

Renville County SWCD

2015 In Review

Introduction

The following is a summary of the 2015 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.renvilleswcd.com) 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 several grants. Each grant has either a progress report or final posted on the SWCD website (www.renvilleswcd.com). In 2015 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.

During 2015 there were limited opportunities to enroll land into conservation easements. The Minnesota Legislature did approve some funds but BWSR is working with USDA on developing a new CREP program that would marry federal and state programs and funds. At the end of 2015 program rules and a sign-up date had not been announced. Interest remains high in Renville County and by the end of the year there was a waiting list of landowners for both buffer easements and wetland restoration easements.

Also in 2015, Governor Dayton proposed a "Buffer Law" and the legislature passed a version of the original proposal. A 50 foot buffer on public waters is mandated by November 1, 2017 and a 16.5 foot buffer on public ditches by November 1, 2018. Soil & Water Conservation Districts will have a large role in educating landowners and operators and eventually in determining compliance. Workload increased during 2015 with numerous landowner and operator questions as well as increased interest in CRP buffers. The SWCD received \$45,000 for Buffer Implementation based on the number of crop acres in the county and the number of miles to be buffered. By year end, none of this money had been spent.

The 2015 Legislature increased funding to Soil & Water Conservation Districts to increase their local capacity. At the end of 2015 a Workplan was being developed for the first year of funding. It was anticipated that the plan would gain BWSR approval and the funds disbursed in early 2016. Goals are to update technology and engineering equipment and to add an employee later in 2016 as the buffer and easement workloads are anticipated to increase.

BWSR received funding through the legislature for the Disaster Recovery and Assistance Program (DRAP) for the flooding caused by the rains of June 2014. Renville SWCD staff were able to obtain funding for projects that were the result of flood damage and to assist with flood prevention in the future. DRAP Phase I funding was \$138,750 to fund four projects. One of those projects was completed in 2015. The remaining projects were in the engineering stage at the end of the year with construction planned for 2016. DRAP Phase II funding was \$894,000. At the end of 2015 those projects were in the planning stage with construction planned for 2017. Two of the projects are extensive and must be reviewed by private engineering firms to determine if a project is even feasible.

SWCD staff regularly present educational programs and are available to work with any school or community groups. In 2015 the SWCD sponsored the annual WALK program for County sixth grade students. Two county school districts participated. A total of 115 students and their teachers were involved along with staff from the SWCD, BWSR & NRCS.

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 & Dahms and with Representatives Miller & Torkelson 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 completed 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.

2015 was another transition year at the SWCD/NRCS. Tom Kalahar, who had been with the SWCD since 1979, retired in the spring and Ben Trochlil was hired as District Technician. Karen Herrig Wermers was hired as the Farm Bill Technician in January 2015. Ryan Clark continued as District Technician but by the end of the year had resigned to take another job. Hiring his replacement was planned for early 2016. Karen Flom continued as District Manager. She has set a retirement date of May 2016. Holly Hatlewick continued as NRCS District Conservationist in Renville County and for a portion of the year was also the acting DC in Redwood County. Ryan Allen was the NRCS technician. By the end of 2015 he had announced plans to relocate to Montana where he accepted a job with the Bureau of Land Management. NRCS contracts with a company for administrative support. In the spring of 2015 Emily Swenson started in that position.

2015 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 7:30 a.m. at the Ag Services Building, 1008 West Lincoln, Olivia MN (FSA conference room).

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

Terrylea Ness
75174 County Road 16
Hector MN 55342
District 3

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

Kevin Kokesch
871 3rd St. S
Franklin MN 55333-1203
District 2

District Staff:

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

Thomas Kalahar, District Technician
(Retired 3/31/2015)

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

Bennett Trochlil, District Technician
(hired 3/15/2015)
ben.trochlil@mn.nacdnet.net

Karen Herrig Wermers, Farm Bill Technician
Karen.wermers@mn.nacdnet.net

NRCS Staff:

Holly Hatlewick, District Conservationist
Emily Swenson, Administrative Assistant

Ryan Allen, Technician

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

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

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
Charlene Brooks,

Dan Nadearl, Water Resource Specialist

High Island Watershed Project

Renville County Soil & Water Conservation District 2015 Accomplishments

Completed Projects

- State Cost-Share
 - \$13,828 was paid to landowners from the State Cost-Share funds
 - FY 2016 allocation is \$10,460. No funds spent or encumbered to date.
- Feedlot Water Quality Management/Clean Water Grants
 - No contracts were completed in 2015. One grant was cancelled and funds returned to BWSR for a feedlot project that was cancelled by the landowner. One CWF Feedlot grant remains. The project deadline was extended to all the project to be completed during 2016.

Education/Promotion

- WALK—2 Renville County Schools participated. WALK was held at the Beaver Falls Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Approximately 115 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 2015 Board of Supervisors meeting.
- Staff and Supervisors attended MASWCD Convention and were moderators of some breakout sessions since the South Central Area 6 hosted in 2015.
- Staff attended BWSR Academy, TMDL meetings, WRAPS meetings, Watershed Project technical 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 completed 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 71 required inspections were completed in 2015.
- In 2015 federal cost-share dollars were used with 1 cooperator totaling \$15,954.00 to construct an animal mortality facility. Both SWCD and NRCS staff have given 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 CRP buffers and buffer easements. They continue to promote new CRP contracts which have been very popular in the wake of the new buffer law. Buffering drainage ditches is a priority for both the SWCD Staff & Board as-well-as for the Renville County Board and will become the law November 1, 2018.
- The SWCD started the year with a new Farm Bill Tech. She immediately started learning the CRP rules and during the year produced 200 quotes for landowners and contacted 45 current CRP landowners who had expiring contracts.

- By the end of the year she had prepared 32 CRP renewal contracts and 52 new contracts. The renewals totaled 172.9 acres and there were 716.97 acres in the new contracts.
- The Farm Bill Tech works with NRCS & FSA to produce the conservation plans for new and renewing contracts and to prepare any modifications necessary for existing contracts. She also works with landowners on seeding plans and helps them with their maintenance questions.

Easement Programs

- Staff continues to promote a future CREP program or RIM Buffer/Wetland sign-up. Approximately 100 landowners are on a waiting list in the office for a future permanent conservation easement. Many CREP quotes were sent out to landowners in targeted areas around the county prone to erosion.
- A total of 3 RIM applications were accepted from the 2014-15 RIM Wetland and RIM Buffer sign-ups, totaling 370.0 acres.
- RIM/CREP Site Inspections – 270 site inspections were completed in 2015. Landowners received a written report on the status of their easement.
- Landowners were given recommendations and advice for controlling heavy infestations of noxious weeds, sweet clover, unwanted trees, buckthorn, etc.
- Dike repairs and wetland structure repairs were completed on 2 RIM easements to ensure the integrity of the restored wetlands on site.
- RIM/CREP maintenance – Staff used available programs to assist landowners with maintenance & enhancement of existing easements.
- With approximately 500 conservation easements in the county, workload remains high

Disaster Recovery and Prevention (DRAP)

- Phase I resulted in \$138,750 in funds to fund four projects in Renville County. One was completed and the landowners paid 100% of the cost which resulted in a payment of \$12,468. The remaining projects are in the engineering and design stage and construction should be completed in 2016.
- Phase II resulted in \$894,000 in fund to fund projects in Renville County. All the potential projects are in very preliminary planning/survey/design stages some with the Technical Service Area staff and some of the more extensive projects with private engineering firms. Realistically most projects will not be completed until 2017.

Local Capacity Funds

- The 2015 legislature approved an increase in base SWCD funding to add to the local capacity of the offices. The past several years most project funding is competitive and does not allow for any administrative costs. This was an attempt to allow districts to hire staff to complete their workload. At the end of 2015 the Renville County SWCD was working on a Workplan to submit to BWSR for this money. High priorities are updating technology, increasing engineering capacity of the staff by purchasing equipment and also adding a technician later in 2016 as the buffer, easement and construction workloads increase.

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

- There were over 50 landowner contacts related to various aspects of the WCA program and wetlands. There were 5 boundary type applications approved, 1 no-loss application and 2 replacement plans approved for wetland banking
- Ryan Clark (Certified Wetland Delineator ID: 5191), Coordinator for Renville County WCA, partnered with Kane Radel, BWSR Wetland Specialist, on investigating violations and reviewing project applications.

Local Water Management

- 9 contracts were completed and landowners were paid for sealing high priority wells.
- Ryan Clark served on the Renville County Local Water Management Task Force.

Mining Permits Reviewed

- 3 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 2015. 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 2015. On the Revenues chart, pass thru funds for cost-share project payments 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 2015. Also included in Misc. are refunds from both our health insurance carrier and our property/liability/auto carrier due to positive experience for the year. Please keep in mind that SWCD reporting is done in a “modified accrual” format so receipts are not necessary shown as Revenue the year they are received. They are shown on our Financial Reports as “unearned revenue” and deferred to the next year. They will be shown as revenue the year they are expended. This is true of all state grants and also the LWM, WCA and Feedlot funds from the County. Funds that fall into this category are those grants where the funds are earmarked for specific purposes or projects or that must be tracked to employee timesheets for work on the programs.

