The Swift County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a local government agency providing conservation and resource management services. In cooperation with federal, state and local agencies, the District provides technical assistance, cost-sharing and natural resource management information and education. Landowners, businesses, industry and agencies may request these services.

2019 Annual Report

Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Chairman – Dale Schlieman
Vice Chairman – Mark Weimerskirch
Secretary – Carl Ahrndt
Treasurer – Orvin Gronseth
PR & I – Scott Olson

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT STAFF
District Manager – Andy Albertsen
Conservation Technician – Dalton Herrboldt
Office Manager – Sheri Gades
Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist – Gemma Kleinschmidt

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
District Conservationist – Melanie Dickman (Acting)
Soil Conservationist – Thomas Tjepkes
Soil Conservation Technician – Rick Gronseth
Assistant State Conservationist – John Matz, Marshall
State Conservationist – Troy Daniell, St. Paul

BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES
Executive Director – John Jaschke, St Paul
Board Conservationist – Douglas Goodrich (Acting), Marshall
Wetland Specialist – Lynda Ponting, St. Cloud
Clean Water Specialist – Brad Wozney, St. Cloud
Buffer and Soil Loss Specialist – Paul Erdmann, St. Paul

Pictured L to R - (Front) Melanie Dickman, Sheri Gades, Gemma Kleinschmidt
(Back) Andy Albertsen, Rick Gronseth, Thomas Tjepkes, Dalton Herrboldt
Sitting (left to right): Carl Ahrndt, Mark Weimerskirch, Dale Schlieman
Standing (left to right): Scott Olson, Orvin Gronseth

Scott Olson - Public Relations
District I
Dale Schlieman - Chairman
District II
Carl Ahrndt - Secretary
District III

Orvin Gronseth - Treasurer
District IV
Mark Weimerskirch - Vice Chairman
District V
What is a Soil and Water Conservation District?

A SWCD is a local unit of government that manages and directs natural resource management programs at the local level. SWCDs work in both rural and urban settings, and assist private landowners and other entities of government to carry out various programs related to conservation, land use, and improvement of soil, water and related resources.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are political subdivisions of the State. Supervisors serve for four-year staggered terms; generally, two or three of an SWCDs five board supervisors are up for election every two years. These positions have been locally elected officials since SWCDs began to be formed in 1938. Dating back to 1971, these office positions have been available on the November ballot as a nonpartisan office.

One of the main areas SWCDs address is that of providing soil and water conservation services to owners of private lands. Privately owned land currently makes up about 78% of the land in Minnesota. The process of managing these private lands, whether agriculture, forest, lake, or urban, is key to protecting Minnesota’s quality of life for all residents. SWCDs work with a variety of individuals, from landowners to homeowners, crop consultants to bankers, producers to township officials, and everyone in between. Working with these individuals, the SWCD can address a broad area of resource concerns including: erosion control, flood prevention, wetland restoration, groundwater management, water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, community education, and more.

All across Minnesota, SWCDs are trusted to provide the needed technology, funding opportunities, cost share and educational services because they are well established in each community, governed by local leaders and focused on conservation of local soil and water resources. SWCDs work with a variety of individuals on a variety of projects across diverse landscapes. While initially created to assist with conservation on agricultural lands, SWCDs have expanded their roles to meet the needs of their respective counties. This includes forested land, lakes, and urban areas. This diverse work means that SWCDs are partnering with cities, townships, and watershed districts to put conservation of all shapes and sizes on the landscape. An example of this is the SWCD partnering with the Swift County Parks and Drainage to install side inlet structures on ditches.

Cost share funding available through each Soil and Water Conservation District is meant to be used for erosion or sediment control or water quality improvement projects/practices that are designed to protect and improve soil and water resources. There are many projects and practices that fall under this requirement. Examples include, rain gardens, cover crops, water and sediment control basins, grassed waterways, side inlets, alternative tile intakes, and many others. Call our office to find out if your project qualifies, or if there may be an alternative funding source.
Soil and Water Conservation District staff and supervisors build partnerships with public and private, local, state and federal entities to develop locally-driven solutions to natural resource concerns. We work with landowners every step of the way from planning to implementation.

Some of the programs the Swift SWCD and their partners offer include: tree planting, no-till drill rental (10’ and 12’ available), selling native grass and flower seed mixes, designing cover crop seed mixes, Walk In Access Program (WIA), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP), Ag Best Management Practice Loan Program (AgBMP), Nitrate Testing Clinics, Educational and Outreach Events, and more!

Our work results in cleaner water, healthier wildlife habitat, better soil, and a collaborative relationship with the community. Soil and water are the basis for life, it is our goal to work with landowners to ensure the long-term sustainability of these vital resources. The Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District is committed to providing high quality technical, financial, and educational assistance to landowners and land managers of Swift County by promoting sound stewardship of our land and water resources.

**SWCD Services and Programs**

- Technical and financial assistance through state cost share for installation of conservation practices. For 2019, the SWCD provided cost share on one rain garden, one streambank stabilization, one diversion, four side inlet control structures, and 12 alternative tile intakes. Additional tile intakes were scheduled to be installed but the wet fall prevented their completion. Project Profile sheets were created for each completed project and they are posted on the Swift SWCD website. **Total cost share funds provided to Swift County landowners in 2019: $26,281.72. These projects will have a combined estimated savings of 57.88 tons/year of sediment and 66.37 pounds/year of phosphorus.**
- Dalton Herrboldt works with the tree planning, planting, and fabric installation. For 2019, there were five tree plantings, and the district sold 4,455 bareroot trees, 860 potted trees, 193 tree tubes, and 11,838 feet of tree fabric.
- Member of the Technical Evaluation Panel for the Wetlands Conservation Act.
- Provide two native grass drills for conservation seeding. The 10’ Haybuster drill was rented for 257 acres while the 12’ Truax was rented for 81 acres.
- Assist walk-ins and customers – provide information or direction to a contact person.
- Report financials into the eLink program for grant management as required by BWSR. The SWCD was able to close out the 2018 Buffer Law Grant, 2018 Technical Training Team Grant, 2018 Buffer Cost Share Grant, 2019 Conservation Delivery Grant, and 2018 Local Capacity Grant.
- Support NRCS with filing and customer assistance. The backbone of our organizations is excellent customer service.
- Tom Orr serves as County Ag Inspector for Swift County as contracted through the SWCD. Tom monitored county and township road ditches this year looking for new populations of Wild Parsnip and Leafy Spurge. He was able to talk the county into acquiring a spraying rig for controlling weeds in county ditches rather than mowing.
- Andy Albertsen works with the AgBMP loan program. Two loans were approved for 2019, one $50,000 loan for conservation tillage equipment and one $200,000 loan for a strip till machine.
- Gemma Kleinschmidt provides Farm Bill assistance in cooperation with NRCS for CRP and WRP, promotes and manages the RIM/CREP programs for the county, and attends local MN Prairie Plan team meetings. Gemma worked with landowners to sign up for CRP and CREP, 96 CRP conservation plans were written in 2019, totaling 1,337 acres. Three CREP applications were submitted and approved, which will result in 182.8 acres being permanently protected in 2019. Dalton performed 52 site investigations on RIM/CREP easements.
- Andy Albertsen attends the Chippewa River Watershed Association and Pomme de Terre River Association meetings monthly and assists with cost share applications.
- Pope-Swift Cooperative Weed Management Area helps identify invasive species in Pope and Swift Counties and provides invasive species control using biological and chemical methods through contracting with local partners. Weed of the Week articles were published in the Agralite News. The CWMA this year offered cost share for pasture spraying, 75% not to exceed $500 per contract. Three Swift County landowners received contracts, however, only one was able to spray.
Gemma assists MN DNR with promotion of the Walk-In-Access (WIA) program and helps enroll interested landowners. One additional WIA site was enrolled this year, bringing the grand total to four sites equaling 440 acres in Swift County.

Andy Albertsen administers the State Buffer Law in Swift County & assists landowners throughout the process. By the end of 2019 Swift County was nearly 100% compliant on all buffers. Less than ten parcels needed to be seeded in the fall, but the wet weather proved to be extremely difficult.

The SWCD sells native grass seed and assists landowners with seed mix selection. The SWCD had 10 sales of seed for 234.7 acres.

The SWCD offers ATV seeding services for smaller areas. We ended up seeding a total of 19 acres with the ATV this year. We also purchased a 48” cultipacker in the fall to use for obtaining better seed to soil contact. We were able to use it on one site.

DNR Observation Wells – The SWCD monitors 28 observation wells monthly for nine months. Readings are entered online and available to the public on the MN DNR Cooperative Groundwater Monitoring webpage.

Rainfall Monitoring – Six sites in Swift County are used to monitor precipitation. Reports are submitted monthly to the Minnesota Climatology Network.

Education Activities

Outstanding Conservationist Award – Schuerman Family Farm (Daren, Kim, and Jordan) received the award this year but were unable to attend the State Convention in Bloomington. They were featured in the newsletter and at the fair.

Arbor Day – Each 6th grade student in the KMS School received a conifer tree to plant.

Newsletter – Two newsletters were printed in partnership with Swift County Parks, Drainage, and Wetlands. They were mailed to every address located in Swift County. Approximately 5,600 copies were distributed for each mailing.

Envirothon – Encouraged participation in the event, although no one participated from the local schools. SWCD Staff assisted with Area 2 Envirothon held at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center.

Nature Day – 5th & 6th grade students from Benson and KMS schools visited 18 different learning stations related to conservation of soil and water. T-shirts were provided, 200+!

Swift County Fair, Conservation Booth was staffed during the 4-day fair. One rain barrel was given away during the free sign up.
The SWCD adopted a three mile stretch of Minnesota State Highway 9, from County Road 20 north to the sugar beet plant. The ditch was cleaned in the fall.

The 1st Annual Tree Open House was held; cider, coffee, and cookies were served. Another open house is planned for early 2020.

The first CRP Establishment Workshop was held at McKinney’s in Benson. Approximately 30 landowners attended to learn about proper site prep, selecting seed mixes, how cost share works, and what to expect from your planting. Vendors were invited to set up a booth and discuss their services.

Soil Health Chat – A soil health chat is a locally hosted event to provide area farmers and producer with an opportunity to connect with others currently using soil health practices like cover crops, strip/no-till, and more. This event was held at McKinney’s on July 11th.

Life in the Pits Field Day – Swift SWCD co-sponsored an event with Renville and Yellow Medicine SWCDs in Granite Falls. The event consisted of soil pits dug in various field locations. Speakers at each pit explained different soil-related topics. There were about 30 participants.

Agency Coordination

Pomme de Terre River Association – The PDTRA will have an approved Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan in 2020 after working on the plan for the past 2+ years. The completed Plan will come with dedicated watershed implementation funds totaling ~$715,000. The PDTRA also received a MPCA 319 Grant for over $300,000 to provide technical and cost assistance for various conservation practices. The PDTRA also created a soil health team of a dozen farmers across the watershed. One meeting was held in 2019 with interest to have follow up meetings moving forward.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture – The District works with the MDA in administering the MN Ag Water Quality Certification Program in Swift County. The SWCD is currently working with five producers to get certified. One of them has already applied and received cost share through the MAWQCP for sealing irrigation wells. The SWCD also partnered with MDA to collect water samples from Shakopee Creek twice per month, or after every significant rainfall. The samples taken were tested for pesticides. Another program the SWCD assisted the MDA with was the Township Nitrate Testing program. Sample collection kits were mailed to Hegbert, Fairfield, Tara, Clontarf, Six Mile Grove, Marysland, Moyer, Shible, Appleton, Edison, West Swift County CAMP
Bank and Swenoda townships. Well owners were instructed how to collect samples and return them to the lab for testing. Summarized results will be available in early 2020.

- **Chippewa River Watershed Association** – The CRWA has been reviewing its structure and will soon have SWCD Supervisors as voting members on the CRWA Joint Powers Board. This revision will set up the CRWA for a future One Watershed, One Plan. Currently, the Technical Advisory Committee (SWCD and county staff) are developing a Public Participation Plan with MPCA that includes a summary of educational programs that SWCDs lead across the watershed, and a plan to create or bring back events like the Annual Meeting, Paddle Events, and a Pints, Pies, and Pollinators event.

- **Minnesota Pollution Control Agency** – The SWCD received a two-year Surface Water Assessment Grant (SWAG) from the MPCA. This grant provides funding to the SWCD for water quality monitoring. Seven streams sites around the county are monitored one to three times per month from April through September. Sampling parameters include temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, conductance, secchi tube, hardness, E coli, chloride, chl-a, total phosphorus and total suspended sediment.

- **Natural Resources Conservation Service** – The District works with NRCS to provide state matching funds when federal funds don’t cover up to 75% of the total costs. The SWCD and NRCS work closely to ensure resource concerns in the county are addressed.

- **Minnesota Department of Natural Resources** – Staff worked with the DNR to hold two public meeting in March and December about the Community-based Aquifer Management Program (CAMP). The CAMP is a civic engagement effort designed to explore and define a community's unique groundwater story. The DNR is working with communities in southern Minnesota that are interested in knowing more about their aquifers. Land use decisions are water use decisions and aquifers may have many users. Knowing the full groundwater story can help citizens and communities align future goals to reduce use, risks and costs associated with the entire water system - from groundwater, to supply, to waste and recharge.

**Other**

- Clint Schuereman, SWCD Supervisor since 1979, passed away in January 2019. His position on the board was filled by Scott Olson of Hegbert township.
- SWCD staff attended Legislative Days at the Capital in March. Staff met with Representative Tim Miller and Senator Andrew Lang. Discussion centered around long-term SWCD funding.
Surveying Gully Erosion
Pomme de Terre Soil Health Team
Surveying a Washout
Root Wads on a Streambank Stabilization
Installing an Alternative Tile Intake
Seeding a CREP Easement
Tree Open House

CRP Establishment Workshop

Potted Trees for Planting

SWCD Cost Share Cover Crops

12’ Truax No-Till Drill