

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Greater Blue Earth

WHY IS THIS WATERSHED SPECIAL?

The Greater Blue Earth River drains 2.26 million acres in south central Minnesota and northern Iowa before converging with the Le Sueur and Watonwan Rivers near Mankato, where the rivers join the Minnesota River. The watershed boasts some of the world's best soils with healthy crop yields, and the local economy depends heavily on agriculture. Although seasonally flooded prairie potholes offer important waterfowl and water quality benefits, the wetlands have been negatively impacted throughout the years. Eighty percent of the wetlands located in the watershed have been drained. Fortunately, local landowners are participating in wetland restorations on a volunteer basis.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

The Targeted Watersheds Grant will focus on the following environmental challenges:

- Excess nutrients and sediment from the watershed are the major contributors to water quality problems in the Minnesota River as well as all the way downstream in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Impacts include cloudy brown water, algae blooms, loss of habitat and aquatic life, and lost recreational opportunities.
- Loss of valuable wetlands that filter runoff, provide habitat, and protect against flood damage.

RESTORATION ACTIVITIES

The Three Rivers Resource Conservation and Development Council are using EPA Targeted Watersheds Grant funds to demonstrate effective ways to improve water quality within the basin as well as downstream. It will:

- Demonstrate conservation cost-share projects, encouraging third crop rotation to minimize erosion.
- Implement wetlands restoration projects to improve habitat and other valuable functions.
- Offer nutrient trial demonstrations and incentive programs to reduce nutrient runoff.
- Install 300 acres of riparian buffers.
- Conduct water quality education and demonstration projects.
- Sponsor directed workshops for homeowners, businesses, and industry on construction erosion control and rain gardens.
- Support citizen stream monitoring.
- Carry out public outreach through numerous public presentations.

"The Greater Blue Earth River Targeted Watersheds Grant has made a positive impact on the landowners of Blue Earth County, especially the conservation cost-share and the buffer incentive."

– Kari Christnagel
Blue Earth County Soil and Water Conservation District



EPA Project Officer Paul Thomas (second from left) discusses the monitoring component of the project with partners Darren Newville of the Martin Soil and Water Conservation District, Chris Lenhart of the University of Minnesota, and Joe Magner of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

A STRONG PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE

A broad and diverse group of stakeholders are strongly committed to realizing environmental improvements.

- Watershed associations and other local organizations, including Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance, Blue Earth River Basin Initiative, and Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Local Iowa and Minnesota Resource Conservation and Development Councils
- Farmers and homeowners
- Counties and municipalities
- States of Iowa and Minnesota, including Department of Agriculture and Pollution Control
- Federal agencies, notably the U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Minnesota State University at Mankato
- University of Minnesota Extension Service
- Iowa Lakes Community College
- Local schools
- Certified Crop Advisors

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The Three Rivers Resource Conservation and Development Council makes frequent public presentations focusing on soil management for students and nutrient management for adults.



Targeted Watersheds Grant cost share funds at work. Filterstrips and field windbreaks help conserve soil and control the runoff of fertilizers and pesticides.

EPA'S TARGETED WATERSHEDS GRANT PROGRAM

EPA's Targeted Watersheds Grant Program is a new, competitive grant program designed to encourage collaborative, community-driven approaches to meet clean water goals.

For more information about the selected watersheds, please visit:
<http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/initiative/>



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