



# Brown's Creek Watershed District goes the extra mile for outreach

October 2015 Snapshots

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Developing a watershed management plan is a complicated process, with a lot of moving parts. Minnesota has 46 watershed districts, and all of them are required by state law to operate under one of these plans, which typically cover a 10-year time period. Watershed districts use these plans to develop a broad range of programs and services to protect and improve water quality. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is the state agency that approves these plans.



In 2015, Brown's Creek Watershed District formally began the process of developing its next 10-year watershed management plan. Two of their first tasks? Public engagement and issue identification. For District Administrator Karen Kill, this is the second time she's developed a watershed management plan for BCWD, and this time, she set out to try different outreach methods to engage audiences the district hadn't heard from before.



The BCWD capitalized on events and promotional activities around the new Brown's Creek State Trail to get more people interested and involved in the events of the district. A series of events held in partnership with the DNR – including a nature photography workshop, a plant identification walk, and a bird walk – were used to reach different audiences and generate excitement about the work happening in the district. The events culminated in an ice cream social and open house held on June 16<sup>th</sup>.

*Activities like a plant identification walk, top, and an ice cream social, bottom, brought the work of the watershed district to a much wider audience.*

To get attendees out on the trail and engaged in the conservation work being done, the BCWD created a bingo card that participants had stamped at each site. The 200-plus people in attendance learned about the watershed district's activities, toured Clean Water Fund projects, got to experience the beauty of the trail and more. District staff and board managers were on hand at each stop to answer questions and provide information.

Significant for the district, they were also able to get much more diverse public input into their work than ever before. Kill set up a survey station – with both electronic and paper surveys available – and got input from 45 individual households during the event. What struck her most was that these were families the district didn't usually interact with, so they got a chance to collect information about resource concerns and issues they might not otherwise have received.

“It was everything we hoped it would be,” Kill said. “We tapped into so many different groups – families, couples, recreational users – and for a pretty minimal investment. That face-to-face feedback is really helpful for our planning process. We’d do it again.”

The District is also engaging residents through other outreach events, meeting residents where they are instead of waiting for the community to come to them. In July, they scheduled an evening gathering at a restaurant in one of the quieter areas of the watershed. They had lots of data on the lakes in the neighborhood, but instead of marketing the gathering as a chance for residents to learn about what the district knew, they asked residents to come share their own lake stories and observations. The gathering lasted long after the formal presentation was finished.

Brown’s Creek has reached out to the business community, as well, scheduling meetings with developers and others to gather as much information for their next 10-year plan as they can.

Reflecting on the process, Kill said, “It’s certainly been more time consuming to do this extra level of outreach but I really think we’re going to get a much stronger plan, and one with much better buy-in from the general public. At the end of the day, that’s worth the effort.”