



A Team Approach to Land Use and Natural Resource Planning

July 2015 Snapshots

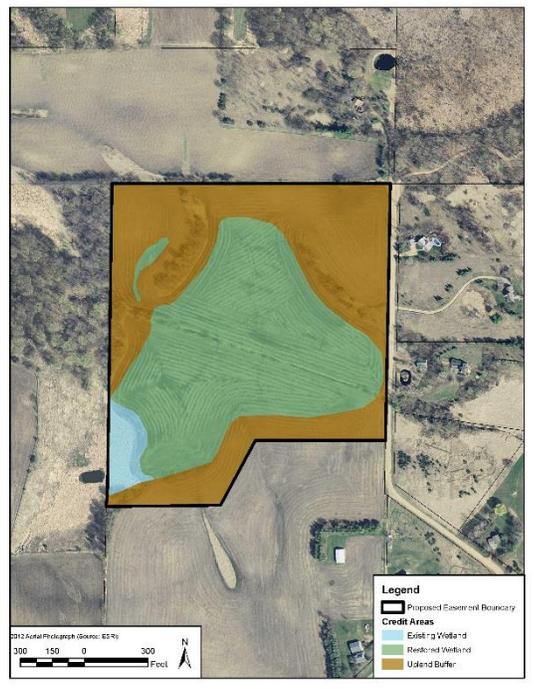
When members of the Mader family reached out to the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) about some land the family owned in Minnetrista, they expected a routine government interaction, not the seed of a much bigger, history-making plan.

The Mader Family Trust was considering selling the 77-acre parcel for development and wanted to both maximize its return on the sale and preserve the site's natural heritage. The property contains a large but degraded wetland complex and the Trust members contacted the District to see how its rules would affect their decision.



What resulted from that initial conversation between the Trust, City of Minnetrista, and MCWD is a testament to the power of teamwork, communication and creative problem solving in the world of land use and natural resources protection. Instead of a landowners-versus-regulators conflict, the groups worked together to come up with a plan that everyone benefits from.

Under the City of Minnetrista's standard zoning rules, the property was only eligible to be divided into six residential lots. Under the District's standard wetland rules, the project would have foregone any restoration and preserve only the 22-acre wetland.



Instead, the partners developed a plan that calls for the eventual developer to restore the wetland and adjoining upland -- a total of 42 acres. The restoration would qualify the property as a "cluster development" under the City of Minnetrista's zoning rules, allowing for an additional four properties, increasing the value for the developer and boosting potential tax base for the city.

"The City of Minnetrista is excited about the potential for this project to serve as an example of what can be achieved through creative collaboration," David Abel, Minnetrista Community Development Director, said.

Lastly -- and this is where making history comes in -- the developer who restores the wetland is eligible to earn "wetland bank" credits, which can be sold to other developers around the state. It would be the first wetland bank within the MCWD, reversing a trend that for many years led to a net loss of wetlands within the District.

When a project impacts a wetland and that impact cannot be mitigated on site, builders can buy credits from a "wetland bank" that funds restoration and preservation of wetlands elsewhere. At present, builders within the District that need

The site, pictured top, will be restored to a wetland, the first wetland bank within the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District.

to mitigate wetland disturbances on their site only have the option of purchasing credits from outside the District's boundaries. This agreement with the Mader Family Trust and the City of Minnetrista would make those wetland credits available for purchase within the MCWD – helping finance the preservation of wetlands somewhere else in the District.

Partnerships such as this are the foundation of how MCWD does its work, and the focus of its next 10-year Comprehensive Plan that's currently being developed.

“As we have learned time and again, it pays off to think beyond business as usual,” said James Wisker, MCWD Director of Projects and Planning explained. “By working with landowners, cities and others in a pro-active and collaborative manner, the District is able to obtain higher community and natural resource benefits than what could be achieved with a standard, reactive approach.”

Jim Mader admits he did not know what to expect when they approached MCWD and City last year, but was pleasantly surprised by the result. “District staff helped us understand the possibilities available to us and established a high level of trust,” Mader said. “We have learned a lot along the way and it has been a terrific experience.”