

DOUGLAS SWCD

“61 Years in Conservation”



2015

ANNUAL REPORT

PREFACE

Minnesota Status Chapter 40, enacted in 1937, created the Minnesota Soil and Water Conservation Board. It was created to help solve serious erosion problems that were plaguing the nation in the 1930's. Chapter 40 authorized the Board to create Soil and Water Conservation Districts and to provide the Districts with State level administration. The Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District was formed in 1954 through the efforts of many concerned Douglas County residents. The District is governed by five locally elected officials.

Our mission as District Supervisors is to promote, guide and direct an action program that will result in efficient conservation of soil and water. Our goal is to encourage use of all Douglas County land within its capabilities and to treat each acre according to its need.

The District cooperates with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service under a Memorandum of Understanding whereby full-time technical assistance on engineering, agronomy, biology, woodland conservation and administration is furnished to the District by the Natural Resources Conservation Service Area and State offices. Under the Memorandum of Understanding, the District uses the Natural Resources Conservation Service office in Alexandria as their headquarters.

The Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District prepares this report for farmers, agricultural agencies, businesses and all tax paying citizens interested in the conservation and preservation of soil, water, plants and wildlife resources. We present this record of our 2014 accomplishments and invite you to avail yourselves of the assistance provided by the Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District and its cooperating agencies.

Board of Supervisors

Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District

Douglas SWCD

The Douglas SWCD and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service prohibits discrimination in its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). The Douglas SWCD and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are equal opportunity providers and employers.

YEAR IN REVIEW

2015 continued to be busy year for the Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). The year started with tree sales, and moved on to the following activities, tree planting, tree matting, tube installation, no-till planting, Wetland Conservation Act work load, survey and design for erosion control practices and feedlot improvement project, and construction of erosion control practices and feedlot projects. Processing RIM/WRP easements consumed a large amount of time. Different projects worked on through the water plan included rain garden construction, lakescaping plantings, water quality monitoring, lake management plans, and lots of technical advice given.

Education activities were also a big part of the districts activities. Some of the educational activities completed this year include, Envirothon, 22nd Annual Kids' Groundwater Festival, Poster and Mural Contests, Essay Contest, Douglas County Fair booth, and Douglas County eco fair.

The Districts tree planting and matting program was again a huge success. Over 10,100 feet of fabric was installed last year. The districts tree sales last year totaled over 22,000 trees, which will benefit wildlife in Douglas County for many years to come. The Staff was busy this past fall with the installation of erosion control practices (Sediment Blocks and Terraces) in the County. A total of 16 sediment blocks were installed last year. Wetland restoration construction was also busy with 12 wetland restorations completed. The District No-till drill program was extremely busy this year in planting native grasses, soybeans, and alfalfa. All of these conservation practices will benefit the soil productivity and water quality of Douglas County.

The SWCD works closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on federal program offered to county landowners. These programs include, Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The district also has a fulltime Pheasants Forever Biologist putting proposals together for landowners whose lands qualify for the CRP Buffers Program and other conservation programs.

2015 Board of Supervisors



Douglas County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors includes (left to right)

Front Row - Paul Barsness and Gary Thoennes Back Row - Ken Rutten, Dave Wolf and Jon Schneider

2015 Staff



Douglas County Soil and Water Conservation District Staff includes (left to right)

Starla Arceneau, Elwood Anderson, Jerome Haggemiller, Steve Henry and Josh Meissner

2015 Outstanding Conservationist



Steve and Janet Schiltgen were recently honored as outstanding conservationists at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, December 6-8, 2015 in Bloomington, Minnesota. They were selected by the Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) for the award.

Each year, the state's SWCDs recognize individuals and organizations for outstanding accomplishments in implementing conservation practices and improving Minnesota's natural resources. The award program is conducted with support from The Farmer magazine, and the award ceremony receives sponsorship from the Minnesota Corn Growers Association.

Congratulations Steve and Janet Schiltgen!

2015 Poster Contest Winners

"Local Heroes Your Hardworking Pollinators" was the theme of the Douglas SWCD 2015 Poster and Mural Contest for 5th and 6th grade students throughout the County. Earlier this spring, Steve Henry from the SWCD visited classrooms and gave presentations on the importance of pollinators. The students then used that information to create posters and murals for the contest.

Each of the winners received a monetary prize from the Douglas SWCD and the Water Wisdom Education Project through the Douglas County Lakes Association.

The school of the Overall Winner (St Mary's Elementary) will receive a \$500 Science Prize through the Water Wisdom Education Project of the Douglas County Lakes Association.

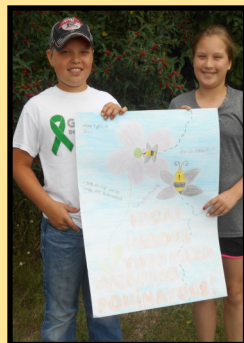
Congratulations to all the winners!



Anna Doherty and Grace Panther

Mural and Overall Winners

St. Mary's Elementary



Dalton Boesl and Kylee James

1st Place Poster Winner

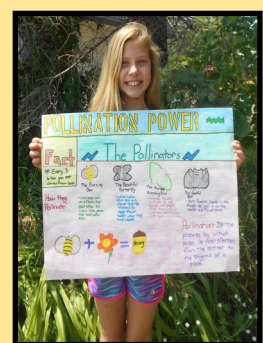
St. Mary's Elementary



Sarah Kelley

2nd Place Poster Winner

St. Mary's Elementary



Emma Roers

3rd Place Poster Winner

Brandon-Evansville Elementary

ENVIROTHON

The Douglas SWCD assisted with the organization of the 2015 Envirothon in which high school students from a 12-county area demonstrated their knowledge of Minnesota's natural resources. The annual area 2 Envirothon was held on Wednesday April 22nd at the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center near Spicer.

The Area 2 Envirothon is a hands on outdoor competition day for high school students. Students attended four learning stations covering Soils, Wetlands/Aquatics, Wildlife and Forestry, and a Current Vent Station, where the topic changes annually and requires students to give an oral presentation on the current topic. The 2015 topic was, "Urban and Community Forestry". Natural Resource professionals from the SWCD, DNR, Prairie Woods Environmental Center and NRCS gave presentations at each station and used the outdoors to test the students' knowledge of the natural world. Each team of five students worked together to answer the questions presented in the tests. Scores were tallied and the three highest scoring teams advance to the State Envirothon held on May 18 at Cloquet Forestry Center, Cloquet, MN.



KIDS GROUND WATER FESTIVAL

The 22nd Annual Kid's Groundwater Festival was held May 2, 2015, at the Runestone Community Center in Alexandria. Again the Festival was a huge success with over 515 fourth grade students participating. All schools within Douglas County and one from Grant and Ottertail Counties were in attendance.

Featured at the Kids' Groundwater Festival were 17 different learning stations. Each of the fourth grade students were scheduled at intervals to take part in seven different learning stations. The Stations cover all aspects of the water cycle. Students attend sessions on surface water problems, aquifers and wells, wetlands, and water treatment. Games are also played such as Water Pictionary, Water Trivial Pursuit and creating giant bubbles at the Bubbleology Station to learn about changing the properties of water. All of the students attend a session in Water presented by the Science Museum of Minnesota.



NO-TILL DRILL-AVAILABLE



In 2016 the Douglas SWCD purchased a new 10' Haybuster No-till Drill they will have for rent. This drill works well for seeding native grasses, alfalfa, soybeans, and small grain. The drill rents for \$9.00 per acre with a \$100.00 minimum. The SWCD will deliver the drill, calibrate it for your seed and pick it up when you are finished. Call the SWCD to reserve the drill.

FOOD PLOT MIXES

The Douglas SWCD will once again have food plot seed available for landowners. Two different deer mixes are available, a perennial mix and an annual mix. The perennial mix includes Alsike Clover, Lanino Clover, Medium Red Clover, White Dutch Clover, and Chicory. The annual mix includes Forage Peas, Radish, Turnips, and Haybet Barley. The SWCD also has a Pheasant/Turkey mix containing Wildlife Sunflower, Wildlife Grain Sorghum, FSG Pearl Millet, and Sugar Graze II Sorghum Sudangrass. Each mix is packaged in 1 acre bags. Food plots are important to retain wildlife in your area after crops are harvested in the fall and to provide feed to wildlife throughout winter season.

CONSERVATION TREES

The Douglas Soil & Water Conservation District is now taking orders for trees for the spring of 2016 planting season.. Whether you are planning a hedge, shelterbelt, shade trees, farmstead/feedlot shelterbelt, field windbreak, wildlife habitat or fruit and nut production we have the right shrubs and trees for your needs. We are offering ten varieties of small shrubs (<15') seven varieties of large shrubs (<30'), eleven varieties of large deciduous trees (>40') six varieties of large deciduous trees (>40') and six varieties of conifers (evergreens) in both bare root and potted stock.



The Douglas SWCD does much more than just sell trees! We provide many extras associated with our tree program. We assist landowners with the planning process by helping with site selection and species selection according to soils and purpose. We also work with landowners to arrange state or federal financial assistance on qualifying tree planting projects.

TREE PLANTING AND FABRIC MULCH

The Douglas SWCD does tree planting, tube installation and fabric mulch installation. Tree tubes will protect your trees from rodents, encourage straight sturdy trees and act as mini-greenhouses reusing the moisture from the trees. Fabric mulch will improve the survival rate of your trees by providing moisture retention and protection from weed competition. With the fabric mulch, post-planting maintenance is virtually eliminated. Cost-Share is available for eligible practices. Contact the SWCD office to learn more.



DNR PROVIDES BUFFER MAPPING PROJECT DETAILS



The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is providing a timeline and other details about its production of maps for the State's new law requiring vegetative buffers around bodies of water. The information is available at www.mndnr.gov/buffers.

"We understand people have questions about the buffer initiative," said Dave Leuthe, DNR project manager. "This information explains the process the DNR will use for the mapping project, the timeline in which maps will be developed, and opportunities for local governments and the public to engage in the process."

Gov. Mark Dayton's landmark buffer initiative was signed into law earlier this year. The law will establish new perennial vegetation buffers of up to 50 feet along rivers, streams and ditches to help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment

The DNR is responsible for producing maps of public waters and ditch systems that require buffers under the new law. Local governments will provide information on ditches, which the DNR will integrate with information on public waters to develop preliminary buffer maps. The DNR is scheduled to produce final maps by July 2016, using a four-phase approach:

- ◆ *Phase I - This fall, the DNR will use existing digital data to identify public waters that require a buffer (50-foot average width) and provide the information to local governments for review.*
- ◆ *Phase II - Beginning this fall and continuing through winter, the DNR will coordinate with counties and watershed districts to transfer local information on ditches, within the benefited areas of public drainage systems, into digital data. This will be used by the DNR to help identify ditches that require a one-rod (16.5-foot) buffer.*
- ◆ *Phase III - In late winter 2016, the DNR will use the combined public water and ditch system data to produce preliminary buffer maps. Local governments such as cities, townships and soil and water conservation districts, will review the maps, take input from landowners, and provide comments to the DNR.*
- ◆ *Phase IV - In summer 2016, the DNR will deliver integrated buffer maps to the Board of Water and Soil Resources, local soil and water conservation districts, and other local governments. The Board of Water and Soil Resources is responsible for the implementation process.*

There will be public engagement opportunities when the preliminary maps are available. The maps will help landowners identify whether they need to create a buffer and, if so, whether they need a 16.5-foot or 50-foot average buffer width. Local soil and water conservation districts will work directly with landowners and help them use the maps to create the right size buffer, or help the landowner select an alternative water quality practice in lieu of a buffer.

Go to www.mndnr.gov/buffers to learn more about how the DNR is producing maps for the governor's buffer initiative.

CRP OPTIONS

Are your Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres expiring this year?

You have options! NRCS in conjunction with FSA is offering choices for those that have land coming out of CRP this year, approximately 5,000 acres throughout Douglas County. If you are not currently enrolled in the CRP program, this would be a great opportunity to sign up. There are practices available that could benefit your current farm management and positively impact your landscape and environment, for example;

Duck Nesting Habitat

Farmable Wetland Programs

Field windbreaks

Filter strips

Living snow fences

Riparian Forest Buffers

Shelterbelts

Wetland Restorations

If you plan to crop your expiring acres, be aware that HEL fields require an approved conservation compliance plan that can be written by local NRCS office staff in Alexandria. If you are unsure of a field's NHEL/HEL status, feel free to contact our office for further assistance.

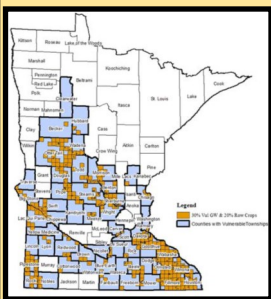
WALK IN ACCESS

The Walk In Access program targets 40 acres or more that are already in Conservation Programs and is entirely voluntary for landowners. Most landowners choose to enroll their property for two or three years. Landowners are paid \$10 per acre to allow hunting access. Up to \$3 per acre are added if within 1/2 mile of existing state or federal hunting land, or if a multiyear contract is signed.

Enrolled lands are covered under the Minnesota recreational use laws that limit landowner's liability. Where private leases do not, recreational use laws provide extra liability protection for WIA acres under MN State Statute 604A.20 to 604A.27. WIA land is for hunting only. No motorized vehicles are allowed on WIA areas and parking is along roads or in designated parking area. No target practice, trapping, dog training, camping, horseback riding or fires are allowed in WIA areas. DNR conservation officers handle any WIA violations as well as any hunting violations.

If you have any questions about the program or if you are interested in enrolling your conservation land into the program, please stop by Douglas SWCD office at 900 Robert Street or give Josh a call at (320) 763-3191 ext. 3.

DOMESTIC WELL NITRATE TESTING PROGRAM



Douglas SWCD has been working with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to test domestic wells in targeted townships as shown on the map to the right. These Townships will include: Leaf Valley, Millerville, Ida, Carlos, Alexandria, Spruce Hill, Belle River, Orange and Hudson Twps.

The quality of drinking water is important for every well owner. Nitrate is one of the most common ground water contaminants found in rural areas. Drinking water with high nitrate concentrations can cause serious health effects in infants and the presence of nitrates may be an indicator of other contaminants in water.

Wells in these townships may be at risk to nitrate contamination due to the type of geology and depth of groundwater. We will be coordinating with homeowners in these targeted townships to offer a free nitrate testing for their wells. They will be sent a letter and testing kit this winter.

The information provided by the testing will help these families and provide valuable information on the presence

- **Breakdown of County Revenue**
- **Deferred Revenue Breakdown**
- **Statement of Activities and Governmental Fund Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balance**
- **Statement of Net Assets and Governmental Fund Balance Sheet**
- **Budget and Actual General Fund**
- **Notes to the Financial Statements**