

Conservation Connection

Winter Newsletter 1-19

Upcoming dates, deadlines and events:

Office Closed 1/21

Board Meeting 2/12

Office Closed 2/18

Board Meeting 3/12

Cover Crop Day 3/14

Board Meeting 4/9



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Le Sueur SWCD Celebrates 2018 Outstanding Conservationists: Krocak Farms

Krocak Farms was selected as the 2018 Le Sueur County SWCD Outstanding Conservationists. Krocak Farms consists of Bob and Liz, their son Marty and his wife, Sarah.

Krocak Farms is located in rural Montgomery and is in its 5th generation. The farm was settled in 1888 by Albert and Rose Krocak. Albert was a Czeck immigrant who came to America and began farming immediately.

Vladimir Krocak Jr, Bob's father, put up a barn in 1919 for hogs. Bob turned the barn into a dairy operation in 1977 and began milking 45 cows. In 1981 Bob and Liz were married and their herd grew to 139 milking cows. In 2005 they installed a parlor which allowed for milking 189 cows twice per day. More on page 2.



2018 CREP Success!

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a combination of Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CREP targets environmentally sensitive land to take out of production and convert into conservation easements. Since the spring of 2017 roughly 12,000 acres throughout Minnesota have been put into CREP easements. A majority of these acres were wetland restorations and filter strips.

Here in Le Sueur County we have six CREP easements in the process of being established, totaling 217 acres. The end of the federal fiscal year on September 30th gave CREP a brief pause in the sign up process. However, with the new Farm Bill being signed recently, the CREP application process should be up and running shortly. Please contact the Le Sueur County SWCD office if you are interested in learning more about the CREP program.



Le Sueur County 2018 CREP Site

Manager's Minute: Mike Schultz— Food Plots, 1W1P, GJGLA Project

Fall was short and winter came fast for everyone in Le Sueur County. The SWCD office managed to complete all planned fall construction projects: 32 BMP's (water and sediment control basin and waterways) and 20 landowners installed cover crops. Overall the SWCD was very busy with work and we considered this fall construction season a success.

2019 Food Plot Seed:

Le Sueur SWCD and the Le Sueur County Pheasants Forever chapter have purchased roundup ready corn and soybeans and sorghum. Food Plot seed will typically come in 50 lb bags. Corn seed can seed up to 3 acres, soybeans can seed around 1 acre. Sorghum seed is packaged in 0.5 acre bags.

Something new this year is food plot seed will cost \$10 per bag, limit one bag of corn per person. The SWCD has not had access to food plot seed for several years and had to resort to purchasing seed directly from the distribu-

tor. If you are interested and want to get on a list for seed, please stop in.

Cannon River One Watershed One Plan (1W1P):

The Cannon River 1W1P process is near draft plan stage. Over the next several weeks, the plan will be reviewed by many partners. Later this year, a 60 day public review period will



Greater Jefferson German Lakes Association
Fall Info Meeting 2018

take place. Follow along with the process by visiting the Cannon River 1W1P website: www.dakotaswcd.org/1w1p

Jefferson German Watershed Phosphorus Reduction Project:

At the fall Greater Jefferson German Lake Association (GJGLA) meeting Le Sueur County and SWCD were awarded \$10,000 from the GJGLA to help towards the Phosphorus Reduction Project. The funds came from money raised from the 2018 Summer Splash event held at Beaver Dam Resort.

The SWCD is very grateful to receive the funds to help towards the overall goal to reduce phosphorus entering the lakes. The funds are part of a commitment the lake association made prior to applying for the grant where they pledged to donate \$12,000. The lake association is well on track to provide those funds. The SWCD looks forward to working GJGLA.

Krocak's Outstanding Conservationist Continued from Page 1

The Krocak family farmed 450 acres of corn, soybeans and alfalfa. They experimented with ridge till in the 80's and never tilled their soybean ground. In 2015 the Krocak's decided to begin organic

farming and raise just corn and alfalfa. They used only their cow manure for their nitrogen source. Radish and turnip were seeded into their corn crop as cover crops. Krocak's commented that their soil has never been healthi-

er since seeding cover crops and turning organic. The wildlife has even come back to the area.

The Krocak's were the first in Le Sueur County to enroll land into the State of MN wetland bank program. Twenty-four acres of drained wetlands were turned back into natural habitat for the purpose of wetland credits.

This past year the Krocaks retired from milking, due to limited organic milk contracts and sold their herd. They are raising approximately 150 heifers and calves on their farm now.

Marty and Sarah are in the process of transitioning into full time farming. Marty currently works at Scott Equipment in New Prague and he and Sarah are raising 4 young children.

The Le Sueur SWCD Board hosted an awards lunch for the Krocak's and presented them with a 2018 Outstanding Conservationist sign to place at the end of their farm driveway. The SWCD board thanked the Krocak family for all their efforts in conservation.



Alfalfa, wetland bank, turnips, cover crops, bee hive

Middle Minnesota Watershed Planning Strategy and the Watershed Planner



Jennifer Hahn, Middle Minnesota Watershed Planner

Local, State, and Federal Agencies have come together to target conservation in the Middle Minnesota Watershed. Jennifer Hahn, the Middle MN Watershed Planner, will be working with the conservation offices and producers in Blue Earth, Brown, Cottonwood, Le Sueur, Nicollet, Redwood, Renville, and Sibley Counties. She will work with landowners and operators on their resource concerns, provide plans and designs to address concerns, and connect the producers to programs for financial assistance. This includes feedlots, erosion control projects, ravine and streambank stabilization, soil health, pastures, nutrient and pest management, just to name a few.

Jennifer grew up on a dairy farm that now runs corn and soybeans and has been assessing and providing conservation planning since 2005 in Minnesota. She also spent time analyzing profitability of conservation practices to help producers increase their ROI.

If you're interested in having someone take a look at an issue you're having out in the field or are curious about options for improving your soil, reducing erosion, tightening up inputs, etc, give your local conservation office a call at 507-357-4879 or give Jennifer a call at 651-485-7848.

Sand Creek Watershed Updates

Manual Updates:

Each year the practices and cost sharing manual is updated for the Sand Creek Watershed. A few of the notable updates this year include:

1. Establish trees and shrubs for \$175 to \$275 per acre as an incentive and 70% of establishment costs
2. Wetland Restoration incentives increased from \$2000 per acre to \$4000 per acre
3. Cost sharing rates have been changed to 85% when a whole farm plan is completed and the producer agrees to maintain

30% residue for the life of the project
70% when a whole farm plan is created
50% for an application without a whole farm plan

Sandborn Lake Restoration

The MN DNR and Ducks Unlimited continue to work with contractors on the installation of the sandborn lake outlet structure. The project will be completed by the spring of 2019.

Picture: Contractors are installing steel weir sheet piling to be used for the new outlet structure.



Sand Creek Watershed Selected in MPCA 10 small watersheds focused funding:

The MPCA has selected 10 watersheds for long term federal funding, starting in 2020. The selections are part of the transition in the federal Clean Water Act Section 319 program, allowing one time grants to be more reliable funding that is focused on small watersheds. The goal of the program is to help local governments make measureable changes toward water quality improvements. Based on input from many local governments, the program is designed to provide a reliable and long term funding source to address all pollutants in small watersheds.

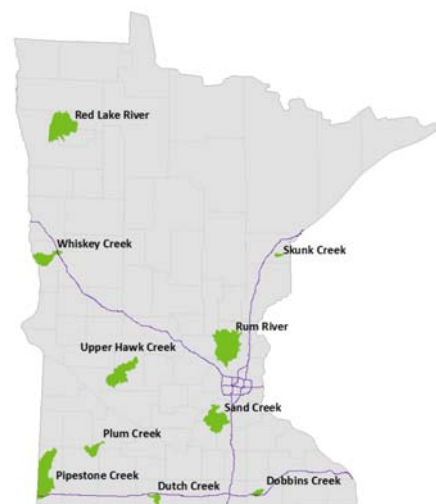
Chosen for prioritized funding in 2020, 2024, 2028 and 2032 are:

- Martin SWCD, for the Fairmont Chain of Lakes and Dutch Creek
- Mower SWCD, for Dobbins Creek

- Redwood County SWCD, for Plum Creek
- Hawk Creek Watershed Project, for Upper Hawk Creek and Wilmar Lake Chain
- **Scott, Le Sueur and Rice Counties, Scott Water Management Organization, and SWCD, for Sand Creek**
- West Polk SWCD, for the Red Lake River – middle subwatershed
- Carlton SWCD, for Skunk Creek
- Buffalo Red River Watershed District, for Whiskey Creek
- Rum River Watershed, for the Rum River – middle subwatershed
- Pipestone County, for Split Rock, Mound, and Pipestone Creeks

After 41 local government units applied for funding, the MPCA conducted telephone interviews with all applicants and chose 19 for

site visits. The agency then chose 10 for funding based on criteria such as state priorities and collaboration, along with input from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources.



Selected Watersheds in Green

Le Sueur County Soil and Water Conservation District

Winter Newsletter 2018/2019



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Like us on Facebook or visit our website at
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To subscribe to an electronic mailing list, please contact Sue Prchal at sprchal@co.le-sueur.mn.us

Minnesota Water Quality Certification Program

SWCD staff are looking for landowners who want to become MWQCP Certified. Over the next few months staff will be promoting the statewide program. See flyer insert or contact the SWCD office for more info!



Targeted Lake Volney Project



A news release was recently submitted to all local media outlets regarding the completion of the Clean Water Fund Lake Volney Targeted Watershed Grant. See insert.

Le Sueur SWCD Hires New Farm Bill Tech-

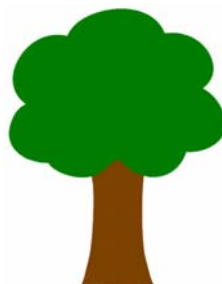


The SWCD has hired Karl Schmidtke as the new Farm Bill Technician. Karl was previously the Minnesota Conservation Corps Apprentice hosted out of

the Le Sueur SWCD office. For more information about Karl please see Summer 2018 Newsletter.

Tree Season is Upon Us!

The Le Sueur County SWCD is currently selling bareroot and potted trees that are due to arrive middle to end of April, depending on the spring. We have 9 different varieties of evergreens, 5 species of hardwood trees and 5 different varieties of shrubs. You can call our office for a tree order form to be sent out to you or visit us online at www.lesueurswcd.org.



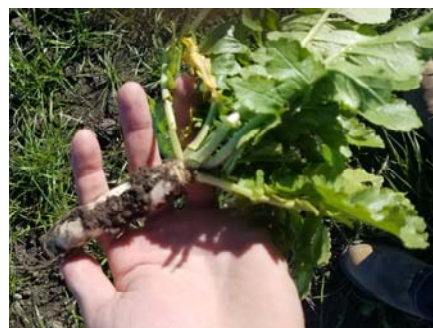
NRCS News Update

The Le Sueur County Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is encouraging all county producers that have natural resource concerns on their property to contact the NRCS office. NRCS has voluntary programs that may provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers



wishing to address resource concerns on their lands. NRCS program contract lengths vary depending on the practice. By working with your local NRCS office we can help identify which of our programs would work best to address your resource concerns. NRCS will suggest opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and other related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.

NRCS encourages volunteering through the Earth Team Program. This program expands NRCS services by using volunteer time, talent and energy to help accomplish the NRCS mission. To learn more about becoming an NRCS volunteer, or USDA-NRCS conservation assistance that is available, contact this office at 507-357-4908 ext. 3.



Cover Crop Tillage Radish from Le Sueur County Farm

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program



OUR GOAL

The MAWQCP goal is to protect and enhance water quality within Minnesota's agricultural lands by working with farmers and landowners to promote stewardship.



HOW DO ALL MINNESOTANS BENEFIT?

The program gives the public assurance that certified farms and landowners are using best management practices to protect and conserve Minnesota's lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater.



Why should farmers participate?

Farmers and landowners participate in the program to protect and improve local lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater and to honor their land legacy.

Participants receive:

RECOGNITION

Certified farmers and landowners may use their status to promote their businesses as protective of water quality and can display signs that show their role in protecting Minnesota waters.

PRIORITY FOR ASSISTANCE

Those seeking certification can obtain designated technical and financial assistance to implement practices that promote water quality.

REGULATORY CERTAINTY

Certified farmers and landowners are deemed to be in compliance with new water quality rules and regulations for 10 years.

water quality practices

Best management and conservation practices have been installed for MAWQCP certification, including:

Water and sediment control basins

GRASSED WATERWAYS

Conservation tillage

Cover crops

Nutrient management

Buffers

Grassed waterways are often used on Minnesota farms

GRASSED WATERWAYS HELP:

- > Prevent soil erosion
- > Control water movement
- > Capture nutrients from runoff water



Get started: Visit MyLandMyLegacy.com



In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this information is available in alternative forms of communication upon request by calling 651-201-6000. TTY users can call the Minnesota Relay Service at 711. The MDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

LE SUEUR COUNTY



Le Sueur County farmer Shawn Onken stood in the 40-acre soybean field where contractors were repairing one water and sediment control basin and constructing another. With a Clean Water Fund grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, Le Sueur Soil & Water Conservation District staff targeted projects to reduce runoff within the Lake Volney watershed.

Photo Credits:
Ann Wessel,
BWSR

Targeting Lake Volney



YouTube Video

<https://youtu.be/kIdBUc-oEJY>

From topsoil-saving field work to rain gardens, the runoff-reducing projects farmers, lakeshore property owners installed working with Le Sueur SWCD and a Clean Water Fund grant benefit water quality

LE CENTER — Shawn Onken's 10-year-old son wants to be a farmer like his dad.

The conservation practices installed today through a Clean Water Fund grant will help to ensure the Le Sueur County farmland is still productive when he's ready to take over.

Onken is among 14 landowners who have treated a combined 450 acres through \$415,240 in targeted restoration projects meant to curb erosion and clear up Lake Volney. A rarity in southern Minnesota, spring-fed Lake Volney is deep — 65 feet at its deepest — and relatively clear for the region.

Le Sueur Soil & Water Conservation District Manager Mike Schultz said in the past, kids from throughout the county were bussed here for swimming lessons. In 2002, the Minnesota Pollution Control



A wetland enhancement originally slated as one of the targeted grant projects was enrolled in the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program instead. A trend toward higher rainfall totals flooded what once was farmland. Lake Volney is across the road.

Agency listed Lake Volney as impaired for aquatic recreation because of excess nutrients.



Le Sueur Soil & Water Conservation District Manager Mike Schultz, left, stood at the edge of a 200-acre field where erosion control structures were installed with help from a Clean Water Fund grant meant to reduce runoff. A gravel road separates the field from lakeshore homes. Below: The 2,017-acre Lake Volney watershed contributes to the Cannon River watershed, which feeds the Mississippi River.

A \$325,240 Clean Water Fund grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources targeted priority projects to reduce runoff — and the phosphorous and other nutrients it carried — within the 2,017-acre watershed. The Lake Volney watershed is perched high within the Cannon River watershed, which feeds the Mississippi River. Phosphorus feeds the algae that turns lakes green.

Work accomplished through the grant would reduce phosphorus by an estimated 1,296 pounds a year, save an estimated 2,510 tons of soil a year — the equivalent of 193 dump truck loads — and cut total suspended solids by an estimated 907 tons a year.

The grant helped Onken replace ineffective structures and add new ones.

“It’s huge — and maybe more to my kids as the generations go on. If we continue down this path and my topsoil keeps moving down through the watershed, we’re just



more or less abusing our land and there’s less and less topsoil for the next generation,” Onken said.

Shawn and Randee Onken run about 1,000 acres, and operate a small commercial grain-hauling business. Onken moved to Le Center as a kid, and worked for a farmer who later became his father-in-law.

The family’s work with the Le Sueur SWCD dated back to 1998. Some of those projects had exceeded their intended lifespan by 10-plus years.

Shawn Onken met with Schultz in November on the 40-acre soybean field where one water and sediment

control basin was being repaired and another was being constructed. It’s one of two sites where additional grant work became possible after a landowner opted to enroll in the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) instead.

Most of Onken’s grant-related improvements — nearly \$47,900 worth of work on two fields — finished in 2017 on a 200-acre field separated from lakeshore homes by a gravel township road.

Onken described the 2013 torrent that followed a spring too wet for fieldwork. He planted a summer cover

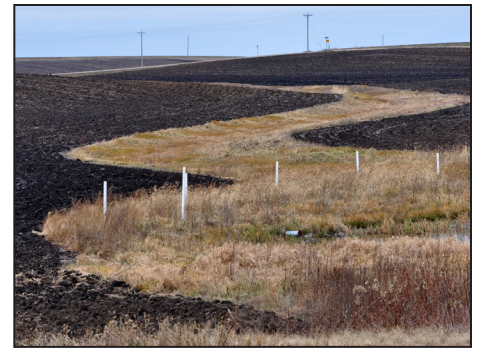
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The best way to treat water quality and nutrient issues is you start in the upper watershed.

— Mike Schultz, Le Sueur Soil & Water Conservation District

crop to meet USDA Farm Service Agency insurance requirements.

“It was about the Fourth of July. It was hot. We seeded the oats, rolled it — and that night we got 6.5 inches of rain on powder-dry dirt that was just perfect for erosion. Sheets of topsoil went into the ditches towards the lake. It was a rare occurrence, but it shows you what can happen. The perfect storm happened,” Onken said.

“Three weeks later, we probably would have had very little erosion,” Onken said.



Left: A treeline marks the highest point in the 2,017-acre Lake Volney watershed. **Middle:** A contractor worked Nov. 8 in Shawn Onken's 40-acre Le Sueur County field. **Right:** Conservation work throughout the Lake Volney watershed augments projects completed through a Clean Water Fund grant. Here, a previously installed basin (in the foreground) and related work prevent erosion from a culvert replacement.

After the storm, Schultz said a layer of topsoil 6 to 10 inches deep filled the basins and plugged culverts already clogged with debris from earlier rains. Water ran over the road. Dirt settled between lakeshore homes.

"We've put in the sediment basins in the right places. We've put in the stormwater ponds in the right places.

We've worked with the township to put in the right culverts

in the right places," Schultz said during a stop at the site, where slight rises in the field indicated erosion control structures and where a bank of grass grew between the field and road.

Lake Volney is among the smallest, deepest and cleanest lakes in the Cannon River watershed. About 45 houses and cabins, a small county park and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' 1.64-acre Volney Lake Aquatic Management Area ring the 277-acre lake.

Jay Witty, 54, is treasurer of the Lake Volney Association, an active group with about 35 members. About half of the lakeshore property owners, including Witty, live here year-round.

Grant partners

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil resources awarded the \$325,240 Clean Water Fund grant to Le Sueur County. The Le Sueur Soil & Water Conservation District carried out the work. Landowners provided \$25,000 in matching funds. The rest came from

\$42,500 in county gravel tax revenue, which paid for three shoreline protection projects; \$9,500 from the Volney Lake Association; \$8,000 in in-kind technical and administrative assistance; and a \$5,000 Bush Foundation Grant via the Cannon River Watershed Partnership.

Three years ago, he and his wife bought her parents' house on Lake Volney. He'd kept his boat there since 2008 when the place was built.

Witty occasionally goes fishing — the lake supports panfish, northerns, bass and some walleye. His children grew up water-skiing and wake-surfing. He still swims in the lake.

"The state, the county, area farmers — they're all working together to try to stop the nutrient flow as much as possible into the lake, which ultimately is going to affect the entire watershed," Witty said.

"There's no way it can't be a positive — what they've done. Everything they've done has done something to try to improve that (water quality) and reduce that flow," Witty said. "I find it hard to believe over time we won't see some positive impacts."

The grant wraps up Dec. 31.

It's built water and sediment control basins, stormwater basins, drainage outlets, plus culvert and inlet stabilizations. Adjacent conservation practices within the watershed augment Clean Water Fund projects.

Those include the MN CREP enrollment, originally planned as a Clean Water Fund wetland enhancement with water-quality and fish spawning benefits involving the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

"The wetland they were going to enhance through the grant is wetter now than it ever had been," Schultz said.

With increasingly heavy rains, historically dry spots held water and made farming impossible. The lake level rose by about 1 foot, which is why SWCD staff believes water being pumped off

the field was returning via groundwater. The drainage system couldn't keep up. And it required major repairs.

"We got storage benefits. We're going to get nutrient absorption through all the plants, and a place for all the nutrients to settle out. We are going to have additional wildlife benefits. The landowner is getting some compensation for a piece of farmland that he no longer is able to farm," Schultz said.

That MN CREP sign-up increased from 7 to 30 the acres placed into conservation programs, and freed \$53,000 for grant work on Onken's 40 and another landowner's 80-acre field.

A series of five water and sediment control basins under construction on the 80-acre parcel lead to the watershed's only natural wetland.

"It helped us hit some major erosion in this field that was going right into the wetland that ultimately ends up in the lake," Schultz said.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' mission is to improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners. www.bwsr.state.mn.us.