



# SCALE

Scott County Association For Leadership And Efficiency

On Friday, June 10, members and guests of the Scott County Association for Leadership and Efficiency (SCALE) gathered for a meeting at the SCALE Regional Public Training Facility outside of Jordan. The morning's principal agenda item was a "water quality primer" led by Scott County Natural Resources Manager **Paul Nelson**.

In introducing the presentation, Prior Lake Manager **Frank Boyles** noted that the issue of water quality has been a significant topic for the SCALE Quality of Life Committee. "After all," he added wryly, "Without quality water, we die." Nelson then began his formal remarks by issuing the caveat that... "This morning's presentation is designed to be an introductory primer, and given how confusing and complex this issue is, I'm afraid we'll only begin to scratch the surface."

First, Nelson delved into the question of "Who's in charge [of ensuring water quality]?" Outlining the major players on the federal (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture), state (the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Board of Soil and Water Resources), regional (the Metropolitan Council), and local (cities, townships, counties, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Watershed Management Organizations, Watershed Districts, and Lake Improvement Districts) levels, Nelson clearly stressed how easily the lines of authority can become confusing, redundant, and often cumbersome. But adding that "... virtually every water body in Scott County is deemed impaired," water quality is an issue that cuts across and overlaps many areas of expertise.

Nelson then explained that the scale of the problem, the unique characteristic properties of water, varying levels of human activity, and general uncertainties (e.g., changing weather patterns) all contribute to the high cost of managing water appropriately. "While each individual problem is generally small, the cumulative impacts of water issues – particularly from non-point sources of pollution from millions of diffuse places – adds up significantly," he said. From alterations in the land – such as rooftops and pavement, cropland and pasture, parking lots and ditches – to the introduction of chemical pollutants and invasive species, he noted, "... it may be unrealistic to try to achieve a 'pristine' standard of water quality. Or maybe we just all have a lot more work to do."

But much of this work is challenged by a number of barriers, Nelson stated. "Small impacts are easy to overlook, and often inconvenient to address," he said. "Further, real progress on water quality requires people to change their behavior, which is quite difficult to do." Also complicating the issue is the fact that the science and research on water quality is still developing, and documenting improvement takes time and is often not "visible" to many people. "That all having been said," he continued, "We are getting more done now than ever before in my career."

Nelson made particular note of the "delisting" of Credit River from the list of Minnesota's impaired waters – "Only two bodies of water have been removed from this list," he said. Further, Scott County's efforts are greatly assisted by good development standards, high levels of cooperation and coordination among the various players, and "... folks in Scott County have a strong conservation

ethic,” he added. Nelson’s presentation was followed by a lively discussion among SCALE members, who had questions and comments that ranged from specific legislative efforts to how to deal with wetland regulations. SCALE Chair and **Prior Lake Mayor Mike Myser** wrapped up the topic by asking SCALE members to consider ways in which the organization could – and *should* – get more involved.

In other actions of the morning, SCALE members unanimously welcomed the Prior Lake/Spring Lake Watershed District as a member, and **Senator Claire Robling** provided a brief overview of the ongoing impasse between the Legislature and the Governor in reaching the a budget agreement. “It has been frustrating, particularly as we get closer to the deadline for a state shutdown,” she said. “But I know that the legislative leaders as well as the Governor don’t want a shutdown, so we’ll just have to find a way out of this.”