

## Owning Land – Dream Come True or Nightmare?

The following is the first in a series of articles geared toward the new landowner. Whether it a lake cabin, a piece of rural property for a home or farm or acreage purchased for hunting, the private ownership of land can have a tremendous positive impact on our environment. The keys to this positive impact are knowledge and application of this knowledge.

Owning land can be a dream come true, a goal finally reached and the opportunity to live harmoniously and productively with the environment or it can be a nightmare of struggling against the environment, unaware of potential problems, frustrated by not knowing where to turn for help and information.

And so we will take each new landowner, step by step, through the process of discovering just what it means to own land.

Our new landowner has just purchased 20 acres of rural property, complete with house, garage and some slightly dilapidated out buildings. Many years ago, this had been a small family farm but over time, parcels had been sold. This particular piece has the old farmhouse, renovated several times, an old well somewhere on the property, a new sewer system, and a mixture of fields and forests. There is a small creek on one corner of the property. The area around the creek is a small wetland with willows and tag alder. The forests are a mixture of soft and hard woods and have considerable deadfall and brush. The fields have not been tended in many years and are slowly being taken over by brush.

In the excitement of finally moving from town to this rural setting, much information given by the previous owners to the new landowner has been forgotten. It is now winter. Snow covers the ground blurring landmarks and hiding plants and small trees. Our "N.L." settles the family into the new home and in a quiet moment realizes how much he or she really doesn't know about living in the country.

Spring melt will bring back the outlines of the old gardens, the remnants of the fence lines and will reveal the actual condition of the outbuildings and the fields. But spring and summer are short seasons and our "N.L." would like to get as much of a head start as possible.

The first thing that must be determined is exactly what kind of environment does our landowner envision for his family? Is this going to be a kid-friendly environment? What kind of gardens, if any, does he plan on planting? What plants will provide him and his family with visual satisfaction and will enhance the environment as a whole? And trees? Is it possible to have an apple orchard? Where is the best place to plant an orchard?

And soil – what kind of soil is here? How rocky is it? What will grow here? What needs to be done to enhance it?

And what about that creek on the far corner of the property? It seems to be part of a little wetland area. Does that need to be maintained some how? Could a pond be created there? Can it be drained? What about mosquitoes?

What is now growing in those old fields? In the fall the fields were knee deep in some kind of brown grass. Will that be a fire hazard in the spring? What can be done about that? And what sort of brush is that next to the barn? They might be raspberry bushes but how can they be identified?

And what about that old well? Is it filled in? Is it covered? And just where exactly is it?

The woods are full of deadfall and brush. How can this be cleared out? What trees should be left?

And animals? What kind of fences and shelters are needed? Is there enough grazing land for some horses or cows or sheep? Do they all eat the same thing? Will those fields have to be planted for grazing?

These and many other questions flood through our "N.L."s mind. Where can he find answers to these questions? Who can he ask?

This series of articles will answer some of these questions. But more importantly, it will inform all new landowners that there is an agency in our county that is ready to help with these and all other questions that may come up involving land ownership. The North St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District is an agency created to help all landowners establish and maintain their property for their personal use and enjoyment as well as for the health and welfare of the environment as a whole. This agency can help with all of the above questions and will also direct the landowner to other available resources.

If you have questions about your land, its uses and how to maintain a healthy environment, ask us. We're here to help.

North St. Louis SWCD – 218-742-9504 or visit our website [www.nslswcd.org](http://www.nslswcd.org)