

Renville County SWCD

2016 In Review

Introduction

The following is a summary of the 2016 programs, personnel and accomplishments of the Renville County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Renville County SWCD was established in August 1 955. 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 , 2015 and is available under separate cover as well as on the SWCD website (www.renvilleswcd.com).

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 2016 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 2016 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. CREP signup has been announced for spring 2017, signup dates and timelines are still being developed. 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 2016 due to 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 the year end \$24,448.31 had been spent.

The 2015 Legislature increased funding to Soil & Water Conservation Districts to increase their local capacity for 2016 & 2017. At the end of 2016 a Workplan was being developed for the second year of funding. It was anticipated that the plan would gain BWSR approval and the funds disbursed in early 2017. Goals are to update technology and engineering equipment. An employee was added with 2016 funding and will continue position with 2017 funding to assist with the buffer law and easement workloads.

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 for four projects. One of these projects was completed in 2015 and one in 2016. The remaining projects were in the engineering stage at the end of the year with construction planned for 2017. DRAP Phase II funding was \$894,000. At the end of 2016 one project had been completed, and additional projects are 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 project feasibility.

SWCD staff regularly present educational programs and are available to work with any school or community group. In 2016 SWCD along with Renville County and Hawk Creek Watershed hosted a Spring Benefits of Cover Crops meeting in June with 60 local attendees and a fall Cover Crop Field day was held in September that even had 72 attendees.

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 relevant training. Once again staff attended the annual BWSR Academy training session. Staff Karen Wermers, Ben Trochilil and Supervisor Terrylea Ness 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.

2016 was another transition year at the SWCD/NRCS. Karen Flom, who had been with the SWCD since 1994, retired in the spring and Holly Hatlewick was hired as District Manager. Karen Wermers continued as Farm Bill Technician. Cody Dale was hired as District technical to replace Ryan Clark's replacement was completed in Jan 2016, by hiring Ben Trochlil continues to work as the District technician. Mike Sandager was hired May 2016 as a district technician using local capacity funding. Jeff Kjorness is the NRCS District Conservationist in Renville County. In the spring of 2015 Emily Swenson started an Administrative contract position with USDA. Sense Oct 2016 contract renegotiations are still being worked on and Emily has not been permitted to work sense Oct 2016.

2016 In Review

Renville County Soil & Water Conservation District

1008 West Lincoln Avenue

Olivia MN 56277

Phone: 320-523-1559

Website: www.renvilleswcd.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 (USDA 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:

Holly Hatlewick, Office
Administrator

Holly.hatlewick@mn.nacdnet.net

Cody Dale, District Technician

Cody.dale@mn.nacdnet.net

Mike Sandager, District Technician

Michael.sandager@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:

Jeff Kjorness, District Conservationist

Emily Swenson, Administrative Assistant

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
Doug Erickson, District 3
Rick Schmidt, District 5

Bob Fox, District 2
John Stahl, District 4

Renville County Administrator

Lisa Herges

Renville County Public Works

Larry Zupke, Ditch Inspector
Seth Sparks, Drainage Department Construction Manager

Renee Hannah, Admin. Asst.

Renville County Office of Environment & Community Development

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 Rauenhurst, 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

Ryan Bohn- Coordinator

Renville County Soil & Water Conservation District 2016 Accomplishments

Completed Projects

- State Cost-Share
 - 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 CWF Feedlot grant remains and a spring 2017 completion is planned. The project deadline was extended to all the project to be completed during 2017.

Education/Promotion.

- Classroom Education -Staff are available for presentations on various topics including the economics of conservation, career exploration, buffers, wildlife habitat & water quality issues.
- Staff members 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 and breakout sessions.
- 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.
- Karen Wermers, Ben Trochlil and Terrylea Ness 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 73 required inspections were completed in 2016.
- 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.

- Karen counties to promote CRP and CCRP end of the year she had prepared 101 CRP renewal contracts and 143 new contracts. The renewals totaled 656.48 acres and there were 1398.44 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 the CREP III program and RIM Buffer/Wetland sign-up. Approximately 80 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.
- Three RIM applications was accepted from the 2015-2016 RIM Wetland and RIM Buffer sign-ups, totaling 427.6 acres.
- RIM/CREP Site Inspections - 152 site inspections were completed in 2016. 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 3 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 \$12,174.00. The remaining projects are in the engineering and design stage and construction should be completed in 2017.
- Phase II resulted in \$894,000 to fund projects in Renville County. One project was complete in 2016 for a total cost of \$40,600.00. Remaining projects are in varying stages of planning/survey/design stages with the Technical Service Area staff and the more extensive projects with private engineering firms. Realistically most projects will not be completed until 2017 & 2018.

Local Capacity Funds

- The 2016 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 fund districts to complete their workload. At the end of 2016 the Renville County SWCD was working on the 2017 Workplan to submit to BWSR for this money. High priorities are updating technology, increasing Engineering capacity of the staff by purchasing equipment, and funding a technician position. This funding is needed in order to fulfill work on the buffer law, easements, and construction workloads. These funds will also help the SWCD work toward its Soil Health goals with additional equipment.

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

- There were over 50 landowner contacts related to various aspects of the WCA program and wetlands. There were 2 boundary type applications approved, 1 no-loss application and 1 replacement plans approved for wetland banking
- Cody Dale 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.
- Holly Hatlewick served on the Renville County Local Water Management Task Force.

Mining Permits Reviewed

- 4 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. Three 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 2016. 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. 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 2016. 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 necessarily 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.

