



Le Sueur County

Soil and Water Conservation District

2023 Annual Report

(1/1/2023-12/31/2023)



Multi-Purpose Drainage Management Water Storage Outlet after a 5" Rain Event Spring 2023

181 W. Minnesota St., Le Center, MN 56057

507-419-0365

www.lesueurswcd.org



A Year In Summary

2023 proved to be another productive year for the Le Sueur SWCD. The SWCD is now involved with 3 One Watershed One Plans; Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Board (approved in 2022), Lower Minnesota River East Joint Powers Board (planning process in 2023) and Minnesota River-Mankato Watershed (funded for planning in 2023). Staff continue to actively engage landowners within these watersheds building relationships and seeking projects. The work in these watersheds will provide the majority of our BMP implementation funding moving forward.

In 2023, SWCD funding was stabilized statewide when the legislature voted to pass a statutory appropriation for SWCDs through the Department of Revenue in the form of "SWCD Aid". In the past, SWCDs have only received funding through competitive grants, Clean Water Funds or county appropriations. This regular and predictable funding source will be used to streamline SWCD work without the need to apply for funding for basic office operation. This was a successful legislative session, as SWCDs have been working towards this goal for 8 years.



MASWCD Leadership graduates from SWCD Area 6, Left to Right: MASWCD Director LeAnn Buck, Le Sueur SWCD Manager Michael Schultz, Sibley SWCD Supervisor Bob Nielsen, Renville SWCD Resource Conservationist Kyle Richter and MASWCD Director Chuck Rau

In August of 2023, Le Sueur SWCD Manager Michael Schultz completed the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (MASWCD) Leadership Program in partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension. The MASWCD Leadership Institute is a dynamic educational experience with a proven track record of building leadership skills, confidence and professional networks to do effective conservation work across Minnesota. The program is a year long commitment where classes are held throughout the state. The SWCD is excited for Michael's skills to be utilized in Le Sueur County as a highly effective leader.

In 2023, LSC SWCD completed several projects. The SWCD installed **\$50,143** in structural projects, **\$187,936** in CREP Easement Construction, **\$65,115** in non-structural practices such as cover crops and Stip-till/No-till as well as **\$60,286** of county drainage construction work through the SWCD Drainage Inspector.

The mission of the Le Sueur County Soil and Water Conservation District is to educate and assist the public in land and water conservation.



Education & Outreach

SWCD Legislative Days

In March of 2023, the SWCD participated in the Minnesota Association of Conservation Districts Legislative Days. The focus of the event was to discuss and advocate for dedicated state funding for SWCDs in the form of SWCD Aid. This effort was successful and SWCDs has received stable funding from The Minnesota Department of Revenue. Staff Members met with local legislators:

- Rep. Brian Pfarr
- Sen. Rich Draheim



MASWCD Legislative Kick Off Meeting



SWCD Staff Mike Schultz and Karl Schmidtke met with Senator Rich Draheim (Left) and Representative Brian Pfarr (Right)



Education & Outreach

SWCD/Le Sueur County Flood Mitigation Bonding Proposal

In 2023, the SWCD partnered with Le Sueur County to pursue a County bonding request for flood mitigation in the Waterville Community. In October, Le Sueur County and Le Sueur SWCD hosted the State House Capital Investment Committee to hear a proposal to install water storage projects in the Cannon River watershed to help mitigate flooding in and around the City of Waterville. The SWCD and LSC requested \$1.2 million in State funding to slow and hold water in the watershed. Staff later presented to the State Senate Capitol Investment Committee in early 2024. The request will be considered along with many other project requests during the 2024 State Legislative Session.



Top Left: Le Sueur County Water Planner Holly Bushman presenting on the hydrologic changes in the watershed; Top Right: SWCD Manager Mike Schultz speaking about water storage and types of projects this funding will provide; Bottom Left: Example of a water storage project storage site; Bottom Right: Le Sueur County Commissioner Dave Preisler speaking to the committee.



Education & Outreach

SWCD Events

In May, Le Sueur SWCD staff presented at the ISG 2023 Agricultural Drainage + Future of Water Quality Tour. The SWCD highlighted Water Storage and Clean Water Funded projects.



Left: In April, Le Sueur SWCD staff Michael Schultz and Le Sueur County staff Holly Bushman Presented at the ISG 2023 Lakes Conference.

Right: Le Sueur SWCD staff Michael Schultz presented on projects that were completed around Lake Washington at the Lakes Conference.





Education & Outreach

Le Sueur SWCD District Manager Michael Schultz Completes MASWCD Leadership Institute

The 13th class of the MASWCD Leadership Institute celebrated the completion of the year long program in August 2023 in Baxter, MN. The Leadership Institute is designed to increase leadership skills of conservation professionals, like SWCD staff and supervisors, as well as resource professionals within state and federal agencies in Minnesota.

These conservation leaders join 300+ past program participants since the founding of the program in 1996. They explored topics like uncovering their unique leadership style, the importance of vision, effective communication and ethical decision-making. As part of the program, participants visit all areas of the state and learn from local and state partners. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources spent time with this year's cohort and featured them in the August Snapshots newsletter. Check out the full feature below.



Graduating MASWCD Leadership Class.



2023 August Snapshots
Subscribe to Snapshots

MASWCD institute cohort develops leadership skills, forges connections

Members of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District (MASWCD) Leadership Institute's 13th cohort are on pace to join the ranks of 300-some past participants from across the state who have expanded their professional networks and honed their collective skills to support each other in conservation work statewide. The last session of the yearlong institute is slated for this month.

The training is tailored to conservation professionals. Designed for soil and water conservation district staff and board supervisors, the training is also open to Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) staff and federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees.

"For me, it has been really perspective-bringing to get a deeper understanding of how conservation work is done across the state, and not just in my work area," said BWSR Board Conservatoinist Michelle Jordan, a member of the current cohort. "Now there are 28 other people statewide I would be completely comfortable calling with a question or to get their input on something."



The 2022-23 MASWCD Leadership Institute cohort visited the Minnesota State Capitol in mid-March to meet with legislators. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, cohort members would also travel to the U.S. Capitol.
Photo Credit: Lisa Hinz, University of Minnesota Extension

assessments, interactive exercises, peer-to-peer sharing and networking. Guest speakers from other organizations share their experiences in leadership development. The institute



Training includes

encourages participants to consider how they can contribute as leaders, regardless of where they fit in their organization's hierarchy, and encourages them to imagine how they



would like to grow their leadership skills. MASWCD has partnered with the University of Minnesota Extension to offer the institute since 1996. The institute integrates local, state and federal agencies that work with conservation programs.

"What we garner from (the institute), is that the members build proficiency in such critical areas as communication, team-building and visionary leadership that provide them with the skills to do effective conservation work across Minnesota," MASWCD Executive Director LeAnn Buck said. "It has also been making for stronger soil and water districts including in the areas of healthier governance and leadership roles not only in (each SWCD's) community but also in the association."

The current cohort's 29 participants have met in person for several two- or three-day sessions at sites across the state. By late July, the group had completed one online session and six in-person



Left: Le Sueur SWCD Michael Schultz participating in an exercise as part of the leadership class.

Right: Le Sueur SWCD Michael Schultz introducing MN DNR Commissioner Sarah Strommen to the Leadership Class.





Education & Outreach

MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Convention



Le Sueur SWCD Supervisors attended the MASWCD Annual Business Meeting at the State Convention.



Le Sueur SWCD Staff and Supervisors attended MASWCD Annual Convention in December



Education & Outreach

Water storage on landscape gets more focus and funding

Mankato Free Press

By Tim Krohn tkrohn@mankatofreepress.com

Jul 30, 2023

As Mike Schultz walks through the tall big bluestem native prairie grass on land next to the south shore of Lake Washington, pointing out five wetlands that have been restored, he says it was “the perfect project.”

The manager of Le Sueur County Soil and Water Conservation District said the 80-acre parcel was put into grassland in 2017 when the landowner enrolled it in the federal Conservation Reserve Program.

“But there was still a lot of serious erosion happening,” said Schultz, pointing to the rolling hills on the land.

The SWCD secured a Clean Water Fund grant to cover half the nearly \$100,000 cost of restoring five wetlands on the property, with the Lake Washington Association covering the matching amount.

“The Lake Washington group has been around a long time and is committed to water quality, so we’ve partnered with them and we work with landowners on projects. The German-Jefferson (lakes) group has kicked in money for projects, too.”

The wetlands slow the flow of water on the landscape, allow sediment to settle and then release water more slowly into tile outlets that flow into the bay of nearby by Lake Washington.

Schultz said the project was a perfect solution for reducing point-source water quality problems.

Growing movement

Storing more water on the landscape — in manmade storage ponds or by restoring wetlands — has long been seen as a way to filter sediment out of water before it gets to rivers and lakes, to reduce erosion, and to slow the flow of water to ravines, rivers and lakes.

But the concept has gained even more attention as more frequent heavy rainstorms and more efficient farm drainage systems have raised concerns about water quality and streambank erosion.

“There’s certainly interest in the topic,” said Rep. Paul Torkelson, R-Hanska, who has long worked on water quality issues, funding and building alliances between the ag community and conservation groups.

“Water storage is a bit tricky to do it right. If you store it in the wrong place, you can create more problems. But I believe water storage done in the right place can be a real benefit.”

Torkelson, a lifelong farmer, said there will always be tension between the two groups.

“But there is room to work together and I’ve always stressed that,” he said. “Find things that work for everybody and it can be done, but it’s tough.

“Too often we get locked into opposing camps, and we both think we have great ideas that can’t be questioned.”

The Legislature in the recent session provided \$17 million in funding for projects and pilot projects related to water storage, continuing a round of funding provided a couple of sessions ago.

“There’s been active groups looking at water storage, and now they have some money to work with,” Torkelson said.

The funding generally covers half of a project, with the landowner or others matching the funding.





Education & Outreach

Water storage on landscape—Continued

By Tim Krohn tkrohn@mankatofreepress.com

Schultz said one thing his SWCD has been looking at is finding those matching funds from someone other than the landowner, who may often get no financial benefit from a water storage project.

“I’ve done a lot of speaking to lake associations and say they need to find ways to kick in money if they want projects done,” Schultz said.

Le Sueur County has been one of the most active counties in the region in doing water storage projects on the landscape and as part of farm drainage ditch improvement projects. The county has multiple lakes and rivers and has seen flooding in its cities.

“Water storage is big for us. In 2014 the towns of Waterville and Elysian flooded, and we completed our One Watershed, One Plan that focuses on preventing flooding in downriver communities by doing water storage,” Schultz said.

The Le Sueur Watershed — located within Blue Earth, Faribault, Freeborn, Le Sueur, Steele and Waseca counties — also has been a primary focus for state and local agencies and water quality groups. That’s because the watershed is one of the most problematic in the Minnesota River Basin as high rates of ravine and bank erosion and heavy sediment loading into rivers occur in the watershed.

Torkelson said even though it’s difficult, the environmental and ag communities need to keep trying to work together and be open to listening to opposing views.

“When you talk about the positive impacts of farm drainage — and there are positive impacts because it’s critical to our production — sometimes environmentalists just shut you down and don’t want to hear it. There needs to be a balance,” Torkelson said.

“Water quality is a topic I’ve worked on for a lot of years — buffers and a lot of other issues. And it’s not going to go away, so we need to continue to explore the possibilities that work for producers and users and the environmental organizations.”

Soil health a focus

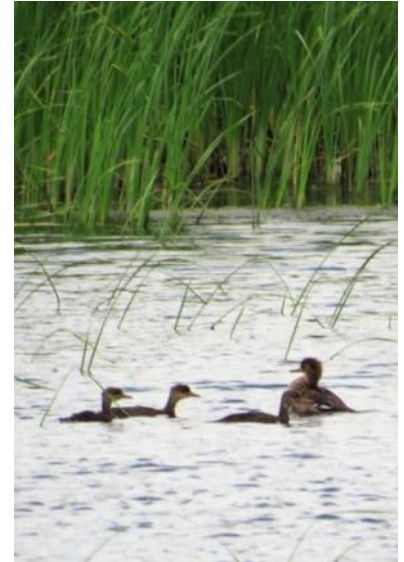
Jared Bach, of the Blue Earth County SWCD, said they’ve done and are planning to do some water storage on farm ditch systems.

“County Ditch 57 west of Mapleton we did a storage and sediment storage project using some lower areas that flooded frequently.” The low areas were redone to hold more water during heavier rains that then release the water slowly into the ditch system.

“We’re going to do some storage on County Ditch 56. That’s in the preliminary stages of planning and seeking grant funding,” Bach said. That ditch flows into Crystal Lake in Lake Crystal and has been the focus of reducing sediment flow from the ditch into the lake.

Bach said they are also working on some soil health initiatives, another area that has received more attention and funding recently. The idea is to improve farm soil health with methods such as cover crops, less tillage and other practices, which helps water quality and improves soil using less fertilizer.

They will be taking applications from county landowners from Aug. 1 to Sept. 15 for soil health projects, with landowners qualifying for grant assistance.





Education & Outreach

SWCD Board Conservation Tour

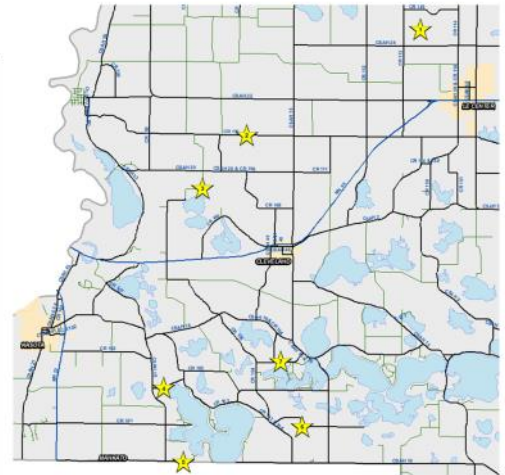
The SWCD Board and staff held their Conservation Tour in July. The tour highlighted the southwest part of Le Sueur County. The tour focused on the recent work the SWCD accomplished around Lake Washington. Projects included water storage and wetland restorations.

Stops on the tour displayed the candidates for Outstanding Conservationists. The first stop featured soil health practices Karl Heldberg implemented on his farm and the second was wetland restorations and water storage on the Schoemaker CRP land near Lake Washington.



2023 Outstanding Conservationist Tour

1. Macho/Traxler Grade Stabilization Structure
 2. Karl Heldberg*
 3. CD 37 416th St. Rock Armor
 4. Lake Washington Park/ Baker CRP
 5. Shoemaker Wetland Restorations
 6. Beckel Grade Stabilization Structure/ Water Storage Site
 7. Guentzel Wetland Restoration*
- Lunch at Westwood on Lake Washington
- * Outstanding Conservationist Candidate



July 11, 2023

Above: Map of the conservation tour sites.



Above: SWCD Board Supervisors Tour the Beckel Grade Stabilization Structure in the Lake Washington Watershed





Education & Outreach

Le Sueur County & SWCD Water Testing Clinic

The Le Sueur SWCD partnered with Le Sueur County to provide two water testing clinics. One clinic was held in May and another in November. The water was tested for Arsenic, Lead and Coliform Bacteria. A total of 15 homeowners attended the clinics.

Le Sueur County Water Testing Clinic

Thursday, May 11th 2023

Why Should I Test My Water?

Le Sueur County's drinking water is predominantly groundwater dependent (public or private wells). Additionally, aquifers that are present in Le Sueur County, supply drinking water to the metro area.

It is recommended to test your drinking water at least once per year. It is important to test your water in order to monitor potential contaminants that could be a risk to your health.

Sources of Pollutants & Contaminants In Drinking Water:

- Septic systems
- Fertilizers
- Pesticides
- Animals/Feedlots
- Landfills
- Mining activities
- Hazardous materials-paints, oils, cleaners, detergents, chemicals, etc.
- Abandoned or poorly constructed wells
- Naturally occurring
- Stormwater

Questions?

Le Sueur County Environmental Services
 Environmental Resources Specialist-Holly Bushman
 Phone: 507-357-8540
 Email Address: hbushman@co.le-sueur.mn.us

Water Testing Clinic

Water Testing Kits that are available in April:

- Nitrates
- Coliform Bacteria

Each test will cost \$17.00

To access a water testing order form, please contact the Environmental Services Department or visit the following website: <https://www.co.le-sueur.mn.us/684/Water-Testing>.

The water testing order form and payment **must** be submitted together. Cash or check is accepted. All order forms must be received by the Environmental Services Department no later than **Monday, May 1, 2023**

- Mailing & Physical Address: 88 South Park Ave, Le Center, MN 56057

For those who ordered a kit, there will be an informational meeting to learn more about the water testing clinic held on **May 8th** from **6pm-7pm** at the Le Sueur County Justice Center, 435 E Derrynane St, Le Center, MN 56057. Doors will be only be open from 5:30pm-6:00pm. Parking is in the west parking lot.

Drop Off Day for kits will be on **Thursday, May 11th** until **5:30 pm**. Any kits dropped off after **5:30pm** will not be accepted. **Kits cannot be dropped off before Thursday, May 11th**. Drop off location is: 100 W Minnesota Ave, Le Center, MN 56057.





Education & Outreach

Upper Cannon River Watershed Flood Risk Reduction Study

The initial Flood Study for the Cannon River Watershed was put on hold due to lack of funding. Le Sueur County applied for a grant through the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to obtain federal dollars to help pay for the study. The County was recently awarded funds. The funds will cover 75% of the total costs and there is a required 25% match component. Le Sueur County will partner with Bolton & Menk to continue efforts with the study.

The work that has already been completed thus far for the flood study includes preliminary watershed modeling and calibration of the Upper Cannon River Watershed. Tasks that still need to be completed include: finishing up modeling of existing conditions in the Upper Cannon River Watershed, installing the flood warning gauge coordination, assessing different concepts for flood reduction alternatives (locations, cost-benefit analysis), developing a report, and hosting public meetings. Projects and practices will be identified within the watershed and assessed on what will provide the greatest benefit for storing water on the landscape, reducing flooding impacts, and building resiliency for all communities within the study area. The study will provide opportunities for organizations to apply for different funding streams in order to implement projects and practices. The image located below is the study area. The study area includes the entire Upper Cannon River Watershed.

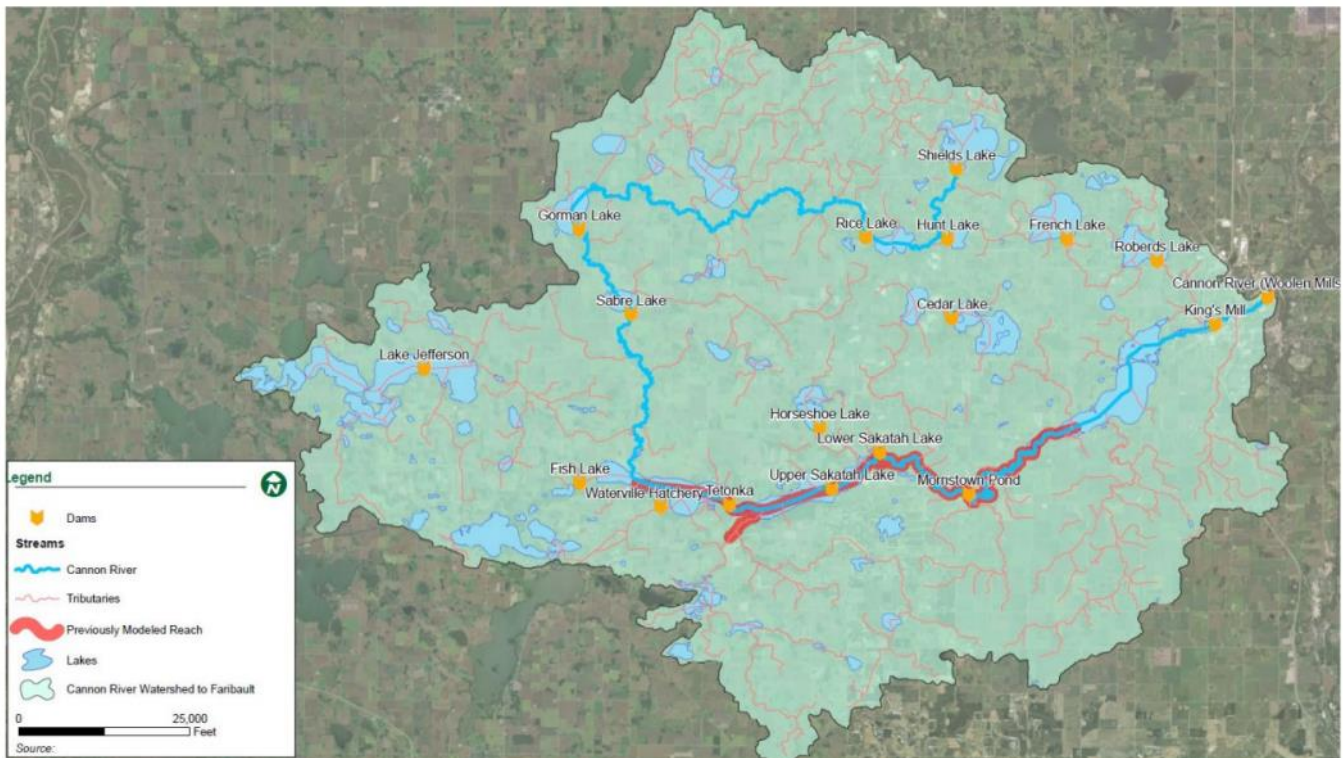


Figure 3. Upper Cannon River Watershed Flood Study Area

Photo Credit: Bolton & Menk

Article From Le Sueur County Environmental Services Newsletter



SWCD Programs

Outstanding Conservationist

The Le Sueur County SWCD Board of Supervisors chose the Heldberg family for the 2023 Outstanding Conservationists of the Year. Karl, Nancy, Garrett, Luke and Gretchen Heldberg run a dairy farm near Le Sueur in Sharon Township.

The Heldbergs are 3rd generation farmers, currently farming on land that was purchased in 1948 by Karl's father and uncle. Karl began dairy farming in 1997 on a rented dairy farm and in 2004 built the dairy on his current farm site. The Heldbergs milk 75 cows along with having young stock and dry cows on their pastures. They have a rotation of corn, alfalfa, small grains and cover crops.

The Heldbergs were selected as outstanding conservationists due to their dedication to soil health practices and incorporating those practices into their farming operations. Karl has no-tilled corn the past 3 years along with changing his corn planting date to maximize the spring growth cover crop productivity for both forage and soil health benefits. Manure is spread on growing cover crops to help reduce runoff and capture nutrients. Cattle are also grazed on cover crops and corn stalks in the fall allowing the manure to be spread naturally on the fields. This also alleviates some of the hauling and compaction issues that can occur.

Karl and his family are witnessing the benefits of incorporating soil health practices through increased water holding capacity and infiltrations rates on their fields. This helped grow healthy crops during the last few years of dry weather. Karl has been a great mentor for surrounding farmers who have questions about soil health practices and is willing to try new practices that have the potential to improve his farming operation.





SWCD Programs

SWCD Drill Programs

The SWCD has 2 seeders available for rent, a Dew Drop Seeder and a Truax No-Till Drill. The Dew Drop seeder is used for seeding small areas and can easily be used with an ATV, UTV or small tractor. It has an electric lift so no hydraulics are necessary to operate the seeder. Rent is \$60 per day. In 2023, the dew drop was used 2 times for a total of 3 acres.



The Truax No-Till Drill is used for planting larger areas. It can be used to plant cover crops, small grains and native seed mixes. The drill has a seeding width of 8 ft. The drill is available to rent for a minimum charge of \$120, or \$12 per acre. The rental charge includes delivery to your farm, calibration/set up and pickup of the drill when the seeding is completed. In 2023, 17 producers rented the drill totaling 136 acres.



Above: Le Sueur SWCD using the Dew Drop Seeder to seed buffers. Below is a photo of the inside of the small seed box on the Dew Drop Seeder.

Left: Le Sueur County producer seeding Native Grasses with the Truax Drill .



SWCD Programs

Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Organization

2023 Annual Report

Partners across the watershed are working together to address priorities within the Cannon River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. Activities in the Plan are split into three categories to include Resource Concerns, Landscape Concerns and Socioeconomic Concerns. Members are working on 11 activities related to Resource Concerns, 5 different Landscape Concerns and 1 Socioeconomic Concerns.

Within this Annual Report there are high level summaries of projects, events, studies, monitoring and funding.



Mission Statement:
Work collaboratively to improve and protect the natural resources within the Cannon River Watershed to ensure prosperity of our urban and agricultural communities.

Projects

- 58 agricultural structures including basins and grade stabilization structures
- 925 acres of agricultural management practices, primarily cover crops
- Prevented 2,336 tons of sediment from reaching priority streams each year
- Prevented 326 pounds of phosphorus from reaching priority lakes each year
- Sealed a large capacity well in Red Wing

Education

- Started a virtual learning series that covers a wide variety of topics
- Developed a logo and created a new website for the CRWJPO
- Worked with partners to offer drinking water testing at 2 clinics
- Hosted a native shoreland workshop, presented to local schools and multiple lake associations



Thirty people attended the native shoreland workshop in August at Ray's Lake Park

Contact Us
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Faribault, MN 55021
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cannonriverwatershedmn.gov



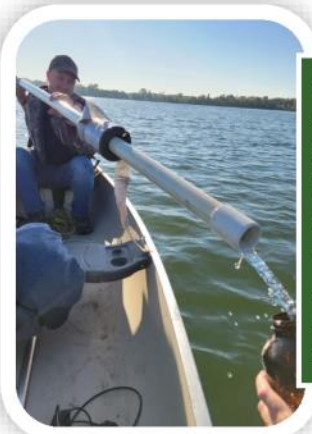
SWCD Programs

Plans & Policies

- Six Lake Management Plans in progress which will help prioritize watershed work and in-lake treatments.
- Prioritize Target Measure Application (PTMapp) used for calculating pollutant reductions and project prioritization.
- Supported the Upper Cannon River Flood Study which received funding from Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- Updated funding policies to incorporate grazing, feedlots, native shoreland plantings, broaden soil health options, and provide incentives for Conservation Reserve Program.



A series of three basins installed to reduce soil erosion in the Little Cannon River Watershed in Goodhue County



Staff collect a water sample from Lake Volney to analyze suspended sediment and phosphorous levels

Monitoring & Tracking

- Partnered with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) for water monitoring on 18 streams and 1 lake in the watershed.
- Tracked progress towards plan goals by compiling individual project data and coordinated with partners to identify and record other water quality projects completed within the watershed.

Grants & Funding

The CRWJPO has spent 93% of the first round (FY20-21) of Watershed Based Implementation Funding and 14% of the second round (FY22-23). Each Fiscal Year allocation was \$1,028,658. It is anticipated that funding levels will remain the same or increase in future years. CRWJPO also received \$30,000 to incentivize Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollment.



An interactive map of the watershed with priority areas and completed projects is available online. Scan the QR code or visit cannonriverwatershedmn.gov



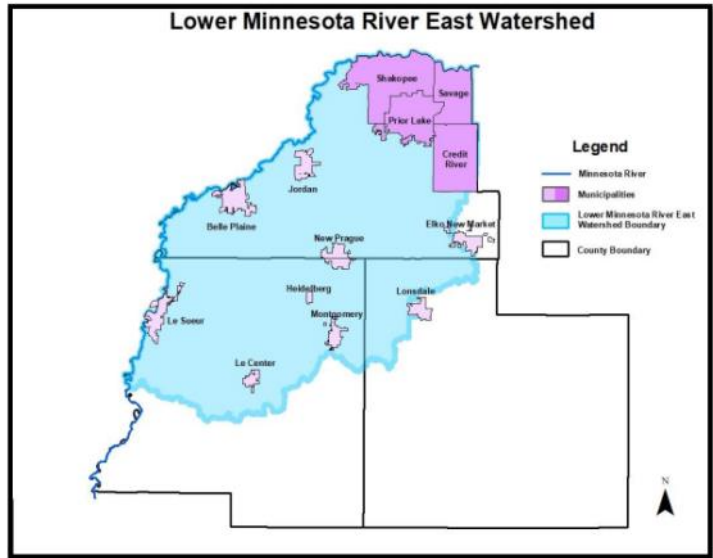
Follow CRWJPO on Facebook and YouTube



SWCD Programs

One Watershed One Plan, Lower Minnesota River East (LoMRE)

The Lower Minnesota River East One Watershed One Plan has been coming along in 2023. Over the past year, many meetings have been held and priorities have been identified. The group decided to create a Joint Powers Board known as the Lower Minnesota River East or LoMRE. The plan was released for comment in early 2024 with an expected completion date of late summer 2024.



Lower Minnesota River East Watershed Map

One Watershed One Plan, Middle Minnesota River– Mankato

The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) selected the Middle Minnesota River Mankato Watershed Planning Area for a planning grant for the One Watershed One Plan program. This is the final watershed within Le Sueur County that needs to start planning efforts in order to develop a 10 year comprehensive watershed management plan. The watershed includes the following local government units: Le Sueur County and SWCD, Blue Earth County and SWCD, and Nicollet County and SWCD. Additionally, there are three municipalities, which are MS4 communities, within the planning area: City of Saint Peter, City of Mankato, and City of North Mankato. Planning efforts are in the very beginning stages. Le Sueur County will provide updates on planning efforts on our website. The following webpage is dedicated to the Middle Minnesota River-Mankato One Watershed One Plan: <https://www.co.lesueur.mn.us/755/6616/Middle-Minnesota-River-Mankato-One-Water>.

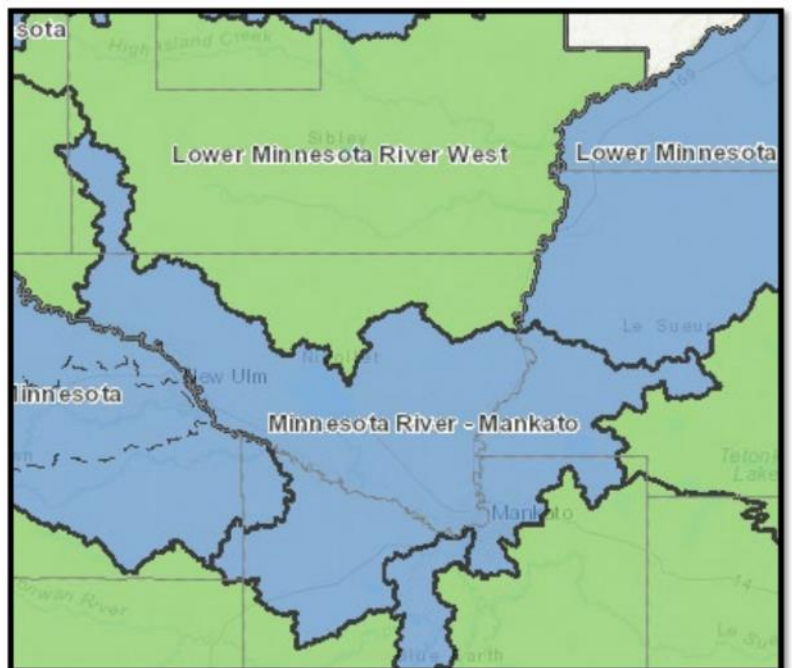


Figure 4. Middle Minnesota River-Mankato One Watershed One Plan Planning Boundary. Photo Credit: The Board of Water and Soil Resources-One Watershed One Plan Program



SWCD Programs

Wetland Conservation Act

Le Sueur SWCD is the Local Government Unit that oversees the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) on behalf of Le Sueur County. The SWCD addressed several wetland inquiries in 2023.

- 84 landowners consulted
- 9 WCA applications were approved
- 18 potential WCA Violations were investigated
- 1 Wetland bank seeding and construction was completed.
- 7 Wildlife Pond Requests



A WCA violation site where a landowner left spoil piles in the wetland.

Minnesota Agriculture Water Quality Certification Program

The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) certifies producers for managing the land within their operation in a way that protects water quality.

The Le Sueur County SWCD is the producer's first point of contact when applying for the program. The SWCD assists with the application process in which compliance is necessary of all existing applicable state water protection rules and regulations. Producers must have, if applicable, a feedlot permit, be in compliance of the MN WCA, a non-violating septic system, in compliance with pesticide and fertilizer application rates and follow shoreland and riparian protection rules.

Producers complete a Certification of Identity form giving permission to the SWCD to request records from the Farm Service Agency for their farming operation. Records are sent to the MN Department of Ag representative for further evaluation. Once the application and worksheets are complete, producers receive a payment of \$100. After final certification and authorization, a final payment of \$200 is given.

Certified producers receive regulatory certainty. They are deemed to be in compliance with any new water quality rule or law during the period of certification which is 10 years. They may use their status to promote their farm and/or business as a steward of water quality and will receive priority when applying for financial technical assistance on projects that promote water quality.

The Le Sueur County SWCD works to promote this program by sending out information encouraging producers to sign up. Letters were sent out, posters are on display in the lobby and information is available on the SWCD Facebook page or www.lesueurswcd.org. Currently there are 19 producers in Le Sueur County certified in MAWQCP.





SWCD Programs

Tree Program

In 2023, over 7700 new trees and shrubs were planted in Le Sueur County as a result of the annual SWCD tree program. A variety of hardwoods, potted evergreens and shrubs were available. Species such as oaks, maples, aspen and birch to shrubs like lilac, dogwood and plum were all available for purchase.

The SWCD District Technician assisted landowners with planning and designing new windbreaks on their properties and worked with Le Sueur County residents on replacement varieties favorable for old shelterbelts.



SWCD District Technician leaving with the tree planter and a load of trees for a Le Sueur County resident.

Plant Kits

In 2023 the LSC SWCD again offered native plant kits. The kits consisted of 36 individual plugs and 6 different species. SWCD offered a variety of kits to plant in different soil conditions ranging from wet to dry and sun to shade. 34 kits were sold in 2023.



Native plugs planted in an urban pollinator plot.

Food Plots

In partnership with the Le Sueur County Pheasants Forever Chapter, the SWCD gave out 15 acres worth of food plot corn and 5 acres of soybeans to 9 landowners. The Le Sueur SWCD has been in partnership with the local PF Chapter since the 1990s.



Le Sueur County Food Plot In September with seed from Le Sueur County Pheasants Forever.



SWCD Programs



Cost Share Program

SWCD staff had consistent work throughout 2023 with 4 construction projects dispersing **\$16,531.75** of SWCD cost share funds and total project cost with partner funds of \$50,143. The following projects were completed:

- 3 Water and Sediment Control Basins
- 1 Grade Stabilization Structure
- 1 Waterway





SWCD Programs

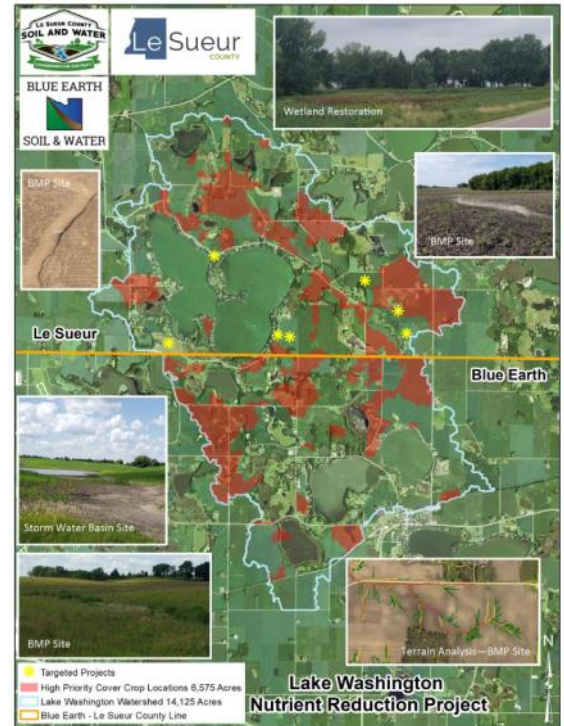


Lake Washington Nutrient Reduction Project

In 2020, the Le Sueur County SWCD was awarded \$310,250 from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources to address resource concerns in the Lake Washington watershed. These resource concerns were targeted in partnership with Le Sueur County and the Blue Earth SWCD. The Lake Washington Improvement Association pledged to pay all of the matching funds needed for the grant in the amount of \$77,563. They have provided much needed support for the project and partnership. A total of **\$300,966** has been spent to date in the Lake Washington Watershed with one year remaining with the grant.

Projects Completed to Date:

- 9 Water and Sediment Control Basins
- 4 Critical Area Planting Sites
- 5 Wetland Restorations
- 1 Grade Stabilization Structure
- 160 Acres Cover Crop With No-Till/Strip Till



Drilled Cereal Rye and Winter Wheat In Lake Washington Watershed



Grade Stabilization Structure Construction –Spring 2023

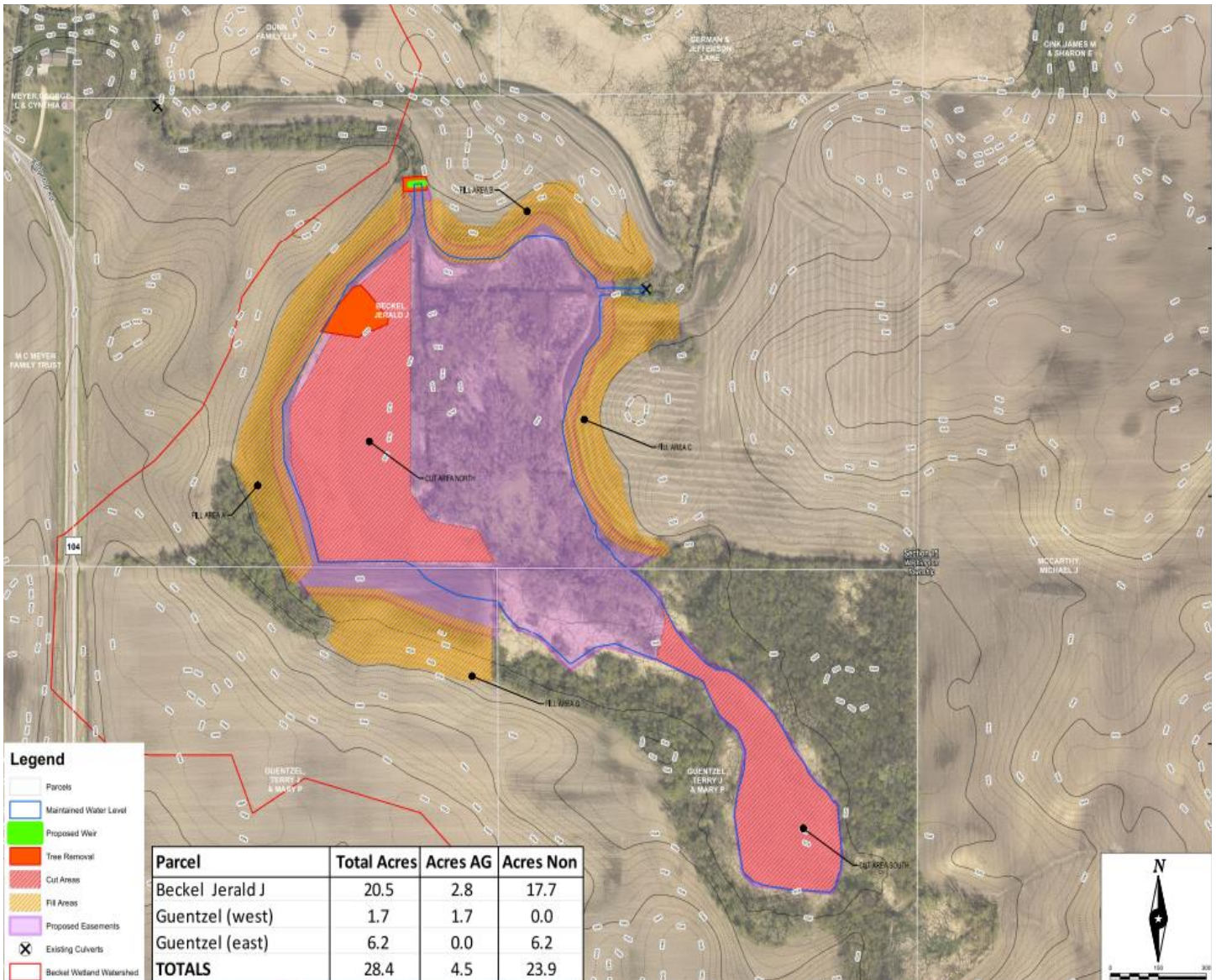


SWCD Programs



Patterson Watershed Storage Project

In 2021, the Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$2 million in grant funding for BWSR to develop a water storage program. The Le Sueur SWCD applied and was awarded a \$408,000 grant to complete a water storage project, with \$77,047 of matching funds coming from Lake Washington Improvement Association. In 2023, SWCD staff worked with multiple landowners to come to a final agreement on easement boundaries. In November, the landowners signed a 25 year easement document with the SWCD, that was recorded with Le Sueur County. The project will be put out for public bidding and construction will be completed in 2024.





SWCD Programs

Soil Health

2023 SWCD Cover Crops

- 979 Total Acres Seeded
- 250 Acres Applied by High Clearance Seeder
- 327 Aerial Applied Acres
- 402 Acres Drilled or Broadcasted after Harvest
- 7 Producers Planted Green into Standing Rye

2023 Strip-till/No Till

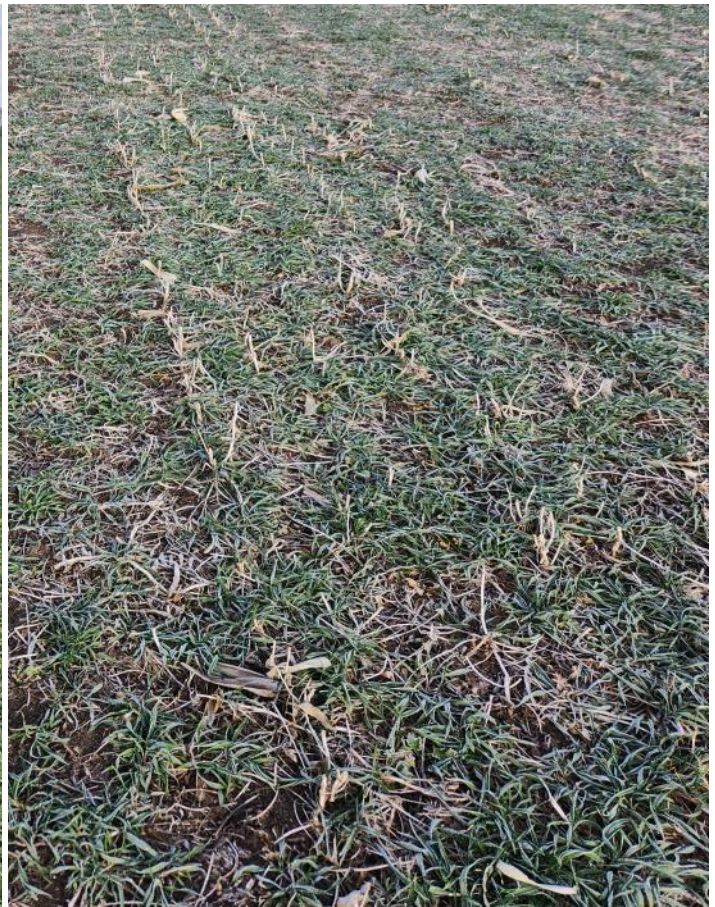
- Offered for the first time as an incentive program
- 101 Acres Enrolled



Drilled Cereal Rye/Radish after Sweet Corn Harvest



Drilled Cereal Rye/Winter Wheat after Corn Silage Harvest



Aerial Applied Cereal Rye/Turnips



SWCD Programs

Conservation Partners Legacy Grant MN DNR

In the spring of 2021, the SWCD was awarded a \$34,903 Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) Grant through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. In the fall of 2021 the brome was cut and baled, and the trees were removed in preparation for farming. Soybeans were planted by a local farmer in 2022. In 2023 the same local farmer planted oats for weed control and to continue the eradication of the brome. To increase the chances of seed to soil contact the DNR recommended some light tillage prior to broadcasting natives. In the fall of 2023 a local contractor broadcast seeded natives on 23 acres of the project. 3 different seed mixes were used based on the various soil types present.

The SWCD will close the grant out in 2024 when the wetland construction is completed.



Red: CPL Project Area Purple: Murphy WMA



Broadcast Seeding Natives



Oats Summer 2023



SWCD Programs



Walk-In Access

Walk-In Access (WIA) is a voluntary program that compensates landowners to allow public access for hunting on their land from September 1st through May 31st. With the number of hunters diminishing in the past decades, largely due to the lack of quality hunting land, the WIA program is more important than ever. A decrease in hunters means less support for wildlife and habitat; which in turn will have a negative effect on local wildlife populations. The WIA program will help sustain future generations of hunters while creating more local hunting opportunities. Le Sueur County currently has 3 parcels enrolled in the Walk-In Access program. Le Sueur County SWCD works with landowners to enroll land into the program.



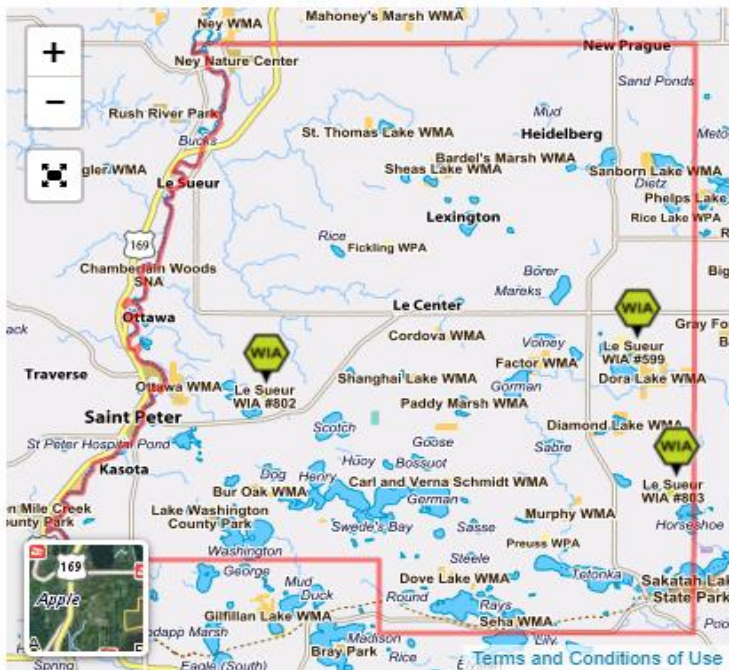
103.04 acres located in Cleveland Township



110.7 acres located in Kilkenny Township



69.05 acres located in Kilkenny Township



Yellow: Locations of WIA sites in Le Sueur County



SWCD Programs

RIM Wetlands



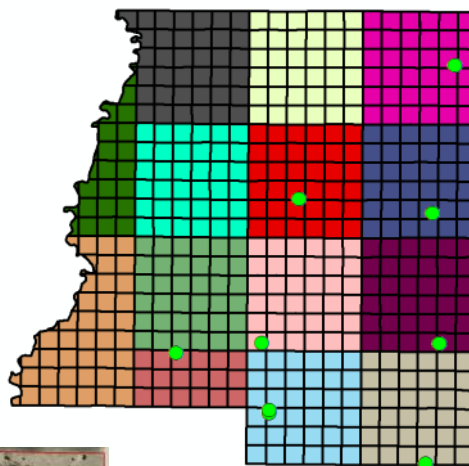
141.67 ac.
Lexington Township



87.0 ac. Easement
Waterville Township



31.55 ac. & 1.34 ac. Easements
Elysian Township



73.88 ac. Easement
Washington Township



54.58 ac. Easement
Montgomery Township



26.95 ac. Easement
Lanesburgh Township



50.21 ac. Easement
Cordova Township



33.24 ac. Easement
Kilkenny Township

RIM Wetlands is a conservation easement program that targets drained wetlands to be restored on both crop and non-cropland. When landowners enroll in the RIM program they enter into an agreement with the State of Minnesota to put a perpetual conservation easement on their land. The landowners are required to maintain the conservation practices in place, while not farming or building within the conservation easement boundary. In 2023 LSC SWCD helped 9 landowners get their applications accepted into the program. 2 easements have been recorded and 7 are still in the recording process.



SWCD Programs



RIM Wetland Structure Repair

In 2023 a landowner from Waterville Township approached the SWCD with concerns about maintaining a water control structure on a RIM WRP easement. The control structure was constructed in 1991. Due to the location of the structure in the wetland, the landowner struggled to access it to clear cattail debris. When the structure was obstructed with debris the wetland would rise well above the designed pool elevation. The SWCD worked with BWSR to make a plan to both make maintenance easier for the landowner and deter cattail debris from obstructing the control structure. To accomplish these goals a 40 ft by 6 ft. rock path was built out to the structure so the landowner could easily access it if needed. To address the cattail debris obstructing the structure the contractor put in a CMP riser with rock rip rap around the structure and placed a metal grate on top. The contractor also excavated a deep entrance channel in front of the structure to deter cattail growth around it.



Rock Access Road



Metal Grate



Existing Agri Drain Structure



Excavated Channel to Structure



SWCD Programs



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Completed Wetland Restoration



Tile Break & Reroute



Berm

In the fall of 2023 the SWCD along with BWSR completed a 72.6 acre CREP wetland restoration located near Montgomery. 2 smaller basins were restored this past fall and the easement also contains 2 larger basins and upland vegetation that was previously resorted through the Conservation Reserve Program. The restoration work included tile breaks, multiple berms, and tile reroutes.



SWCD Programs



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Completed Wetland Restoration



Surface ditch reroute completed



Digging surface ditch reroute



Water control structure and rip rap



Tile outlet

In the summer of 2023 the SWCD along with BWSR completed a 52.5 acre CREP wetland restoration located near St. Thomas. Both an 18 acre wetland basin and adjacent native vegetation upland was restored. The restoration work included tile breaks, a surface ditch reroute, existing tile was outleted at higher elevations, a water control structure was put in and a 2 ft deep scrape was dug to remove existing sediment build up in the basin.



SWCD Programs



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Native Vegetation Restoration



Spring 2023



Summer 2023

Pictured above is the native vegetation restoration of the CREP easement located near St. Thomas. Prior to restoration the field was in a bean/corn crop rotation. In the spring of 2021 oats were planted for weed control until natives were seeded. In the late fall of 2021, a dormant seeding was completed using a no-till drill. The following summer in 2022 the field was mowed as needed for weed control. The pictures above are the results from a successful native seeding and establishment in 2023. The landowner continues to manage for weeds as needed.



Ditch Inspector

Drainage Ditches

The ditch system completed 24 projects in 2023. Projects included: ditch cleanings, repairing bank sloughs, replacing culverts, repairing farm crossings, trapping beavers, removing beaver dams and tree removal.

In 2023 the ditch system continued the process of mowing 1/3 of the county ditches. The program helps to alleviate woody and noxious weeds in the ditch buffer. Between 2019 and 2023 the Le Sueur County/SWCD has sprayed and mowed every ditch system.



CD37 Culvert repair and armor project in Cleveland Township.



CD36 A cleaned out dam located in Elysian Township.

In 2023 the Le Sueur County Drainage Authority initiated \$1,076,755.78 of work throughout the drainage systems on improvements and engineered repairs, while the Ditch Inspector oversaw \$60,286.68 of the construction work. All drainage systems incurred costs were from repairs, engineer reports, correction of records, redetermination of benefits, ditch spraying/mowing, general inspections and labor.



County Ditches/ Buffer Compliance



State Buffer Law & Compliance

In 2015, Minnesota established a statewide Buffer Law that requires perennial vegetative buffers of 50 feet along lakes, rivers and streams and buffers of 16.5 feet along county ditches. These buffers help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment. The deadline for implementation of buffers on public waters was November 1, 2017. The deadline for County ditches was November 1, 2018.

In 2023, the Le Sueur County SWCD completed field checks, staked and sent out letters to non-compliant parcel landowners in an effort to get to 100% compliance with the Minnesota Buffer Law. The SWCD will be monitoring the public water and county ditch buffers at least once every three years. Le Sueur County is currently 99% compliant on public waters and over 90% compliant on County Ditches.



Established Ditch Buffer in Le Sueur County



2023 County Ditches Projects

County Ditch 29 Peat Fire

In November 2022, a wild fire started along County Ditch 29 and spread for a mile along the county ditch. The ditch banks are made up of primarily peat. Peat is an accumulation of partially decayed vegetation or organic matter. Once peat is ignited it can smolder for many months or years if it is not suppressed. Le Sueur County asked for aid from the MN DNR and through working together, the peat fire was suppressed. The damage from the peat fire was repaired in the fall of 2023.



Top Left: Completed repair work, Top Right: Leveling the settled areas from the peat fire and a landowner meeting with Le Sueur County, MN DNR Fire and CD 29 Landowners Below: DNR Fire completing an inspection on digging out the peat fire.





2023 County Ditches Projects

County Ditch 38

The SWCD Drainage Inspector and Le Sueur County have been working for 4 years to complete a ditch re-route project on Spur 3 of JD38. The ditch has been eroding a Township road and needed to be addressed. Instead of doing a temporary fix, ISG was hired to engineer a reroute of the ditch so the Township road would not wash out during flooding.



Left: Located in Kilkenny Township. Judicial Ditch 38 Spur 3

Below: CD23 Culvert repair.

County Ditch 23

CD23 is a complex ditch system with a large watershed. The system has many problems that need to be addressed. One of these problems was a driveway culvert that was starting to erode. The crossing was repaired and rip-rap was placed on the driveway to prevent further erosion.





2023 County Ditch Mowing

County Ditch 38

In 2023 the SWCD Ditch Inspector with the County Ditch Authority's approval conducted a pilot program where the Ditch Specialist mowed 1/3 of the county ditches. A tractor was rented and the County purchased a brush hog attachment. The Ditch Specialist spent 100 hours mowing buffers. From 2019 to 2022 the County used a 3rd party consultant to complete the mowing and spraying of weeds/brush along the County Ditches. The Ditch Inspector, SWCD and County were able to gain valuable insight to improve future management of weed and woody vegetation control on ditches.

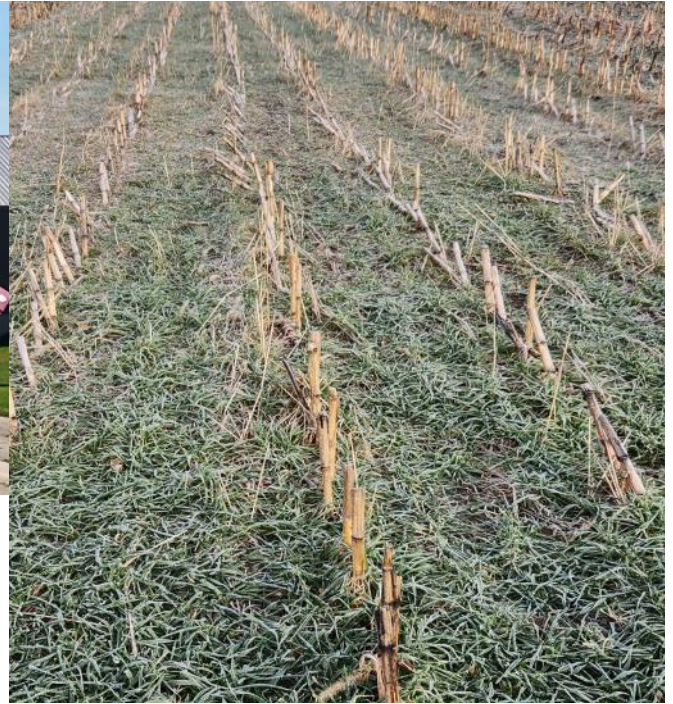




SWCD Projects



*Plane getting loaded with cover crop seed for aerial application.
6th Year of partnering with Scott County to reduce application costs*



Drilled Cereal Rye After Corn Silage Harvest– Fall 2023

*Below: Strip-tilled Field
2023 was the 1st Year the SWCD offered a Strip Till
Incentive program*





SWCD Projects



Grade Stabilization Structure



Restored Wetland as part of a wetland bank



Lake Washington Wetland Project a year after installation. Left: Spring snow melt filled the wetland. Right: wetland drying up late summer as drought hits the region, with vegetation starting to establish.



Multi-Purpose Drainage Management Water Storage Outlet after a 5" Rain Event Spring 2023



SWCD Office

Le Sueur SWCD Supervisors



Greg Entinger (District 1)



Earle Traxler (District 2)



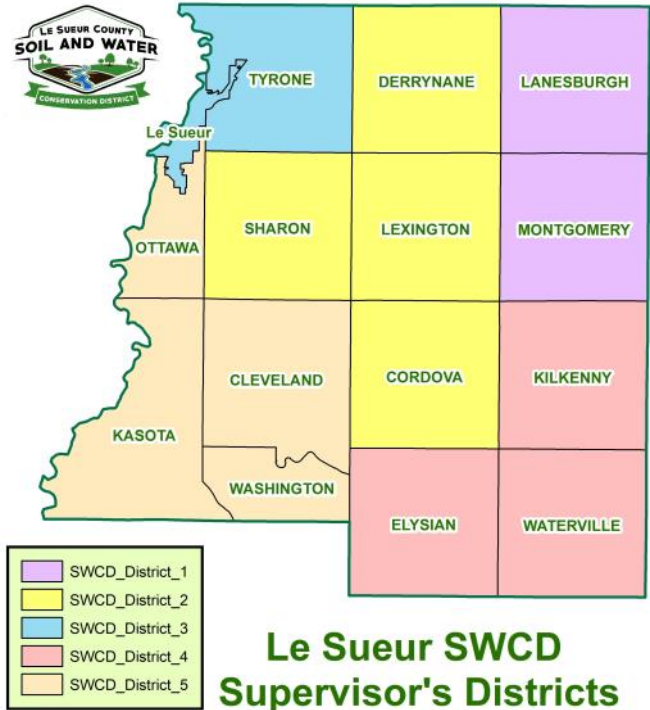
Pete Thelemann (District 3)



Cletus Gregor (District 4)



Jim Struck (District 5)





SWCD Office

Le Sueur County SWCD Staff



Michael Schultz, District Manager



Sue Prchal, Program Specialist



Joe Jirik, District Technician

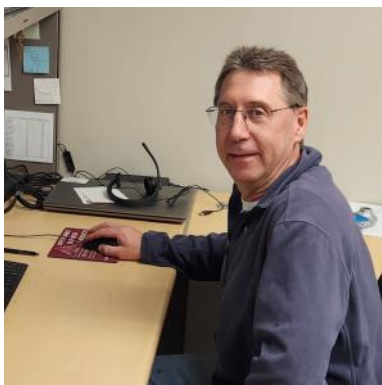


Karl Schmidtke, Resource Technician



Nik Kadel, Ditch Specialist

Le Sueur Natural Resource Conservation Service Staff



*Steve Breaker,
District Conservationist*



*Kim Scheffler,
Soil Conservation Technician*



*Collin Williams,
Civil Engineering Technician*