

Updates on the Miller Creek Total Maximum Daily Load Plan

## Miller Creek Runs Through Heart of 2009 Construction Activities

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The blasting, excavating and other work seen around the Miller Hill Mall Area signal that reconstruction is well-underway along the busy and often congested Miller Trunk Highway, which includes parts of U.S. Hwy 53 and State Hwy 194. The \$24.5 million project, seven years in the making, started last summer. The project partners, MNDOT District 1, St. Louis County and the City of Duluth, are sharing the planning and costs of the project. Federal monies are funding \$18 million of the project, while project partners share the remaining costs. The project is expected to relieve congestion, ensure more orderly growth and improve connectivity among the web of city streets and county roads that cross or run parallel with the Miller Highway corridor. The need for the reconstruction was brought on by new housing and commercial activity in the area, which bring new residents and shoppers from the U.P. of Michigan, Wisconsin and Canada. In addition, trucks carrying heavy or over-sized loads from the Port of Duluth-Superior use Hwy 53 to bring cargo to the range, adding their cumbersome, slow-moving loads to the traffic mix. As a result of these uses, the traffic flow in this area often eddies and pools from frequent highway tie-ups. The project will address the needs of area residents, shoppers and others who walk, use wheelchairs or use public transit. MNDOT reps note that transit users must often wait in the road for buses and elders have difficulty walking to the grocery store, especially in winter, due to a lack of sidewalks. This project addresses those issues by



adding sidewalks, accessible transit stops and other facilities to promote mobility and safety. (Preceding information courtesy of MNDOT NewsLine Article, Sept. 10, 2008).



*A new retaining wall was constructed along Miller Creek below the Kohl's parking lot during construction near the Mall.*

The DNR, MPCA and South St Louis SWCD are all active in monitoring the health of stream during the construction process. Several subcontractors are assisting MNDOT with the project and all are very familiar with the techniques needed to keep construction debris, sediment, oils and other pollution out of this protected trout stream. For example, any water extracted during dewatering activities was cleaned and cooled before being allowed to discharge into Miller Creek. Over the past few decades, construction in this area has resulted in several man-made re-routes of Miller Creek, and, no doubt, some significant environmental damage. Today, people are more aware of the importance of being mindful of environmental issues from the project planning stages through execution. In this case, such forethought will result not only in smoother-moving traffic and improved safety in this area, but also improved aesthetics and health of Miller Creek.

## Current Miller Creek Projects

### 22<sup>nd</sup> Avenue West

In the fall of 2008, the City of Duluth partnered with the SWCD to stabilize a small gully that had formed near 22<sup>nd</sup> Ave. W. This gully was acting as a conduit for a significant amount of dirt to enter the stream during rain storms. The problem was fixed by engineering the surrounding area such that runoff would be routed to and collected in a basin at the top of the old gully. The basin would allow the runoff to slow down and cool down. It would then be discharged from the basin down a rock chute to Miller Creek (see photo). The rock helps build up and stabilize the old gully area, so it will not re-form in the future.



*This rock chute cleans and cools down runoff before it enters Miller Creek at 22<sup>nd</sup> Ave. W.*

### Irresistible Ink

Irresistible Ink is a division of Hallmark that specializes in providing hand-written cards to businesses interested in providing that “personal touch” in their communications. The company is housed in a large building just across Haines Rd. from Miller Creek. Ben Fornear, Print Operations Manager for I.I., approached the SWCD about doing a stormwater Best Management Practice on their property in 2008 in the hopes of having a positive impact on nearby Miller Creek. Over the next 18 months, SWCD staff worked closely with I.I. to develop and install a 215 foot rain garden swale through its large, unused front yard.

“This project has turned our formerly flat, unappealing yard into a beautiful living/breathing stormwater system. What’s not to love?” -Ben Fornear, I.I.

The swale, together with the decreased mowing already instituted by the company, will help reduce non-point pollution to Miller Creek. In addition to its pollution reduction functions, the swale will improve the aesthetics of the property. Improving the “look” of this otherwise nondescript property will not only give I.I. employees some pleasure



*Irresistible Ink employees got their hands dirty planting their rain garden swale.*

when taking their breaks outside on beautiful summer days, but will also improve many Duluth visitors’ first impression of Duluth as I.I. is one of the first properties people see when leaving the airport from Haines Rd. Many thanks go out to Ben Fornear and his I.I. colleagues, who will take care of the garden into the future, property owner, Frank Holappa, Keith Anderson & Tim Byrns of the SWCD JPB, and the Clean Water Partnership Fund for making this project a success.

## Community Action Duluth Cleans up Miller Creek

Residents in Duluth have plenty of opportunities available to responsibly deal with their trash. Thanks to our local waste management companies and WLSSD, people can dispose of hazardous, unusable or unwieldy items for free or for just a minimal charge. Despite this, however, some people still throw trash in any one of the lovely creeks that run through Duluth, including Miller Creek.



*Community Action Duluth spent a Friday evening in July doing good for Miller Creek.*



On Friday, July 24th, about 12 local young adults with Community Action Duluth put on waders and gloves and plumbed the depths of Miller Creek in an effort to remove hazardous and unsightly trash from the Creek. The Community Action Duluth Team came about from federal stimulus money and provides an opportunity for young adults living in Duluth to give back to their community through environmental service. You may have met some of them at your front door – their primary task this summer has been to go door-to-door and offer energy audits to homeowners. When they're not doing that, they do community service projects and learn about environmental careers from local Natural Resource Professionals.

You don't need an organized group to clean up your favorite part of Miller Creek — just make sure to keep yourself safe by wearing gloves and not wading into the stream too far. Your home trash hauler may be willing to pick up a couple of extra bags of trash for free if you call ahead and explain what you're doing. Thanks Community Action Duluth!

## What's Happening with the TMDL Study?

The Miller Creek TMDL study is still in full swing. This summer, SWCD staff are conducting the final year of three years of monitoring that are being done in order to determine the maximum amount of warm water inputs the stream can handle daily without becoming too hot for the trout. Once this third summer of monitoring is done, the data will be evaluated, the likely causes of thermal pollution will be identified, and a TMDL value will be determined. The plan will then go through a technical and public review and approval process and is expected to eventually be approved by the EPA. Stay tuned to our website for updates on when the public review process will be taking place. That will be your opportunity to review and comment on the document before it is submitted to the EPA.

### Miller "Minute Quiz"

- 1.) Miller Creek is named for:
  - a.) a logger
  - b.) a senator
  - c.) the old mill that used to exist along the creek
- 2.) Miller Creek is \_\_\_ miles long.
  - a.) 3
  - b.) 10
  - c.) 55
- 3.) \_\_\_\_% of the Miller Creek watershed is "developed" (pavement & buildings)
  - a.) 25
  - b.) 33
  - c.) 75



*Answers on back page.*



# Rain Harvesting Workshop September 18<sup>th</sup>!

**DATE:** Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup>  
**TIME:** Noon – 1:30 pm  
**PLACE:** Lake Superior College  
**COST:** Free! (incl. free lunch and free rain garden plants!)

*"Minute Quiz" Answers: 1.) a 2.) b 3.) c*

Rain can be "harvested" just like your summer tomatoes & used to water them too! Instead of fighting the crowds for a lunch table on Sept. 18<sup>th</sup>, come eat for FREE while learning about how to harvest the rain for your benefit, & the benefit of Miller Creek. This is a free, casual workshop about rain gardens & rain barrels – two of the most affordable steps you can take at your home or business to reduce the impacts of runoff pollution (all that junk that gets carried off in rainwater to the nearest scenic creek). Master Gardener Bob Gilmore & Carol Andrews from Wild Ones will give short presentations about how to choose rain garden plants & how to construct a rain garden. Joel Peterson of the MPCA, will follow with a presentation on how to assemble your own homemade rain barrel. The meeting will be held in a classroom in Lake Superior College's new building. LSC is located along one of the more scenic sections of Miller Creek. Lunch will be provided & one lucky participant will win a free rain barrel! Free rain garden plants will also be available to help you jump start your own rain garden. With all this free stuff, this could be the most profitable lunch hour you've ever had! Registration is required. Call Kate at 218-723-4867 *by September 11<sup>th</sup>* to register.

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