



2013 Annual Report



Above: Angie Hong talks about public outreach and engagement during the St. Croix Workshop on the Water for local elected officials and decision makers.

Members of the East Metro Water Resource Education Program:

Brown's Creek Watershed • Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed •
Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed • Cottage Grove •
Dellwood • Forest Lake • Lake Elmo • Middle St. Croix Watershed •
Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed • Rice Creek Watershed • Stillwater •
South Washington Watershed • Valley Branch Watershed • Willernie •
West Lakeland • Woodbury • Washington Conservation District • Washington County

**East Metro Water Resource Education Program
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About the East Metro Water Resource Education Program

Background: The East Metro Water Resource Education Program (EMWREP) is a partnership that was formed in 2006 to develop and implement a comprehensive water resource education and outreach program for the east metro area of St. Paul, MN. Current EMWREP partners include Brown's Creek, Carnelian-Marine-St Croix, Comfort-Lake Forest Lake, Rice Creek, Ramsey-Washington Metro, South Washington, and Valley Branch Watershed Districts, Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization, the cities of Cottage Grove, Dellwood, Forest Lake, Lake Elmo, Stillwater, Willernie, and Woodbury, West Lakeland Township, Washington County and the Washington Conservation District.

Purpose: The purpose of the shared education program is to provide education about the impacts of non-point source pollution on local lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and groundwater resources and to engage people in projects that will help to protect and improve water quality in the region. In addition to educating the public, EMWREP also provides training for city, county and watershed staff and local elected officials.

Partnership Structure: EMWREP is guided by a steering committee comprised of representatives from each of the 18 partner organizations. The committee generally meets twice a year to provide recommendations on the program budget and activities. During 2013, EMWREP staff included Angie Hong, full-time education specialist and coordinator for the program, Jenn Radtke, half-time education assistant, and Wendy Griffin, a Washington Conservation District natural resource specialist who provided 170 hours of support for rural education activities. The EMWREP coordinator sends a quarterly e-newsletter to all partners' staff, council members and board members, and communicates one-on-one with individual partners on projects throughout the year. The EMWREP education plan is revised every two to three years to accommodate changing priorities and new target audiences. In addition, the EMWREP coordinator prepares an annual report on program activities and provides outreach data and statistics for partners' MS4 Permit reports. All EMWREP reports, plans, and education updates are available on-line at www.mnwcd.org/emwrep.

Coordination with Other Regional Education Efforts: One of the major benefits of the EMWREP program is that it has helped to strengthen relationships between Washington Conservation District, Washington County and the eight watershed management organizations and eight cities that constitute the partnership, which has resulted in better coordination and less overlap in the management of local water resources. By promoting partner's BMP programs, EMWREP has helped to increase the total number of water quality improvement projects implemented and to target these projects in priority areas.

EMWREP has also played a central role in the coordination and development of two regional education programs, Blue Thumb and WaterShed Partners. Blue Thumb is a partnership of more than 70 public and private entities in the Upper Midwest, developed to promote the use of native plantings, raingardens and shoreline plantings to conserve water resources and reduce runoff pollution. WaterShed Partners, which manages the Clean Water Minnesota media campaign, is a collaborative of more than 60 non-profit and public entities in the Twin Cities metro area that work together to educate the public about stormwater pollution. Additionally, EMWREP frequently partners with other organizations within the St. Croix River Basin for educational events and activities.

Accolades: In 2012, the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts recognized EMWREP as the Watershed Program of the Year.

2013 Executive Summary

General Education Campaign: During 2013, EMWREP continued to use a variety of strategies to educate the general public about stormwater pollution and other issues affecting the quality of surface and groundwater resources, and to inform them about partner programs and activities. Major strategies include more than 100 articles per year in local newspapers and community newsletters, ample use of social media, direct mailings to specific audiences, and participation in nearly 30 community events.

Though the impact of these larger public education and awareness raising efforts is often hard to measure directly, we know they greatly improve the success of our targeted outreach activities and are usually the initial gateway through which people learn about EMWREP partner organizations and engage at a higher level by attending a workshop, participating in a watershed planning process, or installing a clean water project on their property.

In 2013, EMWREP also initiated three new special education projects:

- 1) We collaborated with Chisago County to hold an Aquatic Invasive Species workshop in Scandia, attended by 75 people;
- 2) We created new educational materials and sent mailings to homeowners' associations and lawn care companies in Forest Lake and Woodbury; and
- 3) We held a focus group with representatives from area churches, which led to the creation of a new e-newsletter for congregations and plans for additional education activities in 2014.

Blue Thumb Program: The Blue Thumb – Planting for Clean Water program (www.BlueThumb.org) was developed by the Rice Creek Watershed District in 2006 and is now a dynamic coalition of more than 70 partner organizations working together to raise awareness about stormwater pollution and encourage homeowners to plant native gardens, raingardens and shoreline projects to protect surface and groundwater resources.

EMWREP uses Blue Thumb tools and resources, such as the website and print materials, to promote partner BMP programs and strengthen targeted outreach for neighborhood stormwater retrofit projects. In addition to giving presentations about the Blue Thumb program to several community groups and lake / neighborhood associations, EMWREP also conducted five workshops during the year:

- 1) A raingarden workshop in Scandia;
- 2) A prairie workshop in Afton;
- 3) A workshop for large lot owners in West Lakeland Twp.;
- 4) A raingarden maintenance workshop in Lake Elmo; and
- 5) A shoreline maintenance workshop in Forest Lake.

During 2013, EMWREP provided outreach support for stormwater retrofit projects near Casey Lake (Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District), Brown's Creek (Brown's Creek Watershed District), and Lily and McKusick Lakes (Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization). We also held Ice Cream Social / Raingarden Tours in Stillwater and Woodbury (South Washington Watershed District) to celebrate the completion of recent neighborhood stormwater retrofit projects.

The number of raingardens and other residential projects installed in Washington County continues to climb each year, at least in part, as a result of EMWREP education and outreach efforts. Conservation District staff conducted 240 site visits during 2013. 62 projects were installed with watershed cost-share funding, 45 projects were completed with only technical assistance, and an additional 115 new projects are still in progress. The WCD estimates that residential projects installed in 2013 will reduce phosphorus loading to area waters by 37 pounds per year.

Rural Outreach: During 2013, EMWREP offered several programs specifically designed to engage rural property owners. These included a full-day workshop for horse owners, three water testing clinics for homeowners with private wells, and two buckthorn workshops. In addition, EMWREP also provided outreach support for several targeted implementation projects, including:

- Washington Conservation District - Turf to Prairie;
- Washington Conservation District – Top50P!; and
- South Washington Watershed District’s - Trout Brook.

Because previous audience research has shown us that many rural property owners are more interested in creating wildlife habitat or managing invasive species than in protecting surface water quality, we’ve adapted our messages and workshops for these audiences accordingly. Though we still talk about protecting water resources, we usually use other topics as the hook to engage rural property owners.

Blue Biz: The Blue Biz program consists of a website (www.cleanwaterMN.org/businesses) and outreach materials that partners can use to engage commercial property owners in BMP projects. During 2013, EMWREP initiated conversations with Tamarack Village Shopping Center in Woodbury about a potential stormwater reuse project on their property.

Stormwater U: Early after the EMWREP partnership was created, we worked with staff from Minnesota Extension and the Minnesota Erosion and Stormwater Management Certification Program to develop Stormwater U, a technical training series for municipal staff and contractors, including engineers, planners, inspectors and public works. Past workshops have included Designing for Volume Control, Protecting Water Resources through Comprehensive Planning, Stormwater Pond Management, Turf Management, Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination and Winter Snow and Ice Management.

In 2013, EMWREP:

- Hosted a Stormwater U workshop in January in Cottage Grove, *What is in your Stormwater BMP Toolbox?*;
- Presented at the Stormwater U *Lessons Learned* workshop in February;
- Collaborated with MECA (Minnesota Erosion Control Association) to hold an outdoor erosion control field seminar in Cottage Grove at the site of a new housing development; and
- Hosted a workshop on Street Sweeping for Nutrient Reduction.

NEMO: The Northland NEMO program (Non-point Education for Municipal Officials) provides local elected officials and decision makers with resources and information to make informed decisions about land use and water quality in their communities. Northland NEMO is hosted by the University of Minnesota Extension and EMWREP is one of ten to twenty partner organizations. Program offerings include several basic presentations, as well as the interactive Watershed Game.

During 2013, EMWREP collaborated with several other partners to hold its fifth *Workshop on the Water* for St. Croix Basin communities in both Minnesota and Wisconsin. Over 120 people attended. In September we held a workshop for Washington County communities to introduce the Minimal Impacts Design Standards Community Assistance Package developed as part of a three-year grant project. Representatives from ten cities and the county attended. After the workshop, we met one-on-one with the communities who attended to discuss how they might incorporate the new package into their ordinances and zoning code in the future. An accelerated implementation grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources will allow the Washington Conservation District to continue working with these communities in 2014.

MS4 Toolkit: EMWREP developed the MS4 Toolkit (www.cleanwatermn.org/MS4toolkit) several years ago with a grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. The toolkit includes educational materials that partners can use to meet the six minimum control measures in the MS4 permit, such as brochures, posters, slide shows, training videos and more. In addition to the on-line materials, training videos for parks and public works staff and pop-up banners for community events are available partners to borrow. The Metro WaterShed Partners MS4 work group is currently discussing strategies for updating the MS4 Toolkit and website.