

THORNAPPLE RIVER NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION REDUCTION PROJECT

In 2017, the Barry Conservation District was awarded a grant through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to fund implementation of the Thornapple River Watershed Management Plan. The GLRI grant provides the funding for the Conservation District to educate the public on the importance of water quality and help landowners find new ways to manage their land that benefit them as well as protect our water resources. Watershed Coordinator David Comeau will help landowners by providing planning assistance and funding for agricultural conservation practices and septic maintenance.

Given the rural nature of Barry County, the main focuses of the grant are agriculture and on-site waste water treatment (septic systems). On the land

management side, BCD has funds available to help farmers and landowners implement practices such as filter strips, cattle fencing along streams, and planting of cover crops. BCD is also offering funding to cover voluntary septic system inspections to look for failing septic systems as well as a cost-share option to replace or repair failing septic systems.

The project scope covers over 57,000 acres in three of the most impaired sub-watersheds in the Thornapple River watershed: Mud Creek, Fish Creek, and Milbourn Drain. This project aims to reduce nutrient, sediment and E. coli runoff into the streams in these subwatersheds. With your continued support, we hope to work together with the community to ensure clean water for many generations to come.

2018 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

13 workshops
17 farm site visits
475 acres cover crops planted
3 septic inspections and replacements
4 classrooms conducting water monitoring
2,488 Educational mailers
11 Newspaper articles

NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTANTS KEPT OUT OF THE THORNAPPLE TO-DATE BY THIS PROGRAM:

27 tons of sediment
2,168 lbs of nitrogen
454 lbs of phosphorous

Community steps up to address septic issues, improve water quality

David Comeau, Watershed Coordinator

Grant projects and cost share programs are all well and good, but it takes a village to effect sustainable results. That is to say, real change hinges on the willingness of a community to come together, rethink the status quo, and take action. The Thornapple septic cost share program wouldn't be what it is without our wonderful homeowners.

One such homeowner, Chris Tossava, submitted the program's very first application for septic assistance this past summer. He had heard about the program from a family member and knew he had a septic problem. What he didn't yet know was how big of a project and problem he was taking on.

Tossava noticed some issues with his system and figured it needed to be pumped, which he had done. Shortly after pumping, he began having problems again. Depending upon size and use, a septic tank should only need to be pumped every two to three years, so Chris knew something was amiss. Tossava took action right away, giving Watershed Coordinator David a call to see if the Thornapple Septic Assistance program could help in his area. After confirming

that he was in one of the priority watersheds and met the criteria of the program, Chris chose to set up an inspection with the Health Department. The results

showed that his drain field had failed, and the soil conditions were poor. The Tossavas would need a new system as soon as possible, and a traditional system was not going to cut it. Given their soil conditions, the new system would need to be a low-pressure dose



The new septic system installed at the Tossava residence is having a great impact, reducing nonpoint source pollution in the Thornapple Watershed.

system, also commonly called a mound system.

After receiving his new system permit from the health department, Chris contacted a certified installer of his choice and set up the replacement. The price tag for low dose pressure systems can be a bit steep, and the \$2500 maximum cost share was a small help, but Tossava knew he had to fix the problem for the health and safety of his

family, his community, and all of our water resources. So, the project moved forward, and a new system was installed and is functioning perfectly for the homeowner and his family. Chris is proud of the positive changes he has made and notes that "the system is working great, it changed our lives, one of the best investments ever."

And that's just what Watershed Coordinator David likes to hear, "That is why I work in this field. It is extremely rewarding to help people be good stewards of their natural resources, and even more rewarding seeing them take action to fix an issue and do the right thing by the environment even when it may be expensive or challenging."

The very first project of the Thornapple Septic Assistance program was a win-win for us all, but it could not have happened without great community members stepping up. Not only was it a rewarding experience for both homeowner and the Conservation District, but it also helped mitigate part of a big water quality problem

in a high-priority watershed. The replacement of just this one failed system means nine pounds less phosphorous, twenty six pounds less nitrogen, 204 pounds less total suspended solids, and 369 pounds less biochemical oxygen demand in the Thornapple **each year**. Imagine the cumulative impacts if each of the estimated over 10,000 failing systems in the Thornapple Watershed were replaced!