



2023

Annual Report

Waseca County Soil and Water
Conservation District

Waseca County Soil and Water Conservation District

2023 Annual Report

300 North State Street

Waseca, MN 56093

Phone: 507-835-0603

Website: www.wasecaswcd.org

Mission Statement

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Prime Responsibility of the District is to coordinate assistance on private lands to control erosion, prevent flooding, enhance wildlife, develop recreation, build the economic base, and to manage our soil and water resources.

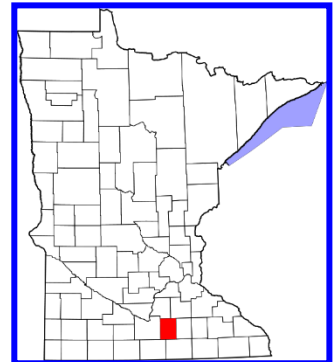
Introduction:

The Waseca County Soil and Water Conservation District is a legal subdivision of State Government operating under provisions of the Minnesota State Statutes Chapter 103C. The District is located entirely within Waseca County and includes all land, public and private, towns and villages. It is governed by a five-member board of elected supervisors, who are responsible for directing all District activities. The Board meets on the second Thursday of each month.

Soil and Water Conservation is essential to the preservation of our environment. Our goal is to implement a soil and water conservation plan on each acre in Waseca County.

The District's success is a result of the efforts of the landowners of Waseca County, the Waseca County Commissioners, the Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, the Extension Service, and the Department of Natural Resources.

We submit to you, this 2023 Annual Report.



The Board meets the second Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Waseca SWCD Offices, 300 North State Street, Waseca MN.

DISTRICT GOVERNING BOARD

Wayne Cords, Chairman

Larry Muff, Vice Chairman

Keith Morgan, Treasurer

Matt Sommers, Secretary

Gregg Rosenthal, Member

AREA OF REPRESENTATION

Alton, Janesville Townships

Byron, New Richland, Otisco Townships

Blooming Grove, Iosco Townships

Freedom, Vivian, Wilton Townships

St. Mary, Woodville Townships

District Staff

**Mark Schaetzke
Joe Edel
Cheri Brummund**

**District Manager
District Technician
District Administrative Assistant**

NRCS Staff

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PERSONNEL

Jessica Beske

Mallory Malecek

Lee Nachreiner

Jeremy Kite

Chelsey Baker

NRCS Team Lead

NRCS District Conservationist

NRCS Soil Conservationist

Wetland Conservationist

Wetland Specialist

Partners Staff

BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES:

Jill Sackett Eberhart

Board Conservationist

WASECA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:

District 1 - Commissioner Doug Christopherson

District 2 - Commissioner Brian Harguth

District 3 - Commissioner Blair Nelson (deceased June2023)

District 4 - Commissioner DeAnne (De) Malterer

District 5 - Commissioner Brad Krause

WASECA COUNTY OFFICES:

Eric Miller

Water Resources Specialist

Brian Zabel

Technician/Feedlot Officer/Ag Inspector

Chris Howard

Drainage Management Coordinator

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES:

Erynn Jenzen

Area Hydrologist, Mankato

Todd Piepho

Area Hydrologist, Sakatah

2023 Outstanding Conservation Farmer

Congratulations Jurgen Peters



Jurgen and his wife Jackie live South of Waseca on 25 Acres along the Le Sueur River. Approximately 17 of those acres covered with trees, some that he planted 40 years ago. Jurgen has the tillable land rented out and is planted in permanent alfalfa, which controls erosion. Over the years, they have installed 2 streambank protection projects that have been a success. Jurgen has surrounded his life with Agriculture and Conservation. For 36 years, he was a Waseca High School Ag Instructor during which time he would get his FFA members to raise and release pheasants on his farm. He constructed buildings using the wood and stones from his property to house his variety of livestock and maintained an orchard. After retiring from the High School, he went on to be a Waseca County Extension Agent until 2003. He would help out when needed and exceed many SROC Horticulture Day Programs. Jurgen was also an active Waseca Soil and Water Conservation Board Supervisor for 10 ½ years from January 1, 2003 to June 3, 2013. He has inspired and helped many people throughout his lifetime, whether it be teaching, volunteering, talking over coffee or a fence post. His support and devotion to agriculture and conservation has been admired by many.

Thank you Jurgen and Jackie for all the things you have done to better Waseca County.



Spruce



Shoreline stabilization

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- **Conservation Planning**
- **Planning and Design of Conservation Practices**
Including:
 - Erosion Control Practices
 - Residue Management Systems
 - Windbreak and Wildlife Tree Plantings
 - Animal Waste Control Systems
 - Manure Application Plans
 - Drainage Systems
 - Wetland Restorations
- **Cost-Sharing for Erosion Control Practices**
- **Assist with implementation of the Food Ag. Conservation Trade Act:**
 - Conservation Compliance Plans
 - Swampbuster and Sodbuster
 - Conservation Reserve Program
 - Wetland Reserve Program
 - Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
- **Administer Minnesota Conservation Easement Programs:**
 - Reinvest in Minnesota
 - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
 - Permanent Wetland Preserve Program
- **Implementation of the Waseca County Comprehensive Water Plan**
- **Implementation of the Wetland Conservation Act**
- **Conservation Tree Sale and Tree Planter**
- **Native Grass Drill**
- **Products available through the SWCD**
 - Educational Materials, Colored Marking Flags, Plantskydd Animal Repellant, Native Prairie Plants, Quality Tree Nursery Stock, Tree Weed Barrier Matting

Education and Promotion

- ❖ Soil and Water Conservation promotion and education is a high priority of the District. Each year the Waseca Office tries to encourage young students to learn more about conservation. We distribute Conservation themed coloring books to the Kindergarten students in Waseca County.
- ❖ In December 2022 4,372 2023 Calendars were sent out to rural addresses. The calendars featured programs and information on various conservation practices. Also this year a decision was made to publish a Newsletter in place of a Calendar. 4613 Newsletters were distributed to rural landowners, cooperating agencies, and businesses. The newsletter highlighted the 75th Anniversary photos, tree order form and other events held throughout the year. The District also is continually updating its website. This has made it easier for the public to get up to date information on a regular basis.
- ❖ The Waseca SWCD also sent out MASWCD Area VI Scholarship Contest information for seniors, to the Principles and Agriculture Instructors in all three Waseca County School Districts. There are 2 scholarships that are awarded through the Area VI MASWCD. 1st place is awarded \$1000 and 2nd place is awarded \$500. Kloe Wadd, a senior at Waseca High School was the selected recipient of the \$1000 award for her entry. Her topic was “Renewable Energy and Effect on Southern Minnesota Agriculture”.
- ❖ 2023 Waseca County Fair SWCD had a booth at the Waseca County Free Fair July 12-16. This provides an outreach opportunity for the SWCD to engage people who may not contact the SWCD or be aware of the SWCD’s services otherwise. This year with the emphasis on the 75th Anniversary, fair attendees were asked to take a quiz. This brought about time to converse with many landowners and curious young people and talk about Soil Conservation and Programs that are offered.



Conservation Easements

- ❖ The District in cooperation with the Board of Water and Soil Resources and the Natural Resources Conservation Service has assisted many Waseca County landowners with the establishing 121 permanent conservation easements on marginal cropland areas. The easements not only benefit the landowner, they also benefit the community by controlling erosion, storing and filtering water, reducing

flooding, and providing much needed wildlife habitat. Maintaining these easements in high quality native prairie and wetland restorations is a priority of the District. Easements are inspected periodically and 48 easements were inspected in 2023. Controlling invasive trees and weeds on these easements is an ongoing challenge. The District continues to assist easement owners with technical assistance for cutting and spot spraying invasive trees, shrubs, and weeds. Controlled burns are recommended on the easements by certified vendors every four or five years.

SWCD Local Capacity Grant

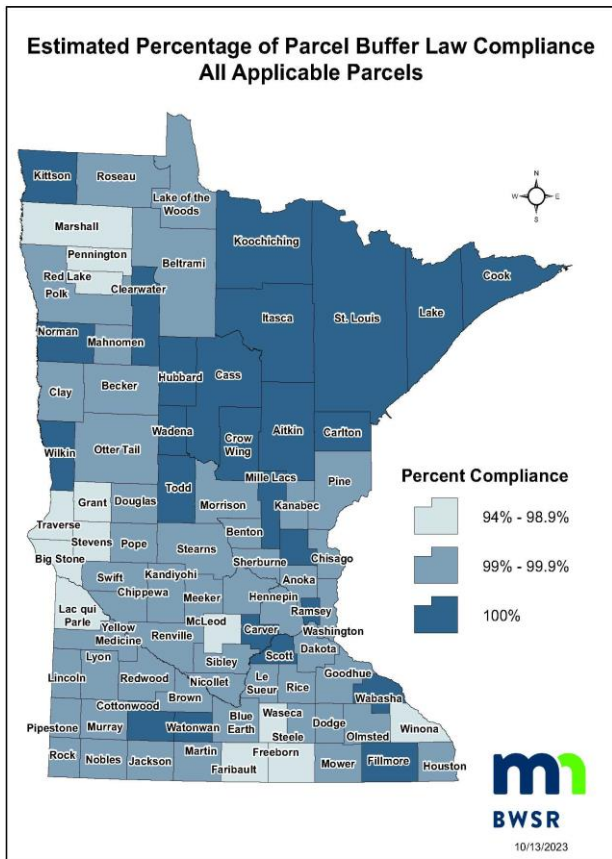
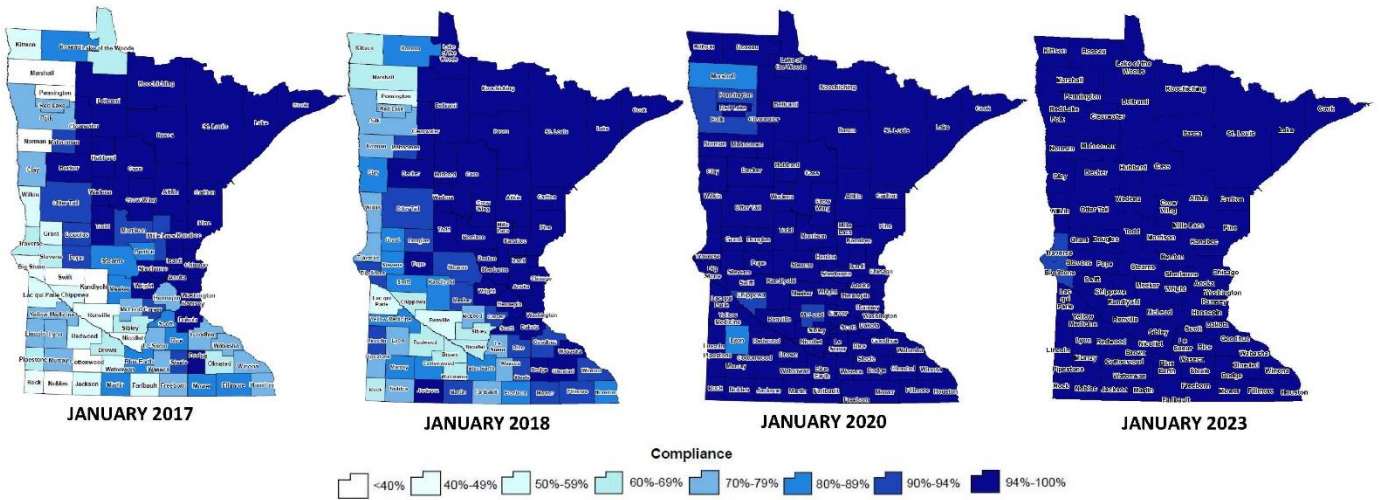
- ❖ This grant came through the Clean Water Land and Legacy Fund. The District used the funds to employ staff to improve how the District can assist landowners. The grant provided the necessary funding to support a full time Administrative Assistant and a District Manager to help fulfill the mission of the SWCD. In 2023 we completed the last of our capacity grant obligations.

SWCD Aid

- ❖ SWCDs have been striving for years to get stable, dedicated funding from the State of MN out of the General Fund. In 2023, SWCDs were successful in accomplishing that with a new allocation named SWCD Aid. It is a \$15,000,000 for the first two years and \$12,000,000 thereafter divided amongst the states 90 SWCDs. The funding allows local SWCDs to have more decision making authority on what and how those funds are used to promote conservation within their district and it does not require grant reporting.

Buffer Law Grant

- ❖ The Buffer grant provides funding for technical staff to aid in helping the landowner maintain the proper buffer adjacent to public waters and public ditch systems throughout the county. The District assisted the county in Buffer Law enforcement, conducted site visits, and reviewed approximately one third of the parcels required to have a buffer. The following maps show the progress made on the Buffer Law Compliance over the years and Statewide Compliance as of January 2023. Through a mutual agreement with Waseca County Land and Water Resources Department Waseca County staff will inspect County Ditch system buffers and coordinate any compliance communications.



All counties in the State have improved in compliance issues over the last 4 years. This is due to greater education on Buffers and their importance, but most of all the willingness of the landowners to comply with Buffer Laws to help keep our waters cleaner.

Most counties have sent out Corrective Action Notices (CAN) to landowners not in compliance with the MN buffer law. Upon receiving these notices, the majority of the landowners are willing to correct issues in a timely manner and avoid monetary and legal penalties. In some instances, the SWCD and/or the County have been able to help in the cost of some of the corrective actions through the help of the Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR) Grant dollars and other State Funding that may be available.

Wetland Conservation Act

- ❖ The District serves on the Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) for lands within the City of Waseca and state owned lands. In 2023 Waseca County delegated administrative duties for WCA to the SWCD. Waseca SWCD coordinates TEP meetings, reviewing applications, application decisions, confirmation of any violations, and development of appropriate restoration orders. In 2023 there were 13 applications and 2 violations.



Wetland under drought conditions

District Tree Program

- ❖ The District had another successful tree and shrub sale in 2023. We distributed approximately 9243 trees and 16 wildflower packets, containing 48 plants per packet. The trees and shrubs will be used for snow control, energy conservation (windbreaks), reducing wind erosion, and wildlife habitat/cover plantings. The wildflower packets will provide pollinator habitat and reduce erosion. The orders were about the same as last year and we likely would have sold more but our nurseries ran out of stock.



Potted Conifers

Conservation Delivery

- ❖ The Conservation Delivery Grant has been used in promoting effective Conservation Practices fitting landowner concerns. Some examples are: site visits, mapping, designing and giving recommendations for waterways, terraces and basins to aid in soil erosion.

State Cost Share Funding

- ❖ State Cost Share is used to provide up to 75% of conservation project costs. The SWCD also provides technical assistance in the form of evaluation, design, and construction certification to the landowner. The landowner was responsible for the remaining 25% of the project. In 2023 we continue to see an increase in project costs and difficulty finding contractors for these projects. Well Sealing contracts had by far the most activity in 2023.

Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA)

- ❖ GBERBA is a Joint Powers Organization consisting of ten participating Counties and SWCDs encompassing the Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Watonwan River Watersheds. GBERBA provides cost share opportunities for Waseca County landowners through various competitive grants. It also facilitates several speakers and information opportunities throughout the year. Current grants being administered include Watonwan Watershed Based Implementation Funds, Watonwan Watershed Drinking Water, and Soil Health Implementation Grant. One contract for cover crops for \$4440.00 was encumbered in 2023 in Waseca County. Waseca SWCD is represented on the Policy Board by one Supervisor and on the Technical Committee by staff.

South Central Technical Service Area (SC TSA)

- ❖ The SC TSA is a Joint Powers Agreement between 11 SWCDs in south central MN. The SC TSA provides technical assistance to the SWCDs for water quality projects. They have one engineer and three engineering technicians available. In 2023 they assisted us with survey and design of water and sediment control basins, terraces, and a lakeshore revine. Waseca SWCD is represented on the TSA board by one supervisor.

Watersheds in Waseca County

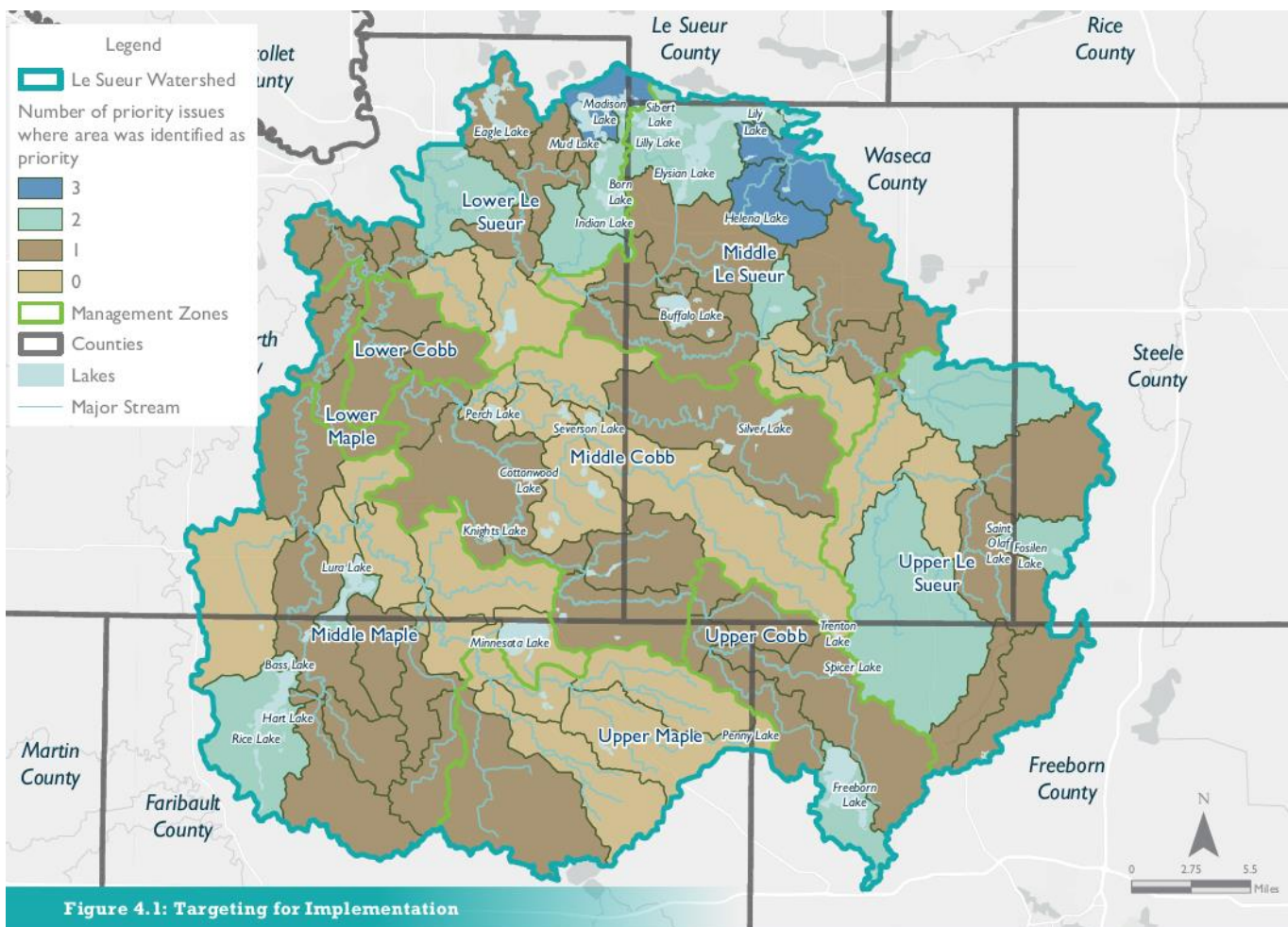
One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) – Cannon River

- ❖ The Cannon Watershed was selected for funding for watershed based water planning from BWSR in 2016. Since then the SWCDs and Counties in Waseca, Steele, Rice, Goodhue, Le Sueur, Dakota, the North Cannon Water Management Organization, and the Bell Creek Watershed District have been meeting consistently to develop a water plan for the Cannon Watershed. In 2020 the Cannon River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was completed, approved by BWSR, adopted locally, and partners formed the Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Board (CRWJPB) to implement the plan. In 2021, the CRWJPB received Watershed Based Implementation Funding and began to implement projects throughout the watershed. Projects included WASCBS, Cover Crops, Shoreline Survey, Soil Health Outreach and Lake Management Plan. In 2023 the CRWJPB received their second Water Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) grant, created an independent website and established a new logo. In 2023 work within Waseca County included project technical assistance, landowner outreach, and a cost share contract for 250 acres of strip till. Waseca SWCD is represented on the CRWJPB by a Supervisor and on the Cannon Implementation Group by the District Manager.



One Watershed One Plan – Le Sueur

- ❖ Partners within the Le Sueur River Watershed were selected for a 1W1P planning grant through BWSR in 2020. Waseca County opted to serve as day-to-day contact and Waseca SWCD provided administrative services. Representatives on the Policy Committee, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Steering Team met regularly to work on planning tasks. Waseca SWCD is represented on the policy committee by one Supervisor and on the Steering Team and TAC by Staff. The Public Hearing for the plan was held March 24, 2023 in Pemberton. The final plan was approved by BWSR on August 23, 2023 and locally adopted. The group agreed to implement the plan through a joint Powers Collaboration. Partners plan to continue to use Waseca County Staff as the future day to day contact and Waseca SWCD as the fiscal agent. The expected WBIF grant increased to \$1,355,872 and partners worked on the necessary policies so that implementation can begin in 2024.



Map of priority areas



Le Sueur 1W1P Policy Committee at Public Hearing

Soil Health Demonstration

- ❖ In 2021 Waseca SWCD received a grant for and committed to 3 years of soil health demonstration with local farmer and 2021 Waseca Outstanding Conservationist Jason Norton. The study areas are 4 plots within three larger agricultural fields. The demonstration includes measuring soil health indicators that are not obvious to the passerby. We completed soil health focused soil tests twice a year, soil temperature records, in field soil health assessments twice a year, and gathered data to quantify return on investment in a soil health farming system. Additional partners include the Minnesota Office of Soil Health (MOSH) and NRCS. A summary of data is located on our webpage: https://www.wasecaswcd.org/uploads/1/1/1/9/111975293/mosh_11-30-2022_report_-_public_domain.pdf

The Programs and Project of the Waseca SWCD and Partnering Agencies Results for 2023

SWCD 2023 Project Accomplishments	
Cover Crops (Riparian Funds)	8 contracts on 464.2 acres
Cover Crops (GBERBA)	1 contract on 40 acres
Cover Crops and Strip Till	1 contract on 40 acres
Reinvest in MN (RIM) Easements	2 applications approved for 108 acres

Waseca County Federal Conservation Funding			
<i>(Information furnished by NRCS & FSA)</i>			
<i>Fiscal Year October 1, 2022-September 30, 2023 (FY23)</i>			
<u>Program</u>	<u>Contracts</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Amount Paid</u>
CRP (NEW)	60	464.93	\$4,277
Active CRP	834	8041.09	\$1,950,129
CRP Expired	35	195.54	\$39,412
EQIP (NEW)	9	1785.6	
Active EQIP	19	3565	\$93,800
CSP (NEW)	2	2379.4	
Active CSP	3	3,307.3	\$50,300
WRP	0	0	\$0
	<i>New Contracts Totals included in Active Contract Totals</i>	<i>New Contracts Totals included in Active Contract Totals</i>	