors interested in doing their part to reduce runoff to visit and discuss her rain gardens. Karen recognizes, "It's a little bit scary when you don't know exactly what to do and how to do it." That is why she was grateful to work with the Isanti SWCD. They not only help people install projects on their land, but they also provide free technical assistance to anyone. Like Karen's, landowners' passion for environmental stewardship and the support of local experts, like the Isanti SWCD, empower individuals to take action to protect their cherished natural resources.

## Funding for Cover Crops through Practical Farmers of Iowa

Practical Farmers of Iowa is accepting applications for thei r





cover crop cost-share program! This program is available to midwestern farmers, including those in Isanti and neighboring counties. Payment rates are \$10 per acre on an unlimited number of acres, and they may be stacked with other publicly funded cost-share programs.

The application can easily **be filled out online**. But hurry! Applications will close on December 1st.

## Contact Details

### Call Us

763-689-3271

### Office

110 Buchanan Street North Cambridge, MN 55008

### Email Us

**Send Email**

Website: [www.isantiswcd.org](http://www.isantiswcd.org)



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Isanti SWCD | 110 Buchanan St. N, Cambridge, MN 55008

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