

LOCALNEWS

Book provides details of project, process

Distribution to state officials for use as example

BY LAUREL BEAGER  
Editor

With the successful completion of a multi-year restoration project nearing, the partnership and process used is being held up as an example to others.

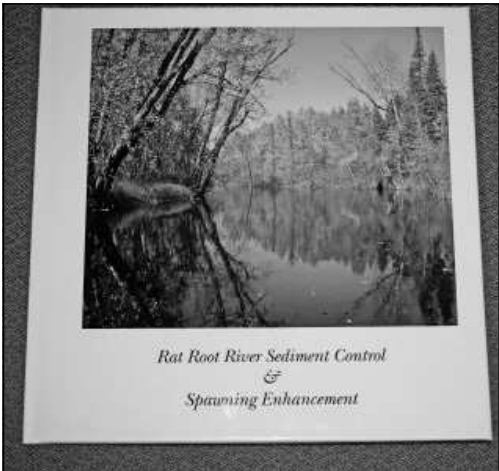
The project and process are included in a book, “Rat Root River Sediment Control & Spawning Enhancement,” created by Pam Tomevi, district administrator of the Koochiching Soil and Water Conservation District.

The district, which served as fiscal agent for the project, participated in the project with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, which provided technical expertise, and the Rainy Lake Sportfishing Club, which initiated the project, provided funding, volunteers and a multitude of other kinds of support.

Tomevi, DNR Area Fisheries Supervisor Kevin Petersen and RLSC member Tim MacKay presented the project in January at the 22nd annual DNR Roundtable, an invitation-only event focusing on fisheries, wildlife and ecological issues.

During the event, Tomevi said she hand-delivered the book to DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr and Gov. Mark Dayton.

The book came from a meeting in 2012 with former Sen. Bob Lessard and long-time RLSC member Tom Worth about the progress being made on the project.



Contact Pam Tomevi, district coordinator of the KSWCD, for instructions on how to obtain a copy of the book about the Rat Root River project.

STAFF PHOTO

Lessard, a senior adviser to the DNR commissioner, suggested Tomevi come to St. Paul to provide information about the project to area lawmakers and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. The council takes part of its name from Lessard, who was among the first legislators to suggest using the state’s sales tax to fund to fish and wildlife conservation. The council provides annual funding recommendations to the Legislature from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, one of four funds created by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, created by Minnesota voters. The Legislature, in implementing the council recommendations, established the Conservation Partners Legacy program in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Grants from the CPL provided money to the project in 2011 and 2012.

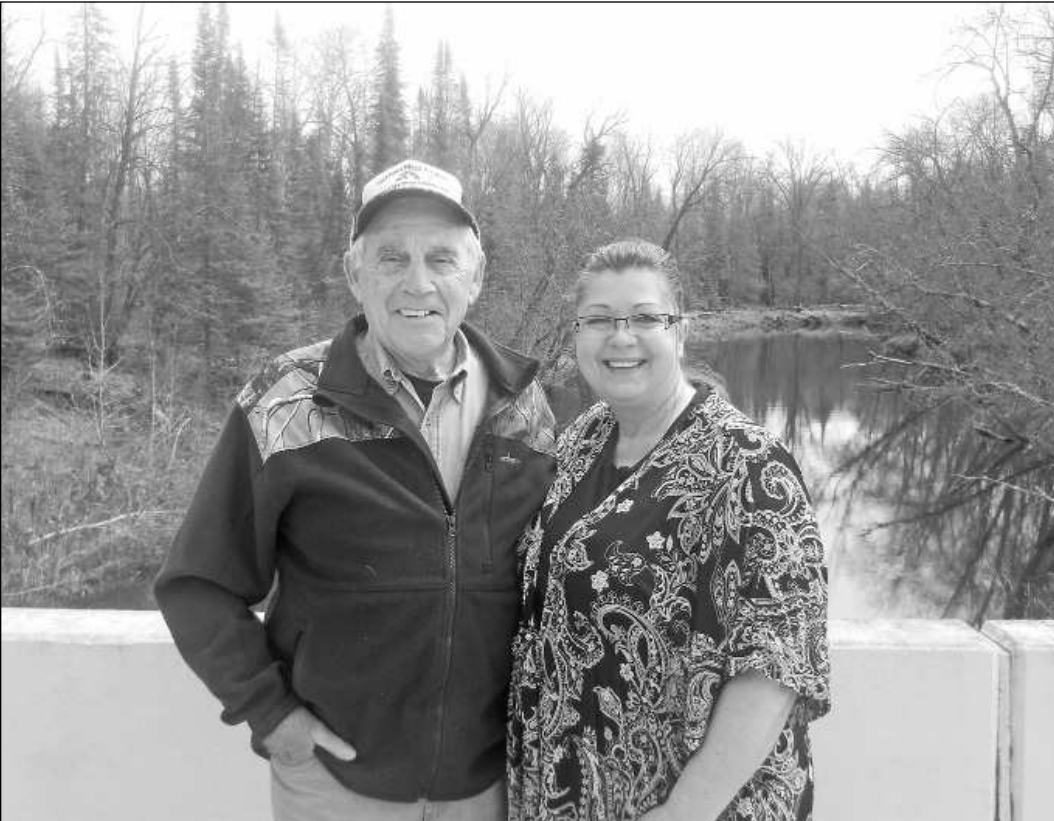
Tomevi said she arrived on the idea of a self-pub-

lished book created using an online service. The process was familiar, she said, because she had just finished a book using the service for her daughter’s wedding.

She settled on a book, rather than PowerPoint presentation or placards, because it is portable and a great venue to tell the project’s story with photographs taken during each phase of the project.

“I didn’t want to get too technical, but it was really about telling a story,” she said.

The story begins with photos taken by contractor Jami Schaak as he removed logjams and will end with an online update with the installation of walleye spawning riffle this spring. The book includes a project map that will be used as a basis for a geospatial map that will be created by Mike Laitta, bi-national GIS coordinator for the International Joint Commission, she said. Laitta saw the book at a pre-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tomevi said Lessard has a passion for the project. They stand on a bridge last summer over the river she said is near and dear to his heart.

vious International Rainy-Lake of Woods Watershed Forum. The map will be included on the KSWCD website.

The book is also a great way to serve as an example to others in the state about how unique partnerships can accomplish goals of common interest, she said.

“We worked so good together,” she said of the three partners in the project. “Projects will vary (across the state), however what I think is really being touted in terms of the project is the collaboration — that’s the highlight.”

Tomevi said egos and turf never came into the project. “We cared more about getting it done, than who got credit,” she said.

She credits the RLSC for starting the project with its own funds, and the local DNR staff who answered questions and provided

guidance and effort.

“It was such a great partnership—I really do believe that the nature of our goals were so aligned,” she said. “It was about a result and I hope the book, if nothing else, provides a good snapshot of accountability. It’s public money and they have the right to know how it’s being used and I hope this is a good indicator that the work was consistent with the mission of the fund that they voted to enact.”

She said the book also highlights the variety of efforts in which soil and water conservation districts around the state can be involved. She said she encourages groups across the state to consider tapping the districts for assistance in conservation projects.

“We’re structured in a way that we’re familiar with the grant process, the accountability requirements,

we do financial reporting to the state every year,” she said. “It’s a great partnership and it’s underutilized.”

She noted there are two openings on the local board and urged local people to find out the district boundaries for which they could serve.

Tomevi said Lessard had a passion for the project because he recalled days gone by when the river had a healthy spawning population that helped supply the coveted walleye to Rainy Lake.

“He has been supportive of getting the word out about our efforts and encouraged us to keep telling the story,” she said.

The book, she said, is a way to tell the story and encourage discussion about how similar projects elsewhere could be accomplished through similar partnerships.

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