

# PLSLWD Education & Outreach Plan

# 2021

*“Our mission is to manage and preserve the water resources of the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District to the best of our ability using input from our communities, sound engineering practices, and our ability to efficiently fund beneficial projects which transcend political jurisdictions.”*

## **Prepared By:**

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*Hike the Watershed participants at Rice Lake. Photo: A. Stelljes*



## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District's (PLSLWD) education and outreach program is to improve understanding of local water resources and practices among all stakeholders in the District. The best advocate for water resources is an engaged and informed citizenry. The education and outreach program follows the goals laid out in the 2020 Water Resources Management Plan and fulfills the requirements of the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit for the Prior Lake Outlet Channel (PLOC).

In 2021, the education and outreach program will include coordinated efforts with the Scott Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), the Scott County Clean Water Education Program (SCWEP), Prior Lake, Shakopee, Savage, Spring Lake Township and Sand Creek Township to continue a community-wide approach to develop an understanding of local water resource issues and the impact each citizen has upon them, with special emphasis on flooding, stormwater runoff, phosphorus reduction, water quality, water conservation, aquatic invasive species (AIS), landowner best conservation practices and illicit discharge.

## **Background and Overview**

The District will partner with the Scott SWCD, SCWEP, local cities and townships to educate the public and help meet its education and outreach requirements as an MS4 permit holder. The District's Citizen Advisory Committee will help implement the District's citizen engagement activities.

The District holds an MS4 general permit for the PLOC which carries stormwater to the Minnesota River. MS4 permits give owners or operators of publicly managed stormwater infrastructure approval to discharge stormwater to lakes, rivers and wetlands in Minnesota and charges permittees with certain responsibilities as part of the permit, including educating the public on water and pollution issues. The permits are mandated by federal regulations under the Clean Water Act and are locally enforced by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Target audiences of the District's education and outreach program include agriculture/rural landowners; urban and lakeshore residents; District partners; and community groups, faith communities, schools and government.

## **Communications & Marketing**

Communications and marketing form an important part of the District's education and outreach program. The District anticipates a variety of passive and active marketing techniques to reach out to various stakeholders in the watershed. Some potential activities include:

- Submit news articles and press releases to the Prior Lake American newspaper, Savage Pacer and the Scott County SCENE. Pitch story ideas to local reporters, as applicable
- Write and post articles and information on the District's website and social media
- Present at the Prior Lake and Spring Lake Associations' annual meetings



- Present to the City of Prior Lake's Citizen Engagement Committee (CEC)
- Annual update presentations to Prior Lake, Shakopee, Savage, Sand Creek and Spring Lake Townships, Scott County and others, as requested
- Participation at Lakefront Days, including interactive displays
- Targeted mailings, especially regarding project updates and cost share programs
- Create and place project factsheets at project sites
- Publish fact sheets/rack cards, banners, newsletters and articles
- Place fact sheets and rack cards at kiosks, such as at Prior Lake City Hall and Savage's McColl Park
- Solicit input from the public, CAC members, PLOC Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and PLOC Cooperators

The District will work to maintain partnerships with other jurisdictions and interest groups that share the District's goals, including:

- |                                               |                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| ➤ Prior Lake Association                      | ➤ Spring Lake Township                           |
| ➤ Spring Lake Association                     | ➤ Sand Creek Township                            |
| ➤ City of Prior Lake                          | ➤ Scott Soil and Water Conservation District     |
| ➤ City of Savage                              | ➤ Scott County Watershed Management Organization |
| ➤ City of Shakopee                            | ➤ Prior Lake-Savage School District              |
| ➤ Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) |                                                  |
| ➤ Scott County                                |                                                  |

## **Website and Social Media**

The District will continue to share a variety of information including District news, project updates and workshops; articles covering water and conservation related topics; and related conservation news on its website and social media. Article topics could include highlighting success stories, project updates, District events and workshops. Staff will review website traffic information to better tailor outreach information.

## **General Outreach and Education**

### **Scott Clean Water Education Program (SCWEP)**

The District will continue to partner with the Scott Clean Water Education Program (SCWEP) to extend its education and outreach efforts. This program is run by the Scott Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and includes the following partners: Scott Watershed Management Organization, Lower Minnesota River Watershed District, Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board, Scott SWCD, Spring Lake Township, Credit River Township, Jackson Township, Louisville Township, Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board and Scott County.





SCWEP's vision is that making clean water choices becomes "second nature" for people who live and work in Scott County. The key message SCWEP is promoting is, "Clean Water Starts with Me!" and will focus upon illicit discharge, stormwater runoff and how individuals can make a difference. Audiences include: agriculture/rural landowners; urban and lakeshore residents; and community groups, faith communities, schools and government.

SCWEP will conduct prairie, shoreline restoration and winter maintenance workshops; promote cost share programs, such as cover crops, agricultural nutrient or residue management and shoreline restorations; participate in community events; and develop targeted outreach activities. SCWEP will publish rack cards, fact sheets, brochures and newsletters; submit news articles and press releases; rotate the Clean Water Display at the Scott County Conservation Center; and utilize social media to get its messages out. Further SCWEP plans are outlined in the SCWEP 2021 work plan.

### **Local Schools Partnership**

The District will seek to continue collaborating with local area schools. District staff will work with staff from local schools, including the Prior Lake-Savage (PLS) schools to identify opportunities for the District to provide programming and support for teachers. This may include giving classroom presentations as requested or providing teachers with lesson plan ideas relating to water resources.

The District will also participate in SCWEP's Scott County Outdoor Education Days. Staff will help run the stations highlighting water and SWCD staff will run stations highlighting other important natural resources for 1,500 students from local schools.

### **Volunteers**

Volunteering provides local residents with an opportunity to help further the District's work, learn more about the District's efforts and learn how to improve our local water resources. The District offers the following opportunities for volunteers to get involved with District programs and projects:

- Volunteer observers report the status of ice on and off conditions of District lakes to staff.
- Precipitation volunteers record precipitation data at their property and send staff their data monthly.
- CAMP (Citizen Assisted Monitoring Program) volunteers (*see photo*) monitor water quality on several District lakes bi-weekly throughout the monitoring season.
- Volunteers assist with the carp management program through tracking carp, baiting carp and reporting areas of carp activity.
- Volunteers participate in clean-up events hosted by the District.





- Volunteers can join one of the District's advisory groups: the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Farmer-Led Council (FLC).

The District will also continue to partner to with volunteers on other projects as needs arise.

## **Events**

The District will continue to partner with the City of Prior Lake to host Clean Water Clean-Up events. The clean-ups are a great way to engage volunteers and increase awareness of the District and our work. The District will try a new version of the clean-up event this fall, doing a neighborhood storm drain clean out and stenciling along with trash pickup. Volunteers will be recruited through emails to past volunteers and notices on the District's and City's websites, Facebook and Twitter pages. The events will be publicized in the Prior Lake American and the Scott County SCENE.

The District is required as part of the MS4 permit to host public involvement activities each calendar year which includes a pollution prevention or water quality theme. The Clean Water Clean-Up helps the District meet this requirement.

Additionally, the District will have a booth at Lakefront Days with information and interactive activities for the public. The District will also present at the Spring Lake and Prior Lake Association annual meetings. This summer the District will partner with SMSC and the YMCA to put on a youth education event at Pike Lake in July. SMSC will be the primary lesson and activity planner, the YMCA will bus kids from a local camp and the District will have staff presenting on lakes topics at the event.

## **Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)**

The District's Citizen Advisory Committee meets monthly and provides the District with feedback and recommendations on District programs and plans. The committee will help implement the District's citizen engagement activities and research new topics and ideas for ways to continue to improve the natural and water resources in the District.

The CAC formed subcommittees in 2020 to focus committee efforts on select topics. Current subcommittees include: AIS (includes AIS signage); shoreline restoration; fish stocking; and upstream storage.

## **Farmer-Led Council (FLC)**

The District will partner with the SWCD to continue its staff support of the Farmer-Led Council. Agricultural lands make up a majority of the landscape in the Spring Lake and Upper Prior Lake watersheds. The role of the FLC is to develop and guide the implementation of strategies that the District will use to accomplish agriculture's share of nutrient reduction goals. It will:

- Inform decision-makers and the public about soil and water conservation opportunities



- Identify base level and site-tailored practices that are available and needed
- Define the best approach for engaging with and assisting farmers to implement practices
- Identify potential barriers to implementation, along with tools and resources needed to overcome them

The FLC holds 3-4 meetings each year to discuss and accomplish the tasks above, as well as to learn more about and troubleshoot agricultural conservation practices. For example, during the March 2021 meeting the FLC discussed experimental cover crops and no-till practices.

The District and the FLC originally planned to host a Growing Healthy Soils event with invited speakers in Spring 2021, however the event was postponed because of Covid-19 until 2022 to allow fuller participation.

In addition, the FLC is sponsoring the **Lake-Friendly Farm Program** which was created to recognize the farmers that are doing an outstanding job of managing their farms in a way that protects the water resources in the District. Once farms meet the program criteria, the farms are certified as a Lake-Friendly Farm and farmers receive a sign (*see right*) which they can post at their farm. The program both identifies and publicly recognizes existing best management practices in the watershed and assists farmers in identifying areas for improvement to help protect our water resources.



### Residential and Agricultural Cost Share

In addition to SCWEP, the District will continue to contract with the SWCD to meet with landowners to promote rural and urban incentive and cost share programs and encourage their participation. For residential incentive programs, PLSLWD will promote citizen participation in the SCWEP workshops as well as District cost share programs.



Part of the goal of the District's cost-share program is to create a "culture of conservation" which inspires residents and results in residents pursuing conservation projects beyond the cost-share program and as a natural extension of their everyday activities.

In rural areas, the District will provide construction incentive payments for filter strips, wetland restoration, well decommissioning, water and sediment control basins (WASCOB) and other stormwater management best management practices (BMP). The District approved the SWCD Conservation Practice Payment Docket, which defines practices, payments and evaluation tools. This year a new scoring system will be used to select cost share projects for funding. The scoring system prioritizes projects that will have the highest benefit to reducing phosphorus and runoff volume to priority waterbodies.





## Project Outreach

The District will continue to promote District projects and efforts to improve local water quality, reduce flooding and prevent the spread of AIS. The District will provide information on these projects through project factsheets, social media, the District website, meetings/articles for lake associations and press releases to the Prior Lake American, Savage Pacer and the Scott County SCENE.

Staff will conduct literature drops to residents residing near PLSLWD construction projects. If necessary, letters may be sent to the residents and neighborhood meetings may be scheduled to meet with residents.



## Carp Management Outreach

The District will continue to communicate carp management activity with the public, including information about carp removals, carp barriers, fish stocking and other carp management activity. Carp management continues to be an area of high interest to the public. Communication methods includes emails to the carp email notification list inviting the public to some removal events, website updates, posts on social media and news releases. As part of the carp grant the District also created a mailer highlighting the importance of aquatic plants for lake health which was sent to Prior and Spring lakeshore residents in April (see Attachment A).

## District Tours

District staff will organize at least two District tours in 2021. On March 2 a tour of the Sutton Lake outlet project occurred. A second tour will be organized for the fall highlighting the Prior Lake Outlet Channel (PLOC).

*Right: Sutton Lake project tour*



## Fish Lake Restoration Project

The District partnered with Spring Lake Township to complete a restoration and demonstration project at the Spring Lake Town Hall. The town hall hosts conservation workshops for residents and has many visitors visiting the town hall and grounds for other events; this visibility makes the site a great location for a demonstration project. The site already had a large rain garden and this project added both an enhanced shoreline and a restored prairie which allows visitors to see demonstrations of several different types of beneficial projects at one site. Interpretative signs



highlighting the restorations and how residents can complete their own projects are being designed and will be installed in 2021.

### **Spring Lake Parcel**

The District owns a stretch of shoreline along the north side of Spring Lake. The District restored the property's 350 feet of shoreline in 2016, removing buckthorn and seeding the site with native plants. Two interpretive signs highlighting the restoration were installed in 2017. This site continues to function as a shoreline restoration demonstration site for residents.

### **Raymond Park**

Four acres of upland and shoreline were restored in 2017 at the City of Prior Lake's Raymond Park and the project serves as a demonstration site for shoreline and upland restoration area for the public. Educational interpretative signs were designed highlighting the restoration project (*see photos below*) and were installed at the park in 2021. The restoration includes: a beach restoration; lawn area converted to low-maintenance turf; an oak savanna restoration and a shoreline restoration. Maintenance responsibilities on the site were transferred to the City of Prior Lake in 2020. The site will continue to be promoted as a demonstration site for the public and staff will continue to coordinate with local residents who have been doing volunteer work to further the restoration efforts at the park.

The restoration was supported by a Conservation Legacy Partners grant from the MnDNR. District project partners included the City of Prior Lake, Spring Lake Township and Great River Greening.



*Raymond Park Project Signage*



# Living Shoreline!

## Shoreline Restoration

At Raymond Park, a variety of "living shoreline" techniques have been used that not only help keep the shoreline safe from erosion and ice push, but also provide great habitat for wildlife and a beautiful array of plants.

### Lawn & Beach Shorelines

Lakefront properties with traditional turf grass and sandy beaches provide a place to enjoy the outdoors, but keeping up with mowing, fertilizing, and shovel use creates a tough work.

However, traditional lawn and beach shorelines require a great deal of time and effort to maintain, and they provide few of the biological and physical benefits that come with natural shorelines.

### Native Shoreline Vegetation

Natural shorelines incorporate a variety of native plants that provide habitat and attract pollinators. The deep roots prevent erosion and soak up excess nutrients & water which helps protect water quality and clarity.

Native shorelines are not only colorful, but they require less mowing and fertilizer than traditional lawn or beach shorelines.

### How YOU can make a difference:

#### Cover Your Slope

Convert unused portions of your yard to native plants. Downy, or low-maintenance grass. This reduces mowing and fertilizing, and attracts pollinators! Best for large or steep shorelines.

#### Plant Native Flowers

Deeply-rooted native flowers attract pollinators and slow down & filter runoff before it enters the lake.

#### Plant Low-Mow Grass

Save time and money with this adaptable and dense, one-inch grass that resembles a traditional, cut lawn. No fertilizer or watering is needed, and it only needs to be mowed 1 to 4 times each year!

#### Keep the Natural Landscape

Naturally growing plants and fallen trees protect shoreline erosion and provide habitat for pollinators, turtles, and fish.



### Down to the Roots: Native Plants

Native plants have deep root systems that help hold the shoreline in place. They also provide many other benefits such as:

- SAVE YOUR SHINKING SHORELINE!**  
Native plants help absorb the impact of waves and ice push, and their strong roots help prevent erosion.
- KEEP MONEY IN YOUR POCKET**  
No mowing, watering, fertilizing or annual plant replacement necessary.
- PROVIDE HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE**  
Birds, butterflies, bees, turtles and other wildlife use native plants for food and shelter.
- CLEAN WATER**  
Native plants allow runoff to soak into the soil and to filter out pollutants before entering the lake.

**The Short of it: TURF GRASS**  
Turf grass has shallow roots that are not able to hold the soil in place. This can cause slumping, undercutting, and erosion along a shoreline.

**How do I get started on my project?**

Call the Scott SWCD!  
952-492-5425  
**SCOTT SWCD**

- Free technical assistance
- Recommendations for shoreline erosion & buffers
- Help planning your project
- Cost-share funds available

**PROJECT PARTNERS:**







For more info:  
(952) 447-4166  
info@plslwd.org  
www.plslwd.org

*Shoreline interpretative designed for Raymond Park*

## Stormwater & Storage Projects

To approach Upper Watershed stormwater management more comprehensively, the District completed the Upper Watershed Blueprint in 2021. The District continues to work to acquire upstream storage for stormwater, as identified in the 2016 Stormwater Management and Flood Mitigation Study. The Upper Watershed Blueprint will be used as a prioritized implementation roadmap for the District and local partners to improve water quality conditions and reduce flooding. Upstream storage holds water in the upper watershed on the land longer, delaying when the water reaches the lakes. The District will partner with landowners to achieve this goal. Outreach will be targeted to landowners living near potential upstream storage areas.

Construction on the Sutton Lake storage project is occurring in 2021. Project outreach was targeted to the local landowners. The District wrote articles for the District website and press releases for the local newspapers and Scott County SCENE newspaper.

## Conservation Easements

The District has nearly 40 conservation easements with over 170 landowners which are inspected annually. In the spring, landowners receive an annual newsletter (see Attachment B) and reminder letters to remedy any issues if violations were present. Landowners also receive a pre-



inspection letter prior to the annual site visit and a post-inspection letter noting the inspection findings, including any violations. Landowners are encouraged to join staff on site visits if they are interested. In 2021, staff will continue to follow-up and work with landowners to correct previously identified violations along with any newly identified violations.

### **PLSLWD 50<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary**

The District marked its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020. To celebrate the occasion the District planned events and marketing surrounding the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to honor the District's 50 years and engage the public. However, the Covid-19 pandemic curtailed the extent of activities that could be held. As such, the District plans to hold some additional programming in 2021 to celebrate the anniversary and engage the public.

The Hike the Watershed initiative will continue to be promoted. Other possible programming includes a trivia night at the Boathouse Brothers Brewery this summer and guided group hikes at some of the Hike the Watershed locations. Potential hike locations are Jeffers Pond, Crystal/Rice Lake and Pike Lake. These events seek to engage new audiences with the District. This is a great opportunity for the CAC to be more involved; the CAC could help District staff brainstorm and plan events as well as involve the public.

### **Budget**

The 2021 budget for MS4 activities is \$9,000 including \$3,500 for SCWEP; \$4,000 for 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary activities, \$4,100 for the CAC; \$750 for the Prior Lake-Savage schools partnership and \$1,500 for project educational signs. In addition, the District budgeted \$58,000 for residential and agricultural cost share incentives and \$51,000 for the Farmer-led Council, which includes money for FLC sponsored cost share. A note that budget amounts do not include staff time.

### **Outcomes & Evaluation**

The desired outcome for 2021 education and outreach is to improve understanding of local water resources and practices among all stakeholders in the District; this strategic goal will be evaluated mostly by compliance with the MS4 permit and our 2020 Water Resources Management Plan. A large part of the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP), a component of the MS4 permit, requires identification and documentation of BMPs undertaken to reduce the discharge of pollutants from the MS4 to the maximum extent practicable. Metrics used to measure the impact of marketing strategies include:

- Number of participants at a specific District hosted event or workshop
- Number of direct mailings, brochures, and newsletters distributed
- Number of submitted press releases and published articles

To maintain compliance with the MS4 permit, District staff will continue to record and quantify the above metrics which help document the success or benefit of each BMP.

## 2021 Planned Activities

Activities & Events	Schedule	Audience	Partners
Sutton Lake project tour	March	Partners	
Cover crop workshop	March	Ag & Rural	SWCD
Contribute to PLA & SLA annual newsletters, as requested	Winter	Lake	PLA, SLA
Write Sutton Lake project article for website & newspaper	Spring	Urban, Lake & Rural	
Raymond Park project interpretative signage installed	Spring	Urban, Lake & Rural	City of Prior Lake
Mailer to lakeshore owners highlighting aquatic plant benefits	Spring	Lake	Carp grant funding
Conservation easement newsletter (mailing)	Spring	Conservation easement landowners	
Mailing to farmers highlighting available cost share & services	Spring	Ag & Rural	SWCD
Coordinate CAMP program volunteers	Spring/Summer/Fall	Lake	Met Council
Coordinate carp volunteers	Spring/Summer	Urban & Lake	
Present at SLA Annual Meeting	April	Lake	
Present to City of Prior Lake Citizen Engagement Committee (CEC)	May	Urban	
Native Prairie workshop	Spring/Summer	Ag & Rural	SWCD
Youth Event at Pike Lake	July	Youth	SMSC, YMCA
Shoreline workshop	June	Rural, Urban & Lake	SWCD
Lakefront Days booth	August	Urban & Lake	
Mailing to new lakeshore residents about technical assistance, cost share and workshops	Summer	Urban & Lake	SWCD
Watershed trivia night	Summer	Urban, Lake & Rural	
Hike the Watershed guided hikes	Summer/Fall	Urban & Rural	
Send inspection letters to easement landowners	Summer/Fall	Urban & Rural	
Clean Water Clean-Up event	Fall	Urban	City of Prior Lake
PLOC District tour	Fall	Partners	
Design & install Fish Lake restoration project signs	Fall	Urban, Lake & Rural	Spring Lake Township
Outdoor Education Days	Fall	Youth	SWCD





Activities & Events	Schedule	Audience	Partners
Coordinate volunteer ice observer reports	Winter	Lake	
Winter maintenance workshop for homeowners	December	Urban, Lake & Rural	SWCD
Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings	Monthly	Urban, Lake & Rural	
Present to partner city councils & township boards, as requested	Annually	Partners	
Farmer-Led Council (FLC) Meetings	Quarterly	Ag & Rural	SWCD
Present to school classrooms	As requested	Youth	
Create project factsheets	Ongoing	Urban & Rural	
Coordinate precip volunteers	Ongoing	Urban & Rural	
Hike the Watershed challenge	Ongoing	Urban, Lake & Rural	
Carp management outreach	Ongoing	Urban, Lake & Rural	
Write articles for website, Prior Lake American and Scott County SCENE	Ongoing	Urban, Lake, Ag & Rural	
Growing Healthy Soils (FLC event)	Postponed - 2022	Ag & Rural	