

Piers & Places

Crystal Lake-- watching the watershed

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In this issue's [Community Connections](#) article, Roland Sigurdson reminds us that whatever we put on the land can easily end up in your favorite lake or river. That's because, when you are talking about water quality, it's all about the [watershed](#). What we do to the land (the watershed) largely determines the water quality in our lakes.

And, since the watershed for a lake is usually big, getting everyone who lives within the watershed to use eco-friendly practices can be a challenge to say the least. That's the challenge for [Crystal Lake](#) in south central Minnesota. Crystal Lake is a 380 acre lake just 10 miles southwest of Mankato in Blue Earth County, and it's a good example of how challenging it can be to stop what's on the land from getting into the water.

At the end of a small chain of shallow lakes, Crystal Lake, [view map](#) [PDF](#), receives the water that flows out of Mills and Loon lakes, but the vast majority of Crystal Lake's water comes from a [county drainage ditch](#) that drains an area of farmland extending to the southwest of the lake. For this reason, farm nutrient inputs into the lake continue to be an area of concern.

So too, are nutrients and other contaminants from the city of Lake Crystal and its residents. The city wraps around the west and south sides of the lake, so everything from lawn fertilizer and garden chemicals to pet waste and leaf litter can end up in the lake.

The watershed is also skirted by US Highway 169 on the east and MN Highway 60 on the west, with several miles of county blacktop roads and city streets running through it, [view map](#) [PDF](#). So, gas, oil, rubber, road salt and anything else that ends up on the roads of the watershed has the potential to make its way into Crystal Lake.

So, when residents are busy swimming or fishing at [Robinson Park](#) in Lake Crystal it's easy to take for granted that clean water and healthy fish in the lake depend on the cooperation of everyone from farmers to homeowners to road crew workers. And when you are gazing at the waterfalls at [Minneopa State Park](#), or fishing for catfish in the [Minnesota River](#) near Le Seuer, it's easy to take for granted that the water you are looking at today was in a farm field southwest of Lake Crystal just a few days before.

Thankfully, the challenge of teaching people about the connections between our land and our water has been taken up by watershed groups like the [Crystal Loon Mills Clean Water Partnership](#). This partnership is a coalition of numerous agencies and individuals working together to educate citizens and landowners in the Crystal Lake watershed about their impacts on the water.

The Crystal Loon Mills CWP was formed in 2007, and has already had some success with endeavors like nutrient management, buffer strips, urban rain gardens, shoreline protection, education programs, and water quality monitoring. But, like most Minnesota watershed projects, there's more work to be done and more people who need to be involved to protect the waters of Crystal Lake.



Shore Fishing on Crystal Lake