

# Badger Creek Lake Watershed Project

Newsletter | Winter 2015/16

## Update from the Project Coordinator

Greetings and Happy New Year! 2015 was a great year for the watershed project thanks to many cooperating farmers and landowners, and our supportive project partners.

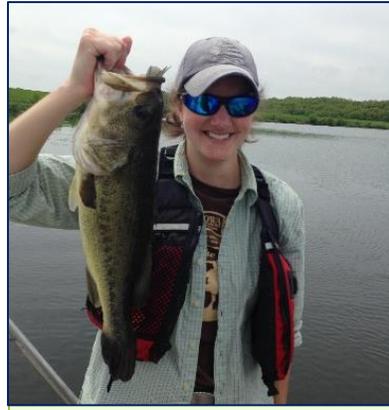
We continue to plan and implement key **conservation practices** such as terraces, grassed waterways, and grade stabilization structures (ponds). One of the highlights this past summer was the completion of a large grade stabilization structure (after two years of planning)! That structure was built to stabilize a gully and prevent further erosion, but it will also trap sediment from the drainage area above it and provide wildlife habitat. We are also making progress toward our goals on state land at Badger Creek Wildlife Management Area (see more on page 3).

Acres of **cover crops** have continued to grow and thrive – there were over 600 acres seeded to cover crops this fall – almost 100 acres more than last year! This doesn't even include the acres below the lake or outside the watershed boundary – if we add those acres, nearly 1,200 acres of cover crops were seeded by Badger Creek farmers this fall!

We have a really special opportunity in the watershed because of the aggregate of farmers trying cover crops over the past 3-4 years; we can compare what works, what doesn't, and continue working toward figuring out the best ways to work cover crops into farming operations. This year many farmers tried a winter hardy cereal rye mix for the first time on some of their fields, which will provide benefits in the spring, and will contribute to our understanding of how to make cover crops work for us in the watershed.

We have also been working toward the watershed project goal **to educate the public and partners** about lake and watershed improvement activities. This year we worked with partners to host field days (see page 2), and participated in several events for students and the public such as AG4KIDS Day for Madison County 5<sup>th</sup> Graders, the Iowa Children's Water Festival, and the Madison County Covered Bridge Festival. We designed and installed new watershed signs at boat ramps (right) and posted Cover Crop field signs throughout the watershed again this fall. We also created a specific webpage for Badger Creek Lake Watershed with information about the project, archived newsletters, links to our Facebook and Twitter pages, and other resources.

We've gotten a lot of conservation on the ground but we're not done yet - let's keep the momentum going in 2016! -AM



Project Coordinator **Anna MacDonald** can be reached at 515-462-2961 Ext. 3 or [Anna.MacDonald@ia.nacdnet.net](mailto:Anna.MacDonald@ia.nacdnet.net)

**Header:** 100s of Trumpeter Swans were observed just east of the lake last February.  
**Above:** PC Anna assisted the IDNR Fisheries staff with an electrofishing survey in April. Fish were identified to species, measured, and released back into Badger Creek Lake.  
**Below:** Updated watershed project signs were installed at east and west boat ramps



### Practices completed since April 2013 (start of current phase of watershed project):

**Terraces**  
29,077 feet

**Grade Stabilization Structures**  
3

**Cover Crops**  
1,669 acres  
(500+ acres each year)

*"I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man who lives in it so that his place will be proud of him."*  
-Abraham Lincoln

# 2015 Field Day Recap

## Women Caring for the Land Workshop

Header: Frederick Martens talks about his family's CREP Wetland



womencaringfortheland.org

The Madison County SWCD partnered with the Women, Food and Agriculture Network to host a "Women Caring for the Land" workshop on May 27<sup>th</sup>. Twelve women landowners from Madison and nearby counties came to learn more about soil health and conservation practices. The morning session started with introductions at the Madison County Historical Complex, and then workshop leaders took turns explaining different aspects of soil health and the role it plays in agriculture and the environment. They also demonstrated how simple soil tests to measure

soil structure, stability, and infiltration can be done by anyone with a few everyday household items.

After lunch the group went on a field tour to get a first hand look at the differences in soil managed with no till and cover crops compared to conventional tillage. The ladies tried out some simple soil tests in the field, used shovels to observe soil structure, and used a penetrometer to measure compaction. The landowner, farmer, and aerial applicator were also present to explain their operations and answer questions.



## The story continues...

Women, Land & Legacy is on its way to Madison County! WLL is an outreach project for rural Iowa women. It's driven by a local network of women in ag who decide what programs, projects, and information they need to assist them in farming and conservation decision making. To learn more, call our office or visit:

womenlandandlegacy.org

## "Multiple Benefits from Wetlands, Prairies and Cover Crops" Field Day

June 15<sup>th</sup> started off very rainy, but despite the weather, close to 50 people gathered in the big red barn to attend the Practical Farmers of Iowa field day hosted by Frederick Martens showcasing the variety of conservation benefits provided by the Martens CREP Wetland, its prairie buffer, and in-field practices including cover crops, grid sampling, and variable rate fertilizer application and planting.



Jessie Lowry of the Blank Park Zoo spoke about the Plant.Grow.Fly. conservation initiative for pollinators, and the importance of small habitats (like the prairie buffer around the wetland), especially as "stepping stones" for migrating species like the Monarch butterfly. Dr. Matt Helmers of Iowa State University talked about the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, noting that multiple practices are needed to address Iowa's nutrient issues, and highlighting practices like the wetland, which can provide multifunctional benefits in addition to removing nitrates from water.



The rain eventually let up and the group was able to walk out to the wetland to see how water levels are managed using the stop log structure (left), and were invited to help boost diversity for wildlife in the prairie buffer by planting plugs of a variety of species including milkweed for Monarchs.

Read more on the PFI Blog by googling: "PFI blog Martens field day"

## Cover Crop Field Day hosted by Jeff Koch



Most farmers were still in harvest mode on November 4<sup>th</sup>, but many chose to take time to attend a Cover Crop Field Day in Van Meter! Jeff Koch has been participating in an Iowa Learning Farms and Iowa Cover Crop Working Group study looking at the effect of various cover crop mixes on soil health, water quality, and crop yields, which created a good opportunity to hold a field day to share information with area farmers.

The meeting started at the Veterans Reception Center with guest speakers discussing cover crop species and mixes, timing and methods of seeding, termination in the spring, and economic considerations. Cover crops provide many benefits, some of which accumulate over time, but immediate benefits include erosion control, nutrient retention, additional forage for livestock, and a potential yield boost for soybeans. After lunch discussion continued at the cover crop study plots in Jeff's field, which were seeded to an oat/radish/hairy vetch mix this fall.



## State Land Projects Update

Last year's newsletter described some of the work we have been planning for state land at Badger Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), including the construction of three ponds, two sediment basins, and conversion of invasive Tartarian honeysuckle to prairie buffer strips. Invasive species removal is already underway;

Before (June 2014)



After (May 2015)



10.5 acres of honeysuckle was cleared from shrub strips last winter (see before and after photos to left), and more work is planned for this winter. We also anticipate be able to begin construction on the ponds and sediment basins this summer.

These projects will not only prevent erosion and sediment delivery to the lake, but will also help improve wildlife habitat. Stay tuned as we move forward!



## Improving Fish Habitat

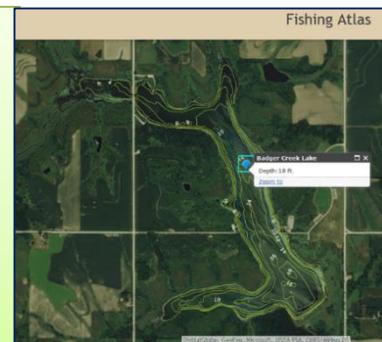
Last January we helped DNR Fisheries staff improve habitat for fish in Badger Creek Lake. Cedar trees were cut, dragged into piles on the ice, and weighed down with cinder blocks. There is one brush pile off a jetty near the west boat ramp, two brush piles off jetties near the east boat ramp, and one in the middle of the lake.

## Conservation Reserve Program General Sign-up

Landowners have until **February 26, 2016** to sign up for General CRP. Seeding down steep, erodible soils is a great way to protect your soil and improve water quality while getting a rental payment for those acres. If you're considering General CRP, contact the USDA Farm Services Agency soon to set up an appointment.

## New Fishing Atlas

The Iowa DNR released a new online fishing atlas this past May which includes information for over 130 Iowa lakes. The GPS coordinates for the new brush piles at Badger Creek Lake will be added this spring. Visit [www.iowadnr.gov/fishing](http://www.iowadnr.gov/fishing) and click on "Fishing Maps" link in the column on the left side of the webpage.



## Congratulations to Darrell Jamison, Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award Recipient!

Badger Creek farmer Darrell Jamison was honored at the Madison County SWCD's Annual Conservation Awards Banquet on January 16, 2016 for Lifetime Conservation Achievement. Darrell has been a farmer his entire life, and has been engaged in conservation since the beginning; he was recognized with an Outstanding Conservationist Award for New Cooperator in 1961. In addition to farming, Darrell has served as treasurer for the Sheep Producers, on the Heartland Co-op Board in Booneville, and elected to serve as a Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioner from 2001 to 2010.



Darrell and his wife Joyce at the Conservation Awards Banquet

Darrell was a conservation farmer long before the watershed project started, but since 2013 he has added terraces, a grade stabilization structure (which is both trapping sediment and helping remove nitrogen from the water), and has been planting cover crops for 3 years now. This year he tried cereal rye and radishes on some of his fields (right) which turned out so well that people were bringing up "Darrell's radishes" at the field day. Way to go, Darrell!





**BADGER  
CREEK  
LAKE**  
WATERSHED  
PROJECT

**Madison Soil & Water Conservation District**

815 E. Hwy 92  
Winterset, Iowa 50273

(515) 462-2961 Ext. 3  
[madison-swcd.org](http://madison-swcd.org)

**Inside the Winter  
2015/16 Newsletter:**

Project Update	1
Progress on Practices	1
2015 Field Day Recap	2
What's New	3
WMA Projects Update	
General CRP Sign-up	
Fish Habitat & Fishing Atlas	
Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award Recipient	3



**New Webpage**

We recently created a webpage specifically for the Badger Creek Lake Watershed Project on the Madison SWCD's website. We included background and goals of the watershed project, links to websites of interest, AND we have archived previous newsletters on the new webpage. Check it out:

[\*\*madison-swcd.org/badger\\_creek\\_lake.html\*\*](http://madison-swcd.org/badger_creek_lake.html)



**!** Badger Creek Watershed has been selected as a priority watershed through the **National Water Quality Initiative** (NWQI) again in 2016 as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offered by the USDA-NRCS, which provides increased incentives for conservation practices. **The sign-up deadline is March 18.** Contact our office to learn more.

**Watershed Project Partners**

*equal opportunity providers and employers*



of the Clean Water Act