

Partnership expands water quality effort



Shell Rock River Watershed District parlays targeted watershed grant, augments Pheasants Forever, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service habitat work



ALBERT LEA — The Shell Rock River Watershed District will reap greater water-quality benefits for nutrient-impaired Pickerel Lake from a partnership among conservation groups restoring wetlands within the district.

With a much bigger footprint and more wetland sites — as many as 35 basins vs. one large basin — the project has the potential to keep more pollutants out of the lake.

The district had slated some of its \$825,000 Targeted Watershed Demonstration Grant for two wetland restorations benefitting Pickerel Lake.

Meanwhile, Pheasants Forever (PF) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) had planned to purchase

248 acres on the southwest shore of Pickerel Lake. They would create and restore multiple wetlands, and establish quality native habitat. By capturing and treating water from a county main tile line, they could achieve nutrient reductions.

District staff saw the potential for greater nutrient removal here than in the wetland restorations it had planned.

Staff approached PF to learn more — and discovered PF and USFWS' restoration and habitat establishment budget was running short.

Without the infusion of the district's grant funds, the project would have either scaled back in scope or proceeded in phases.

This view of Pickerel Lake's outlet faces south. A partnership allowed Shell Rock River Watershed District to leverage a Targeted Watershed Demonstration Grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources.
Courtesy Photos



A partnership among the Shell Rock River Watershed District, Pheasants Forever and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service augments water-quality improvements affecting Pickerel Lake.

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– Courtney Christensen,
Shell Rock River
Watershed District

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District resource technician Courtney Christensen saw a big-picture opportunity.

But one of the district’s wetland restorations already was underway. After a discussion with Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) staff, Christensen determined the partnership would create more bang for the buck than the second wetland identified in the work plan. As a result, the PF/USFWS restoration work

is replacing one of the two original wetland restoration sites.

The district could take advantage of \$25,000 in federal in-kind funds available through USFWS to establish vegetation on the Pickerel Lake site.

“This new wetland restoration location will receive drainage from 184 more acres than the other site, and is expected to remove an additional 20

pounds of total phosphorus each year,” Christensen said.

“Once the engineering team has finished the designs, they will have more accurate reduction numbers. If the county main tile can be tapped into to allow nutrients to filter out over the surface vs. going directly to the lake in a pipe, I see the nutrient reduction numbers going way up,” Christensen said.

The rest of the district’s work plan for its grant — its first Clean Water Fund award from BWSR — involved installing 5,000 linear feet of a two-stage ditch, replacing open-tile intakes with 20 alternative rock inlets, stabilizing 1,200 linear feet of streambank, and adding about 9,000 feet of new or repaired grassed waterways.