

Sauk River waters pass the test, Sauk River lawns don't



Environmental studies professor Michner Bender set out, more than a year ago, to evaluate nutrient loading from lawn fertilizer in lawns along Sauk River as well as in the river itself.

For his part of the research project, Bender soil sampled 77 lawns, front and back. But for the water research, he turned to environmental studies student Sarah Sewell. The senior took bi-weekly water samples at four locations along the Sauk River as it flows through residential and commercial areas of St. Cloud. She also assisted in the laboratory analysis and analyzed the data from surveys given to homeowners along the river.

The student-researcher learned that fertilizer used on lawns along the Sauk River had only a minor influence on the level of nutrients in

the water. But the professor, who had sampled the 77 lawns, found that all but four had excess phosphorus.

"I couldn't have done it without her," said Bender when the research was completed. Sewell is glad that was the case, for the project allowed her to do hands-on research, then present the study findings in several venues – activities that will look very good on her resume.

Sewell first presented the results of the study at the SCSU Student Research Colloquium, which every year gives several hundred students the opportunity to present and defend their work in a setting very much like an actual research conference. Next she presented to the Minnesota chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, where she received second place.

Sewell went on to present at the annual Soil Science Society of America International Meeting Oct. 31 to Nov. 3 in Seattle, Wash. Instead of sharing information on her half of the research project, however, she had the opportunity to present the results of the entire survey. Her trip and presentation were possible because of grants totaling \$1,000 from the SCSU College of Science & Engineering and the Department of Environmental Studies.

Following graduation this year Sewell hopes to earn a master's degree. She's confident that an interesting career will follow: "There are so many things you can do with a degree in environmental studies – and this experience," she said.

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