I’ve heard from our partners that we’re not government as usual — one past mayor in our District once said, “You are one of the strangest governmental agencies I've ever worked with … but in a good way.” With increasing pressure to do more with less and calls for greater accountability of elected and appointed officials, I'm very proud to say we are not “government as usual.” From the important scientific studies we’ve completed to the capital projects we have built, the MCWD has established a reputation as an innovative, cost-effective leader in protecting and cleaning up our lakes and streams; finding new ways to protect natural resources and meeting the multiple goals of our communities.

The acquisition of the Cold Storage property in Hopkins is an example of this innovative approach. This project not only will help the District restore one of the most degraded stretches of shoreline along Minnehaha Creek, it also will create new open space, provide stormwater treatment, and will help the City of Hopkins meet its redevelopment goals.

In 2011, the District was at the forefront of the effort to stop the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). It has been collaborating with citizen-led lake associations, the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District, Department of Natural Resources and local governments on a pilot project to prevent more water bodies from being infested with zebra mussels and other AIS. Carver County has agreed to partner with the District on a boat inspection program at Lake Minnewashta — becoming the first county in Minnesota to take such a step.

The MCWD’s science-based approach to its work is evident in the number of research initiatives we’re implementing. In 2012, we will be collaborating with a small business from Akron, Ohio to investigate the effectiveness using weevils to control Eurasian water milfoil. We also are in the process of developing a partnership with the University of Minnesota on a National Science Foundation-funded carp research project in the Six Mile Creek sub-watershed.

The District prides itself in being transparent and cost-efficient. It launched a new website in 2011 that makes it easier to learn about District activities, accomplished its work without raising its tax levy and limited its administrative costs to about one percent of its total budget.

The MCWD is looking forward to building on the collaborative efforts that made 2011 a successful year. Yes, we may be a little strange (in a good way) and we may not be government as usual, but by working closely with our residents, business community, cities and sister agencies, together we will make our watershed an enjoyable and healthy place to live.

- Eric Evenson
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The Water Quality department is synthesizing and analyzing the lake and stream monitoring data it collected during 2011 for its annual report.

MCWD staff collects water quality data from 27 bays on Lake Minnetonka, 11 upper watershed lakes and 16 limited access lakes that require a canoe. Twenty-five other lakes are monitored by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Three Rivers Park Board, Citizens Assisted Monitoring Program and Citizen Lake Monitoring Initiatives. Water quality sampling also is conducted at 40 stream locations across the District, including 10 along Minnehaha Creek.

Staff uses data on water clarity, algae growth and nutrients to determine lake grades, which are released each spring.

**Highlights of 2011:**

- Launched a proactive aquatic invasive species monitoring and management program, which the MCWD Board recently voted to continue.

- Completed the first year of a three-year study of the zebra mussel infestation in Lake Minnetonka and added a second boat to its lake monitoring program to be used exclusively on lakes infested with zebra mussels.

- Discovered no new invasive species in 2011.

- Partnered on the Gleason Lake Vegetation Management study to help remove curly leaf pondweed, an invasive aquatic plant, from the lake and allow native species to reestablish themselves.

- Removed more than 9,000 wet-weight pounds of flowering rush, an invasive aquatic plant, from Smith Bay and the Crystal-Maxwell Channel Area. The initiative extracted more than 95 percent of the stems, rhizomes, and bulblets from the area. A survey planned for this spring will measure the project’s success.

- Implemented several fish management plans last spring:
  - Hired a commercial fisherman to remove invasive carp from Lake Wasserman.
  - Worked with the youth of the Pierson Lake Association to remove more than 35,000 pounds of carp from the lake. The group won the District’s Youth Naturalist Watershed Heroes award for the project.
  - Removed bullheads and stocked walleyes in Lake Nokomis to reduce the number of rough fish stirring up sediment on the lake’s bottom.
As part of a multi-phase effort to improve Minnehaha Creek through its most urban stretch, MCWD’s Planning Department is working on plans to restore the creek between Louisiana Avenue and the Cedar Regional Trail in St. Louis Park. The project would extend the re-meander of the creek behind Methodist Hospital, a successful collaborative project the MCWD began in 2005.

The District is exploring the potential to reconnect this part of the creek with its historic floodplain and sections of its old alignment, prior to it being ditched in the 1950s. The project, called the “Reach 20 Remeander,” will improve thousands of feet of streambank and improve management of stormwater flowing into the creek.

District planners also are looking into future trails that will connect the Methodist Hospital boardwalk, the creek corridor, two planned light rail stations and the Cedar Regional Trail.

**Highlights of 2011:**

- **Director of Planning James Wisker was named the 2011 Watershed Employee of the Year by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources.**
- **Worked with the City of Hopkins on plans for stormwater management improvements and expanded a park along Minnehaha Creek at Blake Road and Lake Street, across from the Cold Storage property. The MCWD acquired land and cleared commercial and residential buildings to allow for the creek restoration and park expansion.**
- **Worked with homeowners on a streambank improvement project along Minnehaha Creek in Edina between France Avenue and 54th Street.**
- **Planned an improvement of Long Lake Creek and the downstream Tanager Lake. Will reroute a straightened section of the creek, restore a drained wetland and stabilize two sections of eroded streambank.**
- **Prepared to retrofit a Minnetrista neighborhood with raingardens to reduce the phosphorus in Langdon Lake.**
After two years of coordination with a variety of agencies, renovation work at the Minnehaha Falls and glen area wrapped up in December. The final phase of work reinforced the newly placed rocks in the creek bed, which had shifted due to high flows in the spring and summer.

The project improved the structural integrity and recreational potential of the iconic Falls area. Work included stabilizing the streambank, reforesting the hillside, removing invasive species, constructing trails and walkways, improving stormwater management and protecting the WPA-era rock walls.

MCWD’s partners on the restoration spanned a wide spectrum of public agencies: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, State of Minnesota, Minnesota Veterans Home and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

**Highlights of 2011**

- Worked closely with local government officials to manage spring flooding. The District’s advanced hydrological model alerted communities about flood threats. Used bubblers to open the Gray’s Bay Dam a month earlier than usual to build capacity in Lake Minnetonka for the snow melt, and used the dam to manage the flow into Minnehaha Creek.
- Pursued a cutting-edge stormwater technique to improve water quality in Dutch Lake in Minnetrista. Planned installation of a sand/iron filter, developed at the University of Minnesota, to remove phosphorus that had already dissolved in the water. Typical stormwater ponds only remove phosphorus when it is still in particle form.
- Cleared four parcels along Minnehaha Creek in Hopkins, acquired in 2010, of commercial and residential buildings. The new green space will help catch stormwater before it enters Minnehaha Creek and expand Cottageville Park.
- Worked with the City of Plymouth on a plan to restore a stream and stormwater pond in the Chelsea Woods neighborhood.
- Maintained buffers and stormwater ponds at Lake Nokomis, Lake Calhoun, Twin Lake and other sites.
- Oversaw prescribed burns at stormwater ponds in Minneapolis, St. Louis Park and Long Lake and at a wetland in Independence.
- Closed Gray’s Bay Dam on Sept. 6 and winterized it Nov. 16. After a rainy start to the summer, a drier second half left lake levels fairly standard at the end of the year.

The MCWD’s Regulatory Department worked with a variety of organizations to issue a permit for Woodland Cove, a 500-acre, 1,000-unit housing development in Minnetrista. The site at King’s Point Road and Highway 7 borders Lake Minnetonka’s Halsted Bay.

Woodland Cove is the first major project that’s been permitted since the District changed its stormwater rule to allow no new phosphorus creation on a development site. It demonstrates how large projects can still meet the tighter standards and protect surrounding water resources.

Using Low Impact Development techniques like bio-filtration basins, the development will actually reduce phosphorus runoff from the site. The project will also use shoreline and ravine stabilization to reduce the amount of phosphorus flowing into Halsted Bay, which is considered impaired because of its nutrient load.
**Land Conservation and Restoration**

**Matt Norton**
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In September the District made a landmark acquisition that will help it restore 1,000 feet of Minnehaha Creek shoreline in a densely developed area of Hopkins. Among the goals of this project are to clean and slow stormwater before it enters the creek and improve public access to the creek.

After completing its shoreline restoration work, the District plans to sell the balance of the property for redevelopment. That’s consistent with the City of Hopkins’ Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the District’s practice of selling land it doesn’t need for water quality purposes.

The acquisition is part of a larger effort to restore Minnehaha Creek, which has been adversely impacted by land use decisions over the years. This project also may connect with trails planned along the restored creek corridor and a future light rail station nearby.

**Highlights of 2011:**

- **Launched new cost share grant programs to encourage the installation of stormwater management practices such as raingardens, shoreline/streambank plantings and pervious paver driveways. Approved 33 grants for $102,000 in the first year.**

- **Finished revising the Stormwater Management and Administrative Rules with input from surrounding communities. The new rules went into effect June 1.**

- **Worked on Low Impact Development road reconstruction projects in Excelsior, Minnetonka, and Wayzata.**

- **Increased post-construction compliance work, educating developers and land owners on topics such as stormwater management practices and wetland buffers.**

- **Increased frequency of on-site meetings with property owners to discuss potential problems early in the permitting process.**

- **Helped fund a stormwater management project for a five lot development in St. Louis Park, which took extra measures to reduce runoff to Minnehaha Creek.**

- **Shared costs with the City of Mound for a road reconstruction project that improves the city’s storm sewer system.**

- **Conducted about 100 erosion control inspections per month this summer.**

- **Purchased the 112-acre Halverson Farm in August. The property has steep slopes and overlooks Six Mile Marsh in Minnetrista, which flows into the impaired Halsted Bay. Restoration plans include installing prairie, oak savanna, oak woodland and a spur from the Dakota Trail bicycle path. It is one of several projects and acquisitions aimed at restoring water resources and habitat along Six Mile Creek.**

- **Continued an ecological assessment of Painter Marsh that will inform possible restoration activities in and around the area.**

- **Partnered with Minnetonka Boy Scout Mitchell Harding on a wildlife habitat improvement project. Mitchell built and installed nine bat houses on District property for his Eagle Scout project. District staff assisted with identifying suitable sites and provided poles and foundations for installation.**

- **Land Conservation Program Manager Mark Ten Eyck retired in November to travel with his family. Project Director James Wisker and Land Conservationist Matt Norton have assumed larger roles in the program.**
In September, the MCWD partnered with the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chanhassen to host the 2011 Clean Water Summit. This annual event focuses on green infrastructure and stormwater runoff and drew more than 200 people – including local water resource managers, planners, engineers, foresters, landscape architects and public officials.

MCWD Education Manager Leslie Yetka was one of the primary organizers of the 2011 Summit, which raised awareness of the multiple benefits of trees and how they can help clean and manage stormwater. For example, did you know that 100 large, mature street trees can remove 37 tons of carbon dioxide, capture 216,200 gallons of runoff, and provide $230,880 in net benefits over 40 years?

**Highlights of 2011:**

- Hired Education Manager Leslie Yetka, who has experience in the water resources management field working with diverse audiences, including private landowners, businesses, municipalities and community groups engaged in water quality enhancement and protection activities.

- Collaborated with local cities, regional agencies and community groups to host several workshops. Topics included linking land use to water quality, winter road maintenance and salt use, design considerations for stormwater management practices, zebra mussels, native plantings and shoreline restoration, community clean-ups for water quality, and lake and river impairments.

- Provided assistance to local groups in forming citizen-led associations through the Watershed Association Initiative. As part of the process, the District facilitates creation of local lake management plans, which can be a resource guide for community groups to implement water quality improvement projects.

- Administered the Cynthia Krieg Watershed Stewardship Fund grant program, which recently awarded $105,000 to 10 grant recipients. Funded projects will promote clean water education programs and projects hosted by local community groups, non-profits, schools, and other local agencies.

- Participated in K-12 outreach activities, including field trips, Earth Day celebrations, the Children's Water Festival, and in-class presentations.

- Partnered with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, the City of Minneapolis, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to create an awareness campaign to stop the spread of zebra mussels. The “Save Our Summers” campaign included posters, brochures, a web page, buoys on Lake Nokomis and signs along Minnehaha Creek.

- Redesigned the District’s educational mini-golf game to incorporate pertinent water quality themes and improve its durability and portability. The game was used at several events in the community, including the Bakken Museum’s 10 Best Days of Summer in Minneapolis and the Tour de Tonka in Minnetonka.
The District’s Watershed Heroes Awards ceremony was held at the Bayview Event Center in Excelsior in November. The annual event honors those who made significant contributions to water quality in the District. The 2011 winners reflected a broad cross-section of public and private sector individuals and organizations that have gone above and beyond for clean water.

Hennepin County Board Chairman Mike Opat emceed the event and expressed admiration of the work that was highlighted and the partnerships the District has forged to achieve its water quality goals.

As longtime friend of the District U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar wrote, “The contributions and efforts of this year’s Watershed Heroes span everything from sustainable landscape design to invasive species, from donating critical land to community education. Between these Watershed Heroes and the great work of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, the residents of this area know that their local water resources are in good hands.”

Highlights of 2011:

- Hired veteran broadcast journalist Telly Mamayek as Communications Director in February. Mamayek spent nearly 20 years as a news reporter and anchor at WCCO Radio News and has won state, regional and national awards for her work.

- Coordinated with government officials on the District’s spring flooding projections and management. Informed the public by securing widespread media coverage of the situation.

- Issued news releases, wrote articles and conducted media interviews to keep the public apprised of District activities, including its management of zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species and restoration projects across the watershed, including work along Minnehaha Creek and Six Mile Creek.

- Developed a quarterly newsletter to inform public officials and the broader community about the District’s programs and initiatives.

- Coordinated the District’s largest public event, the 2011 Minnehaha Creek Clean Up, which broke records for attendance and amount of trash collected. Around 670 people picked up 4,070 pounds of trash, nearly doubling last year’s total.

- Revised the popular Minnehaha Creek Canoe Map to include more detailed information about canoe launch locations and amenities. Also created an interactive digital map that paddlers with smartphones can access via QR codes posted on canoe launch signs. Expanded the District’s use of social media, resulting in a 60 percent increase in Facebook followers. Also grew Twitter following and began daily clean water Twitter tips.

- Appeared at many outreach events, including Art on the Lake in Excelsior, Steamboat Minnehaha’s Big Island Adventure Weekend, the Bakken Museum’s 10 Best Days of Summer in Minneapolis and the Tour de Tonka in Minnetonka.
The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District is governed by a seven-member Board of Managers appointed by the Hennepin and Carver County Board of Commissioners.

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