

## Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) 2014 Accomplishments

**State Cost-Share Program** – Four projects utilizing nearly \$15,000 in State Cost-Share funds were completed in Meeker County during 2014 with one more currently underway, planned for completion in 2015. All required reports were submitted to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in a timely manner.



The 2014 projects included shelterbelts, sediment basins, and a field windbreak.

Meeker SWCD works cooperatively with the Crow River Organization of Water (CROW), West Central Technical Service Area (TSA), and various lake associations and watersheds to identify critical erosion sites and assist landowners with funding and technical support for projects to control erosion at these sites.

**Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)** – The District is the designated local government unit (LGU) for wetland regulation in Meeker County. Meeker SWCD made over 100 landowner contacts regarding wetland regulation, including both on and off site consultations. The LGU made formal decisions on four applications which included one boundary and type, two no-loss, and one replacement plan.

All required reports were submitted to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in a timely manner.

**Federal Farm Programs** – Meeker SWCD assisted Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) with ongoing federal programs.

**Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)** - Over 5,600 acres in Meeker County are enrolled in perpetual conservation easements with the State of Minnesota. Site inspections were completed on 39 of these easements during 2014. In 2014, 12 RIM buffer applications were submitted, and all existing 2013 easements were closed



**Pheasants Forever Collaboration** – Meeker SWCD collaborates with Pheasants Forever through a Farm Bill Biologist (FBB) based half time at the Meeker Conservation Office.

This year there were 39 Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) contracts enrolled for a total of 605.6 acres. The FBB inspected and worked with landowners on over 90 sites and made over 220 quality landowner contacts about conservation and land inquiries. We had 12 landowners submit applications for the RIM-Buffer program. Unfortunately none of them were funded.

The FBB spoke on grassland management and buffers at two conferences with 48 total participants and provided outreach to 240 students at the Eden Valley Elementary School Environmental Day talking about quality habitat. We enrolled one Walk-in-Access site to add 50 acres of temporary public hunting for the next three years.

**Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Water Permits** - Meeker SWCD reviewed 42 DNR water permits in 2014.

**AgBMP (Best Management Practices) Loan Program** – Meeker SWCD serves as the local government unit for the AgBMP Loan Program in Meeker County. No new loans were issued under this program during 2014, but staff continues to stay abreast of requirements and opportunities in this program and promotes it to landowners who could benefit from the program.

**Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Well Observation** - Water levels are taken on nine wells in Meeker County for the Department of Natural Resources. Five test wells are measured monthly for eight months during the year and four irrigation wells are measured twice a year.

**Feedlot Program** – The Assistant County Feedlot Officer is on staff at Meeker SWCD.

There were a total of 274 feedlots registered in Meeker County at the end of 2014. During the year, 37 inspections revealed 32 feedlots in compliance and 5 out of compliance upon first inspection.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer, responded to one complaint during 2014 regarding feedlot issues. Findings revealed that no state statutes nor county ordinances had been violated.

The District provides information to feedlot owners/producers seeking funding to help them improve their sites. The Assistant Feedlot Officer also helps plan and conduct informational meetings that pertain to topics relevant to our County.

State reporting has been completed, audited and found to be current.

**Tree Program** - Over 12,000 trees were sold in 2014 to landowners for planting. The District completed 11 plantings. In addition, 20,000 feet of weed barrier fabric was installed on tree planting sites.

Each spring Meeker SWCD offers a wide variety of shrubs, deciduous and evergreen trees for sale at reasonable prices. This year 29 different species of trees and shrubs were sold. Technical assistance is provided to landowners in selecting correct tree species and design of field windbreaks, shelter belts and wildlife plantings



The tree program is promoted on the District's Website, through press releases to local media and via fliers distributed to local businesses and agencies visited by Meeker County landowners.

**Noxious Weeds** – The District published the required weed notice in Meeker County newspapers and responded to citizen complaints regarding noxious weeds.

The County Ag Inspector responded to five complaints during 2014 regarding noxious weed issues. Findings revealed no noxious weeds at four of the sites and one site had an infestation of Wild Parsnip. The County Ag Inspector worked with the landowner to develop a plan for controlling the Wild Parsnip.

The District is also working on developing a Cooperative Weed Management Area strategic management plan for the control of noxious weeds in Meeker County.

The Commercial Applicator License Exams was administered.

Required reports were submitted properly and in a timely manner.

**Rain Gauge Program** - Two landowners in Meeker County measure precipitation daily and submit reports to the SWCD office during 2014. The District mails these reports to the State Climatology Office and gathers additional information from the rain gauge program participants as requested by the Climatology Office when special needs arise.

The District acts as liaison between the Climatology Office and program participants, sharing information with and providing materials to program participants.

**Listening Session/Local Work Group** – Meeker SWCD hosted the local conservation listening session in September and participated in the Local Work Group process of prioritizing practices to address priority concerns identified.

**Outstanding Conservationist** – Darlene Miller of rural Litchfield was selected as Meeker County's Outstanding Conservationist for 2014. Miller was honored at a luncheon during the state convention of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in December.

An article about their conservation practices was sent to local media and presented on the District's Website. A photograph Darlene Miller receiving the award in December and an accompanying press release was also sent to local media and appears on the District's Website.



**Poster Contest** – All schools in Meeker County are invited to conduct a conservation poster contest with their sixth-grade students, sponsored by Meeker SWCD.



In 2014, 125 students participated in the contest. Each participating student received a participation ribbon. The posters are judged by the Meeker Board of Supervisors with cash prizes being awarded to the first and second place winners from each class.

A press release including a photograph of the winners was sent to local media.

The top three posters advanced to Area competition.

**Stewardship Week** - Program inserts were provided to churches within the county in observation of Stewardship Week in late April, 2014. In addition, press releases were sent to local media to publicize and recognize Stewardship Week.

**Envirothon** – The District provided contact information for Meeker County schools to the organizers of the Area Envirothon, an outdoor learning event for school students, and provided financial support for the program.

**Healthy Lakes and Rivers Program** – Meeker SWCD is working with the Southwest Initiative Foundation and serving as fiscal agent for a grant approved to support the Meeker County Healthy Lakes and Rivers project.

Meeker SWCD maintained active membership in the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), MASWCD Area 2, Minnesota Association of County Ag Inspectors (MACIA), Minnesota Association of County Feedlot Officers (MACFO) and the Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE).

SWCD staff and supervisors attended meetings of watersheds, West Central Technical Service Area (WCTSA), MASWCD Area II, State and Regional Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), County Ag Inspectors, One Watershed One Plan Technical Committee, One Watershed One Plan Policy Committee, Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force, the annual Water Plan Meeting and various training workshops throughout the year.