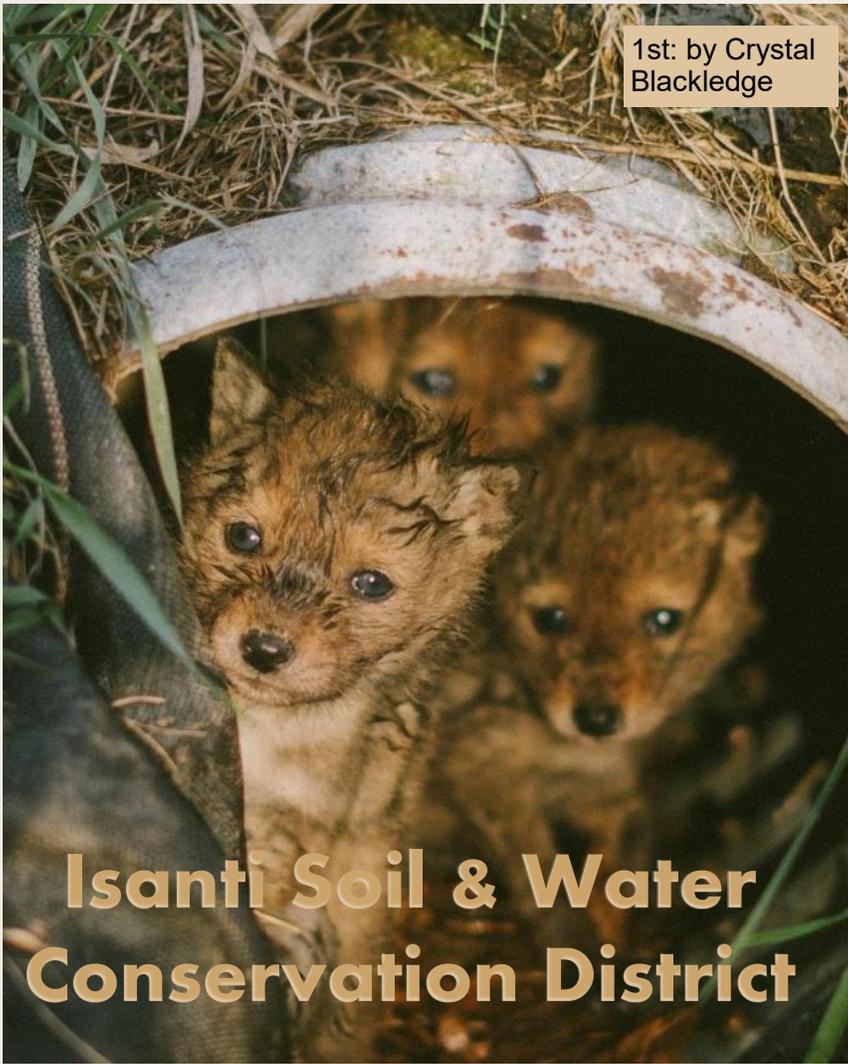


1st: by Crystal Blackledge



Isanti Soil & Water Conservation District

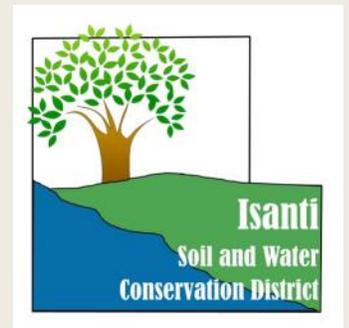
2nd: by Julie Robillard



2022 Annual Highlights

Pictured are the 2022 Photo Contest Winners

3rd: by Aaron Fahnestock



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 Wednesday of the month.

Our Mission

To provide guidance, to inspire action, and to bring innovative resources to the table so that people can become leaders in keeping land and water healthy for future generations.

Staff and Supervisors



**Al Koczur,
Treasurer**

Cambridge Twp



**Dave Medvecky,
Chair**

North Branch &
Isanti Twps



**Clark Anderson,
Vice Chair**

Spencer Brook,
Wyanett & Stanford
Twps



Val Anderson

Maple Ridge,
Stanchfield,
Springvale & Dalbo
Twps



Tom Anderson

Bradford, Athens &
Oxford Twps

Staff (Left to right):

Todd Kulaf, District Technician
tkulaf@isantiswcd.org

Lydia Godfrey, Outreach Assistant
lgodfrey@isantiswcd.org

Linda Gehrking, Administrative Assistant
lgehrking@isantiswcd.org

Tiffany Determan, District Manager
tdeterman@isantiswcd.org

Matthew Remer, District Technician
mremmer@isantiswcd.org



Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Brian Steffen, Acting District Conservationist Team Lead (pictured far right) brian.steffen@usda.gov

Betsy Riley, Soil Scientist Betsy.riley@usda.gov

The SWCD is co-located with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This ensures our office can help coordinate technical assistance and funding programs for landowners.

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.

- Lakes: 7 lakes in Oxford Township, and volunteers were trained to provide monitoring for Green, Blue, and Skogman Lakes.
- Streams: South East Blue Lake inlet (Tiger Street Basins), and tributaries draining into Skogman Lake
- Groundwater: 11 groundwater observation wells
- Precipitation: 4 manual precipitation gauges (volunteer program)



Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

County Assistance: Isanti County implements the States AIS Prevention Planning at the local level. The SWCD assists the County with early detection, monitoring and education. All AIS efforts in 2022 were detailed in an [AIS Annual Report](#).

In 2022 the SWCD 1) inventoried 12 recreational lakes for new AIS infestations; 2) Contracted with CLIMB Theatre to provide 4 performances that had 124 attendees; 3) Presented at the 5th Grade Conservation Day about AIS prevention and taught 115 students 4) Produced materials to be used for outreach including a YouTube video and an Isanti County AIS Handout; 5) Various other AIS outreach including social media posts, newspaper and newsletter articles, and organizing volunteers.

Local Programs & Technical Assistance—*continued*

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 2022 nearly 20,000 trees were sold.



Rural and Urban Outreach

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.

This past year, we hosted 4 in-person events: a Shoreline Restoration Workshop (16 attendees), a Cover Crop Field Day (24), a Spectacle Lake Restorations Workshop: How and Why (14), and an Agriculture Lunch & Learn (30). We also participated in a variety other events hosted throughout the community and by our partners such as Fall Fest, a Lower St. Croix workshop for elected officials and community leaders, and the U of M's Nitrogen Smart.

The SWCD has also continued our outreach through quarterly e-newsletters, meeting attendance, producing brochures, and regular social media and website updates.



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 2022 the drill was used to plant 191 total acres. This consisted of 54 acres of native grasses, 11 acres of pasture, and 126 acres of alfalfa.



Local Programs & Technical Assistance—*continued*

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 review 1/3 of the parcels in the County each year for compliance. Isanti County enforces the law. Based on 2022 reviews, 100% of the parcels remained compliant.



Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

The Isanti SWCD serves as a wetland technical representative for Isanti County. In 2022 staff fulfilled SWCD duties associated with WCA as follows:

- 1) 10 Technical Evaluation Panels
- 2) 10+ site visits
- 3) 2 Determination Notice Forms completed
- 4) 10+ level one wetland delineations
- 5) 10+ maps developed
- 6) 10+ wetland consultations with Isanti County landowners



Studies and Plans

Subwatershed Assessments (SWA)

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 SWAs for: Fannie and Skogman Lakes, Green Lake direct watershed, Blue Lake, North Brook and Wyanett Creek (Green Lake Tributaries), Spectacle Lake, Long Lake, and Rum River discharge points in the City of Cambridge and Isanti.



In 2022 the SWCD finished a SWA for North and South Stanchfield Lakes. We are now updating a portion of the Skogman-Fannie Chain of Lakes SWA that was completed in 2014 by Anoka SWCD. So far, the Skogman Lake Shoreline portion of the study has been completed. Next, we plan to update the rural watershed portion of the Skogman Lake Study.



One Watershed One Plan



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 3 major watersheds: Lower St. Croix, the Rum River and the Snake River. In 2022, the Rum River 1W1P was approved making way for implementation in 2023. The Lower St. Croix was in its second year of implementation. Due to the small size of the watershed within the county, the SWCD is not actively involved in the Snake River 1W1P which is still in the planning stages.



Studies and Plans—continued

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

In 2019, the Lower St. Croix 10-year Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was approved by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. In 2021, local partners received \$1.2 million in state funding over the next 2 years to begin implementing priority projects and programs outlined in the plan.

2022 was the second full year of implementation. Two shared outreach staff have been able to offer additional outreach throughout the basin and in Isanti County. Notably, the watershed offered a workshop for elected officials and community leaders, three soil health field days, offered support promoting behavior changes, and participated in multiple Isanti SWCD events. Also in Isanti County, \$10,000 was allocated for non-structural agriculture projects. In 2022 potential projects sites were identified to be implemented in 2023.

The partners approved their work plan for use of State dedicated watershed funds for years 2023 - 2025.



Rum River 1W1P Boundaries



Rum River 1W1P (www.millelacsswcd.org/1w1p/rum-river-one-watershed-one-plan/)

In 2022 the Rum River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was approved by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), and was adopted by the Isanti SWCD as well as 12 other partners. Forming the Rum River Comprehensive Watershed Plan was a multi-year process involving community input, technical expert advice, and many agency partnerships. A joint powers entity was formed and the new board, the Rum River Watershed Partnership (RRWP), approved a work plan for how they plan to use \$1.1M of state dedicated funds to implement priorities in the plan.

Priorities addressed in the plan include 1) education and outreach; 2) surface water protection, restoration and quantity; groundwater quality and quantity; and 3) natural resources: restoration of upland and aquatic habitat as well as connectivity of habitat.

Isanti SWCD is acting as the Watershed Coordinator. Additionally, the SWCD's Outreach Coordinator will provide basin-wide outreach to achieve plan goals.



Programs and Partnerships

The SWCD partners with a variety of local, state and federal government agencies and non-government organizations. These partnerships enhance our ability to deliver technical and financial assistance for projects and programs as well as educational opportunities.

Reinvest in Minnesota Rum River Easement Program

In 2022 Isanti SWCD continued to partner with SWCDs along the Rum River and the Board of Water and Soil Resources in an effort to protect the health of the Rum River— permanently. Collectively, the partnership received an additional \$2.2 million legislative allocation of Clean Water Funds in 2022 to make permanent easements an option for willing landowners within the nine-county Rum River watershed.

In 2022 the SWCD spent time working on 4 easements covering 5,700 ft of shoreline along the Rum River and continued to do outreach to increase interest.



Harvesting Sunshine Cover Crop Program

Using our partnership with the Nature Conservatory we pursued an initiative aimed at increasing the use of cover crops in Isanti County. In 2021, we installed 612 acres of cover crops using the program. 352 of those acres were 3-year cover crop contracts making 2022 their second year of planting. The cover crops were implemented in a variety of production types such as after corn chopped for silage, interseeded into beans, interseeded into corn, and planted after small grain harvest.

As part of the program the SWCD is measuring soil health, infiltration rates, and biological activity in the soil before and after installation. We are also using the program to identify barriers to planting cover crops and to find ways to help our farmers overcome them.



Programs and Partnerships– *continued*

Invasive Species Management

Upland invasive species management is typically not an activity the SWCD prioritizes due to limited staff capacity. However, our board does advise the staff to play a supporting role when possible.

This is what we did in 2022:

Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR): The SWCD applied for and administers a DNR Conservation Partners Legacy Grant to reduce invasive species on 92 acres within the CCESR. We contract with Anoka Conservation District to oversee project implementation. The Isanti SWCD does provide some limited technical assistance. This project was initiated in 2021 and is targeted for completion in 2023.



Permanently Protected Land Enhancement: With funding remaining from a Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund grant received for the Rum River, the SWCD partnered with Isanti County Parks and Great River Greening to reduce invasive species and enhance native species as follows: 6 acres at Becklin Homestead Park, 10 acres at Vegsund Family Park, and 7 acres at a permanent conservation easement in Isanti Township. These projects began in 2021 and were completed in 2022.



Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

The NRCS and the SWCD have a unique partnership that provides an efficient use of taxpayer dollars. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance for various conservation practices such as: grassed waterways, ag waste storage structures, nutrient management, wildlife habitat plantings and windbreaks. Financial assistance is provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Stewardship Program.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is available to all eligible agricultural producers and provides technical and financial assistance for specific environmental and conservation practices. Common practices include no-till, cover crops, grazing systems and high-tunnels.

In 2022 the NRCS received 12 applications for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) program, 9 were funded. The funded contracts included 445.9 acres of Cover Crops, 2 high tunnels, 1 grazing system and pasture seeding/management. EQIP's new 2022 contract obligation totaled \$54,549.78 and \$43,228.29 was paid to 10 existing contracts.

Conservation Stewardship program (CSP): CSP offers options to enhance or improve current practices and producers choose the enhancements that best fit their operation. Common enhancements include pollinator habitat, cover crops, advanced nutrient and pest management, pasture management and extensive wildlife habitat enhancements. Received 3 applications for CSP/CSP-GCI in 2022 with 2 being funded and funded for a total: \$86,531.00 and payments totaled \$69,517.05 to existing contracts.

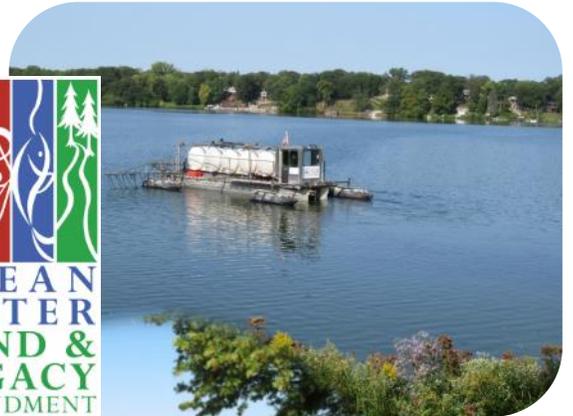
Projects and Grants

The SWCD seeks funding and prioritizes projects based on priorities in plans such as the Rum River and Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans and Subwatershed Assessments (SWAs). Water quality monitoring data and local involvement help push projects and programs forward.

Blue Lake Alum Treatment

We secured a Clean Water Fund Grant to perform an alum treatment on Blue Lake. The Blue Lake Improvement District (BLID) provided the necessary 25% grant match. This is Phase 2 of a larger goal to protect Blue Lake which diagnostic data suggested was at risk of impairment. Phase 1 was dealing with the external sources of phosphorus through conservation projects in the area. An alum treatment was identified as the next most cost-effective way to protect Blue Lake.

While many lakes in Minnesota have undergone this treatment, this is the first lake in Isanti County to be eligible. The treatment will occur in 2 doses: One completed in 2022 and the second in 2024. The SWCD and BLID will work together to keep you updated on the work in the coming years!



Protecting Spectacle Lake

In 2020 the SWCD received \$93,532 from the Clean Water Fund in the interest of protecting Spectacle Lake, also referred to as the “gem of Isanti County”. While the lake is currently healthy, it is under developmental pressure. Therefore, it is important to protect Spectacle Lake now. The grant will install the most cost-effective nutrient reduction projects within the land area that drains to the lake.

In 2022 we installed two projects around the lake on private property. On one property, a dual rain garden was constructed to reduce runoff into the lake. Elsewhere, a shoreline restoration and hillside stabilization was completed to filter runoff and reduce erosion. Together, the two projects will reduce 1.9 lbs/yr of phosphorus from entering the lake—that amount of phosphorus has the potential to grow 950 lbs of algae!

Projects and Grants—*continued*

Federal 319 Grant for Green Lake



Green Lake was accepted into a 16-year granting program administered by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The goal of the grant program is to remove Green Lake from the impaired waters list. The SWCD received \$284,000 in 2021, the first year of the program, to begin working on gaining traction leading to the installation of projects to reduce nutrients from entering Green lake. The Green Lake Improvement District (GLID) will provide a portion of the required 40% match. 2022 was the second year of funding.

Here's what we did with the funding in 2022: planted 215 acres of cover crop, installed 3 shoreline restorations, partnered with Isanti County to complete ditch inspections and identify best practices while doing so (this will lead to more projects), and increased outreach with a focus on outreach to agricultural producers in the watershed.



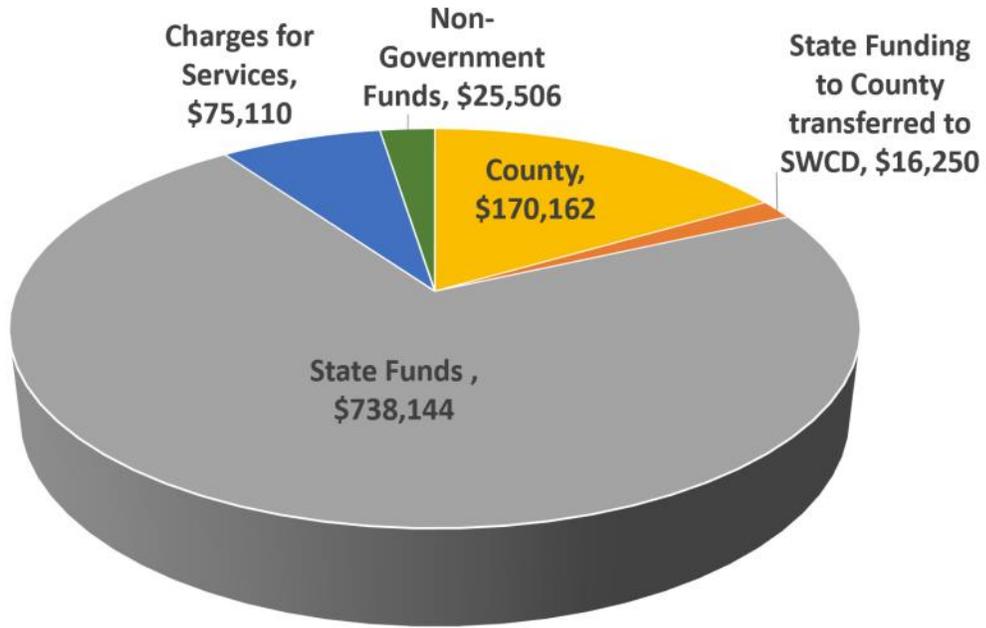
The projects installed in 2022 will reduce phosphorus loading into the lake by 21 lbs per year (that's 10,500 lbs of algae!).



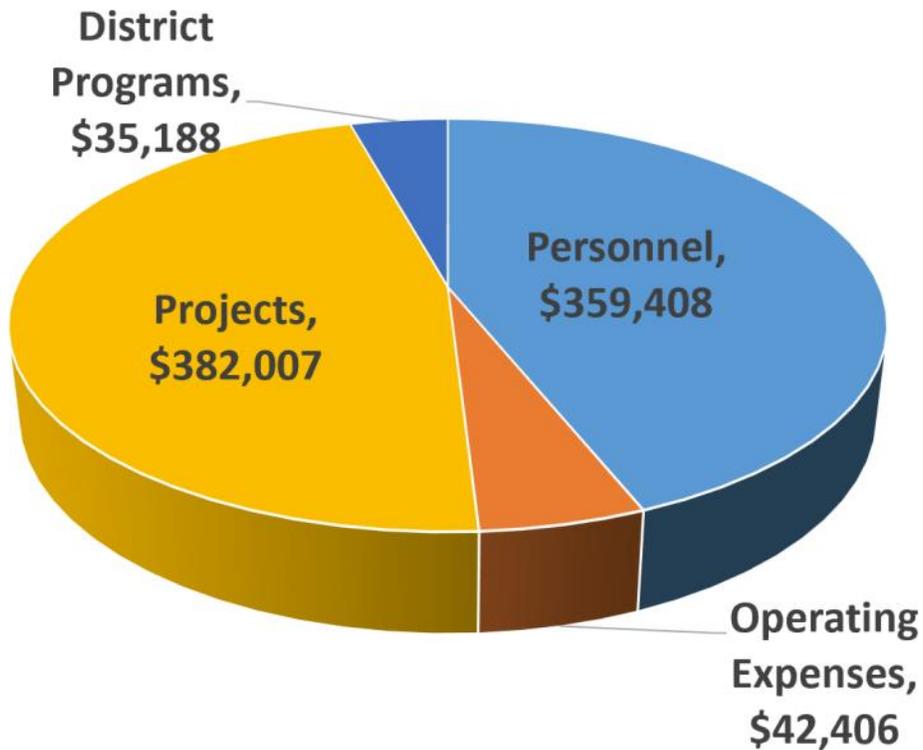
Financials

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.

2022 Revenue



2022 Expenses



Other News and Updates

Board Supervisors Sworn in

In early 2023, two supervisors were sworn onto the Isanti Soil & Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Tom Anderson, our new supervisor, will represent Bradford, Athens, and Oxford Township. Dave Medvecky has been on our board for two years and represents North Branch and Isanti Townships.

Tom spent 30 years employed by the Science Museum of Minnesota as a professional naturalist and a director of the Lee and Rose Warner Nature Center where they provided outdoor education opportunities to thousands. He is passionate about protecting natural resources in Isanti County where his family has lived for generations.

We are thrilled to continue having Dave's perspective on farming, wetland restorations, pollinator planting, and cover crops. Dave and Tom will be two great additions to our board and provide valuable expertise!



New Soil Health Cost-Share Grant

The Isanti SWCD recently received a Soil Health Grant to fund and promote projects that will improve soil health in Isanti County! The grant will allow us to cost-share non-structural agriculture BMP projects such as cover crops, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, and tillage management. These projects will provide soil health and water quality benefits.

We also plan to use the funding to provide outreach to farmers, and offer two events in 2023— an Agriculture Lunch and Learn and a Soil Health Field Day.

Training to Become a Conservation Planner

Our Conservation Technician Matthew Remer has been working to get certificated to write conservation plans for agricultural lands. Matthew has been attending many trainings both online and in-person to achieve this. Once he is certified, we will be able better serve farmers by creating conservation plans for them. It will also strengthen our partnership with NRCS!





Thank you to our Conservation Partners!

We would like to send out a 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!

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