



LET IT GROW: An Adventure in Lakeshore Stewardship

By Margaret Vos for the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group

August, 2021



What a wonderful surprise the other morning to find more flowers blooming at our cabin on Mille Lacs Lake. This time, one of them showed her colors by zooming between the slats of the old Adirondack chair that I had placed on the lakefront hill. Such a delight!

The native flowers blooming on our hillside all began when Harmony Maslowski from Mille Lacs Soil and Water Conservation District dropped off a packet of seeds at our place three years ago. She also left a brochure that explained how growing native plants along the shoreline is good for the lake, and how our property could be part of the COMPASS lakeshore stewardship program. I called the Mille Lacs SWCD office the following Monday to say we were interested in being part of this initiative.

Our participation in the COMPASS program began with a visit from Lynn Gallice, a Mille Lacs SWCD shoreland technician. Lynn walked around our lot and pointed out three areas where erosion was taking place. Because we are on the east side of the lake looking out across 12 miles of open water, we sometimes experience some great whitecaps and wave action. The goal of the plan she proposed was to control the erosion of our shore by using a wide variety of native plants – 25 to be exact. Lynn provided us with a written plan that included a timeline, a list of plants that would thrive on our west-facing slope, and a list of contractors who specialized in lakeshore landscaping with native plants. We were able to adapt the design to our specifications. For example, we wanted plants that would bloom all summer long (which was accomplished); plants that could tolerate the impacts of putting in and taking out the dock (also accomplished); and plants that would not obstruct our view of the lake (also accomplished).

Once we decided on the plants, Lynn helped us with the bidding and review process that resulted in our selection of Minnesota Shoreworks as our contractor in spring, 2019. After preparing the soil, we planted in June that year, a bit later in the month than we had planned because of an extremely cold and wet spring, but once the date was set, the planting went very quickly. Actually, organizing the 828 plants took almost as long as the planting itself! We greatly appreciated the care given by Minnesota Shoreworks' team in planting the hillside and areas

north and south of the cabin. Within six hours the project was completed, and all summer long we enjoyed the colorful blooms of yarrow, bluestem, columbine, black-eyed susan, and a variety of sedges and clovers, to name just a few of the species.

Today we are enjoying our second summer of native growth on the steep hillside (31 steps down to the dock) at our cabin on Mille Lacs Lake. The plantings provide an array of color and beauty from May until the first hard frost, and an unexpected bonus has been the increased populations of butterflies and birds that seem to enjoy the native growth as much as we do. Another bonus is that the plants will reduce erosion and help purify rainwater that drains into the lake. What a perfect way to give back to a lake that provides us all so much pleasure!



“Little things make a big difference.” --Yogi Berra

Contact your local SWCD to learn how you can be part of the COMPASS program.

Mille Lacs SWCD: millelacsswcd.org - (320) 983-2160

Crow Wing SWCD: cwsxcd.org - (218) 828-6197

Aitkin SWCD: aitkincountyswcd.wordpress.com - (218) 927-7284

Visit MilleLacsWatershed.org to learn more about supporting a healthy lake environment.



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