

Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) 2016 Accomplishments

State Cost-Share Program – Two projects utilizing nearly \$10,300 in State Cost-Share funds were completed in Meeker County during 2016. In addition, multiple landowners are planning projects in 2017. All required reports were submitted to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in a timely manner.



The 2016 projects were streambank/shoreland stabilization 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 13 applications which included five boundary and type, one exemption, four no-loss applications and three 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.

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 58 of these easements during 2016. Staff secured state funds to implement cover upgrades on four existing RIM easements in Meeker County.



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

This year there were 107 Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) contracts enrolled for a total of 1,711 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 pollinator workshop focusing on backyard pollinator plots. The Litchfield Wetland Management District of Fish and Wildlife Service provided a Litchfield landowner with cost share to establish a three acre pollinator plot. Meeker SWCD and Meeker Pheasants Forever were also financial partners in this project. During the workshop we had 30 participants learn how to establish their own backyard pollinator plots.



Another local outreach project was setting up a booth at the Meeker County Fair. 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 and rain barrel 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 has completed an off site assessment of 4,600 parcels for buffer compliance. The assessment determined that 85% of parcels affected by the law were already in compliance with the buffer law requirements. Meeker SWCD has cost-share programs, easements, seed, grass drill rental, and technical assistance available to Meeker County landowners who need to become compliant with the buffer law.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Water Permits - Meeker SWCD reviewed 40 DNR water permits in 2016.

AgBMP (Best Management Practices) Loan Program – Meeker SWCD serves as the local government unit for the AgBMP Loan Program in Meeker County. No new loan applications were applied for under this program during 2016. 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 12 wells in Meeker County for the Department of Natural Resources. Eight 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 253 feedlots registered in Meeker County at the end of 2016. During the year, 38 inspections revealed 30 feedlots in compliance and 8 out of compliance upon first inspection.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer responded to 12 complaints during 2016 regarding feedlot issues. Findings revealed that 11 sites were compliant and 1 site was issued a notice of non-compliance.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer also responded to two emergency response efforts due to large liquid manure spills. Both cases were quickly controlled, manure was cleaned up and follow-up testing was completed.

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 2016 to landowners for planting. The District completed six plantings. In addition, 9,500 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 25 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, Facebook, through press releases to local media and via fliers mailed to previous customers.



This year the Meeker SWCD continued a pollinator seed and plant sale to their annual spring tree sale. By adding the 21 native grass and flower seed mixes and 12 seedling plant kits, landowners could add a pollinator plot to nearly any area of their property. These orders will add valuable native flowers to the Meeker County landscape 500 square feet at a time.



Native Seed Drill Program – This spring the District purchased an eight foot native grass and flower seed drill for landowners of Meeker and surrounding counties to rent. With this drill landowners are able to install food plots, cover crops, and native grass and flower plantings. Sixteen of the landowners seeded their CRP plantings and two landowners inter-seeded their pasture. A total of 404 acres were seeded this year. For each landowner, the District delivers, helps the landowner set up the drill, and picks up the drill once they are finished. This program is very successful as it gives District staff one more opportunity to interact with the landowners to ensure they are seeding the correct seed mix, that the site is adequately prepared, and to give additional guidance on ongoing management.

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 20 complaints during 2016 regarding noxious weed issues. Findings revealed no noxious weeds at 5 of the sites, 13 sites had an infestation of Wild Parsnip and 2 sites had an infestation of Spotted Knapweed. The County Ag Inspector worked with the landowner to develop a plan for controlling the noxious weeds.

The District has developed a Cooperative Weed Management Area strategic management plan through the Cooperative Weed Management Area Grant received from the Board of Water & Soil Resources. Four projects totaling \$181.30 were completed using grant funds to control noxious weeds. Grant funds were utilized to educate the public on noxious weeds at events and to provide educational materials for land owners to assist with identification and control of noxious weeds.

Twenty Commercial Applicator License Exams were 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 2016. 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 – Mike Swanson of rural Darwin was selected as Meeker County's Outstanding Conservationist for 2016. Swanson was honored at a luncheon during the state convention of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in December.

An article about his conservation practices and photographs of him with one of those practices were sent to local media and presented on the District's Website and Facebook page.



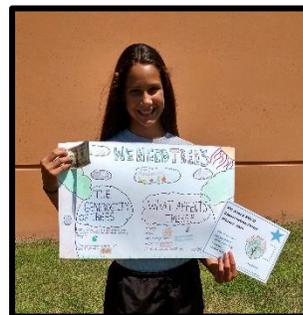
Poster Contest – All schools in Meeker County are invited to conduct a conservation poster contest with their sixth-grade students, sponsored by Meeker SWCD.



Litchfield



Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City



Daniela Parker



Eden Valley-Watkins

In 2016, 270 students from Litchfield, Eden Valley-Watkins and ACGC Middle Schools, participated in the contest. Each participating student received a participation ribbon. Students from Eden Valley-Watkins and ACGC followed the “We All Need Trees” theme and were each given a bare root tree. The posters were judged by the Meeker Board of Supervisors with cash prizes being awarded to the first and second place winners from each class. In addition, the first and second place winners from Eden Valley-Watkins and ACGC classes were each given a potted conifer.

A press release including photographs of the winners was sent to local media and published on our website and Facebook page.

The top three posters advanced to Area competition. Meeker SWCD was proud to have Daniela Parker from ACGC take first place in the Area competition.

Stewardship Week - Press releases were sent to local media and churches to publicize and recognize Stewardship Week in late April, 2016.

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.

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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.