

WE, THE STEELE COUNTY

**SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION
DISTRICT**

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMIT TO YOU
THE**

2009 ANNUAL REPORT

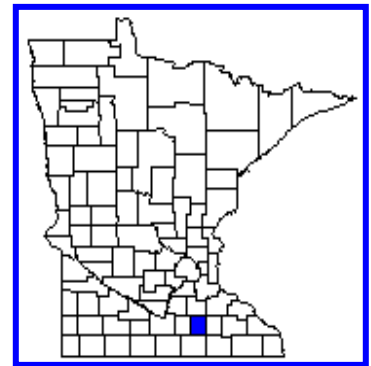
2009 STEELE COUNTY SWCD ANNUAL REPORT

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Prime Responsibility of the District is to coordinate assistance on private lands to control erosion, prevent flooding, enhance wildlife, develop recreation, build the economic base, and to manage our soil and water resources.

Introduction:

The Steele County Soil and Water Conservation District is a legal subdivision of State Government operating under provisions of the Minnesota State Statutes Chapter 40 and Chapter 110B. The District is located entirely within Steele County and includes all land, public and private, towns and villages. It is governed by a five-member board of elected supervisors, who are responsible for directing all District activities. The Board meets on the second Wednesday of each month.



Soil and Water Conservation is essential to the preservation of our environment. Our goal is to implement a soil and water conservation plan on each acre in Steele County. The District's success is a result of the efforts of the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, the Extension Service, the Department of Natural Resources, the Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Steele County Commissioners, and the landowners of Steele County.

We submit to you, this 2009 Annual Report, 2009 Financial Report, 2010 Steele Co. SWCD Calendar and Annual Plan of Work for 2010.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE SOIL WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- Conservation Planning
- Planning and Design of Conservation Practices
 - Including:
 - Erosion Control Practices
 - Residue Management Systems
 - Windbreak and Wildlife Tree Plantings
 - Animal Waste Control Systems
 - Manure Application Plans
 - Drainage Systems
 - Wetland Restorations
- Cost-Sharing for Erosion Control Practices
- Assist with implementation of the Food Ag. Conservation Trade Act:
 - Conservation Compliance Plans
 - Swampbuster and Sodbuster
 - Conservation Reserve Program
 - Wetland Reserve Program
 - Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
- Administer Minnesota Conservation Easement Programs:
 - Reinvest in Minnesota
 - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
 - Permanent Wetland Preserve Program
- Implementation of the Steele County Comprehensive Water Plan
- Implementation of the Wetland Conservation Act
- No-Till Drill Rental

PRODUCTS AVAILABLE FROM THE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- Colored Marking Flags
- Digitized Soil Survey Data
- Educational Materials
- Plantskydd Animal Repellent
- Steele County Plat books
- Tile Probes
- Tree Fertilizer Tablets
- Tree Weed Barrier Matting
- Quality Tree Nursery Stock
- Quality Wood Stakes

DISTRICT GOVERNING BOARD

Kyle Wolfe, Treasurer
James Klecker, Vice Chairman

Mark Ihlenfeld, Bd. Chrmn.

David Melby, Reporter

Dan Hansen, Secretary

DISTRICT STAFF:

Daniel Arndt
Susan Condon
Eric Gulbransen
Danielle Waldschmidt

AREA OF REPRESENTATION

City of Owatonna
Berlin, Blooming Prairie
and Summit Townships
Clinton Falls, Deerfield,
Medford, and Merton
Townships
Havana, Meriden and
Owatonna Townships
Aurora, Lemond and Somerset
Townships

District Manager, Technician
District Administrative Secretary
District Resource Conservationist
District Farm Bill Technician

COOPERATING AGENCIES & GROUPS:

BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES:

Chris Hughes Board Conservationist, Mankato

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PERSONNEL:

Noel Frank District Conservationist
James Smith NRCS Soil Conservation Technician

AREA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PERSONNEL:

John Nicholson Area Conservationist
Aaron Peter Area Engineer
Willis Goll Engineer
Mary Weis Civil Engineer Technician

FARM SERVICES AGENCY PERSONNEL:

Doug Westphal County Executive Director
Ken Prestegard Committee Member
Lonny Klemmenson Committee Member
Sharon Katzung Committee Member

EXTENSION SERVICE:

Brad Carlson Extension Educator

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES:

James Wilson District Forester
Jeanine Vorland District Wildlife Manager
Emily Hutchins Private Lands Specialist

DISTRICT ACTIVITIES

Much of our conservation project activity in 2009 was due to heavy washing rains in June of 2008. Soils are most susceptible to erosion on years when heavy rains occur in spring and early summer before the crop canopies. This was the case in 2008, and it resulted in several landowners installing large grassed waterways to eliminate gullies that formed in crop fields. Landowners also installed several water and sediment control basins to address gully erosion on hillsides. Conservation activity in 2009 is as follows:

	Number	Acres
No-till	26	4,100
Grassed Waterways	8	---
Water and Sediment Basins	6	---
Erosion Control Structures	2	---
Wetland Restorations	11	152.3
Native Prairie	3	96.2
Wildlife Tree Plantings	1	9.0
Animal Waste System	2	---
Filter Strips	12	80.0

Sign Is Erected At Straight River Marsh

The Straight River Marsh wetland restoration project located in south central Steele County has been ongoing since 1996. This project came to fruition as a result of the efforts of several partners including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, MN Board of Water and Soil Resources, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the District. Currently nineteen landowners have enrolled twenty five parcels. A total of 1537 acres have been restored to wetland and upland native prairie habitat. The Marsh is known as a major stop over site for migrating waterfowl in the spring. It has become a popular bird watching area for area birders. A sign was erected recently to identify the project area and acknowledge the sponsors.

MN Wetland Conservation Act Activities

In 1991 the State of Minnesota passed the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act. The purpose of the law is to:

- Achieve no net loss in the quantity, quality, and biological diversity of Minnesota's remaining wetlands.
- Increase the quantity, quality, and biological diversity of Minnesota's wetlands by restoring or enhancing diminished or drained wetlands.
- Avoid direct or indirect impacts from activities that destroy or diminish the quantity, quality, and biological diversity of wetlands, and
- Replace wetland values where avoidance of activity is not feasible and prudent.

Steele County in cooperation with the District administers WCA in the County including all of the cities in the County. The 2009 WCA report reflects that ninety eight landowners requested assistance during the year regarding wetlands. Four applications for no-loss determinations were made and granted. We are pleased to report no wetland impacts in the year 2009.

CRP Activity

Thirty-four new contracts were reviewed and approved by the District.

Danielle Waldschmidt was hired as the Farm Bill Technician in October. This position is shared with Rice, and Waseca Counties, and is funded by BWSR, DNR, Pheasants Forever, and the Districts. The purpose of the Danielle's position is to accelerate the implementation of conservation programs that result in more acres of grass and wetlands for water quality and wildlife habitat. Her duties include:

- Marketing conservation programs that achieve grass and wetland cover.
- Developing conservation plans for these programs
- Practice implementation
- Mid-contract management planning
- General office assistance

Danielle is a welcome addition to our staff.

The District Is An Active Member Of The Following Organizations

National Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Southeast Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Hiawatha Resource Conservation and Development Council
Southeast SWCD Technical Support Minnesota Joint Powers Board
Cannon River Watershed Partnership

Visit Our Website

In an effort to better serve the citizens of Steele County we have established a website. For the latest news and information about the Steele County SWCD log on to the site at www.steeleswcd.org.

Outstanding Conservationists

Each year the SWCD recognizes an Outstanding Conservation Farmer, Outstanding Windbreak, and Outstanding Wildlife Conservationist. These award winners are recognized for there outstanding efforts of protecting our soil and water resources in there respective categories. The 2008 recipients were:

Outstanding Conservation Farmers –Lynn and Grace Miller

Outstanding Windbreak-Greg and Pam Spatenka

Outstanding Wildlife Conservationist –Kevin and Kristen Deml

State Cost Share Program



In 2009 the District applied \$11,785.51 in State Cost-Share dollars. This money was directed at high priority practices that control soil erosion from water. We were able to install 5 water and sediment control basins, 1 vegetated chute, and 1.9 acres of grassed waterways with this amount of money. Most practices were cost-shared at the 75% level.

Tree Program

The District had another successful tree and shrub sale in 2009. Landowners through the county planted 12,535 bare-root trees and shrubs and 1890 potted conifers. We appreciate the landowners that are conscientious about energy conservation and wildlife habitat.



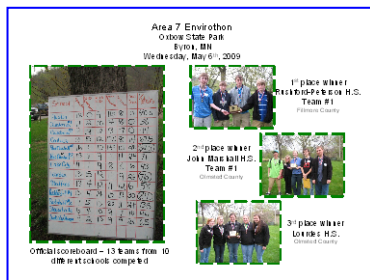
Promotion and Education

Promotion and education are high priorities of the District activities in 2009 included:

- Established a Steele Co. SWCD Website
- Organized and published a 2010 Conservation Calendar
- Sponsored a Fair Booth
- Recognizing an Outstanding Conservation Farmer, Windbreak and Wildlife Conservationist
- Sponsored the Environmental 4-H Conservation Trophy
- Sponsored and Invasive Species Field Day
- Sponsored a Contractors Meeting
- Distributed Soil Stewardship Week Materials to county schools.



2009 SE MN ENVIROTHON



The Envirothon is an outdoor learning event for high school students in grades 9 through 12. The teams consist of 4-5 members from the same high school and/or organization/association. At the state level it is one of the state's largest environmental education initiatives. The state program is coordinated by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), with assistance from local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). It starts at a local area, ours being the SE MN area of

11 counties. The Soil and Water Conservation Districts promote this event usually the first week in May.

Last year was our 16th year of competition. The competition was held on May 6th at Oxbow Park located just outside of Byron, MN, we had 13 teams in competition from 10 different schools. Along with 5 main topics of Forestry, Soils, Water Resources, Impacts on Natural Resources and Wildlife there was an oral presentation on **Biodiversity in a Changing World**. The tests were very competitive. Over 900 students participated in the state-wide area competitions.

The winning top 3 area teams then went on to state competition at the Ironwood Springs Christian Ranch near Stewartville MN on May 18th. There were over 168 students at the competition. The top team then went on to represent Minnesota in the Canon Envirothon held at University of North Carolina in Asheville, August 2-8, 2009.

2009 NRCS REPORT

BY NOEL FRANK
NRCS DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST



The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has continued to deliver Federal assistance and programs to Steele County once again in 2009. The NRCS delivery is “tailored” by the local SWCD to adjust federal financial and technical assistance to the local needs and situations.

Programs offered by NRCS dominate the assistance, because programs offer financial assistance as well as technical assistance to producers. However, NRCS and SWCD offer landowners and operators technical help without program dollars on a daily basis dealing with many natural resource problems.

Federal Conservation Programs in Steele County mainly include: the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

In 2009, EQIP was used to fund \$195,000 of new contracts including no-till incentives, invasive species control, grassed waterways and water and sediment control basins. The EQIP program offers financial assistance to a wide variety of resource concerns.

The CRP program is on-going and approximately 40 new contracts were developed in 2009. Many of these new contracts were expiring old contracts. CRP is used mainly for filter strips along ditches, creeks and wetlands. CRP, also, has been used to idle and restore farmed wetlands to their natural state for the term of the contract.

The WRP continues to be a very strong program in Steele County. With a county having so much hydric soil and potential to be wet, this program has appeal to many land owners. This program pays the landowner a one-time payment to permanently retire the cropland from Ag production and restore all wetlands and upland to its’ original hydrology and cover type. In 2009 over 1000 acres of WRP were signed up by several landowners. Work to restore these areas will take several years to complete. Work in 2009 was also completed on two prior year easements of over 220 acres. The wetlands are now restored and the prairie is planted. This program offers permanent resource protection and greatly improves wildlife potential. WRP work was also completed on over 15 existing easements for maintenance purposes, including prescribed burning and unwanted tree control.

NRCS is Steele County will continue to work closely with the Steele County SWCD to accomplish conservation on the land. We thank you, Steele Co. SWCD for this partnership.

