



Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District

News & Notes

This newsletter also available at www.dakotacountyswcd.org Volume 26, Number 2 Fall, 2007

Ray & Ken Taylor Families Receive 2007 Outstanding Conservationist Award

Congratulations to the Taylor families! Due to their significant contributions in the protection and environmentally sound management of our natural resources, the Dakota County SWCD selected the Ray and Ken Taylor families as the Dakota County Outstanding Conservationists for 2007.

Ray and Mary Taylor, along with Ken and Kim Taylor and their children, grow corn, soybeans, and hay, and raise hogs in Sciota Township. The Taylors were the first landowners in Minnesota to permanently protect their farmland through the USDA Farmland and Ranchland Protection Program and Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas Protection Program. The Taylors permanently protected 308 acres from development and mining through these programs and established over 65 acres of native prairie and wooded buffers along the Cannon River and its tributaries to protect water quality and improve wildlife habitat. Additionally, with the



assistance from the SWCD, the Taylors have worked to eliminate all erosion on their farm by installing grassed waterways and using no-till and minimum-till residue management on cropped acres. Further, all of the hog manure produced on their farm is applied according to a manure management plan and knife-injected to reduce odor.

The Taylors are eligible to compete for the Minnesota Outstanding Conservationist of the Year Award, which will be announced at the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's annual convention held December 2-4, 2007 in Rochester. A luncheon will be held at the convention to honor the Taylors and the other Outstanding Conservationist from around the state.

The Dakota County SWCD commends the Taylors for their contributions towards protecting Dakota County's soil and water resources.

Start Thinking Spring! 2008 *Tree Program Order Forms Available Soon*

The Dakota County SWCD will start taking orders for its 2008 tree and shrub program in a few weeks. An order form with information on our wide selection of native trees and shrubs will be located on our website at www.dakotacountyswcd.org. You may also call 651-480-7777 to request a form by mail or fax.

Each year, the SWCD distributes thousands of bare root seedlings for use in windbreaks, urban and rural conservation projects, wildlife food and habitat areas, and improved aesthetics. Orders will be taken until around April 1, 2008, however many species

sell out so it is best to make your planting plans early! Trees and shrubs come in bundles of twenty-five and sell for \$30 a bundle.

Full payments by check or cash must accompany each completed order form. Delivery of purchased trees and shrubs is tentatively scheduled for late April, 2008 at the Dakota County fairgrounds in Farmington.

Various tree-planting products are also available from the SWCD. These products include Tubex™ tree shelters, Vispore™ tree mats, Right Start™ fertilizer packets, and marker flags.

News & Notes

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The Dakota SWCD Board of Supervisors meets on the first Thursday of every month. All meeting times subject to change. Changes of address or subscription inquiries, call 651-480-7777.

All programs and services of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, or handicap.

Supervisor Profile: Kevin Chamberlain

The Dakota County SWCD staff would like to introduce you to our Board of Supervisors through a Supervisor profile each spring and fall. For this inaugural article, we chose the Board Chair, Kevin Chamberlain.

The SWCD is governed by a Board of Supervisors — officials elected County-wide during the general election in November. The current Chair of our Board is Kevin Chamberlain, a dairy farmer from Nininger Township. He represents District 3, which includes the cities of Vermillion and Hastings and Marshan, Nininger, Ravenna, and Vermillion Townships.

Kevin has served on the SWCD Board for a total of nearly sixteen years: from 1991–2002 and again from 2004 to the present. During that time, he has served in various capacities including Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and Chair. Kevin also chairs the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission and the Dakota County Dairy Association Board. Plus he is involved in many other community activities through his church and other groups in the Hastings area.

The 265 acre dairy farm Kevin owns and operates has been in his family for five generations and was homesteaded by his great-great-grandfather in 1853. On this Century Farm Kevin raises corn, barley, and alfalfa to feed his dairy herd of one hundred cows. His product is 100% certified organic which qualifies for the specialized organic market. Many of the conservation practices that are used throughout Kevin's farming operation today were initiated over fifty years ago by his father, Harold. Harold's conservation efforts gained him the Conservation Cooperator of the Year award in 1977. Harold is also credited with starting the family tradition of serving on the SWCD Board. He was one of the first Board supervisors at the SWCD's inception in 1944. He served as Secretary of the Board for over thirty-five years!

SWCD staff is grateful for Kevin's thoughtful and experienced guidance as Chair and thank him for his service!



Wetland Assessment Nears Completion

The SWCD is nearing completion of a two-year project aimed at inventorying and assessing the condition of wetlands and streams in the Vermillion and Cannon River Watersheds. The project was funded through the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, North Cannon Watershed Management Organization, and the Metropolitan Council. The Vermillion River Watershed was completed in March and the Cannon River Watershed will be finished by the end of the year.

Existing electronic data in the Geographic Information System (GIS) are out-of-date or unsystematic and cannot help us adequately evaluate the exact location of all our surface waters and the buffers or filter strips that may already exist to protect them. An important function of this project is to create a new water GIS map and database for Dakota County that includes all the small and intermittent tributaries and wetlands as well as the larger streams and waterbodies. These data can then be continuously updated as projects and fieldwork occur over time. Ultimately, water quality data from specific watersheds will be integrated with the completed assessment in order to anticipate and prioritize future protection efforts.

Do You Have a Blue Thumb?

Blue Thumb — Planting for Clean Water™ makes it easy for residents to plan, purchase, design, and plant native gardens, raingardens and native shorelines.

The Dakota County SWCD is part of a broad coalition of forty watershed districts, conservation districts, nurseries, nonprofits and garden clubs that make up the Blue Thumb program. Created by the Rice Creek Watershed District, Blue Thumb helps residents exercise their green thumb to help clean up Minnesota's water by planting raingardens (see separate article) and native plants and stabilizing shorelines.

How does Blue Thumb make it easy? The web site (www.bluethumb.org) contains a map of local native plant nurseries, an easy-to-use plant selector tool, links to local cost share programs and a list of Blue Thumb courses and events. Watch this fall for dates and locations of several Blue Thumb workshops around Dakota County.

Last spring over one hundred and forty Dakota County residents attended Blue Thumb workshops to learn about the pollution reducing effects of native

gardens, raingardens, and stable shorelines, and to review dozens of beautiful designs. Their interest being piqued, fifty people decided to attend a second, more detailed workshop. In this "design course," participants worked with landscape architects and created specific

designs for their yards. Through these workshops and courses, thirty-six new raingardens and seven new native gardens were created in communities like Lakeville, Apple Valley, and Eagan.

Because these landscape features help lessen the harmful affects of storm water runoff, the SWCD will provide cost share assistance for most of these projects through their Community Cost Share Program.

If you are interested in receiving a list of upcoming Blue Thumb workshops or would like more information about the Blue Thumb program, please contact our office at 651-480-7777 or visit www.dakotacountyswcd.org or www.bluethumb.org for more information.



What Are Raingardens?

Raingardens are simply depressed gardens that soak up rainwater in your yard. They are typically planted with flowers and other plants that can tolerate partial and occasional flooding and they provide beautiful landscaping and wildlife habitat. Their most important benefit, however, is to our lakes, streams, and wetlands. By soaking up rain where it falls, they slow stormwater runoff, help prevent erosion, and remove pollutants in the process!

The City of Burnsville wanted to see these benefits for themselves. So, with funding assistance from the Metropolitan Council, they installed seventeen raingardens in a neighborhood tributary to Crystal Lake. These raingardens now trap stormwater and all its nutrients, sediment, and other pollutants, that would otherwise flow directly into lake. In addition, these raingardens have been monitored for their effectiveness since 2004 and the results are astounding! A 0.71-inch storm event in 2004 resulted in 35,000 gallons of stormwater flowing into Crystal Lake from a traditional neighborhood nearby, while only 994

gallons of stormwater flowed from the raingarden neighborhood. Over two years of monitoring showed that on average, the raingardens reduced runoff and pollution by ninety percent. That's hundreds of thousands of gallons of stormwater per year that now percolates into the ground rather than flowing into Crystal Lake!

The Dakota County SWCD envisions thousands of raingardens throughout the County reducing stormwater pollutants, enhancing wildlife habitat and enriching our urban landscapes. Through the

Blue Thumb- Planting for Clean Water Program (see separate article) and our Community Cost Share program, we make it easy for residents to plan and install raingardens.

If you are interested in receiving a list of upcoming Blue Thumb workshops or would like more information about the Blue Thumb program or raingardens, please contact our office at 651-480-7777 or visit www.dakotacountyswcd.org or www.bluethumb.org for more information.



Wood Pond Shoreline Gets a Makeover

Wood Park in Burnsville is a thirty-one acre neighborhood park with play equipment, trails, ball fields, and the added amenity of Wood Pond. Unfortunately, at two separate locations along the north shoreline of Wood Pond, the banks were unstable and badly eroded. In addition, the lower banks along the water's edge were being undercut by wave erosion. Gullies and head cuts had formed on the banks due to runoff from the park above the pond. The erosion at both sites were accelerated by foot traffic, causing the soil to become compacted and eliminating the vegetation.



The Dakota County SWCD designed a solution for the pond and provided the City with cost share funding for the project. A combination of cedar tree revetments,

erosion control blankets, and aquatic and terrestrial native plantings were installed in order to stabilize and restore the shoreline. A key component of the project design was to successfully route the runoff from the park and stabilize the outlets so the restoration plantings along the banks could become established.

The benefits of this project, and other projects like it, include improved water quality through sediment reduction which, in turn, improves fish and wildlife habitat and aesthetics. Habitat and aesthetics are also increased through the native plantings. Additionally, this



site is highly visible, making it the perfect place for demonstrating shoreline stabilization techniques to the public and raising awareness about water quality issues.

Construction Site Erosion Control Training

Stormwater runoff from construction sites often carries up to a hundred and fifty times more sediment than runoff from natural areas. As part of its continuing efforts to reduce the negative impacts of construction site runoff, the Dakota County SWCD hosted its unique and acclaimed Erosion and Sediment Control Field Demonstration Seminar on July 17 and August 22. Almost two hundred contractors, developers, and regulatory inspectors attended the seminar where installation techniques for best management practices were demonstrated in the field. The seminar also reviewed and demonstrated situations that commonly increase sediment loading to water



resources in high-density residential construction sites.

SWCD staff has been told that this seminar is the "best training of its kind in the country." It's hard to quantify the improvements in appropriate construction site practices due to knowledge gained in this seminar but it's likely making a big impact for our water resources! Staff is looking for funding to continue this seminar in years to come.

This year, the course was organized by the Dakota County SWCD and the Washington Conservation District in coordination with the University of Minnesota, Centex Homes, Westwood Engineering and more than fifteen contractors and product suppliers.

Bringing Fifth Graders Outdoors

Water, wildlife, soils, agriculture, and nutrient cycling — over eight hundred fifth graders gained a greater understanding of these topics through the seventh annual Outdoor Education Days in September.



The Dakota County SWCD hosts this event every fall on the Dakota County Fairgrounds with help from partnering organizations. Students get hands-on, interactive

learning through four or five stations scattered throughout the restored prairie on the Fairgrounds. The stations get the kids thinking about different aspects of our natural environment and their effects on soil and water resources. Students had the opportunity to pour different types of pollution into a makeshift pond, distinguish different soil textures by feel, identify ducks common to Minnesota, and learn about types of crops and livestock produced in Dakota County. With one day being unfortunately rained out this year, six schools participated, with students and teachers coming from Farmington, Lakeville, and Apple Valley.

Many partners come together to help the SWCD with these education days each year, including the University of Minnesota Extension Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Cannon River Watershed Partnership, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The event is sponsored by the Dakota County SWCD, the Dakota Ringnecks Chapter of Pheasants Forever, and the Minnesota Milk Producers Association.

Weather Monitoring Improves Understanding of Water Quality



Weather plays a critical role in the quality of our surface waters! Rain and melting snow wash pollutants off the land and into our waters, water temperatures are often directly related to air temperatures, and wind can churn up waters, re-suspending sediments and nutrients in large bodies of water. For these reasons, improved weather monitoring was one recommendation of the Vermillion River Monitoring Summit, an event which convened dozens of water quality experts at the SWCD office last November.

This August, the SWCD and the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, in partnership with the Metropolitan Council, installed a weather station on Met Council property in Empire Township. Air temperature, wind speed and direction, rainfall and intensity, and snowfall are recorded every fifteen minutes and sent, via satellite, to computers at the SWCD office for use in watershed analyses.

Dakota County SWCD Receives National Award

The Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) received the District Excellence Award from the National Association of Conservation Districts for outstanding achievements in urban and community conservation. The award was presented on February 7, 2007 at the National Convention of Soil and Water Conservation Districts held in Los Angeles, California.



NACD President Bill Wilson, presenting the District Excellence Award to the Dakota SWCD Manager Brian Watson

The Dakota SWCD began its urban conservation program in 1997 in response to expanding urban areas and their potential impacts to soil and water resources. It was one of the first SWCDs in the Minnesota to begin such a program. The Dakota SWCD provides a wide array of services to urban residents, including urban erosion and sedimentation control, community conservation cost share, low impact development and conservation design assistance, and

backyard conservation.

In addition to implementing projects on the ground, the SWCD is recognized as a national leader among conservation districts for researching and demonstrating how integrated management practices, or small-scale stormwater controls distributed throughout the site, can improve downstream water quality in an urban environment. These research and demonstration projects often lead to the implementation of

stronger local ordinances for managing stormwater.

The SWCD is honored to be recognized in this way. Board Chairman Kevin Chamberlain adds, "We have worked with many visionary and committed partners to provide technical, financial and educational opportunities to all land use types within Dakota County for the improvement of water quality."

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- ❖ Dakota SWCD Receives National Award
- ❖ Tree Program
- ❖ 2007 Outstanding Conservationist Award

An Inside Glance...

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