

Clean Water Legacy Grant Funds Historical Inventory of Septic Systems in Wadena County

A \$50,000.00 grant submitted by the Wadena County Planning & Zoning Department and accepted by the Board of Water and Soil Resources back in 2009 funded a project to do a historical inventory of all known septic systems located in the county as well as on known improved parcels where no septic information is on file with the County.

In an effort to try and determine, not only the total number of septic systems located in Wadena County, but also the number of systems that may be suspected as failing or non-compliant, the Wadena County Zoning Department began the two year long process of developing a tracking system wherein septic systems were identified by parcel and permit number and a determination was made based on recorded information whether or not a system might pass minimum criteria compliance inspection. Those records were noted with the parcel and a notice was sent out to each owners of the improved parcel. The notice included information that was on file about what kind of a system existed and the date it was installed or if there was no record at all. Property owners were encouraged to take measures to have their system inspected for compliance or to have them replaced if they already knew they would be considered failing or non-compliant. All 15 townships located within the County will be completed in alphabetical order. In addition, all the documents currently on file with the County will be scanned and saved electronically for easy retrieval and, hopefully, for future incorporation into paperless files.

With the townships that are currently completed, the County is estimating approximately 74% compliance with the minimum standards for compliance of septic systems within the County. That number grows stronger and will continue to grow stronger with each system that is replaced through this year and the years to come.

Septic systems in Wadena County are required to have a current Certificate of Compliance at any time a permit is issued to add onto an existing home, unless that add-on is a deck or open air porch. A current Certificate of Compliance is also required anytime an application for conditional use, variance, or rezoning is made, and whenever a transfer of ownership on a parcel occurs. Once a Certificate of Compliance is received, it is valid for three years from the date of issuance for the purposes of permitting or sale of property.

With these existing procedures in place, and the tracking put in place now through the historical inventory, Wadena County is in a much better position to see progress being made in the area of sub-surface sewage treatment systems in the County. It is the intention of the Wadena County Planning and Zoning Department to find a way to attach the information generated, as well as any new information generated, to the County's digital map so residents, realtor, banks and other lenders can view the permit and septic information that is available through the County for their own practical purposes.

It has been a serious undertaking for staff in the Zoning Office but it will be well worth the effort, and none of it would have been possible without the funding received from the Clean Water Legacy and the Board of Water and Soil Resources.