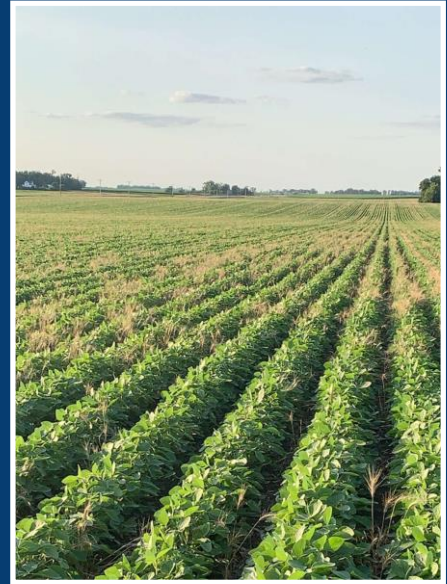




YELLOW MEDICINE
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2023 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.

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ABOUT US

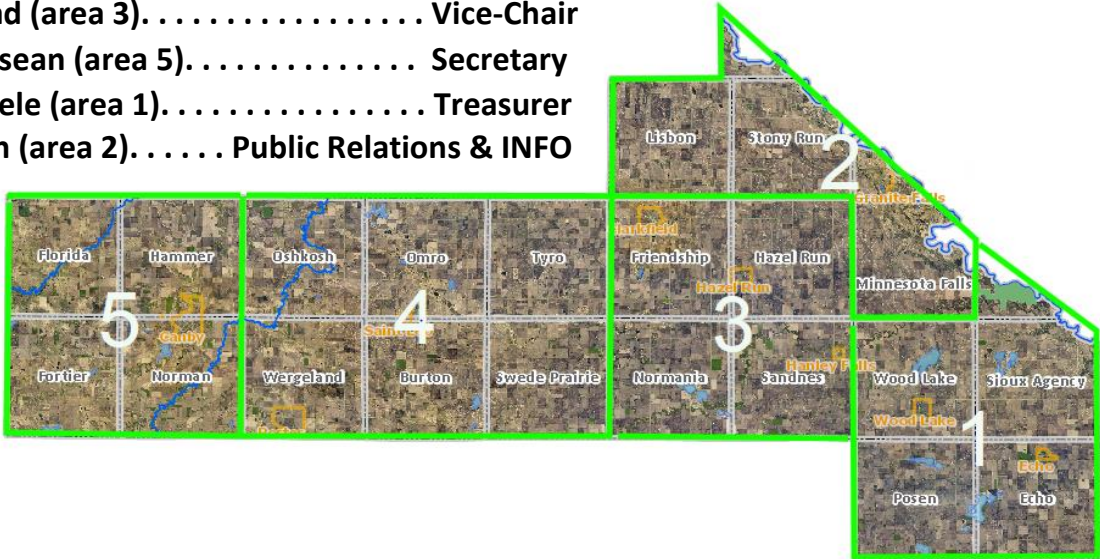
The Yellow Medicine Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) was duly organized as a governmental subdivision of this State, and a public body corporate and politic on the 17th day of April, 1950. The SWCD works with landowners in both rural and urban areas to conserve soil and water resources.

YELLOW MEDICINE SWCD STAFF

Tyler Knutson	Director
Anita Borg	Office Administrator
Brayden Anderson	Senior Conservation Technician

YM SWCD SUPERVISORS

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



NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) STAFF

Kelly Heather NRCS Customer Service Team Lead
Jeffrey Berens District Conservationist
Randy Kraus ACES Technician
Sara Reagan Soil Conservation Technician

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 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 borrower's credit worthiness and services the loan.

In the past 5 years, nearly 1.6 million dollars has been loaned in Yellow Medicine County, including over \$520,000 in 2023. While much of these funds have been used to replace Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS) and wells, several of these low interest loans have also helped purchase farm equipment that will support agricultural best management practices supporting improved water quality.

2023 loan distribution based on number of loans processed:

58% of loan contracts for SSTS and wells 42% for qualifying ag equipment

2023 loan distribution based on dollars distributed:

28% of loan dollars for SSTS and wells 72% for qualifying ag 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.

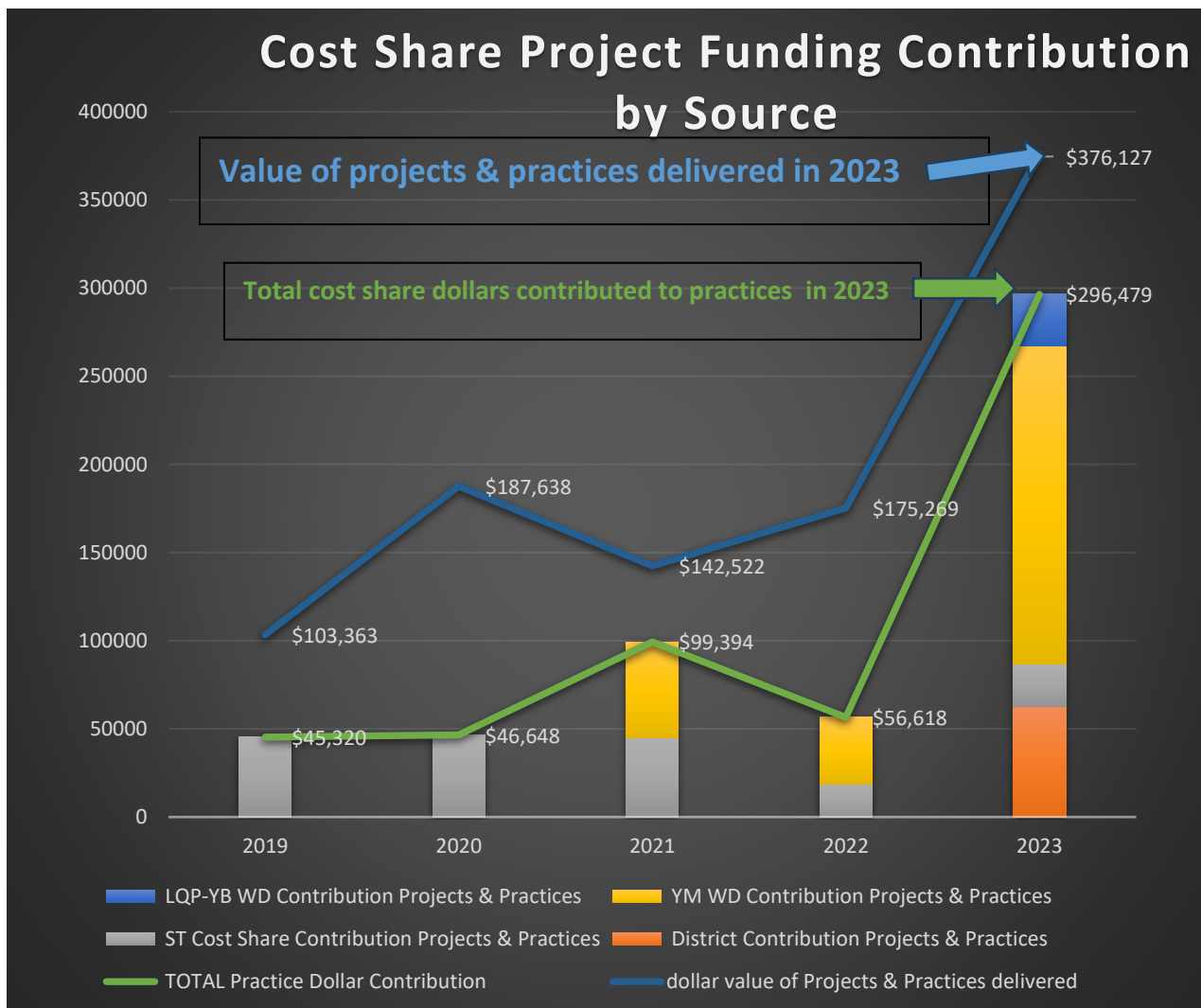
The program began in 2016 and has a total of 218 certifications in Area 5 (Southwest Minnesota consisting of 11 SWCDs), including 18 in Yellow Medicine County.

BUFFER IMPLEMENTATION: Minnesota Statute 103F.48 Implementation. In 2021, the SWCD finished the year with twelve 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.

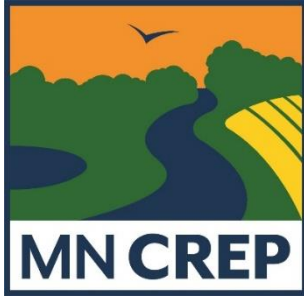


COST SHARE OPPORTUNITIES: The SWCD has never been more active in the development of structural and soil health practices across the work area. The consistent working goal of staff is to continue to have more demand for projects than funding is readily available. At the end of 2022, the SWCD Board appointed Brayden Anderson to the position of Senior Conservation Technician, responsible for all implementation activity with the SWCD work area.

In 2023, the Yellow Medicine SWCD staff helped put over \$375,000 in conservation practices on the land in Yellow Medicine County with cost share dollars. The Yellow Medicine SWCD provided technical and administrative support for these practices. 21 % of cost share dollars came from the local SWCD; 8% from State cost share dollars, 61% from the Yellow Medicine One Watershed One Plan funding and 10% from Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank One Watershed One Plan funding.



The SWCD also conducted 28 inspections on existing cost share projects and practices in Yellow Medicine, finding all 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 1102.92 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. 2022 brought 2 more easements for 67 acres. In 2023 30 more acres were added to a perpetual easement through CREP.

EASEMENT DELIVERY: SWCD staff are responsible for conducting status reviews on CREP and/or RIM Easements: Staff conducted site inspections on 72 easements in 2023.

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 2023, the SWCD planted and sold 6,800 trees to local residents. 8,100 feet of fabric tree mat was also installed as well as 329 3' fabric squares. 167 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 2,481 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 2023, the SWCD spent nearly \$4,800 of WCA grant funds administering WCA guidelines thru review of tiling permits and other projects (see breakdown below):

125	1026's approved
29	1026's approved with restrictions
0	1026's denied
0	Drainage Maintenance request
5	COE/DNR maintenance requests
100	Building permits approved
1	Building permit approved with restrictions
6	On site investigations conducted
0	Contacts without decisions

Staff spent over 100 hours administering this program in 2023.

EDUCATION & PROMOTION

AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species): 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.

In 2023 we helped sponsor AIS awareness commercials featured on PBS’s Prairie Sportsman and ads produced for MN Lakes and Rivers for television broadcast across the state. Through these networks the word of AIS prevention was spread not just through the county, but statewide.

On a local level, our AIS cut out board carrying the AIS prevention message visited several area events in 2023: WesternFest, RockFest, Squidfest in Granite Falls; Canby Hat Daze; the Wood Lake Fair; Hanley Falls Fire DEPT Street Dance; Yellow Medicine County Fair, and Clarkfield Prairie Cardinal Days. The District also provided AIS sponsorships on some of these events. The District sponsored AIS awareness messages on KDMA radio. In addition, a full page AIS prevention ad was featured in the Farm and Home Publishers Yellow Medicine County plat book.





ENVIRONMENTAL FAIR:

Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Southwest Minnesota finally had the opportunity to resume the Environmental Fair after the pandemic and its aftermath. The 2023 Fair took place September 26 & 27 at the Lyon County Fairgrounds in Marshall. Around 1700 5th & 6th grade students from 10 counties

attended in the two days, including approximately 70 students from Yellow Medicine County. The Environmental Fair is a learning event in the “outdoor classroom”, giving students an opportunity 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 accomodate a large number of students.

OUTREACH STATS for 2023:

Media Outreach:

Newspaper - 50k annually

Radio - unknown-AIS message only

Facebook -10,000 annually

Website – 1-3 per day

Email blast – 60 per month

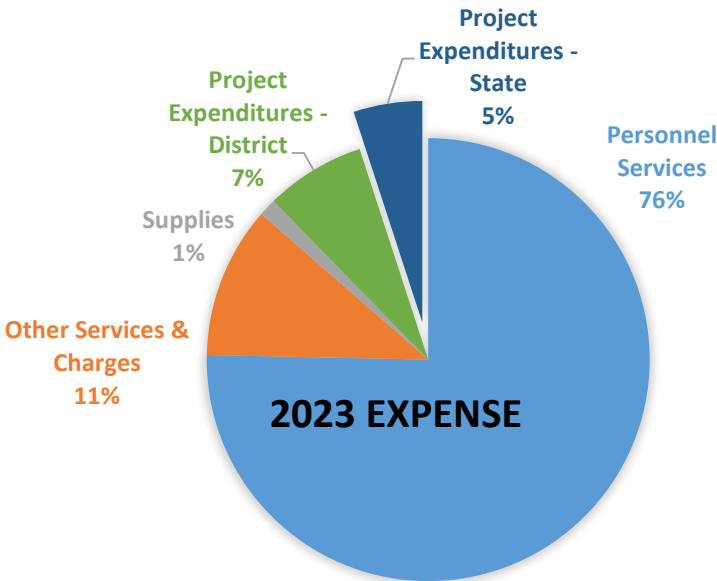
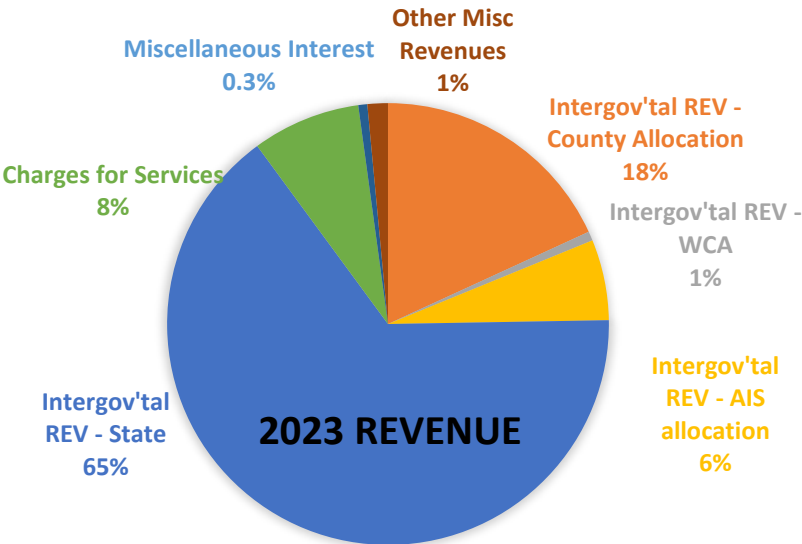
Personal contact – 1-6 per day

Visits to Ag Coops –2 visits during
the year



FINANCIALS

The Yellow Medicine SWCD funds its day-to-day operations through a variety of funding sources. These sources include State grants (65%); County allocation funds (18%); 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 2023 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: The Yellow Medicine River 1W1P saw its third full year of implementation including the use of several million dollars in state and federal funding to implement priority projects in priority geographies. 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). In 2023, the final draft of the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Plan was completed and implementation started.

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 \$3,365 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.

The District utilized SWPTSA technical services on several landowner projects associated with Yellow Medicine Watershed and Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank 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: Mitch Kling is the County’s Commissioner representative appointed 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	NRCS Customer Service Team Lead

Yellow Medicine County Commissioners

Ronald Antony	Canby
Mitch Kling	Granite Falls
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