



# UP STREAM

Swift County Soil & Water Conservation District Newsletter

Fall 2022/Winter 2023

1430 Utah Ave  
Benson, MN 56215  
320-842-7201 x3  
[www.SwiftSWCD.org](http://www.SwiftSWCD.org)

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**Andy Albertsen**  
*District Manager*  
**Dalton Herrboldt**  
*Conservation Technician*  
**Sheri Gades**  
*Office Manager*  
**Gemma Kleinschmidt**  
*PF Farm Bill Biologist*

### NRCS Employees

**Brett Carlson**  
*District Conservationist*



## Four More MN Ag Water Quality Certified Farms in Swift County

*Andy Albertsen, Swift County SWCD*

Harmon Wilts along with daughters Elizabeth (Libby) Wilts, Hannah Sanders, and Katherine (Katie) Wilts Johnson of rural Kerkhoven became Swift County's latest farms certified in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP). Andy Albertsen, District Manager for the Swift Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and MAWQCP Certification Specialist Grant Pearson from the Stearns SWCD presented each with their certifications.

Harmon, Libby, Hannah, and Katie own and operate land in eastern Swift County. The family farms together, raising corn, soybeans, and sugar beets. The daughters have been involved in the farming operation their whole lives, with their input weighing heavily into the future direction of all their farms. In Fall of 2019 they made a decision that has and will continue to impact the sustainability of their farms for years to come; they purchased a strip till machine. They refined their use of the strip tiller by using it for test plots, experimenting with the difference between shanks and coulters. They settled on coulters due to the minimal soil disturbance and proper seed bed prep. Currently, they utilize the strip tiller on all the owned and rented acres, and they have no intention of going back to conventional tillage. They've noticed a change in their heavy, high organic matter soils after just a couple years of reduced tillage. They are 'spongier' and the equipment floats across the fields more easily and doesn't pull as hard, and they've spent less on fuel as a result. Making the leap to strip till was not an easy one, and the only regret they had was not doing it sooner.

In addition to the change in tillage, they have also been addressing the open tile intakes in all their fields. They have addressed these intakes in different ways, by inserting Water Quality Intakes, which are intakes with yellow 'straws' that allow water to flow into the intake but prevent soil and crop residue from getting into and clogging the tile. They have also put tile risers on several other intakes, raising the elevation of the open intake so the water can have more time to infiltrate through the soil. Finally, they each plan to install a rock inlet (French Drain) and a Dense Pattern Tile as a replacement to an open intake. Each of these methods removes the open tile intake and allows the water to filter through the small rock or existing soil. These intake replacements are a win-win for water quality and for the operator, by keeping soil and residue out of the tile lines and allowing the operator to farm right through the area, without the need to bump around an open intake. Andy Albertsen, District Manager from the Swift SWCD said "Harmon, Libby, Hannah, and Katie are motivated producers who are always looking for ways to make better agronomic decisions ." (cont.)





(cont.) As for the other agronomic decisions on the farm, they utilize various technologies to make sure they are being the best stewards of their land. Gridded soil samples are taken routinely and paired with yield maps so they can create prescriptions for each individual field. These prescriptions include variable rate seeding (putting more or fewer seeds in the ground to optimize growth) and variable rate fertilizer application. By reviewing all their farm data on a regular basis, they can determine which parts of each field provide the greatest return on investment (ROI). "Successful farming isn't defined by the highest yields, it's about how to create the greatest ROI on each acre," Harmon says.

Their operation isn't on cruise control either. They are continually learning from the previous season and making improvements for the next. Now that they have a good understanding of how and when to utilize strip till, they are ready to tackle more soil health principles, keep the soil covered and have a living root in the soil for as long as possible. One of their short-term goals is to begin experimenting with cover crops and how they can begin incorporating them into their crop rotation. They feel cover crops can be the missing ingredient to help feed the soil microbes and protect the soil. The Wilts family are true believers that if you take care of the land, it will take care of you. But they want to do better than that, they want to improve their soil and build back their soil structure. With their efforts, they are certainly on the right track.

The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is a voluntary program though the Minnesota Department of Agriculture designed to accelerate adoption of on-farm conservation practices that protect Minnesota's lakes and rivers. Farm owners and operators who implement and maintain improved farm management practices will be certified and in turn assured that their operation meets the state's water quality goals and standards for a period of ten years.



On July 1, 2015 the MAWQCP went statewide in Minnesota. The Swift County SWCD is excited about this program and its potential to help farm owners and operators demonstrate their commitment to clean water and to accelerate the adoption of conservation practices as needed. Program participants are eligible to utilize up to five thousand dollars of financial assistance annually to implement new conservation practices on their farms.

Contact the Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District at 320-842-7201 ext. 3 for more information and to apply for the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program.

**NO-TILL DRILLS**

**AVAILABLE FOR RENT!**

RATES:

**10' Haybuster Drill**—\$100 Mobilization + \$12 per acre

**12' Truax Drill**—\$100 Mobilization + \$14 per acre

**ATV Seeding**—\$50 Mobilization + \$100/hour  
(\$175 Mobilization for out of county users)



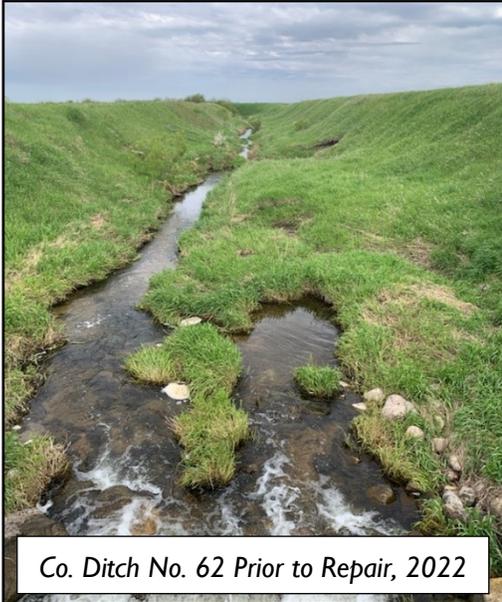
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# Swift County Public Drainage Buffer Update & Upcoming Maintenance

*Kody Fossum, Swift County Parks, Drainage, and Wetlands*



*Co. Ditch No. 62 Prior to Repair, 2022*

Signed into law in June 2015, the statewide buffer initiative designated an estimated 110,000 acres of land for water quality buffer strips statewide. The implementation of the buffer law in Swift County has achieved over 99% compliance, with the remaining parcels needing to be planted per state statute MN 103E.021. Swift County SWCD will continue to work with landowners needing to become compliant with the law. As we are now past the buffer installation deadlines, the SWCD will transition to monitoring buffer areas to ensure continued compliance. Buffers will continue to be monitored on a regular basis using aerial imagery and random spot checks. An alfalfa rotation is an acceptable use to become compliant with the buffer law.

Swift County has a total of 56 drainage systems, which consist of 292 miles of open bottom ditch (County Ditches, Judicial Ditches, and Joint County Ditches), 436 miles of county tile, and 1,060 acres of buffer strips. The vegetated buffers play a big role in the drainage system, one benefit being maintenance access. As we approach the 2023 ag season, Swift County Parks and Drainage has designed a maintenance schedule for the buffers and open bottom ditches. The Drainage Inspector is

subcontracting tree spraying on 1/3 of the drainage systems, 1/3 for tree grinding or removal, 1/3 to sit idle. The objective is that within 5-10 years a majority of the trees/willows/etc. on the buffers and side slopes of the drainage ditches will be under control.

As we shift towards this goal, there are a couple of key factors that play into the cost-effectiveness and efficiency to reach it. One being the current condition of the buffer strip. It is important to maintain the condition of the buffer, to ensure easy access to all areas of the ditch for maintenance. Necessary landowner maintenance includes removal of rock piles, machinery/debris, burning of piled trees and shrubbery, maintenance of private tile outlets and drop-pipe outlets, etc.



*Co. Ditch No. 62 After Repair, w/ Spoils on Buffer to be spread, 2022*



*Sufficient Ditch Buffer*



*Insufficient Ditch Buffer*



## Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Wetlands Program Sign-Up Now Open

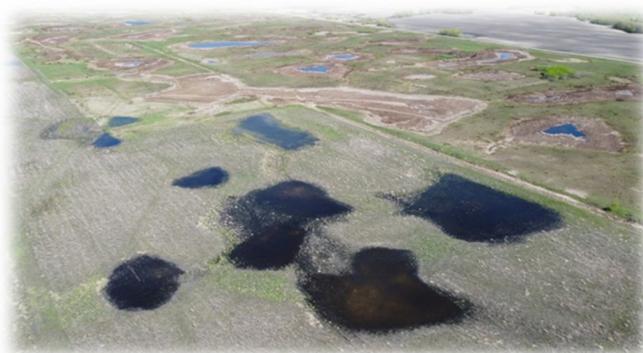
*Gemma Kleinschmidt, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist*

Landowners have a new option to restore and permanently protect their environmentally sensitive cropland with the reintroduction of the Reinvest In Minnesota Wetlands Program (RIM Wetlands). RIM Wetlands is a voluntary statewide program designed to improve water quality and habitat, which is administered by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). The program aims to protect and restore habitat on marginal cropland across Minnesota through wetland restoration.

Landowners accepted into the RIM Wetlands Program place their land into a permanent conservation easement through the state's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement program. Private ownership continues, and the land is permanently restored and enhanced for water quality and habitat benefits.

Eligible land must have been in agricultural production for at least 2 of the past 5 years. Land that is currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) may also be eligible.

Signup for RIM Wetlands began September 30, 2022. Funding decisions will be made via quarterly batching periods while funds are available, with the first batching period ending November 30th. Contact Swift SWCD if you are interested in applying. Additional information about the RIM Wetlands Program can be found at <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/rim-wetlands>



## CRP Practice Spotlight – CP38E State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement

*Gemma Kleinschmidt, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist*

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that contracts with participants to establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative cover to help control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Under a continuous CRP (CCRP) signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time.



One CCRP practice available for landowners to enroll in is the CP38E State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practice. The overarching purpose of the CP38E conservation practice is to restore grassland habitat on the landscape to maintain and enhance ring-necked pheasant populations of Minnesota. Additional goals are to build upon existing habitat to enhance waterfowl, greater prairie chicken, and grassland bird populations. Secondary objectives include providing winter cover and a food source for resident wildlife.

To qualify, an offer must have a 10 to 80-acre block of eligible cropland. Offers less than 10 acres may be offered if they are located immediately adjacent to existing undisturbed habitat that creates at least a 10-acre block of vegetative cover in combination with the offered acreage. The cover type required to be established aims to restore highly diverse native prairie. The seed mix must contain at least 15 native species with a minimum 5 grasses and a minimum 5 forbs. Through this practice, there are also opportunities to establish food plots and native shrubs plantings to benefit wildlife.



## Tree Cost Share



You read that right, for the first time in years we have funding for cost sharing windbreaks and shelterbelts through our tree program!

### Tree Cost Share Information

- ⇒ Cost share funds will be competitive and have an **application deadline of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.**
  - ⇒ Priority will be given to tree plantings that have the greatest total project area.
  - ⇒ Tree plantings must have a minimum total cost of \$1,000 to be eligible for cost share.
  - ⇒ Landowners will be notified on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, on whether their tree planting project received approval for cost share.
  - ⇒ Cost share will be at a rate of 50%.
  - ⇒ Eligible items for cost share are
    - Tree tubes                      - Tree stakes
    - Tree fabric                      - Tree fabric squares
    - Tree planting charge      - Shrubs & trees
  - ⇒ The tree planting will need to stay in place for 15 years. Site inspections will be required 1 year after planting, then again on year 5, 10, 14 of the cost share project.
  - ⇒ Project must follow established criteria related to species and spacing.
  - ⇒ Project must be located within Swift County, but you can purchase trees from any vendor.
- If you are interested or have questions, please call us at 320-842-7201 ext. 3 and ask for Dalton.





## BWSR Accepting Applications for Lawns to Legumes Grants

*Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources*

### **What does this program do?**

Lawns to Legumes aims to protect the federally endangered rusty patched bumblebee (Minnesota’s state bee) and other at-risk pollinators. Lawns to Legumes offers workshops, coaching, planting guides and cost-share funding for installing pollinator-friendly native plantings in residential lawns. The program also campaigns to raise awareness for pollinator habitat projects and offers grants for demonstration neighborhoods, community projects that create habitat corridors and showcase best practices.



### **Why does this matter?**

Minnesota is home to more than 450 native bee species. Pollinators also include butterflies, moths, beetles and native flies. All play a key role in pollinating many food crops and native plants, but populations have significantly declined worldwide in recent years. Population decline can be attributed to habitat loss and lack of related nutrition for pollinators, as well as pesticide use and pathogens. Even relatively small plantings of native flowers can help create conditions that are highly valuable to pollinators and can help build important habitat corridors.



### **Am I eligible? When can I apply for funding?**

Anyone is welcome to use the planting guide developed for this program to help plan a pollinator habitat project, available at: <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/12/> . Minnesota residents who have an area at their home that can be used for outdoor planting can apply for a combination of technical assistance (workshops, coaching) and cost-share funding. Apply on Blue Thumb’s website <https://bluethumb.org/lawns-to-legumes/apply> . Applications will be accepted through January 28, 2023. Funding decisions and all notifications will be emailed in February 2023. Applicants who are accepted into the Lawns to Legumes individual support program can receive up to \$350 of funding through a reimbursement process.

## BWSR Accepting Applications for Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot Program

*Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources*

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is now accepting grant applications for a new program that will benefit pollinator and beneficial insect species’ habitat. The Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot Program (HELP) offers cost-share grants for projects on lands with long-term commitments to conservation management through conservation easements, long-term conservation contracts and public ownership. Eligible lands include those with Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve easements, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) easements, non-profit conservation preserves, city and county parks, and protected natural areas. Eligible applicants include soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts, watershed management organizations and counties.



“The decline of bees, butterflies, dragonflies and other at-risk pollinators that support ecosystems and food production has raised significant alarm among conservation professionals both locally and globally,” said BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke. “It’s critical that we support these beneficial species by restoring and enhancing habitat in strategic areas of the state.”

Funded by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, the HELP pilot program is offering \$273,740 in grant funding during this application period. Grant amount requests can range from \$20,000 to \$60,000. Projects may focus on establishing new floral-rich habitat areas or riparian plantings, or converting existing non-native cover to native vegetation. Projects can be located on multiple land parcels.

Applications will be accepted until Feb. 23, 2023. Information on how to apply can be found on the program’s Request for Proposals at <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/apply>



## Federal Funding Provided Locally

*Brett Carlson, NRCS District Conservationist*

Each year USDA offers programs to assist landowners and operators to manage resources on their farm. NRCS administers the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). EQIP is designed to address concerns on the land that often can be solved with a single practice. EQIP offers incentives along with some of the practices to help offset the learning curve or the potential short-term impacts on yields.

There are numerous practices that are eligible for EQIP; some examples are water & sediment control basins, waterways, rotational grazing systems, well sealing, cover crops, no-till conversion, ponds, nutrient management, roof runoff structures for feedlots, brush management, irrigation conversion to low pressure, high tunnels, and upland wildlife habitat. Practices like no-till, cover crops, nutrient management and irrigation water management are management practices that you can apply for up to three consecutive years.

The CSP program is a little different in that it looks at your whole farm operation instead of focusing on one specific field. CSP takes into consideration your current management on all the acres you own and have rental control of for at least five years. With CSP you are ranked against other producers who are applying for enhancements on their operation. To first be eligible for CSP, you have to be performing conservation at a certain level; once you have met that minimum level you can select enhancements that you are willing to do on your fields for the duration of the CSP contract, which runs on a five year term. You receive payments for performing the enhancements on your farm at the end of the year or when the project has been certified completed by NRCS.

NRCS accepts applications on an ongoing basis and announces application signup cutoffs periodically. If you are interested in a program, contact your local office for an application.

## Swift SWCD Nature Day

*Andy Albertsen, Swift SWCD District Manager*

Each year, the Swift Soil and Water Conservation District hosts a Nature Day Event for Benson and KMS 5th and 6th Grade students. The 2022 Nature Day was held on September 16th 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. Topics included macroinvertebrates, groundwater, prairie, forestry, glaciers, critter crate, and more!

This year, our Nature Day had 16 stations with presenters from Swift, Grant, and Douglas SWCDs, Upper Bonanza education Center, NRCS, Pheasants Forever, Pomme de Terre River Association, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Wildlife Science Center.



We would also like to thank our sponsors for their generous donations to keep our Nature Day event going strong!

1st American State Agency  
Benson Lions  
Benson VFW Post 1403  
Citizens Alliance Bank  
City of Benson  
Co-Op Credit Union

Culligan  
CVEC  
Federated Telephone  
Financial Security Bank  
Grossman Trump  
Kerkhoven Lions

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State Farm Insurance  
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Swift County



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# **Swift SWCD Tree Open House**

Staff will be available to assist you with planning, layout, and tree selection for your planting project.

**NEW for 2023!**

**Cost Share is available for trees!**

*Look inside this newsletter for  
more info, or call us!*

**Thursday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**7:30am - 4:00pm**

**Swift SWCD Office**

**1430 Utah Ave., Benson, MN**

We will have coffee, hot apple cider, and cookies!

\*\*Orders placed during the Tree Open House will  
receive **10%** off their trees\*\* (In-person orders only)