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Tributary feeding Sauk River is targeted for federally funded cleanup

The Sauk River Watershed District went to bat before the EPA for 3 troubled creeks; one of them is now officially declared 'impaired'

SAUK CENTRE, MN. (February 17, 2011) – Three primary creeks that feed the middle reach of Sauk River – and subsequently, the Mississippi River -- have caught the eye of federal authorities because of pollutants that are clouding these crucial waterways.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), last week designated one of the creeks as impaired, which means it does not meet water quality standards. This designation means that the Sauk River Watershed District has the mandate, and the duty to tackle this vital cleanup project. To accomplish this task, the SRWD and its agency partners will be pursuing clean –up funds for this creek.

“Currently there are several funding opportunities for landowners located in the watershed’s contributing to these water resources,” said Holly Kovarik, Administrator for the Sauk River Watershed District. “Funding is available for best management practices that will help to address the impairments.”

Stearns County’s Unnamed Creek located in Spring Hill and Lake Henry Townships is victimized by what is known as turbidity, a key measure of a waterway’s quality, which leaves a cloudy or hazy presence and is caused by microscopic particles suspended in the water.

In making its “impairment” designation, the EPA also noted the perils of turbidity affecting two other creeks in the same watershed, Getchell and Stony. This bureaucratic nod smooths the path to success for the Sauk River Watershed District when it renews its mission for impaired status for the two creeks to the north of Unnamed Creek.

“After pursuing this for two years, this notification and approval opens up a pool of money and resources so the work can begin,” said Greg Van Eeckhout, a watershed project manager for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency in Brainerd. “Land owners in this watershed will be well served.”

Unnamed Creek, indeed its name, lies roughly halfway between Melrose to its north and Paynesville to its south. The creek’s watershed spans nearly 11,000 acres, with more than 85 percent of that land fueling the region’s agricultural industry as pasture or for growing corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and spring wheat.

“By starting to address water quality on the tributaries upstream,” Van Eeckhout said, “the Sauk River’s chain of lakes will benefit, since all these waterways are connected.”

More than a decade of data collected during monitoring led to the Sauk River Watershed District and its allies to this point in pursuit of federal cleanup funding for Unnamed, Gretchell and Stony Creeks.

Specifically, the Watershed District now must turn that funding – born out of the federal Clean Water Act of 1972 -- into action against numerous sources that are harming Unnamed Creek: among them field erosion, creek bank erosion, stormwater, and algae and plant production.

While Unnamed was the lone creek to be categorized by the EPA as impaired, Getchell and Stony were identified as significant sources of excess nutrients and sediments flowing into the Sauk River, and then to the Mississippi River.

About the Sauk River Watershed District

As a local government body, the SRWD extends from within 3 miles of Alexandria at the outlet of Osakis Lake flowing south to the Mississippi River near St. Cloud. The district’s namesake, the Sauk River, meanders for 120 miles. The SRWD District marks its 25th anniversary in service to citizens on July 25, 2011. Members of its 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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