

# Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District Annual Report



2013 Sixth Grade Conservation Day

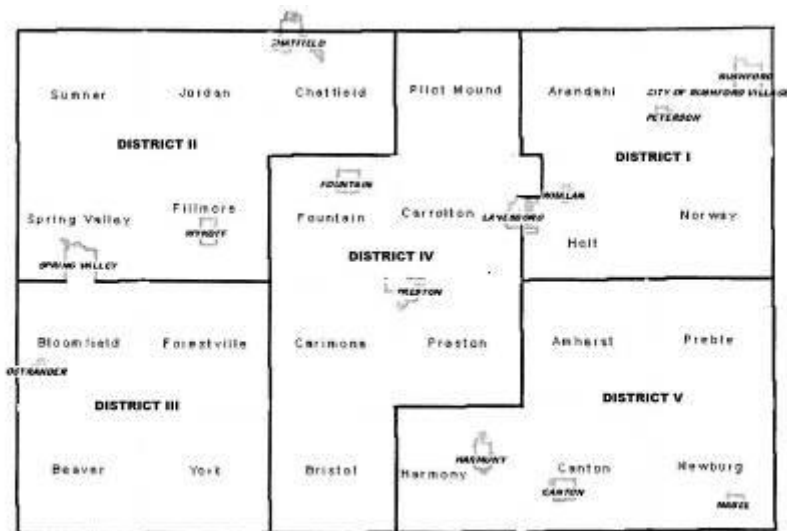
# 2013

## Personnel Resources



### Board of Supervisors

L to R: Leonard Leutink, Jr., Secretary; Travis Willford, Supervisor; Brian Hazel, Chair; Tim Gossman, Vice Chair; Pam Mensink, Treasurer



Board Meetings are held the Thursday after the second Monday of each month at 4:30 p.m.

District I – Brian Hazel  
 District II – Tim Gossman  
 District III – Leonard Leutink  
 District IV – Pamela Mensink  
 District V – Travis Willford

District I – Arendahl, Rushford Village, Norway and Holt townships plus the City of Lanesboro  
 District II – Sumner, Jordan, Spring Valley (excluding the City of Spring Valley), and Chatfield Townships

District III – Fillmore, Bloomfield, Forestville, Beaver and York townships

District IV – Pilot Mound, Fountain, Carleton (excluding the City of Lanesboro), Carimona, Preston, and Bristol townships

District V – Amherst, Preble, Harmony, Canton and Newburg townships

## Soil and Water Conservation District Staff

Donna Rasmussen	District Administrator
Rick Grooters	Resource Conservation Technician
Doug Keene	Resource Conservation Technician
Anne Koliha	Engineering Technician
Dawn Bernau	Nutrient Management Specialist
Dean Thomas	Grazing Management Specialist
Joe Magee	Water Management Coordinator
Jennifer Ronnenberg	Conservation Technician
Jeanette Serfling	Administrative Assistant

## Natural Resources Conservation Service Staff

Jessica Bronson	District Conservationist
Vacant	Soil Conservationist
Vacant	Conservation Technician
Steve Erickson	Soil Conservation Aide

## *COOPERATING AGENCIES*

Basin Alliance for the Lower Mississippi in Minnesota (BALMM)

Bluff Country Hiking Club

City of Canton

City of Chatfield

City of Harmony

City of Lanesboro

City of Mabel

City of Preston

City of Rushford

City of Rushford Village

City of Spring Valley

Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center

Fillmore County Association of Townships

Fillmore County Auditor/Treasurer

Fillmore County Commissioners

Fillmore County Emergency Management

Fillmore County Feedlot Office

Fillmore County GIS

Fillmore County Highway Department

Fillmore County Planning and Zoning Commission

Fillmore County Public Health

Fillmore County Recorder

Fillmore County Solid Waste  
Fillmore County Zoning  
Hiawatha Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)  
Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE)  
Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD)  
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)  
Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)  
Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Forestry Division (DNR)  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Waters Division (DNR)  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Fisheries Division (DNR)  
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)  
National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)  
National Trout Center, Preston, MN  
Southeast Minnesota Water Resources Board  
Southeast Minnesota Wastewater Initiative  
Southeast SWCD Technical Support Joint Powers Board (JPB)  
The Nature Conservancy (TNC)  
University of Minnesota Extension (U of M)  
Upper Iowa River Alliance  
USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)  
Winona State University (WSU)

## *INTRODUCTION*

The Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors hereby submit the Annual Report for the calendar year of January 1, 2013 through December 31, 2013.

In 1940 the first soil and water conservation district was organized in Fillmore County. The District encompassed the eastern half of the county. Two years later, in 1942, the Western District was created. A line running north/south from the town of Preston separated the two Districts. In 1962 the East and West Districts were consolidated into one district by authority of the Minnesota Soil Conservation Committee. It was the opinion of both former boards of supervisors that consolidation would offer more efficient operation.

It has been through the work of many supervisors, district employees, partners and landowners that the rich but fragile resources of Fillmore County have been protected.

The ever constant goal of the Fillmore SWCD is to conserve our natural resources.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District is to promote natural resource stewardship by providing educational, technical and financial assistance.

## **SERVICES AND PROGRAMS**

### **Technical assistance to landowners for the implementation of conservation practices**

- Two Conservation Specialists
  - Assist landowners with planning and design of practices, such as grassed waterways, terraces, grade stabilization structures, ponds, windbreaks, etc.
- Engineering Technician
  - Assists livestock producers with planning and design of feedlot runoff control practices, such as freshwater diversions, filter strips, picket fences, etc.
  - Updates USDA HEL Conservation Plans
- Nutrient Management Specialist
  - Assists livestock producers with developing nutrient management plans to meet standards for NRCS and state feedlot rules including annual updates of plans, manure spreader calibrations and other information needed to complete the plans
  - Assists producers with use and evaluation of nutrient management tools (basal stalk nitrate tests, soil N tests)
- Grazing Lands Management Specialist
  - Assists livestock producers with developing and implementing prescribed grazing plans that meet NRCS standards, such as fencing, pipeline, and interseeding, as well as helping to find financial assistance for implementing the practices
  - Assists producers with use of cover crops
- Conservation Technician
  - Assists landowners with enrolling in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and similar programs that establish permanent vegetation including conservation buffers
- Conservation Planning Specialist
  - Assists landowners with updating their conservation plans to ensure that soil productivity is maintained and that eligibility for the farm program is maintained
  - Assists landowners with complying with the rules of the Wetland Conservation Act related to filling, excavating or draining of wetlands

### **Financial assistance to landowners for implementing conservation practices**

- State Cost Share Program: provides up to 75% cost share up to a maximum of \$5,000 for grassed waterways, terraces, grade stabilization structures, well sealing and other practices on the state cost share docket
- Feedlot Water Quality Management Cost Share Program and Clean Water Fund Grants: provides 75% cost share for runoff control practices and manure storage for feedlots in riparian areas or within 300 feet of a sensitive feature

- Low Cost Feedlot Fix Cost Share Grants: provides 50% cost share with the maximum determined by the particular grant program for non-engineered runoff control practices such as rain gutters, freshwater diversions, filter strips, fencing, etc.
- Ag Best Management Practices (BMP) Low Interest Loan Program: provides 3% loans for implementing water quality practices, such as ag waste systems, manure handling equipment, septic system upgrades, no till planters, well replacement, variable rate technology, and erosion control structures; loans are processed through local lenders

### **Other products and services**

- Trees and tree supplies: potted and bare root stock are available for sale from December to the end of February with proceeds going to support SWCD programs
- 2011 Fillmore County Plat Books: available for sale for \$30
- Tree planters: two planters are available to rent for \$25/half day (min.) or \$50/day
- Gopher machine: one available for rent for \$25/half day (min.) or \$50/day
- Bacteria testing: \$25/sample
- Map sales: GIS maps created and printed; rates are dependent on the size and complexity of the map produced plus any printing costs
- Survey flags: available for sale at \$.10/each or \$10.00/bundle of 100
- Conservation Building conference room rent: \$25/half day, \$50.00/day
- Decorah Shale site investigation: \$20/hr in office research, \$25/hr out of office research
- Rain barrels: \$30 for kit; \$50 for assembled rain barrel
- Nutrient Management Plans: \$0.70/acre for a new EQIP plan, \$0.50/acre for a new non-EQIP plan; \$0.35/acre for plan updates.
- Mini Manure Management Plans: \$0.50/acre for a new plan, \$0.35/acre for annual update

### **Partnerships**

- Fillmore County
  - The SWCD has delegation agreements with the county for the administration of the Wetland Conservation Act and coordination of the Local Water Management Plan
  - One staff is a licensed inspector to assist the Zoning Office with the inspection of newly installed septic systems
  - The Conservation Specialists provide assistance on soil erosion complaints made to the Zoning Office to determine the extent of the erosion and how to remediate it
  - The SWCD staff provides assistance to the Zoning Office with wetland determinations in the Decorah Shale Overlay District and with landowner requests related to the county's sinkhole ordinance and industrial mining ordinance.
- USDA
  - SWCD technical staff provide assistance for planning, designing, and implementing practices funded through federal Farm Bill programs such as EQIP, WHIP and CRP
  - The SWCD submitted two applications in 2010 for the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) for additional EQIP and WHIP funding in Watson Creek and the Upper South Fork Root River/Wisel Creek watersheds for practices that reduce sediment and nutrient runoff. The last EQIP MRBI sign up was in 2013.
  - The Conservation Technician is partially funded with a BWSR Farm Bill Assistance grant to assist landowners with completing CRP Conservation Plans; 45 General CRP plans were completed under an agreement with MASWCD

- MN Pollution Control Agency
  - The SWCD is the lead agency for completing the Root River Comprehensive Strategy, a table that lists all impairments in the watershed and the strategies for meeting water quality standards as part of the Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS). Civic engagement related to this effort is ongoing.
- MN Department of Agriculture
  - The SWCD has a Joint Powers Agreement for the MDA Field to Stream Partnership in which subcontracts and payments are administered by the SWCD, and staff assist with edge-of-field and in stream monitoring activities, data management and watershed assessments.
- SE Technical Support Joint Powers Board
  - Membership dues are paid annually for engineering support for conservation projects.
  - The SWCD is a subcontractor with the JPB for a Clean Water Fund grant for a Nutrient Management Specialist position which serves five southeastern counties.
- SE MN Water Resources Board and Water Resources Advisory Committee
  - The Water Management Coordinator is the staff liaison to these organizations.
  - The SWCD is a sub-recipient of 319 grant funds for feedlot fixes and technical assistance.
  - The SWCD is a sub-recipient of grant funds for the Domestic Well Monitoring Network.
- Basin Alliance for the Lower Mississippi in Minnesota
  - The SWCD is an active participant in BALMM, a locally led ad hoc organization dedicated to protecting water quality in the Basin; the Administrator serves as Chair.
- MASWCD State and Area organizations
  - Membership is maintained; Board members and staff attend Area meetings and the statewide annual meeting.
- Hiawatha Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)
  - Two Board members are assigned as representatives to the RC&D Council.
- Root River watershed
  - The SWCD is the lead agency for the Root River Comprehensive Strategy and the MPCA Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network.
  - The SWCD houses the Grazing Management Specialist who works in the Root and in the Whitewater River watershed and adjoining watersheds in Winona County
- Upper Iowa watershed
  - SWCD staff assist with water quality sampling at three sites from April to October
- MN DNR
  - Observation Well Network: staff monitor water levels every month in one well in the network
  - Dye trace studies: staff assist with placing and collecting charcoal bugs in the springs and with collecting water samples that are analyzed for nitrate concentration and assist with landowner contacts.
- The Nature Conservancy
  - Grant funds were passed through the SWCD to three cooperatives for seeding cover crops in the Rush Pine Watershed which was coordinated by the recently formed Farmer Led Council.



# **DISTRICT PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

## **State Cost Share Program**

In 2013, a total of \$15,349.50 in state cost share funds were paid out to install:

- 6,530 feet of grassed waterways
- 6 farmstead windbreaks
- 2,100 feet of terrace restoration
- 1 well decommissioning

The SWCD's state cost share allocation was reduced from \$43,432 in FY09 to \$31,576 in FY13. The FY14/15 allocation is \$24,289.00.



**Farmstead Windbreak**

## **2013 Outstanding Conservationists**

The SWCD named Arden and Judy Willford as the 2013 Fillmore County Outstanding Conservationists. The Willfords were recognized at a Dec. 3 luncheon at MASWCD's 77<sup>th</sup> annual convention in Bloomington. The awards program recognizes farm families, individuals, conservation organizations, and other groups for their accomplishments in implementing conservation practices and improving Minnesota's natural resources.



**Judy and Arden Willford with Paula Mohr  
of The Farmer magazine**

Conservation has long been an important part of the Willford's farming operation beginning in 1961 when Arden's dad developed his conservation plan with the Soil Conservation Service and the SWCD. Over the years, they have maintained 21,000 feet of terraces, 15,000 feet of grassed waterways, and 5,000 feet of contour buffer strips and also maintain three miles of stream buffers. They are constantly seeking ways to improve their land and preserve the quality of the soil and water resources. They are early innovators using no-till, cover crops and variable rate technology before they were widely accepted. Arden and Judy have passed along this stewardship ethic to their family who are gradually increasing their involvement in the farm operation to ensure that the practices and management on the land are improved into the next generation.

MASWCD, with support from *The Farmer* magazine, sponsors the Outstanding Conservationist Award Program. The SWCD hosts a local recognition event in January to honor the recipients.



## **2013 Tree Program**

The District sells a variety of bare root trees and shrubs and bare root and potted conifers. 2013 sales included 14,100 bare root stock and 1,532 potted stock sold to over 200 individuals, municipalities, and organizations in and around Fillmore County. For Earth Day, 50 free Common Purple Lilac seedlings were given to those attending the event in Lanesboro.



## **Feedlot Water Quality Management**

One feedlot project funded with FY12 Clean Water Funds was partially completed in 2013 and a partial payment was made for \$50,784.00. Three projects were funded with \$38,350 in 319 grants from the SE MN Water Resources Board and \$15,000 from county cost share funds. An additional project used \$5,000 in county cost share funding. A FY14 Clean Water Fund Grant for one feedlot project was approved for \$170,083 from the FY13 application. None of the five projects submitted in the FY14 funding application were funded; nor is the staff time to develop the projects to get them ready for the application.

## **Nutrient Management**

The Nutrient Management Specialist works in five counties and is funded by a Clean Water Fund grant awarded to the SE SWCD Technical Support Joint Powers Board. She has a total of 167 NMP contacts and over 120 plans on about 66,205 acres. Fees charged for the plans help to meet match requirements for the Clean Water Fund grant. The FY12 grant funds the position to the end of 2014.

### Nutrient Management Articles

- 2013 Fillmore Co Fair Poster – 2011 and 2012 Manure Plot Results (July)
- Updated the NMP brochure with the new price changes
- June 2013 Fillmore SWCD Conservation Chronicle “How Much Nitrogen will Green Manure provide the 2014 crop?”
- Conservation Chronicles article “Nutrient and Manure Management Plans”
- 2013 Fair poster “Taking Credit for Manure is Easy on the Pocket Book, Good for the Environment and Improves Soil Health!” (2013 manure plot results)
- Updated NMP brochure
- Provided NMP training for Land Stewardship hire David Rosemann. He is helping update MMP plans.

### Workshops and Field days attended:

- Midwest Forage Association field day at Brian Hazels 7/18/13
- ELINK training 6/19/13
- BALM meeting 6/19/13
- NRCS soil health field homework 5/28/13
- NRCS soil health training phase III 5/30/13
- Root River scenario meeting with MPCA 5/8/13
- NMP EQIP office review by Jeff King 4/16/13
- NRCS soil health phase II 4/2/13
- MPCA feedlot registration update meeting 2/28/13
- NRCS soil health webinar 2/21/13

- Feedlot workgroup meeting for Fillmore Co. 2/4/13
- JPB meeting 1/31/13
- U of M “will grid soil samples work for livestock farms” 1/23/13
- U of M Winter Crops Days 1/16/13
- U of M Research update for Ag Professionals 1/9/13
- MN Forage Association Field Day 7/18/13
- MPCA Feedlot meeting on NPDS permits 8/22/13
- Cover Crop Webinar 8/20/13
- Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Plan Listening Session 9/23/13
- MASWCD State Convention 12/2-12/3 2013
- MASWCD Fall meeting 9/16/13
- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Field Tour Day put on by Fillmore SWCD at Forestville State Park 9/18/13

#### Presentations:

- Presentation on the Lysimeter network at the LWM Citizen’s Com. Meeting
- Provided training for Spencer Herbert the new NMP specialist in Rice Co.
- Provided training to Nicky Johnson CSP employee for the U of M NMP software

#### Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Planning (NFMP) Advisory Committee

There were several listening sessions held throughout the state of MN. As a member of the Task Force, the NMP Specialist assisted with the one held in Rochester. The Draft NFMP plan is now being reviewed along with all the public comments by the commissioner.

#### NMP Software

The U of M software has been updated to work with Windows 7 and access 2010. Kevin Keuhner from MDA is almost done with the Access database MMP software. It will be used for a test run sometime in 2014. The MPCA MMP software is being used as well. Streamlined plans would be ideal that are more farmer-friendly yet still meet all the requirements.

#### Nutrient Management Tools: Watson Creek Watershed and Rush-Pine Creek Watershed

Fall and spring soil nitrate test results were sent out the farmers who participated. Fall 2013 BSNT samples were taken. The results are being put together along with the field management information for 2013. Meetings were held with almost all of the Watson Creek farmers to go over their results and gather the field information. Meetings were held with all of the Rush Pine farmers to go over their results and gather the field information. Project tasks will be finished in January 2014. The final results will then be given to the participating farmers. A summary of the past 3 years of data collection will be included to compare to 2013 results. All the farmers are willing to participate again in 2014.

#### Southeastern Minnesota Soil Water Monitoring Network:

Each farmer has a web link that takes them directly to their Lysimeter results and the precipitation data. SWCD staff are able to go into the Lysimeter network program and make updates and changes as needed along with Winona State students and staff. The students are collecting the samples and processing them. SWCD staff are gathering the field management information. There will be a meeting in early 2014 with SWCD, MDA and Winona State to go over the 2013 results.

## **Grazing Management**

The Grazing Specialist provides free assistance to livestock producers in the Root River and Whitewater River watersheds plus the adjacent watersheds in Winona County. The position is funded with a Clean Water Fund grant awarded to the Fillmore SWCD. There has been a grazing specialist on staff since March 2007 with the current person in that position since April 2009. The Grazing Specialist is currently working with about 40 producers per year developing managed grazing plans, installing fence and pipeline, and troubleshooting existing grazing systems. Since 2009, a total of 3,258 acres have grazing plans with 240,000 feet of pipeline and 387,000 feet of fence. EQIP contracts on these acres total \$941,498, and state cost share funding totals \$63,107. Seven grazing plans were developed of which three were funded through EQIP. Construction checks were conducted as needed. Assistance was provided to NRCS and U of MN Extension and Vet School staff for field days. He also participated in five teleconferences with GLCA and NRCS Grazing Specialists. Cattle pond samples were collected as part of a study with the U of MN Vet School to determine bacteria levels in the water the cattle are drinking. He attended five grazing work group meetings, four soil health videoconferences and assisted with Farm Safety Day and with harvest/hay plots. Presentations: NRCS seed tool training, U of MN Vet students, Envirothon, Soil Health training, six field days and the GLCA soil webinar. Numerous contacts were made about cover crops including prevented planting acres. There were 28 producers who signed up for cover crops through EQIP (4247.1 acres). The Grazing Specialist worked with NRCS to get cover crop standards revised. Numerous site visits were done to check on cover crops and process paperwork for payments and certification of cover crops. Meetings were held with several new producers for potential 2014 funding. Infiltration testing was conducted on fields in the seven Soil Health cover crop contracts which total 999 acres total over five years. An additional 21 EQIP cover crop contracts total 3248.1 acres over one to three years.

An application was submitted to the National Wildlife Federation for a Cover Crop Champions grant that provided funding for a Farmer Champion and an Outreach Champion to do outreach related to



September 25 Cover Crop Field Day highlights the use of tillage radishes on prevented planting acres.

cover crops. Travis Willford, a local farmer who plants cover crops and who is also a SWCD Board Supervisor, and Dean Thomas, Grazing Specialist, received funds to pay for their time and other expenses to meet with agronomists, write articles, conduct radio interviews and plan and hold a field day. A September 25 field day drew about 40 attendees who saw a planting of rye, red clover and tillage radish on prevented planting acres. A second grant application was submitted in November for 2014 activities. That grant was awarded and will be used for meetings with agronomists, writing articles for the local media, and holding a spring field day.

### ***Volunteer Nitrate Monitoring Grant (a.k.a. Domestic Well Network)***

A network of volunteers was established in 2008 to monitor nitrate in drinking water wells in Fillmore County and eight other southeast Minnesota counties. The network of 675 wells includes 119 in Fillmore County. Samples were collected by the volunteers in August 2013 and sent to the SWCD office for analysis. The 2013 samples were sent to the MDH lab. Results have not yet been compiled from the lab. The project was funded initially with 319 grants to the SE MN Water Resources Board. Current funding is from the MN Pollution Control Agency to the Board to continue the project until 2015.

### ***Root River Comprehensive Strategy Project***

In March 2011, a contract was signed between the SWCD and the MPCA to begin work on the Root River Comprehensive Strategy. The strategy will be based upon the results from the TMDLs, Stressor Identification, other assessment work that was completed through MPCA's One Watershed Approach, and from input provided at local civic engagement events. Under this contract, the SWCD is responsible for administering subcontracts, collecting water quality samples, and leading civic engagement efforts. One of the subcontracts with Winona State University paid for electromagnetic resistivity imaging (ERI) and lysimeter studies to aid in understanding nitrate transport through karst. A network of more than 50 lysimeters has been installed on 18 sites under a variety of ag and non-ag land uses. Samples have been collected every 1-2 weeks depending on soil moisture conditions. The ERI studies were completed in 2012 and some sites were revisited in 2013. All reports were submitted in 2013 when the contract ended. The lysimeter network remains in place and is funded through a subsequent grant from the MPCA to continue its use and the three continuous nitrate monitoring stations at the Lanesboro Fish Hatchery springs. Another subcontract with University of Minnesota Extension for civic engagement activities also ended in 2013. The Citizens' Group that formed hosted seven Root River Citizen Conversations utilizing the civic engagement skills they had been trained to use. The Conversations yielded information from 150 attendees to be used in developing the Comprehensive Strategy table. A \$3000 grant from Meadowlark Institute with support from In Commons and the Bush Foundation provided food and other meeting needs for the Citizen Conversations.



**Root River Citizen Conversation attendees analyzing the responses for a civic engagement exercise**

### ***MPCA Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network***

A contract with MPCA provides funding for staff to monitor five sites on the main stem and the major tributaries of the Root River to obtain spatial and long-term pollutant loading information. The contract deliverables include collecting 25 grab samples at each site during runoff and base flow conditions for a total of about 125 samples per year. Staff are also calculating annual loads using the FLUX32 model. Due to the extreme weather conditions in 2013, especially from January through June, 173 samples were collected at all five WPLMN sites.



## ***MDA “Field to Stream Partnership”***

The MDA Field to Stream Partnership project began in 2011. Three edge-of-field monitoring sites are established in Fillmore County. A fourth is in Mower County. The sites in Fillmore County are located in Crystal Creek southwest of Preston and in Bridge Creek near Bratsberg. The monitoring stations have automated samplers which collect runoff from fields where detailed information is collected about management of the fields draining to the station. Samples are analyzed for TSS, turbidity, TP, PO<sub>4</sub>, pesticides, and nitrate-N. An in-stream monitoring station is located downstream from each of the edge-of-field sites. Grab samples and sediment fingerprinting samples are collected at the in-stream sites and at the edge-of-field sites, whenever possible. Once baseline data is established for the sites, various conservation practices will be implemented and any changes to water quality will be monitored. The Crystal Creek site is in an area with many sinkholes and streams, so dye trace studies are being conducted there to better understand the interaction between surface water and ground water. Nitrate samples are collected and analyzed from the springs. Lysimeters have also been installed to evaluate nitrate movement below the root zone.

A new JPA was signed in 2013 to continue funding the project through June 30, 2015. The funds are used to fund staff to administer the subcontract with Mower SWCD, fund 0.75 FTE in the Fillmore SWCD to collect samples and maintain equipment and to work on conservation and implementation strategy planning.

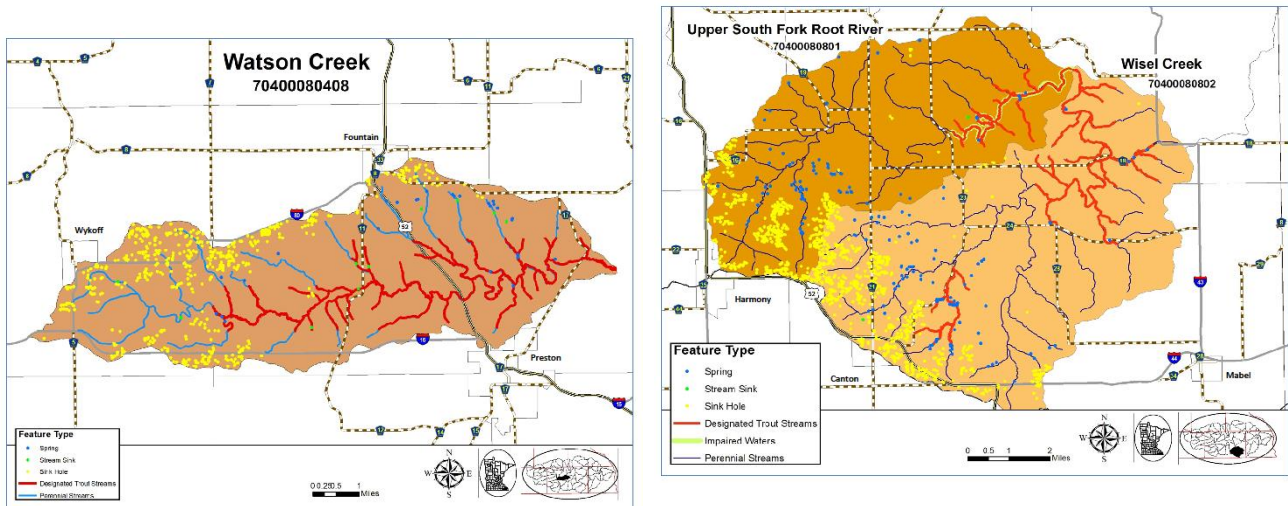
Minnesota is one of three states participating in a Conservation Innovations Grant to design and evaluate simplified edge-of-field monitoring equipment. MDA is leading the project in Minnesota and has selected the Root River as one of the watersheds in which to install two sites. The SWCD is providing a cash match for this project and limited in-kind staff time.



Damage to the wing wall at one of the edge of field monitoring sites following a severe rain event in June.

## **Mississippi River Basin Initiative**

The Fillmore SWCD submitted MRBI applications for two sub-watersheds in the Root River watershed: Watson Creek and the Upper South Fork Root River/Wisel Creek. Priority practices in these watersheds are ag waste storage for dairy and beef producers, nutrient management for operations utilizing manure, and grazing management. These priorities utilize the existing technical staff already housed in the SWCD office and benefit livestock production, which is crucial to maintaining hay and pasture acres in the steep terrain of the Root River watershed.



In August of 2011, agreements were signed with The Nature Conservancy and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for technical assistance funds to hire staff to meet one-on-one with producers in MRBI watersheds and the rest of the Root River to update their conservation plans and identify conservation needs that could potentially be addressed with the MRBI EQIP and WHIP funding. Plans are also being completed for expiring CRP acres and USDA Sodbust requests. From October 2011 to January 2014, a total of 343 plans have been completed on 33,467.32 acres. The soil savings total 120.5 tons per year from those acres and phosphorus has been reduced by an estimated 16,979.56 pounds per year. As a result of the planning efforts, 22 EQIP contracts were signed in 2012 and 2013, and 12 of the projects are completed with the remainder scheduled to be completed in 2014. The projects completed treat 1,792 acres of drainage area. In addition, EQIP contracts signed for FY2010 and 2011 prior to the start of the planning efforts funded four ag waste systems, five nutrient management plans on 1,385 acres, cover crops, waterways and a WHIP native planting.

## **Farm Bill Assistance**

The Fillmore SWCD has staff (~0.5 FTE) funded by Farm Bill Assistance funds from BWSR to promote the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and to assist landowners enrolled in CRP with completing their plans. Staff completed 45 General CRP conservation plans for re-enrollments and new enrollments. Staff time includes management of the plan files both preparing for the enrollment and follow up after enrollment. The SWCD added storm water projects to the work plan in 2011, so some work is being done to provide assistance to cities with storm water education and promoting the SWCD's rain barrel program.

## ***Bacteria Testing***

In May 2009, the SWCD became a certified lab to test drinking water for total coliform and *E. coli* and to test surface water for *E. coli*. The equipment was purchased with flood relief grant funds from Fillmore County Public Health to assist well owners who have had their wells flooded. Three staff are trained to analyze samples. There were 158 samples analyzed in 2013. An internal audit was conducted by the staff in January 2013.

## ***Education and Promotion Projects***

### Scholarships:

The Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District sponsors a \$500.00 scholarship for a graduating Fillmore County high school student pursuing a degree in Natural Resources, Agriculture or related field. Ashley Bue of Lanesboro High School is the 2013 High School Scholarship recipient.

The District also offers a \$500.00 scholarship for Fillmore County college students who will be returning to school in the fall. To be eligible, students must be a returning college sophomore, junior or senior, pursuing a degree in Natural Resources, Agriculture, or a related field, enrolled in classes for fall, and not a prior scholarship recipient. Katie Winslow of Fountain is the 2013 Returning College Student Scholarship Award recipient.

### Lost Creek Hiking Trail:

**Forestry Education:** In 2011, the SWCD formed a Forestry Committee at the suggestion of the 2010 Outstanding Conservationists who actively manage the woodlands on their farm. They are members of the committee along with SWCD staff and Board members. Among the accomplishments are the development of educational materials and activities centered around the Lost Creek Hiking Trail where several forestry BMPs have been implemented. A brochure provides details about the practices signed along the trail. The brochures are accessible at each end of the trail for hikers to pick up. A map in the



brochure shows where the BMPs are located, and marker signs are placed along the trail at these locations. The cost of the brochures and signs were paid by the SWCD. Summer interns hired in 2010-2013 helped organize landowner field days in July utilizing lists of landowners in three counties from the MN Forest Resources Council. Over 60 people attended the field day in 2013. Half the group toured upland forest practices on the Bailey farm, and half toured the creek bottom hardwood management and reed canary grass control project on the Gossman farm.





6<sup>th</sup> Grade Field Day: About 180 students from four schools participated in the annual 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Field Day at Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park on September 18th. Presentations were on the topics of recycling, snakes, animal survival, forestry, electricity safety, and the Forestville Historic site.

Learning about electricity safety

Area and State Envirothon: A Staff member from the SWCD assisted with planning and staffing the 2013 Area Envirothon, which was held at North Alexander Park in Faribault on May 8<sup>th</sup>.

Fillmore County Fair Display: Various posters providing information about SWCD programs and projects were on display at the county fair. The SWCD also purchases one half hour of air time on the local radio station during the fair to interview staff and Board members about current SWCD programs.

“Conservation Chronicles” Newsletter: On January 21, 2013, the Conservation Chronicles was published as an insert in the *Fillmore County Journal*, a free newspaper that goes to 12,790 residences in the county. The Journal sold advertising to offset most of the cost of the insert. Many positive comments were received about this publication. Due to increasing printing and postage costs, the summer and winter newsletters were posted on the SWCD website. An email notice of the posting was sent to those landowners providing their e-mail addresses. Information about programs, upcoming events, tree sales, and other topics are submitted by the staff from SWCD and NRCS as well as other agencies when needed.

Community and School Presentations and Education: Nitrate clinics were conducted in Chatfield in March, in Mabel in May and at the County Fair in July. In April, a presentation was given at Spring Valley for about 40 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students for the Ag in the Classroom program. The SWCD had a display and gave away tree seedlings at the Root River Valley Earth Day celebration in Lanesboro in April. The Water Management Coordinator served on the Board for the National Trout Center in Preston.

SWCD Windbreak Program: For many years, windbreaks were eligible for state cost share funding, but this year windbreaks were removed from the list of eligible practices except in counties where wind erosion is a problem. Fillmore County does not meet the state’s requirements to be considered a wind erosion county. However, the SWCD Board has long recognized the importance of trees on the land, especially on the steep and rolling hills found in most of the county. So, this tradition will continue. The SWCD will continue to offer trees for sale and will offer cost share for windbreaks utilizing its local funds. Up to 50 percent of the cost of the trees for a farmstead windbreak designed by the SWCD staff will be paid to the landowner. Tree cost is based on current potted stock prices offered by the SWCD.

### ***Observation Well Network***

The SWCD measures water levels in a well near Chatfield as part of the DNR's Observation Well Network. The water level is measured once a month in June to December plus two more times during the three-month period of March to May. No readings are taken in January or February.

### ***Precipitation Monitor Program***

The District has 12 precipitation monitoring volunteers, one who has been monitoring rainfall for 35 years, one for 22 years, and six for more than ten years. Participants forward their rainfall information to the SWCD office which is recorded and sent on to the State Climatology Office in St. Paul.

### ***District Website ([www.fillmoreswcd.org](http://www.fillmoreswcd.org))***

The district's first website was created in July, 1999. A new site was created in 2007, then was revamped in 2010. It receives regular updates with information regarding our services and programs, tree ordering, and current events as well as information about our supervisors and staff. Board meeting agendas and minutes are added monthly. Additions in 2013 include the Root River Landscape Plan and Root River Citizen Conversation summaries.