

Valley Vision



Friends of the Minnesota Valley envisions a healthy Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Minnesota River, and surrounding lands and waters.

Friends at Farmfest 2011 by Scott Sparlin

In typical Farmfest fashion, the 2011 event kicked off with a sweltering day of unrivaled proportions. That, however, didn't dampen spirits or keep away the quite surprisingly large crowd for the first day. Scott Sparlin talked with many people about the Friends' conservation activities and our agricultural initiative which features technical changes in the way and methods rural land is drained.

From the responses heard over the three-day period, we are certainly on the right track. Many producers have come to understand that this is an area where progress can be made in improving water quality and quantity issues while at the same time providing for enhancement of the water table within their fields. Groundwater recharge is important as well for many producers who live and have livestock that depend upon that precious resource. Scott discussed with numerous Farmfest attendees the notion that, when planned out in partnership with producers' input leading the way, we can achieve multiple goals. Also, when systems are installed by professionals who have the proper training and are willing to listen to producers with years of experience on their land, those multiple goals can be achieved and enjoyed by all of us.



(Photo, above left): Friends' Watershed Initiative Coordinator Scott Sparlin discusses Friends of the Minnesota Valley's conservation drainage initiative with Tom Wheeler of KNUJ Radio, part of the Minnesota Farm News Network.

(Photo, above right): Scott Sparlin is all smiles as he poses with Senator Al Franken outside one of the tents at Farmfest. The two took time to discuss the upcoming re-authorization of the federal Farm Bill, including the possible inclusion of subsidies to farmers for conservation practices such as conservation drainage, making the adoption of the practice more attractive.

Discovery Farms Offer Farmers Tool for Better Land Management

By Warren Formo

Minnesota farmers have a new farm management decision tool to aid in continued improvement of their farm's environmental and economic performance. Discovery Farms Minnesota is a proactive, farmer led effort to gather field-scale information on water quality impacts from a variety of farming systems in different settings across Minnesota. Combining farm practice information and water quality information gathered under real-world conditions provides practical, credible, site-specific information to allow better farm management decisions, supported by a better understanding of the relationships between land management and water quality.

The Discovery Farms program in Minnesota is coordinated by the Minnesota Agricultural Water Resources Coalition, in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and University of Minnesota Extension. A Steering Committee comprised of representatives from Minnesota farm, agribusiness and conservation organizations guides the overall direction of the program and determines research priorities. MDA technicians are responsible for the design of water monitoring systems on each farm and compilation of all water quality data. MAWRC staff gather all farm practice information, which when combined with the water quality data tells a more complete story than either set of data can provided on its own.

There are currently six Discovery Farms locations in Minnesota, including two in the Minnesota River Basin. The addition of two or three new locations is planned for later this year. Minnesota's Discovery Farms program also works closely with sister programs in Wisconsin and North Dakota, utilizing common research methods and sharing results. This is particularly helpful in compiling data at the basin level along shared borders, such as the lower Mississippi River which serves as a border between Minnesota and Wisconsin and the Red River in northwest Minnesota and eastern North Dakota.

For more information on Discovery Farms Minnesota, log onto www.mawrc.org or contact Dr. George Rehm at 507-263-9127 or radatz@mawrc.org. Warren Formo is the Executive Director of the Minnesota Agricultural Water Resources Coalition.



(Photo, left): Dr. George Rehm is the Discovery Farms Coordinator for the Minnesota Agricultural Water Resources Coalition. MAWRC is partnering with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the University of Minnesota Extension Office on the Discovery Farms Minnesota initiative.

Here, Dr. Rehm gathers farm practices information and water quality information onsite to help better understand the connection between land management and water quality.

Minnesota River Board Annual Meeting Wrap-Up

By Susan Carlin

On Monday, July 18, the Minnesota River Board (MRB) held its annual meeting and conference at the Lakeside Ballroom in Glenwood, Minnesota. After the business meeting, several guest speakers talked about successful projects, public perceptions, and opportunities for further progress in the Minnesota River Basin. These invited guests were Jennifer Hoffman and Paul Wyman, both from the Chippewa River Watershed Project, Cory Netland of the neighboring Hawk Creek Watershed Project, and Warren Formo of the Agricultural Water Resource Coalition.

Every year at the annual meeting, the MRB takes the opportunity to recognize its award recipients. The Tributary Award was presented to Luverne and Mary Jo Forbord. The Forbords raise Lowline Angus cattle at their organic Prairie Horizons Farm. A decade ago, they decided to replace their dairy herd with the short-statured, efficient Lowlines. The cattle are raised on 250 acres of natural prairie grasses, which enhances local biodiversity and flood control. The Confluence Award was given to Dr. Bruce Brown, a retired University of Minnesota professor. Through the Pope County Coalition of Lake Associations, Dr. Brown spent many years coordinating a volunteer effort to collect water samples from many of the lakes in the watershed, including Lake Minnewaska, where the meeting was held.

After lunch, conference participants were treated to a boat tour of Lake Minnewaska. With a peak regional heat index of 121°F that afternoon, everyone agreed that being on the water with a breeze was the absolutely best place to be! From the boat, passengers got to see lakeshore restoration, residential homes, and natural areas, all while conversing with their friends and colleagues.

Susie Carlin is the Program Director for the Minnesota River Board.



(Photo, left): Luverne and Mary Jo Forbord accept the Tributary Award.

(Photo, right): MRB annual meeting participants begin boarding for a boat tour of Lake Minnewaska in Glenwood, Minnesota.



Fourth Annual Conservation Drainage Sessions Completed

Friends of the Minnesota Valley, along with our partners at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Agri-Drain, and the Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition, held our informational sessions on conservation drainage technology in the Minnesota River Watershed for the fourth year in a row. Host cities included Marshall, Chaska and Fairmont. For more information, visit our website at www.friendsofmnvalley.org/article.aspx?articleid=5966.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tim Lies, President
(Vacant), Vice President
Mary Kay Lynch, Secretary
Jenna Mueller, Treasurer
Eric Baker
Pat Cragoe
John Crampton
Greg Genz
John Hickman
Scott Hoese
Jack Kley
Paul Kramer
Anne Ludvik
David Minge
Sever Peterson
Todd Redmann
Bob Williams
Jim Wolf, Past President
Director Emeritus
Ed Crozier

STAFF

Lori Nelson
Executive Director
Scott Sparlin
Watershed Initiative Coordinator
Shelly Miller
Program Communications Assistant
**FRIENDS OF THE
MINNESOTA VALLEY**
10800 Lyndale Ave. S., Suite 120
Bloomington, MN 55420
Phone: 952-881-9055
Fax: 952-881-3174
www.friendsofminnvalley.org

FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

Friends of the Minnesota Valley works to protect and enhance the natural resources of the Lower Minnesota River Watershed, including the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Valley Vision is a publication of Friends of the Minnesota Valley. No reproduction of information in this newsletter without written permission from the Friends.



Printed on 30% post-consumer recycled paper

Supply Us with an E-mail Address and Save a Tree:

Send your request to lnelson@friendsofminnvalley.org.

Friends of the Minnesota Valley
10800 Lyndale Ave. S., Suite #120
Bloomington, MN 55420



NONPROFIT
ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Twin Cities, MN
PERMIT NO.
2941