



The Cottonwood Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a legal subdivision of the State governed by a publicly elected five-member board. The Board of Supervisors provides local leadership and direction in applying conservation practices to the land; and plays an important role in how our county deals with a variety of resource management issues, including wetlands, water quality and soil erosion.

The Board of Supervisors meet monthly to discuss the business of the SWCD, including state program allocations, district conservation and legislative priorities and coordination with other local, state and federal partners.



From left, Clark Lingbeek, Tom Muller, Cody Duroe, Jeremy Nerem, Daryl Tasler.

SWCD Supervisors

CLARK LINGBEEK—Term ends December 31, 2022.

Nominating District I: Mountain Lake, Midway, Selma Townships and the City of Mountain Lake.

CODY DUROE—Term ends December 31, 2020.

Nominating District II: Lakeside, Carson, Delton Townships and the Cities of Bingham Lake and Delft.

DARYL TASLER—Term ends December 31, 2022.

Nominating District III: Great Bend, Dale, Amboy, Germantown Townships and the Cities of Jeffers and Windom.

TOM MÜLLER—Term ends December 31, 2020.

Nominating District IV: Springfield, Amo, Storden, Highwater Townships and the City of Storden.

JEREMY NEREM—Term ends December 31, 2020.

Nominating District V: Southbrook, Rosehill, Westbrook, Ann Townships and the City of Westbrook.

Buffer Initiative

The final deadline of the Buffer Law (103F.48) has passed as of November 1, 2018. This is the final deadline for all Public Waters and Public Ditches on the DNR Public Waters Map.

A final mailing from the SWCD staff was sent to all parcels still marked with an unknown compliance status in October 2018 notifying those landowners to contact the SWCD by December 1, 2018 that their buffers were seeded or why it was not completed. As of January 4, 2019 any parcels still not seeded were determined to be non-compliant and forwarded to the County Environmental Office for enforcement.

As of January 10, 2019, the Cottonwood SWCD estimates that 93% of public waters are compliant and 7% are non-compliant; and 93% of public ditches are compliant and 7% are non-compliant. 112 parcels between public waters and public ditches were forwarded to the county for enforcement.

Landowners that are non-compliant will receive a corrective action plan from the county that will include non-compliant areas and a map for landowners. You will have eleven (11) months to come into compliance before a monetary penalty begins. If you are still non-compliant after 11 months, the monetary penalty starts at \$100 per parcel per month.

If you have questions, please contact the SWCD or County Environmental Office.

NRCS

Environment Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

In 2018 the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) protected 6,163 acres of land. 7 contracts were obligated for \$704,210. EQIP provides technical assistance, cost-share payments, and incentive payments to assist crop, livestock, and other agricultural producers with environmental and conservation improvements to their operations.

A few of the practices used to protect our natural resources in 2018 were:

Strip-till Residue Management, Grade Stabilization Structures, Waterways, and Cover Crops.

EQIP is a competitive program based on a scoring system to rank applications. The scoring system is developed early to address the changing needs for the county.

Sign-up for 2019 EQIP program had an outstanding response with over 25 applications received utilizing practices such as; Rotational Grazing, cover Crops, Structures and Nutrient Management.

The Next application deadline for EQIP 2019 is Friday April 19, 2019. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service for more details about the EQIP program.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

In 2018 the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) continued great success in Cottonwood County with 12 contracts that covered adding 10,525 acres of cropland and pastureland utilizing CSP.

CSP is a voluntary program that encourages producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional practices on their operations. The program is popular for producers who go the extra mile with conservation and sustainable operations, whether they've accomplished goals on their own, with other conservation partners, or through USDA and NRCS programs.

CSP rewarded those in Cottonwood County with over 8 million in payments for 2018 over 100 contracts and 102,000 acres. There is a current CSP sign-up, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service for more details.

GBERBA Coordinators

2018 was another busy year for the Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA). The GBERBA area includes all or parts of ten counties in south central Minnesota. The Blue Earth River, Le Sueur River and the Watonwan River make up the Greater Blue Earth River Basin. Kay Gross, David Bucklin, and Ashley Brenke, Cottonwood and Martin SWCD employees, serve as the coordinators for GBERBA. Coordinator responsibilities include grant writing, project oversight, communications, project reporting, and financial oversight.

Accomplishments in 2018 include, applying for two grants from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources through the Clean Water Fund Program. GBERBA was unfortunately not selected for a CWF grant award.

GBERBA was awarded \$385,785.00 to continue administering the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program into 2019. Several well attended Joint Policy and Technical meetings were held focusing on farm drainage and conservation.

In 2006, the Cottonwood SWCD staff assumed the duties as the GBERBA coordinators. From 2006 through 2018, over \$6,768,152.00 dollars in grants funds have been awarded and utilized by GBERBA members for the conservation of our natural resources. GBERBA will be applying for grants in early 2019 to keep conservation on the ground. Please look for our web site at www.gberba.org.

County Planning and Zoning

The calendar year of 2019 was a busy year for the Cottonwood County Planning and Zoning yet slightly down in permits. During this time, the County issued 134 Permits for 3.615 million dollars worth of Estimated Construction. We also issued 18 Conditional Use Permits, and 3 Variance. No rezoning permits were issued. If you have any questions or future permitting needs, please stop by our office in the USDA building.

Natural Resources Block Grant

The State allocation for FY18 totaled \$47,994 with a required match of \$17,934. Cottonwood County and the SWCD spent \$44,920.55 in grant funds and \$46,951.05 as cash and in-kind match. Programs assisted are as follows:

- Local Water Management (LWM)
- Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)
- DNR Shoreland
- MPCA Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS)

The LWM funding helped seal 11 wells in Cottonwood County totaling \$5,372.50 with landowner contributions of \$5,472.50. Other expenses were GBERBA dues \$3,019.00, water testing \$456.00, environmental education \$1,100.00.

Please see the Feedlot, SSTS, Shoreland and WCA reports throughout the 2018 Annual Report.

Subsurface Sewage Treatment Program (SSTS)

In 2018, 20 compliance inspections on existing systems were completed by private business; 35 construction and repair permits were issued in Cottonwood County—5 permits for new systems and 30 permits for replacement systems, 0 for other establishments, and 0 permits for holding tanks. 41 systems were installed in 2018: 5—At-grade; 32 Mound; 1 Trench; 2 holding tanks; 1 tank replacement. Several of these new systems helped replace numerous non-complying systems that were potentially polluting groundwater, discharging to surface water, or posed an imminent public health threat by discharging sewage to the ground surface.

2018 marked the third year of the County Maintenance Reminder program. After the first 3 years of a new/replacement system operation, homeowners will receive a letter, brochure, and magnet to help them with system maintenance (tank pumping). 39 letters and magnets were sent out to homeowners.

The septic ordinance was revised in 2013 and the property transfer language was updated to include a wider definition of a property conveyance/transfer. Landowners receiving a letter from the County/SWCD pertaining to a property transfer are required to have an existing compliance inspection completed. A list of SSTS contractors is available at the SWCD or on the SWCD and county websites.

County Feedlot Program

This program assists livestock operators to ensure that their farms meet the current water quality discharge standards and feedlot rules of the State of Minnesota.

The end of 2018 marks the end for this most current feedlot registration period, we sent out re-registrations to any feedlot owner that hasn't returned a registration in this registration period. It is essential that all feedlot registrations are updated in order to meet Minnesota Rule Chapter 7020 registration requirements.

In 2017, 18 feedlot inspections were conducted and the Department responded to one complaint and zero emergency response.

As a delegated County by the State, we are required to inspect 7% of our registered feedlots every year. It is an opportunity to ensure that you are still in compliance with State rules standards and address any concerns regarding construction or expansion of your feedlot.

Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Act

In Cottonwood County the Cottonwood SWCD has the technical responsibilities for the Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Act.

The purpose of the Act which was established on January 1, 1992 is, "To maintain and protect Minnesota's wetlands and the benefits they provide. To retain the benefits of wetlands and reach the legislation's goal of no-net-loss of wetlands, the Wetland Conservation Act requires anyone proposing to drain, fill, or excavate a wetland first to try to avoid disturbing the wetland; second, to try to minimize any impact on the wetland; and, finally, to replace any lost wetland acres, functions, and values. Certain wetland activities are exempt from the act, allowing projects with minimal impact or projects located on land where certain pre-established land uses are present to precede without regulation".

In 2018 the Cottonwood SWCD made 50 landowner contacts in Cottonwood County helping all to stay in compliance with the Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Act.

Landowners! Please check first before working near rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands. Restoring a wetland or shore land is an expense lesson to learn!

Conservation Easement Programs

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

In January 2017, the Board of Water and Soil Resources announced a CREP agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture. Over \$500 million dollars of State and Federal money will be invested in the program in the coming years. The MN CREP will target riparian buffer strips, wellhead protection areas, and wetland restorations.

In 2018, the SWCD had 9 applications submitted for ranking to the State and all were accepted, eight wetland restorations and one wellhead protection area. If you are interested in CREP please contact the SWCD.

State Cost-Share Program And Other Funding Sources

The State Cost-Share Program provides a source for landowners to install conservation practices on the land. The primary purpose of the practices must be to control soil erosion, the reduction of sediment delivery or water quality protection.

- The SWCD received \$14,091 for FY2019 allocations.
- Work completed in 2018 included the following practices:
- 15.4 ac. Riparian Forest Buffer- \$4,300.00

Agricultural Best Management Practices Program

This past year one new Ag Waste loan was obtained for \$22,955.00, two conservation tillage projects for \$66,817.00 and twenty-four Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS) totaling \$321,015.31.

To date the Cottonwood County and the SWCD have loaned over \$3,380,459.99 through the AgBMP Loan Program.

Environmental Education

Educating the public is an important part of the SWCD office. Class presentations and educational materials offered to schools and organizations across Cottonwood County include:

- 4th Grade Children's Water Festival
- 6th Grade Environmental Fair
- Windom Farm and Home Show
- Cottonwood County Fair
- Miscellaneous Environmental Presentations to Civic Organizations

Tree Program

An old saying says, "The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the next best time is today"

Don't miss your next best opportunity to plant a tree!

2018 was a good year to plant trees. The spring weather was a challenge for planting, and most trees went in the ground well with good site preparation by landowners. The spring, summer, and fall rains were very ample for establishment and good growth. There is good soil moisture now for new and established trees to get off to a great start in 2019.

- The 2018 plantings included:
- * .5 miles of Field Windbreak
- * 1.5 acre farmstead windbreaks
- * 7.0 acres of wildlife habitat

A total of 5,500 trees were sold in 2018, of those 2,000 were planted by the District.

8 rural landowners received our planting service last spring, and over 30 urban landowners received a new tree through the Windom and Mountain Lake urban tree programs. One of the tree plantings received cost share this year. Funding sources could include the Minnesota State Cost Share Program, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Cottonwood County Water Plan.

Trees clean our air, protect our crops, cool our homes, manage the wind and snow, increase property values, and provide homes for wildlife.

Spring 2019 is our next best time to plant a tree, don't miss it!

Windom and Mountain Lake Urban Tree Programs

Mountain Lake celebrated the thirteenth year of the urban tree program in 2018. The Cottonwood SWCD has worked with the City of Mountain Lake's Tree Commission to help promote and secure grant funds for the urban tree program. The program had another great planting year with 44 urban trees on boulevards and city/public controlled property in Mountain Lake in 2018. This higher than normal planting number, was thanks to grant dollars totaling \$2,000.00. This program has planted 1015 shade trees in Mountain Lake since beginning in 2006 for the health and beauty of our urban surroundings. The City of Mountain Lake annually budgets dollars for this program.

A new program for the Mountain Lake Urban Tree Program is the Ash tree removal grant. Declining mature Ash trees are eligible for the 100% cost share grant for removal. The three thousand dollars allocated in 2018 was fully utilized in preparation for the Emerald Ash Borer's arrival.

The Mountain Lake Urban tree program is actively seeking locations for boulevard trees for planting in 2019. Please contact a tree commission member or Mountain Lake City hall staff soon if you feel you might have a tree planting site on your boulevard.

The **Windom** Tree Commission completed the eighth year of the urban tree program in 2018. The city of Windom Street Department annually budgets dollars for this program. The Cottonwood SWCD also looks for grant opportunities each year to add to the budget.

In 2018 30 large shade trees were planted on boulevards and city owned property. This brings the eight year total to 452 shade trees planted in Windom. If you would like an opportunity to increase the value of your property and make the Windom urban environment a greener and healthier place, please talk to a Tree Commission member, or the head of the Windom Street Department. There are still trees available for boulevard sites for this coming spring.

These urban tree programs will benefit from a Conservation Corps Minnesota crew helping with the tree planting again this spring. This is paid for through a Clean Water Fund Grant received by the Cottonwood SWCD office.

The trees for the urban programs are available to homeowners at a fraction of the true cost and can be planted for you! Please join us in this exciting project.

Special Programs

Minnesota Department of Agriculture—Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program

The District has a working partnership with the MN Department of Agriculture to help promote the MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program to all landowners/operators throughout Cottonwood County.

This is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Those who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified and in turn obtain regulatory certainty for a period of ten years.

Through 2018:

- Landowner Applications—31
- Landowner Completed Assessments—29
- Landowners Certified—12

Statewide 691 farms are certified on over 449,281 acres!

Interested in becoming certified? Stop by our office and we will connect you will our Area V Certification Specialist Danielle Evers. Receive \$100 incentive just to sit down and run through the assessment and receive an additional \$200 incentive after certification!

Clean Water Legacy Cost-Share

The District in collaboration with several partners completed the following projects with Clean Water Legacy funding.

- Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA)
- 120 acres—Cover Crops
- Total—\$3,024.00

District Capacity—Clean Water Legacy

Non-competitive grant investing in building the capacity of local soil and water conservation districts. The grant targets four resource areas—Soil Erosion, Riparian Zone Management, Water Storage and Treatment and Excess Nutrients and supports increased capacity by funding expenses in the following categories: Staffing, Cost-Share/Incentives, Technology/Capital Equipment and Operations.

- FY16 Funding Allocation—\$120,337
- 2018—Expenditures—31,373.57
- Staffing—\$30,235.57
- Operations—\$1,138.00
- FY17 Funding Allocation—\$122,750
- 2018—Expenditures—28,192.59
- Staffing—\$20,561.59
- Operations—\$7,631.00
- FY18 Funding Allocation—\$122,750
- 2018—Expenditures—\$34,071.25
- Staffing—\$25,763.03
- Operations—\$8,308.22
- FY19 Funding Allocation—\$100,000
- 2018—No Expenditures

Watonwan One Watershed One Plan Annual Report 2018

The Watonwan One Watershed One Plan Planning Project got off and running in 2018. This planning project involves all counties and Soil and Water Conservation Districts in parts of six counties. These counties are Blue Earth, Brown, Cottonwood, Jackson, Martin, and Watonwan. The staffs of those counties are now involved in a watershed planning project to strategically move forward with a plan for practices that will result in cleaner water in the Watonwan River. We are about a third of the way through entire process but are just beginning to plan future conservation actions. The public is welcome to attend meetings and assist with planning. Call or stop by your SWCD office to learn more.

SWCD Staff

Kay Gross—SWCD Administrator and GBERBA and Southwest Prairie TSA Administrative Coordinator
Programs: NRBG, Cost-Share, MAWQCP

Dave Bucklin—SWCD District Technician and GBERBA Technical Coordinator
Programs: Tree Program, Wetland Conservation Act, Cost-Share

Kari Clouse—SWCD Administrative Program Assistant
Programs: Well Sealing, Environmental Education, Planning and Zoning

Becky Buchholz—Farm Bill Assistant/District Program Technician
Programs: Conservation Easements, Ag BMP Loan Program, SSTS, Buffer Program

Hannah Herzfeld—SWCD Resource Technician
Programs: Buffer Program, Cost-Share

Josh Votruba—GBERBA Watonwan Watershed Technician

Kathy Smith—GBERBA Financial Coordinator

Herman Barstch—GBERBA Area 6 Certification Specialist

County Staff

Alex Schultz—Planning and Zoning Technician
Programs: Ag Inspector, Shoreland, Zoning, Invasive Species, Feedlots

Marty Mollenhauer—GIS Specialist
Programs: County GIS and IT

NRCS Staff

Kelly Pfarr—NRCS District Conservationist

Sarah Hiniker—General Clerk

