

Our Water #5 – Lessons from Lake Darling

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If you are looking for good news about protecting Iowa's lakes and improving water quality – Lake Darling in Washington County is an inspiring place to start.

This is Prof. Neil Hamilton from Drake University with today's Our Water.

Many of Iowa's lakes suffer from poor water quality – even beach closings – due to pollution coming from nearby fields. Lake Darling got so bad it was on the impaired waters list and unsafe to use. Its very existence was in jeopardy, so local citizens united to save their lake. They formed the Friends of Lake Darling and solicited donations. After securing a state appropriation, the Iowa DNR undertook the \$16 million project.

The 300-acre lake was drained, the dam rebuilt, and new park facilities constructed. Over 300,000 cubic yards of silt were removed. Perhaps the most important step to protect the lake was the work of nearby landowners. Of the 71 farmers in the watershed, 59 agreed to install permanent conservation practices to protect the lake's water quality.

Their hard work paid off and in 2014 the restored Lake Darling State Park was re-dedicated. The park's namesake, Iowa's renowned political cartoonist and conservation leader Ding Darling would be proud. Their effort showed how farmers and communities can work together to protect our water – if they are motivated and have public support. The lessons from Lake Darling can be applied in watersheds all across Iowa.

This has been Prof. Neil Hamilton for Our Water, a production of the Drake University Agricultural Law Center.