



YELLOW MEDICINE

SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## 2019 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

**Kurt Johnson**

**District Manager**

**Tyler Knutson**

**Technical Director**

**Anita Borg**

**Office Administrator**

**Brooke Buysse**

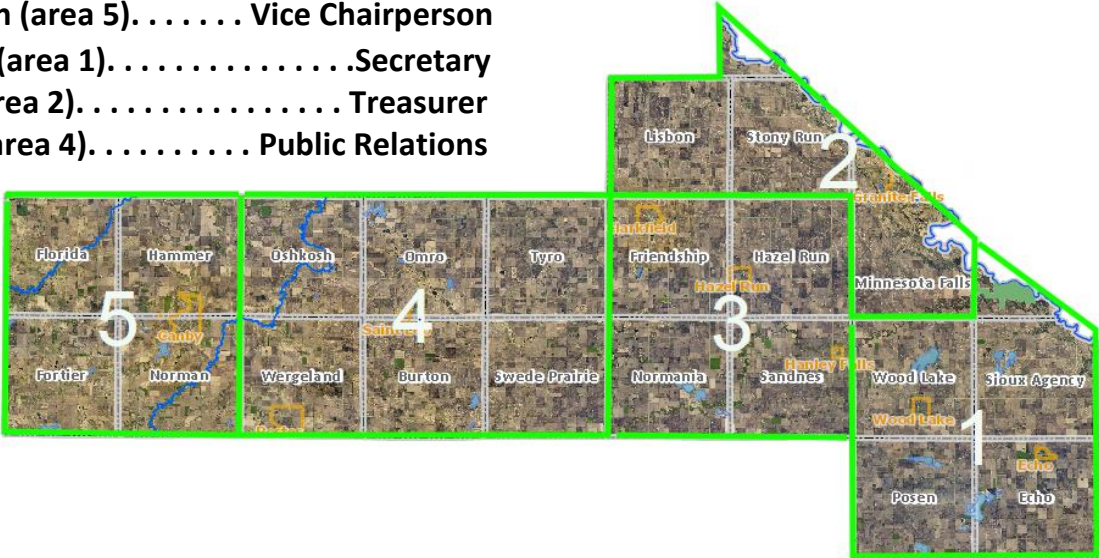
**Water Resource Technician**

**Brayden Anderson**

**Conservation Technician**

YM SWCD SUPERVISORS

Hollis Weber (area 3). . . . . Chairperson  
 Delon Clarksean (area 5). . . . . Vice Chairperson  
 Tom Remmele (area 1). . . . .Secretary  
 Jerry Nelson (area 2). . . . . Treasurer  
 Darwyn Bach (area 4). . . . . Public Relations



NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) STAFF

Kelly Heather Pfarr . . Team Lead, District Conservationist  
 Jon Paul Pringle. . . . . Soil Conservation Technician  
 Jeffrey Berens. . . . . Soil Conservationist  
 Randy Kraus . . . . . ACES Technician

Contents:

PROGRAMS and SERVICES	PAGE 3
EDUCATION and PROMOTION	PAGE 7
FINANCIALS	Page 10
PARTNERSHIPS and COOPERATION	PAGE 11

## PROGRAMS and SERVICES

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.

**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 2019, over \$350,000 was loaned in Yellow Medicine County through the program to replace 11 Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS), replace 8 wells, connect one homeowner to rural water, and help finance a piece of conservation tillage 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. For 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 and the landowner 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

## **AG WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM (AWQCP), cont.:**

implemented such as soil tests, 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 then it will be eligible to be a Water Quality Certified Farm.

In 2019 Yellow Medicine SWCD had a total of 2 applications completed resulting in 2 certifications. The program began in 2016 and has had a total of 12 certifications in Area 5 (Southwest Minnesota consisting of 11 SWCDs).

**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 50 acres in Yellow Medicine County with the Broadcast seeder since the start of the program.

### **BUFFER IMPLEMENTATION:**

Minnesota Statute 103F.48 Implementation. Through 2018, SWCD staff continued to track status and update the Minnesota Buffer Compliance and Tracking Tool (BuffCaTT). Staff also continued, as in 2015 to 2018, to implement conservation



programs including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and other Cost Share programs. Yellow Medicine County landowners achieved compliance of all but 41 parcels in the entire county totaling 98.26%. A final compliance list was submitted to Yellow Medicine County government for handling of enforcement.

**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.

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 is looking to be another very promising year.

**EASEMENT DELIVERY:** SWCD staff are responsible for conducting status reviews on CREP and/or RIM Easements: Staff conducted site inspections on 85 easements in 2019.

**FARM BILL ASSISTANCE GRANT:** The SWCD received funding through the Farm Bill Assistance program to provide technical assistance to landowners with Farm Bill Programs. The SWCD was funded through June 2019 by the Farm Bill Assistance Program. We assisted the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in promoting the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and other aspects of the Farm Bill.

**SOIL HEALTH EVENTS:** The District hosted two Soil Health events, March 1, 2019 at the Wood Lake Community Center in Wood Lake and July 31, 2019 at Eric Dybsetter's Farm in Porter. These



were intended to provide incentive and a venue for a conversation on Soil Health practices such as no till and cover crops. The SWCD provided a free lunch and an even platform for producers to ask questions and share their experience with improving and experimenting with soil health.





**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 2019, the SWCD planted 1,500 feet of field windbreaks and 9 acres of farmstead windbreaks. 9,000 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 over 2,600 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 2019, the SWCD spent approximately \$10,717 of WCA grant funds, and contributed over \$6,000 in match funds administering WCA guidelines thru review of tiling permits and other projects (see breakdown below):

229	1026's approved
19	1026's approved with restrictions
1	1026's denied
27	Drainage Maintenance requests
2	COE/DNR maintenance requests
50	Building permits approved
1	Building permit approved with restrictions
17	On site investigations conducted
18	Contacts without decisions

In addition, reviewed 1 highway project, received 1 basic application, made one decision and worked with two landowner violations.

In 2019, staff spent over 280 hours administering this program.

## EDUCATION and PROMOTION



**AG IN THE CLASSROOM:** Our SWCD Staff participated in the annual “Ag in the Classroom” event held in Granite Falls in March 2019. Fourth grade students played the AIS version of “Who wants to be a Millionaire.” We had about 300 hundred students attend the event and the students really enjoyed the AIS game we created.

### **AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species):**

The SWCD worked with Lac Qui Parle SWCD to attend three different ice fishing tournaments in the area. Del Clark Tournament (January 25 & 26), Wood Lake (February 2), and Lac Qui Parle (February 9). 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.

**AQUATIC ROBOTICS:** Partnering with the Yellow Medicine 4-H program, we began an Aquatic Robotics program. Through this program participants built their own aquatic robot equipped with an underwater camera. The team practiced using the robot in the KCC pool in Granite. This year we were able to take our robots out to lakes in our area. We saw a lot of native vegetation and even found Chinese Mystery Snails in Del Clark Lake. We also attended the Yellow Medicine County Fair and displayed our robot. If you know a student who is interested in a program like this, please contact our office and we can set up a team near their school’s location.



In 2019 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 not just spread throughout the county, but statewide. This is important so anyone who visits our area is aware of what AIS are and how to prevent them from bringing them to our area. We also were asked to sponsor a local event, WesternFest in Granite, and were able to display Clean, Drain, Dry banner at the highly attended rodeo.

**2019 ENVIRONMENTAL FAIR:** The annual Environmental Fair was held on September 24 & 25, 2019. 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 participating soil and water districts. Nearly 1,500 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade students participated from an 11 county area, including students from Clarkfield Area Charter School, Canby Public Schools, ST Peters, Canby, and Yellow Medicine East.



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.

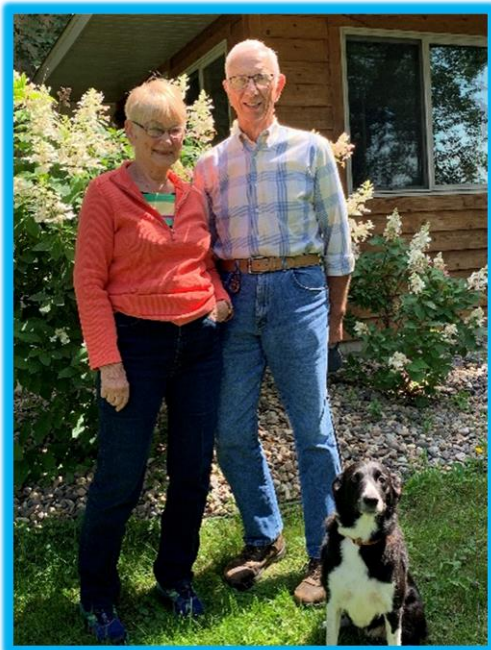
**MEDIA OUTREACH:** In 2019, the SWCD submitted more than a dozen articles to the local and regional newspapers for printing. This was done in an effort to share with the public what we do, and what we need their help to do. Regional papers also highlighted some of the things going on in the SWCD, interviews 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. The SWCD had an active, paid advertisement on Facebook and Instagram at least 75% of the year.



**OUTREACH THROUGH TECHNOLOGY:** In 2017, the SWCD gave a fresh look to their website. 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 can be found on Facebook, and we encourage the public to “Like” us, and stay up to date with news and events, which are being updated regularly. The Facebook page is also linked on our SWCD website.





**2019 OUTSTANDING CONSERVATIONIST:** The Yellow Medicine Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) is honored to award an outstanding conservationist every year. The honorees for the year 2019 are John and Julie Essame of Belview. The farm has been in Julie's family for 148 years and has been a leader in conservation of our precious resources all the while.

John and Julie Essame have dedicated a lot of time into conservation on their 200+acre property. They are always researching new ways to reestablish their land to its native state. They work with the Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Natural Resource Conservation Services, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, United States Department of Agriculture, and different counties to put conservation into practice. The Essame's

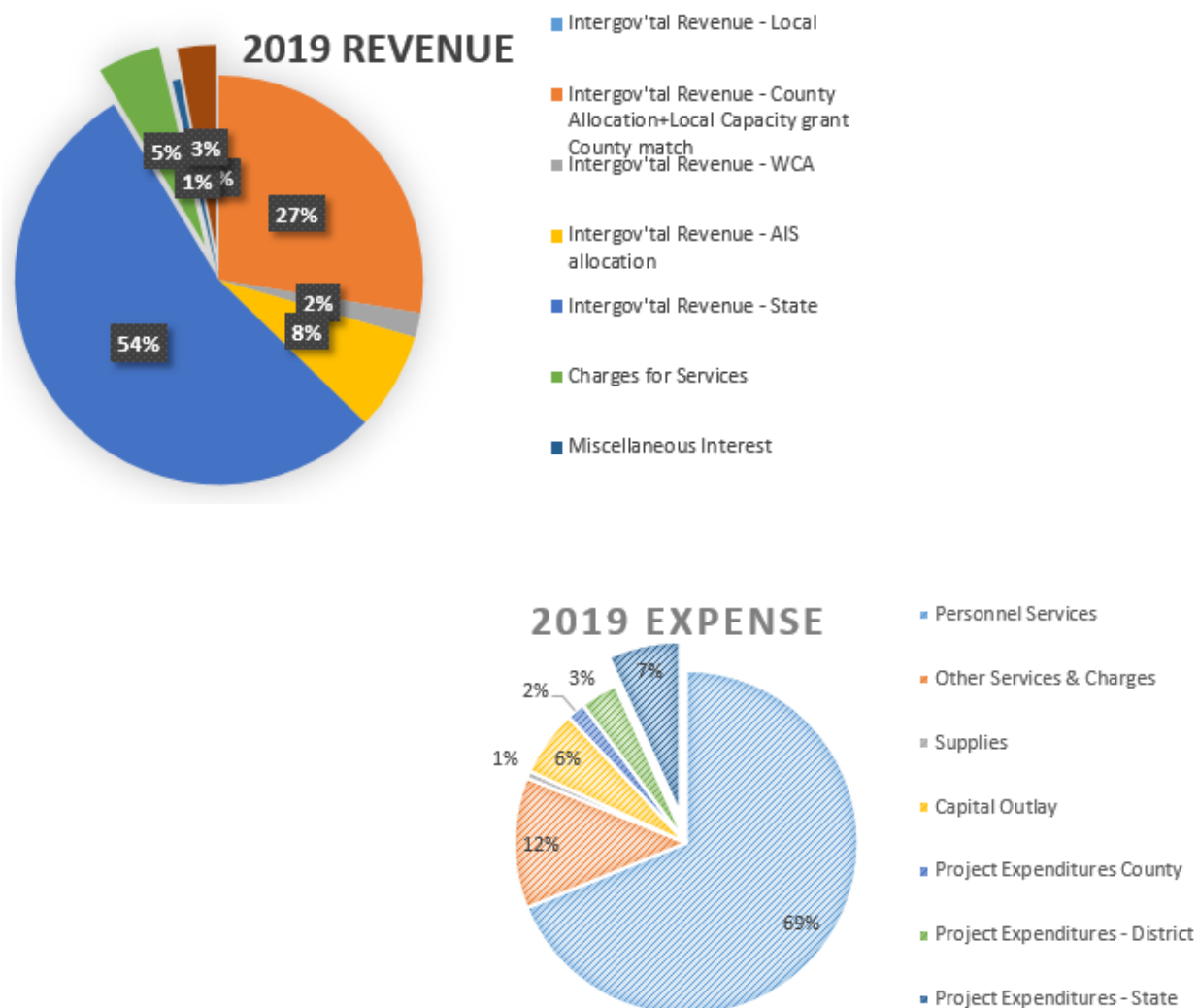
have been working with the local SWCDs where their properties exist for decades. Since they reside on the county edge, they not only work with the Yellow Medicine SWCD but also partner with the Chippewa SWCD as well. They have preserved 40 acres of rare exposed Granite bedrock outcrop by protecting it with a permanent easement. Each year they spend a lot of time trying to maintain Oak Savannah native vegetation by removing and controlling buckthorn and cedars.

Their property has been used for research in the MNDNR non game species research on the rare blue tailed Prairie Skink along with different rare snake species. John has also collected local Upland Milkweed seed and created his own plot to benefit Monarch butterflies. This fall, he is planning on adding an area of native flowers nearby to benefit pollinators. For years, they have raised sheep and rotationally grazed them on their pasture land. The waterways on their property have had wide conservation buffers for years. They have converted 30 acres of cropland and an additional 20 donated acres into a floodplain restoration along the Minnesota River protected by a permanent conservation easement.

We are honored to have John and Julie Essame as our conservationist of the year. They continue to implement conservation and preserve their land. As Yellow Medicine's Soil & Water Conservation District awardee, the Essame's was also nominated to the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts', MASWCD, Outstanding conservationist Award. This honor also extends them an invitation to the annual MASWCD convention. Thank you, John and Julie Essame, for your commitment to conservation.

## FINANCIALS

The Yellow Medicine SWCD funds its day-to-day operations through a variety of funding sources. These sources include State grants (54%); County allocation and grant match (27%); 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, (5%). 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 2019 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 INTERN PROGRAM:** The SWCD employed Landon Abraham, St. Leo, MN and Ali Miller, Sacred Heart, MN for temporary educational employment during Summer 2019. They are both college students who experienced all facets of the SWCD throughout the summer.

**DNR WELL MONITORING:** The SWCD monitors three groundwater observation wells throughout the year designated by the DNR. This program was discontinued in 2019.



**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. For the most part, other areas of the watershed have used more structural funding.

**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.

**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 attended meetings throughout the year.

**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.

## **WATERSHED RESTORATION AND PROTECTION PROJECT STRATEGY (WRAPS)**

**Yellow Medicine River Watershed:** In 2019, the SWCD continued discussions on the second 10-year cycle of intensive watershed monitoring by the MPCA. Monitoring of water quality will begin in 2020 for the next cycle. This monitoring will be conducted by the Yellow Medicine River Watershed District.

## **WATERSHED RESTORATION AND PROTECTION STRATEGIES (WRAPS) Lac qui Parle**

**Watershed:** The SWCD continued its involvement in the development of the Lac qui Parle Watershed Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies document. The WRAPS and total maximum daily load (TMDL) report underwent development this year for review and finalization in 2020.

**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 expanded greatly in 2019. 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

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