

To the Editor

## Lawns

Are you concerned about water quality? Do you support the Cannon River Watershed Partnership? Do you value the Boundary Waters? Good! Your concern is urgently needed. Have you heard about the pollinator decline? Does it bother you that native bees are in trouble? Look out your window. What does your lawn look like? If you (or your neighbors) have applied the chemicals required to make green velvet appear, you (or they) could become a better steward of environmental quality. Those "classic" lawns are expensive to establish, and require considerable maintenance. Could you spend your time and money better?

***Nature's Best Hope***, by Douglas W. Tallamy, makes a strong case for residential properties that restore local native plants and reduce demand for water and chemical applications. (Some of the chemicals used in the U.S. are banned in other countries as carcinogenic.) The state of Minnesota sponsors a Lawns to Legumes program to help people shift to more environmentally friendly lawns. The city of Northfield provides some cost sharing support for rain gardens and native plantings.

As we become more aware of the value of biodiversity and pollinator habitat, it is time to think differently about what makes a good lawn. I am pleased to see some lawns featuring white clover or ground covers. Changing taste is never easy, but it happens. We no longer expect men to wear hats in public, and women to wear corsets. The "early adopters" of new ideas are often criticized, but in time they are vindicated.

Our individual efforts are important, but public policy is also critical for the protection of water quality. As we approach the election, we can urge our candidates to support public policies that protect vital water supplies, biodiversity, and environmental health. Then, next summer, you can enjoy the sound of children laughing outdoors instead of the growl of lawn mowers.