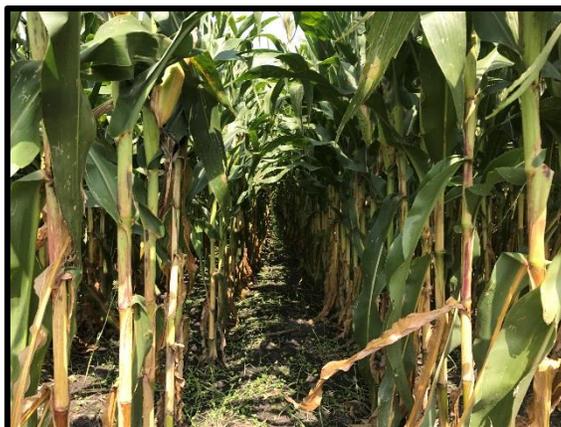


Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) 2017 Accomplishments

State Cost-Share Program – Five cover crop projects utilizing over \$12,800 in State Cost-Share funds were completed in Meeker County during 2017. In addition, multiple landowners are planning projects in 2018. All required reports were submitted to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in a timely manner.

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.



Local Capacity Cost Sharing – Four projects utilizing nearly \$15,000 in Local Capacity funding were completed in 2017. These projects included two water/sediment control projects, one lakeshore restoration and one wetland restoration.

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) – The District is the designated local government unit (LGU) for wetland regulation in Meeker County. Meeker SWCD made over 150 landowner contacts regarding wetland regulation, including both on and off site consultations. The LGU made formal decisions on four applications which included three boundary type and one exemption. Two Wetland Banks are in the process of being established in the county. Over 25 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 49 of these easements during 2017. Staff secured state funds to implement cover upgrades on two 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 109 Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) contracts enrolled for a total of 2,058 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.

A CRP Establishment Workshop was held to connect landowners with vendors during a less-busy time of the year. Through face to face meetings of the landowners and vendors, helpful relationships were formed. These relationships will aid in ensuring that Meeker County gets better quality habitat on the limited CRP acres we have available.



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 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 are 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 30 DNR water permits in 2017.

AgBMP (Best Management Practices) Loan Program – Meeker SWCD serves as the local government unit for the AgBMP Loan Program in Meeker County. One new loan application was applied for under this program during 2017. 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 11 wells in Meeker County for the Department of Natural Resources. Ten test wells are measured quarterly during the year and one irrigation well is measured twice a year.

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

There were a total of 293 feedlots registered in Meeker County at the end of 2017. During the year, 42 inspections revealed 45 feedlots in compliance and 1 out of compliance upon first inspection.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer responded to eight complaints during 2017 regarding feedlot issues. Findings revealed that six sites were compliant and two sites were issued notices of non-compliance.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer also received two Notices of Construction/Expansion and issued three Construction Short Form Feedlot Permits.

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 9,500 trees were sold in 2017 to landowners for planting. The District completed three plantings. In addition, 4,500 feet of weed barrier fabric was installed on 3 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 with their annual spring tree sale. By adding the 17 native grass and flower seed mixes and 14 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 – In 2016 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. Eighteen of the landowners seeded their CRP plantings and two landowners inter-seeded their pasture. A total of 433 acres were seeded this year. The District delivers the drill to all renters, helps them set up the drill, and picks up the drill once they are finished. This program is very successful. 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 15 complaints during 2017 regarding noxious weed issues. Findings revealed no noxious weeds at five of the sites, nine sites had an infestation of Wild Parsnip and one site had an infestation of Spotted Knapweed. The County Ag Inspector worked with the landowners 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. Nine projects totaling \$2,063.16 were completed using grant funds to control noxious weeds. Grant funds were utilized to educate the public on noxious weeds.

The District worked with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and University of Minnesota Extension Service to host the “Walking Weeds & Weevils” education day at the Casey Lake Wildlife Protection Area (WPA) on July 26, 2017. There were over 20 landowners, local government officials and staff members present for the event. During the event, we walked through the WPA, and Monica Chandler with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture talked about Spotted Knapweed identification and control methods. We released seed-head and root weevils in the WPA as a method of biocontrol of Spotted Knapweed. The purpose of this release is to reduce the infestation of Spotted Knapweed in the area and provide a population of weevils that can be collected and moved throughout Meeker County to continue control of Spotted Knapweed infestations throughout the county.

Twenty-three Commercial Applicator License Exams were administered.

Required reports were submitted properly and in a timely manner.

Rain Gauge Program - Eight landowners in Meeker County measure precipitation daily and submitted reports on line or to the SWCD office during 2017. 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.

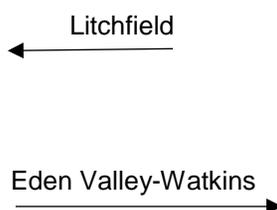
The District acts as liaison between the Climatology Office and program participants, sharing information with and providing materials to program participants.

Outstanding Conservationist – Nick and Joan Olson of rural Litchfield were selected as Meeker County's Outstanding Conservationists for 2017. The Olsons 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 photographs of them 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.



In 2017, 195 students from Litchfield and Eden Valley-Watkins schools, participated in the contest. Each participating student received a participation ribbon. 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. The top three posters advanced to Area competition.

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

Stewardship Week - Press releases were sent to local media and churches to publicize and recognize Stewardship Week in late April, 2017.

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, and various training workshops throughout the year. The District worked with other SWCDs in Area 2 to assist MASWCD staff in organizing the annual convention in December, 2017.