



## Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) 2015 Accomplishments

**State Cost-Share Program** – Four projects utilizing nearly \$6,500 in State Cost-Share funds were completed in Meeker County during 2015 with one more currently underway, planned for completion in 2016. In addition,



multiple landowners are planning projects in 2016. All required reports were submitted to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in a timely manner.

The 2015 projects included streambank/shoreland, rock inlet and well decommissioning projects.

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 five applications which included three boundary and type, and two replacement plans using the Minnesota Wetland Bank. Over 20 potential wetland violations were also investigated by the LGU.

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. The Farm Bill Biologist assisted four Field Offices with 10 on-site monitorings. Each monitoring included GPS points, photographic documentation of conditions and vegetative status.

**Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)** - Over 5,650 acres in Meeker County are enrolled in perpetual conservation easements with the State of Minnesota. Site inspections were completed on 54 of these easements during 2015. In 2015, six RIM buffer applications were submitted, and all existing 2014 easements were closed. In addition to new easements, the staff is working with three landowners on upgrading their existing monoculture vegetative stands to a diverse 30+ species of native grass and pollinator species mixes.



**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 74 Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) contracts enrolled for a total of 1,271 acres. In addition to new sign-ups, we are actively pursuing landowners who are interested in enhancing up to 10% of their existing cover to a pollinator plot.

In May, Meeker County Pheasants Forever and Meeker SWCD hosted a tour for the Meeker County Commissioners showcasing five local projects that the two organizations worked on over the past couple of years. The projects included a CRP planting, a RIM easement, a Walk-in-Access site, a tree planting, and a fee-title acquisition. The tour showcased the daily workings of the SWCD and Pheasants Forever partnership. The commissioners enjoyed the tour, and they hope to make it a bi-annual event.



Another local outreach project was setting up a booth at the Meeker County Fair for the first time in over seven years. General conservation programs were the focus of the booth display. The display included a backdrop from Farm Service Agency, a cooler giveaway from Meeker Pheasants Forever chapter, a table top display focusing on CRP, State Cost-Share, and Easements and a tree giveaway from Meeker SWCD.

**Buffer Law** - In June of 2015, Governor Dayton signed into law a new buffer initiative aimed at enhancing protection of Minnesota's waters. The buffer initiative will help protect the state's water resources from erosion and runoff pollution by establishing roughly 110,000 acres of buffer along waterways. Meeker SWCD is ready to provide technical assistance to any county resident looking to install conservation practices on their land. We will help landowners walk through the process, apply for funding, and be an ongoing resource for establishing buffers and other conservation practices.

**Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Water Permits** - Meeker SWCD reviewed 33 DNR water permits in 2015.

**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 2015, 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 2015. During the year, 37 inspections revealed 36 feedlots in compliance and one out of compliance upon first inspection.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer, responded to three complaints during 2015 regarding feedlot issues. Findings revealed that one site was compliant and two sites were issued notices of non-compliance.

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 10,000 trees were sold in 2015 to landowners for planting. The District completed five plantings. In addition, 6,000 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.

This year the Meeker SWCD added a pollinator seed and plant sale to their annual spring tree sale. By adding the two native grass and flower seed mixes and three seedling plant kits, landowners could add a pollinator plot to nearly any area of their property. This first year there were 40 orders of plants and seed. These orders will add valuable native flowers to the Meeker County landscape 500 square feet at a time.

**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 ten complaints during 2015 regarding noxious weed issues. Findings revealed no noxious weeds at five of the sites and five sites 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 continued its work on developing a Cooperative Weed Management Area strategic management plan and was awarded the Cooperative Weed Management Area Grant for 2016-17 from the Board of Water & Soil Resources.

The Commercial Applicator License Exams was administered.

Required reports were submitted properly and in a timely manner.

**Rain Gauge Program** - Five landowners in Meeker County measure precipitation daily and submitted reports on line or to the SWCD office during 2015. The District mails submitted 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** – Todd and Ann Lemke and family of rural Watkins were selected as Meeker County's Outstanding Conservationists for 2015. The Lemkes were 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 and a photograph of Lemkes receiving the award were sent to local media and presented 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 2015, 120 students from the Litchfield Middle School 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, 2015. 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 worked with the Southwest Initiative Foundation and served as fiscal agent for a grant approved to support the Meeker County Healthy Lakes and Rivers project.

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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), and Minnesota Association of County Feedlot Officers (MACFO).

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.