

Damage Control: the Blakeley Trail Ravines Stabilization Project

November 2014 Snapshots

Imagine, if you will, being hard at work on an almost million dollar, multi-benefit project that is being designed to improve water quality and protect private land and public infrastructure. You're almost done with the project – 70% of the way there – when a six-inch rainfall hits. You visit the construction site, and note with relief that the project has actually held up pretty well. Then, days later, a second rainfall hits. This one's eight inches, and it looks like your entire project might be a loss.

Disaster.

Paul Nelson, the Scott Watershed Management Organization (WMO) Administrator, knows this feeling all too well. He lived it past June, as he watched a project to stabilize the Blakeley Trail Ravines along County Road 60 in southwest Scott County sustain heavy damage in rainfalls that would lead to a disaster declaration.

"I didn't sleep for a week," he said during a WMO-led tour near the site in September.

Original plans for the site included the construction of a water and sediment control basin and six check dams – used to slow water and sediment flow - to stabilize the ravines, protecting private property and the county road while reducing sediment from entering the Minnesota River. Funding included a \$381,000 Clean Water Fund grant from the Board of Water and Soil Resources, roughly a third of the project's total cost.

In the wake of the rain, a number of landslides occurred, closing County Road 60 and covering the construction area in debris. The sediment basin was damaged, the retaining wall washed away, and significant erosion occurred. The WMO worked quickly to salvage what they could, with their first priority being to stabilize the ravine and a roadway that was so unstable it moved as inspectors investigated damage to protect the Town of Blakely below.

When it became clear there was no rebuilding County Road 60 to its former state, it was cut down. The sand and materials from the road were used as fill to stabilize north side of the ravine where the retaining wall had been, a move that not only salvaged the project, but brought it in under

budget. The temporary loss of County Road 60 prevented the project from achieving all its objectives. Thankfully, because of the quick work of the WMO and its partners, the project's conservation outcomes are still on track. That means an estimated 38 fewer tons of sediment a year finding its way downstream, a long-term victory for water quality.



Pictured, top: This July 2014 photo shows significant project damage. Middle: September, after the project had been rebuilt. Bottom: Check dams will help slow water and sediment flow, reducing erosion.