

Conservation News

Spring 2015

Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)

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Chris Dahl , **Vice-Chair**

Dave Ausen , **Treasurer**

Paul Heers, Jr. **Secretary**

Colin Wittmer, **Supervisor**

Congratulations to the 2014 Outstanding Conservationists. . .

Jim and Linda Butler were chosen as our outstanding conservationists for 2014. They were honored at the MN Association of Conservation Districts annual convention in Bloomington on December 9, 2014. They currently live in Cass Lake since retiring in 2004. Prior to that they ran a corn and hog operation in Newry Township by Maple Island. Some of the farm has been in the family since Jim's grandfather farmed in the early 1900's. They currently have 120 acres of RIM/WRP wetland restoration, 22 acres of RIM buffer, 35 acres of CRP prairie restoration, 9 acres of CRP tree planting, a grassed waterway, and two grade stabilization structures. The Butlers realized that some of their land was more suited for habitat and that buffers are valuable to protect our surface waters.

A pair of trumpeter swans has been returning to Butler's wetland restoration for years to raise their chicks, called cygnets. Their recent native planting turned out great and was in full bloom at the time of our visit in August. Their involvement in conservation inspired a daughter to pursue a career in wildlife biology. Jim and Linda hope that conservation programs remain available to land owners so that it is economically viable to place land into conservation easements.



Jim & Linda Butler on their ReInvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement



Trumpeter Swans have found Butler's restored wetland to be a good place to raise their young

Welcome New Staff. . .

Bryar Johnson is the new Soil Conservation Technician for the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service. Some of his duties will include working with CRP, WRP, EQIP, HEL (Highly Erodible Land), and new projects going on throughout the county. His degree is from Northern State University in Aberdeen, SD, where he majored in Biology and Environmental Science.

After college he began working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Minnesota before moving to Texas in 2010. He met his wife and they were married in October of 2013 in Galveston, TX. They both moved to Albert Lea in September of 2014. In his free time, Bryar also volunteers with the Albert Lea High School wrestling team.



Bryar pictured here with his wife Cameron



Planning for a Tree Planting. . .

When customers ask for assistance in determining what tree species to plant on their land, the Freeborn County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) does a number of things to make certain the trees they receive will have the best chance at survival.

One of the very first pieces of information our staff looks at is the type of soils at the location where the landowner is interested in planting trees. Each soil type has its own special set of characteristics; it also has its very own Conservation Tree & Shrub Group (CTSG). A CTSG is a summary of climate and soil conditions in an area that affects a tree or shrub growth and survival. The CTSG is used in the selection of species that would be suitable for windbreaks and other tree and shrub plantings. There are 10 CTSGs and several subgroups based on special conditions such as depth to ground water, limiting layers, calcium carbonate content, and flooding. The CTSG also shows the expected height of tree species in twenty years. Heights can vary in species depending on the CTSG. Staff takes all of this into consideration when making recommendations.

SWCD staff with a site visit can make further recommendations. Depending on the trees purpose a site visit is helpful. Existing trees are usually a good indicator of what will have the most success in the future. For new shelterbelts, it is important to make sure its location will be the most effective at protecting buildings and livestock from strong winter winds and snow.

The SWCD can create a tree plan for the landowner that includes recommended spacing, the number of trees needed to accomplish the landowner's needs and a map showing the location of the planting. On the other hand, they can simply provide the landowner with a list of recommended trees for their site. Either way the Freeborn SWCD offers these services at no cost. Call 507-373-5607 ext. 3 or visit 1400 W. Main Street in Albert Lea to start the process of getting recommendations for your next tree planting.

With the right planning shelterbelts are effective tools to conserve energy

Don't forget to give us your email for timely information or announcements

Freeborn County Soil Health Team. . .



Did you hear about when the banker, soil scientist, farmer, and seed salesman met in Albert Lea to talk about Soil Health? It sounds like a set-up for a lame joke but it actually describes the Freeborn County Soil Health Team meetings. The Freeborn County Soil Health Team is a group of private businesses, local producers, and local government organizations with an interest in improving our soil health and water quality based on the four soil health principles:

- ⇒ *Keep the soil covered*
- ⇒ *Reduce soil disturbance*
- ⇒ *Keep living roots as long as possible to feed the soil*
- ⇒ *Increase crop diversity*

The team was first organized less than a year ago and has been meeting about once a month. The broad experiences of the members allow for sharing of information such as soil science, how soil is affected by agriculture, cover crop seeding recommendations, opportunities for government incentives, and local producers who are successfully doing soil health practices such as strip till and cover crops right here in Freeborn County. We have hosted a field day and a winter workshop to help educate local farmers and Ag professionals on the benefits of soil health and how to implement these practices with our relatively short growing season, wet soils, and corn/soybean rotations. We are learning more and more about these innovative practices and plan to have more field days this year to share this information with the public.

Field Day – Local producers discussing reduced tillage and implementing cover crops

National Arbor Day is April 24, 2015 – plant a tree!

NRCS News. . .

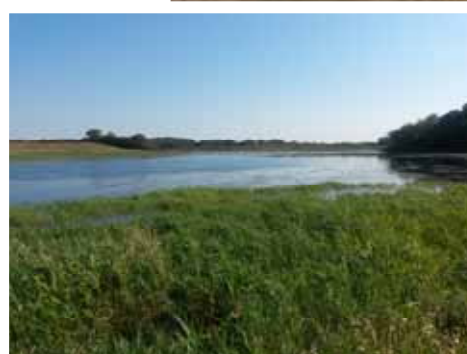
The 2015 Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in order to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water quality and soil health, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, or improved or created wildlife habitat. The sign-up applications for EQIP are on a continuous basis, but NRCS establishes cut-off dates to complete conservation plans and develop potential financial assistance agreements. The last cut-off date for 2015 EQIP plans for MN was December 19, 2014. Any EQIP applications received by December 2015 will be planned for 2016. If you have any questions on EQIP call Gary Kurer at 507-373-7960, Extension 114.



Rock Chute at Dale Stensrud site to stabilize the grade of the ditch in October 2014 using EQIP funding partnered with Freeborn County SWCD & GBERBA using Clean Water Funds

Wetland Easements. . .

If you own land that contains drained altered wetlands with adjoining buffers that can be restored wetland ecosystems, then a wetland easement could be a great option for you. Wetland easements are available through both the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Landowners who enroll in a wetland easement receive an easement payment and agree to retire their land from farming and development, and restore wetland ecosystems. These programs also provide financial assistance for landowners to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands and surrounding native vegetation. Under these easements land is not open to public hunting and landowners retain ownership. Wetland restoration on privately owned land provides benefits not only to the landowner but to the surrounding community by enhancing wildlife habitat, reducing flood damage, improving water quality, enhancing aesthetic quality of the landscape and so much more. Up to 100% cost-share is available for restoration and easement payments are very competitive. If you are interested and would like to know some wetland easement options for your property or know anybody that might be interested, don't hesitate to call Chad Billat, at 507-373-5607 ext. 3, or email, at chad.billat@mn.usda.gov. Chad is located in the Albert Lea USDA Conservation office.



Before and after wetland restoration

Extreme Weather Events and Conservation . . .

In the last several years we have seen more intense and frequent weather events in Southern Minnesota. Just this last June one of our volunteer rain gauge recorders near Clarks Grove reported 10.6" of rainfall in just one week, and 3.3" of that fell in one day. These large rain or snow melt events can wreak havoc on agricultural fields. Common problems we see are large gullies on hillsides and sheet and rill erosion that moves topsoil from hilltops into local water bodies. These issues can have an impact on the productivity of crops. Erosion moves the soil and its nutrients to locations that plants can no longer use them and often to areas where we don't want them.

The Freeborn County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has a solution to these erosion problems; grassed waterways, water and sediment control basins and grade stabilization structures are all ways to help gully erosion. Terraces that follow the contour of the field are a way to prevent sheet and rill erosion. The SWCD can assist in determining the most efficient solution to the issue, provide cost share if available, develop a design, and oversee the construction of the practice to ensure it's built to standards. Visit our office located at 1400 West Main Street in Albert Lea to get started.



Sediment deposited at the bottom of a hill after a large rain event in 2013

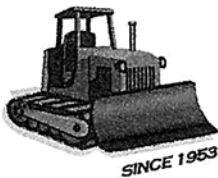
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best selection.**

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