

Owning Land – Dream come True or Nightmare? (Part 2)

We left our new landowner in January. The excitement of purchasing his new home and moving in had given way to the reality and responsibilities he and his family now have as landowners. Questions threatened to lead to confusion and a sense of the enormity of what he wished to do was nearly overwhelming. But he and his family have made a commitment to their new home and began to explore and experience their new world.

Winter was spent snowshoeing and skiing through the property, enjoying the clean crisp air, listening to the stillness of a snowfall, getting to know the face of his land in this season. He and his family have seen the tracks of deer and rabbits and foxes. They've experienced the heart-stopping moment when a partridge explodes out of the snow at their feet. And they've begun to appreciate what a complex environment this 20 acres of land is.

Late winter and early spring have been spent listing projects and setting priorities. Several phone calls to the SWCD have given him both information and the names of other agencies that can help him with his list of projects.

And now spring has finally arrived heralded by the calling of the crows and the chickadee spring song. The faint scent on the air means the skunks are awake and beginning their forays into the sunshine. The finding of a new antler shed coincides with the high call of the geese moving overhead.

Now our landowner takes his lists of projects and knows it's time to start carefully changing the face of his land.

Our landowner has several small children and has determined that the first priority will be to locate the old well and find out if it has been properly sealed and covered. Information gathered from the former owners of the property has enabled him to roughly locate the old well. Now as the snow slowly disappears he has narrowed the area where the old well is located. After contacting the SWCD for information regarding the safety and sealing of abandoned wells, he is ready for his first project.

While the old buildings are picturesque they are also a hazard to curious children. This will be his second project. Can they be repaired or will it be better to remove them? If he decides to remove them, where and how can he dispose of the debris?

The next most important area to tackle will be to determine exactly what sort of plants are growing around the old farmstead. Are there any plants that are dangerous to his children or his pets? Are there invasive plants which have taken root since the farm was let go idle? Where would be a good place to get some information on plants native to the area?

Even though our landowner is impatient to get started with his projects he realizes that the best and surest way to identify these plants, which are now brown leaves and brittle stalks, will be to wait until things start to leaf out. Then he will request some help from the Soil and Water Technical Staff who will help him identify each plant.

The Soil and Water Staff can also walk through his property with him. Each area can be roughly mapped and defined and his list of priorities can be more carefully and productively worked out.

The trees he would like to plant are available through the Soil and Water office. The technical staff will help him determine which ones will accomplish what he has in mind for his property.

There is much to be done. Each step will be taken with a picture in his mind of what he wishes his property to look like in 10 or 20 or 30 years. Each year will bring new information and new ideas as he works with nature to create an environmentally friendly, family friendly home.

If you are a new landowner in Northern St. Louis County and have questions about your land and what can be done, please contact the North St. Louis Soil and Water District Office. This 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.

Contact us – we're here to help. 218-742-9504 or visit our website www.nslswcd.org

