

RICE CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT *Dialogue*

Got Geese?

Once thought extinct, the “giant “ Canada goose subspecies has increased tenfold in two decades in Minnesota to more than 200,000 breeders. This makes the Canada goose one of Minnesota’s major wildlife management success stories.

But success has brought problems. Canada geese are prolific grazers, preferring succulent plants such as short lawn grass. This attracts them to golf courses and mowed lawns – including lakeshore lawns. They like feeding sites with open vistas to see potential predators and access to lakes and marshes to escape danger. Lakeshore that is mowed to the water’s edge is an ideal habitat. Because they are highly social birds that congregate in large groups (except during nesting season) and where there are large flocks of geese there are large amounts of goose droppings, As much as people like to watch geese, they aren’t too wild about what the geese leave behind.

Canada Geese facts:

- ✓ The average Canada goose produces 2-4 pounds of manure/day (wet weight); 1/2 pound (dry weight).
- ✓ Salmonella bacteria can persist in wet droppings for up to one month.
- ✓ The usual number of goslings in a clutch is six; egg incubation is 26 days.
- ✓ Young geese do not find mates and nest until they are three years old; they mate for life. They sometimes do find another mate if the first mate dies.
- ✓ Average life span is 10 years.

Health and Water Quality concerns

It has been documented that goose droppings may contain some of the parasites (e.g. giardia, lamblia, cryptosporidium) and bacteria that affect humans, but the actual infection of people with these parasites or bacteria are rare. “Many swimming beaches are closed annually due to the accumulation of goose feces or elevated coliform counts in the water, however, it usually cannot be conclusively tied to goose feces,” said Steve Wild, chief, Region 3 Division of Migratory Birds, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Goose feces do contain nitrogen and, therefore, they can increase the fertility of a lake. However, goose feces are only one form of excess nutrients being deposited in lakes. The effects of fertilizer runoff from lawns and fields likely play a greater role in increased fertility of larger, deeper lakes than do goose droppings.”

How do homeowners discourage geese?

Restoring your shoreline with native vegetation is considered the most effective long-term and environmentally sound method of reducing goose problems to individual yards and lawns. Canada geese avoid using areas where plants obstruct their view of the surrounding area. Leave a dense strip of naturally occurring trees and shrubs, or a buffer of native grasses and wildflowers that grow 20-30 inches tall in a strip 20-30 feet wide along the shoreline. You’ll still be able to see the lake, but the geese won’t!

To find out how to implement a lakeshore restoration project or raingarden, visit the RCWD website at www.ricecreek.org. There you will find a ten minute “how to overview” movie and a comprehensive planning packet that will guide you through all of the steps from permits to site design and cost estimates to site preparation and planting.

Adapted from information provided by the Minnesota Lakes Association - submitted by Dawn Dubats, RCWD Environmental Education Coordinator