



FARM NEWS

Brushy Creek watershed project works to protect lake

Goal: To keep erosion of topsoil out of the Brushy Creek Lake

By TIA BARKLEY
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Brushy Creek Lake is one of the top fishing lakes in the state of Iowa, the Soil and Water Conservation District and T.J. Lynn, Brushy Creek Watershed Coordinator, are working to keep it that way.

"The Brushy Creek watershed is considerably flat - that along with intense farming practices threaten the water quality of Brushy Creek Lake," said Lynn. "The goal of the Brushy Creek Watershed project is to keep the nutrients and sediments from erosion of the cropland top soil out of the lake."

A watershed is an area of land that drains water into the lowest point. For the 57,000 acres around Brushy Creek Lake the lake is the lowest point. When it rains 57,000 acres drain into the 690 acre lake. Each year the watershed loses approximately 53,000 tons of sediment due to erosion. Approximately 16,000 tons of the sediment reach the lake every year.

"Keeping excess sediment and nutrients out of the lake is impor-

tant because they damage the water quality of the lake," said Lynn. "Excess sediment cloud the lake water, while excess nutrients cause growth of negative aquatic plants, if the level of nutrients rises to high the lake can be considered unsafe and closed to the public."

Working towards protecting the lake the Soil and Water Conservation District in 2003 applied for a Development grant to assess soil loss and livestock issues that affected the lake.

In 2004, the Soil and Water Conservation District applied for federal funding, EPA 319.

"This grant gives money to fix the problems found during the assessment," said Lynn.

Working for the past two years, three water and sediment control basins have been installed. Water and sediment control basins slow the speed of the water and allow the sediments to settle.

"Water and sediment control basins don't stop the water from draining it just slows the process, and decreases the amount of sediment that reaches the lake," said Lynn.

"One of the three water and sediment control basins installed controls two gully's. A typical field will lose 2,000 tons of soil to erosion each year, a gully can lose as much as 20,000 tons of soil to erosion. In this case, this one water and sediment control basin is stopping potentially 40,000 tons of sediments from reaching the lake," said Lynn.

The particular water and sediment control basin Lynn mentioned did not interrupt farming near the area and improved the already existing trail.

December 2007 will mark a milestone in the Brushy Creek watershed project as Miller Marsh will be seeded.

"Originally Miller Marsh was only going to be 40 acres, however the Department of Transportation purchased 146.5 acres across from the original 40 acres for a wetland mitigation project for highway 20," said Lynn.

Miller Marsh is named after Charlie Miller, former Director of the Webster County Conservation Board. Reconstruction of the site included closing one of the two re-

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maining agriculture wells as well as installing three water control structures to maintain several wetlands. Wetlands filter out nutrients, chemicals, and sediments that would otherwise run into Brushy Creek Lake.

"Miller Marsh was big project that would not have been completed without the support of the Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Whitetails Unlimited, Department of Transportation, and the DNR Habitat Stamp Grant," said Lynn.

In addition to Miller Marsh and water and sediment basins in the watershed, Lynn is working to teach landowners about the incentives given for the installation of

conservation practices including Cropland Reserve programs, filter strips, wetlands, strip till/no till, and farm nutrient management.

There are 300 acres of filter strips in dredge ditches up for re-enrollment in the next two years according to Lynn.

"Filter strips are one of the best practices to stop soil erosion, filter strips that can be re-enrolled in 2007 alone, has the ability to stop 1,000 ton of sediment from entering the lake," said Lynn.

Brushy Creek Watershed project is ongoing and will continue until July 2008, after that the Soil and Water Conservation District will apply for an extension of the grant.

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"There are four more sediment and water control basins planned, as well as a pretty large pond. There are a lot of big ideas in the planning stages," said Lynn.

Cited as one of the best fishing lakes in Iowa, Brushy Creek Lake is a valuable resource to Wristband County. "The lake supports local economy and is an important resource in the community," said Lynn. "If nothing is done to protect the lake, it could develop so many problems that nobody will want to use it. The watershed proj-

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ect is taking the steps to protect the popular area before there is a large problem," said Lynn.

According to Lynn any ordinary person can help the watershed project. "Something as simple as picking up your own trash helps the water quality of the lake. Anyone can help keep Brushy Creek Lake one the top fishing lakes in the state of Iowa," said Lynn.

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