



YELLOW MEDICINE

SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

*The mission of the SWCD is to provide technical, financial, and educational support to the public for the purpose of conserving and protecting soil, water, and other natural resources.*

## YELLOW MEDICINE SWCD STAFF

**Tyler Knutson**

**Director**

**Kurt Johnson**

**Technical Advisor**

**Anita Borg**

**Office Administrator**

**Brooke Buyse**

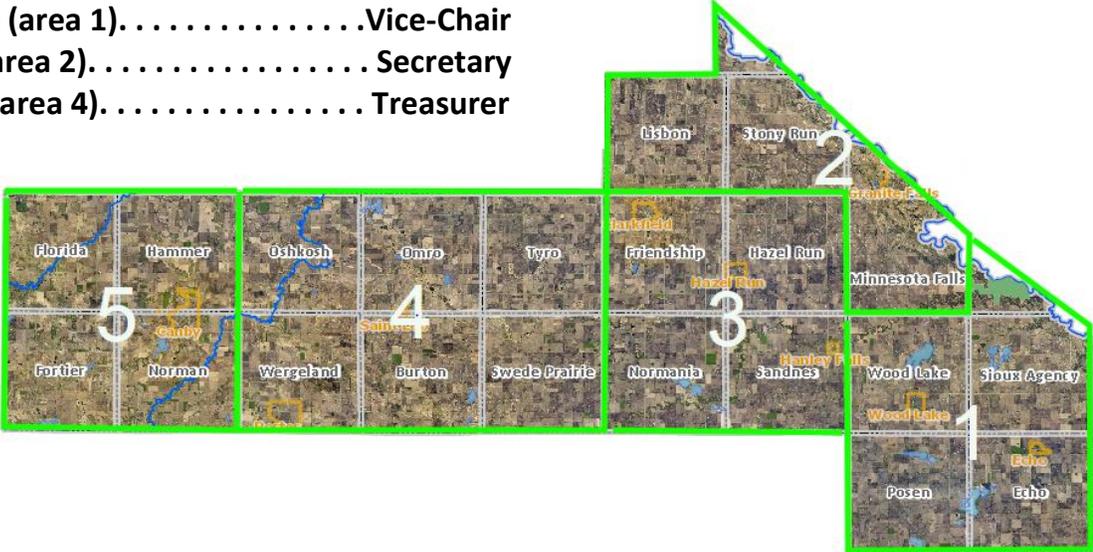
**Water Resource Technician**

**Brayden Anderson**

**Conservation Technician**

**YM SWCD SUPERVISORS**

Elmo Volstad (area 3)..... Public Relations  
 Delon Clarksean (area 5)..... Chairperson  
 Tom Remmele (area 1).....Vice-Chair  
 Jerry Nelson (area 2)..... Secretary  
 Darwyn Bach (area 4)..... Treasurer



**NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) STAFF**

Kelly Heather ..... Team Lead, District Conservationist  
 Jeffrey Berens..... District Conservationist  
 Randy Kraus ..... ACES Technician

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The Yellow Medicine Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) was duly organized as a governmental subdivision of this State, and a public body corporate and politic on the 17th day of April, 1950. The SWCD works with landowners in both rural and urban areas to conserve soil and water resources.

## PROGRAMS & SERVICES

**AgBMP LOAN PROGRAM:** The AgBMP Loan Program is a water quality program that provides low interest loans to farmers, rural landowners, and agriculture supply businesses. Its purpose is to encourage agricultural Best Management Practices that prevent or reduce runoff from feedlots, farm fields and other pollution problems, including well and septic issues. The AgBMP Loan Program is part of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture Finance and Budget Division. It works with counties, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and local water planners to identify current and future financial needs, modifying the program to meet changing trends in agriculture and rural Minnesota.

The program is administered locally through the Yellow Medicine SWCD. The borrower proposes a project on the county level. If the borrower meets state eligibility requirements and the project addresses local water quality priorities, the project can be approved and refer it to a cooperating lender, who evaluates the borrowers credit worthiness and services the loan.

In 2020, over \$276,000 was loaned in Yellow Medicine County through the program to replace 13 Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS), replace 6 wells, and help finance a piece of conservation manure handling equipment. The SWCD works cooperatively with the Yellow Medicine County Land and Resource Management Office's staff to determine project eligibility on certain projects and submit applications to local lenders.

## **AG WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM (AWQCP):**



Farmers can be recognized for protecting one of our natural resources, water. The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is an opportunity for landowners in agricultural districts or farmers to be recognized for their conservation practices. Those who sign up for the program and incorporate approved farming practices will be certified and given regulatory certainty for 10 years.

To become a certified farm, a program application is completed. The landowner then meets with a certifying agent to complete the assessment process. The certifying agent will gather an understanding on the management of the operation and review all the land with land practices implemented using soil tests; reviewing nutrient application, manure application, pesticide application, etc. The certifier will then conduct field visits to review the farm for erosion and other potential impacts it could have on water quality. Once the farming operation meets standards, it is eligible to be a Water Quality Certified Farm.

In 2020 Yellow Medicine SWCD had 5 new applications completed resulting in 6 certifications completed. The program began in 2016 and has had a total of 152 certifications in Area 5 (Southwest Minnesota consisting of 11 SWCDs).

**FAIL TROUBLE IN PROGRESS COMPLETE**



**2020 Plan of Work**

**VISION:**  
Address water quality, water quantity, soil health, agriculture communication and public communication focuses with credibility, education, practical examples, outreach and metrics while maintaining effective and efficient administration and operations

**MISSION:**  
The mission of the Yellow Medicine SWCD is to provide technical, financial, and educational support to the public for the purpose of conserving and protecting soil, water, and other natural resources.

SWCD Water Resources Technician SWCD Focus:

**"Commitment" w/ Cooler Giveaway Public Communications**

Conservation Technician Apprentice	SWCD Focus
Major moving junk out of the basement	Admin/Operations
RIM and Cost Share Site Inspections	Water Quality
LWJ/D Progress Tracking Spreadsheets	Water Quality
County Ditch 18 Storage Area Application	Water Quantity
Scan in all WCA responses to server	Admin/Operations

SWCD Conservation Technician				SWCD Focus Area:
GOALS:	NOTES:	DATE:		
Attend NAJCD and Report on gains from it to the board	Report to staff, board, Area?	FEB	Water Quality	
Reach out to Hill Lake landowners by March 30 for a possible CREP sign up	Direct contracts regardless of sign up	MARCH	Water Quantity	

SWCD Director	
JANUARY	FEBRUARY
<p><b>Buffer Map/Use Update</b></p> <p>Move Kurt to Tyler's Spot and set up open work area by end of January</p> <p>Admin/Operations</p>	<p>Attend NAJCD Meeting in Las Vegas and network with people from multiple states (especially on non profit)</p> <p>Water Quality</p>
<p><b>Grant Aggressiveness</b></p> <p>DRAFT LWJ-18 LWJ-19 Planning RFP and coordinate submittal efforts</p> <p>Water Quantity</p>	<p><b>Grant Aggressiveness</b></p> <p>UKAR LWJ-18 LWJ-19 Planning RFP and coordinate submittal efforts</p> <p>Water Quantity</p>
<p>2020-2021 Staffing Plan</p> <p>Admin/Operations</p>	<p>Seek private funding, GFAAC and Pioneer</p> <p>Water Quality</p>
<p>Seek private funding, GFAAC and Pioneer</p> <p>Water Quality</p>	<p>Plan 2021 Strategy Meeting/Governance Refresher by 12/31/2020</p> <p>Admin/Operations</p>
<p>Water Quality</p>	<p>Plan 2021 Strategy Meeting/Governance Refresher by 12/31/2020</p> <p>Admin/Operations</p>

SWCD Office Administrator	Timeline	SWCD Focus:
Dashboards modelled for staff and board to show multi year financials	by 6/30/2020	Admin/Operations
Identify best number and equation for assessing hourly efficiency	by 9/30/2020	Admin/Operations
Wage theft notifications and update to earnings statement	by 1/31/2020	Admin/Operations
Records retention planning and implement update to files stored	by 12/31/2020	Admin/Operations
Basement organization plan put together and implemented	by 12/31/2020	Admin/Operations
Assist with development of AIS photo cutouts	by 5/31/2020	Public Communications
Coordinate a southern MN admin staff training event	by 9/30/2020	Admin/Operations

200 of 200 WGS COMS PLANS PAID FOR PLANNING			
Add 1,000 acres of CREP countywide by 12/31/2020	pending sign up	DEC	Water Quantity
Top 10,000 acres of RIM easement in county by 12/31/2020	pending sign up	DEC	Water Quality
ONE of 3 more easements secured as part of Sand Lake restoration by 12/31/2020	pending sign up	DEC	Water Quantity
Scan all WCA responses to server by 12/31/2020	Help?	DEC	Admin/Operations

SWCD Director	
JANUARY	FEBRUARY
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**ANNUAL PLAN OF WORK of the SWCD 2020:**

**DEFINITIONS:** Vision = The ideal future if YMSWCD could fulfill its utmost wish—adopted from board priorities and criteria set on 3/28/2019 and adopted 4/25/2019

Mission = The business we are in; answers the question "What good do we do for whom?"

2020 "Wildly Important" Goals = High priorities naming what are relevant priorities for and by staff in addition to day to day duties ("the whirlwind")

Adopted as the Annual Plan of SWCD Work for 2020 at the December 19, 2019 board meeting. Edits by staff as needed.

**BROADCAST SEEDER PROGRAM:** The broadcast seeder program began in 2017. The SWCD started the program to assist landowners in seeding conservation practices on their land. Landowners have seeded over 100 acres in Yellow Medicine County with the Broadcast seeder since the start of the program.

## **BUFFER IMPLEMENTATION:**

Minnesota Statute 103F.48 Implementation. In 2020, the SWCD finished the year with only 12 non-compliant parcels. This converts to nearly 100% compliance with the law. The final parcels' reasons for noncompliance range from accidental herbicide damage to



outright unwillingness to comply to non-response to communications over the last half decade. The SWCD has assisted Yellow Medicine County and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources with achieving compliance under ordinance and statute. A policy has also been adopted to plan for monitoring continued compliance in the future.

**COST SHARE OPPORTUNITIES:** SWCD Staff has recognized the need to better utilize these funds in a responsible and effective fashion. Staff has also realized the availability of a large funding source in the implementation of the One Watershed One Plan. The SWCD is also employing resources in private industry, such as crop consultants, in the effort to give these cost share programs greater effectiveness. In 2020, the SWCD partnered on two unique projects. The first was assisting with funding a large dam repair near Montevideo, MN. Area II River Basin Projects was the lead partner on that. The board also decided to provide about one third of funding to Upper Sioux Community to assist on a major floodplain protection project. That project was shared in the Granite Falls-Clarkfield Advocate Tribune as a front page headline.

The SWCD conducted 47 inspections of existing cost share projects, finding all projects compliant.



**CREP:** In 2017 the Federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the State of Minnesota Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) program partnered to create the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP). MN CREP is a voluntary program that allows landowners to enroll land into a permanent easement. The MN CREP focuses on Filter Strips, Wetland Restorations, and Wellhead Protection areas. The SWCD focused on promotion and outreach of the program.

Since the start of CREP III in 2017, Yellow Medicine has signed up over 1000 acres into the program. In 2018, 9 easements adding up to 396 acres were enrolled. In 2019, 607 acres were enrolled which consisted of 8 Wetland restorations and 3 Filter strips. 2020 added another 93-acre easement to the Sand Lake Restoration.

**EASEMENT DELIVERY:** SWCD staff are responsible for conducting status reviews on CREP and/or RIM Easements: Staff conducted site inspections on 60 easements in 2020.



**SOIL HEALTH EVENTS – cancelled due to pandemic:** After hosting 2 successful soil health lunches in 2018, and another 2 in 2019, the SWCD looked forward to meeting up with producers and Ag professionals once again to discuss soil health and water quality. Unfortunately, the year of social distancing did not make this option possible.

**TREE PROGRAM:** The SWCD has planned, planted, sold and established trees since 1961 for windbreak to mitigate soil erosion and to promote rural conservation and wildlife habitat. Today, the SWCD still sells, plans, advises, and provides for the sale and installation of products to ensure a successful planting.



In 2020, the SWCD planted 4,875 feet of field windbreaks and over 11,000 feet of farmstead windbreaks. 11,000 feet of fabric tree mat were also installed.



**WALK IN ACCESS PROGRAM:** Introduced in 2011 as a part of the Farm Bill, the Walk-In Access (WIA) program allows individuals with a site validation coupon access onto sites throughout the 46 county WIA area from Sept 1- May 31. Landowners receive compensation to allow public access onto their land. There are 2,300 acres enrolled in the WIA in Yellow Medicine County.

**WETLAND CONSERVATION ACT (WCA):** Created in 1991 to preserve existing wetlands and restore legally drained wetlands having potential for flood damage reduction, wildlife, recreational, and groundwater recharge benefits, where practical.

Yellow Medicine County appointed the SWCD as the local government unit to administer the Wetland Conservation Act and the rules of the Board of Water and Soil Resources adopted under the act.

In 2020, the SWCD spent nearly \$8,800 of WCA grant funds administering WCA guidelines thru review of tiling permits and other projects (see breakdown below):

- 64 1026's approved
- 6 1026's approved with restrictions
- 0 1026's denied
- 9 Drainage Maintenance requests
- 2 COE/DNR maintenance requests
- 61 Building permits approved
- 0 Building permit approved with restrictions
- 8 On site investigations conducted
- 14 Contacts without decisions

In addition, reviewed 1 highway project, received 3 basic applications, made 2 decisions and addressed 1 potential violation.

Staff spent over 300 hours administering this program in 2020.

# EDUCATION & PROMOTION



**AG IN THE CLASSROOM – cancelled due to pandemic** -Our SWCD Staff participates annually in the “Ag in the Classroom” event usually held in Granite Falls in March. The event is organized by the local Ag organizations and producers and hosts 4<sup>th</sup> graders from schools in Yellow Medicine, Lac qui Parle and Lyon Counties. We look forward to being a part of this event again in the future.

**AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species)** - The SWCD worked with Lac Qui Parle SWCD to attend two ice fishing tournaments in the area, Del Clark Tournament in January, and Lac Qui Parle Lake in early February. At these tournaments we had fisherman fill out surveys about what people in our area wanted to know about AIS and what area we should be targeting.

In 2020 we sponsored three different types of AIS awareness commercials with KARE11, Prairie Sportsman, and the Angling Buzz. Through these networks the word of AIS was spread not just through the county, but statewide. Public knowledge of how AIS is spread and how it effects the eco system is critical not only to our counties waters, but also to the waters our residents visit and to our area’s visitors.

We also were asked to sponsor a local event, RockFest in Granite Falls. We were able to display a Clean, Drain, Dry banner at the highly attended outdoor event.

Additional outreach included AIS/Yellow Medicine Watershed trivia facts shared by way of drink coasters. These coasters offered info on an aquatic invasive species on one side and “fast facts” related to the Yellow Medicine River and watershed on the other. Nearly 2000 coasters were distributed to area establishments to share with their patrons.

**2020 ENVIRONMENTAL FAIR – cancelled due to pandemic** The Environmental Fair is a learning event in the “outdoor classroom”, giving students an opportunity to study natural resources in a setting that will give them the opportunity to see, touch and sometimes taste what they are learning about. It is designed to encompass multiple aspects of environmental education, and be available to a large number of students.

After 27 years of rotating the event between County fairground sites, the Fair moved to a new venue in 2019, Shetek Environmental Learning Center, rural Slayton. The new location offers students the ultimate learning atmosphere surrounded by nature. The event is organized by the

**2020 ENVIRONMENTAL FAIR (cont.)** - participating soil and water districts. Nearly 1,500 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade students participated from an 11 county area in 2019, including students from Clarkfield Area Charter School, Canby Public Schools, ST Peters, Canby, and Yellow Medicine East.

While being forced to cancel the event in 2020 due to health and safety concerns, we hope to get back on track with a successful event in 2021.



**MEDIA OUTREACH:** In 2020, The SWCD sent monthly news releases related to conservation programs, opportunities and accomplishments to the Granite Falls/Clarkfield Advocate-Tribune and Canby News. These releases were also shared with a couple of regional papers in the area and local radio stations. New articles are also added to the news feed on the District’s website. This is done in an effort to share with the public what we do, and what we need their help to do. Regional papers also highlighted some of the things going on in the SWCD, interviews were held with some of the media outlets to expand our coverage and messaging. The SWCD also made significant investment of time and money into our social media presence.

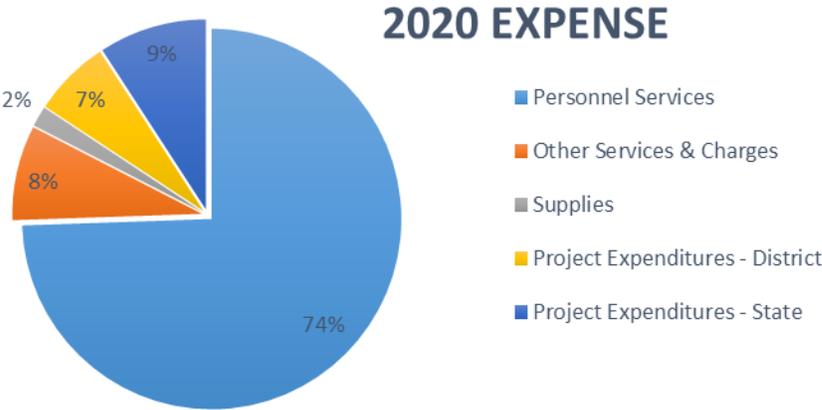
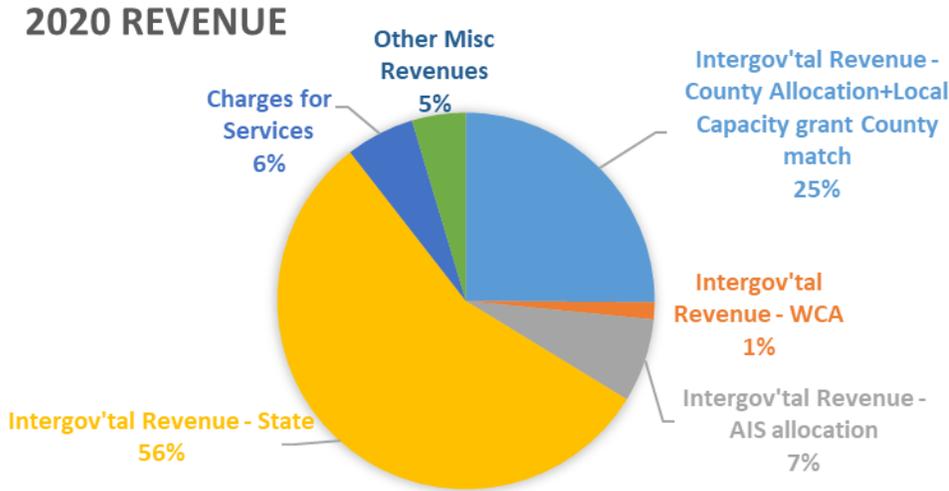


**OUTREACH THROUGH TECHNOLOGY:** The SWCD’s website was given a fresh look in 2017. We continue to update and add new information on a monthly basis. It can be seen at [www.yellowmedicineswcd.org](http://www.yellowmedicineswcd.org).

**AND, the public can look for us on Facebook:** The Yellow Medicine SWCD has an active Facebook page. With over 700 followers so far, the District shares dozens of outreach items ranging from project highlights; conservation program opportunities; educational opportunities; news from other Districts and conservation partners; occasional conservation stories of the past; and more. It’s a great way to offer “up to the minute” updates and information. This Facebook feed is also linked to the SWCD’s website for additional accessibility. We include an invitation to “Like us on Facebook” on several other media sources like newspaper articles, direct mailings, vehicle logos, etc.

# FINANCIALS

The Yellow Medicine SWCD funds its day-to-day operations through a variety of funding sources. These sources include State grants (56%); County allocation funds (25%); the WCA grant and AIS allocation sourced from the State to the County, then passed on to the SWCD for implementation; charges for services including services provided by our tree program, (6%). Although governed by an elected Board of officials, Conservation Districts do not have levy authority and must secure funds from a variety of sources. The District continues strive to leverage additional program funding for local conservation projects.



The charts above depict the distribution of our 2020 revenues and expenses after year-end adjusting entries (subject to audit). Funds are reported on the accrual basis of accounting, under which revenue is recognized when earned, and expenses are recognized when incurred.

## PARTNERSHIPS & COOPERATION

**SUMMER CONSERVATION TECHNICIAN APPRENTICE:** The SWCD employed Kyle Richter, Southwest MN State university student, for temporary educational employment during Summer 2020. Kyle experienced all facets of the SWCD throughout the summer and was a great asset to our office.



**One Watershed  
One Plan**

**ONE WATERSHED ONE PLAN:** The Yellow Medicine River 1W1P saw its second full year of implementation including the use of over two million dollars in state and federal funding to implement projects across the planning area. This planning area covers the Yellow Medicine River Watershed and a few tributaries of the Minnesota River. While mostly federal funding has been used in Yellow Medicine County, activity is picking up where structural projects in our area will be utilizing Clean Water Funds to implement structural BMPs (Best Management Practices). For the most part, other areas of the watershed have used more structural funding. Preplanning went underway in 2020, with SWCD Board adopting policies to join the Lac qui Parle River Watershed Planning Partnership. Funding was attained, and planning was scheduled for the upcoming years.

**RAINFALL MONITORING PROGRAM:** The SWCD participates in the state's rainfall monitoring program. Yellow Medicine County currently has ten volunteer rainfall monitors that record precipitation daily. These reports are submitted monthly to the State Climatologist.

**RCRCA, IMPROVING WATER QUALITY IN REDWOOD RIVER WATERSHED:** The Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area (RCRCA) is an eight county non-regulatory joint powers organization which was established in 1983. RCRCA works to enhance and protect the Redwood and Cottonwood Rivers by making land use changes that improve water quality. SWCD Supervisor, Tom Remmele, serves on the RCRCA committee making decisions for the Redwood River Watershed and was able to participate in monthly meetings online via Zoom.

**SOUTHWEST PRAIRIE TECHNICAL SERVICE AREA:** SWCD contributed \$3,400 towards the Southwest Prairie Technical Services' overall budget. Supervisor, Jerry Nelson, serves on the Southwest Prairie Technical Service Joint Powers Board and was able to attend meetings throughout the year thanks to on line meeting resources.

**USDA STAFF:** The SWCD, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Farm Service Agency (FSA) are all housed in the Ag Services building in Clarkfield. Together SWCD staff and these agencies provide technical and financial assistance to individuals, groups, organizations, and governments in reducing costly waste of soil and water resulting from soil erosion, sedimentation, pollution and improper land use through programs like CRP, CSP, CREP and EQIP.

**YELLOW MEDICINE COUNTY:** The SWCD and Yellow Medicine County have continued to grow the partnership of the two government units exponentially. The benefit of each to the other has continued in 2020. Yellow Medicine SWCD is considered a pseudo-department of the county. Lead staff are involved in monthly department head meetings and semi-annual department updates to the county board. Although significant growth in sharing resources has occurred, the cost of this partnership has maintained steady while the benefits have grown. Through the Minnesota Clean Water Fund, the SWCD and County were able to leverage \$14,400 in state funding for technology and coordinated partnership projects dealing with drainage and other SWCD capacity needs against \$14,400 in Yellow Medicine County funds to assist Yellow Medicine County's Land and Resource Management Office in implementing its work. YM SWCD implements the Yellow Medicine County Local Water Management Plan, and has adopted it as part of its Comprehensive Plan. To view the plan go to the Yellow Medicine County Website: [www.co.ym.mn.gov](http://www.co.ym.mn.gov). The link is located on the right side of the page.

## **COOPERATING AGENCIES**

### **Board of Water & Soil Resources**

John Jaschke

Jason Beckler/Doug Goodrich

Executive Director  
Board Conservationist

### **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Troy Daniell

Kelly Heather

State Conservationist  
District Conservationist-Team Lead

### **Yellow Medicine County Commissioners**

Ronald Antony

Gary Johnson

Greg Renneke

Glen Kack

John Berends

Canby  
Montevideo  
Echo  
Canby  
Granite Falls

### **Other Agencies**

Trudy Hastad

Michelle Overholser

Angie Stienbach

Jolene Johnson

Liz Ludwig/Larry Thielen

Chris Balfany

Wendy Kruger

Lucas Youngsma

Ryan Bjerke

Alicia Webb

Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed Administrator  
Yellow Medicine Watershed Administrator  
County Administrator  
Planning & Zoning Coordinator  
FSA County Director  
County Ditch Inspector  
DNR Area Wildlife Manager  
DNR Area Hydrologist YM Watershed  
DNR Area Hydrologist LQP Watershed  
Yellow Medicine/Lyon 4-H Program Coordinator