



CCM and BWSR: Working together for water quality

November 2015 Snapshots



Since 2007, Conservation Corps Minnesota has received Legacy funds from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to partner with local governments throughout the state on projects to restore and protect water quality of streams, rivers, and lakes. Based on the tradition of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Conservation Corps Minnesota's goals are to help young people become more connected to the environment, engaged in conservation, involved in the community and prepared for future employment. The Corps provides training in resource management, safety, job-readiness and technical skills, and helps young people develop personal responsibility, a strong work ethic and environmental stewardship through direct service managing natural resources. Young adults serve in crews of 4 to 6 people, volunteering as AmeriCorps national service participants for 8 to 10 months to restore public lands in their communities.

"The partnership is a win-win for everyone involved" said Tim Johnson-Grass, Program Director. "Local government partners receive funded labor for smaller-scale projects and Conservation Corps Minnesota AmeriCorps members gain restoration skills while helping improve water quality in their community." Legacy funds from BWSR enable the Corps to partner with local government units on around 50 projects each year, engaging over 85 AmeriCorps members in direct service improving water quality.

Local Project Spotlight: Riceford Creek Cedar Revetment Project in Houston County

Root River Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) in Houston County, The Nature Conservancy, and Conservation Corps Minnesota (the Corps) are working together to restore wildlife habitat and improve water quality. In a new twist on an old concept, Conservation Corps crews are restoring bluff prairies and shoring up a quarter mile segment of Riceford Creek by recycling natural materials.

Corps crews have already prepared approximately 1,300 feet of Riceford Creek for restoration and are starting to clear approximately 80 invasive cedar trees from nearby bluff prairies. Crews will lay the trees end-to-end along a stretch of Riceford Creek and anchor them to the stream bank to help prevent erosion and reduce the amount of sediment and phosphorous entering the creek. Excess sediment and phosphorous can damage aquatic habitat and contribute to algae blooms. "The land is being returned to a more natural condition," said Rich Biske, who oversees The Nature Conservancy's work in Southeast Minnesota. "And using these trees to shore up a beautiful stream and help clean up our waters is a big bonus."

Root River SWCD identified willing landowners and applied to BWSR for a Clean Water Fund grant that was made possible as a result of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. Funding for the project was also provided by the Mosaic Foundation.



Photo of partners prepping Riceford Creek for restoration. Photo Credit: © Rich Biske/TNC

“Water quality affects everyone and Conservation Corps Minnesota is honored to be a part of the first stream bank revetment in this area,” said Drew Wilwert, AmeriCorps Crew Leader. “Projects like these are important to prevent soil erosion and limit farm chemical run off. It has been a great learning experience working directly with The Nature Conservancy and Root River Soil and Water Conservation District.”

Root River SWCD and Conservation Corps Minnesota were key to the project, said Biske, who conceived of the effort to clear the bluff prairies of cedar and then use the material to restore the stream. The Nature Conservancy and Root River SWCD have worked together for years to implement targeted conservation practices to help restore the Root River. Likewise, Conservation Corps Minnesota has long helped the Conservancy keep its preserves in good natural condition by clearing bush, removing invasive species and conducting prescribed burns. “They’ve been great partners,” Biske said.

Conservation Corps Minnesota is currently looking for local government partners interested in working with field crews in 2016. The Corps has crews based statewide that are available for assistance in the Twin Cities Metro area and Greater Minnesota and is especially interested in expanding its work in southern and western Minnesota. More information about the program can be found at <http://www.conservationcorps.org/clean-water-funding/>.