

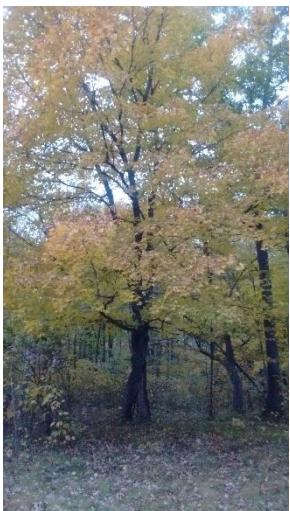
Mille Lacs Lake
Watershed Management Group

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Topic of the Month – October 2018

Trees – Partners in Watershed Health

Barb Eller



Exploring the Forest is a part of my life. I grew up playing in trees, naming trees, hugging them, admiring their branches, and when storms blew them down, I marveled at their roots and the treasures they unearthed. I count them among my friends and always companions. “Forest Bathing” is the term now. I watched as old and dying trees became our winter’s warmth, a new hay wagon, siding for the barns, fence posts, or a place for crows to gather and discuss their strategies. The living trees show their hidden colors with the changing of the seasons and offer their buds, leaves, and fruit to sustain us all. I take great joy in the first Maple bud of the spring, the fall nuts and apples beloved by just about all creatures, and the welcome shade of Old Mighty Oak who holds the family story in silent knowing. The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein comes to mind. When I read this book, I wept in gratitude for all trees.

One large tree on your shoreline captures and lifts 100 or more gallons of water per day and discharges it to the air. During our 6-month growing season, that one tree takes up and returns to the air 18,000 gallons of water. My modest house has a roof area of about 2000 square feet. So when a one-inch rain event occurs, about 1200 gallons of water comes rushing off the roof. Thankfully, trees surround me—about 20 around the house and a whole forest on 80 acres. For my garden, I have a steel roof catchment of about 2000 square feet that during a one-inch rain provides 1200 gallons that I use to irrigate my high tunnel garden all season long. Yes, I have a BIG rain barrel. Since our average precipitation here is about 29 inches/year, I could theoretically capture almost 35,000 gallons of water/year. More than enough to water my garden and reduce excess run-off of water that carries with it all the pollutants humans use on their lawns, in their gas driven vehicles, and off asphalt roofs. Think about the water coming off your roof, across perhaps a well-manicured and chemically fertilized and enhanced lawn, directly into the lake. Those pollutants tend to stay and accumulate in a shallow lake such as Mille Lacs. Not the legacy one wants to leave. Not the ideal habitat for the next generation of fish. Consider planting trees whose roots filter both air and water, hold the earth in place, provide shade for you, future generations, and spawning fish and perhaps nuts and fruits for all. When is the best time to plant a tree? Twenty years ago, of course, but now will do. “Someone’s sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.” -Warren Buffet

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