

OUR VIEW

REGION CAN DO BETTER BY THE PLANET

Earth Day didn't seem to be a big deal in Mankato this year. Maybe that's just an anomaly, and we hope it isn't a sign of a community that is considering environmental stewardship as a secondary concern in tough economic times.

As part of our continuing series of examining eight dimensions of a healthy community, it's worth asking questions about how the community is measuring up in promoting environmental stewardship. Is the region recognizing the need for environmental quality and management of natural resources to ensure a sustainable future? Are all segments of the community willing to assist in this effort?

As is the case much of the time, the answer appears to be yes and no.

In a positive move to encourage all to get involved in management of resources, the community group Envision 2020 Energy Conservation Task Force will be offering energy meters that can be checked out at the Blue Earth County library. They will allow residents to measure the energy use and energy cost of households and businesses.

The meters can be plugged into any standard 120 volt electric appliance to measure voltage, electric cost and consumption.

The effort one has to put forth to take this important step is small, but the education and realization of how much energy we all use, and waste, should be revealing and possibly spur people to investigate further what energy conservation efforts they can make. Meters are available for checkout at all Blue Earth County Library locations, including Mankato, Mapleton and Lake Crystal and the North Mankato Taylor Library.

There was an Earth Day event in Mankato on the water quality of the Minnesota River. Gains have been made in cleaning up the river of the last decade, but there's more to be done, according to Scott Kudelka of the Water Resource Center based at Minnesota State University. There's less sediment and phosphorus in the river, but there appears to be other problems such as pesticide pollution, too much development and runoff. The center offered an analysis of the river at the Mankato meeting and there is another one planned for Montevideo on May 6.

Numerous groups, including Montevideo-based CURE (Clean Up the River Environment), continue to make efforts to improve the water quality of the Minnesota River. But as always, these groups could use more volunteers, and more money. CURE's website offers more information on getting involved at curemriver.org.

The Envision 2020 group also launched the Million Tree Project about two years ago, and there appears to be a sustained effort to continue planting those one million trees in the region. In fact, August Schell Brewing Co. in New Ulm recently donated 150 trees to the cities of New Ulm and Mankato in celebration of the brewery's 150th anniversary.

There is solid curbside recycling in North Mankato and Mankato, and North Mankato and Nicollet County residents benefit from a city recycling center that takes materials such as textiles.

There also was a solid effort this year to recycle old Christmas lights, and by all accounts, it was very successful.

Still, Minnesota River cleanup groups continue to find old tire junkyards along and in the river, and dumping of electronic recyclables has been somewhat of a problem as well. As is always the case with the environment, there's more to be done. But the region has a good start, and there are plenty of opportunities to get involved.

That makes the grade on environmental stewardship about a B in our estimation.