



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.

# 2023 Annual Report

Swift County Soil and Water  
Conservation District



## **Swift SWCD Board of Supervisors**

Chairman – Dale Schlieman  
Vice Chairman – Mark Weimerskirch  
Secretary – Scott Olson  
Treasurer – Orvin Gronseth  
Public Relations & Information – Alan Golden

## **Swift SWCD Staff**

District Manager – Andy Albertsen  
Conservation Technician – Dalton Herrboldt  
Office Manager – Sheri Gades

## **Pheasants Forever Staff**

Senior Farm Bill Biologist – Gemma Kleinschmidt

## **Natural Resources Conservation Service**

District Conservationist/Area Team Lead – Melanie Dickman  
Non-Supervisory District Conservationist – Brett Carlson

## **Board Of Water and Soil Resources**

Executive Director – John Jaschke, St Paul  
Board Conservationist – Jason Weirnerman, Waite Park  
Wetland Specialist – Cade Steffenson, Waite Park  
Clean Water Specialist – Brad Wozney, Waite Park

### **Images on Cover:**

*Top: J-Hook/Stream Barb installed on streambank stabilization project, Fairfield Twp.*

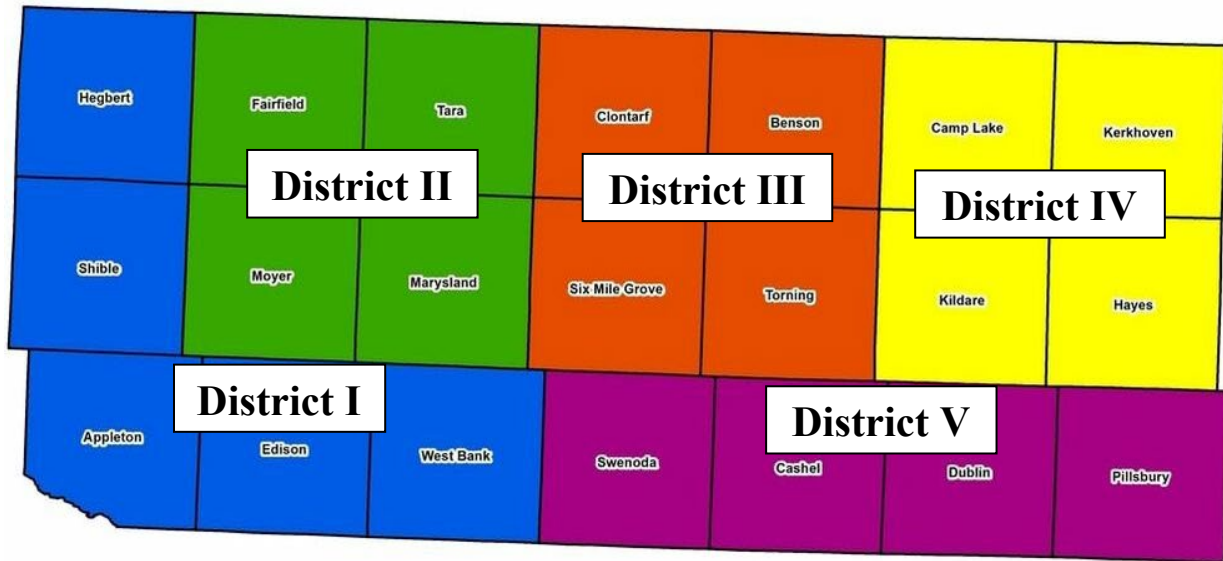
*Middle: Jared House (Grant SWCD) running the Rainfall Simulator at the Soil Health Field Day near Brandon, MN.*

*Bottom Left: Andy planting trees on a windy day.*

*Bottom Right: Wrapping up a streambank stabilization project in Benson Twp.*



*Left to right: Orvin Gronseth, Dale Schlieman, Scott Olson, Alan Golden, Mark Weimerskirch*



**Scott Olson – Secretary  
District I**

**Orvin Gronseth – Treasurer  
District IV**

**Dale Schlieman – Chairman  
District II**

**Mark Weimerskirch – Vice Chairman  
District V**

**Alan Golden – Public Relations  
District III**

## **2023: A Brief Review**

A year of firsts was the theme for 2023 for the Swift SWCD. We were back to having our Tree Open House event in the first part of the year, and folks were eager to come out for tree cost share, the first time we've offered it in several years. This cost share resulted in 12 tree planting conservation contracts that addressed soil health by reducing wind erosion. It was a busy planting season as we had a total of 16 plantings and installed six miles of tree fabric. The program was so successful and popular that we'll be bringing it back for 2024.

Another first this year was the creation of the Swift SWCD Backyard Habitat Program. This program provides a flat rate payment of \$1,000 per acre for landowners wanting to convert their idle pasture or lawn grass to native grasses and forbs. Lately there has been increased interest in lawn conversion, so the SWCD wanted to create an offer to fill this need in the Swift County community.

In the first year of implementation of our first Clean Water Fund grant, we made several outreach efforts to introduce the SWCD to farmers in the Benson and Appleton areas. These targeted areas are the focus for increasing soil health practices. Several conversations were had, with additional follow up meetings being planned for over the winter.

On the theme of grants, we applied for our first Conservation Partners Legacy grant, available from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. This grant was directed towards a specific project, repairing a failed outlet on Hart Lake in Shible Township. We were informed in late 2023 that we were selected for funding! This grant comes with a whole new set of rules we are learning about, but we are excited to get this project knocked out in 2024.

In the late summer, all board and staff members participated in a Strategic Planning Meeting that was phenomenally facilitated by Jason Weirnerman, our Board of Water and Soil Resources Board Conservationist. We covered several hard-hitting topics that challenged us all to think critically about how to take Swift SWCD to the next level. There were several follow up components because of this meeting, which included creating a vision statement, adopting a fund balance policy, completing a full program evaluation, and performing a workload analysis for all staff. Topics yet to be addressed include revise existing and creating a new job description for a soil health position, establish a county funding target, and develop an outreach and engagement strategy plan.

A major theme from the strategic planning meeting was that in order for the Swift SWCD to achieve their lofty goals, the issue of office space needed to be addressed. This led to the calculated decision to purchase our own office building late in 2023. We are beyond excited for what this will mean for the SWCD and look forward to making the move before tree season kicks off in 2024. Fortunately, we will be right next door to the USDA Service Center making the transition easier for all the individuals we serve. Stay tuned for our grand opening in spring!

*In conservation,*

*Andy Albertsen, District Manager*

## What is a Soil and Water Conservation District?

An 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 SWCD's 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.



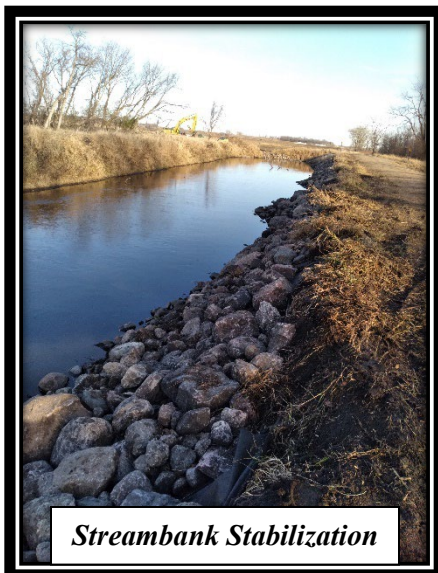
***Quilt and Garden Tour, Benson***

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 (Ag BMP) Loan Program, Nitrate Testing Clinics, Educational and Outreach Events, and more!

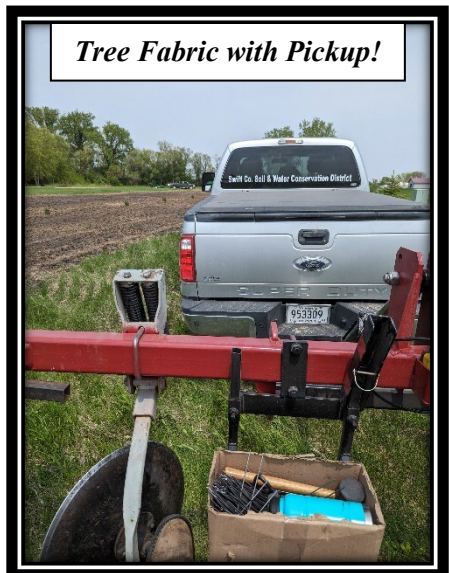
Our work results in cleaner water, improved wildlife habitat, healthier soil, and a collaborative relationship with the community. Soil and water are the basis for life, it is our goal to work with landowners to ensure the long-term sustainability of these vital resources. The Swift County Soil and Water 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.



***Streambank Stabilization***



***U of MN Field Day, Morris***



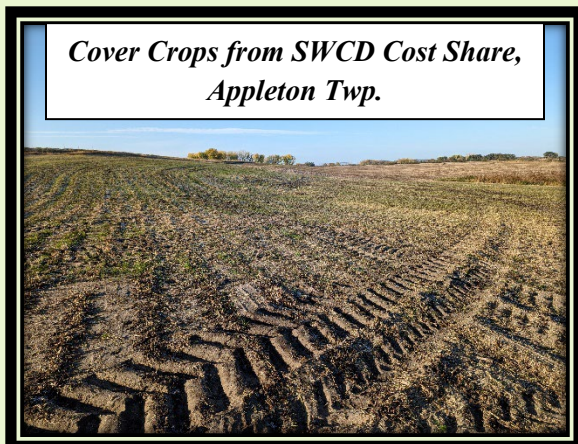
***Tree Fabric with Pickup!***

## SWCD Services and Programs

- **The bread and butter of the SWCD is our cost share program. The table below outlines projects that were installed in 2023.** For 2024, cover crops, a streambank stabilization, a dike repair, and a series of water and sediment control basins are scheduled to be installed across the county.

<b>2023 Conservation Practices</b>					
<b>Type</b>	<b>Number Installed</b>	<b># of Contracts</b>	<b>Sediment Savings</b>	<b>Phosphorus Savings</b>	<b>SWCD Cost Share Provided</b>
Cover Crops	62ac	2	51.3 T/yr	12.4 lbs./yr	\$1,888.70
Streambank Stabilization	2	2	43.45 T/yr	36.94 lbs./yr	\$54,168.75
WASCOB	4	1	84.69 T/yr	84.69 lbs./yr	\$66,073.13
Alternative Tile Intakes	8	4	8.0 T/yr	12.0 lbs./yr	\$9,459.01
Rain Garden	1	1	0.5 T/yr	0.5 lbs./yr	\$2,445.18
Tree Plantings	12	12	30.0 T/yr	1.1 lbs./yr	\$14,175.00
CRP Incentive	26.85ac	1	22.0 T/yr	8.0 lbs./yr	\$8,055.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27 + 88.85ac</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>239.94 T/yr</b>	<b>155.63 lbs./yr</b>	<b>\$156,264.77</b>

- The SWCD also sells native grass and flower seed and assists landowners with seed mix selection. In 2023, the District had 17 sales for 193.7 acres.
- Reported financials into the eLink program for grant management as required by BWSR. The SWCD was able to close out the several state grants.
- Supported NRCS with filing and customer assistance. The backbone of our organizations is excellent customer service. The office was down to one NRCS employee for most of



the year, requiring the SWCD to step up to a higher level with assisting customers.

- Tom Orr served 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. Met with county highway staff to discuss prioritizing locations for spraying wild parsnip. The county was receptive to this idea as it will save costs and be more effective.

- Andy works with the Ag BMP loan program. It was a busy year, with three new loans for conservation tillage equipment. The three loans combined for \$377,000. There is less than \$70,000 available in the revolving loan fund for Swift County landowners looking to purchase reduced tillage equipment, planters to handle cover crop residue, and almost anything that would lead to a water quality benefit. We are hopeful to receive additional funding after the 2024 legislative session.



*Custom Built Strip Till Assembly*

- Dalton works with the tree planning, planting, and fabric installation. **2023 was our busiest planting year since Dalton and Andy started. This was aided by the availability of cost share for certain types of tree planting projects.** Cost share will continue to be offered in 2024.

<b>2023 Tree Program</b>				
<b>SWCD Plantings</b>	<b>Bareroot Trees Sold</b>	<b>Potted Trees Sold</b>	<b>Tree Tubes Sold</b>	<b>Feet of Fabric Sold</b>
16	4,758	2,269	453	31,653 (6.0 miles)

- Andy is a member of the Technical Evaluation Panel for the Wetland Conservation Act. The TEP met on over ten wetland related issues in 2023.
- Andy attended the Chippewa River Watershed Association and Upper Minnesota River Watershed Steering Committee meetings monthly and assisted with cost share applications.
- Gemma Kleinschmidt provided Farm Bill assistance in cooperation with NRCS for CRP, promoted and managed the RIM/CREP programs for the county, and attended local MN Prairie Plan team meetings.
- Provided three native grass drills for conservation seeding. A breakdown of the drill rental program is below.



*Delivering Trees to Elementary Schools on Arbor Day*



2023 No-Till Drill Program		
Seeder	Number of Users	Acres
10' DuraTech	12	225.2
10' Haybuster	14	180.3
12' Truax	15	384.6
ATV Seeding	2	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>792.2</b>



*Installing Tree Fabric,  
Six Mile Grove Twp.*

- Gemma worked with landowners to sign up for CRP and CREP. **She wrote 145 CRP conservation plans in 2023, totaling 2,269.4 acres.** No new CREP applications were submitted in 2023, but she continues to finalize the two RIM Wetland Easements that were approved.



*Hart Lake Outlet Repair, Shible Twp.*

- Dalton performed 54 site inspections on RIM/CREP easements and boundary posted where needed.
- 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. The partnership didn't receive any grant funding in 2023 but will reassess for 2024 and pursue additional funding.
- Gemma assisted the MN DNR with

promotion of the Walk-In-Access (WIA) program. There were no new WIA contracts enrolled in 2023. However, there were two contracts reenrolled to maintain the three sites, equating to 395 acres, in Swift County.

- Andy administered the State Buffer Law in Swift County & assisted landowners throughout the process. By the end of 2023 Swift County was 99+% compliant on all buffers. Kody Fossum from Swift County PD&W assisted with some site checks. Flagger was performed where necessary.
- 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. Overall, groundwater levels decreased during the dry summer months, but rebounded in the fall back to near-normal levels.

- Rainfall Monitoring – Five sites in Swift County were used to monitor precipitation. Reports are submitted monthly to the Minnesota Climatology Network. This program will be discontinued in 2024.
- We continued working on the Clean Water Fund Grant focused on promoting soil health in the communities of Benson and Appleton. Several conversations were had and follow up will occur over the winter. There was one CRP incentive contract approved in the Benson targeted area for 26.85 acres.
- **We applied for our very first Conservation Partners Legacy grant from the Minnesota DNR. It was to repair a blow out for the outlet of Hart Lake in Shible Township. The blow out caused the lake level to decrease several feet. The grant will pay for the construction of a rock arch rapids outlet replacement. This multi-faceted project will also restore hydrology to multiple wetlands, one that was completely drained due to head cutting from the outlet blow out. The grant was fully funded at \$145,000 and work is planned for summer of 2024. The project will involve multiple dedicated landowners.**



*Installing Root wads for Streambank Protection, Benson Twp.*

## Education Activities

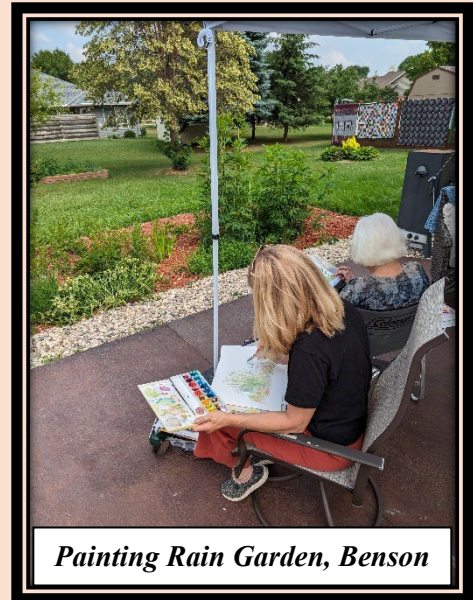
- Nature Day was firing on all cylinders again this year. **We were able to play host to over 220 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students from Benson and KMS schools.** The event was once again held at Ambush Park in Benson. The Swift SWCD partnered with local and state entities to offer fun and educational lessons and activities covering a variety of outdoor topics.



*Native Plant ID Activity at Ambush Park*

- **Arbor Day – We expanded our tree seedling program in 2023 by giving a conifer seedling to each 4<sup>th</sup> grade student at Appleton, and each 5<sup>th</sup> grade student at Benson, and each 6<sup>th</sup> grade student at KMS Elementary Schools. This resulted in 175+ trees donated.**

- Newsletters – One newsletter was printed in partnership with Swift County Parks, Drainage, and Wetlands. They were mailed to every address located in Swift County. **Over 5,700 copies were distributed for each mailing.** It can be viewed on our website.
- We participated in the Swift County Fair again, holding a special drawing for free trees, either one bundle of bareroot, one apple tree, or five potted trees. Five winners were selected from our tree tube sign-up display. Staff sat at the fair and gave out promo items and answered questions.
- Swift SWCD partnered with Pope, Douglas, Kandiyohi, and Stearns SWCDs to host the annual Irrigator’s Clinic in Greenwald. We had presentations from the U of MN Extension, Modern Farm Equipment, AgCentric, and a research update from the Rosholt Research Farm in Westport, MN.
- The SWCD continues to participate in the Adopt-A-Highway program by maintaining a three mile stretch of MN State Highway 9, from County Road 20 north to the sugar beet plant. With the very late spring and heavy tree planting workload, we weren’t able to clean ditches this year. Hopefully 2024 will be more normal!
- We once again held our tree open house at the Swift SWCD office. We had about 38 attendees which was fantastic!
- Pomme de Terre Soil Health Team Meetings – A spring meeting was held at the Old No. 1 in Morris. About 40 people attended. Harmon Wilts, a farmer near Kerkhoven, gave a fantastic presentation on his soil health journey with his family. Discussion also took place about the soil health equipment grants available from MDA. A summer field day was also held near Brandon, MN. Several folks attending in the sweltering heat to learn about John Ledderman’s farming operation.



*Painting Rain Garden, Benson*



*Soil Health Field Day, Brandon, MN*

- Swift SWCD staff led a station at Glacial Hills State Park for KMS 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. The session focused on soil stability and allowed the kids to see how soil structure impacts infiltration rates.
- A Quilt and Garden Tour was scheduled in Benson during the late summer. One of the stops was at a rain garden we had installed a couple years prior. Local artists stopped by to sketch a view of the garden.

*KMS School Event, Pope Co.*



- A Pollinators, Pints, and Popcorn event was held at Rolling Forks in Pope County and Talking Waters Brewing Co. in Chippewa County. Guest speaker Karin Jokela from the Xerces Society provided a talk on how we can create pollinator habitat in our own backyards.
- Soil Solutions: Improving Farm Productivity through Healthy Soil was a field day we co-sponsored with the university of Minnesota near Morris, MN. Attendees learned about cover crops, could view how different tillage implements affect soil structure, and could view soil pits at the top and bottom of a hill.

## **Partner Coordination**

- Pomme de Terre River Association –
  - The PDTRA has an approved Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP) and are currently working on implementing the plan using ~\$717,000 the organization received from BWSR in 2023.
  - Technical Advisory Committee meetings are held monthly. Dalton continues to serve as the Swift SWCD representative.
- Irrigation RCPP – Swift was one of twenty SWCD’s and several other partners across central Minnesota to be awarded a Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant. This grant will allow for landowners within the 20-county area to apply for irrigation improvements that improve soil and water health. The grant also includes funding to train SWCD and NRCS staff on the Irrigation Water Management practice. Swift county producers had tremendous interest in this program, as there were nearly 10 applications, with six receiving funding commitments. This that were selected worked to get the upgrades installed on their equipment over the course of 2023.

*Installing Dense Pattern Tile Intake Replacement*



- Chippewa River Watershed Association – Work continued on the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. A lot of ground was covered in 2023 and the group is approaching the finish line. As things sit now, funds will be available to start doing conservation work in the second half of 2024.



- The Technical Advisory Committee continues to meet monthly, with Andy serving as the Swift SWCD representative.

- Upper Minnesota River Watershed District – The UMRWD also continued to chip away on their Comprehensive watershed Management Plan. This smaller watershed is a few months ahead of where the Chippewa Watershed group is at in the process.

- Minnesota Department of Agriculture – **The District works with the MDA in administering the MN Ag Water Quality Certification Program in Swift County. There was one new application for the program in 2023, Justin Golden, who received certification after addressing his open tile intakes.** The SWCD also partnered



*Justin Golden, Ag Water Quality Certified!*



*Cooking Local Work Group Breakfast*

with MDA to collect water samples from Shakopee Creek twice per month, or after every significant rainfall. The samples taken are analyzed for pesticides. We also worked with the MDA to maintain the weather station that was constructed in Moyer Township in 2022.

- 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. Staff frequently review projects to identify the best funding path for a project. A Pancakes in the Park event was held at Ambush Park with area producers invited to share their thoughts on the environmental concerns in

the county. Swift SWCD and NRCS staff made a pancake, sausage, and egg breakfast for those who attended.

- Pope SWCD – Pope and Swift SWCD’s are in the process of implementing projects laid out within the workplan for the East Branch Chippewa Watershed grant that was received.

### Other

- Swift SWCD received funding from the Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees to host a Regional SWCD Technician meeting. The meeting was geared towards SWCD Techs that work with their SWCD’s tree sales and equipment rental programs. There were about 20 attendees.
- **The SWCD also made the big decision to pursue our own office building. We were successful in acquiring the old State Farm building, which is located only 150 feet to the east of our current office in the USDA Service Center. The goal is to be moved in by April.**
- **A Backyard Habitat Program was created to pay landowners \$1,000/acre for converting or establishing native grass and forbs in place of old pasture or lawn.**
- **An effort to restore the Butterfly Garden at Ambush Park in Benson was initiated. SWCD staff met with community and park board members to discuss options for rehabbing the area. Design work started, and conversations with the City of Benson parks Department will continue.**
- **Swift SWCD staff and board members went through a strategic planning process. Several topics were covered, and post meeting objectives were established. These objectives included creating a vision statement, adopting a fund balance policy, completing a full program evaluation, performing a workload analysis for all staff. Topics yet to be addressed include revise existing and creating a new job description for a soil health position, establish a county funding target, and develop an outreach and engagement strategy plan.**



Now...more  
pictures!



*Tree Planting, Dublin Twp.*



*2023 Tree Open House*



*Meeting of the Minds, Benson Twp.*



*Water Quality Monitoring at Nature Day*



*Surveying Tile Blowout, West Bank Twp.*



*Soil Health Team Meeting, Morris*



*Nature Day Rockstars, Ambush Park*



*Soil Health Field Day, Brandon, MN*



*A WASCOB doing its thing, holding back stormwater*



*Pollinator and Pints Event, Pope Co.*

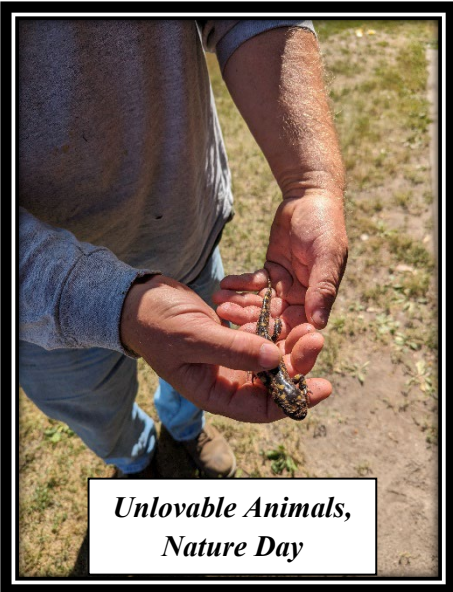


*Tree Planting, Edison Twp.*



*Fabric Delivery. If it fits, it ships!*





*Unlovable Animals,  
Nature Day*



*Tree planting with gnats*



*Rock Inlet, Hayes Twp.*



*Streambank stabilization,  
Fairfield Twp.*



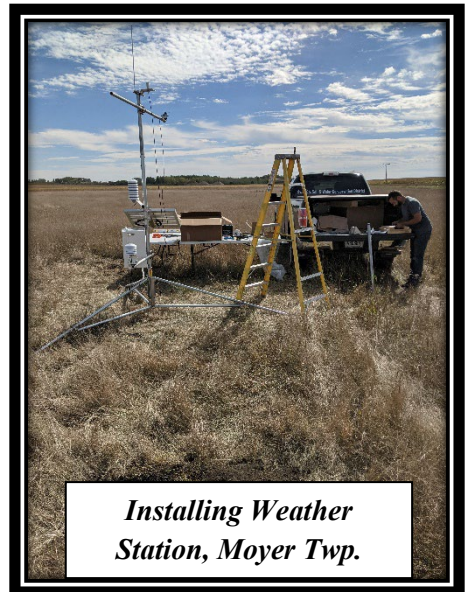
*Rain Garden,  
Camp Lake Twp.*



*Shakopee Creek  
Water Sampling*



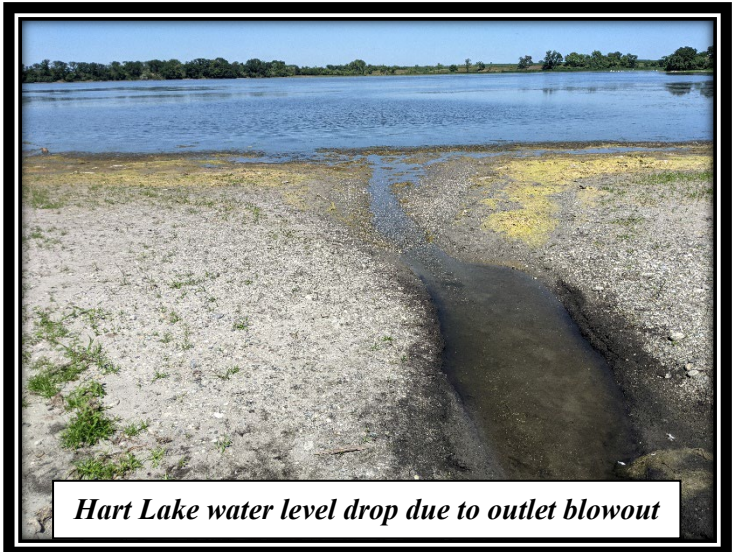
*Arbor Dar Tree Delivery*



*Installing Weather  
Station, Moyer Twp.*



*Fisheries at Nature Day*



*Hart Lake water level drop due to outlet blowout*



*Irrigator's Clinic, Stearns Co.*



*Donut Day at the SWCD*



*Residue Checks, West Bank Twp.*



*Tree Planting, Six Mile Grove Twp.*



*U of MN Soil Health Field Day, Morris*



*Shakopee Creek, Six Mile Grove Twp.*



*Dense Pattern Tile Intake Replacement, Hayes, Twp.*



*Tree Planting, Six Mile Grove Twp.*



*Riparian Buffer, Shible Twp.*



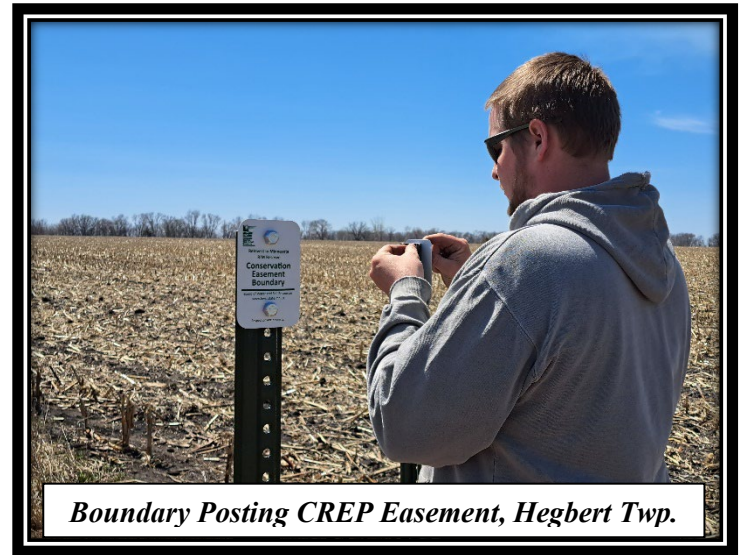
*Tree Planting, Torning Twp.*



*Tree Planting, Torning Twp.*



*Tree Planting, Torning Twp.*



*Boundary Posting CREP Easement, Hegbert Twp.*