



Mississippi River - Grand Rapids Watershed Restoration & Protection Strategies

Strategies for Water Quality Restoration

Protecting our Forests

When we think about protecting water quality by managing land, we often think about the land directly adjacent to a lake or stream. Restoring shorelines, managing run-off, and reducing erosion can all have a great positive impact on water quality. But depending on the watershed, land use changes many miles away can play a big role on a lake or stream's health. Modeling by the Minnesota DNR Fisheries Research Unit tells us that phosphorus concentrations in lakes are directly related to land use disturbance in the watershed. Watersheds where less than 75% of the land is forested have increased phosphorus concentrations in their lakes. That is why it is so important that we keep our forests forested. One way we can accomplish this goal is through forest protection programs. There are many options available for private land owners who want to protect water quality.

Forest Stewardship Plan:

An instrumental plan for family forest landowners who own 20 acres or more of forestland. This voluntary plan offers land management recommendations to landowners based on their goals for their property from a natural resource professional. Plans are updated every 10 years to stay current with your needs and your woods. A Forest Stewardship Plan registered with the DNR qualifies you for woodland tax and financial incentive programs.

Sustainable Forest Incentive Act (SFIA):

SFIA is a tax incentive program available for landowners that have a registered Forest Stewardship Plan. This program offers an annual tax incentive payment per acre based off the amount of forest stewardship acres you have. Payments per acre range from the \$9-16.50, based off the length of covenant the landowner decides to enroll into. SFIA restricts land use conversion and subdivision of the parcel(s). A minimum of 3 acres must be excluded from the SFIA program if there is a residential structure present, landowners can exclude more acres if they plan to make future improvements on the land.

Conservation Easements:

Most, but not all conservation easements are perpetual. Some landowners want to ensure their land will never be developed or converted to another use by selling or donating a conservation easement. Conservation easements serve a variety of conservation purposes and are generally intended to protect important features of the property. They are voluntary, legally binding agreements by the landowner to give up some of the rights associated with their property such as the right to develop, divide, mine, or farm the land to protect the conservation features such as wildlife habitat, water quality, and forest health, to name a few.

Land Acquisition:

Land acquisition is an option to permanently protect the land by selling the land to a conservation organization, agency, or other land trust. Once purchased land is restored or maintained to perpetually protect important natural resource values.

Protecting a forest is just one step in helping protect water quality. Keeping our forests healthy is also vitally important. But what makes a forest healthy?

Forest Diversity:

A healthy forest is a diverse forest. Diverse forests are less at risk for disease, invasive species/pest outbreaks, storm damage and are more adaptable to climate change. You’ve most likely heard the old saying “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket,” and the same saying applies to your forest. Diversity allows the forest to naturally cope with a wide variety of challenges.



Diverse and healthy forests are good for water quality. They reduce run-off by increasing and maintaining healthy canopy cover and soil infiltration. Healthy trees, a variety of shrubs and understory plant cover also provide deep roots that can hold the soil in place. It’s like having a giant water treatment system on your land!

Healthy forests also provide habitat for a larger variety of wildlife by providing different types of habitat for all sorts of species that depend on having a nice mix of young , mid and old forest.

Forest Diversity comes not only from a diversity of tree species but also from a diversity of ages.

The Importance of Young Forests:

Many species of birds need young forests during part of their life cycle. Before European Settlement, young forests were created by forest fires, beaver activity, pest outbreaks, and storms. In modern times, we largely rely on wood harvests to create new young forest habitat. The wood products industry plays an important role in keeping populations of Warblers, Woodcock, and Grouse alive. The best protected forest is a managed forest.



For more information. Please contact one of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts partnering on this project.

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