

# Itasca Water Legacy 2009 Annual Report

## 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 watersheds of Itasca County. IWLP formalized its operations as a community coalition by establishing a board and executive committee to guide partnership activities. The first election took place in January 2009. IWLP has continued to ask representatives from many walks of life and organizations with varying interests in Itasca County's water resources to join the volunteers of IWLP as Board members and to assist with assuring that IWLP is sensitive to the concerns of all Itasca County citizens.

IWLP realized several important accomplishments in 2009, including:

- Continuing implementation of a strategic plan through a subcommittee structure focused on three goals: 1) building local capacity for water quality assessment, 2) encouraging personal practices that sustain high-quality waters, and 3) assessing the full economic value of clean water;
- Continuing a two-year water quality testing program in partnership with Itasca Community College (ICC) and the Itasca County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) by collecting and analyzing water samples from 182 lakes in Itasca County;
- Continuing operation of a state certified water testing and assessment laboratory at ICC;
- Receiving awards of more than a half-million dollars in grants sponsored by the MPCA to complete baseline water quality assessments under a Clean Water Partnership (CWP) grant and a Surface Water Assessment Grant (SWAG);
- Implementing a research project to find suitable incentives that may be used to encourage adoption of improved natural shoreland buffer management practices in Itasca County;
- Actively participating in environmental education celebrations for children at Robert J. Elkington Middle School and "Children First" Fair, both in Spring 2009; and
- Presenting informational material through personal appearances, newspaper reports and public radio to many citizens and landowners in Itasca County who have an interest in water quality.

## Education

"TEAM UP TO GREEN UP!" was the environmental education celebration at Robert J. Elkington Middle School in April 2009. IWLP had a strong presence at the event with

both adult and youth volunteers staffing several informational tables and demonstrations for over 300 visitors. Our IWLP theme was "**Team Up for Clean Waters!**" and we showcased the following activities:

- The "Enviro-Scape" showed a miniature model of a typical neighborhood and how water is used, collected, and moved throughout the system;
- Our "Raindrop Run-off" used carpet squares and glass beads to demonstrate how differently water acts with and without shoreland buffers in place;
- Children enjoyed creating a colorful collage of pictures showing "How We Use Water Through the Minnesota Seasons" on huge poster paper;
- Lollipop prizes with "Clean Water" messages printed on the cards were given to children who participated in these special IWLP activities.

The spring "**CHILDREN FIRST**" fair was a huge educational event for over 2000 area families. IWLP garnered attention with the four activities outlined above as well as additional exhibits, such as:

- Minn-Aqua partnered with IWLP to offer information on clean waters and a "Fish Printing" art activity for children;
- IWLP hosted a guessing game on "How many raindrops are collected?" in the buffer strip demonstration; and
- IWLP members donated prizes, including a bike, to winning participants.

It was a wonderful response from visitors at the fair and IWLP hopes to exhibit again in 2010.

### **Outreach:**

Research being conducted on water quality assessment and native shoreland buffers has led to many useful contacts with individual landowners and an opportunity for discussions and answering of questions about water quality from interested citizens. In an effort to include more citizens in the projects supported by IWLP, more formal presentations have been made to the following: Shallow Lake Association, Wabana Lake Association, Deer Lake Association, Sand Lake Association, Pokegama Lake Association, the Association of Itasca County Townships, Wabana Township, and the Wes Libbey Izaak Walton League. Margaret Haapoja has written an article on the Northern Community Internet and The Herald Review has done a press release on what IWLP has been doing since inception in 2006. The Itasca Soil and Water Conservation District Board supported the MPCA's CWP grant proposal on a diagnostic test for Deer and Pokegama Lakes. That grant also required a board with enforcement powers to be included and, in that role, the Itasca County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved support for the CWP grant application.

### **Membership**

To seek a greater awareness and support for IWLP's mission from Itasca County citizens and to provide funds that would support IWLP's printing, mailing and other operational costs that are not provided in grants, financial contributions from citizens and lake associations were solicited. Currently, members of IWLP include 64

individuals, families and benefactors, 4 individual lake associations (Deer, Pokegama, Sand, and Wabana), Deer Lake Watershed Association, Itasca Coalition of Lake Associations and the Izaak Walton League. Contributions as of 12-31-09 are in the amount of \$26,381.

### **Science and Monitoring**

ICC students sampled and assessed water quality on 182 lakes in Itasca County in the summer of 2009 as part of a partnership of Itasca SWCD, IWLP and ICC. An additional Surface Water Assessment Grant covering 45 of the 182 lakes in the Bigfork River Watershed was initiated by the SWCD in 2009 in partnership with IWLP and ICC. These lakes include those that may eventually be subject to development and have not yet been monitored by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). This was the second field season of a two-year water quality assessment project funded by a MPCA Surface Water Assessment Grant (SWAG) and Itasca County's Environmental Trust Fund. Working with Drs. Jack Jones (University of Missouri) and John Downing (Iowa State University), ICC is seeking to establish a first-of-its-kind water quality technology program on campus, which in the future would train students for careers as water quality technicians, an outstanding employment opportunity for the Itasca County workforce.

### **Grants**

In partnership with Itasca County, Itasca County SWCD, ICC, lake associations and the University of Minnesota, IWLP investigators have continued to seek 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.

Three areas of IWLP focus have been identified as follows:

- 1) Establish a certified water quality assessment laboratory and water technician training program at ICC to provide information on water quality in Itasca County lakes and to provide local students enhanced opportunities to study water resources,
- 2) Foster human behaviors that sustain Itasca County's high quality waters, and
- 3) Assess the full economic value of Itasca County lakes.

### **Grants Previously Awarded**

1) Lake sampling in open water seasons for 2008 and 2009 that was funded by an MPCA Surface Water Assessment Grant, SWAG, (\$327,350) has been completed. A small number of lakes that were listed and not previously sampled will be sampled in 2010.

2) IWLP/Itasca County was awarded a \$75,000 Native Shoreland Buffer Incentives grant from the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund for a three-year pilot project (2009 to 2011) to pilot an incentive program for maintaining or restoring shoreland buffers. Matching funds approved by the Itasca County Board from the Environmental Trust Fund provided \$10,000 for the project. Door to door surveys of landowners conducted by trained local volunteers and mailed KAP (knowledge, attitudes and practices) surveys designed by University of Minnesota researchers on five selected Itasca County lakes were conducted in 2009. In preparation for developing

strategies for finding suitable incentives to shoreland owners who may be encouraged to restore or enhance natural shoreland buffers, summarization and interpretations of findings were presented by investigators and feedback from shoreland owners was solicited at a meeting held in Marcell.

**Grant applications prepared and submitted but not funded:**

1) An application to the Legislative-Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) that was supported by the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative for a 3-year project, titled "Northern Minnesota Site-Based Watershed Education," in the amount of \$569,450 was not funded. The project proposed to develop and deliver rigorous place-based, watershed science lessons to elementary students in the Mississippi River-Grand Rapids watershed.

2) In collaboration with ICC, IWLP submitted a 2010 Reverse Lottery Beneficiary Application to the Rotary Clubs of Grand Rapids for a deadline of October 15, 2009. The purpose of the proposed funding was to purchase equipment for the certified water testing laboratory at ICC to be used in the next 3 years of water testing. Items included: Spectrophotometer, IDEXX Bacteria Analysis System and used 4 X 4 drive vehicles for obtaining and transporting water samples. The total cost of the proposal was \$41,046. The proposal was not funded.

**Grant applications submitted and funded:**

Itasca County SWCD and IWLP investigators submitted a proposal to the MPCA for a Minnesota Clean Water Partnership (CWP) Resource Investigation Project for a September 18, 2009 deadline. The goal of the proposed 3-year project is to provide a foundation of water quality data about Pokegama and Deer lakes. The total project cost amount was \$713,516. Minimum 50 percent matching contribution is required. Grant funds requested from the granting agency = \$249,986 and matching funds, including cash and in-kind services, = \$463,530. MPCA review, evaluation and selection occur in 5 steps. This proposal was approved for funding available in 2010 to 2012. Development of a detailed work plan and budget will begin in early 2010. Thirty to forty trained volunteers from the lakeshore community of each lake will be needed to help with data and sample collections.

In collaboration with ICC and Itasca SWCD, IWLP investigators submitted a proposal to the MPCA for a 2010/2011 Surface Water Assessment Grant (SWAG) for a deadline of November 6, 2009. The purpose of the proposed 2-year project is to inventory water quality of 6 high priority Big Fork watershed lakes targeted by the MPCA in the SWAG RFP, 61 lakes in the Big Fork River watershed, 17 in the Little Fork River watershed and 19 un-monitored lakes that appear to be in the same watersheds. Matching funds from the applicant were not required. Grant funds requested = \$254,881. A notice of funding of the proposal has been received. Revisions in the work plan are expected to take place in early 2010 with funding available in 2010 to 2011.

*[Prepared 1-12-10, H. Dziuk]*