

# 2019 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

Adam Maleski - District Technician  
Joseph Otto – FarmBill Technician  
Tammy Neubauer - District Administrative Assistant/District Manager  
Beau Peterson – District Manager

### Cooperating Agencies

#### USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Gary Hoffman - Soil Conservation Technician  
Troy Daniell – State Conservationist  
Jonathan Matz – Assistant State Conservationist Field Operations  
Burton Hendrickson – District Conservationist  
Jennifer Sweeney - Asst. State Conservationist

#### 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  
Roger Sandberg  
Brent Olson  
Erick Klepel  
Jay Backer

## **BIG STONE SWCD MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of 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 – recipients for 2019 rejected the award
- Conservationists Award – recipients for 2019 are Joel Stattelmann and family. They were unable to attend the award ceremony at the State Convention in Bloomington in December. District Staff accepted the award on their behalf.
- Arbor Day – Each 4<sup>th</sup> 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.
- District presented pheasant habitat education to 4<sup>th</sup> graders at the Bonanza Education Center.
- 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 was periodically staffed during the 3 day fair.
- Ortonville Sports & Leisure Show – A conservation booth was fully staffed during the 2 day event.
- District participated in 12 radio programs.
- 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 our office through RMB labs.
- **Tree Plantings** – District sold 677 trees to private landowners. The District planted 1597 trees for landowners that were contract plantings. 4 plantings had weed barrier fabric applied. 32 tree tubes were sold and installed for these practices for animal control.
- **Grass Drill Seedings** – 153.81 acres of grass seed were sold to 36 landowners; 143.81 acres were planted by the District’s drill and operator on 29 sites. Sixteen of these were buffers, 2 were cover crops.
- **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 77.29 acres on 6 parcels.
- **Spraying** – The District provided weed spraying for 6 landowners on 32.0 acres. Seven hours were also spent spraying volunteer trees for 1 township. Due to an extremely wet spring and summer, the District was unable to complete all the acres in need of treatment.
- **State Cost-Share Practices** – see Grants Administration
- **Site Inspections for Cost Share Practices** – 9 farmstead shelterbelts were inspected, and conditions documented per requirements of the cost share contracts.
- **Easement Inspection** - The District site checked 23 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 2019 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.
- **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 2019. Three applications were in process from 2018.
- **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 52 produced 9 new contracts and renewed 8 contracts, with 17 different practices involved, for a total acreage of 382.98 acres. Twenty-seven contracts were modified in 2019. Programs were applied on the following:

Contracts	Practice	Acres
2	CP21	5.45
13	CP23A	336.82
4	CP37	36.58
1	CP8A	4.13

## 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 was involved with the CLWM committee and utilized past and current year’s funds for cost share on 51.54 acres of buffers installed equaling \$3,030.86; Remaining funds of \$969.14 were returned to the Big Stone County Environmental Office for other project spending.
- **EQIP/NRCS** – District was involved with the coordination of the Public Local Workgroup meeting and assisted in conservation planning software and documents.
- **Farm Bill Technician** - Big Stone SWCD partnered with BWSR to maintain funding for a fulltime technician for Big Stone County through the Farm Bill Assistance Grant, but the District chose to reduce Farm Bill grant money to half time for the technician position. Currently, there is no Farm Bill funding for this position.
- **Big Stone County Pheasants Forever Chapter** – The District Technician and Farm Bill Technician worked at the Annual PF Banquet. The District technical staff coordinated approved projects in the spring of 2019, including tree plantings, prescribed burns, and prairie seedings.
- **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.
- **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 alone.
- **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 and 2.5 miles of roadside were treated.
- **Minnesota Department of Agriculture-Township Water Nitrate Testing** – the District partnered with MDA and RMB Laboratories to test nitrate levels in Odessa, Akron and Browns Valley Townships. 213 random sampling kits were sent to landowners in these townships – a total of 55 were analyzed. Results were sent directly to well owners from the laboratory.

## **Additional Funding Opportunities**

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) allocated \$1,092,129 with 16 contracts funded, on 4,658.9 acres planned in 2018. No new contracts were awarded in Big Stone County in 2019.

NRCS funded 3 CStP contracts for \$321,804 contract dollars on 1,743.7 acres, in addition to 5 renewal CStP contracts with \$848,229 obligated on 8,682.5 acres. The County has 35 active CStP contracts on 37,737.7 acres in 2018. No new contracts were awarded in Big Stone County in 2019.

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 Farmbill Technician created 17 contracts on 382.98 acres in 2019. The CRP was promoted with radio and 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 2019, the District has received Local Capacity funding from the Board of Water and Soil Resources for \$120,000.

-The District encumbered these funds to install 2 shoreline restoration projects for \$24,047. Three ag BMPs for water and sediment basins were installed for \$14,400, in cost share funds.

-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.

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

-The District used these funds to cost share well sealing at allowable 50%. Three wells were sealed, and cost shared for a total of \$1,550, and one well sealing is encumbered for \$562.50.

-The District cost shared one water and sediment basin for \$4,740, and cost shared a grass waterway on .6 acre for \$1,520.75.

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

-The District has received funds to use toward buffers and/or alternative practices for landowners. Current disbursed amounts for 2019: \$800 on 2 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 2020. District staff will begin making annual inspections in 2020, as described and stated in the Buffer Law Monitoring Plan.