**Week 18- How Can I Do My Part to Protect Our Water Quality?**

**Conservation Corner**

***Conservation Corner is a regular article produced by the Forest County Land &Water Conservation Department. For more information contact Al Murray, Land&Water Resources Technician at 715-478-1387 or by e-mail at*** ***lcc@co.forest.wi.us******.***

What happens to our waste when we flush the toilet? To some, this may be a stupid question, to others they may not know.

Some homeowners and residences, including most in the City of Crandon, the Town of Laona, the Town of Wabeno and some of the Tribal community areas are on municipal waste systems where the waste is sent to a central treatment system and aeration and natural processes are utilized to break down the waste. Treated water back into the ground or natural groundwater systems by infiltration through soil, evaporation and sometimes direct release into streams.

A majority of homes and residences in Forest County rely on private onsite wastewater treatment systems (POWTS) to treat human waste. These systems are commonly known as septic systems. POWTS come in a variety of designs depending on the ability of soils in each particular area to filter and treat waste from the water before the water re-enters into the natural groundwater systems through soil infiltration. Some of the actual solid waste remains in the septic tank where much of it is broken down by bacteria and some of it is removed through pumping. Septic tanks are our first line of defense in water quality, maintenance and pumping of septic tanks are critical to our water quality.

Un-treated or improperly treated wastewater is a primary threat to the ground and surface waters in Forest County. Historically many lakes and streams were affected by improper waste treatment of wastewater and this too has caused some of the nutrient enrichment found in many of our lakes.

Since 2008, State Statutes 145.20, Wisconsin Administrative Code, and the Forest County Sanitary Ordinance require inspection of all sanitary systems to insure they are properly working and properly maintained. In order to maintain regulation of these laws and codes, each year the Zoning Department sends out notices to 1/3 of all property owners with POWTS on their property to track and insure that all systems are properly inspected. This system is utilized to insure that all POWTS are inspected on the mandatory three year inspection interval.

If you have a property with a POWTS system, you can do your part to protect our water quality by making sure that your system is inspected at least every three years or when you receive the notice from the Zoning Department. If you do not receive a notice for inspection, please contact the zoning office. You can also protect water quality by making sure that you maintain and operate your POWTS by following the operation and maintenance plan that was signed when your system was installed. Information on POWTS systems in Forest County is available by contacting the Zoning Office at 715-478-3893. Please note that during the spring and summer this department has a lot of responsibilities and site visits, request for basic information is better in the winter months when construction season has slowed down.

Let’s all do our part to protect the quality of ground and surface waters in Forest County!