Pine County Soil & Water Conservation District

formerly knows as the Pine County Waters

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Pine SWCD Restructures - Who are we and what do we do?

2018 has brought big changes to Pine SWCD. Due to the county building project, we are now in a temporary office location (John Wright Building) in Sandstone. We will be relocating to our permanent office location after the construction is complete and county offices are moved around, in early 2019.

In April, longtime employee Robin Poppe retired. Robin handled the Wetland Conservation Act for the district. When Robin announced her retirement, the district met with the County to discuss the changes. After several meetings, Pine County Planning and Zoning office became the new Local Government Unit for the Wetland Conservation Act.

Just before Robin left, our new forester, Paul Swanson started. Paul is originally from Wisconsin, and knows trees and plants better than anyone at the district!

With all of those changes happening in a short amount of time, we have repeatedly been asked "so what do you do?" We wanted to re-acquaint everyone with Pine Soil & Water.

Who is Pine SWCD?
The Soil and Water Conservation District implements conservation projects focusing on water quality. Every project we do and program we administer focuses on water quality.

We currently have 3 staff.
Jill Carlier, District Manager,
Kris Larson, District Technician, and
Paul Swanson, District Forester.

We have a 5-member board of supervisors that serve 4 year terms.
Skip Thomson, Chairman
Tom Swaim, Vice Chair
Doug Odegard, Secretary,
Jerry Telker, Treasurer
JJ Waldhalm, Public Relations.

What does Pine SWCD do?
There are quite a few programs that we administer.

State Cost Share projects
Pine SWCD receives money on an annual basis to help fund the installation of conservation practices in partnership with local landowners. These conservation practices are designed around protecting and improving water quality by controlling soil erosion and sedimentation. This program is known as the State Cost-Share Program.

(continued on the back page)

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Inside this issue....

Pine County **Soil & Water** CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Pine County Waters is funded through state and local grants for water plan implementation. All programs and services of the Pine SWCD are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, political beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, marital status or family status.

PINE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Farm Loan Manager: Julie Kolodji, Farm Loan Officer; Betty Sorenson, Farm Loan Officer Trainee Katie Zachman, Program Technician Sandy Beck

People You Should Know....

Pine SWCD is happy to introduce Paul Swanson, our new District Forester.

Paul started on April 2, 2018. Paul is originally from Oakfield, Wisconsin, a small town in the southern part of the state. After he graduated high school, he attended college at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities where he studied forestry. In the fall of 2012 he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Forest and Natural Resource Management.

Paul spent the next few years working in the field of forestry continuing to learn and gain experience. For the last two years, he worked for the Fond du Lac Indian Reservation near Cloquet as their Forest Inventory Technician. He learned a great deal working there both in forestry and other fields of natural resource management.

Paul says "now as the district forester for Pine SWCD, I am excited to bring all I know to the district and continue to learn and grow as a forester. I am excited to get to work for the people of Pine County and I hope to continue building the forestry program for the district. I hope to provide quality and sustainable forestry work for the county landowners for many years to come. I am happy to meet with anyone that is interested or just curious about possible options that your land may provide for you. Please feel free to contact me or go online to our website to see what forestry or other services the Pine SWCD can provide for you. "

Severe Weather Events

The Pine Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) often have multiple construction projects going on at any one time during the spring, summer, and fall. This year, we have received some large storms with significant rainfalls. But not just your ordinary rainfall; some of these rain events have been of the 10-year, 15-year, and 20-year variety!

It's not just the SWCD and the NRCS that are noticing this changing pattern. Farmers, road construction crews, and landscapers are facing similar challenges. Soil is most vulnerable to erosion when there is no vegetation, such as in a newly plowed farm field, or on a construction site. There are no plants to reduce the velocity of the water and no roots to hold soil in place. This makes it much easier for rushing runoff water to erode and transport sediment to the nearest storm drain, lake, or river.

Sediment carries phosphorus, the main nutrient that causes algae blooms in lakes, as well as other pollutants like oil, gas, garbage, lawn clippings, and pesticides. In a lake or river, each of these items has detrimental effects. Together, they degrade water quality and lead to impairment of water recreation and enjoyment.

How can we cope with these increasingly more severe and extreme weather events during critical periods of construction and open soil? Erosion control practices during construction are critical. Some examples are putting a filter fabric over storm drains to keep sediment out, using biologs and erosion control fabric to cover bare soil while plants re-establish themselves, and using quick-germinating cover crops to green up a disturbed area fast.

Farmers can use conservation tillage practices to keep as much residue on fields as possible. Residue helps slow water down to prevent some erosion and promotes more infiltration. Cover crops are another option to keep soil "covered" before and after the main crop of the season is growing. These critical times are typically before planting in the spring and after harvest in the fall.

As weather changes, we all must adapt. This year has proven the need for effective erosion control practices to be used during construction projects. To learn more about conservation projects, contact the SWCD at 320-216-4240.

NRCS Helps Close Unused Manure Storage Facilities

Julie Salmon, NRCS District Conservationist, julie.salmon@mn.usda.gov, 320-384-7432

Over the years many livestock operations around the area have converted from dairy to beef or to cash crop production. With this change, old manure storage structures which were once an important part of the farm may no longer be needed. These abandoned manure storage structures pose a safety threat to people and pets, and can be a potential source for ground water pollution. The local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) wants to make sure landowners know there is both technical and financial help available to close these old storage structures and create a useable space.

Abandoned manure pits often hold at least four feet of liquid. Even if a pit was pumped out before use was discontinued there is always some manure left in the bottom and rain water will fill the pit. Sometimes crust or vegetation will form at places on the surface. This crust can appear safe to walk on, but will not support the weight of a person. The combination of these things makes an unused pit a drowning hazard, especially for small children.

A pit that is not in use is also a potential source for ground water pollution if it's not being maintained. Tree roots or burrowing animals can make holes in earthen manure pits, and past use of pumping equipment can damage the liners." A structure that has been damaged can provide a conduit for the nutrient rich contents of the pit to enter and contaminate groundwater and possibly the farm's well.

Fortunately, there is help available to close unused manure storage facilities. NRCS will assist landowners with a plan for closing the structure properly and help identify resources for getting the work completed. For earthen structures, the plan typically involves removing any manure that is left in the pit and any contaminated soil. This material can be applied to cropland where the nutrients can be used by crops. Any old transfer pipes are removed or flushed and sealed at both ends.
The pit is then filled in and sloped to drain naturally, and the site can be returned to crop production or seeded to perennial vegetation for pasture or other uses. Financial assistance is available to implement this practice. The level of financial assistance is based on the size of the manure storage structure to be closed.

For more information, landowners are encouraged to contact the local NRCS field office or visit the MN NRCS website: www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov or contact Julie Salmon or Jason Rehn at 320-384-7432 ext. 3.

Ag waste pit before closing

Ag waste pit after closing

Paper Birch Holiday Décor: Be Responsible. Be Sustainable

Paul Swanson, District Forester, paul.swanson@co.pine.mn.us, 320-216-4245

Although the Holidays do not swing into full gear for a couple of more months, the harvesting of forest products for holiday décor will start shortly. A vast array of wood products harvested from our own North Woods are sold throughout the nation. Spruce tops, fir boughs, and young birch stems are the most popular. However, these forest products can come to you at a great cost. Although a large portion of these products are harvested and sold sustainably, many are not. This can create ecological and economic stress to our forests. The most notable is young paper birch stems.

Though there are still some issues, thorough permitting and regulations are in place in most areas for spruce tops and fir boughs. Young birch however, is a much larger issue. Permitting is not as widely available which makes illegal products much harder to track once they reach the stores. In some areas, young paper birch is being completely removed from the landscape. Public lands are taking the brunt of the damage. Taking these young trees is considered illegal as well as timber theft without a permit. If left to mature, those trees would have been of considerable timber value in the future. Without thorough permitting, it is much harder to track where it ends up, and people continue to buy these popular items which only furthers the demand and the illegal activity. In recent years these illegal harvesters, or birch bandits, have moved into Northeast Minnesota as supplies of young birch are being depleted in Northern Wisconsin and Michigan. Conservation officers are doing their best to thwart these thieves, but the activity is widespread, and hard to track once the product leaves the harvest site. If you see any unusual activity on public lands, or pick-up beds and trailers full of young birch stems, contact a local conservation officer to report it.

The best thing you can do to help is to not purchase any birch products from stores until further permitting and regulations are put into place to make harvesting of these birch products more sustainable. If you wish to have these products in your home, look for young birch on your property or talk to a private landowner about harvesting a small amount from their property. When out harvesting after permission is granted, look for small clumps of birch. Leave one or two good looking stems per clump to allow the tree to continue to grow and provide ecological and economic benefits for the future. Only take what you need and leave an area be for several years before returning to harvest again. If we all work together, we can maintain the health of our forests and reap the benefits it can provide us. Be responsible, be sustainable, and enjoy our forests.

Butternut Trees

Paul Swanson, Forester, 320-216-4245, paul.swanson@co.pine.mn.us

Butternut (Juglans cinerea) once was a much more common tree and a popular one at that. A close relative of the black walnut, it was highly prized for its nuts. They have a similar, and some say better taste than black walnut. Its wood is not as prized as black walnut but it is still highly sought after for its light color, rot resistance, and ease of crafting for furniture and other household items.

But butternut has been declining rapidly the last several decades and is now gone from many places it once thrived. A fungal disease known as butternut canker is the main reason for this. Butternut canker was first discovered in Wisconsin in the late 60s and started decimating the tree in the state. By the 70s it had spread to Minnesota and continued to wipe out the species. Now, the disease has spread throughout the range of the tree. It is unknown where the fungal disease is from, but it has caused great harm to the butternut population and there seems to be only small populations resistant to the infection. It has become such a serious issue in Minnesota that butternut is listed as endangered on the state endangered species list.

Belonging to the walnut genus, butternut is similar in appearance to its close relative, the black walnut. It is a moderate growing, sun loving tree. The bark is light gray and has shallow fissures with a smooth texture. In contrast, black walnut bark is much more rigged and rough, and it also is much darker in color. The branches and twigs on butternut are stout. Twigs will have large leaf scars that some say resemble a "monkey face". A light fuzz may be present on the new year's growth. Leaves are compound and will have 11 to 17 leaflets. The underside of the leaflets will be fuzzy. Nuts will set mid-summer and will ripen in late summer or early fall. Unlike the traditional round walnut, butternut is more elongated in shape. The husk on the nut is green, thick, and densely covered in fine hairs.

Butternut can grow in a wide variety of forest habitats, but seems to prefer to be near water just out of reach of the floodplains. It would likely be found as a scattered individual or in a small group. It would be unlikely that the tree would make up the majority of a stand of trees. It is a shade intolerant species so it needs small or large scale disturbances to open up the canopy to allow younger trees to grow. If you plant one in your yard, make sure it is an area that receives full sunlight.

Managing for butternut is fairly simple. If you have a few mature trees and wish to establish some more, clear the area around the trees so there is an open forest floor for seeds to get established. Make sure plenty of sunlight reaches the forest floor so new seedlings can grow. If there is not enough sunlight, seedlings that have sprouted will struggle and will likely die. Thin the mature trees out if necessary and leave the ones with the straightest stems and the best crowns.

If you know or think you have butternut on your property, do your best to maintain them. Watch for any dark, weeping spots on branches or the main bole of the tree. Any cracked bark or sunken areas are things to look for as well. These are all symptoms of butternut canker. It may be best to remove these trees and destroy the material in order to protect other butternuts on your property. There have been a few small populations scattered throughout its range that have shown some resistance to the otherwise fatal disease. By keeping the butternut on your property alive and healthy, you are helping save the species from possible extirpation, or extinction, from the state.

If you have more questions about butternut and what you can do to help or if you think you might have butternut on your property, you can contact Pine SWCD or your local DNR office.

Pine SWCD has a 12' No-Till Drilll for rent.
$14/acre

The schedule fills up quickly. Stop in or call now to reserve it!
320-216-4240

Invasive Species

Paul Swanson, Forester, 320-216-4245, paul.swanson@co.pine.mn.us

Many non-native plants grow just fine in Minnesota and never cause a major issue in the natural order of things. But there are some that do. These non-native plants are labeled as invasive or noxious. Many of these trees and shrubs were brought here because of a desirable trait, but because of unforeseeable situations, or the lack of careful study, these species overwhelmingly thrive and take over. They outcompete native vegetation, and create less diverse environments.

An invasive plant is a non-native species that has not co-evolved with the ecosystem it is in, grows and reproduces aggressively, and harms the environment, economy, and/or human health. Having not co-evolved with the environment they were put it, there are no checks and balances in place to keep the species in its place. Herbivory and disease keep native plants from taking over. Without their native predators or diseases to keep populations stable, invasive species populations explode.

Buckthorn is a prime example of this. They are right at home growing under the canopy of the forest, but grow fast and reproduce quickly. Too fast for native understory plants to compete. The native plants eventually get choked out and all that remains is buckthorn. Their leaves and twigs are not palatable to native herbivores, and their berries, although eaten by birds, cause digestive distress. This allows seeds to be dispersed very quickly. Without insects and other plant eating animals in the area, predators are not around either. Other plant species slowly disappear. Soon the low diversity of the site causes great degradation to the ecosystem. This degradation can eventually lead to lower soil productivity, erosion and runoff. This in turn can affect local watersheds and degrade aquatic ecosystems as well as lower water quality.

Many of these invasive species are strictly regulated and cannot be sold or knowingly spread from property to property. Others you can still find at local nurseries due to their classification by the state. They may not be labeled invasive, but are still monitored and regulated. An example of this is the Amur maple. As a large shrub or small tree, this species will attract pollinators in the summer and show off brilliant colors in the fall. They are very popular. However, they produce large amounts of seed that spread with ease. Minnesota has not banned the plant from sale yet, but labels it as a specially regulated plant. There are several other plants regulated this way. These trees and shrubs should be avoided as much as possible. If you already have these species on your property, be aware and understand that there is a great deal of work that may have to be done to manage and control the spread of them. If you are unable or are not up for that task, it may be best to remove them from your property.

Below you can find a list of invasive or noxious terrestrial plants in the state of Minnesota and where they are originally from. Go to the MNDNR website to find this list as well as any other plants or animals that the state is regulating or looking out for. Any plant on this list should be avoided when you are thinking about planting. They can lower diversity, degrade and overrun your property, and spread to neighboring properties creating an issue for them as well. They also can create an economic stress on you as a landowner when they begin to spread and you are constantly working on managing them. It is always important to do your homework and know what you are planting and what kind of effects it may have. Plants in bold are ones that are found in Pine County.

Invasive Terrestrial Plants in Minnesota

Amur maple- Northern Asia
Amur silver grass- Northeast Asia
birdsfoot trefoil- Eurasia and North Africa
black locust- Southeast Unites States
black swallow-wort- Western Europe
British yellowhead- Europe and Asia
buckthorn- Europe, North Africa, West Asia
bull thistle- Europe and West Asia
butter and eggs- Europe and Northern Asia
Canada thistle- Europe and Northern Asia
common tansy- Europe and Asia
common teasel- Europe, Asia and North Africa
cow and hairy vetch- Europe and Asia
creeping Charlie- Europe
crown vetch- Europe, Africa, Asia
cut-leaved teasel- Europe and Asia
Dalmatian toadflax-Southeast Europe West Asia
exotic honeysuckles- Europe and Asia
garlic mustard- Western Europe, North Africa
giant hogweed- Central Asia
Grecian foxglove- Eastern Europe
hoary alyssum- Eastern Europe and Asia
Japanese barberry- Japan and Far East Asia
Japanese hedge parsley- Europe and Asia
Japanese hops- East and Southeast Asia
Japanese knotweed- East Asia
leafy spurge- Europe and Asia
meadow knapweed- Europe
multiflora rose- East Asia
musk thistle- Europe and Asia
narrowleaf bittercress- Europe
Norway maple- Central Europe and West Asia
orange hawkweed-Central and South Europe
oriental bittersweet- East Asia
oxeye daisy- Europe and Asia
sow thistle- Europe
poison hemlock- Europe and North Africa
Queen Ann's lace- Europe and Southwest Asia
reed canary grass- Europe, Asia, Africa
Russian olive- Western and Central Asia
Siberian elm- Central and Northern Asia
Siberian peashrub- North and Northeast Asia
smooth brome grass- Europe
spotted knapweed- Eastern Europe
tree of heaven- Northeast and Central Asia
white and yellow sweet clover- Europe, Asia
wild parsnip- Europe and Asia
yellow iris- Europe, West Asia, North Africa
yellow star thistle- South Europe, North Africa

Moving Forward With The Buffer Law

Kris Larson, District Technician, kris.larson@co.pine.mn.us, 320-216-4242

Since the buffer initiative was signed into law in June of 2015, state and local agencies have been hard at work implementing the new law throughout the state. For any public waters, the Buffer Law requires vegetative buffers that are an average width of 50 feet and a minimum width of 30 feet. The law also requires a minimum buffer width of 16.5 feet along public drainage systems. Throughout the state, 75 counties have elected jurisdiction to enforce the Buffer Law, including Pine County.

The deadline for compliance was November 1st, 2017 for public waters; public drainage systems have an upcoming compliance deadline date of November 1st, 2018. Currently, there is about a 99% compliance rate on Public Waters statewide. While this number shows great progress, there is still a lot of work to be done. Seeing all this progress, the Pine SWCD has been working with the Board of Water and Soil Resources to develop a monitoring plan to ensure that this progress stays on course and that the benefits for water quality continue long into the future. To track the compliance status of all parcels subject to the Buffer Law, Pine SWCD staff will conduct reviews of all parcels over a 3-year period. 1/3 of all the parcels in Pine County will be reviewed each year beginning in 2019. The order of the reviews and how the county is divided will change for each 3-year tracking cycle.

In addition to the 3-year tracking cycle, random spot checks will be conducted every year on 25-50 parcels in Pine County using both aerial imagery and on-site review. The professional opinion of the Pine SWCD will determine what parcels will be included each year and the level of review that will be required. At any point during the 3-year tracking cycle, a parcel may be deemed non-compliant and be moved to Pine County for enforcement measures.

Moving forward, the Pine SWCD wants to be an ongoing resource available for landowners to maintain their compliance, transition into compliance, or to simply assist with land management issues. If you have questions regarding any aspect of the Buffer Law, please contact Kris Larson with the Pine SWCD at kris.larson@co.pine.mn.us or (320) 216-4242.

Improving Water Quality, A Team Effort

Kris Larson, District Technician, kris.larson@co.pine.mn.us, 320-216-4242

Because lakes and streams play a central role in Minnesota's economy and our way of life, it is vital that we maintain or improve their water quality throughout the state. With over 69,000 miles of streams and more than 11,842 lakes in Minnesota, it is nearly impossible for state agencies to continuously monitor the full extent of water resources in our state. For all waterbodies, monitoring data is essential for tracking long term water quality trends. Continuous monitoring is by far the best way to determine if the health of a lake or stream is getting better or worse over time. In most cases, it can take more than 8 years of data collection to properly determine water quality trends.

To help with this enormous task, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) created The Citizen Water Monitoring Program. The Stream Monitoring Program was created in 1998 and now has over 400 volunteers at 500 stream sites. The Lake Monitoring Program was created in 1973 and now has over 1,000 volunteers and covers 900 lakes throughout the state.

The MPCA's Citizen Water Monitoring Program provides a unique opportunity for people across the state to monitor the water quality of their favorite lake or stream, with no prior experience required. Volunteers can even return to the same lake or stream and monitor it year after year. This is a great way for residents to feel more connected to a water body they already use, by providing insights into the importance of water resource management.

In the programs, citizen volunteers take Secchi readings, which measure water transparency or clarity. It's a simple and quick measurement that can reveal a lot about water quality. By measuring the amount of light penetrating the lake, we can get a good indication of the amount of suspended material in the water, and in many cases this can be directly related to algae growth. A minimum of eight readings per season are required to adequately define the water quality trend for each summer.

Data collected by volunteers is entered into an interactive online database managed by the MPCA and also entered into the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's water quality database. This means the data collected by local citizens is being used by professionals and local groups across the state, playing a crucial role in assisting with lake and stream management initiatives. Citizen-collected data also helps make other land management decisions such as shoreline restoration efforts or stormwater cleanup projects. These programs empower participants to make a lasting difference, both in their local communities and across our state.

The Pine SWCD assists the MPCA with coordinating the Citizen Water Monitoring Program throughout Pine County. Any resident or landowner in the county that has interest or would simply like to find out more information on what they can do to help, please contact Kris Larson with the Pine SWCD at 320-216-4242 or kris.larson@co.pine.mn.us.

Pine County
Soil & Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Armyworm Invasion in Pine County

Heavy rains, and a streak of mid 80s plus temps proved to bolster plant pests in both forest and field this summer. But one devastating and unusual pest made a big impact to farmers' hayfields, corn, and landowners lawns.

In mid-July, a phone call came in. A landowner had half of her lawn devoured in less than 72 hours. After visiting the property, it was determined that her lawn had been invaded by army worms. They had eaten half of her back-yard lawn down to dirt. It was nothing she had ever seen in the 20 plus years she had lived there. It was nothing we had ever seen either.

The next day, one of Pine SWCD's board members came in to tell a story of acres of his hay fields being devoured by armyworms in less than a week's time. Several of his neighbors had a field eaten and a neighboring corn field was being eaten as well. Other farmers he had talked to were experiencing the same devastating phenomena. A call to the Farm Service Agency in Mora, and we learned that Pine County was not the only one to be experiencing an army-worm invasion. Anoka, Isanti, Sherburne, and Sterns counties were all being invaded as well. Fields of crops were being devoured in a matter of days.

Forest tent caterpillars are sometimes called army-worms, but are not true armyworms. They defoliate trees and do not attack grasses. True armyworms are generally a pest of Southern United States, but on rare occasion adult moths will ride strong air currents northward. TThis is what is invading and destroying lawns and fields.

Outbreaks in Minnesota happen sporadically depending on if adult moths are pushed northwards. Eggs are laid and once hatched can cause massive damage to a field or lawn in less than a week.
Multiple generations may possibly occur in one growing season and this will expand and extend the length of the damage.

Damage can be extensive and happen quickly. For farmers, little can be done to recuperate the loss of income that your crops would have provided. Crop insurance would be your best bet to regain some of the loss. Call the Farm Service Agency in Mora to report the issue and see if there is anything they can do for you.

If you are a landowner and wish to protect the remainder of your lawn from being eaten, call a lawncare provider for treatment options. Many of the pesticides used to stop armyworms require an applicators license, so a professional lawncare expert will likely be needed. As for lawn that has been destroyed, you likely will not have to re-seed the area. The root systems of the grass will likely still be intact. Water and fertilizer to the affected areas should bring your lawn back from the dead.

EQIP Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, commonly called EQIP (pronounced e-quip), helps farmers with voluntary conservation activities on active agricultural lands. "Help" can range from fixing major gullies to soil health improvement plans, grazing plans, forestry, and pollinator planting.

The first step in the process is to identify the resource concern. Is there concentrated soil erosion, lack of wildlife habitat, low organic matter levels, or something else? From there, a technician will work with the landowner to determine what his or her goals are and to present a couple options for addressing the concern. This can all be done without a fee to the landowner just by visiting the local Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) or Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) office. In Pine County, the NRCS office is located at 260 Morris Avenue, Hinckley; and the Pine SWCD office is located at 130 Oriole Street East, Sandstone.

A landowner interested in receiving cost share on their project will fill out an application. The project will be reviewed and ranked according to NRCS's process to determine which projects are funded. This determination is usually made by March. There are always many more funding requests than there are funds to be allocated across the nation, so funding is not guaranteed. However, if not funded, the landowner can apply again the following year.

If the project is funded, the technician will help guide the landowner in the process to get the project installed. This may mean soliciting bids from contractors or instructing the landowner on how to install the project himself or herself. Bigger construction projects that require engineering will be observed and checked by an NRCS engineer to ensure all construction is completed according to plan.

USDA

Cost share funding is delivered to the landowner after the completion and certification of the project by NRCS staff. The landowner should provide invoices and receipts and will be reimbursed according to their contract. The level of cost share depends on the project, but will be determined before a landowner signs a contract with NRCS and before any construction occurs.

If you are interested in the EQIP program, stop in the NRCS office, or call (320) 384-7432.

Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 4:30pm
Stop in to see us!

Pine SWCD Restructures - What does Pine SWCD do?

State Cost Share & Clean Water Grant projects
Through these program landowners can request financial and technical assistance from their local SWCD to implement state-approved conservation practices. Pine SWCD has a cost share policy where potential projects are ranked/scored to determine the amount of funding that will be provided to landowners. Typically, "high-priority" projects are funded at a rate of 75 percent.

The Pine SWCD partners with state engineers to design high quality, long-lasting projects. Most landowners enter a 10-year contract with the state to ensure the practice is kept and maintained but the practices themselves are designed to last far into the future.

For large projects that exceed our cost share funds, we can apply for clean water grants. Clean Water Grants use funds designated from the tax amendment money from the state legislature. Pine SWCD has received grants such as: Sturgeon Lake Well Sealing Grant, Robinson Park Streambank Stabilization and Planting, Agriculture Runoff Reduction, and Forestry grants in the past few years.

Buffers
The buffer law was written to help protect Minnesota's waters by Governor Mark Dayton. The way the law was written, the local SWCD will check aerial photography for compliance, contact landowners in question, and hand off any non-compliant parcels/landowners to the County for enforcement.

Pine SWCD reviewed the aerial photography to determine if landowners had buffers on their property. Some landowners were contacted to verify types of crops/plantings along the edge of the property. Most landowners in Pine County were deemed compliant. Only a small number of landowners appear not to be in compliance. These landowners will deal with Pine County Planning and Zoning Department.

No-Till Drill
Pine SWCD received a Clean Water grant in 2015 to purchase a no-till drill. The drill is rented out to farmers to use in seeding fields using no-till practices which is better for soil health, and generates less runoff. The drill is a 12' Great Plains drill. That means seeding width is 12'; but actual physical width of the machine is 15'7" (watch out for mail boxes and fence posts!) Since its arrival, the drill has accumulated over 2,000 acres.

Lake Water Quality Monitoring:
Pine SWCD conducts extensive water quality monitoring efforts for most of the major lakes in Pine County. The purpose of this program is to detect and diagnose water quality issues that may affect the suitability of lakes for recreation, or harm citizens or wildlife. Having lake data also helps determine future project sites. Lakes are monitored 8 times annually and are kept in the monitoring regiment for 2-years. Trained Pine SWCD staff conduct the monitoring and then water samples are analyzed at an outside lab. Lakes are chosen based on the level of use but over time lakes are cycled out of the program and new lakes are monitored. The district is always open to receiving input from citizens or other agencies to help direct the program. This program is possible by funding assistance from the Pine County AIS Program as well as the Board of Water and Soil Resources.

Snake River Watershed Management Board:
The Snake River Watershed crosses the boundaries of Mille Lacs, Kanabec, Aitkin, and Pine County. To assist with managing water quality issues within the watershed, the Snake River Watershed Management Board was created. The board is made up of elected county commissioners, representatives from county soil and water conservation districts, local lake association members, and other local organizations. The goals of the SRWMB are to improve recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat, protect properties from flood damage, maintain and improve the water quality of lakes, streams, and groundwater, and to protect resources from sedimentation and other pollution by controlling land erosion.

Community Outreach/Education:
The Pine SWCD believes in utilizing education and outreach to encourage natural resource stewardship on the local level. It is important to educate people of all ages on the importance of local natural resources and provide them with the skills and knowledge to understand complex natural resource issues.

Woodland Stewardship Plans
The Woodland Stewardship Plan describes your goals and the resources on your land and then recommends management options such as enhancing habitat for wildlife species, planting trees, building trails, and pruning high-value trees. If you own between 20 and 1,000 acres of land and at least 10 of your acres are wooded, you qualify for a plan.

The plan provides a comprehensive, thorough overview of your land. It includes an aerial photo, a map of the types of timber, plant communities you have, and additional information about the vegetative cover.

Based on your family's desires and needs, your plan will describe a long-term future goal for each of the different habitats of your land. It also will suggest activities you can do to meet those goals while maintaining a healthy and productive woodland ecosystem.

Small Acreage Plans
Small acreage plans are similar to a forest stewardship plan, but are designed for properties smaller than 20 acres. They help the landowner visualize their goals for their property while keeping it healthy and managing it responsibly.

Invasives
Invasive species are detrimental to both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. They disrupt natural functions of ecosystems, aggressively take over, degrade habitat, and can be both an economical and physical threat to humans. The Pine SWCD forestry program wants to help landowners deal with invasive species. Identification and management of invasive species is crucial to slow or stop their spread. This protects both soil and water resources in the process. The Pine SWCD forester can help answer any questions regarding invasive species, help you identify areas on your property that have them, give suggestions on how to manage them, and possibly help find funding and cost-share opportunities to help offset the financial burden invasive species can have on a private landowner.

Tree program
The district has a tree sale every year in the spring. The sale is a fundraiser for the district, but also promotes planting trees, which helps with soil health, erosion and water quality. The district sells approximately 28,000-30,000 trees each year.