



Trickle UP Engagement: Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Goes Grassroots

February 2014 Snapshots



“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime,” the old adage goes. In the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD), those words aren’t just a proverb, they’re the basis for a new model of citizen engagement centered around stormwater pollution reduction. Using almost \$322,000 from a 2013 Clean Water Fund grant awarded by BWSR, MCWD, in partnership with the Freshwater Society, has launched an exciting new grassroots approach to improving water quality in the Minnehaha Creek Watershed.

Modeled after Master Naturalist and Master Gardener programs, the new Master Water Steward program works to “recruit, inspire and train citizen volunteers who work in their own communities to organize and build projects to keep storm water and the pollutants carried by storm water from flowing into lakes and streams.”

“The Master Water Stewards program is a way to develop local community leaders that can leverage our resources and effectively bring water resource enhancement and protection to the grassroots level, which is an important piece of the puzzle in sustainable watershed management,” Leslie Yetka, Education Manager for the MCWD said.

“We know that to meet water quality goals we have to work with private owners,” Freshwater Society’s Peggy Knapp, Director of Programs, said. “The best way to make those connections is on a neighborhood level. By working neighbor-to neighbor we can more effectively engage landowners to participate.”



Stewards Mike McCabe (L) Sue Roedl (Center, with wheelbarrow) Bruce Jones (second from right) and neighbors install a rain garden in Sue Roedl's front yard.

The first group of participants – the “class of 2013” – came primarily from the downstream part of the watershed in and around Minneapolis. During their time in the program, they took classes on topics such as Basic Hydrology, Stormwater 101, Water Policy, Environmental Behavior and Decision Making, Creating a Residential Stormwater Plan, and Community Engagement Strategies. Participants worked together to complete capstone projects involving installation of a stormwater project designed to reduce runoff and non-point source pollutants from entering Minnehaha Creek or other downstream water bodies.

Stewards Dave Stack (R) and Jacquie DiGiacomo finish up installing a rain garden in a neighbor's yard.



For the first class of participants, those projects included rain gardens, water-permeable walkways, and rain barrels. As part of their community engagement and education strategy, the group hosted neighborhood gatherings to showcase these new best management practices and teach their community about ways to improve water quality.

“Minnesotans care deeply about water, and the people of this state want very much to do the right thing, but often they don’t know how to start,” Freshwater Society’s Knapp said. “This program fills that gap. It gives participants the knowledge, skills and confidence to go out in their communities and make a difference.”

What's next? The program has recruited its next class of participants for 2014, and will start their training program on January 21. This group comes from the middle of third of the watershed, including the cities of Edina, St. Louis Park, Hopkins and Minnetonka. Graduates of the program receive certification as Master Water Stewards, and the program's goal is to certify 70 residents of the MCWD by 2015. You can learn more about the Master Water Stewards project by [visiting their website](#).



Steward Carol Kuechler (L) gives her neighbors a tour of the new stormwater management projects in her back yard, including the permeable pavers in the driveway, and a new raingarden.