2026 AIS Inspectors

MAY 2026

WRIGHT SWCD NEWS

Spring Newsletter of Wright Soil & Water Conservation District

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AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES INSPECTORS FOR 2026

Meet our 2026 AIS Inspectors! AIS inspectors will be staffing public launches throughout the county May through September. Their goal is to inspect water related equipment for plants, animals, mud, and water.

This job helps protect Wright County and other Minnesota Lakes from aquatic invasive species like Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels, and starry stonewort. They are working under Wright SWCD delegated authority to enforce Minnesota state statute.

All boaters are required to comply with their instructions including submitting to a visual and physical inspection of equipment, opening live wells and drain plugs, lowering motors, draining ballasts, checking anchors, and checking fishing gear. Please welcome the inspectors as you see them before you enjoy Wright County lakes.

Due to state funding limitations and lack of use, the Wright County decontamination station in Annandale will remain closed for the 2026 boating season. For available decontamination sites visit https://apps.dnr.state.mn.us/ais_decon_sites.

Establishing Native Seeds and Plants: Tips for Success and Long-Term Maintenance

Establishing native plants is as much about working with nature as it is about managing it. With proper preparation, thoughtful planting, and consistent early care, native landscapes become low-maintenance, resilient, and beneficial for both people and wildlife.

1.Site Preparation

a. Remove existing competition: Clear out turf grass, invasive weeds, and debris. Native seedlings struggle against aggressive competitors.
b. Herbicide selection: If using herbicide for site bed preparation, check the active ingredient. Glyphosate works well for native seeding plantings, while triclopyr can have more negative effects on germination.
c. Minimize soil disturbance: While it's important to prepare the surface, excessive tilling can bring dormant weed seeds to the surface.

2.Choose the Right Species Mix

a. Match plants to conditions: Consider sunlight, moisture levels, and local natives already present in your region.
b. Diversity is key: a mix of grasses and flowering plants (forbs) creates resilience against pests, disease, and weather extremes.
c. Timing: Fall seeding is often ideal for native seeds, as many require cold stratification (winter exposure) to germinate. Spring planting works well for plugs (young plants) and certain species that don't require stratification.

3.Prepare and Plant

a. Ensure good seed-to-soil contact: lightly press seeds into the soil – don't bury them too deeply.
b. Mix seed with a carrier: Sand or sawdust helps distribute seeds evenly.
c. Mulching: Avoid heavy mulch for seeded areas which can block sunlight needed for germination. A light mulch can help retain moisture and suppress weeds for plugs.

Photo Caption: Native plants emerging in drill rows in July. Oats (nurse crop) along with black-eyed susan, purple prairie clover and partridge pea are visible. Maybe you see more!

4.Short Term Maintenance

a. Mow high and often: when weeds reach 12-18 inches, mow them down to about 6-8 inches. This prevents shading out native seedlings.
b. Watering during establishment: Water lightly but regularly until seedlings are established.
c. Hand-pull aggressive invaders: Especially perennial weeds that can dominate quickly.

5.Long Term Maintenance (typically after 1-3 years)

a. Prescribed burning or cutting: Mimics natural processes and helps control woody encroachment and invasive species.
b. Seasonal mowing: If burning isn't possible, mow once annually in late winter or early spring.
c. Spot weeding: Continue to monitor and remove invasive species before they spread.

Practice patience and more patience. Native plants often spend their first year developing roots rather than visible top growth. The first year may look sparse, the second better, and by the third year, you'll often see a thriving, self-sustaining ecosystem.

Sources: Board of Water and Soil Resources and Department of Natural Resources

Incidental Wetlands in Minnesota

Not all wetlands in Minnesota form naturally. Some appear unintentionally because of everyday land-use activities. These are known as incidental wetlands and understanding them helps landowners know when wetland rules do – or don't apply.

What Is an Incidental Wetland?

Under Minnesota's Wetland Conservation Act (WCA), an incidental wetland is a wet area that develops accidentally on land that was not originally wetland. These areas form solely as a by-product of another activity, not because someone intended to create a wetland.

Common Examples of Incidental Wetlands

1.Stormwater ponds
2.Ditches or drainage features
3.Excavated pits or depressions
4.Impoundments built for wastewater, erosion control, or other non-wetland purposes

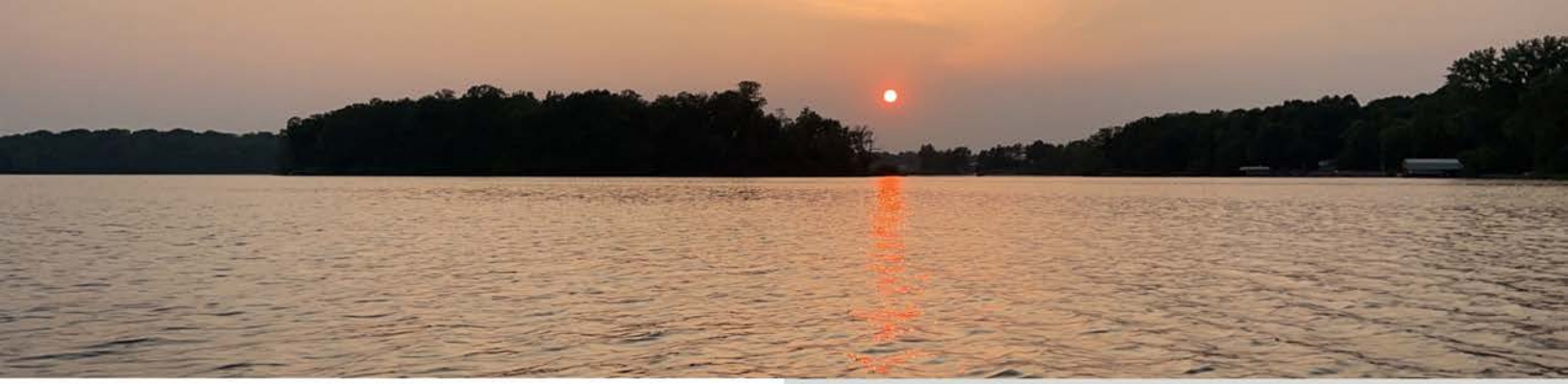
How Are They Identified?

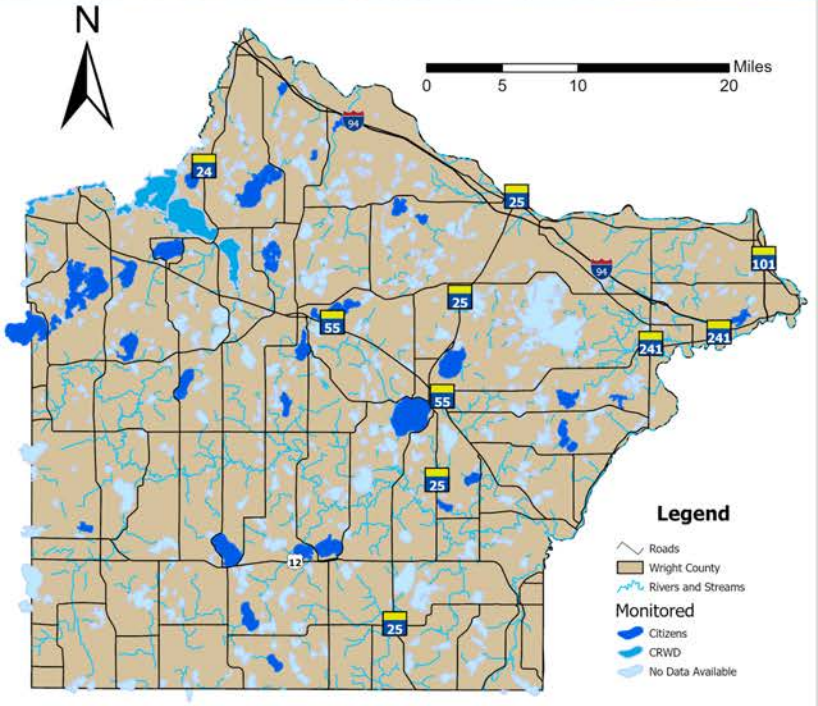
To qualify as incidental, the landowner must be able to demonstrate that the area was not a wetland before, and it only became a wetland due to some other project or land use. Local government units like the Wright SWCD review evidence like aerial photos, soil surveys, and land-use records to make this determination.

Key Takeaway

If a wet spot on your property was created unintentionally and wasn't a natural wetland, it may be considered "incidental" and therefore not subject to WCA regulations. When in doubt, contact the Wright SWCD for confirmation before starting work.

Although the area in blue meets the technical definition of a wetland, it is considered an incidental wetland given it was created for stormwater management purposes in a historically non-wetland area.





Lakes of Wright County that participate in the Citizen Monitoring Program show in dark blue. Some lakes may monitor water quality through other programs or entities such as the Clearwater River Watershed District (CRWD).

Citizen Monitoring

Thanks to dedicated citizen volunteers, 17 lakes in Wright County have 20 years or more of routine water quality data. Several other lakes have at least 10 years and more lakes are joining the program each year (map on left).

Volunteers collect water samples at the surface of the lake five times throughout the summer. The samples and data are sent to RMB Environmental Laboratory. They analyze for total phosphorus, chlorophyll-a, and secchi disc. Each of these measures is an indication of the overall health of the lake, but it is the long-term trends that really tells the story. It's like when you get check your cholesterol checked. One test is good, but a routine will help know if it is going up, down, or if it is stable.

The data is used by SWCD staff to help prioritize work. If a lake is barely over the impairment standard and trending towards better water quality, we want to give those lakes a little nudge toward being delisted. Same is true if we see a lake trending in the wrong direction, we want to work there to stop it from going over the impairment threshold.

It is never too late to start a monitoring program on your favorite lake. Supplies and training are provided. Sampling can be done from a pontoon, fishing boat, or even a canoe. Sampling takes about one hour per month, then samples need to be delivered to Buffalo on the third Monday of each month, May through September. The cost for the 2026 sampling season is $400.

2026 Sample Drop-off Days

May 18 | June 15 | July 20 | August 17 | September 21

Bareroot Tree Planting and Care Guide

Plant your trees ASAP. After planting, water, weed, and protect your trees from critters.

Do not store more than 5 days. If planting won't happen within 5 days, select a shady area, remove trees from package, and "heel" them into a trench in the soil, covering the roots with soil. Keep soil moist.

Keep packaged trees away from direct sunlight, heat, and wind. Keep the package cool (35-50 degree F), moist and dark. A refrigerator works great. Sprinkle with water every couple of days if not planted immediately.

When planting, carry the trees in a pail with a few inches of water or moist wood shavings. Do not stand trees in water over 2 hours.

Create a hole as deep and wide as the tree root system. Breakup soil clods. Dig as deep as the roots since most roots will grow outward.

If roots are too long or broken, cut them off. You do NOT want roots to be folded or "J-hooked" in the bottom of the hole. The root collar of the tree should be at ground level when planted. This is where the upper most roots protrude from the trunk or main stem of the tree.
Spread out roots so they don't encircle and girdle the tree as it grows.

You do not need to amend the soil. If you choose to, use at least 50% native soil so the roots aren't discouraged from growing outward.

Press the soil with your hands firmly around the roots to avoid air pockets. This can greatly affect survival.

Put wood/bark mulch around trees to help hold moisture and reduce weeds. Keep mulch 3" away from the trunk to prevent disease. Alternatively, biodegradable tree mats made from wood fiber or coir can be used.

Water trees thoroughly after planting, this helps remove air pockets. Watering trees weekly in dry weather will help survival.

Thank you to everyone who purchased and picked up trees, shrubs, seeds and rain barrels during our tree sale! We sold approximately 40,000 bare root seedlings. We appreciate everyone's patience as we worked through fulfilling and packaging a live product and GREATLY appreciate everyone who gets those seedlings planted!

Staff Training: Soil Mechanics

Our team is sharpening their field skills! Charlie Bean, Engineering Technician, recently attended a Soil Mechanics class in Faribault focusing on the Unified Soil Classification System hosted by NRCS Miranda Berge and Stuart Veith. Attendees got hands-on experience texturing lab samples and logging local soil borings. This popular training is a great opportunity for NRCS staff and partners to master the fundamentals of soil classification.

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

We are pleased to share our 2025 Annual Report. This publication highlights some of our projects and programs that help us accomplish our mission to be the trusted leader in natural resource conservation in Wright County.

Annual Report Contents:

- All About Us
- Education and Outreach
- 2025 Projects
- Water Management
- Cooperative Programs
- Partners

View the Reporting page on our website (wrightswcd.org/reporting) to access our Annual Report. Enjoy!

Wright Soil and Water Conservation District

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