



# ITASCA WATER LEGACY PARTNERSHIP



## 2008 Annual Update

### Partnership Brings Half Million Dollars to Itasca County Lakes in 2008

#### Mission, Values & Guiding Principles

The mission of the Itasca Water Legacy Partnership (IWLP) is to support the development and implementation of educational programs, projects and policies that ensure the quality, protection, and improvement of all Itasca County waters. The mission is guided by the following values and principles: 1) to work collaboratively, and 2) to promote a strong and sustainable economy.

#### Organizational Update

Local water quality advocates came together in late 2006 to identify and implement a set of activities that would ensure clean water resources and quality habitat in the major watershed of Itasca County. The group solicited assistance from the Blandin Foundation, which helped assemble representatives from key stakeholder groups to create IWLP. After several months of development and growing success, IWLP formalized its operations as a community coalition by establishing an interim board and executive committee to guide partnership activities. The first full board election will take place in January 2009.

The group has realized several important accomplishments in 2008, including:

- Awards of more than a half-million dollars in grants to complete a baseline water quality assessment and to promote better shoreland practices in Itasca County
- Implementation of a two-year water quality testing program in partnership with Itasca Community College (ICC)
- Establishment of a revolving loan fund with the Itasca County Soil & Water Conservation District for upgrades to failing individual septic treatment systems
- Adoption of a mission statement (above) and bylaws to govern coalition
- Implementation of a strategic plan through a subcommittee structure focused on three areas: 1) building local capacity for water assessment, 2) encouraging personal practices that sustain high-quality waters, and 3) assessing the full economic value of clean water
- Branding its public awareness efforts with a “Team Up for Clean Waters” logo and slogan

#### Water Assessment Committee

Nine ICC students sampled and assessed water quality on 151 Recreational Development lakes in Itasca County in the summer of 2008 as part of the new partnership between IWLP and the college. These lakes include all of those that may eventually be subject to recreational development and have not yet been monitored by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). This was the first field season of a two-year water quality assessment project funded by the MPCA and Itasca County’s Environmental Trust Fund. Working with Drs. Jack Jones (University of Missouri) and John Downing (Iowa State University), ICC instructors Sue Hutchins, Harry Hutchins, Bill Sacket, and Derek Fox are establishing a first-of-its-kind water quality technology program on campus, which will train students for careers as water quality technicians, an outstanding employment opportunity for the Itasca County workforce.



To ensure data accuracy, each lake will be assessed ten times by the end on 2009 using MPCA-approved field methods for transparency; turbidity; dissolved oxygen; total phosphorus and nitrogen;; alkalinity; suspended solids; and several other important measurements. During 2008, some of the more straightforward data analysis was done at a new ICC lab set up for the project, while the University of Minnesota-Duluth Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI) and the Iowa State University, and the University of Missouri (Columbia) limnology labs performed more complex analyses. The grant from Itasca County has enabled IWLP to order equipment and initiate the lab setup, which will be fully functional and certified in Spring 2009.

The first summer's data are now in and show remarkable variety and quality in Itasca County's lakes. Some of these data will soon be viewable on the web at:

<http://limnoweb.eeob.iastate.edu/itascalakes>.

### **Public Awareness Committee**

Visual recognition, a catchy slogan, and appropriate communication tools are key to establishing the IWLP presence in Itasca County. With financial assistance from the Blandin Foundation, communications specialist, George Hornik, developed branding for IWLP that includes a unique logo; the "Team up for clean waters" slogan; letterhead; a general IWLP fact sheet; newsletter template; and website design.

A preliminary step in creating a public awareness plan is gathering information on the knowledge, attitudes, and current practices from key audiences: local lakeshore owners, weekend lakeshore owners, non-lakeshore residents, and educators. The committee plans to schedule focus groups with these stakeholders in early 2009. IWLP has also awarded a Native Shoreland Buffer Incentives grant through the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, which will provide an opportunity to gather information from lakeshore owners specific to this water quality Best Management Practice. Future public awareness campaigns that are focused on voluntary septic system maintenance and conservation development are in their early planning stages. The committee is also strategizing ways to pursue water quality education for Itasca County youth.

### **Grants Committee**

The Grants Committee has sought funding for projects that fit the priorities established by the IWLP board and broad-based citizen input from Itasca County's planning activities for its Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Local Water Management Plan.

**Grants awarded.** The MPCA awarded IWLP a \$327,350 Surface Water Assessment Monitoring grant for its water quality assessment project. The Itasca County Environmental Trust Fund also awarded the group \$100,000 to purchase essential laboratory equipment for a certified water quality laboratory and training program at ICC. In late December, IWLP/Itasca County was also awarded a \$75,000 Native Shoreland Buffer Incentives grant from the DNR to pilot an incentive program for maintaining or restoring shoreland buffers on two Itasca County lakes.

**Grants in progress.** In 2009, the group intends to pursue a Major Research Instrumentation Program grant from the National Science Foundation for purchase of next-generation research instrumentation for ICC's water quality lab and a Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) Blue Water Project grant to fund IWLP's community-based watershed stewardship projects.