

We Are Water West Central MN
Minnesota Humanities Center 2020

Blaine Hill:

My name is Blaine Hill. I'm the city manager for the city of Morris, Minnesota, and I actually grew up here. There were no trees here when people came and founded Morris. It was prairie. And so then, rivers, and streams, and those areas are very important to the natural aspect of this.

So one of the things I would share with you, that's really interesting. I had a discussion with a person yesterday, it's kind of right on the city end of this. There's an apartment complex. And behind it is a guy that owns a house, and he owns a great, big, huge open lot. I mean, it's probably two blocks square, open lot. And the neighbors are complaining, because the grass is high and everything, and they didn't like it. And technically, if you look at our ordinance, once your grass gets above six inches, you're supposed to cut it, and it's like, well, you should be mowing that, you know?

And then the guy came in to talk to me and he said, "Well, I don't like to mow in the springtime, because right now there's eight duck nests in that one area." And I said, "What?" I said, "There's ducks nesting right in ..." And yeah, he goes, "There's eight of them." He goes, I actually have flagged the nest sites. So him and his wife will go through, and they'll watch, and then they will actually mark the nest sites. And so one of the neighbors was complaining about it, and I told them about it, and he couldn't believe it. And so he goes, "I'm going to go talk to that guy." And I said, "You should take your kids, and then have them go show you where these nest sites are," and then they'll understand why he doesn't want to mow it until all the ducklings are gone.

And at first I was like, "Yeah, let's just get rid of it." And then it's like, "No, we need to change our rules," because we do have some of these wide open spaces. But I will tell you as a kid and as a city manager, I know and understand every single year there are ducks that nest in town. And then it's like a rite of passage that everybody watches these ducks that are trying to cross the road, because they're trying to get to Lake Crystal with their little ones. And so then every year, and just the other night, I saw duckling trying to cross the road. So it must've got left behind, or the mom was probably hiding in the weeds waiting for it or whatever. But sometimes we don't understand that we have wildlife living with us right now. And it's all because of the lake, and the river, and all those things that are here.