

# MAWRC Monthly

- January 2015



## **Governor Proposes Expanding Buffer Requirements to Create Habitat**

Governor Mark Dayton announced at the recent DNR Roundtable that he will be asking the legislature to require a 50-foot buffer strip along waterways throughout the state and to give the DNR the authority to enforce the requirement. Dayton told Roundtable attendees that the proposal would provide 125,000 acres of habitat for pheasants and other wildlife, as well as helping improve water quality.

Currently, buffer requirements are included principally in two different laws and/or rules. The Shoreland Rule calls for counties to establish local ordinances to require buffers along rivers, streams and lakes. Some counties have established such ordinances while others have not. The rule allows for local flexibility to adopt a requirement other than 50 feet for "counties or portions of counties with topography or vegetation characteristics that would make" 50 foot buffers "impractical."

Minnesota drainage law requires a one-rod (16.5 feet) buffer strip along certain drainage ditches, specifically those publicly administered, privately funded ditches that have undergone redetermination of benefits, certain major repairs or improvements.

Details of the Governor's proposal have not yet been made public, but several media outlets have reported that the proposal is likely to include increasing the current buffer requirement along drainage ditches from 16.5 feet to 50 feet.

---

## **Nutrient Management Conference to be held in Mankato**

The MAWRC invites all farmers and ag professionals to the seventh annual Nutrient Management Conference to be held on February 9 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Verizon Wireless Center in Mankato.

Crop producers continue to fine-tune nutrient application practices in response to economic pressures, seeking to utilize nutrients as efficiently as possible. Current research, much of which is funded by Minnesota farmers through commodity check-off programs and the Agricultural Fertilizer Research and Education Council (AFREC), provides insights into emerging technologies and fertilizer strategies that can help improve the farmer's bottom line while improving the efficiency of food production systems. Translation- improved efficiency equals more affordable food and a smaller environmental footprint!

Attendees at this year's conference will hear from soil fertility and crops experts working in Minnesota and surrounding states. Topics include in-season nitrogen management, predicting nitrogen credits and managing micronutrients. Certified Crop Advisors in attendance will earn CCA credits.

Sponsors for the event include the MAWRC, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, University of Minnesota Extension, Minnesota Crop Production Retailers, Minnesota Independent Crop Consultants, Minnesota Corn Growers, Minnesota Soybean Growers, Agrium, Dow, Koch Nitrogen, Mosaic, Minnesota Valley Testing Labs, Ostar, Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Coop, TitanPro, West Central and USDA-NRCS.

Thanks to the support of our program sponsors, there are no fees to attend and lunch will be provided. To register and see the full agenda, go to [www.mda.state.mn.us/nutrientconference](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/nutrientconference). The full agenda and presentations from past conferences can be found at [www.mawrc.org](http://www.mawrc.org), on the events tab.

---

## Farmers Take Proactive Approach in Seven Mile Creek Watershed

Twenty farmers who raise crops and livestock in and around the seven mile creek watershed gathered for a farmers-only meeting in St Peter recently to discuss what was happening in the watershed in relation to water quality and agriculture. Farmer leaders associated with Minnesota Pork Producers, Minnesota Farm Bureau, Minnesota Corn Growers, Minnesota Soybean Growers and other farm organizations led the discussion facilitated by Jeremy Geske of the MAWRC.

Like many watershed across MN, the effort to “clean up” seven mile creek is being led by a non-agricultural group which has received a large clean water grant. This project is unique in that farmers are actually leading the conversation, with the MAWRC serving as a resource to help the farmers identify a course of action to improve water quality. This is a model of a genuine farmer-led initiative that the MAWRC seeks to replicate.

The initial farmers-only meeting produced an excellent discussion with a number of proactive suggestions. As an initial step, several farmers committed to completing the Green Star Farms resource self-assessment at [www.greenstarfarms.org](http://www.greenstarfarms.org). This will provide a baseline of the extent to which farmers are taking appropriate steps to manage soil and water properly, and also identify areas for potential improvement. These farmer leaders also discussed the importance of tailoring solutions to each farm’s unique needs. Next steps will include making a list of conservation practices the farmers believe will actually contribute to improving water quality and developing a plan to secure any needed funding.

---

## Be Sure to Visit the MAWRC at MNAg Expo on January 29

Make plans to stop by your booth next week at MNAg Expo, hosted by the Minnesota Corn Growers and Minnesota Soybean Growers. The Discovery Farms Minnesota 2014 Year in Review Report will be available and will be posted at [www.discoveryfarmsmn.org](http://www.discoveryfarmsmn.org) soon after. The Year in Review summarizes water quality data collected through the Discovery Farms Minnesota network in 2014. This data is building a better understanding of actual surface runoff, tile drainage, sediment loss and nutrient loss at the edge of field on representative farms across the state. The program will continue to document the good practices that protect water quality while also helping identify areas for potential improvement.

While you are there, ask us a question about farming and water quality and we will make a donation to Second Harvest Heartland. Our “ask a farmer, feed a family” campaign is primarily intended to help engage non-farm audiences in conversations about their concerns relative to farming and water issues, but we want to include our farmer friends as well. We’re finding that the questions we think are important are not always the same questions others want to talk about.

And if you haven’t completed the Green Star Farms resource evaluation yet at [www.greenstarfarms.org](http://www.greenstarfarms.org), we want to encourage you to check it out. Complete the evaluation on-site at MNAg Expo and get a MAWRC travel mug.

---

The MAWRC is a non-profit research and education corporation comprised of 24 agricultural organizations working together to address water issues. For more information, go to [www.mawrc.org](http://www.mawrc.org).

