



2024

Annual Report

Waseca County Soil and Water
Conservation District

Waseca County Soil and Water Conservation District

2024 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.

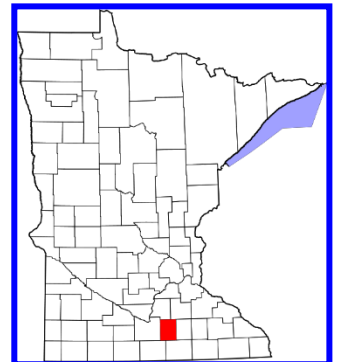
Introduction:

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 2024 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

Larry Muff, Chairman

Gregg Rosenthal, Vice Chairman

Wayne Cords, Treasurer

Matt Sommers, Secretary

Keith Morgan, Member

AREA OF REPRESENTATION

Byron, New Richland, Otisco Townships

St. Mary, Woodville Townships

Alton, Janesville Townships

Freedom, Vivian, Wilton Townships

Blooming Grove, Iosco Townships

District Staff

Mark Schaetzke

Joe Edel

Cammi Nordmeyer

Cheri Brummund

District Manager

District Technician

Resource Technician

District Administrative Assistant

NRCS Staff

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PERSONNEL

Jessica Beske

Lee Nachreiner

Jeremy Kite

NRCS Team Lead

NRCS Soil Conservationist

Wetland Conservationist

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 Brad Milbrath

District 4 - Commissioner DeAnne (De) Malterer

District 5 - Commissioner Brad Krause

WASECA COUNTY OFFICES:

Chris Howard

Land & Water Resources Director

Brian Zabel

Agriculture & Ditches Coordinator

Gregg Huber

Watershed Coordinator

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES:

Erynn Jenzen

Area Hydrologist, Mankato

Todd Piepho

Area Hydrologist, Sakatah

2024 Outstanding Conservation Farmer

Congratulations Karl Swenson



Karl Swenson of Otisco was selected as the 2024 Outstanding Conservationist for Waseca County by Waseca Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Board of Supervisors. He grows sweet corn and soybeans on the west side of highway 13 by Otisco. Karl started farming 10 years ago after his father retired from a long farming career. For the past 10 years you may have noticed much of his farm is greening up in the fall and one of the first fields to be green and growing in the spring because he plants cover crops after sweet corn harvest every year. He also manages around 50 acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for his family that is too wet to farm. Karl uses strip tillage and cover crops to protect his soil from water and wind erosion. On some winter days the results are literally a night and day difference. Snow drifts next to his fields are white like they are supposed to be and sometimes fields within just a few miles are jet black from blowing soil from the field. He has also witnessed better infiltration, soil tilth, and soil structure since implementing these soil health practices. He notes that what he does is considered conservation, but he thinks of it as making farming easier and better.

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
 - Conservation 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 (RIM)
 - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
 - Permanent Wetland Preserve Program (PWP)
- **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. 285 coloring books were delivered.
- ❖ 4753 Newsletters were distributed to rural landowners, cooperating agencies, and businesses. This was up 140 recipients from 2023. The newsletter highlighted 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.
- ❖ A Facebook Page was added in 2024. This offers timely information and updates to the public.
- ❖ Waseca SWCD had a booth at the Waseca County Free Fair July 10-14. 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 was on watersheds and programs and cost share opportunities available. This brought about time for Staff to converse with many landowners and curious young people and talk about Soil Conservation and Programs that are offered.



- ❖ Another outreach event was the World Honey Bee Day at Hofmann Apiaries, rural Janesville, in August. Joe spent the day sharing information on the wonders of wildflowers and which types of bees prefer which type of plants.



Soil Health Resource Technician

- ❖ After reviewing current and anticipated workload, cost share opportunities, SWCD financial position, and a BWSR staffing grant opportunity, Waseca SWCD added a Resource Technician position to increase our staff from three to four. Cammi Nordmeyer joined the Waseca SWCD Staff in July 2024 as a Resource Technician focused on Soil Health. She has been active in Soil Health Projects, working with landowners on Cover Crops, No till and Strip till projects. She has been participating in Soil Health Events and attending conferences and learning sessions over the past couple months. She will be working on some new projects in the coming year. One of the Programs is a Peer-to-Peer program where she will be asking landowners to share their conservation practices experiences with others that are just starting out or have questions about projects like cover crops, no till/strip till. The addition of a Resource Technician and Cammi have been a great asset to the SWCD.

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. 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 Aid

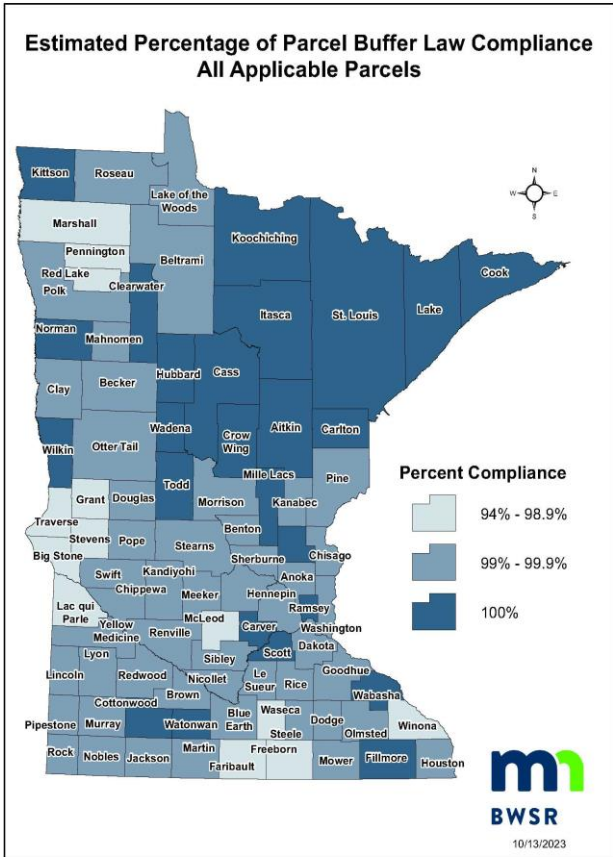
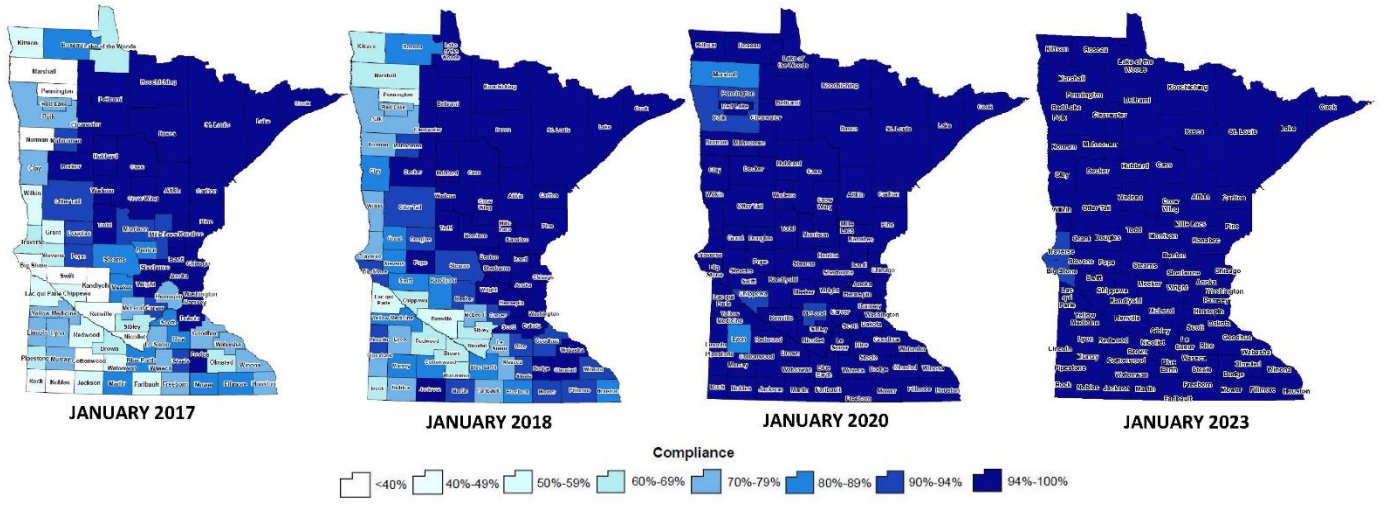
- ❖ SWCDs have been striving for years to get stable, dedicated funding from the State of MN out of the General Fund. In 2023, SWCDs were successful in accomplishing that with a new allocation named SWCD Aid. It is a \$15,000,000 for the first two years and \$12,000,000 thereafter. The funding allows local SWCDs to have more decision-making authority on what and how those funds are used to promote conservation within their district and cover the costs of staff to work on those projects.

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 a portion of the 1800 parcels in Waseca County required to have a buffer. The following two maps show the progress

made on the Buffer Law Compliance over the years and Statewide Compliance as of October 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. Compliance for Waseca County was at 95.8% at the end of 2024.

BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES **BUFFER COMPLIANCE ALL WATERCOURSES**



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

- ❖ 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 2024 there were 17 applications and 2 violations. The District serves on the Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) for lands within the City of Waseca and state owned lands.



Wetland Banking Easement

District Tree Program

- ❖ The District had another successful tree and shrub sale in 2024. We distributed approximately 8295 trees and shrubs and 11 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 down from last year but our nurseries had limited amounts of stock due to dry weather in 2023.



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 2024 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 2024.

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 40 acres of cover crops was implemented in 2024 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 2024 they assisted us with survey and design of water and sediment control basins, terraces, and grassed waterways. Waseca SWCD is represented on the TSA board by one supervisor.

Watersheds in Waseca County

One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) – Cannon River

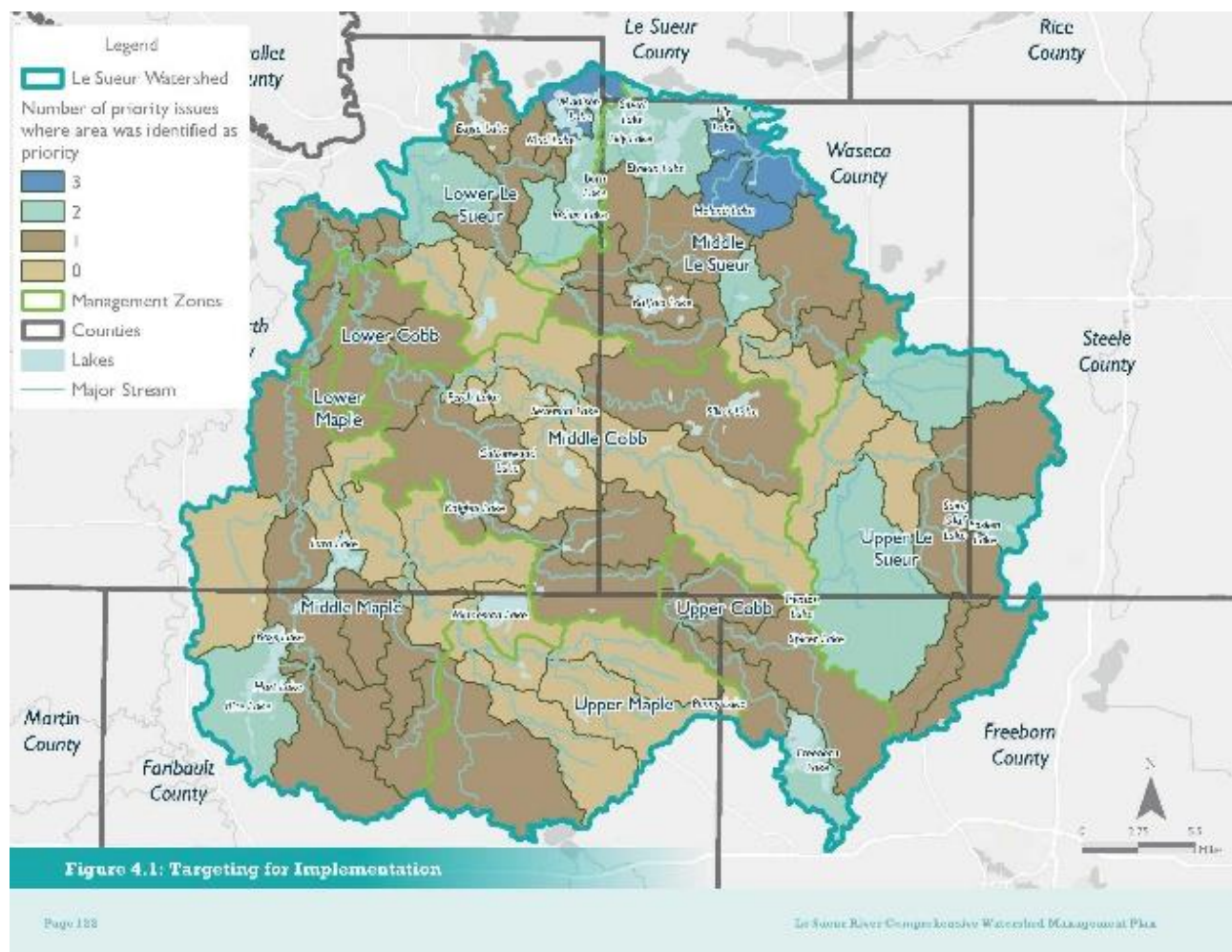
- ❖ The Cannon Watershed was selected for funding for watershed based water planning from BWSR in 2016. Since then the SWCDs and Counties in Waseca, Steele, Rice, Goodhue, Le Sueur, Dakota, the North Cannon Water Management Organization, and the Bell Creek Watershed District have been meeting consistently 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 2024 work within Waseca County included project technical assistance, landowner outreach, and a cost share contract for 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 River Watershed Based Implementation Fund(WBIF)

- ❖ Partners within the Le Sueur River Watershed were selected for a 1W1P planning grant through BWSR in 2020. The Partners in the Watershed are Blue Earth County, Blue Earth SWCD, Faribault County, Faribault SWCD, Freeborn County, Freeborn SWCD, Waseca County and Waseca SWCD. Waseca County is the current Plan Coordinator and Waseca SWCD is serving as Fiscal Agent. 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 Le Sueur River Watershed WBIF grant can aid landowners with funds to pay part or all of the project cost depending on Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and grant policies.

- ❖ The Total Le Sueur WBIF Grant is for \$1,355,872.00. It is structured as a 50/40/10 grant, meaning the Fiscal agent is supplied with 50% of the Grant until that amount has been completely spent, then 40% will be supplied, when the entire grant is used then the final 10% will be issued. The Fiscal Agent (Waseca SWCD) was supplied with \$677,936.00 on February 29, 2024. As of December 31, 2024 this grant has aided landowners with \$8,100.18 for Agriculture Practices, \$1,231.25 Well Sealings, \$229,053.25 in Non-Structural Management, \$175,446.17 in Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems, \$22,72.06 on total Technical/Administrative/Project Development/Planning & Assessment. The total amount spent so far is \$436,202.91. These funds have been used to aid landowners throughout the Le Sueur River Watershed Area.



Map of priority areas

The Programs and Projects of the Waseca SWCD and Partnering Agencies Results for 2024

SWCD 2024 Project Accomplishments	
Cover Crops (Riparian Funds)	10 contracts on 843.71 acres
Cover Crops (GBERBA)	1 contract on 40 acres
Cover Crops and Strip Till	9 contracts on 989 acres
Reinvest in MN (RIM) Easements	2 easements in process for 108 acres
Water and Sediment Control Basins	2 contracts and 3 basins
Well sealings	6 contracts and 6 wells

Waseca County Federal Conservation Funding			
<i>(Information furnished by NRCS & FSA)</i>			
<i>Fiscal Year October 1, 2023-September 30, 2024 (FY24)</i>			
<u>Program</u>	<u>Contracts</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Amount Paid</u>
CRP (NEW)	23	147.11	\$44,475
Active CRP	849	8,159.36	\$2,036,087
CRP Expired	18	94.76	\$21,811
EQIP (NEW)	4	260	\$29,998
Active EQIP	14	2583	\$309,359
CSP (NEW)	3	785.4	\$213,858
Active CSP	6	4092.7	\$723,419
WRP	0	0	\$0
	<i>New Contracts Totals included in Active Contract Totals</i>	<i>New Contracts Totals included in Active Contract Totals</i>	