

# 2020 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, Vice Chairman & Personnel Committee	Toqua, Graceville, Moonshine Twps
Area II	Thomas Holker, Member	Browns Valley, Foster, Prior Twps
Area II	Mike Jorgenson, Chairman & Personnel Committee	Malta, Almond, Otrej Twps
Area IV	Ronald Reisdorph, Finance Committee	Ortonville, Big Stone Twps
Area V	Lon Moen, Treasurer & Finance Committee	Odessa, Akron, Artichoke Twps

### Staff

Joseph Otto – Program Technician

Isaac Johnson – District Technician

Tammy Neubauer – District Manager

### Cooperating Agencies

#### USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Gary Hoffman - Soil Conservation Technician

Burton Hendrickson – District Conservationist

Troy Daniell – State Conservationist

Jennifer Sweeney - Asst. State Conservationist

Jonathan Matz – Assistant State Conservationist Field Operations

#### UPPER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Amber Doschadis – Administrator

#### BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES (BWSR)

John Jaschke - Executive Director

Jason Beckler - Board Conservationist

Lynda Ponting - BWSR WCA Representative

#### MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (MASWCD)

LeAnn Buck - MASWCD Executive Director

#### BIG STONE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICE

Darren Wilke - Environmental Officer

Ronda Maas – Deputy Environmental Officer

Danny Tuckett – Environmental Technician

#### BIG STONE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Wade Athey

Brent Olson

Jay Backer

Roger Sandberg

Erick Klepel

## **BIG STONE SWCD MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Big Stone Soil and Water Conservation District is to educate policy makers and citizens on environmental conservation issues impacting Big Stone County. This will be accomplished through providing land management services, technical guidance, and financial assistance to landowners who are implementing conservation practices on their lands that will achieve: soil health improvement, water quality improvement, shoreline protection, storm water runoff reduction & retention, water and wind erosion reduction, and groundwater protection.

### **Services Provided by the District:**

- Tree planning, planting, and fabric installation
- Tree tubes and installation available, and Plantskydd were sold for animal control
- Technical and financial assistance through state cost-share for installation of conservation practices
- Promoted conservation educational activities through information contests and displays
- Administered State Conservation Programs such as RIM, Erosion Control & Water Management Program, Buffer Implementation, Buffer Cost Share, Soil Health, etc.
- Served on the TEP for the Wetlands Conservation Act of 1991
- Provided no-till drill, rotary mower, and spraying services as requested.
- Provided grass seed for various seeding projects
- Administered the county well-sealing program with appropriate funds as they became available
- Assisted walk-ins and customers – provided information or directed to a contact person
- Entered State Grant information into the eLINK program for resource management for BWSR
- Assisted NRCS with filing, sorting mail, bulletins, and correspondence.
- Assisted NRCS with Farm Bill implementation of CRP, EQIP, WRE
- Educated and Assisted landowners with noxious weed control

### **Education Activities**

- Beautiful Farmstead Award – due to the uncertain times with the pandemic, no recipients were chosen for 2020.
- Conservationists Award – due to the uncertain times with the pandemic, no recipients were chosen for 2020.
- Arbor Day – Each 4<sup>th</sup> grade student in Ortonville and Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley schools in Big Stone County receive a bare root tree to plant in recognition of Arbor Day. Due to the pandemic and school closures, no trees were able to be delivered to the schools.
- The annual report was distributed to essential partners.
- Newsletter information page is available on the District website @ [www.bigstoneswcd.org](http://www.bigstoneswcd.org).
- Envirothon –no one participated from the local schools.
- Big Stone County Fair – A conservation booth is generally staffed during the 3 day fair. The fair was cancelled in 2020, due to the pandemic.
- Ortonville Sports & Leisure Show – A conservation booth is usually fully staffed during the 2 day event. The show was cancelled in 2020, due to the pandemic.
- Maintained District website and kept updated records and information on the website as required by BWSR.
- District staff regularly submitted articles to the local newspapers about conservation opportunities.

## Program Activities

- **DNR Observation Wells** – The SWCD monitors 5 wells monthly for 8 months. Readings are entered on the DNR Observation Wells website, and annually receives compensation of \$60.00 per reading per well.
- **Rainfall Monitoring** – Four 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.
- **Water Testing Kits** – Test kits are available at the office through RMB labs.
- **Tree Plantings** – the District had 30 orders from private landowners which compiled to 1,048 trees sold. Staff planted 794 trees for contracts with 8 landowners. 9,829 feet of fabric was installed on the 8 sites.
- **Grass Drill Seedings** – The District seeded 758.0 acres for private landowners on 33 separate parcels. 9 additional seed orders were placed by landowners for approximately 8 acres.
- **Buffer Law** – District attended meetings and trainings regarding implementation of law, used BWSR tracking software to track compliance, and made several site visits with and without landowners.
- **Buffer Cost Share** – District provided cost share to landowners to install buffers as required by State Statute. See numbers below.
- **Rotary Mower Services** – The District provided mowing services on 425.17 acres on 11 parcels. 9 contracts were for CRP maintenance and 2 contracts were for tree and shrub control.
- **Spraying** – The surveyed 337.85 acres for spraying. 324.85 acres were surveyed for weeds and 13 acres for trees and shrub issues. 7 landowners had weed issues – 46.24 acres were treated. One landowner had a tree and shrub issue – 9.58 acres were treated. In total, 55.82 acres were sprayed for 8 landowners.
- **State Cost-Share Practices** – see Grants Administration
- **Site Inspections for Cost Share Practices** – 4 farmstead shelterbelts were inspected, and conditions documented per requirements of the cost share contracts.
- **Easement Inspection** - The District site checked 12 RIM and/or CREP easement parcels.
- **WCA** – The District serves on the TEP for the WCA administered by the Big Stone County Environmental Office. Activities in 2020 included monitoring active banking site establishments, reviewing new drainage applications, and attending training sessions. Violations were reviewed but are managed by the Big Stone County Environmental Office.
- **Control Crop Consulting Partnership** – The District continued the partnership with Control Crop Consulting to provide technical expertise to landowners involved in District cost-share programs for cover crops and other vegetative practices.
- **MAWQCP** - The District worked with Minnesota Department of Agriculture to promote the program to landowners within Big Stone County. Progress includes program promotion and the certification of two landowners. Three additional landowners are in the process of certification with applications submitted.
- **CWMA** – see Agency Coordination.
- **Native Prairie Bank** – There are sites interested in the program and are still being considered by the State.
- **Walk In Access Program** – The District promoted the Walk In Access program and maintained 3 active WIA sites.
- **Working Lands Initiative** – see agency coordination below.
- **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** – There were 6 interested landowners in the CREP program during 2020. Three applications were in process from 2019.
  - **Farm Bill Assistance Grant** – Although there currently is no Farm Bill Assistance Grant funding, the Farm Bill Technician assists with the implementation of CRP. CRP was promoted with radio and newspaper articles. Sign Up 53 produced 17 new contracts and renewed 32 contracts, with 11 different practices involved, for a total acreage of 729.95 acres. Twenty-five contracts were modified in 2020. Programs were applied on the following:

Contracts	Practice	Acres
6	CP21	28.86
24	CP23A	428.50
1	CP23	12.55
1	CP8A	3.30

## Agency Coordination

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

- **Pomme de Terre River Association** – The District meets monthly at TAC meetings and 1W1P meetings in Morris.
- **Bois de Sioux/Mustinka Watershed** - The District attended the annual steering committee and are attending 1W1P meetings as well as serving on committees for projects within the plan.
- **Upper Minnesota River Watershed District** – The District met with the UMRWD Administrator on numerous topics throughout the year regarding drainage permits, buffer law, Whetstone River restoration, WRAPS citizen committee, shoreline projects, and discussed upcoming 1W1P.
- **Working Lands Initiative (WLI)** – The State of Minnesota is currently not funding this program.
- **County Local Water Management Plan** – The District applied \$4,000 from the Big Stone Local Water Plan NLMP funds to help deferred costs on a shoreline restoration project.
- **EQIP/NRCS** – The District was involved with the coordination and administration of the virtual Public Local Workgroup meeting and assisted in conservation planning software and documents.
- **Farm Bill Technician** - Currently, there is no Farm Bill funding for this position. The District has retained this position and has been reclassified it as the Program Technician, and this position continues to work on Farm Bill programs.
- **Big Stone County Pheasants Forever Chapter** – District technical staff attended Pheasants Forever meetings, with ideas for tree plantings, prairie seedings, and prescribed burns. The annual banquet was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic.
- **Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA)** – Big Stone SWCD was unsuccessful in receiving this grant for 2019-2020. However noxious weed control was still utilized through services and an intern was hired to educate landowners, survey lands for infestations, and spray and treat identified areas.
- **West Central Technical Service Area** – The District utilized the WCTSA to train staff and work on civil engineering projects for landowners, including grass waterways, water and sediment basins, shoreline restorations, and wetland restorations. The WCTSA serves 12 counties for engineering purposes and each district uses their funds to keep them in service. The WCTSA worked on 12 active erosion control projects in Big Stone County. Four projects were constructed, 5 projects were finalled, and WCTSA staff made 9 site visits.
- **Minnesota Department of Agriculture-Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Grant** – the District was successful in receiving a grant from the MDA for invasive weed treatment. The field staff surveyed 8 townships, and 600 acres in Big Stone County. Seventeen acres were treated for invasive weeds, along with treating 50+ acres for wild parsnip, and 2.5 miles of roadside were treated.

## **Additional Funding Opportunities**

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) currently has 5 active contracts in Big Stone County, totaling \$663,000. One new contract was awarded in Big Stone County in 2020, for \$145,500.

NRCS has 26 active CSP contracts. Ten contracts were completed in 2020, paying \$570,000. No new contracts were awarded in Big Stone County in 2020.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) can provide additional funding for BMP applications such as grass waterways, buffers, and wetland restorations. The Program Technician created 49 contracts on 729.95 acres in 2020. The CRP was promoted with newspaper articles.

The NRCS Wetland Restoration Easement program (WRE). There were no new applications.

## **BIG STONE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT GRANTS ADMINISTRATION**

### **Erosion Control and Local Water Management Policy**

#### **Local Capacity Funding:**

-In 2020, the District has received Local Capacity funding from the Board of Water and Soil Resources for \$124,805.

-The District encumbered these funds to install 2 shoreline restoration projects for \$25,597, and installed one shoreline restoration, funding \$11,471. The District inspected 2 shoreline restorations and 3 water and sediment basins that were funded with local capacity funds. One ag waste pit closure was funded and 75% of the project was completed in 2020. 40 acres of cover crops were installed and funded for \$4,800.

-Funds from the Local Capacity grants were also utilized to purchase equipment and supplies to enhance and continue the conservation services provided by the District. It also provided funding to support the time, effort and training of the District Manager and staff.

#### **Conservation Delivery**

-Big Stone SWCD received \$18,037 in conservation delivery monies. These funds are distributed to help pay for costs of district operations, such as administration, employing staff, office space, office supplies, supervisor compensation, and other cost associated with operating the District. These funds are disbursed to the District annually, and require reporting on ways these dollars are spent, such as grant outcomes, activities and accomplishments.

#### **State Cost Share Funds:**

- In 2020, the District received \$6,550 to cost share projects that are eligible under the current Big Stone SWCD Nonstructural Land Management Practices Policy. The District used these funds to cost share well sealing at allowable 50%. Four wells were sealed, and cost shared for a total of \$2,010.00. One shoreline restoration was partially funded with state cost share funds for \$245.

#### **Buffer Cost Share:**

-The District has received funds to use toward buffers and/or alternative practices for landowners. Current disbursed amounts for 2020: \$5,936.08 on 6 contracts for conservation cover and cover crops. Current encumbered contracts for conservation cover – 4 contracts for \$1,370.00.

**Buffer Law Implementation:**

-The District continued field checks to verify compliance on several parcels and made plans to bring more landowners into compliance. For several landowners who have not finalized compliance plans, District staff sent correspondence reminding landowners of past deadlines and the need to make decisions as soon as possible. The District has plans to report the next group of non-compliant parcels to the enforcement authority at the beginning of 2021. District staff began making annual inspections in 2020, as described and stated in the Buffer Law Monitoring Plan. The entire county of affected parcels was reviewed and recorded in BuffCAT.

**Clean Water Fund:**

- The Big Stone SWCD was successful in their Clean Water Fund Grant Application, entitled Phase I of Five Mile Creek and Marsh lake Improvement Strategy, for 2020. The CWF grants are competitive for funding and only so many dollars are available for the grant applications. The project will involve installing 30-40 water and sediment basins and other alternative practices within the Five Mile Creek watershed. Using PTMApp and identifying high sediment loss areas, the SWCD will target those landowners within this area.