



Conservation Update

West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District

Crookston MN 56716

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WINTER 2020

EQUAL EMPLOYEEMNT OPPORTUNITY

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CONGRATULATIONS West Polk SWCD District Manager Nicole Bernd, 2019 Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee



West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District (WPSWCD) District Manager Nicole Bernd is the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) 2019 Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee. Bernd was honored during the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' (MASWCD) annual convention in Minneapolis Dec. 9, 2019.

"Local conservation staff go above and beyond every day to preserve and protect our water and soil resources," BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke said. "Nicole Bernd demonstrates professional excellence alongside a commitment to collaborative planning processes that benefit watersheds both within and beyond the district she leads." Bernd has played an essential role in two One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) planning efforts. She acted as facilitator for the Wild Rice/Marsh Watershed 1W1P and has been a major contributor to the Red Lake River 1W1P process as they move toward plan implementation. The expertise she gained through these planning efforts has resulted in numerous speaking requests by local conservation groups embarking on similar planning processes.

In addition to her work on 1W1P, Bernd completed a multimillion-dollar water quality and habitat project in 2018 on the Sand Hill River, coordinating multiple agencies and acting as grant fiscal agent and project manager. The project was completed under budget with greater impact than anticipated thanks to Bernd's sound fiscal and project management.

West Polk SWCD Buffer Update

By Morgan Torkelson

By the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resource's most recent assessment, between 80% and 89% of parcels in Polk County are now in compliance with the State's buffer law. On the surface, numbers like this might give the impression that we're in the home stretch of buffer implementation. While it's true that the efforts of many Polk County farmers have brought a lot of the cropland in our district into buffer compliance (on behalf of all your RRV friends and neighbors, THANK YOU!), we know that many of you are still effectively in the implementation stage. We conservation workers understand how plans have been derailed by the last few seasons' weather. And we understand how situations can vary a lot from farm to farm, storms can drop heavy rain in localized areas, individual fields handle rainfall differently, different crops allow different opportunities for buffer seeding or installing side water inlets... For those of you whose best efforts at buffer compliance have been stymied by forces outside your control, your SWCD is here to help.

Since 1957, the purpose of West Polk SWCD has been to *work with landowners* to conserve, maintain and improve the soil and water resources within the district. In that spirit, we have done just about everything we legally can to make Minnesota's buffer law more effective and easier to implement up here. Although the deadline extensions we fought for have long passed and state law mandates that we inform Polk County Planning & Zoning of noncompliant parcels for enforcement proceedings, know that we are still here to help you bring your parcels into compliance. This is especially important to keep in mind if you or your landlord has received a Corrective Action Notice (CAN) from Polk County Planning & Zoning because your cropland is out of compliance.

Receiving a CAN does not necessarily mean you'll be expected to seed 16.5' or 50' (for public ditches and waterways, respectively) of additional buffer. Due to existing alternative practices and/or existing buffer vegetation, farmers might only need to let a few feet of grass creep in from the edge of their field to bring their parcel into compliance. If you farm along a public waterway, our evaluation of aerial imagery can show you how much additional buffer is needed and where to seed to make your parcel's transition to compliance as straightforward as possible.

If you have any technical questions about your land's buffer requirements or you received a notice regarding your parcel's compliance status, stop by our office or call us at (218)281-6070. Our technicians will look at your operation on a parcel-by-parcel basis to eliminate guesswork and help you make a plan for the 2020 growing season to bring your land into compliance with the least inconvenience. (Contact Polk County Planning & Zoning for information about enforcement proceedings.) And please remember to **call us when your parcel has been brought into compliance!**

WEST POLK SWCD 2020 TREE PROGRAM

By Morgan Torkelson

West Polk SWCD is now accepting orders for the spring 2020 tree planting season. Please make selections on the enclosed order form and submit it with your payment (cash or check only, please). Bare root trees and shrubs are sold in bundles of 25 (minimum order) and container grown evergreens are sold individually.

Orders should be placed by February 14th, 2020 to ensure fulfillment and all orders must be paid in full before any trees can be released.

Trees are delivered to us in late April/early May depending on weather. Expect a post card from us around that time with specific dates and times when your trees will be available for pick-up. You can also check our website for updates: www.westpolkswcd.org/tree-page. West Polk SWCD does not accept any responsibility for the survival of any trees and we are unable to offer leftover discounted trees.

If you want assistance with designing a windbreak, we have GIS mapping tools that can help us plan your project and estimate cost. We also provide a bare root tree planting service for shelterbelts, homestead windbreaks and living snow fences. (You provide worked soil; utility tractor and driver and we provide tree planter and labor.) **Cost-share is available for field windbreaks** – we can offset up to 75% of the total cost of installation (tree and planting cost). Feel free to call our office at (218) 281-6070 or email me at morgan.torkelson@wpolk.mnswcd.org if you have any questions about selecting trees that will fit your needs and thrive on your property.

Pollinator the New “BUZZ” Word

*By Jillian Fejszes, Farm Bill Biologist II
Pheasants Forever, Inc. and Quail Forever, Inc*

Pollinator is very much a “buzz” word now. Pollinator mixes are all over and there are numerous programs advertised to give people assistance with putting in a pollinator plot. Why should we care about pollinators? Pollinators consist of insects such as bees, butterflies, moths, wasps and flies that move pollen between flowers and enable them to produce seeds. There are even some animals such as hummingbirds and bats that are pollinators. Pollinators help over 85% of the world’s flowering plants to reproduce which help feed many living beings- including people. Ensuring the survival of pollinators ensures the ready availability of our food supply. Pollinators are in decline due to factors such as loss and degradation of habitat, pesticide use and diseases. However dire the prognosis, there are many ways people can help pollinators on their land.

Pollinator plots can provide ideal forage and habitat for many beneficial insects. Even a small area can be helpful. Pollinator plots contain a variety of plant species with different blooming times. This provides continual flowers in the growing season and a constant food source for pollinators. A pollinator planting can be a beautiful addition to your property as well to attract more pollinators to your land. Pollinator plots can also attract other animals like deer, turkey and grouse. If you are interested in learning more about a pollinator planting, stop in to the West Polk SWCD.

buffers!

By Aaron Habermehl

Minnesota Statute §103F.48 requires water resource protection requirements (buffers) on public waters and public drainage systems. Buffers are areas of perennial vegetation adjacent to all (indicated) bodies of water that are intended to protect water resources of the state from runoff pollution, stabilize soils, shores and banks and protect or provide riparian corridors. **Required buffers on Public Waters (50’) were to have been seeded by November 01, 2017; buffers on Public Drainage systems (16.5’) were to be seeded by November 01, 2018.**

If a landowner is out of compliance with the requirements of Statute (failure to establish and maintain a buffer), Polk County Planning and Zoning will issue a Notification of Noncompliance or Corrective Action Notice to the parcel owner (notification provided to the [state] Board of Water and Soil Resources [BWSR]) with potential Administrative Penalty Order (APO). Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are not the regulatory entity regarding buffers under MN Statute; Polk County has affirmed jurisdiction and amended the zoning ordinance (08/2017) to incorporate enforcement procedures of §103F.48.

Minnesota DNR has released a landowner resource “buffer protection map” (updated August 2018) www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers that identifies areas that require permanent vegetative buffers. Landowners are encouraged to visit SWCD staff for technical assistance determining buffer requirements. The action of contacting/seeking SWCD technical evaluation on specific parcels may allow for a reasonable timeline for completion concurrence and prevent a (parcel) status determination of non-compliance. **Landowners are ultimately accountable for the installation and maintenance of buffers as identified on the DNR buffer protection map.** Please inform SWCD staff when buffers have been seeded!

SWCD staff are available to: assist with any inquires relative to buffer legislation/requirements and qualified to identify options for compliance with direction. State Buffer Compliance Cost-Share funds are available as per/acre flat rate for site preparation/seed costs for buffer implementation or 75% Cost-Share for design/installation of an (SWCD) approved “Alternative Practice” that provides comparable water quality benefit to a standard filter strip, i.e. surface water inlet pipes (SWIs) intercepting all field ditches entering Public Drain/Watercourse (a 10-year practice lifespan contract is required).

If you are an absentee landowner, we recommend that you instruct your renter or manager to contact our office. If a parcel (adjacent to a Public Drain/Watercourse) has an expiring (C)CRP contract, exemption status from §103F.48 is no longer applicable and requires the water quality benefit provided by the prescribed buffer width as identified on the DNR Buffer Protection Map.

It is our certain intention to assist you with technical guidance and field all inquiries. A “self-initiative” approach to compliance (without any contractual State or Federal program assistance or compensation) allows a landowner to determine the seed mix of perennial vegetation for establishment and required maintenance of buffer obligation.

Please view www.westpolkswcd.org buffer page and utilize direct links to BWSR and MnDNR web pages for current available information regarding buffers or visit our field office- West Polk SWCD: (co-located with NRCS) 528 Strander Ave. Crookston, MN.

NRCS Financial Assistance Options



EQIP- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural and forestry producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, and improved or created wildlife habitat. Common Practices in West Polk are Cover Crops, No-Till, Structures for Gully Erosion/Wash-outs, Perennial Pollinator Plantings, Nutrient and/or Pest Management Plans (to help eligibility for CSP). **Don't miss your chance for 2020, sign-up NOW.**

CSP - Conservation Stewardship Program helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. Whether you are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop resiliency, or develop wildlife habitat, we can custom design a CSP plan to help you meet those goals. We can help you identify natural resource problems in your operation and provide technical and financial assistance to solve those problems or attain higher stewardship levels in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. Open to Cropland Operators or grassland Other Tenants. Individuals are eligible to receive up to \$40,000/yr. for **5 years (\$200,000 total) Sign-up deadline early 2020.**

Non-financial Technical Assistance- NRCS also offers technical assistance to address your resource concerns.

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Seeding Green

Bob Guetter, USDA-NRCS, District Conservationist- Team Lead



Seeding Green! Some producers are doing it for the soil health benefits and long-term gains, some because their neighbors are, some because it's the next big thing, some because the field looks better green than black, some to reduce erosion, and others for many more reasons. Regardless of the reason for seeding green it is a phenomenal way to conserve and enhance the resource that is; **your soil.**

What is seeding green? Seeding green is no-till or strip till planting directly in to a live green growing cover crop. The process has proven extremely effective and is most commonly used for Soybean crops. The process all starts the summer or fall before seeding green.

Around early August until Early September a cover crop gets planted whether it is flown on to corn or soybeans or it is direct seeded following a small grain harvest. What species you use in your cover crop cocktail helps set up the plans for the following season. No-tilling directly in to a frost killed cover crop is still beneficial but a green growing plant helps warm the soil, gets the soil organisms moving and coming back to life, utilizes excess moisture during wet periods or in wet areas (if it's dry, kill the cover crop early to conserve moisture), and increases trafficability through enhanced soil structure.

An example of a simple Broadcast/Flown-on blend of Radish 1 lbs./ac, Turnip 2/10th lbs./ac, Winter Rye or Wheat 30 lbs./ac, can be utilized. The Radish and Turnip generally frost kill over winter but the Winter Rye or Wheat will come back to life in the spring to create the benefits of planting green. The benefit of Winter Rye over Winter Wheat is the allelopathic effects which can help reduce the germination or growth of some non-

desirables. (Potentially Winter Rye could cause decreased Corn yields, seek the input of a crop consultant if you're going to plant Corn into a Winter Rye Cover Crop) If a more extensive cover crop cocktail mix is desired for specific benefits contact NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) for additional assistance. Once spring comes, Seeding Green is similar to No-till planting with the exception that your seeding in to a nice lush green growing cover. Do look at Cover Crop Termination Guidelines to ensure compliance. Polk County, MN is located in Zone 3, meaning cover crops must be terminated at or before crop planting. If this is part of a No-till system termination can be delayed up to 7 days from the above guidance. There are exceptions to this rule, please consult NRCS for further details for your operation. Once seeding has been completed and the cover crop appropriately terminated, the field is generally rolled to open up the canopy for more sunlight to contact the leaves of the new crop. If the soil type is heavy in clay or has surface sealing/crusting issues please seek additional guidance. During the rolling process, the residue of the cover crop is laid on the soil surface creating a mat which helps regulate soil temperature, reduce soil evaporation (which helps reduce salt concentrations on the surface and retain water during the summer months or a drought), and breaks up the energy of raindrops hitting the ground to reduce erosion. This mat can also inhibit the growth rate or density of weeds potentially saving you a chemical pass. If you would like further details, on the ground assistance, or potentially options for financial assistance please contact your local NRCS Office.

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Recent Additions to West Polk SWCD Tree List

By Morgan Torkelson

West Polk SWCD has a few recent additions to our tree program. These trees and shrubs were selected for their ability to adapt to the unique soil and climate in our area with minimal maintenance, and for their windbreak and wildlife value.

Russian Almond (*Prunus tenella*)

Although Russian almond is an introduced species, it doesn't pose a threat as an invasive weed in our area. In fact it has a long history as a useful shrub for conservation purposes. It likely first arrived in North America in the early 1950s when Agriculture Canada saw its potential as windbreak option for prairie provinces. Hailing from east central Asia, Russian almond is very winter hardy and makes good use of a short growing season. Its dense, suckering habit, brilliant spring flower display and tasty nuts (don't eat the bitter ones!) provide high quality wildlife habitat. And like most other small shrubs we offer, old plants can be rejuvenated by cutting them back to short stumps in early spring.

Thornless Honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* var. *inermis*)

Thornless honeylocust is a fast growing, medium-large shade tree with an open, rounded crown and good growth habit. They are easily recognizable by their fern-like leaves and bright yellow spring and fall foliage. Though they are capable of growing 2 to 4 feet each year, their wood is hard and durable unlike other fast-growing trees making them valuable for firewood and timber. They are a good candidate for farmstead windbreaks not only because their tiny leaves allow some sunlight to filter through to lawns and other plants, but the leaves are so small that they fall between blades of grass. No raking!

Eastern Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)

Eastern redcedar is a medium-sized conifer with an irregular pyramidal form. These trees are tough as nails and virtually maintenance free. They like our heavy alkaline soil and they'll put up with saturated springtime soil better than other conifers. They are extremely drought tolerant and their dense foliage provides important habitat for wildlife, especially nesting and overwintering birds. One of the longest-lived trees native to North America, the eastern redcedar makes a good addition to a windbreak that you can establish and forget about for a few hundred years.

Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*)

Norway spruce is a very fast-growing conifer that can achieve mountainous size in just 30 years. Its open crown is attractive at maturity and makes it more resistant to mites and needle cast than other spruce species. Its form is more cylindrical than other spruces meaning that with proper spacing, Norway spruce will form a nice gap-free wall of wind protection. With secondary branches that droop to the ground and a less

dense crown than other spruces, it does a better job of filtering and slowing wind, rather than just redirecting and funneling it. These trees require very little maintenance - just give them room to grow and they will work hard for you for a long, long time.

Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act

By Aaron Habermehl

Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act

Minnesota 76th Legislature 1990 c 391 art 1 s 2; 1991 c 354 art 1 s 2 established regulatory policy that the wetlands of Minnesota provide public value by conserving surface waters, maintaining and improving water quality, preserving wildlife habitat, providing recreational opportunities, reducing runoff, providing for floodwater retention, reducing stream sedimentation, contributing to improved subsurface moisture, helping moderate climatic change, enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape, are important to comprehensive water management and that it is in the public interest to: achieve no net loss in the quantity, quality and biological diversity of Minnesota's existing wetlands; increase the quantity, quality and biological diversity of Minnesota's wetlands by restoring or enhancing diminished or drained wetlands; avoid direct or indirect impacts from activities that destroy or diminish the quantity, quality and biological diversity of wetlands; and replace wetland values where avoidance of activity is not feasible and prudent (MN §103A.201, 1990-1991).

Despite their benefits, wetlands have long been considered a nuisance and have been drained or filled for agricultural production or urban development. Lack of awareness about the benefits of wetlands and governmental policies that encouraged draining and filling are largely to blame for this loss. Until the settlement of Minnesota in the 1860s, about 18.6 million of its 53.6 million acres were wetland. Today, only half remain (BWSR, 2019).

Please be aware of Minnesota's Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) and contractor responsibility. It is imperative to visit/contact West Polk WCA Local Government Unit (LGU) before potentially impacting any wetland (not all wetlands share traditional/visible features) to avoid costly restoration and/or replacement according to State law.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) IS NOW OPEN!

CRP General sign-up is being held now until **February 28, 2020**. Continuous CRP is also open. If you have any unproductive, hard to farm, problem spots or enjoy supporting wildlife habitat you may want to enroll some land.

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-program/>

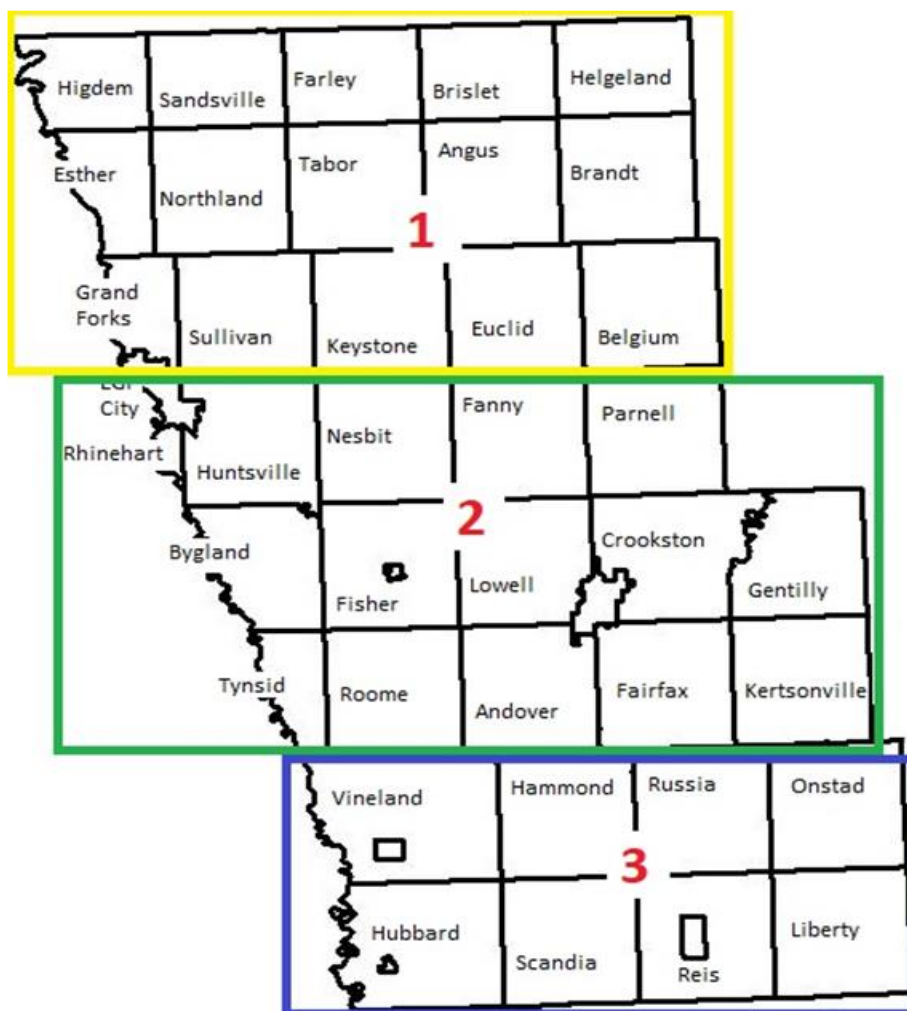


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West Polk SWCD shifts to Buffer Monitoring Phase

By Morgan Torkelson

Despite Mother Nature's best efforts, the majority of parcels in our district have now been brought into compliance with Minnesota's buffer law. To ensure that the buffers established by farmers and landowners continue to protect our waterways from fertilizer and silt pollution, West Polk SWCD will begin shifting to an ongoing buffer monitoring program in 2020. In this phase, all parcels subject to the buffer law will be checked every three years to ensure that buffers have not been cropped or otherwise degraded. Parcels will be reviewed on-site and/or remotely, depending on field accessibility and the availability of up-to-date aerial imagery.



Above: West Polk SWCD's three buffer monitoring regions.

Along with field checking all parcels in one of the three monitoring regions each year (see map), we will be looking at a number of random parcels as well as "parcels of emphasis". These might include those with previous compliance issues or those with alternative practices and/or cost-share, for example. (Visit <http://westpolkswcd.org/buffer-program.html> for more information.) The goal for our buffer monitoring program is to work with landowners and operators to ensure ongoing compliance with Minnesota's Buffer Law. If an on-site evaluation is necessary but only possible by entering your property, we will contact you for permission prior to a visit.

Visit us on our Facebook page at
<https://www.facebook.com/WPSWCD>

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