

Renville County SWCD

2014 In Review

Introduction

The following is a summary of the 2014 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 by 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, 2013 and is available under separate cover as well as on the SWCD website (www.renville-swcd.com) Based on current audit requirements, the next audit will be for the year ending December 31, 2015.

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, WRE, 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 apply to the State as additional grant opportunities are announced. In recent years there have been funds through the Native Buffer Cost-Share program and through the Feedlot Water Quality Program. Those grants are now completed and final reports for each of those programs are posted on the SWCD website. In 2014 staff continued to pursue grants through the BWSR Clean Water Fund Program, The DNR CPL program and have been cooperating with other entities to pursue funds from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) through the Legislative-Citizen

Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). Any notices for competitive grants are reviewed by the staff to determine if we have projects that fit into the grant criteria.

In the fall of 2009 BWSR introduced the Buffer Easement Program for land along streams and ditches. The purpose of the program is to improve water quality and increase wildlife habitat and it is funded by both the Clean Water portion and the Wildlife Portion of The Legacy Amendment that was approved by Minnesota voters in 2008. Buffers are enrolled in the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) perpetual easements. The program has been very popular with Renville County landowners who enrolled approximately 80 easements. Beginning with the sign-up that began July 1, 2014, all applications were scored by BWSR staff and had to compete with other applications throughout Minnesota. That change, coupled with a decrease in available funds, left all 26 Renville County applications unfunded. Had those applications been funded they would protected 117,597 linear feet of watercourses, permanently protected 893 acres of marginal farmland and paid county landowners \$6.82 million. While this was discouraging, we are hopeful the January 2015 Governor's proposal to buffer the state's watercourses will result in additional funding in the future.

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 2014 the SWCD sponsored the annual WALK program for County sixth grade students. Three of the four county school districts participated. A total of 154 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 Senators Koenen and Representative Falk to discuss environmental issues. Both staff and supervisors attended area and state MASWCD meetings. In addition, staff attended any relevant training. Once again staff attended the annual BWSR Academy training session. Ryan Clark began an 18 month Leadership Program along with staff and supervisors from throughout Minnesota.

Staff also cooperate 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.

2014 was another transition year at the SWCD/NRCS. Ryan Allen joined the staff as an NRCS Technician in February. Later in the year Jeff Kjorness transferred to the Redwood Falls Field Office. The new District Conservationist, Holly Hatlewick, started work in November. By the end of the year both Chris Gehrig & Trent Brenny had moved on and the position of Farm Bill Technician had been offered to Karen Herrig who was due to begin work in January 2015.

2014 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

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, Sec/Treas
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, Vice Chair
80656 County Road 8
Buffalo Lake MN 55314
District 1

Dave Guggisberg, (resigned effective 3/14)
50427 640th Ave.
Fairfax MN 55332
District 2

Kevin Kokesch (appointed 3/14)
871 3rd St. S
Franklin MN 55333-1203
District 2

In the November 2014 General Election, Kathryn Kelly & Kevin Kokesch were re-elected. Terrylea Ness replaced Marc Iverson who did not seek election.

District Staff:

Karen Flom, Office Manager
kmflom@yahoo.com or
Karen.flom@mn.nacdnet.net

Thomas Kalahar, District Technician
tjkalahar@gmail.com

Ryan Clark, District Technician
Ryan.clark@mn.nacdnet.net

Farm Bill Technician
Chris Gehrig (11/13-6/14)
Christopher.gehrig@mn.nacdnet.net

Trent Brenny (11/13-11/14)
Trenton.brenny@mn.nacdnet.net

NRCS Staff:

Jeff Kjorness, District Conservationist
Replaced by Holly Hattlewick

Ryan Allen, Technician

Jen Aalderks, Assistant through 7/14...replaced by Janelle Schmoll in 10/14

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
Jake Dornseif

Tom Anderson, Farm Loan Manager
Stacy Lindahl
Jiselle Pfarr

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

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 (Position is vacant)

Renville County Soil & Water Conservation District 2014 Accomplishments

Completed Projects

- **State Cost-Share**
 - \$13,794.50 was paid to landowners for completed projects in 2014.
 - At the end of the year there were two approved contracts to be completed in 2015.
 - All remaining FY 2014 funds spent or encumbered.
 - FY 2015 allocation is \$10,460. No funds spent or encumbered to date.
- **Feedlot Water Quality Management/Clean Water Grants**
 - No contracts were completed in 2014. One grant was cancelled and funds returned to BWSR for a feedlot project that was cancelled by the landowner. One CWF Feedlot grant remains, and the project is planned to be completed during 2015.

Education/Promotion

- **WALK**—3 Renville County Schools participated. WALK was held at the Beaver Falls Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Approximately 154 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**—Staff are available for 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. Senators Dahms & Koenen attended the December 2014 Board of Supervisors meeting.
- Staff and Supervisors attended MASWCD Convention.
- Staff attended BWSR Academy, 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.
- Ryan Clark began an 18 month Leadership Program through the MASWCD.

Feedlot Inspections

- A Renville SWCD Staff member continues to fill the role of Renville County Feedlot Inspector. The 70 required inspections were completed in 2014.
- In 2014, in addition to the actual feedlot inspections, the SWCD was asked by MPCA to complete an Owner Assistance Tracking form for the program year. The SWCD and USDA NRCS did track contact with feedlot owners and that information was made part of the reporting process.
- In 2014 federal cost-share dollars were used with 9 cooperators totaling \$210,000.00. Both SWCD and NRCS staff have given many suggestions and recommendations to feedlot owners to improve feedlot management in regards to water quality protection and soil health.
- Being onsite with a feedlot owner gives the SWCD staff an excellent opportunity to discuss conservation and environmental issues concerning both feedlot operation and farming practices.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP & CCRP)

- 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.

- The SWCD started the year with two Farm Bill Technicians. At the end of the grant period in June, the staffing was reduced to one employee. In 2014 the Farm Bill Techs had 1,174 contacts with landowners. They assisted landowners with 127 new CRP contracts totaling 1,390 acres. In addition there were 87 management activities which needed plan modifications completed. Those modifications were on 807 acres.

Easement Programs

- Staff continued well-monitoring on two MnDOT roadbank easements from prior years. Staff continued to work with landowners & BWSR on maintenance of these easements
- Staff continued to promote the RIM Buffer Easement program. Approximately 80 buffer easements have been recorded since 2009. In 2014 the SWCD staff submitted 26 applications from Renville County landowners. Due to limited funding, none of those easements were funded. Those landowners and more are waiting for the next round of funding to reapply.
- RIM/CREP Site Inspections – 130 site inspections were completed in 2014. Landowners received a written report on the status of their easement.
- RIM/CREP maintenance – Staff used available programs to assist landowners with maintenance & enhancement of existing easements. Tree removal was done on some easements using funds from several agencies to complete the projects.
- With approximately 500 conservation easements in the county, workload remains high

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

- Over 400 staff hours were spent on over 50 contacts related to various aspects of the WCA program and wetlands. There were 5 violation investigations and 5 project applications.
- Ryan Clark (Certified Wetland Delineator ID: 5191), Coordinator for Renville County WCA. Ryan partnered with Kane Radel, BWSR Wetland Specialist, on investigating violations and reviewing project applications.

Local Water Management

- 19 contracts were completed and landowners were paid \$6,158 in cost-share for well-sealing projects.
- Ryan Clark served on the Renville County Local Water Management Task Force.

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 (CROW) * 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 2014. 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. One staff computer was purchased in 2014 and the SWCD ATV was replaced. 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 some of which is reimbursement from the State for legal fees and title insurance premiums for the RIM easements recorded in 2014. Payment of those fees is included in the "Other Expenses" in the expense chart.

