

Summary of Research from 2010 for Rural Landowner Outreach

County Fair Survey

1. Results

- a. **Respondents:** 52 out of 60 own less than 40 acres of land
- b. **Land uses and habitat types:**
 - i. Of the people surveyed, half (29 out of 60) have woods on their property, 1/3 have meadow or prairie and 1/4 have wetlands or marsh.
 - ii. A quarter have farm animals (mostly horses)
- c. **Interests**
 - i. Controlling weeds and invasive plant species
 - ii. Reducing property taxes
 - iii. Wildlife habitat
 - iv. NOT - planting buffers along streams and wetlands, fixing erosion or drainage issues or planting prairie
 - v. People with 5-10 acres were the most interested in conservation; people with more than 40 acres and people with horses were the least interested

2. Implications

- a. **Target mid-sized landowners.** EMWREP may see the most success if we target our initial outreach efforts to people with 5-10 acres, since they are the most interested in conservation topics. This is the group that is the most interested in creating wildlife habitat.
- b. **Promote programs that have the potential to reduce tax burdens.** Federal or state programs – Green Acres, Conservation Easements, etc.
- c. **Use invasive species management as a hook to engage people in larger conservation projects that also have a water quality benefit.**
- d. **Focus on the wildlife habitat benefits of conservation practices.** People were very interested in creating habitat for wildlife. At the same time, they expressed little interest in the types of projects that create wildlife habitat, such as stream and wetland buffers and prairie plantings. They were also not interested in getting advice on managing their land or getting help designing and installing conservation projects.

To be successful in our outreach, we might want to craft a message to focus on “bringing birds and wildlife to your property,” instead of on the specific practices we would like people to do. The site visit, then, would be the opportunity to discuss recommended practices to create wildlife habitat and to “push” those practices that would also benefit water quality (and qualify for funding).

Focus Groups

1. Recruitment

- a. Invitation letter mailed to 30 landowners in each of three target areas – Afton, CLFLWD near Bone Lake & Brown’s Creek headwaters
- b. Follow-up e-mails sent to Brown’s Creek rural landowners on Karen’s e-mail list
- c. People were given a \$25 Target gift card to participate

2. Afton Focus Group

- a. All 9 attendees live on their land
- b. They cited privacy, wildlife and woods and their favorite aspects to living in southern Washington County.
- c. People were VERY interested in buckthorn management
- d. A few people commented on surface water concerns – these people all lived on a stream or had active erosion problems on their land
- e. Some people were concerned with groundwater availability and quality

3. Northern County Focus Group

- a. Three out of 4 do not live on their land
- b. They cited the rural nature, hunting and outdoor recreation as their favorite aspects to living in northern Washington County.
- c. People were most concerned with development pressure and unfair treatment by cities, also buckthorn, but less so.
- d. They were less knowledgeable about resources available through the watersheds and Conservation District.
- e. They felt neighbors would be more receptive to outreach from a sportsman group than from a government agency.

4. Overall findings:

- a. Most people in both groups were already active in land improvement projects and informed of environmental factors impacting their properties.
- b. People were most interested in invasive species control and relieving development pressure.
- c. People were not as interested in doing projects to protect the St. Croix or other waterways.
- d. People responded positively to suggestions of an outreach program that would help them to improve wildlife habitat and manage invasive species.

Interviews with Past BMP Participants (9)

- People were overall very satisfied with the projects and assistance
- Half did their projects to fix a problem on their land (ie. erosion) and half did it to protect a water resource
- The two components that most helped people to do their projects were design assistance and engineering and the people
- 8 of 9 interested in improving habitat & half thought their neighbors would be also

Interviews with Potential Conservation Partners

*Many others were contacted but did not return calls (ie. sportsmen groups)

1. Parks and Nature Centers
 - a. Afton State Park
 - i. Park naturalist starting this summer who can do presentations
 - b. Carpenter Nature Center
 - i. Would like assistance with buckthorn management
 - ii. They have volunteer base for projects + tools and equipment and can be host for events
 - c. Warner Nature Center
 - i. Would like help mitigating runoff from driveway into bog
 - ii. Potential host for events
2. Non-profits
 - a. Arcola Mills
 - i. Would like assistance for projects on site.
 - ii. Facility available for programs and they have relationships with other organizations.
 - b. Audubon Minnesota
 - i. Would like assistance reprinting bird booklet and doing outreach in the county. Have a mailing list and staff to do presentations.
 - c. Belwin Conservancy
 - i. Need funding and physical help for projects on site.
 - ii. They have technical expertise and equipment for projects off site.
 - d. Friends of Mississippi River
 - i. Mostly doing outreach in Dakota Co., but some targeted outreach along Mississippi River here. Has a volunteer base.
 - ii. Would like to work with landowners on planting and restoration projects.
 - e. Great River Greening
 - i. Would like to collaborate on planting trees for stormwater management. They need sites to plant trees.
 - f. Izaak Walton League
 - i. Needs funding assistance. Has land for programs outdoors.
 - g. What we need is here
 - i. Have funds and artists for a raingarden projects along the St. Croix
 - ii. Need technical support