

2016 Annual Report

Big Stone Soil & Water Conservation District

A Soil and Water Conservation District is a legal subdivision of the State governed by a five member Board, elected by the public. They provide local leadership & direction for applying conservation practices to the land.

This annual report is presented by the following board members and office personnel for the Big Stone SWCD:

Board of Supervisors

Board of Supervisors meetings are the first Tuesday of the month at 3:00 p.m.

Area I	Dan Morrill, Finance Committee	Toqua, Graceville, Moonshine Twps
Area II	Thomas Holker, Member	Browns Valley, Foster, Prior Twps
Area II	Mike Jorgenson, Vice Chairman & Personnel Committee	Malta, Almond, Otrey Twps
Area IV	Holly Wellendorf, Chairman & Personnel Committee	Ortonville, Big Stone Twps
Area V	Lon Moen, Treasurer & Finance Committee	Odessa, Akron, Artichoke Twps

Staff

Blayne Johnson - District Technician	Beau Peterson - Farmbill Technician
Tammy Neubauer - District Administrative Assistant	

Cooperating Agencies

USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Krecia Leddy - District Conservationist	Gary Hoffman - Soil Conservation Technician
Jason Weller - State Conservationist	Mark Kulig - Asst. State Conservationist

UPPER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Dianne Radermacher - Administrator

BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES (BWSR)

John Jaschke - Executive Director	Jason Beckler - Board Conservationist
Kane Radel - BWSR WCA Representative	LeAnn Buck - MASWCD Executive Director

BIG STONE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICE

Darren Wilke - Environmental Office/Local Government Unit

BIG STONE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Wade Athey	Brent Olson	Jay Backer
Roger Sandberg	Joseph Berning	

Services Provided by the District:

- Tree planning, planting, and fabric installation
- Tree tubes and Plantskydd are sold and installed for animal control upon request
- Technical and financial assistance through state cost-share for installation of conservation practices
- Promote conservation educational activities through information contests and displays
- Administer State Conservation Programs such as RIM, State Cost-Share, etc.
- Serve on the TEP for the Wetlands Conservation Act of 1991
- Provide landowners access to a no-till drill, rotary mower and spraying services as needed.
- Provide grass seed for various seeding projects
- Administer the county well-sealing program with appropriate funds as they become available
- Assist walk-ins and customers – provide information or direct to a contact person
- Enter Cost-Share information into eLINK program for resource management for BWSR
- Assist NRCS with filing, sorting mail, bulletins, and correspondence.
- Assist NRCS with Farm Bill implementation of CRP, EQIP, WRP
- Administer the Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) grant for noxious weeds

Education Activities

- Beautiful Farmstead Award – recipients for 2016 are Todd & Bonnie Dybdahl of rural Clinton.
- Conservationists Award – recipients for 2016 are Ron & Tammy Schumacher of rural Ortonville.
- Conservation Camp Scholarship – no applicants in 2016
- Poster/Mural Contest – None of the eligible schools participated in 2016
- Arbor Day – Each 4th grade student in Ortonville and Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley schools in Big Stone County received a bare root tree to plant in recognition of Arbor Day.
- Environmental Fair – since Big Stone is no longer in the MASWCD Area V, no schools participated.
- Newsletters – one newsletter was developed in partnership with NRCS
- The annual report was distributed to essential partners.
- Newsletter information page is available on the District website @ www.bigstoneswcd.org.
- Envirothon –no one participated from the local schools.
- Big Stone County Fair – A conservation booth was periodically staffed during the 3 day fair.
- Ortonville Sports & Leisure Show – A conservation booth was periodically staffed during the 2 day fair.
- District participated in 9 radio programs.
- Maintained District website and kept updated records and information on the website as required by BWSR.
- Submitted 3 Weed-of-the-Week articles to local newspapers
- District presented educational information to 6th grade students at the Bonanza Education Center.
- District Technician submitted 14 articles and the Farm Bill Technician submitted 8 articles to newspapers.

Program Activities

- **Abandoned Well Sealing** – Big Stone County Water Plan provided \$2,000 for cost-share funding for sealing abandoned wells in 2016. Well sealing was considered a priority for State Cost Share in 2016.
- **DNR Observation Wells** – The SWCD monitors 5 wells monthly for 9 months. Readings are entered on the DNR Observation Wells website, and annually receives \$60.00 per reading per well.
- **Rainfall Monitoring** – Five sites in Big Stone County volunteered to monitor precipitation. The SWCD monitors one rain gauge at the Ortonville field office. We are always looking for more monitor volunteers.
- **Tree Plantings** – District sold 2,901 trees to private landowners. The District planted 318 trees in 3 EQIP projects, 176 trees in 1 Pheasants Forever cost share funded project, and 3,489 trees planted in 7 CRP contract projects. Sixteen plantings had weed barrier fabric applied. The total amount of fabric applied was 33,737 feet or 6.4 miles. 395 tree tubes were sold for these practices for animal control.

- **Grass Drill Seedings** – 325.6 acres of grass seed were sold to 35 landowners; 464.8 acres were planted by the District’s drill and operator on 39 sites. 477.5 acres of cover crop seed were sold to 6 landowners, of which 341.2 acres were planted by the District on 3 sites. The District seeded 7 sites in-between tree rows and sold seed to 2 other tree row projects.
- **Rotary Mower Services** – The District provided mowing services on 45 acres for 7 parcels.
- **Spraying** – The District provided weed spraying for 10 landowners on 90 acres. Twenty one hours were also spent spraying volunteer trees for Akron Township in the road right-of-way ditches.
- **State Cost-Share Practices** – One shoreline protection project was completed with 2015 and 2016 state cost share assistance totaling \$6,857.00. Three wells were decommissioned at 50% assistance totaling \$735.00.
- **Site Inspections for Cost Share Practices** – 17 farmstead shelterbelts were inspected per requirements of the cost share contracts.
- **Easement Inspection** - The District site checked 20 RIM and/or CREP easement parcels.
- **WCA** – Although most WCA contacts do not initiate official project applications, mitigation plans, cease & desist orders or other official forms, activity involving the Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Act (WCA) remains steady in Big Stone County. The District Technician remains on the TEP committee. The District Technician is also a Certified In-Training Wetland Delineator by the WDCP of MN.
- **CWMA** – see agency coordination below.
- **Native Prairie Bank** - The Farm Bill Technician continued protection discussion with 18 landowners with Native Prairie. DNR reviewed 7 more sites for future protection. Paperwork between landowners and the DNR are ongoing for 1 easement including 2 easement offers in Big Stone County.
- **Walk In Access Program** – The District promoted the Walk In Access program with no interest.
- **Working Lands Initiative** – see agency coordination below.
- **ReInvest in Minnesota (RIM)** –There was no RIM signup for 2016. There is a growing list of potential CREP sites to be ready for 2017 CREP 3.
- **Wetland Bank Program** – no signup in 2016.
- **Farm Bill Assistance Grant** – Farm Bill Technician assists with the implementation of CRP. Sign Up 48 produced 42 new contracts for 310 acres, and renewed 53 contracts on 424 acres. CRP was promoted with radio and newspaper articles. Twenty four contracts were modified in 2016. Programs were applied on the following:

<u>Contracts</u>	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Acres</u>
4	CP5A	8
7	CP16A	4
34	CP21	192
2	CP22	6
12	CP23A	125
26	CP27/28	306
6	CP37	78
1	CP38E	10
3	CP42	5

Agency Coordination

The District office is involved with several multi-agency groups that meet accordingly. These include:

- **Moonshine Lake Project** – coordinated by Bois de Sioux Watershed District. *currently inactive*
- **Pomme de Terre River Association** –The District attends monthly meetings as part of the TAC.
- **Bois de Sioux Watershed** - The District meets quarterly as part of the TAC.
- **Working Lands Initiative (WLI)** – The District promoted the WLI through radio, landowner discussion and letters. Two tree removals, 6 prescribed burns, and 4 easement inter-seedings were completed in the spring of 2016 through 2015 funds impacting 137 acres. Monetary total of these projects equaled \$28,961.61 to which the District received \$707.84 in administrative money from this total. 2016 paperwork has been completed on 2 more tree removals, 7 prescribed burns, and 1 easement inter-seeding to be completed in 2017, affecting 254 acres of prairie.
- **County Local Water Management Plan** – The District is involved with the CLWM committee and was allocated \$2,000 to be spend by 12/31/17.
- **EQIP/NRCS** – District is involved with the coordination of the Public Local Workgroup meeting.
- **Farm Bill Technician** - Big Stone SWCD and NRCS partnered with BWSR to maintain funding for a fulltime technician for Big Stone County through a Farmbill Assistance Grant.
- **Big Stone County Pheasants Forever Chapter** – The District Technician and Farmbill Technician worked at the Annual PF Banquet, providing a report during the dinner. The District technical staff coordinated 2015 approved projects in the spring of 2016 including 2 tree plantings, 2 prescribed burns, and 4 prairie seedings on 270 acres. Monetary total of these projects equaled \$9,325. Staff also built a list of several projects for the Chapter of landowners requesting help with habitat enhancements in 2017.
- **CWMA (Cooperative Weed Management Area)** – Big Stone SWCD participated with other agencies to receive a grant of \$15,000 for education and weed eradication in Big Stone County beginning in 2010. The CWMA joined with Traverse County to form the Big Stone/Traverse Counties Cooperative Weed Management Area and received a grant for \$20,000 for 2012-2014. The District administers and tracks all aspects of this grant accordingly. Progress, results and expenditures of this program are recorded by the District in eLINK. The District submitted a grant proposal and was awarded another grant of \$15,000 in 2016 to continue the enhanced work being accomplished.
- The District is a part of the **Area II Technical Service Area (TSA)**.

Additional Funding Opportunities

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) allocated \$1,771,023 with 34 contracts funded.

Big Stone County funded 11 CStP contracts for \$264,043 contract dollars on 10,326 acres. The County has 28 active CSP contracts on 20,389.8 acres.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) can provide additional funding for BMP applications such as grass waterways, buffers, and tree establishments. The Farmbill Technician wrote 95 contracts on 734 acres in 2016. The CRP was promoted with radio and newspaper articles.

The NRCS received one application for the Wetland Restoration Easement program (WRE).

2016 Local Capacity Funding:

-The District utilized these funds in various ways that improved our ability to better operate and provide essential services to our area. \$4,890 was awarded to an eroding shoreline project on Big Stone Lake. \$7,231 was awarded to an eroding stream bank project that directly outlets into Big Stone Lake. \$21,828 was spent on a new 2017 GMC pick-up. \$2,149 was spent to trade in and update the District's JD Gator. \$21,105 was awarded towards 4 ag BMPs with 2 completed and paid out in the fall of 2016 totaling \$10,077. The other 2 projects are set to be completed in the spring of 2017. \$8,339 was spent on other small items of valuable use. The remaining funds continue to receive discussions as to how best our District plans to utilize them with a large portion being set aside to help fund other agricultural and shoreline projects. A total of \$120,337 was allocated to the District in 2016.

2016 Buffer Law Implementation:

-The District sent a letter throughout the entire county regarding updated information about the Buffer Law which brought in additional interest for CRP Sign-up 50. Several landowners requested the SWCD to review their land for compliance. Sites were measured, flagged and gps'd per request by each landowner.

2016 Clean Water Fund Grant Application:

-The District Technician submitted a Clean Water Fund Grant application in 2016 that targeted the Stony Run Watershed area for erosion improvement practices, but was unsuccessful in receiving the competitive grant funds. The application included 31 water and sediment basins involving 11 landowners on 7 separate sites totaling \$317,550.00. Several of the involved landowners also applied for EQIP to provide financial compensation with their erosion projects. If successfully funded, the SWCD plans to provide additional financial assistance to those applicants through the District's Local Capacity funding pool.

2016 NAWCA – North American Wetland Conservation Act grant:

-The District received a NAWCA grant in 2015 to implement wetland enhancement projects on protected lands for the 2016 spring season. 2 CREP project locations were funded for invasive tree removal on all easement acres followed by a prescribed burn to allow native vegetation to thrive. Total funds awarded to those projects totaled \$22,264.00 and improved 184.50 acres of grassland/wetland acres protected by a perpetual easement.