

# Targeting Clean Water through Wastewater Facilitation

March 2016 Snapshots

Improving water quality in Minnesota is a collaborative effort. Whether we're working to stabilize eroding streams, restore wetlands, establish buffers, or place land in easements (to name just a few), we all strive to make an impact.

For Sheila Craig and Aaron Wills, making a difference means helping the public make informed wastewater decisions. Sheila and Aaron are Community Wastewater Facilitators with the Southeast Minnesota Wastewater Initiative, a collaboration of Cannon River Watershed Partnership, the Southeast Minnesota Water Resources Board, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Since 2002, the Wastewater Initiative has helped twenty-two small communities upgrade their sewer systems. This has eliminated 317,290 gallons of untreated sewage per day (115 million gallons per year) from the lakes, streams, and rivers of Southeast Minnesota.

Sheila and Aaron are committed to establishing partnerships and making projects happen. According to Craig, "our role is to help small communities understand that they have a problem, and then help them come together to solve the problem as a community. We bring resource people to them, such as engineers or other wastewater professionals, and help put a funding package together so that the project is affordable for the residents." The most fulfilling part of the job, according to Wills, is building trusting relationships with community members and seeing the positive impacts of a new wastewater treatment system on both the environment and the quality of life in the community.



*Projects Completed and In Process with assistance from the Southeast Minnesota Wastewater Initiative. Completed projects are in green.*

Recognizing the accomplishments of these talented facilitators, two awards have been presented to the Southeast Minnesota Wastewater Initiative. The Cannon River Watershed Partnership received the Bush Foundation Prize for Community Innovation. The prize honors the Wastewater Initiative's work facilitating community sewage treatment solutions. In addition, Ononoco Township received a Local Government Initiative award for the Kings Park community sewage treatment system, of which Sheila Craig served as facilitator. These awards are an honor for the facilitators and the partners who made the project successful.

The Southeast Minnesota Wastewater Initiative recently received FY 2016 Clean Water Accelerated Implementation funding to continue their efforts. The two wastewater facilitators are currently working with fourteen communities. Four communities – Cedar Beach Subdivision (located on Lake Zumbro), Turtle Creek 1 and 2 (two subdivisions located west of Austin along Turtle Creek), and Myrtle (Freeborn County) – have construction slated for 2016.