

# 2020 Annual Report

## Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District

2020 was an unusual year for many, the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (Dakota County SWCD) included. The onset of the pandemic forced all of us to adapt what was “tried and true” and find new and creative ways to achieve our mission of land and water conservation.

As life moved online, our staff worked to stay connected with residents, utilizing virtual platforms to meet with landowners, coordinate projects with partners, and host our popular Landscaping for Clean Water program. Masked up and socially distanced site visits became the norm as staff met with landowners to discuss drainage and erosion issues, or when inspecting construction of water and sediment control basins or streambank stabilizations.

Good ideas and great partners are essential for achieving high goals. Thank you for being our partner and we look forward to working with you in the future!

### Connect with us through Conservation

Need some information about the many different programs we offer? Head over and check out our **BRAND NEW WEBSITE** - [www.dakotaswcd.org](http://www.dakotaswcd.org) - to learn more and get your questions answered!

Connect with us on one of our social media platforms—**Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter!**

Got conservation on your mind? Shoot us an **email** with your questions and we can discuss potential partnerships and available grant opportunities!



### 2020 Highlights

In 2020, the Dakota County Soil & Water Conservation District...

- Assisted landowners with land and water issues at over **210** sites around the county
- Provided technical assistance and cost share funds to install **107** rural & urban conservation projects resulting in the removal of **1,885** lbs of phosphorous, **921** tons of total suspended solids (sediment) and **9,348** lbs of nitrogen from reaching our lakes, streams or groundwater resources annually
- Transitioned the Landscaping for Clean Water program online and educated over **750** people on landscaping practices that benefit water quality and pollinators
- Monitored water quality in **21** water bodies across **4** watersheds



## Landscaping for Clean Water

The **Landscaping for Clean Water** (LCW) program got a complete makeover in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Only four in-person classes were held before the state shutdown in March and the Landscaping for Clean Water program transitioned to an online only format. All three programs — Introduction Class, Design Course, and Maintenance Workshop — were available to participants beginning in mid-April.

### Program highlights:

- Through the **Introduction to Clean Water Class**, over 500 local residents learned how their efforts can have positive impacts on local water quality and provide pollinator habitat!
- New in 2020, SWCD hosted virtual garden consultations for **Design Course** participants as part of the new office hours program! This was a great opportunity for staff to meet one-on-one with participants, answer questions about project design and plant selection. With socially distanced site visits and following mask guidelines, Dakota County residents **installed 50 great projects** all across the county!
- Over 100 past LCW participants attended the **Maintenance Workshop**, learning how to keep their gardens healthy and beautiful year-round to provide maximum water quality benefits and property beautification. Participants found value in the program as they were provided with trouble shooting tips and best practices for proper maintenance.

Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive regarding the online format and many recommended including an online option in future years!

## Countywide Plans

In 2020, there were several efforts to complete comprehensive plans in partnership with Dakota County. The Dakota SWCD participated in the planning process for the **Aquatic Invasive Species, Groundwater, and Land Conservation plans**.

The plans are available on the **Dakota County website**, search by plan name.

## 2020 Outstanding Conservationist



Kurt Kimber, Chris Kimber, and Carol Lowry, siblings and owners of Contours family farm. Their mission for the 240 acre farm is to grow food for local consumption. Over the last seven years, they implemented several conservation practices including becoming organic certified in 2017, contour farming, reduced tillage, cover crops, and 14.7 acres of prairie restoration as prairie strips to improve infiltration, reduce erosion, and provide pollinator habitat. The farm became a certified participant in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) in 2017. Kurt, Chris and Carol strive to farm more sustainably and be good stewards of the land.

The Dakota County SWCD commends **Kimber Contours** for being leaders in conservation and supporting clean water practices in Dakota County!



## Conservation Work : Rural

In 2020, Dakota SWCD works with rural landowners and operators on projects to promote soil health, reduce erosion, and protect local water quality. We worked with landowners and operators to install:

- 13 water and sediment control basins
- 5,763 linear ft of grassed waterways
- 77 acres of wetlands restored
- 2,313 acres of cover crops

## Conservation Work : Urban

In 2020, we worked with residents, cities, schools, churches, and businesses to improve stormwater management, water quality, and pollinator habitat. Projects include:

- Installed 6 bioretention basins
- Planted 11.2 acres of native prairie on five different projects with the Native Prairie Restoration program
- Connected with over 750 residents through the Landscaping for Clean Water program and installed 50 raingardens, native gardens, and shorelines



## 2020 Partners

*This is a partial list of partners worked with in 2020:*

- Black Dog Watershed Management Organization
- Cities and Townships of Dakota County
- Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Board
- Cannon River Watershed Partnership
- Conservation Corps of Minnesota & Iowa
- Dakota County
- Eagan-Inver Grove Heights Watershed Management Organization
- Lower Minnesota River Watershed District
- Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization
- Metropolitan Council
- Metro Conservation Districts Joint Powers Board
- North Cannon River Watershed Management Organization
- State of MN: Board of Water & Soil Resources; Department of Agriculture; Department of Health; Department of Natural Resources; Pollution Control Agency
- USDA: Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization

## Project Partnerships

*Major conservation projects can only happen as a result of partnerships! Dakota County SWCD worked on projects around the County with several partners this year, including:*

- Cherokee Heights Channel Stabilization
- Records Trail Grade Stabilization
- Conservation Corps Shoreline Stabilization Projects (Bachman's and Vermillion PCA)
- Conservation Corps Trout Brook Streambank Stabilization repair
- Lebanon Hills Iron Enhanced Sand Filters
- Holland Lake Channel Stabilization
- Inver Grove Heights Underground Stormwater Chambers
- Western Service Center Entrance Bioretention
- Jordan and Braun Wetland Banks
- Thompson Lake Restoration
- Spring Lake Park Erosion and Gully Stabilization
- CR 78-06 Wetland Restoration
- Jensen Lake Gully Erosion



## Water Quality Monitoring

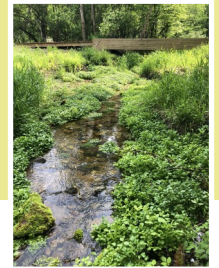
Dakota County SWCD partnered with local watershed organizations and Dakota County Parks to collect samples from lakes and rivers all around the county. The robust dataset provides natural resource managers with data to use when evaluating watershed health and determining ways to improve water quality. This year's activities included:

- 78 days of fieldwork
- 21 water bodies visited & tested
- 265 samples collected

Sites were monitored for temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, and transparency. Water samples were analyzed for sediments, nutrients, and *E. coli*.



Dakota County SWCD also works with state and local agencies to monitor groundwater levels as part of the Minnesota DNR's Cooperative Groundwater Monitoring Program, a network of observation wells used to collect static groundwater level data of different aquifers all around the state, the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District's fen well monitoring program, and Dakota County Parks nitrate spring monitoring program in the Trout Brook Watershed.



## Cooperative Weed Management Area

In 2020, the Dakota County Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) is a formal partnership between state and local governmental agencies, and non governmental organizations was created. CWMA's are tasked with managing invasive plants across jurisdictional boundaries. The CWMA establishes a defined work area where these groups can pool resources to address invasive species problems.

All cities, townships, and county departments within Dakota County as well as state agencies, federal agencies are eligible to join. The partnership developed the 2020-21 Dakota County CWMA plan listing wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa L.*), leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula L.*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe L.*), and palmer amaranth (*Amaranthus palmeri*) as priority species due to public concern and interest.



### Dakota County Board of Supervisors & Staff

December 2020

#### Board

District 1: Kevin Chamberlain, Vice Chair

District 2: Laura Zanmiller, Chair

District 3: Chelsea Skog, Secretary

District 4: Bruce Johnson, Public Relations & Information Officer

District 5: Jayne Hager Dee, Treasurer

#### Staff

Brian Watson, District Manager

Curt Coudron, Project Management Supervisor

Joe Barten, Sr. Resource Conservationist

Ashley Gallagher, Resource Conservationist

Todd Matzke, Resource Conservationist

Gabe Okins, Resource Conservationist

John Stelzner, Resource Conservationist

Lindsey Albright, Water Resource Specialist

Dave Holmen, GIS Specialist

Lana Rotty, Finance & Grants Coordinator

Diane Schmidtke, Administrative Specialist

## Cannon River Joint Powers Organization

In 2020, the Cannon River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) was approved by the Board of Water and Soil Resources and adopted by the Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Board.

The fourteen member Board continues to work together, but have shifted their focus to implementation of the Plan. In order to begin implementation, the group had to develop funding and operational policies, secure grant funding, develop reporting and measuring systems, and then work with partners and landowners to accomplish activities outlined in the Plan.



Dakota County SWCD will serve the group in an administrative role by providing oversight for how water quality improvement projects are documented and measured. The 10-year implementation timeframe of the Plan contains work all across the watershed. A couple of the focus areas in Dakota County include wetland restorations in Chub Creek, as well as cover crops and soil health practices in Trout Brook.