

MAWRC Monthly

- June 2015



Final Clean Water Act rule announced

The US EPA and Army Corps of Engineers have released their final “Clean Water Rule: Definition of Waters of the United States” otherwise known as WOTUS. The agencies draft rule, first published for public comment in April of last year, attracted more than one million comments, including many by development, energy and agricultural interests and states calling for withdrawal of the rule and asking the agencies to start afresh with efforts to clarify the scope of the Clean Water Act.

In releasing the final rule, the agencies also provided several fact sheets attempting to quell concerns about expanded jurisdiction and restrictions on land use. Several national agricultural organizations have weighed in with concerns about how the rule may in the future require new permits and potentially restrict some widely accepted farming practices. In addition, the US House of Representatives have voted to prevent the agencies from implementing the rule. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has passed similar language, which will now move to the full Senate for consideration.

Read more about the rule at <http://www2.epa.gov/cleanwaterrule>.

Visit the MAWRC at Farmfest

The MAWRC will once again be in the AURI tent directly across from the main entrance to the Farmfest Forum tent. Visit with us about buffers, WOTUS, Discovery Farms, the Green Star Farms Initiative and whatever else is on your mind.

We will once again be conducting nitrate screening at our booth. Nitrates have been in the news frequently as anti-agriculture extremists continue their quest to instill fear in people with regard to food and water. Nitrates are important and necessary nutrients, but as is often the case, too much of a good thing can be bad. Nitrates have been implicated in contributing to the area of low oxygen, or hypoxia, in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Some places within Minnesota have also experienced elevated nitrate levels in groundwater drinking supplies.

In an effort to help farmers and rural residents better understand the presence of nitrates in their local areas, MAWRC staff will test samples brought to our booth, with results available in less than 30 minutes. Rural residents are encouraged to bring in samples from their drinking water wells. Farmers might also consider bringing in samples from their tile lines. Some farmers have begun mini-science projects on their farms, gathering tile samples from a single tile line at 10-14 day intervals, to begin getting a handle on the seasonality of nitrate movement.

Collecting a sample is easy, simply let your tap run a few minutes, collect about a cup of water in a clean container, and bring it with you to Farmfest. If the sample is taken ahead of time, simply throw it in the freezer, then let it thaw on your way to Farmfest.

You cannot see nitrates in water, but we hope to help create a clearer picture of nitrates in water resources by providing more information.



CTIC Conservation in Action Tour Coming to Minnesota

The Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) will host their eighth annual Conservation in Action Tour in Minnesota August 11-12. The tour includes stops at several farms in southeast Minnesota highlighting advances in nutrient management, drainage systems, cover crops and other innovative practices. For more information or to register for the tour, go to <http://www.ctic.org/CIATours/>.

Ag/Environment Bill Passed in Special Session

The Ag/Environment bill was passed during the special session held June 12, and signed into law by Governor Dayton on June 13. The legislation includes the buffer language reported on last month.

Environmental extremists worked against the bill throughout the legislative session and special session, claiming that the bill lowered environmental protections by doing away with the MPCA Citizens' Board. The Citizens' Board actually pre-dates the MPCA and many of the multiple layers of environmental protection enacted in recent decades which remain in place.

The final legislation also requires economic analysis of recently adopted or proposed changes to water quality standards and rules.

Drought Talk Ends- Fields Turn Wet in NW MN

Timely spring rains have allayed fears of drought across most of Minnesota and the middle portion of the country. In fact, farmers report acres of standing water in northwest Minnesota due to highly frequent rains in recent weeks. Data collected at Discovery Farms weather stations shows rainfall totals at our Norman and Wilkin County monitoring locations of 6.6 and 8.3 inches respectively since April 19. You can access weather data at eleven Discovery Farms locations at <http://discoveryfarmsmn.org/weatherstations/>.



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.

