

## Project Partners

- Barnesville River Watch
- Barnesville Economic Development Authority
- U of M Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Northwest Regional Office
- Hawk Creek Watershed
- U of M West Central Partnership
- U of M Extension
- U of M Water Resource Center



# Why is water important to us?

A Study Circle project engaging citizens, local officials and agencies around water issues and decisions that impact their water quality.

## Buffalo River Study Circle

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## Hawk Creek Study Circle

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### **What is the purpose of this project?**

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and local partners in two watersheds are exploring ways to better engage local citizens in water quality decisions by:

- encouraging dialog with others in a given watershed to increase understanding of both natural and human drivers and responses related to healthy waters;
- sharing of ideas on how citizens can maintain or improve water quality;
- increasing knowledge of water quality indicators, terms, agency roles and local and state policies;
- increasing understanding of impacts on water through personal, business and community practices and local policies and climate change, and;
- developing action steps on a personal and community level to change behavior and local policies to improve water quality.

### **What is a study circle?**

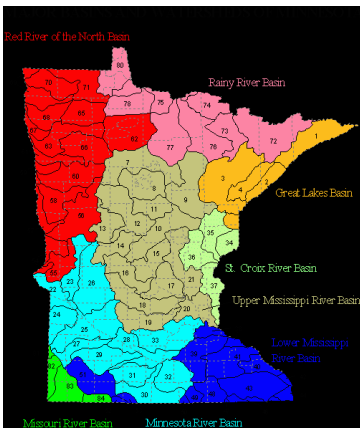
*According to Study Circle Resource Center, a study circle is a small group of people (8 to 12) who come together to talk to each other about complex public issues. In study circles, people try to understand others' views. There is no pressure in a study circle for everyone to agree to everything. People do not have to give up things that are important to them for the study circle to be a success. By sharing common concepts and looking at ideas for action, people often can work together to improve their community.*

## Why should I get involved?

*“Children of a culture born in a water-rich environment, we have never really learned how important water is to us. We understand it, but we do not respect it.”*

William Ashworth, *Nor Any Drop to Drink*, 1982

Water is vital to all life on Earth. The water in a stream sustains aquatic organisms such as fish and insects as well as organisms that live through the entire watershed. That includes humans (You!). Entire cities may depend on the water in a single river. Water is used for drinking, washing, watering and irrigation, and many commercial and industrial processes. The same water transports the effluent of wastewater treatment. Because water is vital to life, it is accurate to say that poor water quality equals a poorer quality of life.



You are part of a watershed where the water quality is challenged by actions of humans through various land use and water use practices and climate changes. Government agencies mandated to improve water quality have expertise in understanding and managing ecological conditions, but need citizen engagement and understanding in watershed

systems, how human actions and policies contribute to these challenges, and help develop solutions to maintain and improve water quality in the watershed.

## What is expected of me?

For this project, we're asking you to:

- Make a good effort to participate in five small group (8 to 12 people) sessions of the program.
- The study circle sessions will be no more than 2 hours over a two month period during the winter of 2010.
- The location and time will be determined by all the participants in the study circle within your watershed area.
- Make an effort to read suggested readings and conduct activities in-between sessions.
- Participate in the sessions by listening carefully to others as well as sharing your own thoughts and ideas.
- Be willing to engage in friendly disagreement, challenge ideas and opinions, sharing your opinions, but do it with respect.
- Keep an open mind and strive to understand various points of views.

## Who else will participate?

Study Circles are designed for small group dialogue. A typical group is no more than 12 to 15 and not less than 8. Key stakeholders in the watershed will be recruited representing various groups and interest such as farmers, clergy, civic leaders, business, professionals, labor, new comers and diversity of age, income, gender and ethnicity or race. The more diverse the group, the more the robust the discussion.

## Are Study Circles going to lead to action, or is it just talk?

According to the Study Circles Resource Center, study circles have lead to action in may ways:

**Changes affecting individuals**—people considering moving out of a neighborhood as didn't feel welcomed have stayed in their neighborhood after participating in a study circle where they made connections and friends.

**Changes affecting communities**—after the study circle experience, groups have formed to rebuild churches, create resource centers and sponsor soup kitchens.

**Changes affect local and state governments**—in responses to input received from study circles involving several dozen people, a county government has secured a mix of public and private funding for a new solid waste education initiative.

For this project—**Why is water important to us?**—we envision the study circle process a space for dialogue among stakeholders of a watershed to:

- learn about rivers, lakes and watershed characteristics;
- human, policies and natural impacts on water quality, and;
- a civic discussion that will lead to action for solutions on a community as well as a personal level.

**“Study Circles are  
small-group  
democracy in  
action”**

*Study Circles Resource  
Center*