



Where Water and Forests Meet

May 2016 Snapshots

As much as lakes are a central part of our state's identity, the trees that line so many of those lakes are just as important. When we think about water quality, many conservation practices come to mind, but for many of us, forest management isn't one we'd naturally think about.

The truth is, trees help minimize erosion, keeping soil on the land and helping to filter pollutants out of the water supply. Urban forests can reduce annual stormwater by 2-7% and a mature tree can store 50 to 100 gallons of water during large storms. Annual phosphorus discharge from forested lands is estimated at just a tenth of a pound per acre per year. When that land is developed, no matter the use, discharge increases exponentially.

Private forested lands are the most vulnerable to these kinds of development concerns, and in the northeast and north central forest zones of the state, work is ramping up to conserve these lands and keep them forested. Dan Steward, a long-serving Board Conservationist at the Board of Water and Soil Resources, has shifted roles in recent months. In his new role, he is working closely with the Department of Natural Resources Forestry Division and the Forest Resources Council to build and establish a water quality and habitat protection strategy around private forest management and local water planning.



Forested lands along the Mississippi will be targeted as part of this program.

What does that mean? To start, it means working closely with the counties in the region, especially those in the Mississippi Headwaters, to help them work through what it means to establish a protection strategy and a forest cover-based minor watershed approach as part of their county water plan updates.

Increased capacity funding for soil and water conservation districts means that many of these counties now have staff who are able to focus more of their time working with landowners on forest management and conservation opportunities. The program helps align county water planning with the work being done by the DNR, using easements and other conservation practices to really help protect wildlife and water quality. Unlike more traditional agricultural easements, working forests easements allow landowners to continue to harvest and manage their timber under an approved Forest Stewardship Plan.

"Public interest is often greatest where the water and forest meet," Steward said. "In many cases, your best habitat and biggest water quality impacts are there – that's the sweet spot. All of these partners are working together to use the practices and resources available to make sure we are protecting these corridors and maximizing public benefit."