Anoka County is rich in wetlands. Wetlands can help prevent flooding, protect water quality, recharge groundwater, provide fish and wildlife habitat, reduce erosion and sedimentation, and reduce nutrient pollution. Often property owners want to “improve” wetlands by altering them. Such activities might include:

- digging wildlife ponds

- extending yards by putting sod into low areas or drainage easements
- cutting tall vegetation like cattails or grasses
- ‘composting’ yard waste by piling lawn clippings or leaves in low areas.

There is a balance point between nature and a property owner. It comes into sharp focus when a property owner does something on their property causing an impact that may result in or add to:

- flooding
- harming to the very resource they want to improve
- violating a law in place to protect a resource or community
- using public or private funds for repairs.

This is common with wetlands or waterways. Many people don’t realize they are impacting a wetland, while others try to “act now, ask for forgiveness later.” Either way, acting without a permit can be costly – in dollars and in landscape impacts.

When it comes to natural resource management, the balance point is set by the law. For wetlands, there are federal and state laws that allow for permitted activities. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act is enforced by the U.S. Corps of Engineers. The Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act, a state-local partnership, is implemented by an authorized local governmental unit such as a watershed district, county conservation district or city, which are overseen by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. Enforcement can involve the
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

You can find your watershed organization at www.cooncreekwd.org and then enter your address into the “Finder.” Use the link, “Are You In Our District?”

-Coon Creek Watershed District is the LGU within its boundary: 763-755-0975
-Rice Creek Watershed District is the LGU within its boundary: 763-398-3070
-For Anoka County overall, try www.anokaswcd.org “Wetlands” tab and link to the Wetland Authority map, or call: 763-434-2030, ext 14

What to do

-Be careful; regulated wetlands can be hard to see. Areas that are spongy or wet for 14 consecutive days of the growing season can qualify. The boundary of a wetland needs to be defined legally by a specially trained wetland delineator. Even “cleaning up” a wetland can change it; call your wetland local government unit first!

-Check your plat to see if you have a wetland, mitigation site, drainage & utility easement, stormwater pond, ditch or other water feature. If you are unsure of what is on your plat, ask your city engineering department or watershed organization or county conservation district. Be as specific as possible with your question so you can be directed to the person with the right knowledge.

-Buying acreage? Check for wetlands on the plat. Give the address or lot number to the wetland local government unit for that site. Expect at least a week for them to get back to you. Remember, a realtor will not likely understand wetland issues; it is your responsibility as the property owner to know what is on your property.

-Is there a pond you want to add or change? Call your wetland local government unit first!

Laws change

The intent for the 1991 Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act is to allow for development while also protecting the functions of our wetlands. Now, it is being reviewed and rules updated with legislative changes in the last five years. Also, the state is looking at taking over the responsibilities of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

Changes in regulations will continue to happen. Agencies like Coon Creek Watershed District that implement regulations as one of its services are also regulated by state and federal agencies. Staff works to keep updated on the latest regulations, methods, knowledge in the water resources field. Trainings are offered to developers, builders, engineers, and agency partners to keep them updated on regulations, methods, and knowledge as well.

The law does not excuse ignorance. Plan early. A few phone calls might save you a pile of
money in the long run and protect our resources.

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