

Fillmore  
Soil and Water  
Conservation District  
Annual Report



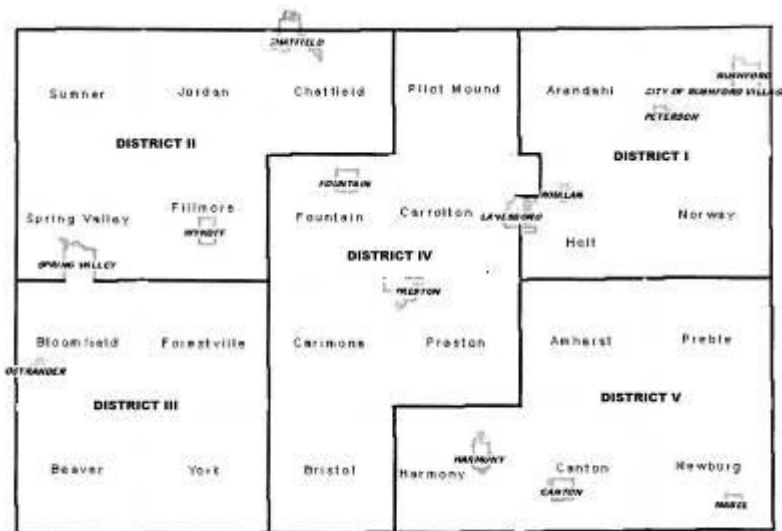
2020

## Personnel Resources



### Board of Supervisors

Front row: Bob Pickett, Supervisor; Kathy Tesmer, Treasurer; Travis Willford, Chair  
Back row: Brian Hazel, Vice Chair; Tim Gossman, Secretary



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

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, Carrolton (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

Laura Christensen	District Administrator
Doug Keene	Resource Conservation Specialist
Anne Koliha	Engineering Technician
Mindy Williamson	Administrative Assistant
Dean Thomas	Area Soil Health Technician
Nikki Shaw	Water Management Coordinator
Aaren Mathison	Conservation Technician
Sara West	Nutrient Management Specialist

## Natural Resources Conservation Service Staff

Jessica Bronson	District Conservationist
Teddy Moreno-Santos	Soil Conservationist
Vacant	Conservation Technician

## COOPERATING AGENCIES

Basin Alliance for the Lower Mississippi in Minnesota (BALMM)  
Bluff Country Hiking Club/Lost Creek Hiking Trail  
Conservation Corps-Minnesota  
Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center  
Fillmore County Cities -- Canton, Chatfield, Fountain, Harmony, Lanesboro, Mabel, Ostrander,  
Peterson, Preston, Rushford, Rushford Village, Spring Valley, Whalan  
Fillmore County Association of Townships  
Fillmore County -- Auditor/Treasurer, Board of Commissioners, Emergency Management, Feedlot  
Office, GIS, Highway Department, Public Health, Recorder, Sheriff/Sentence to Serve, Solid  
Waste, Zoning  
Friends of the Root River  
Grazing Lands Conservation Association (GLCA)  
Hiawatha Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)  
Land Stewardship Project (LSP)  
Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE), SE Area 7  
Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), SE Area 7  
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)  
Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)  
Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Forestry, Fisheries, Ecological and Water  
Resources, Wildlife Divisions  
Minnesota Forestry Association (MFA)  
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)  
National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)  
National Trout Center, Preston, MN  
Root River One Watershed, One Plan LGUs  
Southeast Minnesota Water Resources Board  
Southeast Minnesota Wastewater Initiative  
Southeast SWCD Technical Support Joint Powers Board (JPB)  
The Nature Conservancy (TNC)  
University of Minnesota (U of M): Extension, 4-H  
Upper Iowa River Alliance  
USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

## *INTRODUCTION*

The Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors hereby submit the Annual Report for the calendar year of January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

In 1940 the first soil and water conservation district were 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**

### **Resource Conservation Specialist, Conservation Technician, and Engineering Specialist**

- Assist landowners with planning and design of practices, such as grassed waterways, terraces, grade stabilization structures, ponds, windbreaks, etc.
- Assist landowners with enrolling in programs that establish permanent vegetation including Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and conducts annual status reviews of easements.
- Assist landowners with complying with the rules of the Wetland Conservation Act related to filling, excavating or draining of wetlands.

### **Engineering Technician**

- Assists livestock producers with planning and design of feedlot runoff control practices, such as freshwater diversions, filter strips, picket fences, etc.
- Assists with Buffer Law implementation and compliance.

### **Nutrient Management Specialist**

- Assists livestock producers with developing manure management plans to meet standards for 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, split N applications, etc.) through on-farm demonstration plots.

### **Area Soil Health Technician**

- Assists producers with practices that enhance soil health--managed grazing, cover crops, no-till--including help with financial assistance for implementation using EQIP or local or state funding.

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

- State Cost Share Program: provides up to 75% cost share not to exceed \$6,000 for grassed waterways, terraces, grade stabilization structures, as well as well sealing (50% up to \$1000 maximum) plus other practices on the state cost share docket.
- Local Capacity Grant Cost Share for cover crops and structural conservation practices using the same cost share rates as State Cost Share.
- 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 terms of up to 10 years for implementing water quality practices, such as ag waste systems, manure handling equipment, septic system upgrades, no till planters, well sealing and 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.
- 2019 Fillmore County Plat Books: available for sale for \$35.
- 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: \$50/sample (\$20 for households with a child under age 1 or a pregnant woman).
- 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/day.
- Decorah Shale site investigation: \$20/hr. in office research, \$25/hr. out of office research.
- Rain barrels: \$40 for a DIY kit; 6 sold in 2020
- 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.

## 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. The Water Management Coordinator and Administrator are coordinating the Root River One Watershed, One Plan. The Policy Committee is made up of representatives from 13 LGUs and includes a SWCD Supervisor representing the Fillmore SWCD.
- Investigations of soil erosion complaints made to the SWCD or Zoning Office determine the extent of the erosion and work with the landowner/operator on how to remediate it. Follow up on one complaint received in 2017 which was resolved.
- 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. No requests received in 2018.

### USDA

- SWCD technical staff provides assistance for planning, designing, and implementing practices funded through federal Farm Bill programs such as EQIP, CSP and CRP.

### MN Pollution Control Agency

- Root River watershed: The SWCD has a contract with the MPCA to conduct water quality monitoring for the Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network.
- Fillmore SWCD is a subcontractor with Olmsted SWCD for a Surface Water Assessment Grant to conduct water quality monitoring for Cycle 2 of Intensive Watershed Monitoring in 2018-2019.

### MN Department of Agriculture

- MDA Field to Stream Partnership Monitoring Grant: administration of subcontracts and payments administered by the SWCD, and 2 staff assist with edge-of-field and in-stream monitoring, data management and watershed assessments.
- BWSR Field to Stream Partnership Phase II Implementation Grant (\$804,385) and Targeted Watershed Grant (\$493,233): Two competitive BWSR grants were awarded to implement BMPs in the FSP study watersheds while monitoring continues to evaluate the effectiveness of the BMPs for reducing sediment and nutrient runoff.

### SE Technical Support Joint Powers Board (disbanded mid-year)

- Membership dues are paid annually for engineering support for conservation projects.
- The SWCD is a subcontractor with the JPB for the Area Soil Health Technician who works in the 11-county SE Area 7 promoting soil health practices and assisting producers with implementing those practices. In October 2018, the position funding comes from a NRCS Conservation Collaboration Grant.
- The SWCD and Soil Health Technician are partners with the JPB for the LCCMR SE MN Cover Crop and Soil Health Initiative to oversee cover crop demonstration plots in Area 7 which ended in 2018.

### SE MN Water Resources Board and Water Resources Advisory Committee

- The SWCD 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 Volunteer Nitrate Monitoring Network.
- The SWCD is a sub-recipient of grant funds for 0.2 FTE of the Nutrient Management Specialist to coordinate N-BMP outreach in 3 counties funded by MDA.
- \*Disbanded in 2019

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 District Administrator served 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; 2018 dues were paid.

Upper Iowa watershed

- SWCD staff assist Iowa DNR with water quality sampling at three Upper Iowa River sites in Minnesota 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 assists 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 for dye trace studies.
- Spring flow monitoring was begun in Engle Spring in Camp Creek watershed.

The Nature Conservancy

- Grant funds were provided to the SWCD to purchase prairie cordgrass plugs for stabilization of a Decorah Shale outcrop along County Road 5 in Jordan Township, which used about half the funds. The site is monitored annually.
- The remaining half of the funds helped purchase plants for the Fillmore County Office Building storm water basin rehabilitation completed in 2016. The site is maintained annually.



In 2020, Fillmore SWCD served as the fiscal agent for seven active Clean Water Fund grants. These grant funds were allocated both locally and regionally totaling \$1,886,643 with active grant periods ranging from 2016-2021.

## *DISTRICT PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS*



## **State Cost Share Program**

In 2020

13,286' Grassed Waterway

3 Rock Lined Waterways

21 Grade Stabilization structures

1,804' Terraces

5,526' Subsurface Drain

1,700' Underground Outlet

1 Rock Chute.

19 of these practices were implemented pairing state and federal dollars, while 2 were implemented using straight federal dollars.

State cost share projects completed: 2 Grade Stabilization

## **2020 Outstanding Conservationists**

The 2020 Outstanding Conservationists selected by the Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was Gary & Josh Eisenman. The Eisenman's farm 600 acres of corn, soybeans, oats, hay and cover crops on both owned and rented land in Jordan Township. Gary started strip tilling back in 2000 on his corn and soybean ground and converted to 100% no-till in 2019. The Eisenman's have done cover crops through NRCS (EQIP) and SWCD programs and continue to use them on their corn silage and soybean acres. They sometimes harvest their cover crop (Winter Cereal Rye) in the spring for forage if needed and weather permits for their beef cows. The Eisenman's have 40 cow/calf pairs that are rotational grazed on a three-week cycle through the summer. Calves are weaned in the fall and put in the feedlot where they are backgrounded and marketed at a later time. Cows are wintered on corn stalks and spend no time in a feedlot. Their 25 acres of woodland which they do tree trimming, tree harvest and planting according to a private forester's forest plan. Also, Gary is starting to do beehives and is looking into planting some pollinator plants to attract bees. Also, by having cover crops that provide good wildlife habitat and protection in the winter and spring months.

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. No recognition ceremony was held. Eisenman's will be invited to recognition events in 2021.

## **2020 Tree Program**

The District sells a variety of bare root deciduous trees and shrubs and bare root and potted conifers. 12,256 trees were sold to individuals, municipalities, and organizations in and around Fillmore County. Bee Lawn Seed mix gained interest and tree tubes, tree mats w/staples and fertilizer packs were also sold.



## **SWCD Windbreak Program**

For many years, windbreaks were eligible for state cost share funding, but in 2013 windbreaks were removed from the list of eligible practices except in wind erosion counties. Fillmore County does not meet the state's requirements to be a wind erosion county. However, the SWCD Board has long recognized the importance of trees on the land, especially on the steep and rolling landscape found in most of the

county, so the SWCD continues to 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. six windbreaks were installed in 2020 totaling 4,670 feet utilizing \$2,703.00 from the SWCD cost share funds.

### ***SWCD Summer Construction Set Aside Program***

The SWCD Board established this program in 2011 to pay \$163/acre on up to 10 acres following the critical area seeding practice in the EQIP docket for use with the summer construction of waterways and other practices as recommended by the SWCD technicians. In 2020 2 landowners utilized the program for a total of 11 acres.

### ***Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)***

There were 51 landowner contacts in 2020. Three WCA applications for boundary type (2) and no loss (1) were approved. Two potential violations were investigated. Fillmore SWCD began contracting with Wabasha SWCD in 2018 for shared WCA services. Monthly meetings were held with the Wabasha SWCD Ecological Technician either in person or by phone, and also with TEP members when needed.

### ***Feedlot Water Quality Management***

No projects were funded utilizing 319 grant funds from the SE MN Water Resources Board/Goodhue SWCD. Funding is not available in 2021.

### ***Nutrient Management***

The Nutrient Management Specialist serves within the Root River Watershed as well as other areas in SE MN on a per requested basis. Roughly 0.8 FTE of this position is funded through Root River 1W1P Watershed-Based grant. A small fee is charged per acre for the new or updated nutrient management plans, and the funds are used for other program-related activities.

Funding for the other 0.2 FTE for this position comes from MDA through a Joint Powers Agreement between the SE MN Water Resources Board and MDA for Nitrogen BMP Outreach to set up on-farm N comparison plots. 7 new or updated plans were completed in 7 different counties. Soil nitrogen samples, plant population counts, pre-side-dress nitrogen testing, basal stalk nitrate samples, whole plant samples and SPAD readings along with yields provide the data from the plots.

### ***Soil Health***

In 2020 the Area Soil Health Technician completed 28 cover crop plans, 9 grazing management plans and certified 2,420.4 acres of CC for CSP & EQIP payments for 30 producers in 3 counties He partook in grazing training for pasture score sheet training in the SE and SW for 63 NRCS and Partners; Training in the SE and NE for 87 NRCS and Partners for fence/pipeline/water tanks/stream crossing/HUAP. This work was done in Dodge, Fillmore, Freeborn Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Wabasha, and Winona counties.

In October 2018, a NRCS Conservation Collaboration Grant began funding approximately 85% of the position for support to NRCS with soil health activities. The remaining 15% of the position is funded from the BWSR Root River Watershed-Based grant, BWSR Drinking Water Protection in SE MN grant,



and also from funds from the SE MN Technical Support JPB for soil health assistance on local and state programs with each of the 11 southeast Minnesota SWCDs that are members of the JPB.

### ***Root River One Watershed, One Plan Pilot Project***

The Root River watershed was selected on June 25, 2014, as one of five projects around the state for BWSR's One Watershed, One Plan Pilot Program. The Policy Committee gave final approval of the plan on December 19, 2016, after approval by the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources. All 13 LGUs represented on the Policy Committee approved the Joint Powers Agreement for governance during implementation of the plan. A BWSR Watershed-based Grant (\$851,301) was received in May 2018, and activities began using the work plan and budget developed by the Planning Work Group after meeting with the Advisory Committee which was then approved by the Policy Committee. The Winona SWCD is the fiscal agent for the grant, and the Fillmore SWCD is the day-to-day contact.

Fillmore SWCD staff completed six grade stabilizations utilizing Root River One Watershed One Plan Implementation dollars piggybacked with RCPP funds. A civic engagement plan was completed with partnership of the University of Minnesota Extension.

### ***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 23 grab samples (plus 2 duplicates) per year at each site during runoff and base flow conditions for a total of about 125 samples per year. Samples are analyzed for Nitrate + Nitrite-Total Nitrogen, Total Phosphorus, Dissolved Orthophosphate Phosphorus and Total Suspended Solids. Staff also calculated annual loads using the FLUX32 model and managed photo files. In field measurements are now recorded using the Canvas program on a mobile device. A two-year contract was renewed in 2020.

### ***MDA "Field to Stream Partnership"***

The MDA Field to Stream Partnership project began in 2010. Three edge-of-field monitoring sites are established in Fillmore County, and a fourth is in Mower County. The sites in Fillmore County are located in Crystal Creek watershed southwest of Preston and in Bridge Creek watershed near Bratsberg. The monitoring stations have automated samplers which collect runoff from fields where detailed information has been collected about management of the fields draining to the station. Samples are analyzed for total suspended solids (TSS), turbidity, total phosphorus (TP), phosphate (PO<sub>4</sub>), pesticides, and nitrate-nitrogen. An in-stream monitoring station is located downstream from each of the fields with edge-of-field sites. Grab samples are also collected at the in-stream sites. In-field observations are recorded at all sites. Equipment and site maintenance are major tasks for the water monitoring staff. 2019 marked the tenth year for collecting water quality data. As BMPs are implemented, changes in water quality are being monitored.

Crystal Creek watershed has many sinkholes and springs, so dye trace studies have been 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. Spring monitoring equipment is installed at Engle Spring in neighboring Willow Creek in

cooperation with DNR and MPCA. Staff assisted with contacting landowners, setting up the equipment and recording data.

A new contract agreement between Fillmore SWCD and MDA began on August 1, 2019. The funds continue to be used to administer the subcontract with Mower SWCD and Fillmore SWCD to collect samples, maintain equipment and manage the data.

An application for \$804,395 in a Clean Water Fund Grant was approved in December 2015. A Targeted Watershed Grant application for \$493,233 was approved by BWSR in March 2016 for additional BMP implementation in the Headwaters plus rehabilitation of the E-3 flood control structure in Crystal Creek.

In 2020 one feedlot runoff control was implemented, 2 Grade Stabilizations, 0.7 acres of buffer and 1,375' of grassed waterways were installed. Phase II Implementation grant closed out the end of 2020; Targeted Watershed grant will finish up in 2021.

### ***Rain Gardens***

Maintenance is still needed on the two water retention basins at the Fillmore County Office Building in Preston which were renovated in November 2016 as rain gardens to provide more function and beauty to the neighborhood and less maintenance for County staff. Due to the very wet conditions throughout 2018, little work could be completed. The Harmony Gardens rain garden is also in need of maintenance. In 2020 SWCD staff checked on the Harmony Rain Garden and no further action was taken.

### ***Ag BMP Loan Program***

The SWCD administers the Ag BMP Loan Program which is funded by the MDA. Loans are available to farmers, rural landowners and farm supply businesses for loans to restore or protect water quality, whether on a farm, a rural home site, or in an unsewered community. Eligible practices include: feedlot improvements, manure storage basins and spreading equipment; no till equipment; terraces, waterways, sediment basins or other soil conservation practices; septic system upgrades; Variable Rate Technology (VRT); well relocation and sealing; secondary fuel containment; or other projects that improve water quality. In 2020, 14 loan applications were approved for \$458,528; 10 were completed for \$380,703. Those included four manure equipment, one feedlot fix, and five septic systems.

### ***Buffer Grant***

Stream buffers are an effective practice for protecting water quality, especially when combined with other upland practices. The 2015/2016 buffer law requires perennial vegetation buffers of an average width of 50 feet (minimum of 30 feet) along DNR public waters to help filter phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment.

The law appropriated Clean Water Fund (CWF) funds to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for grants to local units of government to assist landowners with compliance with riparian buffer or alternative practice requirements. The funds were used by Fillmore SWCD to provide technical assistance to landowners to identify where buffers may be needed along public waters in Fillmore County and to assist with requests for installing the buffers. Financial assistance information was also provided to landowners for those who wish to enroll eligible acres into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or other programs. BWSR cost share funds were available, but no requests were

received for funding so funding was returned to BWSR in 2018. Advice regarding appropriate seeding mixes, maintenance and other technical assistance is being provided as needed.

In 2020, staff conducted status reviews as outlined in the Monitoring Plan. Staff continued to update the in-house database and BuffCAT as needed with notes and compliance status. A news article was published in the annual SWCD newspaper insert. There was correspondence with DNR Fisheries on specific parcels and follow up on concerns from citizens. Staff continues to work with the county on non-compliance parcels as necessary.

## **Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program**

The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Those who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified and in turn obtain regulatory certainty for a period of ten years.



Through this program, certified producers receive:

- Regulatory certainty: certified producers are deemed to be in compliance with any new water quality rules or laws during the period of certification
- Recognition: certified producers may use their status to promote their business as protective of water quality
- Priority for technical assistance: producers seeking certification can obtain specially designated technical and financial assistance to implement practices that promote water quality

Through this program, the public receives:

- Assurance that certified producers are using conservation practices to protect Minnesota's lakes, rivers and streams

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) transferred to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Clean Water Fund (CWF) funds appropriated to the agency to implement the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program statewide. The program was promoted in the annual SWCD newspaper insert. Information was provided to land owners about the program. A lunch and learn event was held in January of 2020.

## **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. The lab also offers nitrate screening at no charge to the client using MDA nitrate testing equipment. These are not certified lab results. Two staff are trained to analyze samples. An internal audit and external audit were completed for the lab in 2020. All findings from the external audit were addressed and approved and entered into ELDO along with updates to manuals and forms. In 2020 there were 84 private well samples tested in our lab. Of the 84, 32 had coliforms present, and of those 32, 3 were also positive for *E. coli*.

## ***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. Kelsey Biel from Fillmore Central High School is the 2020 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. Tyler Raaen was the 2020 Returning College Student Scholarship recipient.

Forestry Field Day: Forestry Field Day was held differently in 2020 due to COVID. It was held July 29 at Isinours Forest Management Unit outside of Preston. Handouts were created for a self-guided tour. 25 attendees in person.

Prairie Walk: Event not held due to COVID

6<sup>th</sup> Grade Field Day: The 2020 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Field Day was held and 5 different units of “distance learning friendly” topics were created and distributed to all 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers in Fillmore County to an estimated 350 students.

Decorah Shale Protection Project: The SWCD was contacted by a landowner whose property has a Decorah Shale outcrop along County Road 5 southwest of Chatfield. The sidehill had been slumping into the road ditch ever since the road was widened in the 1970s. Each time the County Highway Department would clean out the ditch, the area would slump again requiring the landowner to repair the fence several times. In an effort to break this cycle, the SWCD and landowner came up with a plan with the Highway Department and The Nature Conservancy to document the use of deep-rooted prairie cordgrass to stabilize the hillside. Prairie cordgrass does extremely well on wet sites that can be seasonally dry just as Decorah Shale seeps can be. The landowners fenced the cattle out of the area and paid for half the cost of prairie cordgrass plugs (~\$800) that were planted in the spring of 2015. The Nature Conservancy provided the other half of the funding for the grass plugs. The landowners have also been taking pictures of the site on a regular basis to document any changes. The Highway Dept. is refraining from cleaning out the ditch until after the grasses get established (unless a safety issue arises). The area was also seeded with other native grasses using seed collected locally by the landowners and the SWCD Board member. The SWCD has measured elevations in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 and will do so periodically for further documentation of any movement of the hillside. Staff took measurements in 2019 to record any further slumping of hillside and noted there is still slight movement occurring. County Highway Department contacted the landowner and decided to re-slope the hillside, removing a portion of the hillside. With this action, no further measurements will be taken.

Farm Safety Day Camp: No Activity.

Area and State Envirothon: A staff member from the SWCD assisted with planning and staffing the 2020 Area Envirothon. New Junior High activities were created.

Fillmore County Fair Display: No Activity.

Nitrate Clinics:

No nitrate clinics were held due to COVID. 61 nitrate samples were analyzed in the Fillmore SWCD lab. Samples are analyzed using MDA equipment.

“Conservation Chronicles” Newsletter: On February 10, 2020, the Conservation Chronicles newsletter was published in the *Fillmore County Journal* a free newspaper that goes to over 16,000 residences in Fillmore County and surrounding counties. The *Journal* sold advertising to offset 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 are now posted on the SWCD website. An email notice of the posting is sent to those landowners providing their e-mail addresses (~100). 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. In 2020, one online newsletter was completed in the summer.

Community and School Presentations and Education: Activities in 2020 included: The 2020 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Field Day was held and 5 different units of “distance learning friendly” topics were created and distributed to all 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers in Fillmore County to an estimated 350 students. A Fillmore SWCD staff assisted with the Area 7 Envirothon. Provided 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum to High School Ag teachers as requested

Conservation Intern: No intern was hired in 2020.

Lost Creek Hiking Trail Forestry Education: Trail maps were printed and a new forestry look will be added in 2021.

Fillmore County Integrated Roadside Management Project: In 2020, the Fillmore County Highway Department and Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) worked together to continue implementing the no spray policy to reduce the costs of noxious weed spraying in the roadside ditches of Fillmore County highways and to offer landowners/renters who own land along county highways an alternative to spraying. For those who complete a “No Spray” request form and submit it to the Fillmore County Highway Department, the County will not spray that section of county road, and the landowners/renters agree to control and/or remove the noxious weeds and brush within the “No Spray Zone” signs. This is an annual contract that needs to be renewed each year. In 2019, the option to sign a long-term agreement was implemented. The Fillmore County Highway Department has signs available for purchase at their office. It is the property owner’s responsibility to install and maintain the signs at the proper location.

Another aspect of the project is to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative control methods for wild parsnip in small areas. Demonstration plots were set up north of Preston along County Road 17 in November with assistance from Extension staff. Two alternative control methods are being tested: interseeding of native plants to outcompete wild parsnip and use of corn gluten to prohibit germination of wild parsnip seed. The effectiveness of the collaborative effort will be surveyed in 2021.

### ***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 from June to December plus two more times during the three-month period of March to May. No readings are taken in January or February. Fillmore SWCD continues to monitor two wells.

### ***Precipitation Monitoring Program***

The District has 11 precipitation monitoring volunteers, two who have been monitoring rainfall for 40 years, one for 27 years, and four 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. Volunteers who are celebrating anniversaries of five-year increments are recognized at the Annual Recognition Dinner in January. No dinner was held in 2020. The Fillmore SWCD continues to collect volunteer data to submit to the state.

### ***BWSR Local Capacity Grant***

In 2015, the state legislature appropriated \$22 million of Clean Water Funds for the FY2016-2017 biennium for Local Capacity Grants to all the SWCDs in Minnesota. Another allocation was made for 2018-2019. FY16 funds were used for education and outreach expenses in 2018. FY17 funds were used for structural practice implementation (two grade stabilization structures and one 2110' grassed waterway) and technical/ engineering assistance for implementation of those and other practices. A policy was developed for use of FY18 funds for three-year cover crop contracts; two contracts were approved and paid for 52 acres in their second year of implementation. Funds remain for additional practices. FY18 funds were also used for education/outreach expenses (see above) as well as for technical/engineering assistance. FY19 funds were distributed between technology expenditures (\$4,000), technical assistance (\$56,000) and cost-share projects (\$40,000). Cost-share projects funded in 2020 included 2,720' of grassed waterways, 2 grade stabilizations, 1,194' of terraces and 1 Grazing Fence.

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

The district's first website was created in July, 1999. A new site was created in 2007, then 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. All reports required to be posted by BWSR are on the website.

A Facebook page was set up for the SWCD in 2015. The Administrative Assistant maintains the page and posts new information.