

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONSERVATION PLANNING EFFORTS TARGET HICKORY GROVE LAKE

The Story County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Story County Conservation Board are conducting a watershed assessment to look at the impacts of land management on lake water quality.

Nevada, Iowa (June 2, 2009)- The Story County Soil and Water Conservation District was awarded a Development and Planning Assistance Grant to conduct a watershed assessment and develop a conservation plan for the Hickory Grove Park watershed. In cooperation with an advisory group that includes the Story County Conservation Board, State and Federal agencies, local landowners and lake users, and agricultural engineers from Iowa State University, they are conducting a year-long study to look at the impacts of land management on lake water quality.

The purpose of the assessment is to “get a picture of the watershed, see what the water is like and what the land looks like,” says Dennis Barrick of the Soil and Water Conservation District. The assessment project is a cooperative effort involving the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Division of Soil Conservation of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. “The combination of these groups all focusing on a big issue is really exciting,” says Steve Lekwa, Director of the Story County Conservation Board. “Hopefully it will bear good fruit,” he adds. Hickory Grove Lake currently faces issues of excess nutrient loading and sedimentation; the 4000-acre watershed is predominantly row crop agriculture with little perennial cover to mitigate soil erosion and nutrient movement. The lake is also on Iowa’s Impaired Waters list because it occasionally violates state water standards for bacteria at the beach, due in large part to the resident Canada geese.

As part of the assessment program, government agencies facilitate the process by providing statewide assessment protocols and testing assistance, tablet computers with watershed assessment tools, and GIS mapping support. The Soil and Water Conservation District began the land-based assessment late last year, developing a catalog of management practices used in the watershed, including crop rotations and tillage practices. Efforts continue this spring as they continue mapping watershed features such as field erosion, road drainage and culverts, and existing conservation measures. Staff from the Park will be taking water samples for turbidity, nitrate and phosphate levels, and *E. coli* bacteria. They will be testing throughout the summer in multiple locations within the 98-acre lake as well as at sources of inflow to the lake, such as tile drainage outlets and surface run-off. All the while, the groups will be taking notes for developing a strategy that will protect the future of the lake.

The assistance grant lasts for one year, and the final management recommendations are scheduled for release in spring of 2010. The goal of the watershed plan will be to make recommendations for the future and to make informed decisions about where to target conservation efforts and what sorts of conservation efforts to promote. The plan will be a particularly useful tool when applying for funding to implement specific land management practices, such as the installation of riparian buffer strips and grass waterways, or for lake improvements like the addition of shoreline structure and fish habitat.

The Story County Soil and Water Conservation District 's mission is to promote soil conservation and water quality to landowners, operators, and residents of Story County.

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If you would like more information, please contact the Story County SWCD at (515) 382-2217

Hickory Grove Park is located southwest of Colo, between 250th & 255th St and 670th & 680th Aves