

Minnesota Waters Conservation Partnership Grant Program  
FINAL REPORT  
Zumbro Watershed Partnership  
September 30, 2010

Project Partners:

- Jen Dankers, District Manager, Wabasha Soil & Water Conservation District
- Skip Langer, District Technician, Olmsted Soil & Water Conservation District
- Beau Kennedy, Water Planner, Goodhue Soil & Water Conservation District

Other Participating Organizations:

- Rice County
- Olmsted County
- Whitewater Watershed Project
- Rice County Soil & Water Conservation District
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- Dodge County Environmental Services
- Dodge County Soil & Water Conservation District
- McGhie & Betts Environmental Services

1. Project Planning

Almost immediately after the grant contract was signed, project partners including Zumbro Watershed Partnership (ZWP), Olmsted Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Wabasha SWCD and Goodhue SWCD, along with Rice SWCD and Whitewater Watershed Project, had the opportunity to talk to farmers about shoreland buffers, barriers to installation, and opportunities for education at the AgriNews Farm Show held in Rochester March 24-25, 2010. The following week, project partners met to discuss what we had learned from our ad-hoc needs assessment of buffer education.

Since the beginning of the year substantial changes have occurred in each county that altered this project. Last year, a formal complaint about a violation of Minnesota's 50-ft shoreland buffer rule in Olmsted County set in motion a series of events. In March of this year, the Olmsted County Planning and Zoning sent out a formal letter to 488 shoreland landowners who are known to be out of compliance with the regulation. A second letter was sent in May to those landowners who did not respond to the first letter. As a result of those letters, approximately 380 of the notified landowners have contacted the Olmsted SWCD to get help in planting a shoreland buffer. Currently, both Goodhue and Wabasha counties are planning similar efforts over the next year. Substantial educational outreach and enforcement by Dodge County SWCD and Planning and Zoning has taken place over the past two years and therefore, it was decided by ZWP and Dodge SWCD that resources from this grant should be directed at the counties with a greater need. Because of the

small percentage of the watershed in Steele County, we decided not to send the mailing to shoreland landowners in that county.

Meetings Held: 1  
Total Volunteers: 10  
Volunteer Hours: 53

## 2. Create Riparian Landowner Database

It was decided that the targeted counties – Olmsted, Goodhue, Wabasha and Rice – would identify riparian landowners in the watershed with cultivated land within 50 feet of a public waterway. Once attained, ZWP assembled these databases into a single database for the Zumbro Watershed to use in this project and future communications.

The amount of in-kind labor provided for this deliverable was significantly less than originally estimated. This was due to the recent release of a GIS dataset about land use within the 50-ft shoreland impact zone in each of the targeted counties developed by the Cannon River Watershed Partnership. Therefore, SWCD staff had to simply query by cultivated land and clip the dataset by the watershed boundary to get a list of landowners with cropped land within the 50-ft shoreland zone in the Zumbro Watershed.

Total Volunteers: 4  
Volunteer Hours: 10

## 3. Informational Mailing and Invitation to Forum

Lisa Eadens, project manager from ZWP, spent substantial time reviewing current educational materials on shoreland responsibility, regulations, and conservation opportunities. She gathered information from more than 30 different websites, local, state and federal agency materials, and other conservation organizations.

After an exhaustive review of current materials, she created a draft 2-page, bi-fold buffer brochure with information on: what is a shoreland buffer, the benefits of buffers to water quality, wildlife and farmers, economic opportunities for buffers, and Minnesota's state law for shoreland zones. The brochure was reviewed by 13 project participants and stakeholders, and revised accordingly.

Discussion among project participants revealed that a survey included with the educational mailing to evaluate the brochure would not get a good response. Therefore, we modified this project component to be an evaluation of the educational mailing in conjunction with evaluation of the workshops at the conclusion of each workshop.

Discussion with project participants also revealed that the mailing should also be sent to township clerks to share with their boards, and to county commissioners representing constituents throughout the entire watershed. As possible

enforcement moves forward in a number of counties, project participants felt that informing these representatives with the brochure would help them answer questions posed to them in the future.

Meetings Held: 1

Total Volunteers: 13

Volunteer Hours: 10

Publications: Buffer brochures were mailed on July 26<sup>th</sup> to 743 shoreland landowners in Olmsted, Goodhue, Rice and Wabasha counties and 78 township clerks and county commissioners in Olmsted, Goodhue, Rice, Dodge, Wabasha and Steele counties. (Please see attachment)

#### 4. Landowner Forums

Project partners and participating organizations discussed how best to conduct multiple forums across the watershed. It was decided that Olmsted and Goodhue counties would hold two buffer workshops each and that Wabasha County would hold one. Because of the small amount of land in the Zumbro Watershed in Rice County, we decided not to hold a workshop in that county. The workshops were scheduled for August 17 (Oronoco, Olmsted County), August 19 (Byron, Olmsted County), August 24 (Kenyon, Goodhue County), August 25 (Millville, Wabasha County), and August 26 (Pine Island, Goodhue County) from 8:30-10:00am. The workshops were publicized as “Breakfast and Buffers” and addressed the shoreland ordinance, the benefits of buffers, financial incentive programs for buffers, and buffer maintenance for those who have recently come into compliance (particularly in Olmsted County). Another purpose of the workshops was to encourage landowners to sign up for conservation programs or to get their name down for programs that could be funded by a Clean Water Fund grant this fall. Speakers at the workshops varied by location but generally included staff from ZWP, the local SWCD, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Meeting space for three of the five meetings was donated to the project as in-kind support and the other two meeting spaces were offered at a reduced rate. Publicity for the workshops included a ‘Save the Date’ card inserted into each mailing; 2” x 4” printed advertisements in the Rochester Post Bulletin (ran Saturday, August 7<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, August 12<sup>th</sup>), Money Saver Newspaper (ran Tuesday, August 10<sup>th</sup>), and AgriNews (ran Tuesday, August 10<sup>th</sup>); a press release; and by email and word of mouth.

A 1-page survey was created to evaluate both the buffer brochure and workshop (see attached, with results). The survey was drafted by ZWP and edited by project partners. Survey responses were received from 26 workshop participants. Results showed that most people (46%) heard about the buffer workshop through the buffer mailing. Expectations of the workshop ranged from learning about what must be done to come into compliance with Minnesota’s buffer rule, to having the buffer rule explained, to hearing about buffer incentives. Most people (82%) felt that the workshop met their expectations. Generally, people felt that talking to the agency staff and having their questions answered as well as hearing about what incentive

programs are available were the most helpful parts about the workshops. On average, participants felt it was useful to have all of the organizations present. A quarter of the participants desired future contact by staff from their local SWCD to follow-up on the workshop topics. With regard to the buffer brochure, 54% of workshop attendees had received the buffer brochure. Sixty percent of people said that the brochure presented new information to them. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very effective, the brochure averaged a 4.00 on presenting the information effectively. Additional survey results can be found in the attached document.

Although attendance was slightly lower than predicted, conversations between landowners and presenters were good at all five workshop locations. We also believe that information sharing is likely between the landowners in attendance and their neighbors, family and friends and therefore, we hope that the material presented will reach a wider audience than those present at the workshop.

Workshop attendance totaled 46:

- August 17, Oronoco: 9 people
- August 19, Byron: 20 people
- August 24, Kenyon: 1 person
- August 25, Millville: 5 people
- August 26, Pine Island: 11 people

Publicity:

- A front-page article was featured in the August 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the AgriNews: <http://www.agrinews.com/buffers/are/hot/breakfast/topic/story-2839.html> (also attached).

Workshops Held: 5

Total Volunteers: 18

Volunteer Hours: 90

Publications: Breakfast and Buffers Save the Date insert included with mailing to 743 shoreland landowners in Olmsted, Goodhue, Rice and Wabasha counties and 78 township clerks and county commissioners in Olmsted, Goodhue, Rice, Dodge, Wabasha and Steele counties; Printed Advertisements. (Please see attachments)

### 5. Follow-Up and Sign-Up

As stated above, a quarter of workshop participants desired future communication from their local SWCD to follow-up on buffer topics. Within two weeks of the final workshop, SWCD staff contacted all of these landowners.

So far, landowners at the workshops that have enrolled in a conservation program to solve the buffer issue on their land include:

- Olmsted County: One landowner enrolled seven acres in the Conservation Reserve Program – SAFE and one landowner enrolled three-and-a-half acres into the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program.

- Goodhue County: One landowner enrolled four acres in the hayable buffers program, a program currently offered through a Clean Water Fund grant.

ZWP also has distributed results from the workshop evaluation, observations and impressions from the workshops to its project partners and participants. Additionally, the buffer brochure has been emailed to project partners and participants for further review. Comments and edits received have been incorporated into a final draft, which will be printed and distributed for other organizations and agencies to distribute at their offices, at events, etc.

A number of other watershed organizations, including the Cannon River Watershed Partnership and the Whitewater Watershed Project, are looking into conducting similar educational campaigns on buffers and will use the results from this project to further develop and refine their efforts.

Total Volunteers: 10  
Volunteer Hours: 25

Additional Information

During this grant period, three other presentations and events took place in which ZWP and its project partners were able to highlight shoreland buffers. The first event was a table at the annual “Breakfast on the Farm” event on June 26<sup>th</sup> near Rochester. At this event, two ZWP volunteers spent six hours handing out materials and talking with landowners about shoreland buffers. The second was a presentation by Skip Langer with the Olmsted SWCD to Olmsted County township officials in which he spoke exclusively on the shoreland buffer ordinance and what Olmsted County has done in response to the regulation over the past six months. The third was a booth at a natural resources field day held at the Gorman Creek Farm near the town of Kellogg in which over 100 farmers attended to learn more about conservation practices on their land.

Total Volunteers: 4  
Volunteer Hours: 22

We believe substantial ground has been made with this project and with the ongoing efforts of the county SWCDs and the ZWP, additional shoreland buffers installed will result in significant water quality and wildlife habitat improvements in the Zumbro Watershed.

Attached Documents:

- Shoreland Buffer Brochure (both the version we mailed and the general version which will be distributed to project partners for use)
- Save the Date Workshop Insert
- Advertisements that were displayed in the Rochester Post-Bulletin, Money Saver, and AgriNews

- Workshop/buffer brochure evaluation and results
- Article in AgriNews featuring the buffer workshop held in Byron
- Photo of workshop at Byron
- Map of Zumbro Watershed