

# 2008 DISTRICT ACTIVITIES

## **Clean Water Legacy Grant**

Steele County was successful in acquiring a \$266,000 Clean Water Legacy Grant in 2008. The grant was used to fund an extensive rain garden – storm water control system located at the Medford Public School. The system will not only control and treat storm water; it will also serve as an environmental learning site for Medford students. The project is located on the north and west sides of the Medford school adjacent to County Road 12.

Larry Berkland, former Steele County assistant County Engineer, was instrumental in acquiring this grant and initiating this project.

## **District Embarks On Easement Maintenance Program**

Maintaining quality native prairie on the uplands of permanent conservation easements has been an ongoing challenge for easement owners. The primary problem is the encroachment of invasive species like wild parsnip, European buckthorn, willow, and cottonwood trees.

In an effort to assist easement owners with this problem the District established the service of spot spraying. We were also successful in securing two grants to assist in this endeavor. The first grant is through the Board of Water and Soil Resources. It is called the Cooperative Weed Management Grant, and its purpose is to assist landowners in controlling invasive species on wildlife type lands. The second grant is through the Minnesota Conservation Corp. The purpose of this grant is to complete controlled burns on existing native prairie habitats. Approximately 375 acres were spot sprayed by the District crew in August. The controlled burns will be completed on 167 acres by MCC in the spring of 2009.



## **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 New 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](http://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 their outstanding efforts of protecting our soil and water resources in their respective categories. The 2008 recipients were:

Outstanding Conservation Farmers - James and Margaret Deml  
Outstanding Windbreak - Curtis and Cheryl Linge  
Outstanding Wildlife Conservationist - Mike and Liz Belina

## **State Cost Share Program**



In 2008, the District applied \$5,740.00 in State Cost-share money to practices that control erosion by water. This included \$4,045 invested in 3.3 acres of waterways and \$1,425 for water and sediment control basins.

## **Tree Program**

In 2008, the District had another successful tree and shrub program. Landowners throughout the county planted 10,350 deciduous bare root plants, 6,500 bare root conifers and 1,650 potted conifers.

This wouldn't be possible without landowners that are conscientious about energy conservation and wildlife habitat.



## **Promotion and Education**

**Promotion and education are high priorities of the District activities in 2008 included:**

- Established a Steele Co. SWCD Website
- Organized and published a 2008 Conservation Calendar
- Sponsored a Fair Booth
- Recognizing an Outstanding Conservation Farmer, Windbreak and Wildlife Conservationist
- 4H Conservation Trophy
- Sponsored a strip-till field day
- Sponsored a Conservation Tour
- Held a Tree Day Open House with DNR Forester
- Sponsored a Contractors Meeting
- Distributed Soil Stewardship Week Materials to county schools and churches



## 2008 SE MN ENVIROTHON



The Envirothon is an outdoor learning/competition 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 on May 1st at Camp Winnebago located just outside of Caledonia, MN, we had 14 teams in competition. Along with 5 main topics of Forestry, Soils, Water Resources, Impacts on Natural Resources and Wildlife there was an oral presentation on ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES – IMPACTS ON NATURAL RESOURCES. The tests were very competitive.

The winning top 3 area teams then went on to state competition at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center in Fergus Fall on May 14th. There were over 150 students at the competition. The top team from Minnesota then went on to National competition at the Canon Envirothon that was held at Flagstaff, Arizona.



## 2008 Steele Co. SWCD Fair Booth



The Steele SWCD has had a display at the fair for as long as anybody can remember. In 2008 we were able to include a display depicting how to design a windbreak. This display was donated by Joe Gibson (son of Robert and Lorie Gibson) of Blooming Prairie Twp.

Joe built the display in 2006 and entered it in the Forest Resource Division at the fair where it was judged to be the Grand Champion entry. From there the display went to the State Fair, where he also received the Grand Champion ribbon.

This display demonstrated Joe's interest in the natural community, which was sparked by his parents. This started years ago when his parents installed a farmstead windbreak and wildlife plantings on their property. Most recently they have restored native prairie on marginal cropland through the CRP program.

# 2008 NRCS REPORT

BY NOEL FRANK  
NRCS DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Steele County is proud to have had a successful year in 2008. Jim Smith is back in full swing since his return home from active duty in Iraq, now more than a year ago.

Program activity was quite strong in 2008, considering the uncertainty of many economic factors. Application of conservation practices were completed on time, in most cases. Commodity prices are back down from a year ago. Whether that is good or bad, it seems to be a little more normal. When the commodity prices were so high, it was more difficult to get producers interested in conservation. Now with prices back to previous years levels interest in the program activity has somewhat rebounded.

The CRP interest is still slow but steady. FSA raised rental rates in 2008 helping to spur interest in the filterstrip and wetland types of CRP. In 2009, over 50 CRP contracts will expire and we are hopeful that we can re-enroll the majority of these contracts.

EQIP has remained strong in 2008. Over \$190,000 in new contracts were approved for the 2008 signup. Practices vary from invasive species control to no-till to animal waste systems. Application for prior year EQIP contracts progressed smoothly. Landowners have followed through with their multi-year contracts and have completed the majority of practices in a timely manner.

The WRP is also very active in Steele County. Work was completed for the wetland restoration on a large easement of more than 100 acres. Management of existing easements has become a significant workload item. Controlled burns, tree spraying and management mowing was all part of keeping high quality grassland and prairie on the permanent easements. The NRCS and SWCD stress the importance of proper management of these easements, now and in the future.

Every year seems to go by faster than the previous. We still wait for the role out of the new farm bill, but we are close now. So far it appears like conservation programs and technical assistance will be a priority of the new administration. We hope we will continue to merge national and local goals together through the unique partnership we have with the Soil and Water Conservation District here in Steele County.

