

Fish Creek Partnership

A project of the
CHEQUAMEGON BAY
CBAP
AREA PARTNERSHIP

people working for cleaner water

Summer 2017

EDITOR'S NOTE

Fish Creek Partnership Update



Matt Hudson



Megan Mader

AS A LANDOWNER in the Fish Creek watershed, you've been receiving these newsletters two-to-three times per year for the past several years. It's worth revisiting why. All of you who live or own property in the watershed are connected by the streams that flow into Fish Creek and eventually Chequamegon Bay.

This is a special place with many people who care deeply about Fish Creek and want to see it be the best it can be. The project that brings you this newsletter is an attempt to actively work with private landowners, agencies, and groups to improve Fish Creek. Funding for the work comes from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Projects like the one featured in this newsletter are examples of how our project team has worked with landowners over the past few years to improve areas draining to Fish Creek and other local streams. There are more great projects scheduled to happen this summer and I want to thank all the members of our project team and the private landowners who have helped us achieve much so far.

I also want to take a moment to thank our former Chequamegon

Bay Area Partnership Coordinator, Val Damstra, for her work to bring you this newsletter and her help to coordinate broader resource management activities in the Chequamegon Bay region. Val has taken a new position with UW-Extension and will continue to work with resource managers and landowners in the area to deliver conservation projects where they are most needed.

In Val's absence, I have taken over the role of editor for the Fish Creek Partnership newsletter, and am pleased to bring you this edition that features several stories written by Megan Mader, a talented Northland College student who works with me at the Mary Griggs Burke Center for Freshwater Innovation at Northland College. We hope you enjoy this edition and please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this newsletter and our work to improve Fish Creek. Thank you!

Matt Hudson

Water Scientist

715-682-1481

mhudson@northland.edu

Bluff Stabilization Site Identified

For the past several years, a team of resource professionals and landowners tried to complete a project to stabilize a large, eroding bluff along the south side of Old Hwy. 2, just west of the confluence of North Fish and Pine creeks. We have reported on this project in previous editions of this newsletter. Unfortunately, we were not able to get all necessary approvals in place to complete the project at that site.

The good news is that a potential new site has been identified, upstream of the previous one on North Fish

Creek. The project team is working hard to get approvals and design in place. If all goes well, the plan is to construct the project before the end of September 2017. Stay tuned for progress.

There are approximately twenty of these eroding bluffs that contribute two-thirds of the sediment from Fish Creek into Chequamegon Bay. By stabilizing the worst of these sites, the long-term goal of our project is to improve fish habitat in Fish Creek and reduce sediment inputs to Chequamegon Bay.



▲ Ben Dufford, Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department and Ben Lee, Inter-Fluve, Inc. at a North Fish Creek bluff erosion site being considered for stabilization. Photo by Michele Wheeler, Wisconsin DNR.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can now request conservation assistance online.

Farmers and private landowners can now do business with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through an easily accessible online portal. The Conservation Client Gateway gives landowners a choice between conducting business online or visiting a USDA Service Center. The online portal enables farmers and private landowners to securely:

- Request NRCS technical and financial assistance;
- Review and sign conservation plans and practice schedules;
- Complete and sign an application for a conservation program;
- Review, sign and submit contracts and appendices for conservation programs;
- Document completed practices and request certification of completed practices;
- Request and track payments for conservation programs; and
- Store and retrieve technical and financial files, including documents and photographs.

To learn more or to sign up for Conservation Client Gateway, visit: www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway and click Get Started.

If you have questions about your land, or would like to request a free site visit on your property with a natural resource expert, please email My Lake Superior Northwoods at info@mylakesuperiornorthwoods.org or call 715-913-0006.

Bayfield County Working for Landowners



◀ Bayfield Co. Land and Water Conservation Department staff, Travis Tulowitzky and Anne Leafblad, survey a cow lot in Barksdale as part of completing a project with a private landowner. Photo by Ben Dufford, Bayfield Co. Land and Water Conservation Department.

The Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department is a resource that is ready to help land owners make the best use of their land and preserve it for many generations to come. Contact them at:

615 2nd Avenue E
P.O. Box 126
Washburn, WI 54891
715-373-6167

BY MEGAN MADER

The Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD) works with private landowners on water, agriculture, sediment, erosion, and other resource issues—from improving barnyards, to replacing culverts, installing fencing around streams, and creating wetland habitat.

LWCD staff Ben Dufford and Travis Tulowitzky say working with landowners in the area is rewarding because there is so much appreciation for the land, and people here are proud of what they have.

Dufford and Tulowitzky perform every job start to finish, hiring local private contractors to complete construction. All funding comes from the state or through grants, which allows them to work efficiently with landowners to make projects happen on a timely basis.

Some projects in the works for 2017 include finishing a covered barnyard, placing fencing around streams to

prevent cattle from entering them and installing well water sources as an alternative drinking source for the cattle. They also will be implementing grazing plans, culvert replacements and streambank erosion control, among many more projects.

Dufford and Tulowitzky both commented on how the progress and benefits of these projects can be seen immediately.

For those asking why these projects? The benefits can be seen through the county and across the Chequamegon Bay region. Preventing cattle from being in and near streams improves water quality, reduces potentially harmful pollution from reaching Chequamegon Bay and improves fishing. Creating wetland basins “slows the flow” of runoff to streams and is valuable to many waterfowl and other bird species, which hunters and bird watchers alike can agree on the importance of. Replacing culverts and stabilizing

bluffs reduces erosion and the loss of property, while improving water quality.

“We all like local milk, beef, eggs, chicken, and crops, and these projects help ensure the continuation of healthy natural resources and the continuation of local multi-generation farms,” Dufford says.

Not only are these projects beneficial to land and water users, but for property owners, they can help improve farm operations, protect land from erosion, and improve property values. Owners can often receive tax breaks for their conservation efforts. There are no costs to landowners for design work of projects, and the LWCD can cost share up to seventy percent on most projects and even more on projects that have multiple benefits. In some cases, landowners can further reduce costs by providing their own equipment and labor to help with the project.



New Cow Lot Paves Way for Better Farming

BY MEGAN MADER

Perched on the hills near Washburn, Wisconsin just over two miles from Lake Superior, a local farmer works to make his small beef operation more environmentally friendly.

Larry Ekholm has been working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD) to make his farm an example of how hard work and cooperation can change landscapes and save farmers money.

If not managed properly, runoff from farms can be harmful to water bodies by adding nutrients to the water that can cause harmful algal blooms. Ekholm's property is cut by Bono

Creek, which empties directly into Lake Superior.

In fact, it was Bono Creek that led the NRCS to Ekholm, to ask if he'd be interested in making changes to his cow lot to better preserve the recreational, cultural, and natural services the stream provides.

NRCS proposed that he replace his muddy cow lot with a concrete base that drains waste through a filtration system, preventing harmful runoff from entering the stream. With the NRCS, LWCD, private contractors, and Ekholm's own hard work, the project was completed in a few weeks.

A layer of geotextile material covered by another layer of geogrid material was topped by gravel, then

five inches of concrete. Steel rebar was inserted at one foot intervals to reinforce the concrete and make it permanent and the system then drains into a filtration lot of grass.

Ekholm says the project was successful and transformed the lot from a muddy mess where "the cows were in mud up to their bellies," to an easily cleaned concrete slab that also prevents manure-laden runoff from entering Bono Creek.

The project was successful enough to prompt Ekholm to design a secondary lot paved by asphalt. This lot is an experimental work of art built similarly to the first concrete lot. The asphalt lot has the same layering of materials, minus the rebar, and a drain pipe

seventy feet long that runs into the filtration lot.

The NRCS cost-shared fifty percent of the project, and the LWCD covered seventy-five percent of the remaining fifty percent. This left Ekholm with minimal costs that were accounted for in his time and work that he put into the project himself.

"All of these guys were great to work with," Ekholm says. "They all did a great job and did it right."

This partnership transformed Ekholm's property into a high quality system that is no longer a "money pit," Ekholm says.

Ekholm can now better utilize his pastures and has gained grazing area—and can get an extra three to four days of grazing out of a lot now. Also, Ekholm says he is saving money on fertilizer by spreading his own

manure on the fields he uses for hay to feed the animals.

Ekholm reports that the overall health of his animals has also been greatly improved by the paved lots. He used to expect two to four cases of hoof rot—caused by damp conditions and ample bacteria present in muddy pastures— but hasn't seen any cases since making the changes.

In the past, when the mud was knee deep, Ekholm had to pull newborn calves in sleds just to get them somewhere they could stand. "It's a great stress off of me," he says, and he notes saving greatly in vet bills.

Ekholm is planning on adding another project as well—a watering system that will reduce cattle traffic, preventing the ground from being further torn up by constant wear as they trek to a water source every

day. This system will be comprised of a waterline and a system of spigots running through a series of pastures that will ensure the cattle are always watered.

"I would recommend working with them [NRCS and LWCD] because they do it right and are really good to work with," says Ekholm. "When I retire, this place will be all set for future farmers to move in and take over," he says.

Ekholm encourages others to look into contacting the NRCS and LWCD when they buy property and get good pointers as to what they can do to better their property.

If nothing else, Ekholm's projects provide an inspiration as to how easy and cost-effective it can be for farmers and other landowners to make progressions of their own that can better the landscape for future generations.



▲ Larry Ekholm's finished cow lot improvement project (left) and before construction (above).

Watch Out for Worms

BY MEGAN MADER

While proficient at composting table scraps and attracting fish to a hook, worms can also be really good at harming ecosystems. The Great Lakes Region has become host to fifteen worm species that are not native to this area according to Andy Teal, aquatic invasive species coordinator with the Bayfield County Land & Water Conservation Department. In fact, due to glaciation in the Great Lakes Basin, native terrestrial worm species have not been here for at least 11,000 years. This has allowed our forests to develop rich layers of duff—decomposed leaf litter—that are capable of supporting our vast forests. Unfortunately, due to worms, those layers are now at risk.

Worms are voracious eaters of organic material. In some instances, this is useful. In others, it is not. In the case of our forests, many of our tree and plant species have evolved to

continued on next page



▲ The top picture shows an example of the lack of ground vegetation in a forest area infested with earthworms. The bottom photo shows a healthy forest floor not affected by earthworms.

Photo credit: University of Minnesota

GET THE DIRT

Under the Wisconsin Invasive Species Rule (NR 40) it is illegal to transport several species of worms.

Go to <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/invasives/classification.html> for more a more detailed description of the rule.

For more info on worms go to <http://greatlakeswormwatch.org/forest/index.html>

For more information on safely composting with worms, check out

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/eeek/earth/recycle/compost2.htm>

WORMS continued

thrive and grow specifically in rich duff layers. Among those species are sugar maple. Without thick layers of leaf litter, their seeds cannot germinate, and saplings can't grow. Sugar maples are an important component of the forest products industry and are essential to anyone who likes to take the sugary sap they produce and boil it into maple syrup. Also, thick layers of leaf litter prevent erosion and runoff which can be harmful to waterbodies and the landscape.

While it is unsure how these worms got here, it is believed that they may be a result of European settlement, and that anglers, compost, garden materials, or any activity that

moves soil around have caused the spread. Without human aid in their movements, earthworms spread at rates near a half mile per 100 years according to Great Lakes Worm Watch. With this in mind, we can prevent their spread to more areas that have not yet been invaded. As a gardener, only use, sell, trade, or purchase compost that is free of worms and has been properly treated to kill the worms and their eggs. Also, be sure to buy or sell plants and landscaping materials that are free of any traces of worms. Lastly, as a fisherman, be sure to throw your leftover worms in the garbage and not into the water or woods.

Snapshot



A wetland basin project in the Fish Creek watershed recently completed by a local contractor and the Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department.

CBAPPARTNERS

- Ashland County Land and Water Conservation Department
- Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Bad River Watershed Association
- Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department
- Bayfield Regional Conservancy
- City of Ashland, City of Bayfield
- Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department
- Northland College (sponsoring organization)
- Northwoods Cooperative Weed Management Area
- Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute (coordinating partner)
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- University of Wisconsin Extension-Basin Education
- Wild Rivers chapter of Trout Unlimited
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

The Fish Creek Partnership is a project of the Chequamegon Bay Area Partnership, which is coordinated through the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College. This newsletter is paid for by support from the Great Lakes Commission under the authorization of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.



Snapshot



Tom Maderich of Washburn caught this dandy steelhead from a Fish Creek watershed stream in mid-May. Nice fish Tom!

Lake Superior Day

Sunday, July 16, 2017
Thompson's West End Park
Washburn, WI
10 am – 3 pm

Come share your love of the lake! Pack a lunch and enjoy the beach for the day. Fun activities including:

10 am - noon

- Words for Water portraits
- Water quality monitoring demo
- Sailboat cruises

11am - noon

- Corn hole competition

1 pm - 3 pm

- Lighthouse monitoring station
- Beach volleyball games
- Sailboat cruises

For more information: Michele Wheeler 715-685-2912 or michele.wheeler@wisconsin.gov

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
ASHLAND, WI
PERMIT NO. 140

CHEQUAMEGON BAY
CBAP
AREA PARTNERSHIP
1411 Ellis Ave
Ashland, WI 54806
(715) 682-1326