

Winter 2021-2022

Itasca SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Conservation Today

Have you ever thought what this county would be like without good stewardship of the land. The Itasca County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) employs some of the finest trained technicians' in the state. Lets take a look at the who, what, when, where, and why, of conservation today.

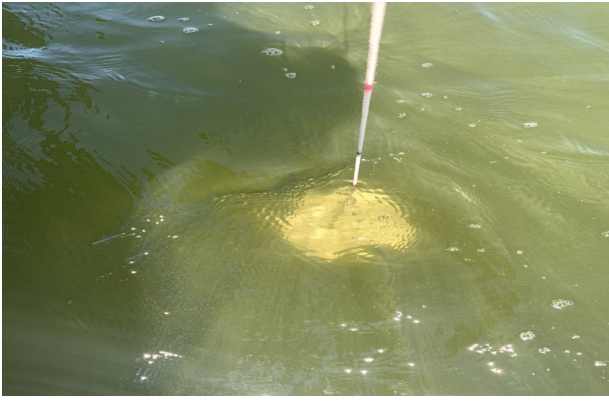
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WHAT TO READ

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- Boat Ramps and dealing with low water
- How Wetlands impact Itasca County
- Shoreland Stabilization and Forestry Practices
- AIS Prevention and Awareness and Training
- AIS Control and Monitoring
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WATER QUALITY AND RESOURCES



Above shows poor water clarity in late summer. Below shows clear water quality in late spring before sunlight and warm temps can increase algae amounts in water.

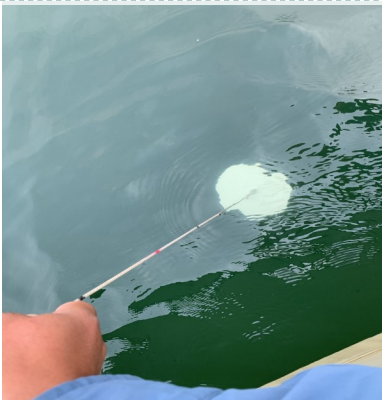
Matt Gutzmann, Water Resource Specialist, reports that the staff at Itasca SWCD are able to help you with questions about water quality, water pollution, and citizen lake/stream monitoring programs. Itasca SWCD will work with you to make changes to improve water quality and reduce pollution entering

lakes and streams.

Itasca SWCD contracts with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to perform water quality tests to monitor water pollution levels at rivers and lakes throughout the summer months.

(Continued)

Many times, as water quality worsens water clarity will decrease, which can be measured with the Secchi disc.



SECCHI DISK MEASURING

Volunteer water quality monitoring is a simple but effective way to keep tabs on some pollutants getting into the water. Many times, as water quality worsens it will show as less water clarity when measuring with the Secchi disc.

WATER QUALITY AND RESOURCES (CONT)

This information is used to help find lakes and rivers that may be impaired with pollution and help with solutions to improve these water bodies in Itasca County. The lakes and rivers often have low levels of pollution in the water however some lakes do have things to be concerned about. Itasca SWCD is here to help find solutions to maintain and improve lakes and streams.

Volunteer water quality monitoring is a simple but effective way to keep tabs on some pollutants getting into the water. Many times, as water quality worsens it will show as less water clarity when measuring with the Secchi disc. This can be good “first line” of defense for keeping an eye on water pollution and is very cost effective if you already have a way to get out onto a lake. Itasca SWCD can help homeowners get setup with this water quality monitoring and assist with training for volunteers.

The Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS) grant project for each major watershed is where the community members and any interested person or entity can come together to learn about the current health of the water systems within each watershed for the remainder of the ten-year cycle.



Above: Surface vegetation can be natural in many lakes, however, runoff from lawns can carry phosphorus into the lake and cause weeds and algae to grow in thick, dense mats.

WATER QUALITY AND RESOURCES (CONT)

Planning and prioritization help to clarify protection and restoration projects would be most beneficial and effective to achieve conservation that benefits the physical landscape, water resources, habitat, while also providing benefits to the people of Itasca County.

The goal at Itasca SWCD is to maintain, improve, develop and conserve soil, water, wildlife and recreational resource. Collaboration with property owners, municipalities, and recreators is essential to make sure best practices are utilized.



(Pictured below)- A boat ramp during a low water year can be a problem for many reasons. Boaters often find it more difficult to launch a boat because of power-loading holes created at the end of a ramp. Here, the exposed sand, dirt, and gravel will wash into the water and can raise pollution levels in the water. Planting native grasses and shrubs near lake shores and river banks is a great way to keep the dirt and sediment from getting into the water.



Picture on the left is of the Bigfork River. The amount of vegetation in the water can actually make a noticeable difference in the height and speed of the water. That's just one of the factors that can change with the seasons!

CONSERVATION PRACTICES



This is a shoreline stabilization project that was implemented in May of 2021.

Austin Steere, Itasca SWCD, is available to answer landowner questions about shoreland stabilization, stormwater management, forestry programs available, and conservation easements. Staff will work with landowners to help implement practices to mitigate problems that negatively affect the soil, water, wildlife and recreational

resources that are located within Itasca County. We also provide educational outreach to schools, communities, and the general public. Financial assistance to install projects may also be available.

Itasca SWCD provides many services for landowners with shoreland erosion and stormwater runoff problems.



Above is a shoreline stabilization and buffer planting project. This project does a good job of showing how you can mitigate two problems with one project. These shoreline species have a good root system to hold sediment in place while treating any stormwater runoff that would otherwise make it to the lake without being treated.

CONSERVATION PRACTICES (CONTINUED FROM ABOVE)

Staff will perform site visits to assess the problem and work with the landowners to come up with feasible practices that mitigate the problem. We also have a Cost Share program that helps landowners offset the total cost of these practices getting implemented. These practices help protect and preserve our pristine lakes of Itasca County. Staff at the Itasca SWCD can help answer forestry questions, provide you with information about state incentive forestry programs and get your land enrolled in a conservation easement. Conservation easements are beneficial to improving water quality by reducing soil erosion, phosphorus and nitrogen loading, and improving wildlife habitat on private lands. Forestry and water quality go hand in hand, a healthy forest leads to good water quality.



Itasca SWCD Native Tree and Plant Sale

Itasca SWCD Native Tree and Plant Sale is scheduled to start taking orders in early 2022. Many of the native stock will work well in a raingarden or stabilization project. Please call the District

RAIN GARDENS

Above is a raingarden in an urban area that treats potentially polluted stormwater runoff before it can enter the cities stormwater system or a nearby waterway. This is important because water entering a stormwater system doesn't get treated and flows directly to a waterway. Some pollutants that can be found in stormwater runoff include litter, heavy metals, motor oil, fertilizers, and anything else that can be found on city streets.



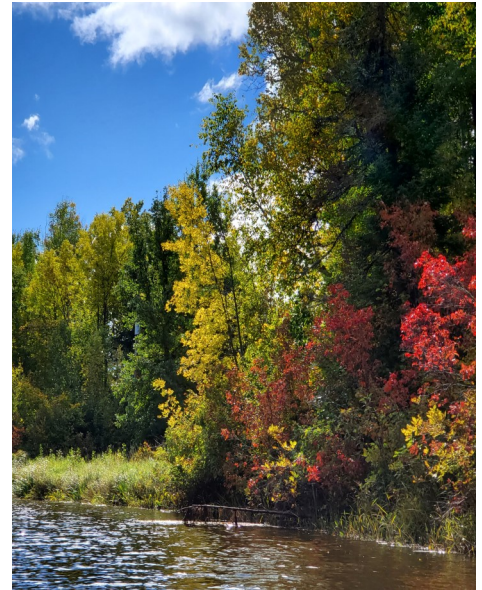
Pictured on the left : There are two types of conservation easements that the Itasca SWCD can help you get enrolled in. One is for protecting wild rice waterbodies and the other is for protecting the headwaters of the Mississippi River. Both have incentives for landowners to join these programs. The goal of conservation easements is to protect the conservation value of the land by permanently limiting the use of the land. Contact Itasca SWCD to see if your land qualifies or if you would like to learn more about these programs.



Picture above is a pristine photo of Blue Water Lake on a perfect summer day.

LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Waylon Glienke, Wetland Specialist with the Itasca SWCD works alongside a handful of agencies to enforce the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) in Itasca County. When situations rise that call for wetland impacts staff at the Itasca SWCD are more than willing to help a landowner avoid any sort of legal trouble and assist the landowner by helping them navigate in a way that both fulfills the needs of the landowner and the wetland law.



DID YOU KNOW?

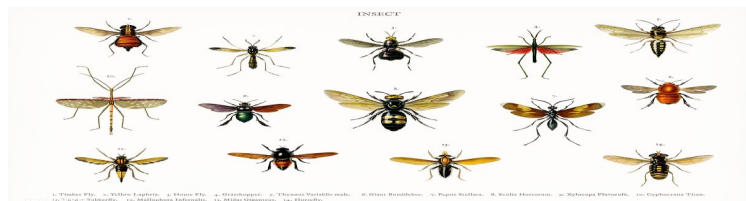
Pictured on the left: The pink and white *lady's slipper* (*Cypripedium reginae*) was designated the official *state flower* of *Minnesota* in 1902; protected rare wildflower. Plant height is 6–17” Blooms May–July The Showy *lady's slipper* is one of 43 orchid species that are native to *Minnesota* and is easily recognizable as a brightly colored orchid.



6 **Pitcher Plant**

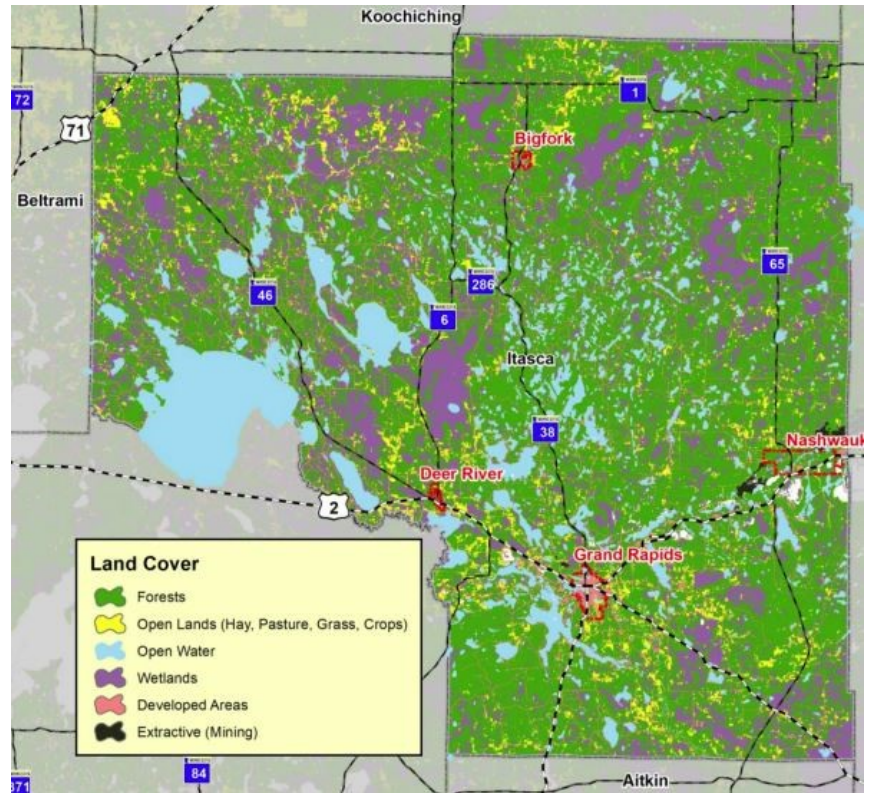
WETLAND PLANT SPOTLIGHT:

The Purple Pitcher Plant is a perennial native to the acidic soils peat bogs in the northern half of the state have to offer. The Pitcher Plant has an ‘obligate’ wetland indicator status, meaning if you come across a Pitcher Plant you are almost certainly in a wetland. What makes this plant so interesting is that it’s



WETLANDS IN ITASCA CO

Itasca County would rank as the 3rd smallest state in the union if it were a stand-alone body. The nearly 3,000 square miles of land within its borders are full of hydrologically influenced features. Itasca County is what the state of Minnesota deems an '80 or greater county' which means that over 80% of the pre-settlement wetlands are still intact and functional.



The Itasca SWCD administers the Mn Wetland Conservation Act in Itasca Co.

PICTURE OF SOILS



Soils are one of the three critical indicators that determine if an area will be considered upland or wetland. Soils that have a greyish depleted hue combined with rust-colored mottles (redox) are indicators that the soil is often wet enough to support a wetland habitat.

THE ITASCA SWCD AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM



Above, an Itasca SWCD watercraft inspector shows a boat owner an area where Zebra mussel like to hide.

Bill Grantges, Itasca SWCD AIS Program Coordinator, reports aquatic invasive species (AIS) are animals, plants, or organisms from another region of the world that don't belong in their new water environment. An aggressive reproductive cycle combined with a lack of natural predators allow the AIS to spread rapidly and forces out the native organisms by consuming the nutrients, light, and habitat. AIS changes entire ecosystems and effects the way we use our lakes and rivers. Itasca SWCD is on the front lines in the battle against AIS.

Through delegation agreements with the State and Itasca County, Itasca SWCD offers one of the best AIS programs in Minnesota. The MN DNR uses Itasca County's AIS program as one example for other counties to follow on how to organize a county-wide AIS program. Our year around and seasonal AIS staff implement a five-part program designed to fight the spread of AIS on multiple fronts.

Itasca SWCD is on the front lines in the battle against AIS



Perhaps the most visible program are the watercraft inspectors you see at select public water access sites throughout the county that are part of our Prevention program. Over 37,000 inspections were performed in 2021 in Itasca. In a large part due to inspections that also involve education the boat owners about AIS, we have seen violation rates drop from 34% at the start of the program in 2014 to just under 2% in 2021. We also offer free full decontamination services to AIS from watercraft, boatlifts, docs, and any other item that will be placed in Itasca area waters.



Another method we use to fight AIS is the Community Action Projects (CAP) grant program. This grant program provides matching funds for Itasca residents that have a good idea on how to fight the spread of AIS.

Top picture on the left, Zebra mussels have clogged a water cooling supply line.

Bottom picture on the left, Eurasian watermilfoil has completely fouled this outboards prop



Itasca AIS Program, Awareness & Training Booth at 2018 Children First Festival

Awareness and Training is the name of the Itasca SWCD AIS program that provides public outreach. We have offerings that range from general AIS informational sessions to full hands-on AIS identification classes. Each year we send AIS information to thousands of Itasca residents by email and through our AIS website and direct postal service mailings. Thousands more Itasca residents are reached at area events like the Itasca County Fair, Children First Festival, Home and Sport shows and the Tall Timber Days weekend event and parade.

Perhaps the least visible but equally important program we have is with Itasca County. The support we receive from our County Commissioners and the Environmental Services department make it possible for us to offer one of the best AIS programs in the State.

Our fifth AIS Program is unique in the state. We have received requests from other counties in Mn and even other states to come tell them how our Control and Monitoring program works. While accurate, calling the work they do “search and destroy” is only part of what this program and its group of highly trained professionals do. Chris Evans, Itasca SWCD AIS Specialist and Assistant AIS Coordinator, manages this innovative program. Chris describes the Control & Monitoring in the next article.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL & MONITORING

Besides their robust watercraft inspection program, and Awareness and Training and CAP grant programs, the Itasca SWCD also facilitates a comprehensive program geared towards the early detection and control of invasive species populations in the lakes and rivers of Itasca County. This program annually hires seasonal staff to physically survey around 70 lakes and rivers that are identified to be at high risk for AIS infestations.

Since its conception in 2015, this Control & Monitoring crew has surveyed nearly 300 lakes in Itasca County totaling over 1,200 miles of shoreline. Around 70 of the highest-risk lakes have been surveyed up to 10 times over the years and new discoveries of invasive plants and animals have been found all along the way.

In collaboration with the MN DNR, USFWS, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, various lake associations and citizen scientists, our AIS Control & Monitoring program implements management projects for invasive plants on over 70 lakes, 4 major stretches of river and numerous wetlands within the county. Examples of these management projects include manual removal of Flowering Rush and Curly Leaf Pondweed from shallow waters and the biological and chemical control of Purple Loosestrife within riparian areas.



AIS Control & Monitoring Technicians removing Curly Leaf Pondweed by hand from a Pristine Itasca County Lake.

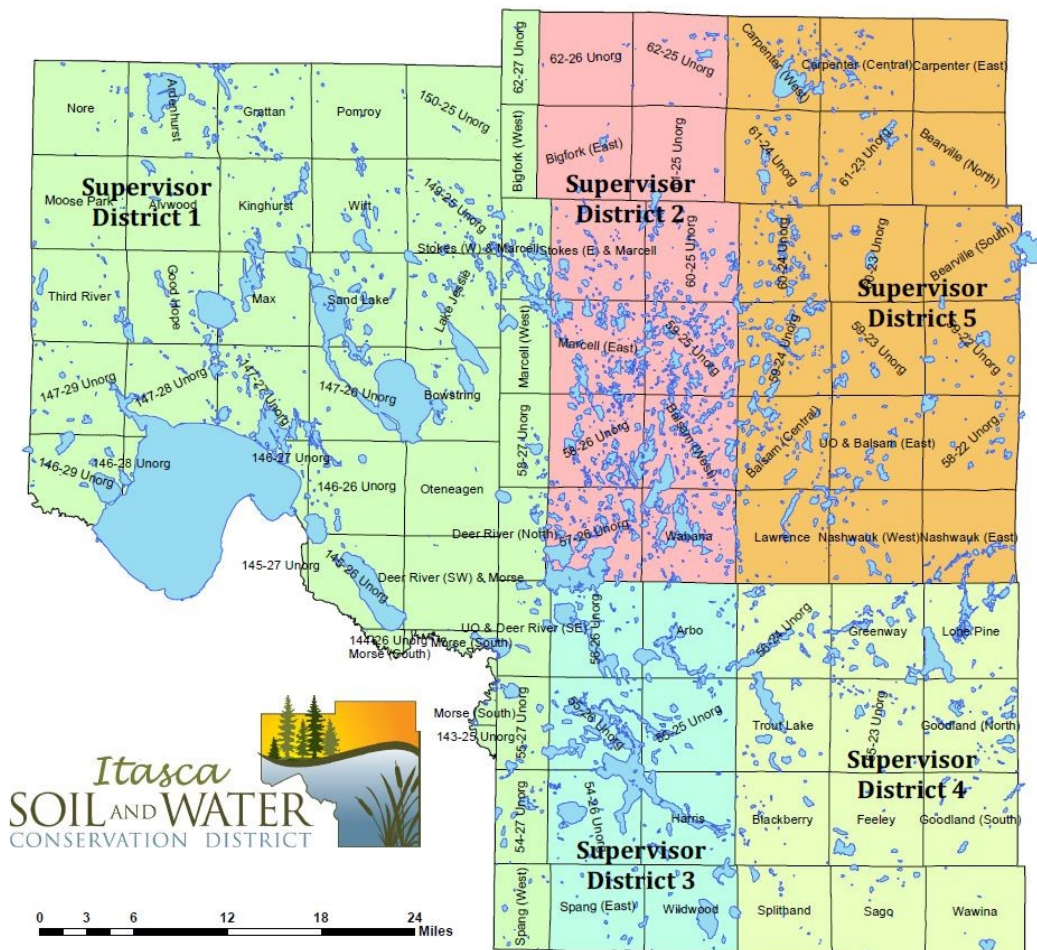
AIS Control & Monitoring Technicians examine woody debris for invasive mussels and snails.

For more information on AIS and the Itasca SWCD AIS Program, or to report suspected AIS, visit our webpage at www.ItascaSWCD.Org/programs/aquatic-invasive species or www.ItascaAIS.Info or call the Itasca AIS Hotline at 218-256-4243.

Itasca SWCD Supervisors and Districts they Represent



L to R: Ken Lundgren District 1, Tom Nelson District 2, Calvin Saari District 5
Dennis Barsness District 4, Paul Rustad District 3



Itasca SWCD Staff



L to R: Waylon Glienke-Wetland Specialist, Austin Steere- Projects Coordinator, Matt Gutzmann- Water Resource Specialist, Chris Evans- AIS Specialist, Bill Grantges- AIS Coordinator, Kathy Cone- Bookkeeper, Andy Arens- Manager.

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