

# **Renville County SWCD**

## **2013 In Review**

### **Introduction**

The following is a summary of the 2013 programs, personnel and accomplishments of the Renville County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Renville County SWCD was established in August 1955. It is governed by a five member elected Board of Supervisors. Supervisors are elected from the County Commissioner District where they reside. Supervisors serve four year terms.

The financial health of the SWCD can be evaluated by referring to the Document entitled Financial Statements, which is posted separately on the SWCD website. Financial Statements are completed in accordance with the requirements set forth by the Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR). The SWCD is audited by an outside CPA as required by State Statute. The most recent audit was completed for the period ending December 31, 2011 and is available under separate cover as well as on the SWCD website ([www.renvilleswcd.com](http://www.renvilleswcd.com)) We anticipate an audit will be required for the year ending December 31, 2013. An auditor will be hired in the spring, with the audit completed before the end of the year. It will be posted on the website when it's available.

The Renville County SWCD is housed in the Ag Services building in Olivia and is co-located with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA). SWCD staff work cooperatively with the USDA staff on Federal Farm Bill Conservation Programs including CRP, CCRP, CSP, WRP, and EQIP.

The SWCD staff also partner with Renville County to provide feedlot inspections as required by MN Statutes Chapter 7020. This partnership has been instrumental in helping landowners obtain cost-share for feedlot upgrades. Through co-location with USDA, and because of involvement with several watershed projects, the SWCD staff is in a position to acquire funds from a variety of sources to help landowners fund Ag Waste projects.

The SWCD is designated by Renville County as the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) LGU. SWCD staff also assists the Renville County Environmental office with technical assistance for mining reclamation plans, rain garden design and installation, and other environmental activities. SWCD staff serves on the Water Plan Task Force. In 2012 that group spent considerable time on extensive updates and changes to the Renville County Local Water Management Plan. The Plan was adopted by the County in 2013 and by the SWCD Board of Supervisors as the District's long range plan.

The SWCD administers the State Cost-Share program and actively seeks out projects in accordance with program priorities and guidelines. In addition to the use of the regular cost-share program, staff regularly applies to the State as additional grant opportunities are announced. The Native Buffer Cost-Share and Feedlot Water Quality Management funds that were requested in 2011 & 2012 were received in 2012 and landowners get paid as their projects are completed. In addition, one landowner was paid market rate adjustment payments through the DNR Working Lands Initiative (WLI) for enrolling land into CRP. The

Native Buffer Grant was closed-out in 2013 along with other Competitive Grants. Final Financial Reports for these grants are available on the website.

In the fall of 2009 BWSR introduced the Buffer Easement Program for land along streams and ditches. The purpose of the program is to protect water quality and increase wildlife habitat and is funded by both the Clean Water portion and the Wildlife Portion of The Legacy Amendment passed in 2008. Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) perpetual easements are put on the buffer. Twenty-seven applications were approved for funding in early 2010 and an additional four in July 2010. The SWCD receives administrative funding for easement processing. Landowner interest remains high. Another application period began 2012 and continued into 2013. As of December 31, 2013 twenty-one easements had been completed and landowners paid, thirty-one easements were proceeding through the easement process, and one application is on hold until ownership requirements are met. These easements total 960.1 acres and will pay landowners just over \$5.3 million dollars for protecting Renville County natural resources.

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) has awarded nearly \$4 million to fund easements in Renville, Redwood, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle and Yellow Medicine Counties. The purpose of this program is to protect rare & unique granite rock outcrop areas that are particularly vulnerable to development. The counties involved made an application for additional funds in the 2013 RFP but did not get funded. Staff will continue to look for funding opportunities to protect these rare landscapes.

The SWCD no longer sells trees for conservation purposes. Customers are referred to neighboring SWCDs for tree purchases and planting. Renville County SWCD staff assist landowners with tree questions and with designing tree plantings.

SWCD staff regularly present educational programs and are available to work with any school or community groups. In 2013 the SWCD sponsored the annual WALK program for County sixth grade students. Three of the four county school districts participated. A total of 138 students and their teachers were involved along with staff from the SWCD, NRCS, Renville County and the Hawk Creek Watershed Project.

Staff and Supervisors are involved in area, state and national conservation organizations and are actively involved in the political process at all levels. Both staff & supervisors attended the annual Legislative Day at the Capitol where they met with Senator Koenen and Rep. Falk to discuss environmental issues. Both staff and supervisors attended area and state MASWCD meetings. In addition, staff attended any relevant training. Once again a staff member was invited to give a presentation at the annual BWSR Academy training session.

Staff also cooperates with other agencies and other SWCD offices, as program opportunities present themselves. An extensive list of cooperating agencies and offices is listed at the end of this report. Also listed are specific accomplishments for the year.

2013 was a year of significant change for the SWCD. A long-term NRCS Technician, the SWCD technician and the Farm Bill Technician all took jobs with the State of Minnesota. From September through the end of the year, a significant amount of time was spent on the hiring process and on training new employees.

# 2013 In Review

## Renville County Soil & Water Conservation District

1008 West Lincoln Avenue

Olivia MN 56277

Phone: 320-523-1559 Fax: 320-523-2389

Website: [www.renvillewcd.com](http://www.renvillewcd.com)

### Board of Supervisors

The Board met the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 a.m. at the Ag Services Building, 1008 West Lincoln, Olivia MN.

Marc Iverson, Chair  
PO Box 536  
Bird Island MN 55310  
District 3

Kathryn K. Kelly, Vice Chair  
302 South 4th  
Olivia MN 56277  
District 4

Jim Hebrink  
88815 County Road 21  
Renville MN 56284  
District 5

Mark Koenig  
80656 County Road 8  
Buffalo Lake MN 55314  
District 1

Dave Guggisberg, Sec/Treas.  
50427 640<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Fairfax MN 55332  
District 2

Mr. Hebrink & Mr. Koenig were new Supervisors in 2013. Both were elected in the 2012 General Election. Dave Guggisberg was re-elected.

### District Staff:

Karen Flom, Office Manager  
[kmflom@yahoo.com](mailto:kmflom@yahoo.com) or  
[Karen.flom@mn.nacdnet.net](mailto:Karen.flom@mn.nacdnet.net)

Thomas Kalahar, District Technician  
[kalahar@yahoo.com](mailto:kalahar@yahoo.com)

Taralee Latozke, District Technician (thru 10/13)  
Ryan Clark was hired & began work in November  
[Ryan.clark@mn.nacdnet.net](mailto:Ryan.clark@mn.nacdnet.net)

Jason Beckler, Farm Bill Technician (thru 9/13)  
Two new Farm Bill Techs began work in 11/13  
Chris Gehrig  
[Christopher.gehrig@mn.nacdnet.net](mailto:Christopher.gehrig@mn.nacdnet.net)

Trent Brenny  
[Trenton.brenny@mn.nacdnet.net](mailto:Trenton.brenny@mn.nacdnet.net)

### NRCS Staff:

Jeff Kjorness, District Conservationist  
[jeff.kjorness@mn.usda.gov](mailto:jeff.kjorness@mn.usda.gov)

Mike Anderson, Technician (resigned 9/13)  
position vacant on 12/31/2013

## Others Assisting the Renville County SWCD

### Renville County Farm Service Agency (FSA) Committee & Staff

Orlynn Hegna  
Barb Melberg

Owen Anderson

Kevin Beekman, CED  
Kay Precht  
Lynn Zieske

Tom Anderson, Farm Loan Manager  
Stacy Lindahl  
Jiselle Pfarr

Greg Kodet, Field Reporter

Joe Serbus, Field Reporter

### Renville County Board of Commissioners

Randy Kramer, District 1  
Paul Setzepfandt, District 3  
Lamont Jacobson, District 5

Bob Fox, District 2  
John Stahl, District 4

### Renville County Administrator

Sara Folsted

### Renville County Public Works

Larry Zupke, Ditch Inspector

Renee Hannah, Admin. Asst.

### Renville County Office of Environment & Community Development

Mark Erickson

Scott Refsland

Julie Kohout, Admin Asst

### Renville County Household Hazardous Waste & Water Management

Diane Mitchell

Carrie Tersteeg, Admin Asst

### Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Jeff Zajac, Wildlife Manager  
Gary Bennett, Waters

Lee Sundmark, Fisheries

### Hawk Creek Watershed Project [www.hawkcreekwatershed.org](http://www.hawkcreekwatershed.org)

Heidi Rauenhorst, Project Coordinator

Dean Dambrotten, Planner/Field Tech

Jordan Austin, Water Quality & Outreach Technician

### Crow River Organization of Waters

Diane Sander, Coordinator

Dan Nadearl, Water Resource Specialist

### High Island Watershed Project

Nick Banks, Coordinator  
[NickB@co.sibley.mn.us](mailto:NickB@co.sibley.mn.us)

# **Renville County Soil & Water Conservation District**

## **2013 Accomplishments**

### Completed Projects

- **State Cost-Share**
  - \$9,348 was paid to landowners for completed projects
  - At the end of the year there were three approved contracts to be completed in 2014.
  - FY14 allocation was \$10,460. \$6,250 of that was encumbered for projects leaving \$4,210 unencumbered.
- **Native Buffer Cost-Share**
  - All projects that had not been completed by the end of 2012 were cancelled. The remaining funds were returned to BWSR in 2013 and the grant closed.
- **Feedlot Water Quality Management/Clean Water Grants**
  - No contracts were completed in 2012. Two grants remain active with 2014 project completion anticipated.

### Education/Promotion

- **WALK**—3 Renville County Schools participated. WALK was held at the Beaver Falls Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Approximately 138 students were involved. All SWCD staff participated in planning and with the presentations. Topics included wise land use, watersheds & water quality, wildlife & wildlife habitat.
- **Classroom Education**—All the staff gave presentations on various topics including the economics of conservation, career exploration, buffers, wildlife habitat & water quality issues.
- One staff member manned an information booth at Farmfest.
- Staff and Supervisors attended MASWCD Legislative Day at the Capitol & maintained frequent contact with elected officials at local, state & federal levels.
- Staff and Supervisors attended MASWCD Convention.
- Staff attended State Conservation Plan meetings, TMDL meetings, Working Lands Initiative Meetings, DNR Shoreland meetings, Prairie Plan meetings, as well as training for specific programs. The trend is for more web based training which saves travel time and travel costs.
- SWCD staff completed an application to the USFW Foundation for a grant to hire a staff person to promote & implement conservation practices. The two-year grant was funded for \$100,000. Funds will be available beginning March 1, 2014

### Feedlot Inspections

- A Renville SWCD Staff member continue to fill the role of Renville County Feedlot Inspector. The 70 required inspections were completed in 2013.
- In 2013 USDA EQIP funded two landowners to do CAP (Conservation Activity Plans) as a prerequisite to funding their ag waste projects.
- One landowner began construction on a project in 2013 and will complete the project in 2014. EQIP funding for that project is \$115,000.
- Additional time was spent working on past and present feedlot issues. Feedlot issues are normally a cooperative effort between the SWCD, NRCS, the County, and Watershed Projects, along with engineers & landowners.

### Conservation Reserve Program (CRP & CCRP)

- This was a difficult year for enrolling landowners in CRP contracts. The extension of the expired Farm Bill and software problems delayed any sign-ups until May of 2013. Then in October 2013 the SWCD staff found themselves alone in the building for nearly 3 weeks as

the government shutdown took place. In addition, no Farm Bill after the end of the Federal Fiscal Year on Sept. 30, 2013 meant no CRP programs for the remainder of 2013.

- None-the less, landowners enrolled 43 new CRP & CCRP new contracts totaling 431.7 acres into CRP. In addition, 5 General CRP bids were accepted.
- Staff members continue to promote the Buffer Easement Program on CRP buffers. They continue to promote new CRP contracts whenever possible and they work to target specific watersheds and ditch systems. Buffering drainage ditches is a priority for both the SWCD Staff & Board as-well-as for the Renville County Board.

### Easement Programs

- Staff continued well-monitoring on two roadbank easements from prior years. Staff continued to work with landowners & BWSR on maintenance of these easements
- In early 2013 Renville County SWCD staff met with partner SWCD staff on the potential of a new Granite Rock Outcrop grant request to the LCCMR. Renville & Redwood staff worked on the proposal throughout the spring and it was submitted for review. Unfortunately the project was not funded. Staff will continue to look for funding opportunities for landowners interested in protecting these areas. Twenty-one landowners offering 733.6 acres have indicated an interest in protecting their rock outcrops in a perpetual easement. These applications remain in limbo until such time as funding is available.
- The eight SWCD offices that submitted an application to the LCCMR were also instrumental in working with BWSR & DNR on creating an easement program to protect grasslands. Interested landowners in those eight counties offered 49 parcels totaling over 2,500 hundred acres for perpetual grassland easements. Tom Kalahar, along with BWSR & DNR staff, presented the program to the Lessard-Sam Outdoor Heritage County (LSOHC). The grant request was for \$40 million. A pilot project was funded for \$5 million.
- Staff continued to promote the RIM Buffer Easement program. By the end of the year, 21 easements had been recorded and landowners paid. An additional 31 easements were proceeding through the easement process. One application is on hold. The easements total 960.1 acres and when completed will result in \$5.3 million in payments to landowners.
- RIM/CREP Site Inspections – 135 site inspections were completed in 2013. Landowners received a written report on the status of the easement.
- RIM/CREP maintenance – used available programs to assist landowners with maintenance & enhancement of existing easements.
- With nearly 500 conservation easements in the county, workload remains high

### Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

- Over 300 staff hours were spent on over 100 contacts related to various aspects of the WCA program and wetlands. There were six violation investigations.
- Tara Latozke coordinated the program until she took a new position with MN DNR in October. Ryan Clark began as the Coordinator in November 2013. His wetland delineation training was completed prior to being hired by the SWCD. Ryan partnered with Kane Radel, BWSR Wetland Specialist, on investigating violations in November and December.

### Working Lands Initiative (WLI)

- There is one market rate adjustment incentive payment of about \$24,000 in 2013.

### Walk-In Access Program (WIA)

- One Renville County landowner has a contract to allow public hunting on their property.

### Local Water Management

- 12 contracts were completed and landowners were paid \$7,873.88 in cost-share for well-sealing projects.
- Tara Latozke continued to work with Diane Mitchell, Renville County, on completion and approval of the Renville County Water Plan which serves as the SWCD Comprehensive Plan.

## Mining Permits Reviewed

- 2 mining reclamation plans were reviewed and approved.

## Rain Garden Plan Review

- Staff continue to work with interested landowners on design and installation of rain gardens. Two designs for impervious surface exemptions under the shoreland rules were reviewed.

## Partnerships

BWSR \* DNR \* NRCS \* FSA \* MASWCD \* Renville County \* MnDOT \* Hawk Creek Watershed Project \* Crow River Organization of Waters \* High Island Watershed Project \* Pheasants Forever \* Chippewa SWCD \* Redwood SWCD \* Yellow Medicine SWCD \* Lac qui Parle SWCD \* Upper Sioux Agency \* Lower Sioux Agency \* US Fish & Wildlife

## Revenues & Expenses

These charts illustrate SWCD funding sources as well as SWCD expenses in 2013. Note that on the Expense chart Project Expenses State & District are direct payments to landowners. Remaining expenses were personnel costs as well as office maintenance which include vehicle expenses, rent, insurance, dues, office supplies, telephone, etc. Two staff computers were purchased in 2013. On the Income chart, pass thru funds for cost-share project payments and for incentive payments to landowners are included in the State Funds. Miscellaneous funds include reimbursements and refunds including reimbursement for legal fees and title insurance premiums for the easements recorded in 2013.

