

Water quality work expands

Recreational use grows as crews remove snags

Wayne Goeken has been paddling the Sand Hill River near his home in Fertile for years, both recreationally and as a River Explorers kayak trip leader.

He's continued to lead River Explorers' student water-monitoring paddles since he retired two years ago as the



International Water Institute's special projects coordinator. Goeken started IRI's River Watch, a citizen water-quality monitoring effort, in 1995 with four high schools in the Red River Basin. Data collected monthly from April through October includes turbidity, dissolved oxygen, pH, water and air temperature.

Map Link

<http://bit.ly/SandHillRiverPaddling>

Stretches of the Upper Sand Hill are impaired for turbidity, E.coli and low oxygen levels — which affect fish and recreation. But those reaches are close to meeting state water-quality standards.

An East Polk Soil & Water Conservation District program — funded partly by the Sand Hill River Watershed District and by Clean Water Fund grants from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources — has installed 133 water and sediment control basins throughout the watershed since 2011.

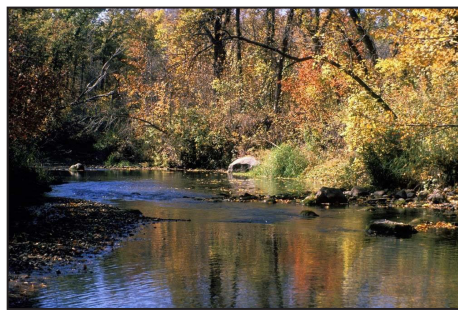
Combined, those structures keep 5,540 tons of sediment — the equivalent of 426 dump truck loads — and 4,120 pounds of algae-causing phosphorus out of the river each year.

The \$1.58 million in East Polk SWCD projects drew from four Clean Water Fund grants totaling nearly \$1.2 million, plus about \$430,000 in matching funds from the watershed district and landowners.



Left: A canoe rests by the Sand Hill River in Polk County. Improved water quality is the goal in the Upper Sand Hill River Watershed, where East Polk Soil & Water Conservation District's Clean Water Fund projects fix gully erosion in farm fields and keep more than 425 dump truck loads of sediment out of the river annually. **Photo Credit:** Ann Wessel, BWSR

Below: Trees arch over the river. **Photo Credit:** Sand Hill River Watershed District



Goeken led efforts to clear snags, which opened more river reaches to paddlers.

In September, a Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa crew contracted through the Sand Hill River Watershed District started a 20-day snag-clearing job in Fertile. Moving west, they cleared downed trees, garbage and debris that cause roiling water to erode the banks.

The project was funded for its water quality benefits, but the crew's work also will make paddling easier.

In the three years since volunteers started

to remove downed trees, Goeken has noticed more vehicles parked at unofficial launch sites. He created a Sand Hill River paddling brochure mapping four segments totaling 8 miles near Fertile. Nearly 200 people follow the Sand Hill River Kayaking page on Facebook.

"It's in the Glacial Lake Agassiz beach area, so it's (got) steeper slopes. You do get a faster current," Goeken said. "There's a lot of waterfowl and deer through that area. It's spring-fed through there, so usually there's some base minimum flow that keeps it going."

Goeken said he'd like to see the community view the Sand Hill River as an asset and become better stewards.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' mission is to improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners. www.bwsr.state.mn.us.