



MARCH 2008

VOLUME 14 · ISSUE 3

# NEWS & VIEWS

RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# 2008 RIVER WATCH FORUM

Youth engagement in community service was the theme of the 13th Annual River Watch Forum held March 19th, 2008 at the UofM Crookston campus. High school students and teachers not only shared results of their water quality monitoring efforts but also how they are using skills and tools from the River Watch program to contribute to school and community vitality.

There was plenty of activity throughout the day for Forum participants to be engaged in. Over 150 students and teachers from 18 schools in Minnesota and North Dakota presented results of their monitoring via display boards and presentations. Resource managers and board members, presenters and interested citizens who attended for all or part of the day brought the attendance total to well over 200.

### FIRST, THE DATA

Starting with four high schools monitoring the Sand Hill River in 1995, Red River Basin River Watch has grown to 33 schools now monitoring in Manitoba, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Of this total, 26 Minnesota schools are supported by the Red River Watershed Management Board and individual watershed districts. In Minnesota alone, these schools monitored over 150 sites in 2007—providing enough data to officially assess 131 sites thus far.

The main impairment that Minnesota schools continue to find is high sediment as measured by turbidity. Of



*Bruce Paakh-MPCA with Bagley RW Team*

the 131 River Watch sites with enough data for assessments, 54 (41%) are considered impaired according to the current Minnesota state turbidity standard of 25 NTUs. In regard to dissolved oxygen, only 8 sites or 6% of the 131 River Watch sites fall below the 5 mg/l criteria for dissolved oxygen impairment. Individual school displays featured water quality conditions specific to each school's watershed.

### LEARNING NEW PERSPECTIVES

River Watch teams learned some new perspectives on watershed related topics as they rotated among four concurrent sessions. Dr. David DeMuth

of the UofM-Crookston illustrated how the new online River Watch database can be used as an interactive tool to guide research on a variety of topics related to watershed conditions. Dr. Mark Meister from NDSU shared research findings that he just completed regarding watershed awareness of the general public and challenged the RW teams to be a key part of a communications strategy to raise general awareness of watershed issues.

Joe Courneya, MN Extension led a panel discussion with recent high school and college graduates regarding career opportunities in the field of natural resources and information

*Continued...*

technology. New career guidebooks (see career guides at [www.internationalwaterinstitute.org/riverwatchmain.htm](http://www.internationalwaterinstitute.org/riverwatchmain.htm)) for these fields were introduced and useful skill sets for high school students were discussed. Learning while having fun playing River Watch Jeopardy was the name of the game as hosted by Dan Olson of the MPCA and the RRWMB's own Danni Halvorson.

### ENGAGEMENT

Youth involvement was emphasized in the opening address to the afternoon assembly by several members of CURE—Clean Up the River Environment, an organization working to celebrate and protect the Upper Minnesota River Watershed. High school students serve on their Board of Directors and have a real voice in raising awareness and generating involvement in river protection.

Ayla Winskowski, Stephen/Argyle Junior presented an overview of a variety of activities the S/A RW Team has been involved with in the school and community including conducting a summer science camp for younger students, teaching a GPS class for the community, establishing a school nature area, and helping younger students with the River of Dreams program.

Climax/Shelly River Watch rocked the house with a self-produced DVD about the Adopt-A-River clean-up they did on the Sand Hill River in 2007—mixing interviews of community members with river clean-up and canoeing action shots set to lively music.

Bagley River Watch provided a demonstration of two emerging activities that will likely become more common for other RW teams. One was their monitoring of macroinvertebrates as an indicator of stream health and the second was how to use podcasting to document and communicate results.

Barnesville rounded out the large assembly presentations with a review



*Walhalla Awards for Display, Communications, and Voyageur Award.*

of water quality studies they are doing that contribute directly to real water issues in their watershed including an investigation of high E.coli levels that could pose a risk to the swimming area in Barnesville and to the aquifer connected to the City's drinking water.

### CELEBRATE SUCCESS

The energy and excitement continued to grow among the assembled as award recipients were announced for efforts above and beyond basic River Watch, watershed communication, outstanding partners, and display presentations (see related awards article). Drawings for door prizes provided by generous Forum sponsors also added excitement to the afternoon festivities.

As the Forum came to a close, optimism was definitely in the air as River Watch teams were fired up for the start of another monitoring season just around the corner. By the time you receive this newsletter, rivers around the Basin will be opening up and maybe you'll see a group of young adults with safety vests scurrying about on a bridge deck near you taking the pulse of your local river. Stop and thank them for a job well done. Get involved with

what they are doing—just as they have become involved in the critical effort to better understand and manage our valuable land and water resources.

*Primary sponsors of the River Watch Forum are the Red River Watershed Management Board and the International Water Institute. Many other sponsors also made contributions to help make this celebration of youth engagement possible. A sincere thanks to all.*



*Red Lake River Watch Team Display*

# 2008 RIVER WATCH FORUM AWARDS

## PARTNERSHIP AWARD

Recognizing individuals or organizations that have helped support and advance the Red River Basin River Watch program with technical assistance, financial resources, coordination, or other support; two partnership awards were presented in 2008. Recipients were the Northwest Minnesota Foundation and the Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership.

Both organizations have provided financial support at various times to help River Watch try new ideas and expand its programs. Most recently the Northwest MN Fdn provided funding of the Watershed Watch program which allowed the International Water Institute and the RRBasin RW program to become more involved in watershed building activities in the Red Lake Watershed District. This allowed staff to provide planning assistance and support to efforts such as the Red Lake River Rendezvous Tour—helping communities recognize rivers as assets to be protected and enjoyed.

The Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership has provided funding over the years to assist with various strategic planning efforts as the River Watch program has evolved from basic monitoring to integrating River Watch into school curricula, providing dual high school-college credit, and helping find partners to help “grow” the

River Watch program. One of these efforts included providing resources to develop the online data system that has quickly emerged as one of the best in the nation.

## VOYAGEUR'S AWARD

Just as French voyageurs in the Red River Basin were known for extraordinary hard work and exceptional skill at their craft, the Voyageur's Award recognizes efforts that go above and beyond the normal monthly monitoring duties of the River Watch program. Three recipients were selected for the Voyageur Award.

Stephen/Argyle River Watch, under the leadership of Science Instructor Garry Kotts and Walhalla River Watch, led by the 2007 North Dakota Science Teacher of the Year Ila LaChapelle both exemplify how students can use the tools and skills gained in River Watch in a variety of activities, demonstrating the great potential and contribution that River Watch can provide to a school, a community, and a watershed.

The third Voyageur Award was presented to an individual for the first time—to Sheila Carlson, Barnesville Science Instructor, who exemplifies scientific inquiry and discovery. Continually questioning the interconnections between their many tributaries, Sheila has rallied her team to sample at 20 sites on each monthly run. But the

quality of their monitoring is even more impressive than the quantity. To better understand “what’s going on” in the watershed, Sheila has guided students in macroinvertebrate monitoring, E.coli bacteria monitoring, use of mapping for analysis of soils, topography and land use, and other investigations questioning the various connections between their water quality data and the landscape. Sheila has set up the program to allow students the option of taking River Watch for high school credit. Sheila is retiring at the end of this school year, but we look forward to her remaining active in the RW program for a bit longer.

## COMMUNICATIONS AWARD

The Red River Basin Commission sponsored and presented the first annual communications award to Walhalla River Watch based on the extensive outreach effort that the Walhalla Team did over the past year. Just a few of their activities include making presentations about watershed conditions to their local County Commissioners, School Board, Teacher workshops, City Council, and at the River Watch Forum. They also provided a series of news releases with photos to their local newspaper about their monitoring and used video technologies learned through River Watch to assist with a variety of community projects. They also raised visibility by having a River Watch entry in their local 4th of July parade.

## RIVER WATCH DISPLAY AWARDS

A panel of judges selected the following six schools to receive awards for their table top displays based on how well they communicated their results in a scientific and understandable manner.

Gold: Barnesville  
Gold: Climax  
Silver: Bagley  
Silver: Red Lake Falls  
Bronze: Walhalla  
Bronze: Win-E-Mac

## RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

*At it's regularly scheduled March meeting, the RRWMB:*

- *Discussed the progress of the board's public information initiative and reviewed the information provided by Mark Meister of CR\*CS.*
- *Received a report from Ron Harnack, Project Coordinator.*
- *Authorized the board to sponsor the Project Management Plan (PMP) of the Red River Basin Watershed Specifically Authorized Feasibility Study conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.*
- *Received a report from Dan Thul, Red River Coordinator.*
- *Received a report from Naomi Erickson, Administrator.*
- *Discussed the Water Quality staffing position funded by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.*

## WATERSHED DISTRICT DEVELOPMENTS

### MIDDLE-SNAKE-TAMARAC RIVERS WD

The District received the results of a two-year "review" by the Office of the State Auditor. This review was precipitated by concerns raised by an individual. The Auditor found four areas in which the District could improve operations. These issues were minor in nature and, in fact, had already been implemented. This was the second review by the Auditor's Office in the last three years at the urgings of this individual.

The District is anticipating funding for the construction of the Agassiz Valley Water Resource Management Project. It is hoped that sufficient funding will be made available for the letting of a contract this spring. The District's lawsuit with one of the signer's of the Settlement Agreement for Breach of Contract is on going.

The Brandt/Angus Coulee Project continues to progress. The District has received the Preliminary Engineer's Report and the Project Team continues to meet regularly.

### RED LAKE WD

The Red Lake WD reported on the Grand Marais Outlet Restoration Project No. 60F. The Preliminary Engineer's Report has been prepared. The Board of Mangers have scheduled a joint informational meeting with the Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers WD (MSTRWD) Board of Managers and landowners in the project area for April 2, 2008 at the community center in Alvarado, MN. The purpose of the meeting is to present the Preliminary Engineer's Report to landowners and the MSTRWD to allow them to comment on the design and development of the proposed project. If the project appears feasible, discussion will move towards the development of a possible Joint Powers Agreement between the MSTRWD and the Red Lake WD to provide for better project implementation.

*The next scheduled meeting of the RRWMB will be held at the Sand Hill River WD, 219 North Mill Street, Fertile, MN, on April 15th, starting at 9:30 a.m.*



VISIT US ONLINE AT  
[WWW.RRWMB.ORG](http://WWW.RRWMB.ORG)

PERMITTED  
STANDARD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Grand Forks, ND  
PERMIT NO. 317

NEWS & VIEWS  
c/o RRWMB  
P.O. Box 763  
Detroit Lakes, MN 56502-0763

Your comments and contributions are always welcome. If you are receiving this newsletter and are not currently a member of a governing unit in the Red River Basin, please notify us and provide the name of the appropriate person to be added to our mailing list. News & Views, c/o RRWMB, P.O. Box 763, Detroit Lakes, MN 56502-0763, Phone: (218) 844-6166; Fax: (218) 844-6167.