

West Metro Water Alliance (WMWA)

In 2006 the Shingle Creek and West Mississippi Watershed Management Commission's Education and Public Outreach Committee (EPOC) invited the Education Committee of the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission to partner in developing joint education and outreach activities. Since that time this voluntary partnership has grown to include the Elm Creek Watershed Management Commission, the Three Rivers Park District, Hennepin County Department of Environmental Services, and the Freshwater Society. The WMOs are designated as "members," the latter three organizations as "partners."

WMWA meets monthly, as needed, on the second Tuesday, at Plymouth City Hall. Member representatives include Laura Jester, Administrator, Bassett Creek WMC; Doug Baines, Dayton, Elm Creek WMC; Shelley Marsh, Brooklyn Center, and Ben Scharenbroich, Plymouth, Shingle Creek and West Mississippi WMCs, Denis Hahn, Three Rivers Park District; Mary Karius, Randy Anhorn, and Alisa Reckinger, Hennepin County; Joan Nephew, Freshwater Society; Jenny Schaust and Mary Anderson, Educators; Diane Spector, Wenck Associates, technical support; and Judie Anderson and Amy LeMieux, JASSS, administrative support.

This alliance, the West Metro Water Alliance (WMWA), grew from a recognition that the individual organizations have many common education and public outreach goals and messages that could be more efficiently and effectively addressed and delivered collaboratively and on a wider scale.

In 2014 eight meetings were held. Among the topics discussed were:

Watershed PREP

Watershed PREP is a program of WMWA, and stands for Protection, Restoration, Education, and Prevention. 2014 was the second year of the program. Two persons with science education backgrounds serve as contract educators to be shared between the member watersheds. The focus of the program is two-fold - to present water resource-based classes to fourth grade students and to provide education and outreach to citizens, lake associations, other civic organizations, youth groups, etc. Goals of the program are 1) to have a general understanding of watersheds, water resources and the organizations that manage them, and 2) to understand the connection between actions and water quality and water quantity. The ultimate goal is to make this program available to all fourth graders in the four WMWA watersheds and to other schools as contracted.

Fourth Grade Program. Three individual classes meeting State education standards have been developed. **Lesson 1, What is a Watershed and Why do we care?** provides an overview of the watershed concept and is specific to each school's watershed. It describes threats to the watershed. **Lesson 2, Water Cycle - More than 2-dimensional!** describes the movement and status of water as it travels through the water cycle. **Lesson 3, Stormwater Walk,** investigates movement of surface water on schools grounds.

Late in 2013 Hennepin County awarded a \$7,940 Green Partner Grant (ROOT) to fund expansion of the program. Project goals were to triple the number of classrooms visited in 2014 and develop a stronger connection to action by introducing the Storm Drain Goalie into the program.

Community Education and Outreach. The PREP educators also provided outreach at five community and school events and presented the lessons to Hennepin County Environmental Services at their staff retreat.

Educational Materials

Goals of the program are three-fold. 1) Inform various stakeholders about the watershed organizations and their programs; 2) Provide useful information to a variety of stakeholders on priority topics; and 3) Engage stakeholders and encourage positive, water-friendly behaviors. Two informational pieces have been developed by WMWA:

10 Things You Can Do Brochure. This popular brochure targeted to the general public was edited and freshened and reprinted in 2014. 35,000 copies were printed and distributed to WMWA members and their partners. The brochure is distributed at all venues where the Commissions or member cities have a presence and also in the Watershed PREP classrooms.

Maintain Your Property the Watershed Friendly Way. This handbook is targeted to small businesses, multi-family housing properties, and common ownership communities such as homeowners' associations. It contains tips for specifying and hiring turf and snow maintenance contractors, and includes checklists for BMP inspections. This eight-page handbook was updated in 2014 and will be reprinted in 2015.

2014 Marketing Plan

WMWA partnered with the Freshwater Society and Excelsior Brewing on a **beer coaster project**. Excelsior has agreed to print batches of their coasters with water quality messages and the WMWA name and contact info at no cost to WMWA. The flip side of the coaster has a QR code that takes the reader to a web page of environmental messages.

Water Links. The Commissions contribute to the WMWA eNewsletter *Water Links*, which is published by Hennepin County Environmental Services. Only one issue was published in 2014. Two volunteer writers were recruited and will work with WMWA and Hennepin County to generate more timely newsletter content.

Seed Packets. One of the priority messages in 2014 was the role of native vegetation in improving stormwater infiltration and reducing other negative environmental impacts. To help promote this message, WMWA and the member Commissions handed out 800 packets of native seeds. A short educational message was printed on the seed packets.

Plymouth Yard & Garden Expo. Bassett Creek, Shingle Creek and Elm Creek booths were combined into a large area and included a WMWA focused area at the 2014 Expo, April 11 and 12. The Plymouth Environmental Fair was held on Saturday of the Expo. Over 900 folks visited the event.

"5,000 acres by 2025," Proposed for 2015, this project would promote planting native vegetation to increase infiltration and filtration and enhance habitat, replacing at least 5,000 acres of turf grass or impervious surface. The project would include an advertising campaign, workshops, technical assistance, plant sales and financial incentives. The project would be funded in part from the WMWA special projects budgets from 2014 and 2015. At 2014 year-end a steering committee was named to meet with Dawn Pape to solicit her ideas and recommendations and to possibly determine her interest and availability to write a work plan for the project.