



YELLOW MEDICINE

SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2021 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

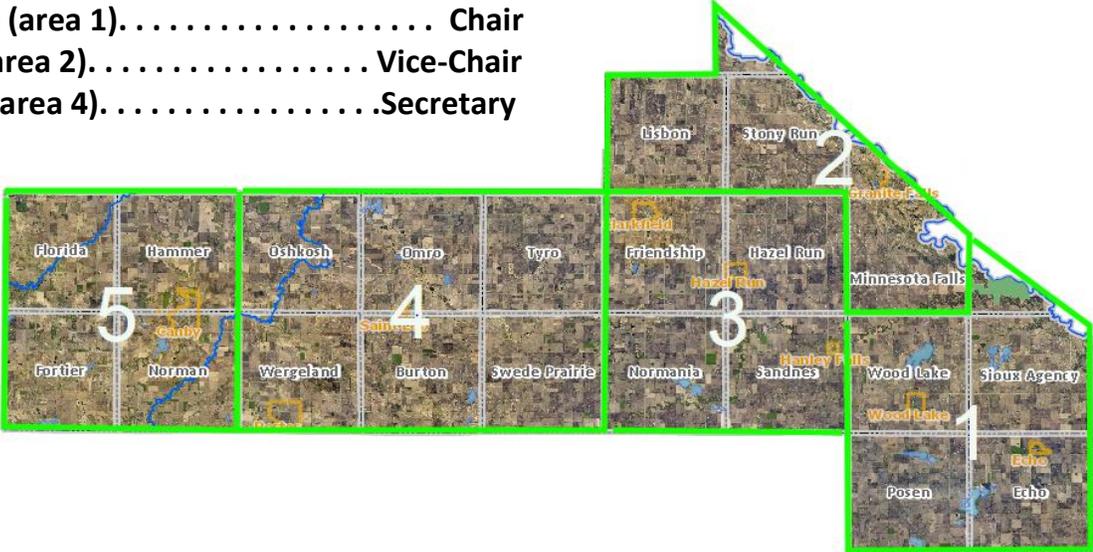
Office Administrator

Brayden Anderson

Conservation Technician

YM SWCD SUPERVISORS

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



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 the past 5 years, over 1.25 million dollars has been loaned in Yellow Medicine County, including nearly \$72,000 in 2021. Most of these funds have been used to replace Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS) and wells. Some of these low interest loans have also helped purchase farm equipment that will support AG best management practices supporting improved water quality.

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.

The program began in 2016 and has had a total of 177 certifications in Area 5 (Southwest Minnesota consisting of 11 SWCDs), including 17 in Yellow Medicine County.

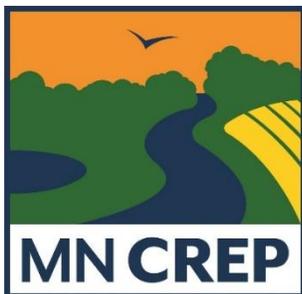
BROADCAST SEEDER PROGRAM: The broadcast seeder program began in 2017. The SWCD started the program to assist landowners in seeding conservation practices on their land. Landowners have seeded over 100 acres in Yellow Medicine County with the Broadcast seeder since the start of the program.

BUFFER IMPLEMENTATION: Minnesota Statute 103F.48 Implementation. In 2021, the SWCD finished the year with only 5 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: The SWCD has never been more active in the development of structural projects across the work area. The consistent working goal of staff is to continue to have more demand for projects than funding is readily available.

The SWCD also conducted over 40 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 1006.1 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 and 2021 didn't have any easements make it to the recording stage, due to landowners backing out or lower interest due to high crop prices. There are a few pieces of land expiring from CRP that landowners are looking to enroll into CREP in 2022 with the final round of funding.

EASEMENT DELIVERY: SWCD staff are responsible for conducting status reviews on CREP and/or RIM Easements: Staff conducted site inspections on 95 easements in 2021.

SOIL HEALTH

EVENTS:

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. The summer of 2021 finally allowed us to let that happen again. In August local landowners and producers were invited to Porter for a morning of short presentations on best management programs available, followed by a tillage equipment demonstration & walk-around, then a tasty lunch and panel discussion on nutrient management, economics, and soil health. The event was attended by nearly 40 landowners, producers, conservation & Ag partners.

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 2021, the SWCD planted 3,940 trees and sold an additional 3,345 trees to other local residents. 9,040 feet of fabric tree mat was also installed as well as 788 3' fabric squares. 723 protective 4' tree tubes were also sold.



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 2021, the SWCD spent nearly \$6,000 of WCA grant funds administering WCA guidelines thru review of tiling permits and other projects (see breakdown below):

- 52 1026's approved
- 11 1026's approved with restrictions
- 0 1026's denied
- 1 Drainage Maintenance request
- 0 COE/DNR maintenance requests
- 98 Building permits approved
- 0 Building permit approved with restrictions
- 1 On site investigations conducted
- 12 Contacts without decisions

In addition, reviewed 1 highway project and reviewed 1 basic application.

Staff spent 165 hours administering this program in 2021.

YELLOW MEDICINE SWCD PLAN OF WORK 2021:

- ✓ 152 projects completed by month beyond day-to-day work.
- ✓ 110 (72%) of those had a direct link to One Watershed One Plan outreach efforts in 2021.

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 4th 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): In 2021 we helped sponsor AIS awareness commercials featured on KARE11 and PBS’s Prairie Sportsman. 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 county’s waters, but also to waters our residents visit and to our area’s visitors.

On a local level, we were asked to be one of the sponsors of RockFest in Granite Falls. We were able to display a Clean, Drain, Dry banner at the highly attended outdoor event. Our cut out board carrying an AIS prevention message was displayed at this event as well as Granite Fall’s Squidfest and the Wood Lake Fair. The District also sponsored AIS awareness messages on KDMA radio.



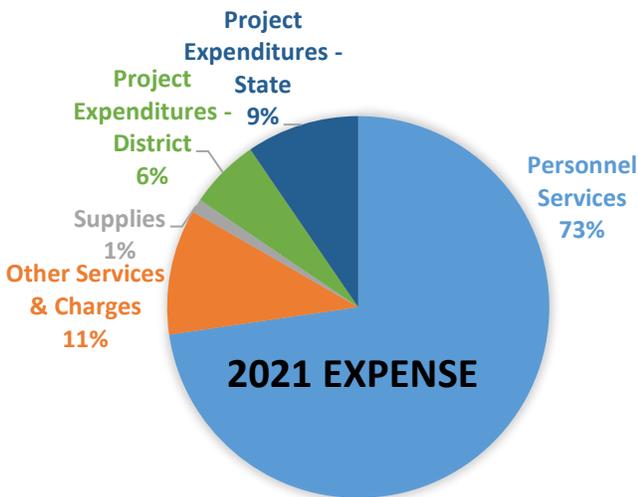
OUTREACH STATS for 2021:

- Media Outreach: Newspaper - 50k
- Radio - unknown-AIS message only
- Facebook -10,571 annually
- Website – 1-3 per day
- Email blast – 60 per month
- Personal contact – 1-6 per day

Approximately 100,000 people have seen or heard our message in 2021.
Assume 1% (1,000) were given an impression.
Assume 0.1% became actively engaged in SWCD work.
ESTIMATE of 100 people actively responded to SWCD outreach efforts in 2021.

FINANCIALS

The Yellow Medicine SWCD funds its day-to-day operations through a variety of funding sources. These sources include State grants (61%); County allocation funds (21%); 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 (8%). 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.



These charts depict the distribution of our 2021 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



**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 nine 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 (SWPTSA):

SWCD contributed \$3,545 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, partly in thanks to online meeting resources.

The District utilized SWPTSA technical services on several landowner projects associated with Yellow Medicine Watershed One Watershed One Plan Cost Share Grants.

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: Yellow Medicine County Commissioner Gary Johnson attended a few SWCD Board Meetings in 2021. He did so in the place of Commissioner Greg Renneke, the county’s appointed representative to sit in on SWCD meetings. 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. The link is located on the right side of the page.

COOPERATING AGENCIES

Board of Water & Soil Resources

John Jaschke	Executive Director
Jason Beckler	Board Conservationist

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Troy Daniell	State Conservationist
Kelly Heather	District Conservationist-Team Lead

Yellow Medicine County Commissioners

Ronald Antony	Canby
Gary Johnson	Montevideo
Greg Renneke	Echo
Glen Kack	Canby
John Berends	Granite Falls

Other Agencies

Trudy Hastad	Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed Administrator
Michelle Overholser	Yellow Medicine Watershed Administrator
Angie Stienbach	County Administrator
Jolene Johnson	Planning & Zoning Coordinator
Larry Thielen	FSA County Director
Chris Balfany	County Ditch Inspector
Wendy Kruger	DNR Area Wildlife Manager
Kyle Jarcho	DNR Area Hydrologist YM Watershed
Ryan Bjerke	DNR Area Hydrologist LQP Watershed
Alicia Webb	Yellow Medicine/Lyon 4-H Program Coordinator