

# 2021 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, Chairman & Personnel Committee	Toqua, Graceville, Moonshine Twps
Area II	Thomas Holker, Vice Chairman	Browns Valley, Foster, Prior Twps
Area II	David Dybdahl, Finance Committee	Malta, Almond, Otrej Twps
Area IV	Ronald Reisdorph, Personnel Committee	Ortonville, Big Stone Twps
Area V	Lon Moen, Treasurer & Finance Committee	Odessa, Akron, Artichoke Twps

### Staff

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      Jeff Klages

## **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 are 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 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
- 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 2021.
- Conservationists Award – due to the uncertain times with the pandemic, no recipients were chosen for 2021.
- 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.
- Ortonville Sports & Leisure Show – A conservation booth is usually fully staffed during the 2 day event. The show was cancelled in 2021, 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 programs and funding 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** – Two 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** – Staff planted 996 trees for contracts with landowners. 5,348 feet of fabric was installed on the 4 sites. A total of 1,765 trees were sold.
- **Grass Drill Seedings** – The District seeded 220.04 acres; 202.24 acres in CRP, 6.6 acres in food plots, 6.2 acres in buffers, 5 acres in Ag Wetland Bank.
- **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. Notices of Non-Compliance have been issued and sent to the Environmental Office for enforcement.
- **Rotary Mower Services** – The District provided mowing services on 42.69; 2 CRP mid contract management, 1 weed management, 1 tree removal.
- **Spraying** – The field technician surveyed approximately 300 acres for spraying. 12.9 acres were treated.
- **State Cost-Share Practices** – see Grants Administration
- **Site Inspections for Cost Share Practices** – 8 farmstead shelterbelts and 3 shoreline stabilization projects were inspected, and conditions documented per requirements of the cost share contracts.
- **Easement Inspection** - The District site checked 15 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 2021 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, and the Ag Water Quality Certification Program.
- **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 were certified in 2021.
- **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 no new landowners interested in CREP in 2021. The District remains involved in 1 active CREP easement with a landowner needing construction completed in 2022.
- **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. The current Programs Technician resigned his position with the Big Stone SWCD in February, 2021, and a technician has not been replaced.

## 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. The UMRWD is successful in securing a 1W1P grant. **One Watershed, One Plan** planning grants support groups of local governments in developing watershed-based plans that are prioritized, targeted, and capable of achieving measurable results. The District is involved in the committee meetings and decision making for the plan, and meet regularly.
- **Working Lands Initiative (WLI)** – The State of Minnesota is currently not funding this program.
- **County Local Water Management Plan** – The District did not receive LWM funds in 2021.
- **EQIP/NRCS** – The District was involved with the coordination and administration of the Public Local Workgroup meeting.
- **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. The position is currently not filled, due to a vacancy. The District is actively advertising for applicants for this position.
- **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 2021, due to the pandemic.
- **Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA)** – Big Stone SWCD was unsuccessful in receiving this grant for 2020-2021. 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 6 active erosion control projects in Big Stone County. The WCTSA staff were in the County to re-evaluate shoreline projects, review plans for a fishway, and redesign a CWF grant project. Staff will return in the spring of 2022 to provide as-builts for projects completed.
- **Minnesota Department of Agriculture-Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Grant** – the District was unsuccessful in receiving a grant from the MDA for invasive weed treatment.

## **Additional Funding Opportunities**

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) currently has 5 active contracts in Big Stone County. NRCS paid \$269,615 to producers for completion of their practices. EQIP has 3 new contracts with \$76,359 obligated for these contracts.

NRCS has 19 active CSP contracts. Ten contracts were completed in 2021, paying \$549,318.40. No new contracts were awarded in Big Stone County in 2021.

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 CRP was promoted with newspaper articles. There are 46 new CRP contracts in Big Stone County in 2021.

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 2021, the District received Local Capacity funding from the Board of Water and Soil Resources for \$124,805. These funds come from the State Clean Water Fund.

-The District installed one shoreline restoration, funding \$15,924. The District inspected 2 shoreline restorations. One ag waste pit closure was funded and 75% of the project was completed in 2020 and the remaining 25% was completed in the spring of 2021. One well decommissioning was completed at 50% cost share.

-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 funds. 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 costs 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 2021, 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%. Three wells were sealed, and cost shared for a total of \$1,067.50. One shoreline restoration was partially funded with state cost share funds for \$8,169.10.

**Buffer Cost Share:**

-The District had received funds to use toward buffers and/or alternative practices for landowners. Current disbursed amounts for 2020: \$5,936.08 on 6 contracts for cover crops. Contracts for conservation cover – 4 contracts for \$1,370.00. These Buffer Cost Share funds were due to expire in 2021 and the District returned \$47,592.92 of unspent funds. Landowners did not show interest in utilizing these cost share funds.

**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 in 2021. District staff began making annual inspections in 2021, as described and stated in the Buffer Law Monitoring Plan. The entire county of affected parcels was reviewed and recorded in BuffCAT. Enforcement is being pursued on 118 parcels. Of these, 35 landowners have plans in place. Ten buffer sites have been flagged and 4 sites were flagged and seeded by the District in 2021. Eleven sites will need to be flagged in spring 2022. Six landowners came into compliance with the buffer law. The BSC Environmental Office, who is the Buffer Law enforcement agency, issued 21 Corrective Action Notices and 3 of these have been forwarded to the County Attorney's Office for further action.

**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. The CWF grants are competitive for funding and only so many dollars are available for the grant applications. The project will involve installing 10 water and sediment basins, tile and tile intakes, pipe, fill, seeding, 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. Due to changes in landowner project status, the WCTSA engineer has proposed new designs and is meeting with the involved landowners to find the most efficient way to apply the practices, as redesigned. The District staff arranged meetings with landowners affected by this project, together with the WCTSA engineers to decide on best management practices, and who in this watershed will be affected.