



Higher education meets Clean Water in Stearns County

February 2016 Snapshots



Stearns County residents are justly proud of two features of their local community: higher education and clean water. With five universities and colleges within its boundaries, higher education is a cornerstone of life within the county. The Mississippi River and many lakes and rivers enhance the county residents' quality of life. Now, higher education is taking a stand for clean water. Saint Cloud State University and Saint John's are enhancing the natural environment through the installation of water quality improvement projects on their campuses.

The Saint John's University campus contains Sagatagan and Stump Lakes. Established 150 years ago, there were certain historic land use choices that presented water quality challenges to the university today. Concerned about allowing untreated storm water to flow into the lakes, the campus community sought help from the Stearns Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). In 2014, the district was awarded a Clean Water Fund (CWF) grant to install a variety of practices that would trap pollutants flowing from parking lots, sidewalks, and buildings. These practices will keep an estimated 300 pounds of soil from flowing into the lakes each year!

Saint Cloud State University Campus borders the mighty Mississippi River, a natural focus point for the community. The heavily-used Q parking lot south of the Herb Brooks National Hockey Center was also a source of pollution. The gravel and asphalt parking lot drained directly to the Mississippi River. After rain, untreated runoff carried dirt and other pollutants into the river, creating a chocolate milk colored plume that was clearly visible from the banks. The Stearns SWCD worked with the University community to install a basin and native plants that allows this runoff to be cleaned naturally before it flows into the Mississippi River. Design and installation of these practices was supported by a 2014 CWF grant, as well.

Thousands of students benefit from attending Saint John's University and Saint Cloud State University every year. These projects benefit not just those on campus, but those in the surrounding communities. It's an investment, much like education, that will pay dividends well into the future.



Pictured left: Planting along the newly-installed basin. Right: The basin in September 2015, with native plants established.