

How I Came to Understand FWS & MWS Genevieve Gates

Feb 2, 2016 Feb 8, 2016. Univ. of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN. 10:55am

This week was the first classes of spring semester. In my English course we get to work with non-profits, and some have come to class to present to us. I think I am going to choose the Freshwater Society. I really liked their presentation. I have never heard of a water steward, a watershed, or a freshwater society, and frankly they all sound intriguing. When FWS was talking to the class, I begin to have flashbacks to days spent on the lake and nights spent under lampposts dancing in the rain. Are all of these memories connected somehow? How has water impacted my own life? I feel excited at the thought.

FEB 2. The kitchen of my apartment in St. Paul, MN. 10pm

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I've been thinking...I live my life at the University of St. Thomas. I drink water out of my sink in my room. I never think about where my dish soap goes after it so easily wipes away the grime from last nights pasta-bake. I never think about the water that runs off the roof of my apartment building to the street to the sewer. I think I'm a pretty good person, I don't litter and I try and be nice to people. What else is there for me to know?

Feb 30, 2016. Freshwater Society in St. Paul, MN. 5:00pm

I visited the Freshwater Society today inside a building just north of University Ave, and I met the vibrant faces of those who spend their lives teaching people about watersheds districts and water usage. Wait, what is a watershed district? I was told it is one layer of the government—you have counties, you have cities, and you have.... Watersheds? What? I never heard of that before. Watershed Districts are part of the local government; they help manage water resources within designated boundaries. A watershed is an area or ridge of land that separates waters flowing to different rivers, basins, or seas. There are so

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many of these in Minnesota! Because of this, the watershed districts work to protect and improve water quality in lakes, rivers, wetlands, and streams in each district. This is unique to Minnesota; no other state makes water take such precedent.

Mar 4, 2016. The couch in my apartment in St. Paul, MN. 8:00pm

I just keep thinking...I didn't know until I learned at the Freshwater Society that there is so much we each can do. Each home has their own lawn, drains, and pavements that all affect our over-all water quality. The pollution that comes from homes, runoffs from agricultural areas, or wind-borne debris is all called "non-point pollution." This pollution is a major issue because it directly affects streams, rivers and lakes. If I weren't told this, I never would have thought about it.

Mar 14, 2016. Univ. of St. Thomas OEC in St. Paul, MN. 1:00pm

I presented on FWS and MWS in class today. I have been reflecting on action steps. Now that I know about non-point pollution, I wonder what we can do to combat it? Peggy from the Freshwater Society tells me that there are a few main things homeowners can do. First, take your grass cuttings and leaves from your yard and compost them! All of that becomes food for algae within our lakes if we allow it to get into the drains. That algae sickens the lakes. Next, reduce chemical usage in the household and in the garden. Next is to allow water to soak into the ground— You can do this through creating rain gardens. A rain garden is usually placed at the edge of your property and acts as a buffer between the run-off from your room and the storm drain. It is important for the water to go into the ground because then it keeps a healthy water cycle.

Mar 15, 2016. Mississippi Watershed Management Organization. Minneapolis, MN. 7:00pm

Today I went to a Master Water Stewards class to learn more about the program. Master Water Stewards is a program through the Freshwater Society that trains everyday people to become masters of understanding water systems in Minnesota! The class was two hours long and we learned about different approaches to helping people understand water-related issues in the Twin Cities. The content was interactive, the stewards were lively in discussion, and the teachers were graduates of the program, which made it even better. It felt as if the community was working together in this class.

Mar 22, 2016. The couch in my apartment in St. Paul, MN. 11:00pm

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I'm realizing that the problems that are addressed in the Master Water Stewards program look different in each community. In Minnesota we have a wide range of people and communities, so the water issues facing Wayzata may be different than in West St. Paul. That doesn't mean it is a lost cause, though, because tailoring the message to the audience is the key! Fitting the message to a community could mean simply teaching

classes at a church versus a library. Or teaching those who live in apartments more about their water usage, and those who live in houses about their lawn care! Same cause, different delivery.

April 9, 2016. The couch in my apartment in St. Paul, MN. 8:00pm

I went on the MWMO's (Mississippi Watershed Management Organization) watershed tour on a chilly Saturday. We spent the day exploring Minneapolis' plans, projects, and success stories for water management. These ranged from elaborate rain gardens, innovative urban planning, and even MWMO's own facility choices to work towards water quality. This tour

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showed me that there are large systemic changes that can be made, as well as smaller ones. One great way communities are working towards protecting water is called a bump-out. A bump out is a thinning of a street on both sides through the extension of the curb. These bump outs reduce asphalt usage, make room for rain gardens, as well as slow down traffic on the road. I saw smaller changes as we visited the home of a Master Water Steward graduate, where she renovated her entire yard to maximize water usage and runoff. I am starting to see opportunities for water protection everywhere...

April 10, 2016. The couch in my apartment in St. Paul, MN. 8:00pm

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Now that I have learned all these things, I see them everywhere! I drive down a road and look at lawns and imagine rain gardens transforming a yard. I look at a large expanse of a parking lot and imagine a redesign with a nice walking path with native grasses. There seems to be ever-ending opportunities for change. It feels like a breath of fresh air, a problem with real solutions, I think that's pretty cool.