



Public Private Partnership Benefits the Poplar River

April 2017 Snapshot



Cook County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) received an \$829,000 Clean Water Fund Targeted Watershed grant from BWSR in 2015 to reduce sediment to the Poplar River and ultimately Lake Superior. The Targeted Watershed Program focuses on watersheds where the amount of change necessary to improve water quality is known, the actions needed to achieve results are identified, and a majority of those actions can be implemented within a four-year time period.

Set among Lake Superior's unique mountain-like topography, the high profile Poplar River watershed is a vital natural area, trout fishery, and economic engine for the North Shore. Erosion along the Poplar River's stream banks and main tributaries are major contributors to its sediment issues, and the watershed was listed as impaired for turbidity in 2004.

Citizen interest in the river health is high with primary concerns about the native trout fishery and water quality. The Poplar River is a DNR Trout Stream that supports a spring-run of rainbow trout and a fall run of pink Chinook, Coho salmon, and coaster brook trout. In addition, the University of Minnesota has listed the Poplar River watershed as a sentinel watershed. In 2005, landowners within the watershed organized the Poplar River Management Board (PRMB) in response to the sediment impairment. For over a decade, the Cook County SWCD has been working in partnership with the PRMB and others toward the goal improving the water quality of the river.

The PRMB members represent over 90% of the private land in the lower watershed, which ensures landowner cooperation with projects. Since 2005, both public and private dollars have helped to leverage multiple grants that have been successfully awarded and managed within the watershed. Thus far, this implementation work has reduced sediment by approximately 35% of the 60% sediment reduction goal.

The Targeted Watershed grant represents the continuation of over ten years of private and public scientific investigations and on the ground projects designed to reduce non-point pollution entering the Poplar River and Lake Superior. While great strides in sediment reduction have taken place to date, the goal of the project is to have the Poplar River removed from the impaired waters list.

To help manage and control erosion along the Poplar, the SWCD is working collaboratively with the PRMB and considering conveyances that shift water away from failing slopes, stormwater basins, gully repairs, and revegetation in addition to the streambank restorations. Thanks to these



Lutsen Mountains' Tom Rider, Cook SWCD staff, and BWSR staff review progress to date earlier this year.

Clean Water Fund dollars, the district has been able to target where practices should be installed – and which specific practices will be the most effective to help improve the Poplar River’s water clarity. The district estimates that through the practices implemented over the four year lifespan of this grant, they will reduce sediment in the watershed by 400 tons annually, 100% of their reduction goal.