



UP STREAM

Swift County Soil & Water Conservation District Newsletter

Fall 2023/Winter 2024

1430 Utah Ave
Benson, MN 56215
320-842-7201 x3
www.SwiftSWCD.org

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District Manager

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Conservation Technician

Sheri Gades
Office Manager

Gemma Kleinschmidt
PF Farm Bill Senior Biologist

NRCS Employees

Melanie Dickman
Area Team Lead



Jack Byrne Receives Wildlife Habitat Steward Award

Andy Albertsen, Swift County SWCD

The Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District has selected Jack Byrne for the Wildlife Habitat Steward Award. This award is co-sponsored by Pheasants Forever Inc. and the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. This award is meant to honor landowners who have implemented extensive wildlife habitat management practices that result in the highest quality habitat and promote biodiversity. This award recognizes landowners that consistently go above and beyond to maximize wildlife habitat value on their land.

Below are some of the highlights of the efforts Jack has put into creating high quality habitat for all animals, big and small.

In 2008/2009, Jack established a 10-row block evergreen/shrub planting for wildlife, with cost-share assistance from the local Pheasants Forever chapter. This planting was on the edge of a ½ acre wetland, creating a safe refuge for animals, both small and large. This planting is also directly adjacent to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) easement that Jack co-manages with his brother, Pat Byrne.

Jack and his brother actively work towards controlling buckthorn that is on one of their CREP easements. They understand this process takes time and commitment and continue to invest their resources into maintaining and improving their easement.

In 2017 Gemma Kleinschmidt, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Senior Biologist, applied for funding through the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) Bee and Butterfly Habitat Program, which paid for portions of permanently protected land to be converted to pollinator habitat. This program also allowed the University of Minnesota to access the site to perform research on the benefit of the planting for bee and butterfly habitat and health.

Through the program, Jack was able to have 15 acres of his CREP easements converted to pollinator habitat. The easements were also burned prior to completing the planting work. The U of MN Bee Lab was able to conduct their research on his site for 2-3 years. Jack was able to meet with them when they set their bee traps in 2020 and shared their findings with the SWCD office. They found 22 different bee species in 2019!

In 2021, he enrolled 18.79 acres of cropland into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) under the CP38E SAFE practice and included a one-acre food plot for wildlife. Rather than using a run of the mill economy seed mix, Jack opted for a highly diverse tallgrass prairie mix that consisted of nine different native grasses and 25 different forbs.

He recognizes the benefits of prescribed burning and utilizes it as a management activity on his land. He utilizes fire as a method to control plant material on his CREP easement, knowing it also controls woody encroachment from nearby woodlots. (cont.)





Jack Byrne Receives Wildlife Habitat Steward Award (cont.)

Jack has also received assistance from the Swift County Pheasants Forever chapter to improve habitat. In 2018, he applied for cost-share from the chapter to purchase native seed to convert four acres of brome to prairie habitat.

These acres are not enrolled in any program, but he knows the importance of putting native grasses and forbs on the landscape, even on small, odd acres.

Jack consistently seeks technical advice from Gemma and the SWCD. He has done tree plantings through the SWCD and rented their no-till drill for his CRP planting. Much of the work he has done to make and improve habitat over the years has been made possible through available grants and cost-share programs. When his easement is up for inspection every three years, he is eager to tag along and learn about the plants on his property and what else he can do to improve this habitat. He is always happy to share what he's been working on to improve habitat and enjoys going on site visits with us.



Jack owns a 25.8 acre CREP easement that was enrolled into the program back in 1999. He also jointly owns and manages another 106.8 acre CREP easement with his brother, Pat, that was enrolled in 2001. Jack also enrolled another 18.79 acres into CRP in 2021.

What makes Jack a great wildlife steward is that he cares deeply about the environment he is creating for wildlife to use. He understands that the wildlife will use and enjoy this land more than he will, and wants to curate this to the best of his ability. Jack manages his property the same, whether they are enrolled in a program or not. Jack has over 11 acres of additional wildlife habitat (forest and grassland) that isn't enrolled in any program, but he still works diligently to control noxious weeds and improve the landscape, frequently purchasing trees from the SWCD to plant in areas where habitat could be improved.

Even though Jack is, by definition, considered an absentee landowner, he is one of the most passionate people we've worked with when it comes to managing his habitat, even from over 1,200 miles away! The land has been passed down through his family and every time he is back to the state where he grew up, he is checking in or working on his land. Though his land is just a small piece of Minnesota's landscape, his commitment to conserving it should be commended.

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)



The United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice & TDD).

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Whole Farm Conservation Planning: A Blueprint for Sustainability

Lily Becker, Kanati Land Management

Kanati Land Management, a privately-owned conservation company located in Avon, MN, is leading the effort to inform and deliver conservation. Partnering with Anez Consulting Inc. from Willmar, MN and supported by the USDA and NRCS, Kanati Land Management and Anez Consulting Inc. is launching a project defined as Accelerated Conservation Delivery and Implementation in the West Central Technical Service Area (WCTSA) (hereafter referred to as “the Project”) which includes the twelve counties of Benton, Big Stone, Chippewa, Douglas, Kandiyohi, Meeker, Morrison, Pope, Stearns Stevens, **Swift** and Todd. There is a tremendous sense of urgency to protect the integrity of “whole farms” and what they represent – the dedication, passion, responsibility, and admiration towards the land by those who own it. The purpose of this Project is to furnish landowners with well-thought-out conservation plans and the potential for financial benefits to ensure their property remains sustainable while protecting the conservation values of the farm. This undertaking considers all land uses and practices including those not included in the USDA Farm Bill. The approach looks at a farm as a whole entity and connects cropland, pasture, forestland, and farmstead land uses. This provides intrinsic value in preserving working farms and protecting natural resources in Minnesota.



The focus of the project’s first year will be outreach and promotion of the Project, which will include informing landowners, soil and water conservation districts, financial partners, implementers, growers, and the general public of the Project and the programs available to them within west central Minnesota. The Project’s outreach efforts will include social media campaigns, large group ‘Learning Luncheons’, one-on-one meetings, and innovative virtual plannings. The goals of these efforts are targeted within the WCTSA with Learning Luncheons being hosted in towns across the twelve counties. The dates of these luncheons will be spread throughout November of 2023 through March of 2024 in the following towns: Foley, Melrose, Montevideo, Ortonville, **Benson**, Little Falls, Morris, Willmar, Alexandria, and Glenwood, along with two virtual meeting date options. Within the first year, Kanati and Anez will also begin designing custom Whole Farm Conservation Plans. The conservation plans developed by Kanati and Anez will promote conservation practices, water quality, wildlife habitat improvement, and numerous other conservation applications. Following extensive planning in the first year of the grant, the final two years will involve further construction, development, and implementation of these certified conservation plans ending September 2026.

Formed in 2019, Kanati Land Management considers social, economic, and environmental considerations for wildlife, and provides conservation and sustainable living for landowners, businesses, citizens, and non-profit organizations. Using a team-based approach, Kanati is intent on finding ways to further develop innovative systems for conservation. The company was built on the vision to serve landowners and help them obtain their goals in both areas of conservation and wildlife management while also rendering them with means of implementation. Kanati strives to eliminate confusion and offers direct, personal communication with participants throughout the entire process; not leaving them to step into the unknown alone and allowing them to depend on their expertise. The company works with a diverse group of clients including agricultural producers, absentee landowners, recreational landowners, small-scale urban agriculture landowners, beginning farmers, and nontraditional landowners such as cities, counties, and other government agencies. Dependent on developing positive relationships with their clients, the company has become a sought-out platform as conservation advisors trusted by landowners.

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Whole Farm Planning (cont.)

In keeping with the core values of Kanati, Anez Consulting Inc., established in 1997, helps their clients reach their agronomic and business goals while remaining good stewards of the land. The company is well-versed in all aspects of soil health and crop analysis, sustainability, and planning. With a firm footing in agriculture, Anez has a quality reputation for helping clients navigate through the regulatory steps of conservation programs offered through the USDA, MDA, as well as area SWCD programs.

Kanati Land Management and Anez Consulting Inc. are well-respected and proven performers in the conservation field. From compliance and conservation, to engineering and design, the two companies have the expert staff to form a dynamic, client-focused team with the shared goal of developing strategic Whole Farm Conservation Plans. Landowners can set up one-on-one consultations with Kanati and Anez to discuss their conservation needs and land priorities. These meetings can include discussions on building positive relationships, in-person farm assessments, mobile mapping systems, drone imaging, detailed notes and job diary documentation. The information gathered will help in developing a distinct Whole Farm Conservation Plan catered to the needs and wants of the client. The Conservation Plan is shared promptly with the owner and can be sent to the NRCS and SWCD offices. Participating in a Whole Farm Conservation Plan allows the landowner to manage practices that protect the conservation values of the property, such as maintaining soil health, protecting water quality, and preserving wildlife habitat.

Whole Farm Conservation is about loving the land, it's about having pride and purpose, it's about preserving familial heritage and protecting a legacy. The average landowner has little knowledge of what is available to them and their days are consumed by running their farm, leaving little time to seek out the right information on their own. This project connects landowners with people who understand their hopes, fears, and needs in order to protect their property and the demanding work that has gone into developing it. Kanati Land Management, partnered with Anez Consulting Inc., are eager to share their wealth of expertise with landowners for the opportunity to help them create informative networks to support one another and to build upon their available resources.

Follow Kanati Land Management's Facebook page for upcoming event locations and times or email them at info@kanatiland.com.

Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Riparian and Floodplain Restoration Easements

Gemma Kleinschmidt, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist

The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has recently received funding to secure Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easements along riparian areas in MN. The program goal is to restore and protect riparian and floodplain areas across the state to improve and enhance water quality and wildlife habitat. Benefits of this easement program include decreased sediment, pollutant, and nutrient transport, reduce hydrologic impacts to surface waters and increase infiltration for groundwater recharge. When a landowner opts to place land into a Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement, private ownership continues, and the land is restored or enhanced for water quality and habitat benefits. Both limited term and perpetual easement options are available, with the flexibility to allow for limited working lands activities.

Eligible land must have been in agricultural production for at least 2 of the past 5 years, though land that is currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) may also be eligible. Minimum enrollment size is 8 acres. Areas adjacent to public waters subject to the Minnesota Buffer Law are not eligible to receive payment but may be included in the easement as donated land.

Enrollment for this program began 10/02/2023. Applications will be accepted during the months of January, July, and October. Applications must be submitted by the last day of the applicable month. Contact Swift SWCD if you are interested in applying. Additional information can be found online at:

<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/what-programs-are-available>





Tree Cost Share



So nice we're doing it twice!

Funding for cost sharing windbreaks and shelterbelts through our tree program returns for another year!

Tree Cost Share Information

- ⇒ Cost share funds will be competitive and have an **application deadline of February 2nd, 2024.**
- ⇒ Priority will be given to tree plantings that have the greatest total project area.
- ⇒ Cost share will be at a rate of up to 50%.
- ⇒ Tree plantings must have a minimum total cost of \$1,000 to be eligible for cost share, maximum cost share of \$2,500.
- ⇒ Landowners will be notified on February 9th, 2024, on whether their tree planting project received approval for cost share.
- ⇒ 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.





Swift County Feedlot Update

Barry Bowman, Swift County Feedlot Officer

Swift County is currently beginning a new workplan for 2024-2025 and looking to make owner assistance a priority. For all operators looking to make any changes such as adding more animals, planning construction or checking into cost share, give the office a call to schedule a farm visit. We have resources available to design feedlot components and take care of new registrations and assist with planning on site.



We encourage producers to contact the Environmental Office at 320-843-2356 and Pam will be happy to pass along information to arrange assistance. Calling in to claim your Odor Exemption while applying manure is a good idea as well if there should be a complaint regarding odor. The Environmental Office or Feedlot Officer has information to discuss with neighbors that manure is being applied and odor is to be expected for a short time. Call the Feedlot Officer - Barry Bouwman at 320-424-0194 and he can fill you in on just what an Odor Exemption can do to address any potential complaint.

We are looking to assist anyone with over 300 Animal Units with updating Manure Management Plans or putting one together if needed. We have technical assistance available to put together plans and some cost share at times to cover costs. If you are over 100 AU we can send out record keeping sheets. Be sure to keep stockpiles of manure well away from homes and 300 feet from ditches and water features. Swift County is available to help with siting stockpiles and there is a good fact sheet we can send you. Call any time for assistance.

Swift County Public Drainage Buffer Update & Upcoming Maintenance

Kody Fossum, Swift County Parks, Drainage, and Wetlands

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*



Wilts Family Farm Selected as Area Winner for Outstanding Conservationists

Andy Albertsen, Swift SWCD District Manager

The Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) has named Wilts Family Farm as one of eight Area Finalists in the 2023 Outstanding Conservationist Award Program. Harmon and Gina Wilts, Hannah and Luke Sanders, Katie and Simon Johnson, and Libby and Alex Love will be recognized at a Dec. 13 luncheon at MASWCD's 87th annual convention in Bloomington, MN. The awards program recognizes farm families, individuals, conservation organizations, and other groups for their accomplishments in implementing conservation practices and improving Minnesota's natural resources. Of the eight finalists, one will be announced as the State's Outstanding Conservationist of the Year at the Dec. 13 luncheon.

"We're proud of the Wilts Family for what they've done in conserving the natural resources in our area," said Andy Albertsen, District Manager of the Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District, which nominated the Wilts Family for the award. "It's great to be able to recognize the work they've done locally. They are continually learning new ways to accelerate soil health practices across their acres, and are always willing to share their experiences with others. With the adoption of strip till and recent incorporation of cover crops, the Wilts Family understands the importance of agriculture in our world, and we are fortunate to have them farming in Swift County." Albertsen said.

MASWCD sponsors the Outstanding Conservationist Award Program, with support from The Farmer magazine.



Swift SWCD Nature Day

Andy Albertsen, Swift SWCD District Manager

Each year, the Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District hosts a Nature Day Event for Benson and KMS 5th and 6th Grade students. The 2023 Nature Day was held on September 15th at Ambush Park in Benson. The Swift SWCD partnered with local and state organizations to offer fun and educational lessons and activities covering a variety of outdoor topics. Topics included Glaciers, Aquatic Invasive Species, Fisheries, Water Quality Monitoring, Unlovable Animals, and more!

This year, our Nature Day had 16 stations with presenters from Swift and Douglas SWCDs, University of Minnesota Extension (Swift County), NRCS, Pheasants Forever, Upper Minnesota River Watershed District, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, 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!

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City of Benson

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Domat's
Don's Building Center
Dooley's Petroleum
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Phone: 320-842-7201 ext. 3

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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.

Tuesday, January 9th, 2024

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
be entered into a drawing for three \$50 gift cards**

(In-person orders only)

**Ask about cost
share for your
tree planting project!**