



Community comes together to restore McKusick Lake

April 2015 Snapshots



McKusick Lake, nestled along the St. Croix River flyway in the heart of the City of Stillwater, is a community staple where residents love to fish and watch wildlife. When the lake was listed as impaired in 2006 for failing to meet state water quality standards for nutrients, it was a big wake-up call for the community.

The first step was determining what practices would get McKusick Lake back on track. A lake management plan and a subwatershed assessment - a computer-based mapping and pollutant analysis – created a community road map for targeting practices in the lake and on the land to improve the lake’s water quality. When completed, these plans identified the most cost-effective practices in the best locations to reduce phosphorus and meet the environmental and recreational goals for the lake.



High phosphorus levels resulted in algal blooms in Lake McKusick.

Once the community knew what was needed, it was time to get to work. Multiple partners, including the Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization (MSCWMO), Browns Creek Watershed District, City of Stillwater, McKusick Lake Association, and homeowners, collaborated to approach the problem from a variety of angles.

The MSCWMO applied for and received state grants, including Clean Water Fund grants from the Board of Water and Soil Resources, to install projects to improve the lake’s water quality. Pollution reduction from residential raingardens, shoreline plantings, and larger stormwater projects improved McKusick Lake enough to meet state water quality standards.

But the community didn’t stop there. Over the last five years, the partners invested substantial time and resources to build support from local elected leaders, the lake association, local governments, and landowners within the watershed to reduce pollutant loading.

“This long-term investment has reduced stormwater nutrients directly discharging to McKusick Lake by nearly 25%,” Mike Isensee, watershed administrator, says. “It’s also increased landowner understanding and support of conservation practices needed to restore McKusick Lake to a high quality and productive public water.”

Today, the Middle St. Croix Watershed and community remains committed to the cause. The MSCWMO has hosted *Blue Thumb – Planting for Clean Water* workshops for the public annually since 2008. The organization also provides funding for the East Metro Water Resources program, which publishes over 50 articles each year devoted to water quality and conservation education. During street reconstruction projects the City of Stillwater and Washington County install water quality practices to treat stormwater before discharging to the Lake. The combined outreach and efforts have helped reinforce public support of water quality improvement, and the upward trend in water quality shows their hard work is paying off for McKusick Lake and the greater St. Croix River.