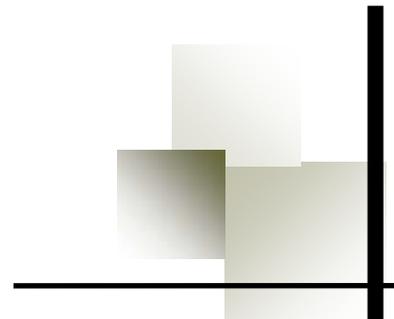




2014 Annual Report

2014 Annual Report of Activities and
Accomplishments for the Lake of the Woods
Soil & Water Conservation District



District Organization

Supervisors

John Sonstegard- Chairman	District I since 2007
Frank Sindelir- Vice-chair	District III since 2013
Russel Hansen- Treasurer	District II since 1990
Nancy Dunnell- Secretary	District V since 2013
Roger Krause- Public Relations	District IV since 1992

Staff

Josh Stromlund- County LWPO & SWCD Manager
 Mike Hirst- Resource Technician
 Corryn Trask- Resource Technician
 Rebecca Buegler- Office Assistant

NRCS Partners

Kelly Voigt - District Conservationist
 Jane Hafvenstein- Soil Conservation Technician
 Sunny Dorow- Office Assistant

"The purpose of the District is to provide for the adoption of sound water quality, proper land use, and soil conservation practices on all lands in the District, to assist with the development of a prosperous agricultural economy, and to foster other community development for the general welfare and security of the people of the District."

Councils and Committees

County/SWCD Liaison Committee
 Ditch Committee
 Envirothon Planning Committee
 EQIP Local Work Group
 Financial Committee
 Giziibii RC&D
 IMA- Technical Advisory Committee
 International Watershed Advisory Committee
 Keep it Clean Committee
 Land Use Planning Committee
 LOW Control Board
 International Rainy - LOW Watershed Board
 Local Water Plan Committee
 LW School Forest Committee
 MASWCD Area VIII Committee
 MN Association of County Feedlot Officers
 NC MN JPB Engineering Board
 Rainy/Rapid River Board
 Wetlands Technical Advisory Committee



District Responsibilities

Wetlands Conservation Act

State statute gives SWCDs the role of technical authority for the Wetlands Conservation Act. For Lake of the Woods SWCD, this role includes providing technical assistance for wetland determinations, evaluating construction projects to minimize wetland impacts, and assisting with wetland restorations.

- Participate in monthly County Technical Advisory Committee meetings
- Worked with regulatory agencies to expedite applications for shoreline protection projects
- Reviewed over 50 applications for shoreline protection
- Provided technical assistance to approximately 20 landowners who are considering construction projects or agricultural drainage projects which may impact wetlands
- Assisted the County Land and Water Planning Director on wetland determinations
- Provided technical assistance for wetland enhancement or alteration projects
- Reviewed 5 wetland banking projects
- Provided numerous comments and feedback to state and federal agencies on a wetland banking project that is receiving preferential political treatment by the agencies

County Feedlot Program

Lake of the Woods County is a delegated county for the MPCA Feedlot Program. Through an agreement with the county, the SWCD provides a staff person to serve as the County Feedlot Officer. Funding for this position comes from the MPCA, with an additional match by the county. Although this is a step away from SWCDs traditionally acting as non-regulatory entities, it also opens the doors to providing financial assistance to help producers meet water quality standards.



- Feedlot Officer attended MPCA Quarterly Feedlot Meetings and work plan review sessions
- Published articles in the SWCD newsletter and local newspaper
- Conducted site visits at 3 feedlots for routine inspections
- Unregistered one facility that is no longer in operation
- Completed feedlot annual report for 2014
- Reviewed the feedlot annual report with the County Board and Lake of the Woods High School government students at a County Board meeting
- Provided producers with assistance with programs and opportunities through other entities
- Updated the feedlot mapping tool in the MPCA's Delta database.

Cost Share Programs

The District receives Conservation Cost Share Program funding to implement conservation practices that will improve and protect water quality and soil resources. In addition to this annually funded program, the District can apply for Feedlot Water Quality Management Grant funding and other special cost share programs for special projects. Water Plan funds are also a source for cost share assistance, and the SWCD has set aside funding each year to seal abandoned wells and implement other programs.

- Contracted with U of M Extension rain garden specialist to work with County Museum on rain garden project (this project has expanded to include landscape and planning for the entire museum property)
- Provided weeding and maintenance assistance for the Baudette Depot Rain Garden and also created a map of plants in the rain garden
- Working with Wabanica Church to determine causes of instability on shoreline and seek funding for corrective measures
- Worked with Morris Point Resort on flood damage issues. Was able to provide some funding assistance to the resort for repairs
- Assisted MNDOT, County PWD and private landowner on gully cleanup and stabilization project. MNDOT provided engineering assistance and equipment to perform the dirt work
- Coordinated with County PWD staff on private land erosion issues that are affecting county right of way



Native flowers at the Depot rain garden

Water Plan

The District is the lead agency for the implementation of the County's Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan. The 2010-2020 Water Plan was finalized in 2009. In 2014 the water plan committee met 3 times to complete the five year amendment to the water plan. A public hearing was held on December 10, 2014.

Abandoned Well Cost Share Program

- Paid out \$877.50 in cost share funds to local landowners to assist landowners in sealing abandoned wells. Landowners cover a minimum of 25% of the cost.
- Worked with the Department of Health to promote well sealing cost share programs
- Encumbered funds for five well sealing projects

Well Water Testing

- Provided reduced cost testing for e.coli, coliform bacteria, and nitrates during our Annual

("Water Plan" continued...)

Well Testing Clinic

- 51 wells were sampled during the county-wide clinic, including a test for the County Landfill well
- Continued to provide well testing mailing kits for year-round testing

Watershed Management

- Working with County Highway Department and private landowners to encourage the installation of best management practices to reduce erosion
- Continued partnership with MN Pollution Control Agency on year three of a four-year watershed study for the Lake of the Woods watershed. The year concluded with the new draft impairments on the Lake of the Woods Watershed
- Presented a poster at the Lake of the Woods Water Quality Forum in International Falls highlighting the SWCD's programs and activities
- Provided funding and engineering assistance to install 2 sidewater inlets on County Ditch 1, a culvert outlet protection project on CR251 and an overflow protection project on CR250
- Worked with highway department staff to catalogue all sidewater inlets on County Ditch 1 and was successful in obtaining funding to replace over 10 culverts
- Partnering with NRCS, County PWD and landowners along County Road 17 to install field runoff stabilization projects in conjunction with road construction

Water Quality Monitoring

- Partnered with Lake of the Woods High School to hold the 8th year of the Rainy River Basin River Watch Program, a student-based monitoring program that tracks the water quality of the Baudette and Winter Road Rivers
- The District partnered with Koochiching SWCD to continue basin-wide MPCA Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring. Monitoring includes 10 sites, 4 of which are covered by LOW SWCD (Black River, Rainy River, Rapid and East Fork of Rapid River). Nearly 30 samples were taken at each site at various water levels to help paint a picture of annual rates of sediment and other pollutants traveling through these system

Large Lake Issues

- High water levels in 2014 took priority over other projects. The SWCD spent large amounts of time dealing with high water issues, including:
 - * Providing tours of shoreline damages to: SWCD Board Members, Lake of the Woods Control Board Members and Engineering Staff, International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Control Board Members and International Joint Commissioners
 - * Presentations to the Lake of the Woods Control Board and the International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Board highlighting flood damages in the county
 - * Dedicated the county fair booth to high water levels and provided data on the extents of damages and information on available assistance



Installing culvert outlet protection through Clean Water Funding.

(Other responsibilities and activities continued...)

- * The SWCD and NRCS office became a repository for flood damage reporting. Over 100 reports were received. This information was shared with the County Emergency Management Office, DNR, Army Corps of Engineers and Board of Water and Soil Resources
- * Assistance and coordination was provided to public and private landowners to assist with the permitting process to complete shoreline protection work to expedite the process
- * Funding was sought for public and private landowners for financial assistance for shoreline protection through grants, disaster declarations and local, state and federal programs
- * Seeking grant funding to complete the following objectives: assess the current shoreline protection designs, educate landowners of flood easement on LOW, and to obtain needed data to better inform the water level management decisions made by the LW Control Board



- Collaborated with DNR staff to survey Morris Point and Pine and Curry Islands to gather topography data for present day conditions of the islands
- Remained informed on the activities in the Lake of the Woods Watershed, including participating in regular meetings of the Rainy Rapid Board, International Multi Agency Technical Advisory Committee, International Joint Commission, Lake of the Woods Control Board and the L/W Water Quality Forum
- Assisted MPCA by being a local sponsor of a Phosphorous Study on Lake of the Woods
- Provided comments on the Lake of the Woods Basin Water Quality Plan of Study

Shoreline Restoration Assistance

- Provided engineering assistance and technical guidance on shoreline protection and restoration techniques
- Worked with multiple landowners to provide shoreline riprap installation guidance and met onsite with local contractors
- Held multiple meetings with DNR to provide flood damage control guidance

Other Responsibilities and Activities of the SWCD

Grass-roots conservation is the driving force of the District. The SWCD promotes land-use activities that benefit the environment and help create a sustainable community.

Local, State, and Federal Policy Making

- SWCD Supervisors participated in Local Water Planning Efforts
- Conducted Local Work Group meeting to set priorities for financial assistance programs

(Other responsibilities and activities continued...)

- Met with the Executive Director and President of the National Association of Conservation Districts via conference call to discuss NACD's work for local SWCDs
- Met with the county board throughout the year to update them on the County Feedlot Program, discuss joint County-SWCD projects, share the SWCD's annual report, and to report progress on water monitoring projects
- Held four special quarterly meetings in addition to regular board meetings. These extra meetings included: a strategic planning session, a tour of SWCD projects and high water issues, tour of Norris Camp and projects in the Beltrami Island State Forest and a budget meeting

Forestry and Tree Sales

- Sold 4,350 trees during the annual tree sale
- Provide source of trees for people who want to plant smaller quantities (<500)
- Provide tree care items, such as pin flags and deer repellants, to protect newly established trees
- Continued to be a source of information for programs such as the Sustainable Forests Incentives Act and programs to promote forestry and land conservation
- Worked with multiple landowners on tree planting plans and recommendations, including assisting with windbreak planning

Engineering Assistance

- Provided low cost engineering assistance for projects that protect water quality. Engineering assistance established through a 9-county Joint Powers Board agreement
- Completed topographic survey of Pine and Curry Island and Morris Point in 2014 to document current state of the islands

Accountability and Reporting

- Provided Annual Plan and Budget to Board of Water and Soil Resources and the L/W County Board
- Completed eLink reporting to account for all project dollars received through BWSR
- Prepared year end Financial Reporting Statements for BWSR
- Hired a CPA to conduct an audit on 2013 financials
- Continue to post the SWCD financial report, budget, annual plan, most recent independent audit and board minutes on the SWCD website

AgBMP Program, low interest loans for water quality

- Continue to promote and support the program, despite low demand for funding (banks are able to offer similar low rates)
- Promote the AgBMP program on the SWCD website, SWCD newsletter and via local newspaper



A culvert rover takes high resolution video of the inside of culverts.

(Other responsibilities and activities continued...)

Wildlife Habitat

- Continue partnership with US Fish and Wildlife Service and serve as a local connection to get projects on the ground
- Planted bulrushes with students at the Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area pond to try and improve diversity
- Assist landowners with tree planting recommendations, pond planning, and habitat management recommendations



Planting bulrushes at LW School.

Invasive Species Management

- Formed an Aquatic Invasive Species committee to develop a management plan to best utilize the AIS money from the state
- Initiate discussions with Always There Staffing to provide contract labor to control buckthorn
- Provide recommendations on weed management to landowners

Historical Data Preservation

- Continue to work on scanning the County Drainage Ditch records, dating back over 100 years. Project partners include County MIS Department and Conservation Corps of Minnesota
- Continue to catalogue, scan and distribute copies of studies and assessments which have been conducted in Lake of the Woods County

Community Involvement and Education

- Serve as co-coordinator for the Area VIII Envirothon, a natural resources competition for 6th– 12th grades
- Published an issue of “Bridging the Gap” - the only local natural resource news publication covering conservation topics
- Continued the “Keep it Clean” campaign to clean up the shores of Lake of the Woods
- Attend public meetings to provide input and to stay informed on international water management issues
- Resource Technician participating in 2-year long leadership cohort to advance skills
- Serve an active role on the School Forest Committee and aid in the development of the Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area
- Hosted a Conservation Corps Apprentice who helped LW School staff twice a week as part of the summer school program.



Garbage collected along the shores of Lake of the Woods.



Financial Activities

Cost Share Funds received from the State in 2014

\$10,142 Total State Cost Share Funds received from State for Conservation Projects.

Cost Share Payments for Conservation Projects

\$22,883 Payments to Public Works Department to install 2 sidewater inlets and 2 erosion control structures in County ROW 

\$10,029 Cost share payments to landowners to control erosion

\$877 Cost share payments to landowners to seal abandoned wells

\$33,789 Total

Other Funding Assistance Provided by the District

\$1000 Staff time and funding contributed to host the spring tree pruning workshop

\$500 Donated to the Keep It Clean program to support the dumpster program

\$510 50/50 in matching funds spent for annual well testing clinic

\$5,000 Additional cost share funds set aside from Water Plan funding

\$7,010 Total

Total Additional Cash or In-kind Funding Received Through Partnerships

\$7,818 Donations received for the 2013-14 Keep It Clean Program from partners: Adrian's Resort, Cyrus Resort, Zippel Bay Resort and Babler's Access, LOW Tourism Bureau, Roseau SWCD, Cities of Warroad & Baudette, Bdt/LOW Chamber of Commerce and LOW County

\$3,960 Grant for MCC crew to clean up gully at Clementson Rapids 

\$6,600 Grant for MCC crew to assist with the Keep It Clean lakeshore cleanup 

\$31,140 Clean Water Funding received to inventory judicial ditches 

\$3,000 Staff time in-kind contributions for scanning county historical ditch records

\$52,518 Total

On the Ground Accomplishments

- 3 Wells sealed with cost share assistance
- 5 Well sealing applications received
- 17 Rain Gauge Program Volunteers helped to collect county-wide rainfall data in 2014
- 2,200 “Bringing the Gap” Newsletters distributed
- 20 Landowners who received technical assistance for Wetland issues
- 100 Flood damage reports received at SWCD and shared with County, State and Federal Partners
- 13 Educational newspaper articles published in local paper
- 51 Wells tested for e.coli, coliform bacteria and nitrate contamination
- 4,350 Trees sold for conservation plantings
 - 6 River Watch Program water sampling sites on streams within LOTW County (Baudette, Winter Road River)
 - 4 Total water sampling sites for the Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network (Black, Rainy, Rapid and East Fork of the Rapid)
 - 3 Routine feedlot inspections completed
 - 10 Grants written in 2014 to fund projects to help accomplish District goals. (4 FY15 Clean Water Fund grants, 1 MCC crew grant, 2 museum rain garden planning grants, 1 MCC Conservation Corps Apprentice)
 - 9 Notifications of previous grant applications (2 FY14 Clean Water Fund grants, 2 MCC crew grants, 2 museum rain garden planning grants, 2 NorthStar Electric Roundup grants, 1 MCC Conservation Corps Apprentice)
 - 6 Lake accesses participating in the “Keep it Clean” dumpster campaign to help keep our lake free of trash
 - 45 “Keep It Clean” signs placed at lake accesses
- 1240 “Keep It Clean” decals distributed to over 40 local resorts and businesses
- 14.5 Miles of LOW shoreline cleaned up with the MCC crew and volunteers
- 115 Tons of trash hauled from the Keep It Clean dumpsters at lake accesses
- 19 Participants attending the “Tree Pruning” workshop hosted by the SWCD in partnership with U of M Extension
 - 1 Follow-up workshop on Tree Pruning planned for 2015 due to positive response
 - 1 High school teacher attending the River Watch sampling training



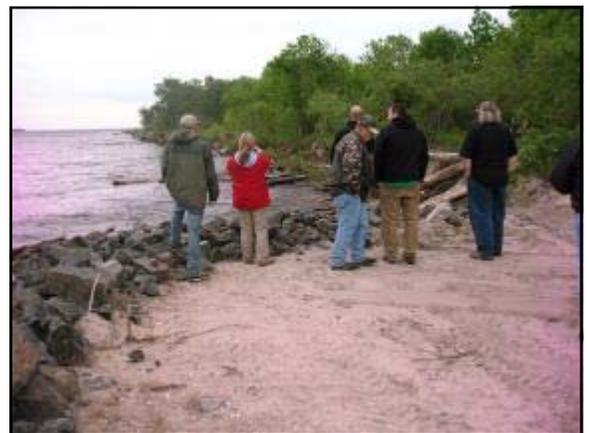
The Keep It Clean Dumpster Program continues to receive positive feedback from resorts and anglers as a program for keeping Lake of the Woods Clean!



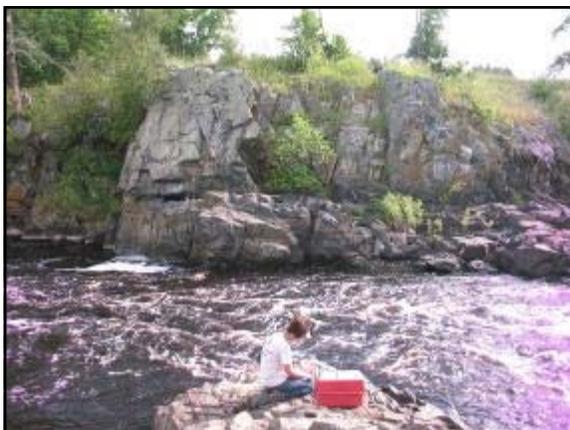
The SWCD Board held a strategic planning session in March with assistance from Extension Staff to regain focus and set goals and priorities for the next five to ten years.



The SWCD booth at the LOW County Fair focused on 2014 high water levels.



The SWCD Board stopped at Morris Point during its annual tour in June to view the high water damages.



The MN Conservation Corps apprentice program helped the SWCD monitor water quality on the Rapid River.



MN Conservation Corps crewmembers did some heavy lifting to help clean up and stabilize a ravine near Clementson Rapids.



Since 1952