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Contact Robb Leer 612.701.0608

Central Minnesota awarded crucial funding for protecting environment

More than \$2 million in grants and loans secured by the Sauk River Watershed District means a cleaner future for area lakes, rivers and groundwater.

SAUK CENTRE, MINN. (February 03, 2011) — The mission to protect the environment enjoyed by central Minnesota’s citizens and visitors has scored a string of victories by locking up grants and loans topping \$2 million that are aimed at improving the water quality of the Sauk River and its tributaries.

The Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD) pursued and secured vital funding from various state agencies for eight grant projects developed to prioritize areas of concern, assist in the upgrading of noncompliant septic systems, protect waters from stormwater runoff and erosion and confront a host of other challenges.

The SRWD has been very successful in securing grant and loan funds since 1994. The SRWD has received funding for loans totaling approximately \$3 million in grants and \$6 million in loan funds during this timeframe. However 2009 was a difficult year for the SRWD to secure grant and loan assistance.

“We are truly excited about these funding opportunities available to the landowners,” said Holly Kovarik, administrator of the SRWD, which is marking its 25th anniversary this year. “This is our chance to put projects on the ground.”

Kovarik said some of the money comes from the three-eighths of a percent sales tax increase that voters approved as an amendment to the State Constitution in 2008.

“The benefit of that vote in support of the Legacy Amendment is closer to reality than you might think,” Kovarik said. “We can’t thank our citizens enough for their foresight and for understanding the importance of the environmental preservation we can all enjoy through this minimal financial sacrifice.”

Specifically, here is a glimpse at the eight projects that will share in about \$1.36 million in grants and \$800,000 in loans awarded by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency:

- **Todd County Surface Water Assessment Grant:** To determine lake water quality status and identify lakes that are not meeting state standards.
- **SRWD Watershed-Wide Groundwater Protection Project:** Identify and halt threats from abandoned wells and noncompliant septic systems.
- **Sauk River Water Quality Protection, Phase III:** Addressing stormwater runoff and erosion threats from municipal and rural sources.
- **Lower Sauk River Water Quality Protection:** Halt the river's degradation and prevent it from being categorized as impaired.
- **Osakis Shoreland Enhancement Continuation:** Restore shorelines of Osakis Lake to a natural state and address the threat to the Sauk River from stormwater runoff.
- **SRWD Watershed-Wide Stormwater Initiative:** Reduce the amount of stormwater runoff and its accompanying pollutants that enter the Sauk River. The SRWD will partner with local schools and cities to begin "Rain Garden Initiatives." This effort will put rain gardens and treatment trains on school and public property.
- **Technical Assistance for Sauk River Watershed-Mississippi River Basin Initiative:** Begun in 2010, this initiative funds technical assistance for landowners in developing and designing projects that directly impact the water quality of the Sauk and Mississippi rivers.
- **DNR Grand Lake Shoreland Habitat Assessment:** This project aims to conduct a physical assessment of the shoreline to determine what changes need to take place to increase aquatic habitat which also benefits water quality.

In addition to these grant projects, the SRWD assisted similar efforts in Douglas, Stearns, Todd and Pope Counties to complete the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative grant application for the Sauk River Watershed area. Douglas County Natural Resources Conservation Service and Douglas County Soil and Water Conservation District received \$8 million for the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program; the four-county partnership was also awarded \$4 million for areas located from the Osakis Lake outlet to the Cold Spring Dam on the Sauk River Chain of Lakes. This project will be led by the Stearns County Natural Resource Conservation Service Office and the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District.

About the Sauk River Watershed District: As a local government body, the SRWD was formed in 1986 and extends from its headwaters on Lake Osakis to St. Cloud, where it flows into the Mississippi River. The district's namesake, the Sauk River, meanders for 120 miles. Members of the District's Board of Managers are appointed to three-year terms by commissioners from the five counties to represent the interests of Douglas, Meeker, Pope, Stearns and Todd counties. For more about the SRWD, visit www.srwdmn.org or call 1-320-352-2231.

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