



Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group

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Topic of the Month – June 2018

What is the Deal with Wetlands?

Susan Shaw – Mille Lacs Soil and Water Conservation District, District Administrator

There are many different types of wetlands. In fact, eight types are classified in Minnesota! Some wetlands have no visible water, only soil saturation just below the surface. Some wetlands only hold water for a few weeks during the rainy part of the growing season, and they may be farmable. Other wetlands could be completely forested.



Photo Courtesy of Mille Lacs SWCD

In general, it's safe to say you could find wetlands between areas of deep open water and upland. So, along the banks of streams, around the perimeter of lakes, in dips and low spots in the field and the yard. Did you know that about 90% of Mille Lacs County has seasonally saturated soil within 30cm of the soil surface? It might be a safe bet that everyone in Mille Lacs County can look out a window and see a wetland somewhere in the distance...or right at your feet!

Right now some of you reading this might have a nostalgic feeling, invoking images of the wildlife that can be found in and about wetlands. But others may have tried to build, farm or landscape and that wetland may have felt more like an obstacle than an opportunity. The State of MN created the Wetland Conservation Act in 1991; you may have heard of it called WCA (pronounced “wack-uh”). The law was made in response to a rapid loss of wetlands statewide, and the general intent was to achieve “no net loss” of wetland into the future.



Photo Courtesy of Dillon Hayes, Mille Lacs County Environmental Resources

The wetland law recognizes eight (8) “types” of wetlands. Each type of wetland may have somewhat different protection levels based upon how common or rare that type of wetland is statewide. Regardless of wetland type, the Wetland Conservation Act requires that everyone (individuals, business and governments) must try to avoid filling, draining or excavating wetlands. If a proposed activity cannot be accomplished without avoidance, then the expectation is the impacts must be minimized. Replacement of wetlands is required for any unavoidable impacts (drainage, fill or excavation). Some exemptions apply but the rule is complex so it’s important to check with trained wetland staff at the Soil & Water Conservation District or Mille Lacs County Environmental Resources.

The old adage “It’s easier to ask forgiveness than permission” really does not apply well to the Wetland Conservation Act. The law requires restoration to the same condition prior to filling, draining or excavation; or, if restoration is not possible, replacement of that wetland’s function and value through the purchase of wetland bank credits. That can get expensive. Please take the time to make a call before altering wetlands.



Photo Courtesy of Dillon Hayes, Mille Lacs County Environmental Resources

The Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is here to help you with any question you may have regarding wetland alteration. The SWCD coordinates with Mille Lacs County Environmental Resources to help citizens understand WCA.

Please find more information on our **website** www.millelacsSWCD.org/wetlands/ or on our **Facebook** page or **call** us at 320-983-2160.