

ISANTI SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT 2019 ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS



Our Mission is . . .

to provide technical, financial and educational resources in order to implement practices and projects that preserve, protect and enhance water quality, soil, and other natural resources.



The Isanti Conservation District is a legal Subdivision of State Government organized under provisions of Minnesota Statute 103C. The District is governed by a Board of Supervisors composed of five members elected by the voters of Isanti County, and who are responsible for directing all District activities. The board meets monthly on the third Tuesday of the month.

SWCD Supervisors and Staff

Supervisors

Roger Larsen, Chair. Maple Ridge, Stanchfield, Springvale, Dalbo Township

Jerry Schaubach, Vice-chair. Bradford, Athens, Oxford Township

Clark Anderson. Spencer Brook, Wyanett, Stanford Township

Al Koczur, Treasurer. Cambridge Twp.

Greg Swanson, Secretary. North Branch, Isanti Township

Staff (right to left)

Tiffany Determan, District Manager

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Todd Kulaf, District Technician

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Thomas Zimmermann, District Technician

tzimmermann@isantiswcd.org

Linda Gehrking, Administrative Assistant

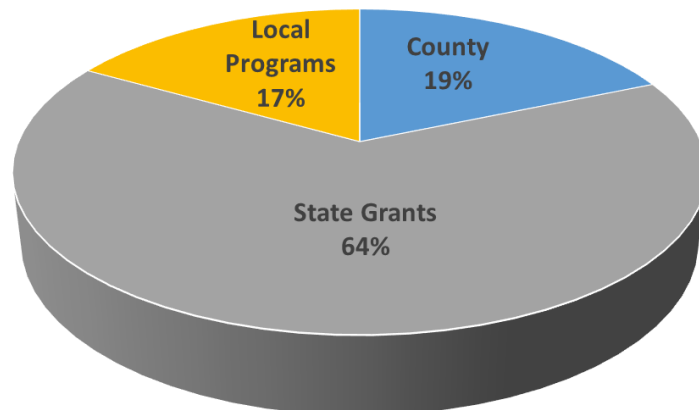
lgehrking@isantiswcd.org



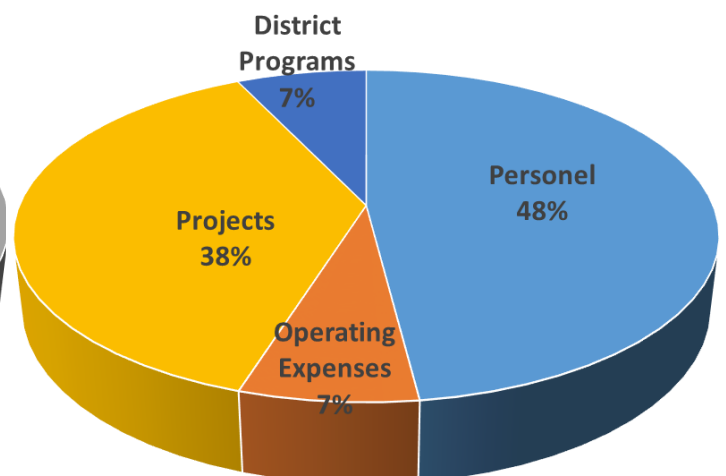
2019 Financial Summary

The Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District finances its day-to-day operations through a variety of revenue sources. Although governed by an elected board of officials, Conservation Districts do not have levy authority and must secure funds from many sources to maintain programs and services.

2019 Revenues



2019 Expenses



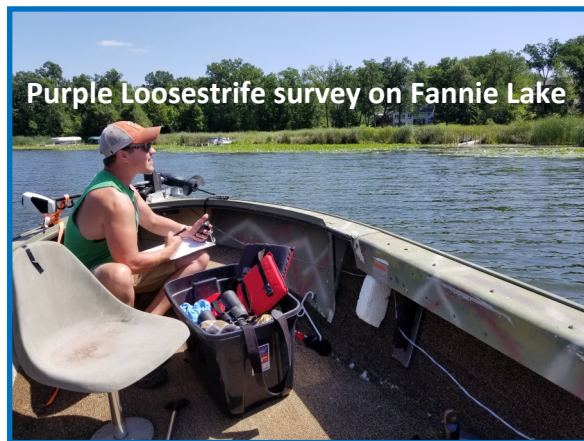
Local Programs & Technical Assistance

There are fees associated with some of the services we offer. Please contact our office for more information.

Water Monitoring

Lake and stream monitoring provides the data necessary to manage the health of Isanti County's lakes, rivers and streams for recreation, wildlife, and consumption. Upon request, the SWCD contracts with lake groups and other organizations to provide water quality monitoring services, including monitoring plan development, water monitoring and summary reports.

- Blue Lake: 2 lake sites (sampled by volunteers), 3 tributary sites (sampled by SWCD)
- Lake Francis: 1 lake site (sampled by volunteers)
- Long Lake: 1 lake site (sampled by volunteers), 2 tributary sites (sampled by SWCD)
- Oxford Township Lakes: 7 lakes (sampled by SWCD)
- North Branch Sunrise River: 1 location (sampled by SWCD)
- Groundwater: 11 groundwater observation wells (monitored by SWCD)
- Precipitation: 4 manual precipitation gauges (volunteer program)



Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

Mapping for local treatment permits: The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) requires mapping before issuing permits to treat AIS such as curly-leaf pondweed and Eurasian Watermilfoil. The SWCD offers mapping services to lake groups in order to expedite permit issuance, ensure treatment occurs as early as possible and to authenticate the necessity of treatment. In 2019 the SWCD completed mapping of AIS for Blue, Spectacle and Green Lakes.

County Assistance: The County implements the States AIS Prevention Planning at the local level. The SWCD assists the County with early detection, monitoring and education. In 2019 the SWCD

1) inventoried 12 recreational lakes for new AIS infestations– one new infestation of Eurasian Watermilfoil was found on Fannie Lake; 2) provided AIS education at the 6th grade Environmental Education Day; 3) contracted with CLIMB Theater to provide education to over 250 5th graders at Cambridge Intermediate School and the Arts and Science Academy; and 4) surveyed 9 lakes for purple loosestrife.

Rural and Urban Outreach and Education

Through education, people develop the skills necessary to understand complex natural resource problems and, more importantly, what they can do to protect natural resources for future generations. The SWCD incorporates education and outreach in all of its programs through a variety of efforts such as presentations, one-on-one conversations, workshops and field days.

2019 accomplishments: Tour of SWCD Practices (19 attended); Soil Health Workshop (13 attended); and Blue lake shoreline restoration workshop (27 attended). In addition to the programs listed here, the SWCD attended and presented at many events including watershed public meetings, lake, township, and county Board of Commissioners meetings to provide information about natural resource protection.

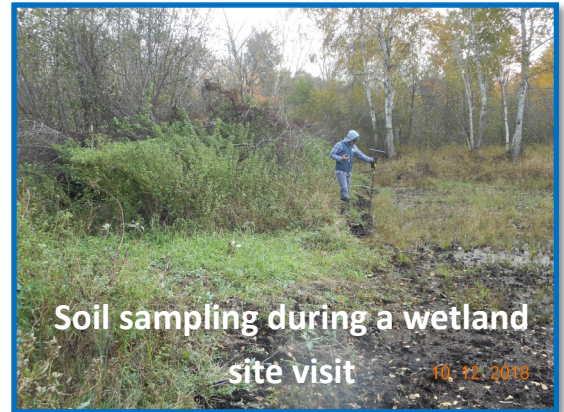


Local Programs & Technical Assistance- Continued

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

The Isanti SWCD serves as a wetland technical representative for Isanti County. In 2019 246 hours were spent fulfilling SWCD duties associated with WCA as follows:

- 1) 9 Technical Evaluation Panels
- 2) 15+ site visits
- 3) 2 restoration order
- 4) 4 certificates of satisfactory completion
- 5) 10+ level one wetland delineations
- 6) 15 Maps Developed



District Tree Program

The tree sale is an important annual program that supports small backyard habitat projects as well as large forestry restoration projects. The sale originated in order to provide landowners with an affordable and convenient way to purchase trees and shrubs for conservation practices such as windbreaks, shelterbelts, living snow fences, scenic buffers, wildlife habitat, and more. In 2019 over 20,000 trees were sold. Additionally, the SWCD employed two temporary Tree Sale Technicians to assist with the sale.

Buffer Law Compliance Assistance

Minnesota's Buffer Law was signed into law by Governor Dayton in June 2015. The law requires 50-foot average width buffers on public waters and 16.5 foot buffers on public drainage systems. The SWCDs role in the law is to provide technical assistance to ensure that landowners are meeting the requirement and to periodically review parcels for compliance. Isanti County enforces the law. Based on 2019 reviews, 100% of the parcels remain compliant.

District No-till Seeding Program

The SWCD owns a seed drill suitable for planting native grasses and wildflowers. The drill is rented to landowners. In 2019 the drill was used to plant 170.5 acres of pasture/hay, 32.5 acres of cover crops and 2.5 acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) native prairie.



Studies and Plans

Stormwater Retrofit Assessments (SRA)

The SWCD completes these assessments to map and model how much rainwater runoff makes it into our lakes and streams untreated. This modeling uses advanced computer applications to calculate the amount of rainwater that becomes runoff. The outputs of these studies are used to target the use of grant funds. Ideal project locations are then identified to maximize benefits while minimizing costs. The SWCD has completed SRAs for: Fannie and Skogman Lakes, Green Lake direct watershed, Blue Lake, North Brook and Wyanett Creek (Green Lake Tributaries), Spectacle Lake and Rum river discharge points in the City of Cambridge and Isanti.

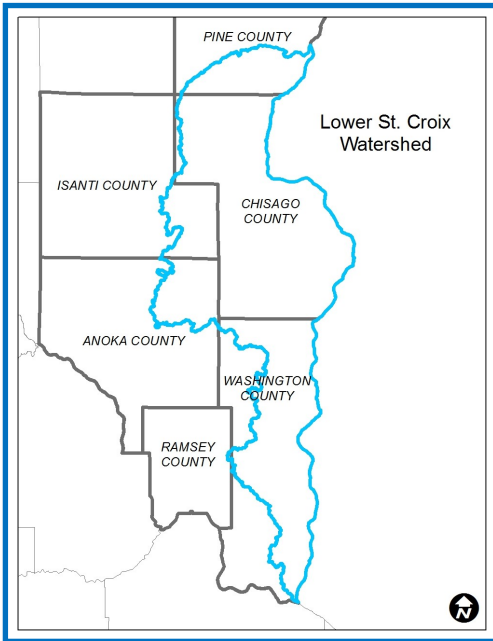
In 2019 the SWCD completed a SRA for the Long Lake Direct Watershed. The project was done via a partnership with Lake Improvement District and Association. The SRA identified 19 rural residential projects that could be installed in the watershed.



Studies and Plans- Continued

One Watershed One Plan (1W1P)

The 1W1P program is part of a statewide initiative aimed at aligning local water planning with major watershed boundaries and enhancing collaboration between upstream and downstream partners. The planning program results in comprehensive watershed plans that are prioritized, targeted and measurable. Isanti County is part of three major watersheds: Lower St. Croix, the Rum River and the Snake River. All three watersheds are currently in the 1W1P planning process. Due to the small size of the watershed within the county, the SWCD is not actively involved in the Snake River 1W1P.



Lower St. Croix 1W1P (www.lsc1w1p.org)

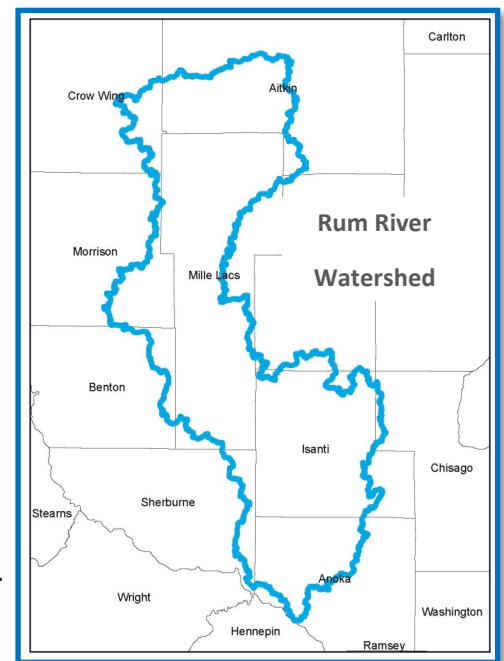
Over the last two years 15 local government partners in Anoka, Chisago, Isanti, Pine, and Washington Counties have worked together to create the watershed plan. During the process the partners collected input from more than 700 stakeholders, including 440 farmers and 160 community leaders. The plan, targeted to be approved in 2020, proposes implementing activities that address resource issues associated with groundwater, lakes, rivers and streams, wetlands, upland habitat, the St. Croix River, and Lake St. Croix. The State is proposing \$600,000 per year in funding to assist in implementing the plan.

The SWCD is actively participating in the process as the Project Coordinator and Notification Coordinator. Additionally, two board supervisors sit on the Policy Committee.

Rum River 1W1P (www.isantiswcd.org/studies-plans)

In 2019, 19 local government partners in Anoka, Isanti, Mille Lacs, Sherburne, Kanabec, Benton, Morrison, Aitkin and Crow Wing Counties worked together to hire a consultants to assist with development of the plan, wrote and began implementing a Civic Engagement Plan, and formed committees to guide plan development. Additionally, progress was made towards identifying resource issues to be addressed in the plan. The bulk of work will be completed in 2020 and the plan is targeted for completion in early 2021.

The SWCD is actively participating in the process as the Project Coordinator. Additionally, two board supervisors sit on the Policy Committee.



Campus Groundwater Conservation Planning

The 11-county Metropolitan Conservation Districts have recently developed a protocol for groundwater conservation planning for use at public facilities. The systematic approach reviews water-using systems and identifies potential water-saving opportunities. As a deliverable, the facility receives a prioritized list of potential water conservation opportunities in order of cost-effectiveness, which could facilitate future water conservation efforts and save money. Examples of water saving opportunities include: replacing water-using fixtures with WaterSense or ENERGY STAR certified models, installing soil moisture sensors for irrigation systems, and educational efforts to increase disciplined use of water (e.g. turning water on only while rinsing hands).

In 2019 the SWCD completed groundwater conservation plans for Anoka-Ramsey Community College, the City of Isanti Campus, and the Isanti County Government Center.

Projects

The SWCD prioritizes projects based on surface water monitoring, Stormwater Retrofit Assessments (SRAs), the County Water Plan, and other completed studies such as Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS) and soon the Rum River and Lower St. Croix 1W1P Comprehensive Water Plans.



Blue Lake Protection

In 2018 the SWCD received a \$251,000 Clean Water Fund grant to install projects identified in the Blue Lake Stormwater Retrofit Assessment (SRA). The projects will help protect the health of Blue Lake. The Blue Lake Improvement District (BLID), Stanford Township, and Spencer Brook Township provided the required matching funds for the grant. In 2019 staff worked to build a list of lakeshore owners interested in reducing pollution into the lake. The list was prioritized based on cost per pound of phosphorus reduced. The most cost-effective projects will be installed in 2020. Additionally, the SWCD worked with BLID to seek alternate locations to treat polluted flow from the lake inlets.

State Cost Share

The SWCD receives annual funds from the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) so that we can help landowners offset the costs of installing conservation practices that protect and improve water quality by controlling rainwater runoff, soil erosion, and reducing sedimentation. Cost share can be used to fund a variety of projects including lakeshore restorations, rain gardens, cover crops, tillage management and well sealing. In 2019 the State Cost Share program funded one erosion control/restoration project on Fannie Lake, five shoreline restoration on Green Lake, and 55 acres of cover crops.



Rum River High Meadows Re-Meander

The SWCD received two grants from the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment and matching funds from The Nature Conservancy to work in partnership with the MN DNR and a local engineer to restore habitat, water health, flooding capacity, and recreation to a one-mile stretch of the Rum River. The repair will ultimately plug a man-made shortcut and route flow back into the historical channel. Construction occurred in the winter of 2018/2019. Unfortunately, record breaking rainfall and river levels in 2019 damaged the project. Repairs to the project are needed. The project will be re-assessed for feasibility in 2020.

Rum River Cedar Tree Revetments

Cedar tree revetments are a cost-effective bioengineering practice that can be used to stabilize actively eroding riverbanks. In the fall of 2019, the SWCD, with the help of Anoka Conservation District and Conservation Corp of Minnesota (CCM), was able to install 100 linear feet of revetments to River Bluff Park in the City of Isanti. This project was the final phase in erosion control at this location. Erosion at the property, which was dominated by bank undercutting, was in the beginning stages of creating a more serious issue. By applying low-cost ecologically friendly bank stabilization approaches such as cedar tree revetments, the partners hope to minimize the long-term need for costly work that is often necessary to correct severe erosion.

Projects Continued



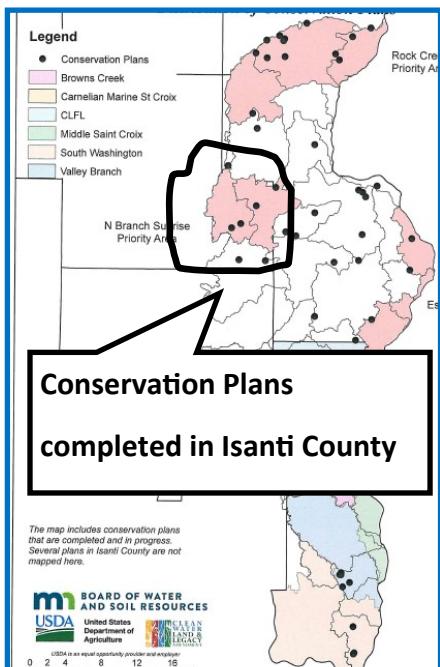
Green Lake Community Partners Program

Using the locally led and successful Long Lake Shoreline Improvement program as a template, the SWCD partnered with the Green Lake Improvement District to fund a program that builds the capacity of the lake group while also providing funding to install lakeshore restorations and other projects that reduce pollution from the nearshore areas. The goal of the program is to build capacity and momentum such that the lake group is able to fund, plan and install projects on their own. The SWCD provided \$10,000 of Clean Water Funds, the Green Lake Improvement District provided \$5,000 and the landowners contributed \$3,500 of volunteer time to install five lakeshore restorations.



Wetland Restorations

Utilizing unique partnerships and funding sources, the SWCD was able to help instigate the restoration of over 10 acres of wetland adjacent to the Rum River in Stanford Township. The project was funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Isanti SWCD via a grant from The Nature Conservancy, and the landowner. Restoring the water holding capability of wetlands will be important as land use and climate continue to change.



Conservation Planning Initiative

Via a program targeted at the Lower St. Croix River watershed, SWCDs partners have been working in with the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to target conservation planning assistance to high priority areas, increase landowner readiness and participation in conservation programs, and to accelerate conservation practice implementation. A Conservation Planner was hired by Chisago SWCD and works throughout the entire watershed. Within Isanti County, Planner focuses most closely on the North Branch of the Sunrise River due to the presence of sandy soils that are vulnerable to erosion.

In 2019 nine conservation plans were completed in Isanti County. Six of the plans were used to apply for Federal Farm Bill related funding for implementation.

Other News & Updates

New Administrative Assistant

The SWCD added a half time Administrative Assistant position in 2019. The position focuses on general administrative duties, manages the annual tree sale, and assists with outreach and communication related efforts. Linda Gehrking joined our team in September 2019. Linda was employed as a legal administrative assistant for over 20 years before joining the Isanti SWCD. We are so thrilled to have her on the team!

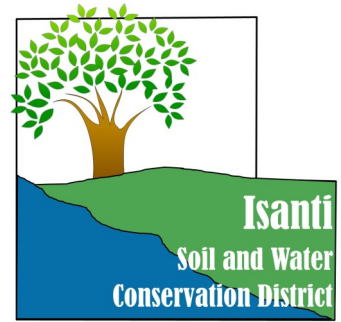
"I've always been interested in our environment and my love for nature and wildlife. I hope to gain as much knowledge as I can and I hope to teach others new things about our environment. Joining Isanti SWCD seemed like the next logical step for me." ~L. Gehrking



ISANTI SWCD

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Outstanding Conservationists

Each year the State association of SWCDs and local SWCDs recognize individuals and organizations for outstanding accomplishments in implementing conservation practices and improving Minnesota's natural resources. The SWCD board selected the Rod and Sara Elmstrand as the 2019 Isanti County Outstanding Conservationists.

The Elmstrand farm has been in the family since 1934; although it wasn't until 1981 that Rod's Berry Farm was established. The Elmstrands are continually seeking ways to improve productivity while also improving soil health, protecting groundwater and reducing pollution into nearby lakes and streams. Some of the ways they have done this include: Reducing tillage, planting multi-species cover crops, and managing irrigation. Additionally, the farm recently became a certified Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certified Farm.



THANK YOU to our Conservation Partners!

We would like to send out special thank you to all of the Federal, State, and Local partners who support our programs and priorities! Our partners include but are not limited to: Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Isanti County, The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), all Isanti County Lakes groups (you know who you are), The Nature Conservancy, The MN Department of Natural Resources, Pheasants Forever, the MN Pollution Control Agency, and all Soil and Water Conservation Districts!