

Conservation News

Fall 2019



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Woodkes named Stevens SWCD Outstanding Conservationists

Congratulations to Derek and Darin Woodke of Morris and Kensington for being selected as Stevens County's Outstanding Conservationists for 2019. Derek and Darin farm the Woodke home farm in Swan Lake Township, as well as farming land in several surrounding townships. They have farmed, working closely with their parents, Steve and Molly Woodke, and their uncle Loren Woodke, for over 15 years. Steve, Loren and their grandfather Donald Woodke were the Stevens Outstanding Conservationists in 1995, so the Woodke roots in conservation stewardship and environmental efforts go deep. Derek and Darin grew up with the positive influence of their family and neighbors to help them make lasting improvements on their farms, with conservation as a priority.



Both Darin and Derek have made it a priority to work on soil health and increase environmental practices on their land. They have worked closely with NRCS and Stevens SWCD to incorporate EQIP, CSP and nutrient management on their land. The Woodkes have been certified in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP). Through this whole-farm evaluation, they identified more opportunities to utilize conservation practices that will improve their land. Their goal is to improve land quality while producing crops more efficiently.

Derek and Darin credit landlord Jerome Winter as being a driving force behind their use of no-till/strip-till and cover crops. Winter was already using these practices when the Woodkes began renting his farmland. The Woodkes continued these practices and immediately started seeing the benefits in soil health. They have been buying equipment to be able to incorporate the same practices on more of their land. Derek and Darin have also been proactively installing sediment dams to decrease erosion on their acres. They have evaluated their soil, by grid or zone sampling, and are transitioning to variable rate anhydrous application so they apply only what fertilizer is needed.

The Woodkes put lot of time and planning into doing the right things with their land and leaving a legacy for their families. Derek is married to Elysia and they have three children: Britney, Brady and Brendon. Darin and his wife Alexis have one son, James. We are proud of the Woodkes for the conservation work they do and the passion they have for conserving their land for future generations.

Producers learn about Ag Water Quality Program



Stevens SWCD hosted a meeting for landowners and producers interested in learning more about the MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) in August. Grant Pearson, the area certification specialist, gave a presentation about the ins and outs of the certification process and how it can be a great opportunity for producers to see their operation from a new perspective. The group had some good discussions about conservation practices that can be implemented to improve water quality and how soil health complements this program. All landowners and

producers can apply for this voluntary program year-round.

If you would like more information on the Ag Water Quality Certification Program, stop by the SWCD office or give us a call at (320) 589-4886 ext. 4.



STEVENS SWCD SERVICES

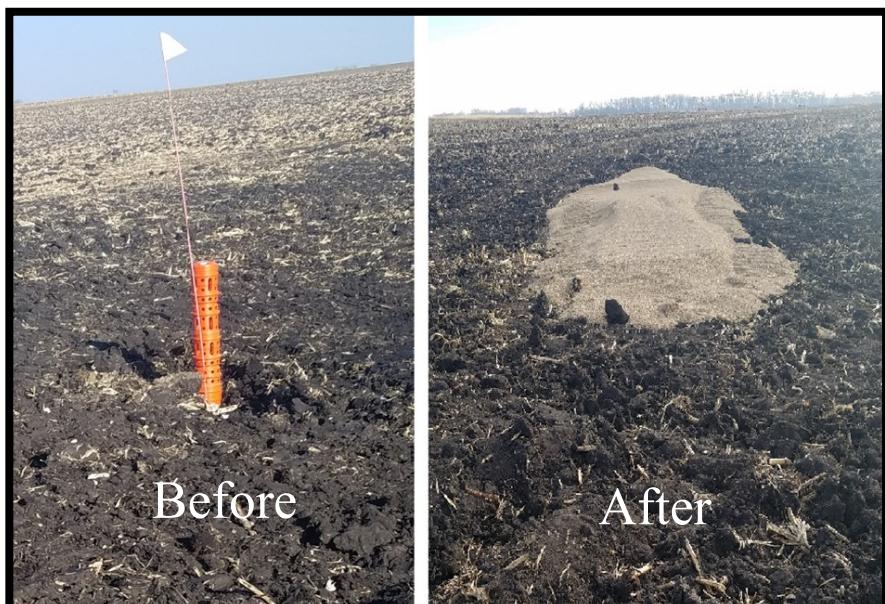
- CRP conservation planning
- Mowing & spot spraying
- Native grass & buffer seeding
- Rain garden design & installation
- Tree planting & fabric installation



Water quality: alternative tile intake conversions

An alternative tile intake, also known as a blind inlet or french drain, is an intake structure that allows entry of surface water to a subsurface drain through a trench filled with clean coarse aggregate. It is sometimes used in place of a perforated tile riser or pipe inlet orifice.

Stevens SWCD helped fund approximately 70 tile intake conversions in 2018. In addition, with help from the Stevens SWCD, there are an estimated total of 75 more to be converted in the fall of 2019.



Installation consists of removing the existing intake and replacing it with a four foot wide by four foot deep by 20 foot long trench. The trench will have a connected perforated tile installed. The trench is then filled with pea rock to one foot above ground level.

This design has many advantages over conventional surface intakes:

- Water quality benefits
- Easy tillage... no more destroying the intake
- Can plant over intake in straight rows

Aquatic Invasive Species Family Fun Night at Perkins Lake

Family Fun Night at the Lake was hosted at the Perkins Lake access this summer for kids and their parents to come learn about Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), play games, and have some dinner.

Minnow racing was a highlight for many of the kids. They also learned that the minnows couldn't be released in the lake, because we need to follow the law that says bait must be disposed of in the trash if we don't intend to use it anymore.

For any AIS questions or if you think you may have found an invasive species, stop in the SWCD office or give us a call at (320) 589-4886 ext. 4.



Times of transition for Adams & PDTRA



Stephanie Adams, PDTRA Watershed Coordinator, recently left the PDTRA to take on new career challenges working with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana. As Director, she will be helping promote conservation programs to local producers and ranchers there.

During Stephanie's three years working for the Association she has been involved with the water quality monitoring of the Pomme de Terre River, facilitating management planning, and worked with local SWCDs to educate and promote water quality.

"Some of my most fond memories working for PDTRA have been the conversations I get to have with folks. Whether it's in the board room, a landowner advisory committee, or during a River Run event, there's a lot to learn about how water shapes our communities, the challenges we face, and the innovative solutions people are implementing," Adams said.

Though she will miss the incredibly endless lake exploration and fishing opportunities that western Minnesota has to offer, she is looking forward to continuing these conversations across the large and wild Montana.

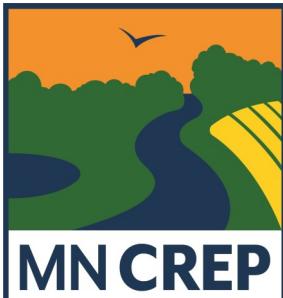
Considerations while making plans for fall tillage and seeding:

- If the SWCD will be seeding for you, soybean/small grain stubble is best. If heavy residue is present (ex. corn stalks, prevent plant), till area this fall and have the area rolled prior to us seeding it. Seeding usually takes place after November 1 in the fall and between May 15 and June 30 in the spring.
- Please contact us now if you plan to have the SWCD flag CRP contract boundaries, buffers or other conservation practice areas. We encourage landowners to till areas with heavy residue (ex. corn stalks) and have the site prepped for seeding before it's flagged. If the site will be no-tilled, give us a few days notice to try and get the area flagged before your fall tillage. Otherwise try to leave the approximate seeding area with a little extra room and we will flag as soon as we can.
- If you have established a buffer area on your own, make sure you notify the SWCD so that we can update our compliance records.

Cover crops on prevent plant acres

With the extremely wet spring and summer, a large portion of Minnesota had many crop fields left unplanted to annual crops. This summer, NRCS held a special Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) sign up, allocating funds specifically for cover crops on acreage that couldn't be planted due to a wet planting season. High priority was given to acreage on which fertilizer had already been applied for the 2019 crop. Due to high demand, the funding for cover crops was very competitive across the state with over 1950 applications. Stevens County was able to fund a very limited amount of contracts.

Most of the cover crops that went in around the county were done by farmers on their own. However, this sign up allowed NRCS to have many conversations on cover crops with many different operators and landowners. Annually, NRCS has regular EQIP and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) financial assistance program sign-ups for cover crops and other practices. NRCS works with landowners to develop a cover crop mix that works with the harvest timing of their cash crop as well as their soil health goals. If you are interested in cover crops, please stop into the NRCS office for more information.



CREP easements continue to draw interest in Stevens County. We have three funded easements through the current CREP signup which began in the summer of 2017. Two were enrolled as wetland restoration practices and one as a filter strip to meet the requirements of the MN Buffer Law. The reasons people have for taking a permanent easement on their property can vary. Permanent easement areas provide multiple benefits such as wildlife habitat and water quality improvements but they also directly benefit the landowner financially while permanently protecting a legacy for the future generations to enjoy. The easement payment rates for 2019 remained the same as 2018 and the new sign-up period should hopefully start late this fall. We welcome questions at any time and can help you decide if a CREP easement is the right fit for your situation.

Stop into the Stevens SWCD to see how a CREP easement may benefit your property. Additional CREP information can be found at www.bwsr.state.mn.us/crep

MN Buffer Law in Stevens County

Across Minnesota, buffer compliance is reported at 98-99%. Locally in Stevens County, we are closer to 97%. The compliance numbers will continue to increase this fall as final field verifications are completed, and abnormally wet sites are able to be seeded. Non-compliant parcels will be subject to the county buffer enforcement policy. We will also begin our buffer compliance monitoring this fall and will monitor 1/3 of the county each year on a three-year rotation.

There is still cost-share available to cover buffer establishment costs at a rate of \$200 per acre for conventional grass mixes, \$300 per acre for native grass mixes and 75 % cost share on structural practices. *Cost share requires a signed contract approved by the SWCD board before any of the work to establish the buffer takes place, so please contact the SWCD for details.

Notify the SWCD office once you have planted your buffer so we can update our compliance records. We appreciate the commitment of the landowners in Stevens County to help us implement the MN Buffer Law.



It's never too early to think trees — order now for spring! We carry large trees, small trees, and shrubs. We have spruce and deciduous trees available in both bare root and potted trees.

Give John a call to order trees or set up an appointment to plan for a new farmstead or field planting. 320-589-4886 ext 4.

TREES!



Landowners help pollinators through EQIP

Habitat loss, disease, parasites, and environmental contaminants have resulted in the decline of many pollinator species. This is a problem when you realize that three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and 35 percent of the world's food crops depend on pollinators to reproduce. This year, multiple landowners signed up for two new practices within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to plant pollinator plots and combat the decline of pollinator species. Landowners had a choice of planting an annual pollinator plot and/or a perennial pollinator plot. The perennial pollinator plots consisted of grasses, legumes, and flowers planted on cropland, buffer zones, odd areas, near farms sites, and/or corners. Landowners agree to keep the plot in place for at least five years and in return, they receive financial assistance for seedbed preparation, seed, planting, weed control, and forgone income. The annual pollinator plots were planted to a mix of yellow mustard, buckwheat, cowpeas, annual sunflower, and clover. These plots provided safe honey bee forage during the summer.

Landowners received financial assistance for seeding the plot as well as monitoring the use of different flowering species by honey bees, and native pollinators. This practice can be applied to the same acres for up to three consecutive years. Both pollinator practices have not only helped honey bees and other pollinators, but they helped reduce erosion, increase soil health, and increase populations of other beneficial insects and wildlife to make agricultural operations more efficient.

If you are interested in adding pollinator habitat to your farm, please stop in the Natural Resource Conservation Service for more information.



Water Fest for 6th graders in its 15th year

Over 350 students from Pope and Stevens counties learn about water and water quality at the 6th grade Water Fest each fall. Water Fest, held in Glenwood, is in its 15th year. Students rotate through eight learning stations throughout the day. At left, they learn about micro and macro invertebrates and how the creatures help make cleaner lakes and rivers. Judy Johnston, of Stevens SWCD, is the co-coordinator for this event.

Managing weeds on your conservation practices

Stevens SWCD offers mowing on all conservation practices. This includes total site mowing or spot clipping of weeds and small trees. Stevens SWCD is equipped to handle clipping on any acreage.

Clipping and spot spraying in combination are very effective ways to manage your conservation site. We are currently set up to do small sprayings, up to 10 acres, on conservation practices such as CRP, WRP, and on new seedings. Spraying is very beneficial in managing your practice because it keeps noxious weeds from taking over your site. Spot spraying allows the landowner to control weeds without totally eliminating the forbs (flowers) on your site.

In order to establish a good stand of grass, it is essential to mow new plantings for the first one to three years. Many times, new seedings will need to be mowed two or three times the first year depending on the time of year planted and the amount of weed competition.

Clipping is also done after the grasses are established. Many conservation contracts require some sort of mid-contract maintenance, and on all established seedings, it is important to control invasive weeds and/or voluntary trees. These established sites should be clipped to a height of 8-12 inches. Probably the biggest problem with invasive weeds in our area is Canada Thistle.

Please contact Stevens SWCD at (320)-589-4886 ext 4 if you have any questions or are interested in weed control on your conservation acres.



Pomme de Terre River Watershed conservation tour

On Wednesday, August 28, the Pomme de Terre River Association (PDTRA) hosted the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for their annual Board Tour. The tour offers board members and staff a valuable opportunity to see first hand how partnerships between local conservation staff and landowners are making a difference in communities across Minnesota. Board tour destinations rotate each year to highlight different regions of the state.

"Landowners and local government staff are the driving force behind conservation delivery in Minnesota because they understand the unique needs of the communities where they live and work," BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke said.

Local partners in the Pomme de Terre River Association discussed an abundance of projects, goals, lessons learned, and programs being implemented in the watershed as a unified effort to protect and enhance water quality in the Pomme de Terre watershed.

Tour stops included a stream barb project at the Mill Dam in Stevens County, a 1,000-foot stream restoration project on Drywood Creek in Swift County, a large conservation easement along Pelican Creek, and a local landowner's no-till & cover crop demonstration sites in Grant County.

BWSR helps to provide grant funding to local units of government through the Clean Water and Legacy Amendment, which began in 2009 to aid projects in protecting drinking water, wetlands, prairies, wildlife habitat, and improving the quality of water bodies. Since 2011, PDTRA has received nearly \$3 million in Clean Water Funds to install and promote water conservation across the Pomme de Terre watershed.

The board visited sites identified as priority areas by the Pomme de Terre watershed's One Watershed, One Plan planning partnership. One Watershed, One Plan offers an alternative to the traditional project-by-project approach by enabling a collaboration of local governments to pursue timely solutions based on a watershed's highest priority needs.

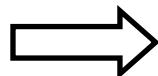
The 20-member BWSR board includes representatives from state agencies, local governments, and citizens. The projects featured during the annual tour illustrate how successful partnerships between federal, state, and local governments and private landowners safeguard and enhance Minnesota's soil and water resources.



Tour participants take a walk along the river to see a stream barb installed in Stevens County in 2012



Tour participants explore a no-till demonstration plot and discuss the benefits, challenges, and potential future programs



SWCD staff pictured with Sarah Strommen, DNR Commissioner; LeAnn Buck, MASWCD Executive Director; and John Jaschke, BWSR Executive Director. SWCD, BWSR and MASWCD staff attended a tour of the Pomme de Terre Watershed as part of their monthly board meeting.



Storm water collection projects

This summer we were able to install six rain gardens for storm water collection. If you are not familiar with a rain garden, it is simply a shallow depression in your yard that's planted with native wetland or wet prairie wildflowers and grasses. Rain gardens collect, store, and filter storm water from impervious areas such as roofs, parking lots, sidewalks, and driveways. Some of the many benefits of rain gardens are filtering runoff pollution, recharging local

groundwater, improving water quality, removing standing water in your yard, reducing mosquito breeding, reducing potential home flooding, and creating habitat for birds and butterflies.

We do offer cost-share on most rain gardens of up to 70% of the total project cost. Feel free to contact Stevens SWCD about information on our rain garden program at (320)-589-4886 ext. 4.



Walk in Access program highlights

When you enroll land in the Walk-In Access (WIA) program you are leasing that land to the state of Minnesota for the public to hunt.

Landowners are afforded liability protection through the Recreational Use Statutes. This ensures that the landowner does not have liability issues if someone would get hurt on their property.

Hunters who have purchased a WIA validation along with their hunting license can access the land one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset from Sept. 1 to May 31.

Other uses by the public are prohibited without your written permission. You and your minor children can hunt the enrolled property without a WIA validation, but everyone else must have the validation in their possession when hunting land enrolled in the program.

No motorized vehicles are allowed except by the landowner performing normal maintenance or farm operations.

Prior to giving written permission to an individual for an activity other than hunting, please note that in the landowner agreement you have agreed that use of the land will not impede public hunting. An example of an activity that would be considered an impediment is camping. Trapping is not considered to impede public hunting, but the WIA agreement requires that you or anyone you give written permission to trap must adhere to trapping regulations that apply to public land.

If you choose to enroll your land, you will receive an annual payment up to \$14 an acre. You will receive your annual payment by June 30, following the agreement year. For example, if your land is enrolled for 2020-2021, you will receive your payment by June 30, 2021.

Sign-up will open January 2020, but if you are interested in enrolling land into WIA feel free to contact Stevens SWCD any time prior to that at (320)-589-4886 ext. 4.



12 Hwy 28 E Ste 2
Morris MN 56267

Tree Sales Open House December 5, 12-4:30 pm

Free conservation tree
plan design & planning

Order trees for 2020

Ask your questions about
shelterbelt design & planting
and tree care & maintenance



Call 320-589-4886 ext. 4
for more info!

Stevens SWCD is located
on the frontage road next to Subway in Morris

Visit us on the web at www.stevensswcd.org or look us up on Facebook!

