



Lake of the Woods
Soil & Water Conservation District Est. 1952
www.LakeoftheWoodsSWCD.org



Bridging the Gap

Your link to local natural resource topics.

Summer-Fall 2023
Volume 18, Issue 1



We are excited to share that the Rainy-Rapid Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was approved by the State Board of Water and Soil Resources in May! It has been adopted locally by Lake of the Woods County and Lake of the Woods Soil and Water Conservation District. These partners are now working together to implement priorities within the plan using dedicated Clean Water Funding.

The plan priorities include protecting surface water quality by reducing erosion, restoring altered hydrology in the peatlands, protecting groundwater, and enhancing habitat.

The first biennium of funding is allocated for:

- Cost share for Forest Management Plans on private lands
- Funding for agricultural practices to control erosion and improve soil health
- Stabilizing stretches of county ditches in need of repair
- Researching suitable locations to retain water in the peatlands
- Completing a stormwater management plan for the City of Baudette

If you are interested in practices for forest management, soil health, planting pollinators or improving grazing pastures now is the time to contact us and get your project planning underway!

Upcoming Events



SWCD Board Meetings, monthly

SWCD Board meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 5:00 p.m.

Meetings are held in the LW County Government Center Commissioner's Boardroom. A remote attendance option is available upon request.

Tree Sales Program

The SWCD sells conservation-grade trees and shrubs for larger-scale plantings. Stock is available on a first come, first serve basis. Seedlings will be ready for pickup in early May.

Contact us to be placed on our mailing list. The order form is typically available in December or January.

Deer Browse Protection

Now is the time to protect your tree seedlings from deer and rodents.

Plantskydd deer and rodent repellent can be purchased at the SWCD. The SWCD also has bud caps for white, red and jack pine protection.

Tree tubes are available for purchase upon request.



District Supervisors

Monica Dohmen, District I
Chairman

Frank Sindelir, District III
Vice-chair

Nancy Dunnell, District V
Treasurer

John Sonstegard, District II
Secretary

Roger Krause, District IV
Public Relations

District Employees

Josh Stromlund,
County LWPO & SWCD
Manager

Mike Hirst,
Resource Conservationist

Corryn Trask,
Resource Conservationist

Becky Buegler,
Office Assistant

Joe Vrtacnik,
Water Resources Technician

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Partners

Michael Steinhauer,
Resource Conservationist

Will Lee,
Soil Conservationist

Silvia Chamberlain,
Office Assistant

Mission Statement

"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."

EEO—All programs of the Lake of the Woods Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA, and NRCS are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.

SUMMER AT THE SWCD

For 12 years now, the SWCD has partnered with the Conservation Corps of MN and Iowa to host an AmeriCorps member through the Individual Placement Program. These AmeriCorps members spend the summer working with government and nonprofit partners and engage in conservation-related projects.

This summer, Mathew Mattern spent two months working alongside SWCD and NRCS staff in our office. Mathew is a recent Lake of the Woods High School graduate and has plans to attend Vermillion Community College this fall.

We are thankful to have had Mat's assistance throughout the summer and we wish him the best of luck in the future!



Mathew Mattern's Summer Report

Individual Placement Program

Conservation Corps of MN and Iowa



A few months before I started service, my career instructor mentioned a summer conservation job. I was originally planning on moving to Arizona this summer, but my plans were ruined and I was stuck in Baudette, Minnesota with nothing to do. I had a dishwashing job at the time and didn't want to spend my summer doing dishes, so I reached out to my career instructor and he helped me get the job.

I was very grateful to have had the opportunity to work a conservation job since that's what interests me the most. I took a job shadow with a forestry technician in March and I really wanted to pursue that career and I knew this job would be great experience for that. I was kind of bummed that I'd spend my last summer free of responsibility, doing some job I knew nothing about and it'd be a waste of time, but it actually was really enjoyable, something I didn't know a job could be. And it really saved me from boredom.

My favorite memory from the job was about two weeks after I started. We were doing a land inspection to find a good place for our soil health clinic and I saw some dark clouds in the distance. My coworkers were talking to the land owner and I was watching the clouds get closer and closer. It felt like they were talking a very, very long time. When they started, it was bright and sunny and by the time they finished, it was dark. Thankfully, they had to wrap up their conversation because of the approaching storm. Before we packed up, I looked up at some of the clouds above us and they were swirling around and it looked pretty cool, like a mini hurricane. It got kind of scary though when two little funnels of cloud came out of the center of the swirling clouds and started to wrap around each other. They faded away before turning into anything, but we still had to go because of the rain. We had to head straight through the storm to get back to the office and it was raining so hard we couldn't see and had to pull over. It was also hailing pretty hard and the sensors in the truck were going crazy because of the storm. The picture I have is of another storm that came through; I didn't get any pictures of the cool one though.

Overall, I'm pretty happy I took this job. Learning how to sample water and survey land and becoming an AIS inspector was something I never thought I'd do. The job was great experience and will look great on my resume whenever I get another job. The money was also appreciated. Maybe next summer I'll do this again.



One of Mat's lessons learned this summer is that accomplishing field work is at the mercy of mother nature. Mat took this photo as they drove away from the storm.

Who knows...maybe he'll become a storm chaser instead of a forestry technician!

TATTOOS ARE COOL!



Boaters will now be greeted with a new message as they leave the water. Boat ramps in Lake of the Woods County were tattooed this summer with the message "Clean. Drain. Dry. Stop Invasive Species"

Special thanks to the following for helping us spread the message!

Bugsy's on Bostic
Ken Mar Ke Resort
Rainy River Marina
Cyrus Resort
Ship's Wheel Public Landing
Timbermill and Peace Park City Landings



Intern Mathew Mattern and SWCD Technician Joe Vrtacnik are shown above stenciling the boat ramp at Timbermill City Park.

One of the summer projects for SWCD intern Mathew Mattern was to inventory public and private accesses in the county to see if a stencil would work. If a site met requirements, Mattern then followed up with the owner to see if they were interested in having this message applied to their ramp.

RECYCLE, REDUCE, REUSE

Our focus at the SWCD often revolves around soil erosion, but we do recognize that there are many ways to protect water quality. Properly disposing of pharmaceuticals, paints, oils and other wastes is one way that most individuals can help keep these contaminants out of our waters.

So, to help make things a little more convenient for people, we wanted to help get the message out. Here are some resources in Lake of the Woods County where you can recycle, reduce and reuse.



Graceton Solid Waste Facility

Did you know that household hazardous waste is accepted year-round at the Graceton Solid Waste Facility?

The following is an abbreviated list of items that are considered household hazardous waste:

- Bleach, cleaners
- Pesticides and herbicides
- Paints and stains
- Aerosol cans
- Lithium batteries
- Fluorescent lightbulbs
- Mercury thermostats
- Oil and antifreeze, used or new



No commercial wastes are accepted. Containers should be labeled if possible but it's not required.

The Landfill also offers other ways to reduce the strain on our landfills by recycling and reusing items. Things like brush and grass clippings, pallets and clean lumber, shingles, cardboard, glass and other items are being recycled or repurposed. Metals like copper, aluminum and brass are all sorted separately for market.

For a list of items accepted along with fees you can contact the staff at the landfill or visit the County website at www.co.lake-of-the-woods.mn.us/highway-department/solid-waste-2/

Location: 1758 53rd St SW, Williams

Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri, 8:00-4:00 & Sat 8:00-12:00

Questions? Call (218) 783-3995

Aluminum Can Fundraiser

The Boy Scout's have an aluminum can trailer parked in the Auto Value parking lot in Baudette. The Scouts recycle these cans and use the money from the sale to support their programming.



This trailer is available for aluminum can recycling from around April through October. Outside these times you can contact Eric Tange 218-791-8392 to arrange a drop-off.

DISPOSE 
TO PROTECT



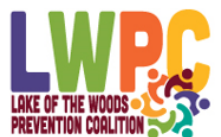
Family Community Environment

Don't flush your prescription drugs down the drain! It's important to safely dispose of your prescription medications in order to protect others. Proper disposal also protects our lakes and streams from contamination.

There are options available if you need a safe place to dispose of your unused or expired medications.

Safe drug disposal boxes are located in Baudette at:

- CHI Lakewood Health Clinic
- Lake of the Woods County Sheriff's Office



Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medication Disposal

Studies have found that medicines flushed down the drain can contaminate our lakes and streams, which can hurt fish and other aquatic wildlife, and end up in our drinking water. Some medications, such as hormones and

antidepressants, include endocrine disrupting compounds that interfere with the reproduction and normal growth of many aquatic species, such as frogs and fish. (MN PCA)

See the previous page for disposal locations.

Want your organization or business to be included on the recycle, reduce, reuse list?

Email us at Staff@LakeoftheWoodsSWCD.org We are happy to include other resources for our community.



The SWCD has received a new tool from our partners at DNR Forestry to help combat European buckthorn.

Buckthorn is tough to kill. When cut down it will sprout back, sending up dozens of shoots from the stump. In order to prevent this the stump must be treated with chemical. Here's where Buckthorn Blasters come in to play. Buckthorn Blasters are small containers that hold the herbicide which will kill European buckthorn. They make it possible to apply a very small amount of herbicide to the stump. The Blaster has a cap and so it can be safely stored between uses.

How can you receive a buckthorn blaster?

1. Determine if buckthorn is on your property by bringing in a sample or having a site visit conducted by the SWCD or DNR Forestry.
2. Come into the SWCD office to sign our check-out sheet and pick up your Blaster along with a copy of the chemical safety data sheet.
3. Go forth and kill some buckthorn!

What is Buckthorn?

European buckthorn is a highly invasive shrub or small tree that forms dense thickets. In Lake of the Woods county we are seeing it mainly around the cities of Baudette, Williams and Roosevelt but it is spreading outward. It is listed on the State's restricted noxious weed list.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: SHARPTAILED GROUSE

Article by William Lee, NRCS Soil Conservationist

The Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) is one of Minnesota's native grouse species that currently resides in the Northwest corner of Minnesota with some populations in the Northeast/Lower arrowhead area of the state. However, it hasn't always been this way. Sharptail historically had range over a greater portion of Minnesota and extended further south in the United States. Since the early 1900's their range and habitat have both shrunk significantly. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources estimates the average hunter harvest numbers for these game birds to have been over 100,000 birds in the 1940's to recent years where harvest levels are at 10,000 birds or less annually. Anecdotally, many stories are told of massive flocks of these birds in the western reaches of Minnesota. These population changes are due in large part to habitat loss through conversion of grasslands to row crops, and natural succession of grasslands closing into larger woody species or being planted to pine or spruce plantations.

The fascinating cycle of a Sharp-tailed Grouse begins in the spring of each year in late March and can go through Mid-May in some parts of their range. Males (cock) and females (hen) gather on breeding grounds known as "leks" to court with unique dancing rituals to attach a mate. Leks are most often formed in areas of sparse/low vegetation and sometimes on a hill or rise above the surrounding landscape. The dancing usually begins in the twilight hours of the morning or even when it is still just dark out and can last into the mid-morning. While similar to other prairie grouse species, the Sharptail has its own unique artistic flare to the breeding dance. Males will extend their necks forward and hold their fan (tail feathers) high moving them back and forth quickly in a vibrating motion, at the same time quickly stomping their feet and moving back and forth in circles. Small purple air sacs located on the neck are inflated and deflated to make a cooing

sound, this can be seen when the cock expands his neck feathers and raises a brilliant yellow eyebrow patch. To finish off this dance move he will spread his wings out, and slightly downward for the duration on the dance (see picture!). Hens observe these mating dances from the outside edge of the lek and will move into the center and mate with the male that put on the right dance moves for them.

Females will nest on the ground often near clumps of grass or near the base of shrubs in a thicket and lay about a dozen eggs on average. Eggs are light brown or green and some can have many speckles on them. The clutch of eggs will be incubated for just less than 4 weeks. Young Sharp-tailed Grouse are precocial (able to feed and move on their own very young) and will forage on mostly insects and can even make short flights at just a couple weeks old, under the watchful eye of their mother. Within about 3 months the young birds look much like the adults but smaller and by the autumn months look and act just like the adults and are roughly the same size.

Sharp-tailed Grouse can eat a large variety of different types of food including insects like grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars and also fruits produced by species such as rose-hip, dogwoods, buffalo-berry, chokecherry, and others. They will eat the harder tree/shrub products such as buds from aspen, and catkins from birch and alder. They are also often seen in agricultural fields feeding on grains and agricultural products like alfalfa, wheat, oats, flax etc.

Sharptail favor a habitat of open native grassland and shrub mosaic with scattered pockets of native shrubs and a much smaller component of aspen stands on the edge of their preferred open ground. In harsh winter conditions in Minnesota, they can be found in frozen cattail marsh's or utilizing bogs.

Hope for the Sharp-tailed Grouse has grown stronger in recent years. Conservation organizations, one being the NRCS, have given higher funding prioritization to projects that include core habitat management practices within Sharp-tailed Grouse range. Many other organizations have begun a push in recent years to get more information about Sharp-tailed Grouse to the public and prioritize projects to benefits these native prairie birds.

To learn more about Sharp-tailed Grouse and how you can help to manage your landscape to benefit these birds there are multiple fantastic resources for information. Some organizations can even assist with a habitat project providing financial assistance through a conservation program to improve better habitat and food resources.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Guide Sheet

<https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/MN/sharptail.pdf>



SOIL HEALTH COACHING

Soil health experts Kent Solberg and Doug Voss from the Sustainable Farming Association have been coaching local producers on the principles of soil health. They provide technical support for testing soil productivity, lowering inputs and trying new techniques. Most recently, staff from SFA, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the SWCD hosted a field day north of Williams.

If you would be interested in 1 on 1 coaching from SFA, contact the SWCD.



BRUSH SHEARING FOR HABITAT

Brush shearing is a common way to increase habitat for bird species such as sharp-tailed grouse. Shearing overly-mature stands of brush creates diversity for feeding and shelter.

Contact the SWCD if you are interested in learning about cost-sharing options for practices like this.



FOREST PLANNING

Forest Stewardship Planning Cost Share Program

There is currently funding available for landowners in Lake of the Woods County for Forest Stewardship Planning. The primary goal of this cost share program is to encourage participants to actively manage their forested lands for water quality benefits.

The secondary goal is to increase land protection efforts in the watershed by supporting enrollment in the Sustainable Forest Incentives Program. SFIA enrollees receive an annual payment for each acre enrolled in this program. Enrolled land cannot be developed and it should be managed according to recommendations in the plan.

Eligible applicants must have a minimum of 20 acres forested land and must meet eligibility requirements for plan writing. This program is delivered on a first come, first serve basis.

Cost share will cover up to \$300 + \$6.50 per planned acre up to 320 acres, with payment not to exceed 100% of the total plan cost.

Did you know...? Payments for forested land enrolled in SFIA ranges from \$10.09 to \$17.86 per acre. You must have an active Forest Management Plan and enroll for a minimum of 8 years.

LILAC TROUBLES?

The SWCD office has been fielding several phone calls this year about well-established lilac bushes dying. I have been experiencing this same phenomenon at my own house. My beautiful lilac hedge started slowly dying back in early July. By the first part of August it was almost completely brown and had spread to the adjacent hedge.

So, I decided to reach out to the Plant Disease Clinic Specialists at the University of Minnesota to find out what's happening to the lilacs around here. It turns out, the Clinic Director there is an old classmate and past co-worker of mine. What a fun, small world we live in!

Here was his response...

"My strong suspicion would be Pseudocercospora leaf blight as it's been affecting lilacs strongly in the 2nd half of the summer for the last 3 years or so. It's a foliar disease so doesn't impact the overall health of the tree as much as other more systemic diseases but severe infection year after year could stress the tree. Not a new disease so why it's gotten worse since 2020 is really kind of a mystery."

He also shared this resource: hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/lilac-pseudocercospora-leaf-spot

So, don't despair (yet) if your lilac leaves turned brown and crispy. There's still hope! With a little TLC they may just make it. If not...you can purchase replacements on the SWCD's annual tree sale. (what...too soon??) -Corryn



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Thank You!

Thank you to the partners who help support our programs throughout the year.

Jake's Sawmill for providing wood shavings that are used to protect the tree seedlings for our annual tree sale!

Howard's Cenex for contributing towards gift certificates for our rain gauge program volunteers.

Andy's Garage of Williams for serving as a drop-off point for our well testing clinic participants in the Williams area.