

Redwood



2016 Annual Report

Conservation Equation

Local Leadership + Local Action

=

Lasting Value

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THANK YOU

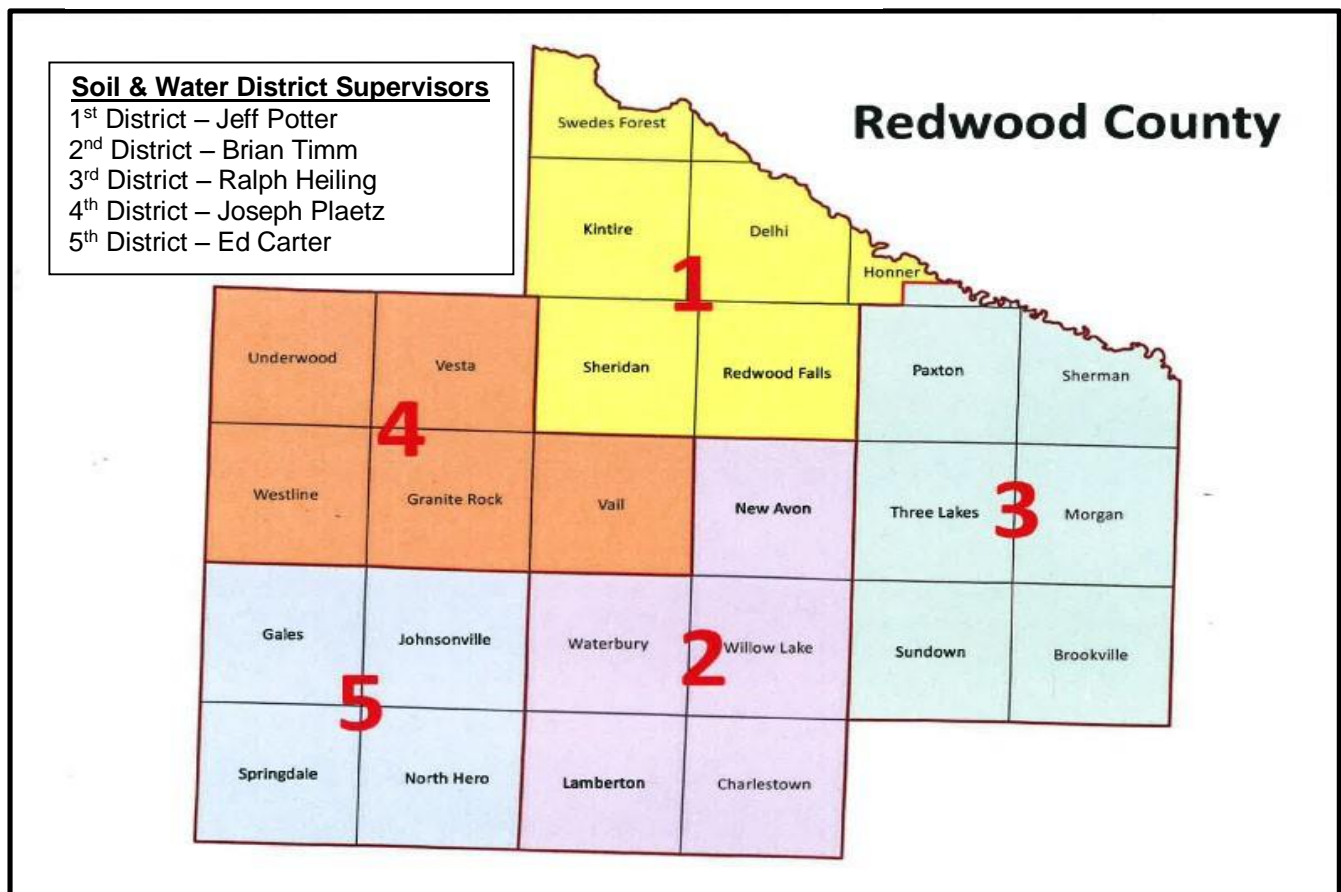
The Redwood SWCD Board and Staff extend our sincere appreciation to the Redwood Board of Commissioners and our other conservation partners. We would like to thank Redwood County Landowners/Operators for implementing Best Management Conservation practices to help us work toward Redwood SWCD Water Quality goals.

Board of Supervisors & County Commissioner



Monthly Meetings
2nd Wednesday of
every month at
8:30 a.m.
in the meeting
room at the Ag
Service Center in
Redwood Falls

Pictured left to right: Jeff Potter, Brian Timm, Ed Carter,
Ralph Heiling and Joe Plaetz



REDWOOD SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION



“Helping bring YOU clean water”

Redwood SWCD

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Redwood Falls, MN 56283
Phone: 507-637-2427 EXT 3
Fax: 507-637-6002
www.redwoodswcd.org



Pictured from left to right; Front Row: Shannon Gegner, Marilyn Bernhardson, Kari Clouse and Kristy Zajac. Back Row: Brian Pfarr and Kurt Mathiowetz.

Redwood SWCD & NRCS Staff

District Staff

District Administrator
Marilyn Bernhardson

Office Assistant

Kari Clouse

Conservation Specialist

Kristy Zajac

Water Quality Technician

Kurt Mathiowetz

Resource Specialist

Brian Pfaff

NRCS Staff

**District
Conservationist**
Shannon Gegner

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Redwood Soil and Water Conservation District is to educate and assist the citizens of Redwood County to efficiently and economically manage the soil and water resources of the county, for present and future generations.

SERVING THE CONSERVATION NEEDS OF REDWOOD COUNTY



The Redwood Soil and Water Conservation District was established in January, 1953. Citizens of Redwood County were concerned about soil erosion by wind and water and its effect on water quality. Since the districts inception, many refer to us as 'Redwood SWCD'. The district was authorized as a result of the state legislature passing the Minnesota Soil Conservation District Law in 1937. The law enabled farmers to organize for conservation purposes and gave them the power to enter into legal agreements and provide financial aid to landowners.

Other powers and duties granted to districts include:

- Legal subdivisions of the state which can exercise public powers
- May carry out soil and water conservation measures on any land in the district with the consent of landowners
- May cooperate or enter into agreements with any governmental agency or individual landowner for the purpose of carrying on a program of erosion prevention and control.

This district is governed by five locally elected supervisors. Each is elected from one of five nomination districts in the county. The district board is charged with three basic roles:

- To establish policy that guides district staff in the day-to-day operation of the district;
- To provide guidance in the development of long and short range plans, and develop a yearly budget;
- Hire staff that will carry out the policy and plan for the district.

Redwood SWCD receives funding from Redwood County, the State of Minnesota, self-generated funds, various conservation grants and sometimes through agreements with the Federal Government.

County Funds - Redwood SWCD receives an annual allocation from the County that enables the district to secure technical, administrative and educational staff to implement

State Funds - Each district receives approximately \$120,000 administrative funds and several pass-through grants for various programs that places conservation on the ground.

Self-Generated - Our district has a tree matting program that earns limited funds.



LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES

Redwood SWCD continues to have a voice in legislative activities relating to conservation through its supervisors and administrator. Minnesota Soil and Water Conservation Districts have made legislators aware of their support of conservation, by making regular visits to the state capitol and lobbying for continued support. District Administrator, Marilyn Bernhardson, has been active with the legislative activities through the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) Legislative Committee. The legislative committee is responsible for setting the legislative agenda for the state association.



Representative Chris Swedzinski,
Representative Paul Torkelson,
Jeff Potter, Brian Timm, Ralph Heiling
& Marilyn Bernhardson



Marilyn Bernhardson, Jeff Potter,
Representative Bill Weber, Ralph Heiling
and Brian Timm



Ralph Heiling, Brian Timm,
Senator Gary Dahmes,
Marilyn Bernhardson & Jeff Potter



Representative Rod Hamilton,
Marilyn Bernhardson, Brian Timm,
Ralph Heiling & Jeff Potter

REINVEST IN MINNESOTA (RIM) PROGRAM

In 1986, the Reinvest in Minnesota Resources Act was enacted to restore certain lands to protect soil and water quality and support fish and wildlife habitat. RIM is a voluntary conservation easement program primarily designed to take sensitive cropland out of production to address a variety of concerns. The vast majority of RIM easements are permanent in duration. The RIM contract means the landowner surrenders certain rights they have to the property; cropping, haying/grazing (unless approved), general disturbance of conservation cover, and building structures or developing roads. Essentially, the landowner must keep the habitat intact. Landowners are compensated for granting these conservation easements, all the while the landowner still owns the land and manages access, pays taxes (typically reduced) and conducts the management on the parcel. This program is administered by the Board of Water and Soil Resources. Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts implement the program locally.

Since 1986, almost all of the capital bonding bills has included funding for the RIM program. Bonding dollars have been the backbone of RIM since its inception. In addition to bonding money, various other pots of money have been used to assist in acquiring these conservation easements. In Redwood County, we have easements on wetland restorations, grasslands, buffer strips, rock outcrops, calcareous fens and maple-basswood forests. Programs like RIM have been integral to protecting water quality, wildlife habitat, and threatened ecosystems on private land.



In 2008, the citizens of Minnesota voted to change to the constitution, increasing the sales tax and dedicating a large portion of that money toward clean water and wildlife habitat. It has been hugely successful, especially here in Redwood County. In addition to a large influx of money allocated by the legislature for RIM Bonding, we were able to enroll larger areas adjacent to rivers, ditches and lakes, and public water wetlands.

Currently, Redwood County has a total of **481 easements** recorded or in process since 1986. These contracts total 15,559 acres. Local seed vendors, earthwork contractors, land management contractors, area elevators and farmers have been hired to perform the establishment, maintenance and management of these conservation lands. These lands are tremendously important for area wildlife, wildlife enthusiasts, water quality, and soil health. Having more diversity on this landscape is the basis to quality of life, ensures financial risk management, and values the land ethic for future generations. We need to continue to see value in things that don't visibly show financial value on our landscape. Conservation values are often hard to quantify, but the gap of our knowledge is lessening every day.

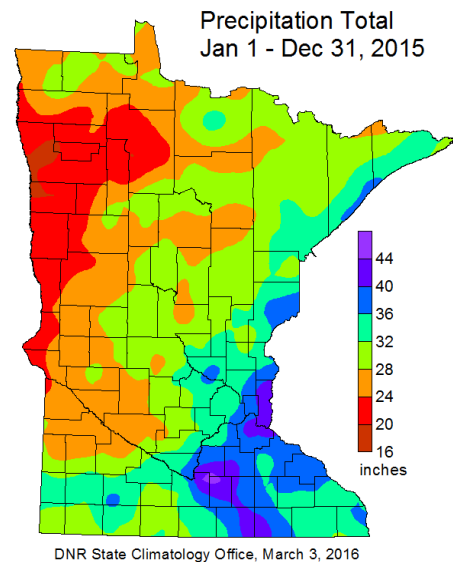
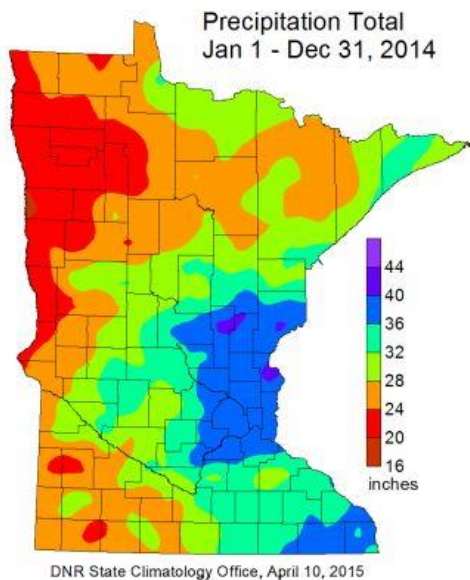
"Biological wealth...is much more potent for long-term human welfare than is generally appreciated..." – E.O. Wilson

RAIN GAUGE PROGRAM

Redwood SWCD continues to cooperate with the State Climatologists Office to enlist individuals across the county to collect rainfall data. All SWCD's in the state select individuals every 12 miles across the state to collect this data. The data is used to record average rainfall data for the entire state.

Our present ran gauge holders include: Ervin Runck – Lamberton, Tom Daub – Wabasso, Mike Appel – Milroy, David Swedzinski – Milroy and Redwood SWCD – Redwood Falls.

The two photos are a comparison of rainfall in 2013 and 2014.



United States Fish and Wildlife Service – Pollinator Projects

In coordination with the USFWS, we develop pollinator habitat in Redwood County through tree removal and re-seeding native pollinator habitat on RIM/CREP easements, CRP contracts and private remnant prairie pasture.

Seven (7) projects were funded for a total of 162 acres with an expenditure of \$21,865. We were able to piggy-back some of this money on two grassland projects funded with WLI funds to increase benefits. Except for 10 acres of tree removal and 50 acres to seed this spring – all these projects are complete. We now await the pollinators.



LOCAL WATER MANAGEMENT

Redwood SWCD is the coordinating agency for implementing Redwood County's Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan. In 2016 the water management plan was amended to include an implementation plan for 2016-2020.

Task Force Members included:

Dennis Groebner – Redwood County Commissioner
Sharon Hollatz – Redwood County Commissioner
Kerry Netzke – Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area
John Hogan – Citizen and Ag. Producer
Brad Salfer – Banker
Scott Wold – Environmental Office
Jim Doering – City of Redwood Falls
Ed Lenz – Board of Soil and Water Resources
Brian Timm – Redwood SWCD Supervisor
Kurt Mathiowetz – Redwood SWCD, Water Quality Technician
Marilyn Bernhardson – Water Plan Coordinator

Task Force felt the Four Priority Concerns would address issues in the county that the implementation plan would identify:

- 1) Groundwater protection that will focus on wellhead protection for public or private water supply.
- 2) Drainage management focusing on wetland restorations and floodwater retention opportunities (altered hydrology).
- 3) Surface water quality addressing impaired waters by major watershed for these priority pollutants: phosphorus, nitrogen and fecal coliform bacteria.
- 4) Erosion and sediment control focusing on residue management county-wide, and gully and concentrated flow areas in the southwest portion of Redwood County.

Some Accomplishments in 2016:

Held meetings for Water Management Update
Provided funding so students can attend SW Environmental Fair
Published Newsletter in local newspaper
Sponsored Ecology Bus for two schools in county
Funded 54.7 acres of buffers along county ditches
Sealed 5 wells

EROSIN CONTROL AND WATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Redwood SWCD receives a grant each year from the Board of Water and Soil Resource (BWSR) to help local landowners/operators offset the costs of installing conservation practices. These funds are used to protect and improve water quality by controlling soil erosion and reducing sedimentation.

Through the State Cost Share Program, landowners/operators can request financial and/or technical assistance to implement state approved conservation practices.

This was the first program legislated for soil and water conservation districts to implement at the local level.

The program provides financial assistance up to 75% of the project cost to install best management practices such as:

- Water and Sediment Control Basins
- Grassed Waterways
- Grade Stabilization Structures
- Field Windbreaks
- Shelterbelts
- Diversions
- Terraces
- Agricultural Waste Systems

Approved construction practices include activities that stabilize critical soil erosion areas, reduce wind erosion, control gully, rill or sheet erosion, divert runoff to protect and improve water quality, control storm water runoff or protect surface, and improve or protect ground water quality.

Since 1978, Redwood SWCD has helped landowners install 351 different practices across Redwood County totaling approximately \$548,805.



Completed water and sediment control basin



Structural Practices for Water Control

Redwood SWCD has placed high emphasis on controlling the surface runoff and keeping the water where it lands.

Interest from Redwood County producers continues to grow throughout the county to install Best Management Practices (BMP's) that are engineered to construct structures that hold back the water from entering water courses, such as rivers streams or ditches.

In 2016, 15 structures were installed to control water and prevent gully erosion. Some of the practices that were used to accomplish erosion control were:

- Grade stabilization structure
- Water and sediment control basins
- Grassed waterways
- Streambank protections

Each of these practices has its own purpose for controlling water and preventing gullies:

Grade stabilization structure is to slow and hold the surface water that is coming off watersheds in a ponding area.

Water and sediment control basins are installed to hold water for a period of time and meter the water out so it can slow the water entering the streams and ditches.

Grade stabilization structures and basins are instrumental in slowing water down to help prevent flooding that occurring downstream.

Grassed waterways are installed to convey water down a slope to prevent a gully from forming. Grassed waterway are installed in areas where watersheds are too big for basins and grade stab to hold the water.

Streambanks and shoreline protections were installed in areas where property and or cropland is being threatened to be eroded away. This due to extreme weather events and added drainage that occurred within the watersheds.

All of these BMP's are installed to reduce sediment and phosphorus loading that is occurring to the ditches and streams.



Sub-Watershed Targeting in The Cottonwood River



Project Narrative

Clean Water Funds: 2012

Clean Water Grant	\$363,957
Leveraged Funds*	\$134,003
Total Project Budget	\$497,960

* Leveraged Funds include required 25% local match

Targeted Water:

Minor Watershed 29053

Amended to add:

Minor Watershed 29043 and
Minor Watershed 29048

Project Sponsor:

Soil and Water Conservation
Districts within RCRA

Partners:

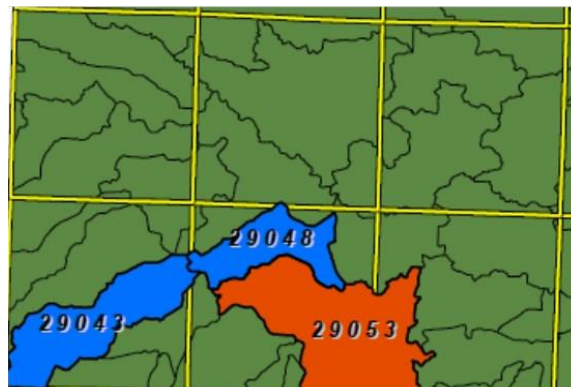
Natural Resources Conservation
Service

Grant Period:

January 2012-June 2016 With
extension and Amendment

Project Contact:

Marilyn Bernhardson
(507) 637-2427 x 3
marilyn.bernhardson@racgroup.net
www.REDWOODSWCD.ORG



Minor watershed 20953 is one of the many little Tributaries to the Cottonwood River, one of the thirteen major watersheds in the Minnesota River Basin and the largest watershed in Redwood County. The dominant land use in all

of these minor watersheds and the Cottonwood River Watershed is agricultural, chiefly row-crops with some livestock production. The vast majority of the wetlands have been drained through a highly intricate and efficient system of tiling and ditches. The minor watersheds that lie south of the Cottonwood River have a topographic that is very different from the remaining parts of the county; have steep slopes, intense grade and deeper confined ravines. Concentrating conservation efforts in these small sub-watersheds allows us to intensify the water quality, water recreation and wildlife habitat benefits local and positively impacting the Cottonwood River downstream of the targeted area. Due to unforeseen circumstances with several landowners in the initial minor watershed, 20953, we requested and received approval to add two additional adjoining minor watersheds (29043 and 29048) and an extension to June 30, 2016. These two minor watersheds have the same topography and some of the same landowners who wished to extend their work into these areas.

Results:

TSS – Sediment Reduction.....1,358.02 tons per year
Soil Saved.....1,135.55 tons per year
Phosphorus reduction.....1,340.01 pounds per year

Based on Feedlot assessments, there were improvements made to three feedlots in the sub-watersheds. Grid Sampling and variable rate applications now assures correct placement and reductions in nutrient applications on 1,798.4 acres in the watersheds.

Targeting the Cottonwood River *continued*;

<u>Proposed Outcomes:</u>	
Water and Sediment control basins.....	4
Grassed Waterways.....	2 Systems
Grade Stabilizations Structures.....	3 new and 2 Repairs
Grid Sampling with Variable Rate Nutrient Applications.....	1,200 acres
Feedlot Assessments for Containments.....	5

<u>Actual Outcomes:</u>	
Water and Sediment Control Basins.....	10
Grassed Waterways.....	4,700 Feet
Grade Stabilization Structures.....	9
Paid an incentive to Comprehensive Nutrient Management Assessments completed on three feedlot operations in the initial watershed.	
It was recommended that two of the feedlots establish grass buffers to address runoff. Both established their buffers to achieve compliance. The third feedlot, there were steep slopes present and gullying was evident. The landowner made the decision to relocate the feedlot.	
Provided an incentive payment to seven landowners to try Grid Sampling and Variable Rate Application on 1,798.4 acres. All landowners have continued with this type of nutrient applications as they found their yields increased or stayed the same with correct placement and in some cases reduced amount of nutrients applied.	

FARM BILL PARTNERSHIP



The farm bill partnership position continues to bring additional conservation acres to Redwood County. In 2016, 332 CRP contracts totaling 2,950 acres were placed under protection utilizing the following practices:

Buffers/Filters	226 contracts	561 acres
Wetlands	84 contracts	2,203 acres
SAFE	6 contracts	49 acres
Pollinator	16 contracts	137 acres

Redwood SWCD, once again, received funding to staff a three quarter time position to accelerate the implementation of state and federal conservation programs.

Redwood SWCD continues to participate in the Farm Bill Partnership to promote conservation practices on private land using USDA Farm Bill programs; e.g. CRP. This partnership also allows the SWCD to work with conservation programs to protect and enhance wildlife habitat and improve water quality. During 2014, we were very busy sending buffer strips and wetlands restoration proposals to encourage enrollment in a conservation program. The interest in Redwood County for RIM continues to be impressive.

Under this partnership, we work with the USDA NRCS and FSA to target lands for conservation practices, assist the landowner and governmental agencies in following through with sign-ups and provide technical guidance on practice establishment and maintenance.

With new enrollees and re-enrollments contracts were signed into the following practices: grassland establishment, pollinator plantings, buffer strips, farmstead shelterbelts, living snow fences, field windbreaks and wetland restorations. Redwood County has been very successful in maintaining continuous CRP practices and our hope is for this to continue in to the future.



AG BEST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Redwood Soil and Water Conservation District administers the Ag Best Management Loan Program offered by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

The loan program provides low interest financing to farmers, rural landowners, and agriculture supply businesses for the implementation of best management practices that improve water quality problems in Redwood County. Loans are provided for projects that meet the goals in Redwood County's Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan.



Y Drop Applicator

Some activities that have qualified for low interest loans in Redwood County include:

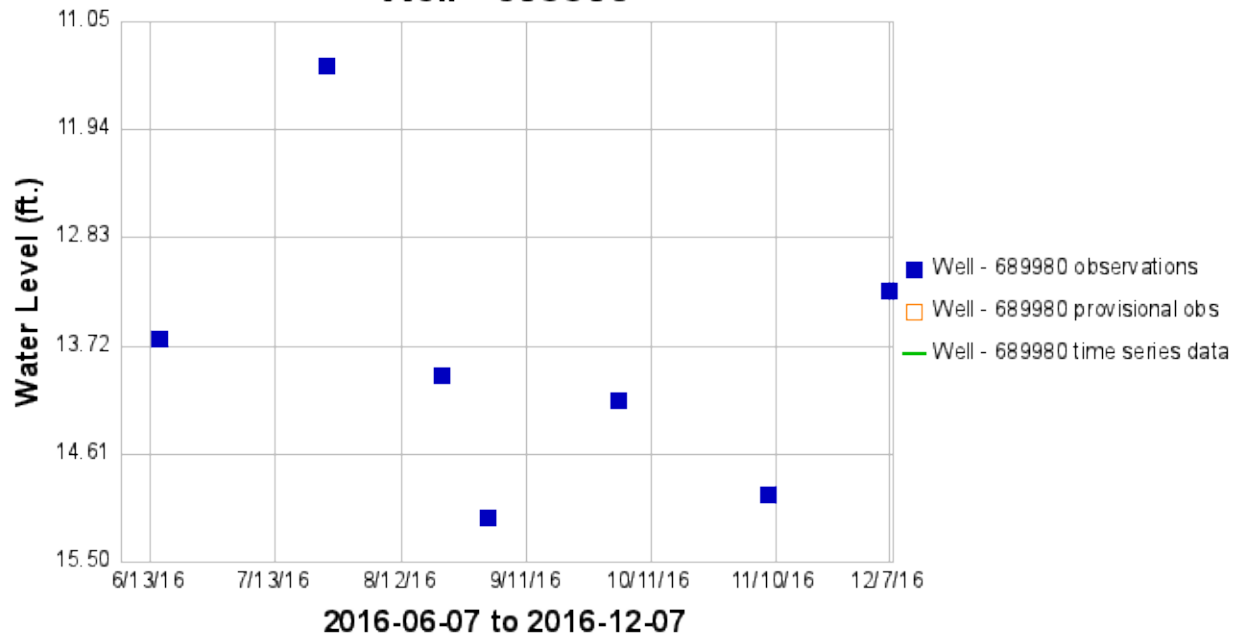
- Feedlot improvements to treat a pollution problem
- Manure handling equipment
- Conservation Tillage equipment to leave minimum of 30% residue
- Upgrade out-of-compliance individual septic systems
- New well construction if old well is contaminated by proof of water test.

Through 2016, this program has provided low interest loans in the amount of \$2,550,581 in the following categories:

Ag Waste Management	16	\$ 807,514
Conservation Tillage	60	\$1,112,768
Septic System Upgrades	68	\$ 479,969
Drill New Well/Sealing	2	\$ 42,500
Manure Separator	1	\$ 100,000
Y-Drop Nutrient Side Application	1	\$ 7,830

WELL OBSERVATIONS

Well - 689980



Most months throughout the year, the SWCD staff measures State of Minnesota observation wells in Redwood County and reports to the MN DNR the water levels of each well. The six (6) wells we monitor are from Redwood Falls south to Sanborn and west to the County line. One of these wells has been monitored since 1952; another since 1972; the others were installed in 2008 and 2010. These wells provide the state with information about ground water levels. The readings in these wells have shown mixed results in water levels.

The well in the above illustration is near Lamberton, and was first observed in 1972. This record is from June to December, 2016. This well along with most of the other wells showed water levels that dipped significantly in the fall, however made a recovery as the year progressed. This type of data is very valuable when we talk about water supply, aquifer levels, and groundwater recharge. To find out information about water levels check the Minnesota Climatological Working Group website at http://climate.umn.edu/ground_water_level/.

WETLAND CONSERVATION ACT (WCA) PROGRAM

Redwood SWCD is the designed WCA LGU under resolution from Redwood County Board of Commissioners, with oversight by the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources and enforcement from the MN DNR Enforcement Division. The Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) required anyone proposing “impacts” to wetlands to go through a permitting process. Certain activities are exempted from WCA. These exemptions vary by type, size and location.

A summary of 2016 accomplishments:

1. Assistance provided to 46 individuals
2. Applications – 10 approved
3. Exemptions – 2
4. Replacement Plan – 1 approved
5. Enforcement Actions - 1
6. Potential Violations – 5
7. Trainings – Attended 3 training sessions to maintain credits for certified delineator.

Redwood SWCD has a Certified Wetland Delineator on staff.

Several entities regulate wetlands, sometimes with overlapping jurisdiction. Wetland issues are land use issues, so it doesn’t matter if you live in a rural area or a town you need to make sure you are in compliance with both state and federal requirements.

In 1991, reacting to public concern about the disappearance of wetlands in Minnesota, the Minnesota Legislature approved and signed the Wetland Conservation Act. There are several purposes of the Wetland Conservation Act.

1. Achieve no net loss of wetland quantity, quality and biological diversity or existing wetlands.
2. Increase quantity, quality and biological diversity of wetlands through restoration or enhancements of previously impacted wetlands.
3. Avoid impacts that destroy or diminish quantity, quality or biological diversity.
4. Replace wetlands when avoidance of impacts is not feasible and prudent.



Restored Wetland

DISASTER RECOVERY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Redwood SWCD received Flood Recovery funds from the 2014 Flood Recovery allocation the Minnesota Legislators approved during the 2015 Legislative Session. Board of Supervisors adopted a flood recovery policy that will remain for possible futures funds.

The funds can be used in the followings ways:

- 1) Repair best management structural practices that were damaged as a result of the heavy rains that occurred in June, 2014.
- 2) Install new best management structural practices on the landscape in areas were the heavy rains caused erosion.

We submitted a total of \$2,342,105 worth of projects across that county that were in need of repair or fix an erosion area. When the application was submitted we had to prioritize them based on a ranking system developed by the Board of Water and Soil Resources. Unfortunately, we were only able to secure \$583,594. Therefore, to date we have only been able to fund 12 of the 55 we submitted. We still have some funds that will be able to funds several more projects.

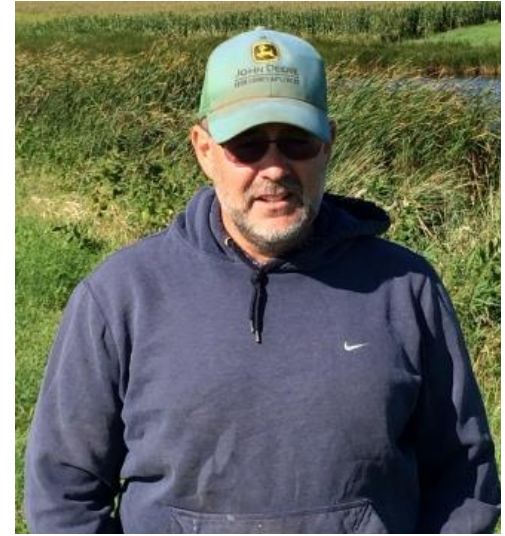
Example of Grade Stabilization Project
completed as part of the
Flood Disaster Relief



2016 Conservation Farmer

Redwood SWCD selected the Hicks Family from Tracy as our conservation farmer for 2016. The farm, located on the banks of the Cottonwood River, has been in the family since 1885. Brian and his father David have been incorporating conservation practices for decades. They operate a row crop operation along with grazing cattle on the native prairie.

Some of the conservation best management practices they have implemented include: a multi-purpose dam, three (3) grade stabilization structures and one repaired, managing six (6) agri-drain stop log structures for sub-surface irrigation and drainage on cropland.



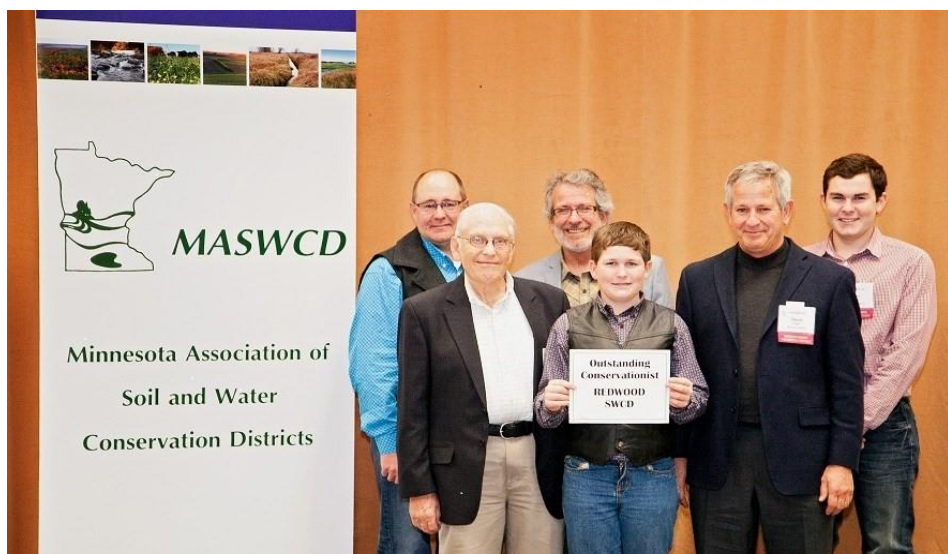
Brian Hicks

Drainage Water Management is being used on about 150 acres of cropland to rescue excessive moisture during times of high water and store water underground for use during the drier times of the growing season.

- Four (4) grassed waterways totaling 3,350 feet
- Ten (10) water and sediment control basins

Along with these and other conservation work they have done on their farm they have 320 acres of remnant prairie, 78 acres of CREP and 421 acres in the Grassland Reserve Program.

Hicks Family were recognized at the 2016 MASWCD State Convention



Front Row: David Hicks, Adam Hicks & Steve Inglis
Back Row: Brian Hicks, James Inglis & Jake Hicks

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities, and by improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities already in place. CSP encourages land stewards to improve their conservation performance by offering annual land use payments for the operation-level environmental benefits they produce and the increase of environmental benefits while enrolled in CSP. CSP provides two types of payments through five year contracts; annual payments for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices; and supplemental payments for adopting a resource conserving crop rotation. To be accepted into CSP, producers need to already be good stewards of the land, but adopt additional conservation practices on their operation during the contract to increase their operations conservation performance.

In 2016 Redwood Office renewed 9 contracts totaling 11,145 acres. Total annual payments for these 9 contracts are \$193,052. Also in 2016 a sign up was held to accept new applications. They accepted 3 new contacts enrolling 2,039 acres. Total annual payments will be \$76,782.

Redwood County has a total of 91 contracts totaling 64,414 acres. Total payments will be \$4,102,596

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is a federal program that provides technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers in order to address natural resources concerns. Redwood SWCD has successfully partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) counterparts to promote EQIP as well as other Farm Bill Programs.

The efforts have meant just over \$1,139,680 in federal cost share to assist Redwood County producers in implementing conservation measures since 2011. Practices implemented in the county through EQIP include: nutrient and pest management, rotational grazing, Cover Crops, No-Till, Ag-Waste and Structural Best Management Practices. Interest in EQIP continues to be strong. Each year Redwood County is able to use all of its allocated funds as well as receiving additional dollars from the reserve pool at the area level.

Year	Number Funded	Funded Amount
2012	10	\$33,434
2013	21	\$359,654
2014	23	\$309,305
2015	22	\$284,370
2016	24	\$68,243

The Redwood SWCD prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

Middle Minnesota River Watershed

Redwood SWCD along with other SWCD offices have been working on the Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) in the Middle Minnesota Watershed. WRAPS is a program Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is in charge of implementing. The purpose of WRAPS is to identify areas of concern and to engage the citizens of the watershed in the process.

Redwood SWCD completed several items to inform the citizens that live in Redwood County of the project:

- 1) Developed map of the area and sent a letter explaining project.
- 2) Sent a survey asking them to comment on issues of concern in the Middle Minnesota Watershed.
- 3) Held a meeting at Gilfillan asking citizens to come and talk about issues and concerns. Bruce Tiffany gave a presentation on how he made conservation changes on this farm.
- 4) Have dedicated funds to provide financial support through Redwood County Water Management Plan to implement the following best management practices: Variable rate nutrient management, cover crops, no-till or strip-till and alternative intakes.



Water Quality Certification Program

What Is Water Quality Certification Program? The Water Quality Certification Program is a program that provides farmers an opportunity to take the lead in implementing practices that protect our water resources. Farmers who execute and maintain good farm management practices will be certified and receive regulatory certainty for 10 years.

Why should Farmers Participate and how do they benefit?

1. To help protect and improve water quality in Redwood County and in Minnesota.
2. To receive regulatory certainty.
3. To receive recognition for conservation stewardship.
4. To receive access to financial and technical assistance.
5. To help ensure land productivity for future generations.
6. To receive stability to plan for and invest in conservation practices.
7. To be part of the water quality solution.

What are the Benefits to the Public?

The public will be assured that the certified farmers are using conservation practices that protect Minnesota's waters.

How do Farmers Become Certified?

1. Application – First step is completion of an application indicating they are currently in compliance with existing regulations.
2. Assessment – Second step is the evaluation of each field within the operation using the computer model. The following items are assessed:

- Nutrient Management Factors
- Physical Field Characteristic
- Tillage Management Factors
- Pest Management Factors
- Tile Drainage Factors
- Conservation Practices

Water Quality Certification Program *continued*;

3. Verification – Last step in the certification process is the farm field verification. The onsite visit allows farmers and the certifier to discuss water quality issues on a field by field basis.

After completing the three step certification process, farmers can enter into a ten-year contract that ensures regulatory certainty from the State of Minnesota.

Once a producer completes the three step process they are eligible to receive \$100.00 for taking the time to go through the assessment. If they become certified they receive an additional \$200.00.

If you are interested in seeing if you want to complete the certification process, please contact Redwood Soil and Water Conservation District 507-637-2427 Ext. 3.



MN Buffer Law

In 2015, the MN Legislature passed a buffer law which essentially reinforced laws already on the books - the Shoreland Ordinance and Public Drainage Ditch buffers. The law requires a vegetated buffer be placed along Public Waters (50-foot average width) affected covered under the current Shoreland Ordinance and along Public Ditches (16.5-foot width). The Public Water buffers must be in place by Nov 1st, 2017 and the Public Ditches by Nov 1st, 2018. The purpose of the law is to help improve water quality in the State of Minnesota. We all know this will not fix water quality, but is one tool being used to help.

Part of the legislation included the SWCDs conducting a preliminary review of the waters in their county and assess compliance. In Redwood County, the buffer law impacts 2,737 parcels of land - overall compliance is approximately 52%. Our assessment during the end of 2016 indicated Public Waters parcels were over 75% compliant, but Public Ditches are only 36% compliant.

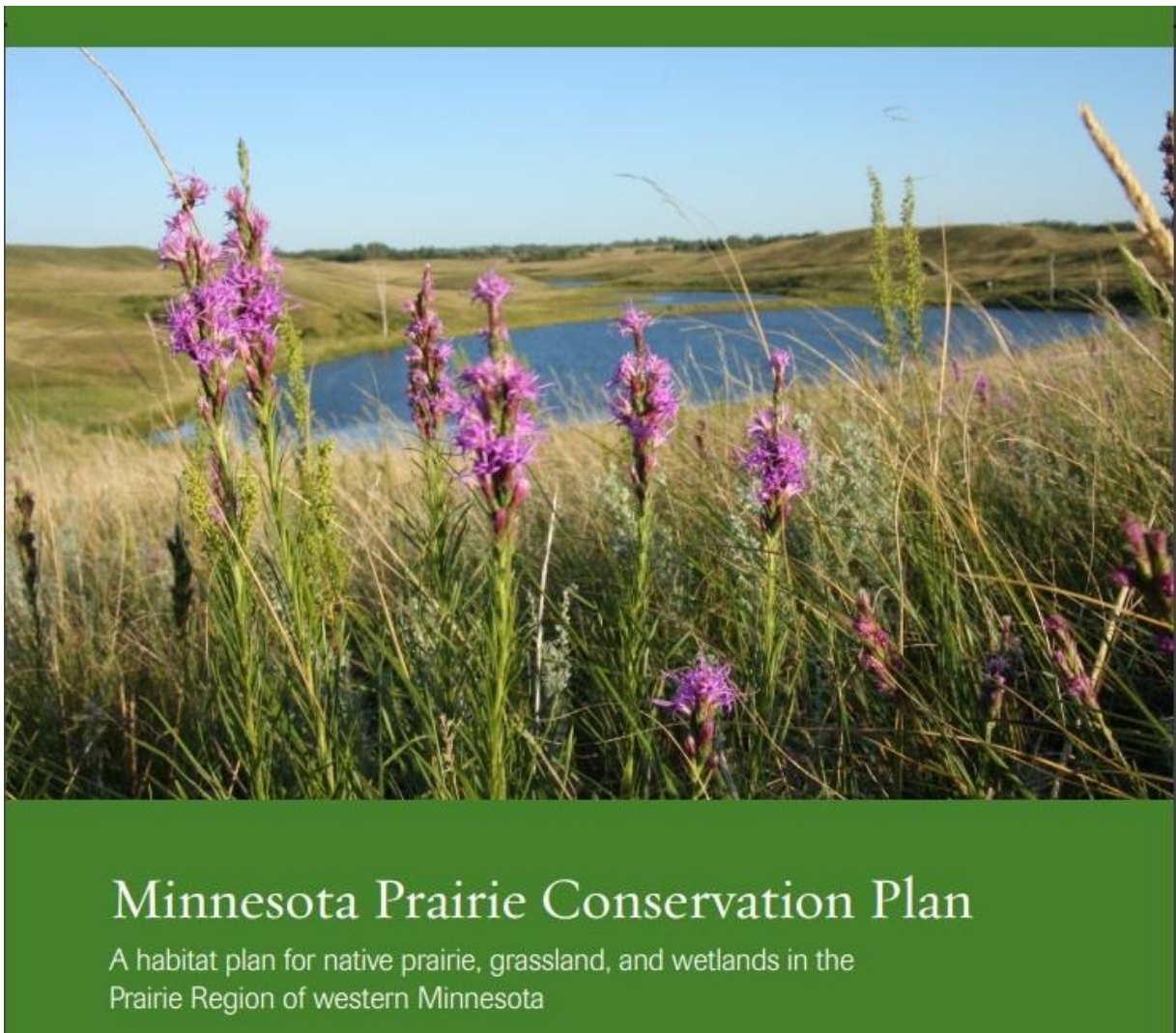
There is much work to be done yet in Redwood County to achieve 100% compliance. The SWCD has been fielding a number of questions from both landowners and operators regarding buffer requirements. During July 2016, we held four (4) informational meetings across the county.

The Redwood SWCD continues to work with customers daily to provide technical support regarding the buffer law. Additionally, we are helping enroll landowners in various conservation programs to aid in the establishment of these buffers to offset some of the loss to crop land.



MN Prairie Conservation Plan – MN Valley Local Technical Team

The Redwood SWCD serves on the local MN Valley Local Technical Team (LTT) for the MN Prairie Conservation Plan. Since the inception of the LTTs there has been money available through the DNR for a variety of grassland-related projects under the Working Lands Initiative (WLI). Last year, we were awarded funding \$44,569 for three projects with WLI funds. The first was a red cedar/junk hardwood removal on a remnant prairie pasture in Sherman Township (45 ac for \$18,630 - nearly complete). The second is for a 33 ac red cedar/buckthorn removal on a remnant prairie under a RIM fen wetland easement in Swedes Forest Township for \$24,939 (to be completely this winter). Both of these projects have a deadline of June 30th, 2017. Lastly, we were awarded \$1,000 to conduct a Grassland Management Workshop in Redwood Falls in July. We had over 30 attendees. The day included discussion about programs, management options, enhancement, etc. Following the classroom presentations, participants boarded a bus to see a few local prairie sites and discuss the grassland management that had been completed and the vegetative response.



Cover Crops

What are Cover Crops:

Cover crops are grasses, legumes, forbs or other herbaceous plants that are established for seasonal cover and conservation purposes.

Cover crops are typically planted in the late summer or fall around harvest. Common cover crops used in Minnesota include winter hardy plants such as rye and wheat. Other less common, but also effective cover crops include oats, barley, spring wheat, crimson clover, red clover, turnips, canola, radishes and triticale.

Where Should the Practice be Applied:

Cover crops may be used on all lands needing vegetative cover for natural resource protection and they are an excellent tool for improving soil health.

Purpose and Benefits of Cover Crops:

- Used for grazing in the fall after crops have been removed
- Reduce erosion from wind and water
- Increase soil organic matter
- Reduce nitrogen and phosphorus loss
- Nitrogen credits for the following years crop
- Weed suppression
- Soil moisture management
- Increase biodiversity
- Promote biological nitrogen fixation
- Reduce energy use
- Minimize and reduce soil compaction

Things to Consider of Thinking about Establishing

Chemical plan to make sure there is no carry over that would damage or kill the cover crop.

Plant cover crop in a timely manner to establish a good stand.

Maintain an actively growing cover crop as late as feasible to maximize plant growth, allowing time to prepare the field for the next crop and moisture depletion.