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Water Quality Workshops Scheduled

What is the value of clean water to you? How you value clean water probably depends on who you are.

If you are thirsty, you may be grateful for the water from your tap at home. If you are young, you may look forward to swimming at the beach with friends. If you are older, you dream of fishing or boating. A farmer appreciates how the stream drains water from the fields. If you work for a resource agency, you want the water to meet standards.

How do we pull these values together? How do we respect each person's interest but work collectively so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy the same benefits we have? These questions are the topic of a watershed study circle sponsored by the Buffalo-Red River Watershed District and the Barnesville Economic Development Authority March 11 and March 25. Other partners are the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the University of Minnesota.

Both sessions will be at the second floor meeting room at Wells Fargo Bank in Barnesville. The meetings start at 6:30 and will end at 8 p.m.

A study circle is a small group of people who come together to talk about complex issues in a neutral setting. Two sessions are planned: the first on March 11 will present basic information about watersheds, the water cycle, and water quality monitoring. Presenters will be Sheila Carlson and students from the Barnesville High School River Watch program.

The second session, on March 25, will be a dialogue. Participants will be asked to share their understanding of what clean water is and what is important for the community to know about clean

water. A clean water day is being planned for this year's Clay County Fair, so this session will also be a chance to identify activities for the fair.

In November 2008, Minnesotans voted overwhelmingly to establish a Clean Water, Land and Legacy Fund, by adding 3/8ths of one percent to the existing sales tax. That amendment stated:

"The Minnesota Constitution shall be amended to dedicate funding to protect our drinking water sources; to protect, enhance, and restore our wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game, and wildlife habitat; to preserve our arts and cultural heritage; to support our parks and trails; and to protect, enhance, and restore our lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater by increasing the sales and use tax rate beginning July 1, 2009, by three-eighths of one percent on taxable sales until the year 2034."

The new tax is expected to raise at least \$80 million per year for clean water projects. The University of Minnesota is developing a framework to advise the Minnesota Legislature on how to spend this money. There is an on-line survey where citizens can record their preferences for expenditures. The survey can be found at:

<http://wrc.umn.edu/watersustainabilityframework/minnesotansandtheirwater/index.htm>

The Buffalo watershed is in the midst of a water quality study which is intended to identify which of the watershed's waters meet standards and need protection, and which do not meet standards and need restoration. This study will then make recommendations for how to protect and restore waters, and local units will request funds from the new tax to implement those strategies.

The study circle is separate from the watershed study, but ultimately, the two efforts are linked. Since there are many uses for water, many voices are needed to do the job of keeping water clean. This

study circle is intended to be a place for Barnesville area residents to identify their concerns and to have a voice in the process.

Everyone is welcome to the sessions. No special training is required other than an interest in the waters of the Barnesville area. Copies of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' CD-ROM program, "*Healthy Rivers: A Water Course*", are being provided to the Buffalo Red River Watershed and the Lake Agassiz Regional Library. This is an excellent introduction to the ecology of streams and rivers, especially for those who want to know more. It can be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/healthyivers/index.html>

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