



MASWCD Annual Report

December, 2011

The following are annual reports of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) President & Standing Committees.

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Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts

790 Cleveland Ave. So.
Suite 201
St. Paul, MN 55116

Phone (651) 690-9028
FAX (651) 690-9065

www.maswcd.org

MASWCD President's Report

by Dr. Kathryn K. Kelly, Renville SWCD Supervisor

Challenges, creativity, collaboration, involvement and partnerships ...these words very well describe the activities within MASWCD the past year.

CHALLENGES: Certainly our districts experience specific challenges, whether it is completing projects germane to the area, challenges for sustainable funding, or public visibility at elections. We must work together to maintain the strength of the organization through on-going education at area and local district meetings, through active participation in opportunities to learn such as workshops, tours, conferences and by implementing successful work in our home district. This requires creativity!

CREATIVITY: Successful implementation of conservation practices provides great opportunity to be creative and to involve another district in self improvement. In other words, working across

boundaries such as MASWCD areas, county or watershed boundaries and with partner organizations are all excellent methods for district self improvement. Creativity is the key! No district is an island and successful districts are able to mentor or contract services to another to aid in improvement, thereby strengthening the entire organization.

COLLABORATION: Collaboration by local districts and/or areas energizes one another with ideas and other initiatives for project completion. Collaboration provides opportunity to multiply our capacity to do things together, to provide greater access to users. Some say collaboration is "messy under the hood" because of the complexity. Nonetheless, key to the multiplication of capacity is the requirement of doing things together! A prime example of collaboration is the Local Government Water Management Roundtable, an on-going effort of three state



organizations: MASWCD, Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD) to examine effective and efficient methods of streamlining conservation practices without overlap. Very committed staff and leaders of the organizations meet regularly to hone the message to be presented to state legislators, offering suggestions of effective water management. At our annual meeting several individuals from the collaborating organizations will be in our midst. We welcome them to our event, just as they welcome our representatives to their annual meetings.

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MASWCD President's Report (continued from page 1)

INVOLVEMENT: Perhaps we overlook opportunities to engage in activities or to serve on behalf of the organization. Fellow supervisors have accepted the call to serve on MASWCD committees. Thank you to those supervisors who serve so faithfully for the enrichment of MASWCD! The opportunity to network with peers, hearing other opinions while discussing topics of interest and value, creates opportunity for life long bonds, all in the name of conservation. Additionally, we all have talents to share and active service provides opportunity for greater understanding of the differences across the state, from north to south, east to west; forested land to waterways, outstate Minnesota to metro Minnesota. Each SWCD is unique with different programs and different emphasis. Serving first as vice-president and now as president of MASWCD, I have traveled across the state, attending area meetings, workshops, conferences, partner meetings and events such as the RIM 25th anniversary. I have been privileged to travel out of state to NACD conventions, to Washington, DC to meet with legislators and meetings representing MASWCD. Your board members, president and others have testified at state and national committee hearings. Minnesota's long established

leadership role in conservation is strengthened and maintained through involvement by our members at local, regional and national levels. We are represented at the table as voting delegates and officers at the regional level. Never underestimate the importance of your role as an elected supervisor. Grassroots involvement and effort are important! The Minnesota SWCD Supervisor Handbook, prepared by the Board of Water and Soil Resources states,

"SWCD Supervisors have been entrusted with some of Minnesota's most precious assets: our natural resources. Your primary responsibility is to ensure that your community uses its natural resources wisely, with an eye toward the future. To do this, board members and staff must seek and achieve a delicate balance between people and the land we inhabit. In order to be an effective board member and feel a sense of accomplishment for the people you serve, district officials should have a working knowledge of your responsibilities as 1.) a SWCD board member; 2.) a locally elected official; and 3.) a community leader."

PARTNERSHIPS: We have important work to complete at the local level providing coordination between agencies to both provide conservation services and

financial assistance through programs, and to educate citizens on conservation efforts. As your president, I value the work you do. I commend the local and MASWCD staff for their unwavering energy and commitment to our purpose. I appreciate and value the involvement of our partners BWSR, NRCs, MCIT, MAWD, AMC, and others. The MASWCD board is kept very well informed, guided and supported.

Often quoted author Louis L'Amour says it well. "We must never forget that the land and the water are ours for the moment only..."

Our indigenous settlers, too, cautioned, "Treat the earth well; it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."

Qwatsinas, of the Nuxalk Nation also advises, "We must protect the forests for our children, grandchildren and children yet to be born. We must protect the forests for those who can't speak for themselves such as the birds, animals, fish and trees."

The charge has been given; we must accept the mantle and go forward together! 🇺🇸

Awards Committee Report

by Kurt Beckstrom, Chair, Mille Lacs SWCD Supervisor, MASWCD Area 3 Director

The awards committee met at the MASWCD office August 25, 2011, to review many fine applications from all corners of the state.

The committee chose winners for MASWCD/MPCA community conservationist, MASWCD/DNR outstanding forest steward, MASWCD outstanding conservationist (supported by *The Farmer* magazine) and for the MASWCD media, environmental educator, teacher, and outstanding supervisor awards. These and others will be recognized during this year's annual convention.

I would like to thank all the committee members for their dedication and hard work! It is very exciting to review award applicants with such a commitment to conservation and dedication to the future quality of life in Minnesota!

This year there will be no SWCD distinguished service or SWCD of the Year awards, as the format is under review and will implemented for 2012. Thank you to the districts for taking time to submit applications on top of all the rest of your responsibilities! 🇺🇸



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Legislative Committee Report

by Marilyn Bernhardson, Chair, Redwood SWCD Manager

As has been said in the past, and is still true today, the legislative committee has one of the most important roles of the MASWCD. With so many different programs that districts implement it is hard to develop a legislative platform that meets the needs of all districts.

- Feedlot Water Quality Cost Share
- Election Issues
- Rural Preserve Property Tax Program

After a government shut down and a special session, the legislature passed several pieces of legislation that impacted Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

1) The Environmental and Natural Resources Finance Bill. This is the bill that provides funds to BWSR to pass through to soil and water conservation districts. The pass through cuts from BWSR were not as deep as first anticipated.

2) The Legacy Bill. This funds the Clean Water Fund and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund, which gives the districts the opportunity to apply for conservation dollars.

3) Bonding Bill. This bill had \$20 million dollars for the Reinvest in Minnesota Program. These dollars combined with federal WRP dollars also help to put conservation on the ground.

We would first like to thank Sheila Vanney, MASWCD Assistant Director, for taking on the legislative affairs work for the organization. This past legislative session presented many challenges, including another state budget shortfall and many new legislators. Sheila did a great job getting to know everyone and keeping the districts informed.

The committee always begins its work by reviewing the current policies on record, reviewing the resolutions that passed at the convention, and looking at issues that are in the forefront that MASWCD may need to react to. The difficulty is always narrowing down the issues in order to develop a platform that can achieve positive results.

2011 Platform included the following:

- State Biennial Budget
- Constitutional Amendment Funding
 - ◇ Clean Water Fund
 - ◇ Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund
- Policy Recommendations from Local Government Water Round Table
- Supplemental Bonding Bill

There were also issues that MASWCD continued to monitor and prepare to take action if necessary:

The legislative Committee would like to thank each and every one of you for taking the time to attend the Legislative briefing, make other personal contacts, send emails and write notes. These contacts continue to be very important, especially since there is continued pressure for state dollars.

The legislative committee would also like to thank not only Sheila, but LeAnn and Stefanie for all they do to support the legislative committee and keep districts informed during the legislative session. 🇺🇸

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Left: State Representative Paul Torkelson and MASWCD Legislative Committee Chair Marilyn Bernhardson.



Right: SWCD representatives attend the 2011 MASWCD Legislative Briefing the evening before meeting with legislators at the State Capitol.

Resolutions/Policy Committee Report

by Mark Zabel, Chair, Carver SWCD Supervisor, MASWCD Vice President

The Resolutions/Policy Committee, represented by members of each of the eight MASWCD areas, met on August 22, 2011. The Committee reviewed all resolutions submitted to MASWCD as adopted through the eight MASWCD Areas. One resolution was determined by the Committee as ineligible for consideration according to MASWCD Policy. That resolution was a duplicate of a resolution submitted in the previous year, which was voted down by the membership, and was submitted by the same district this year.

The Committee discussed each resolution among its members and voted a recommendation for the consideration of the membership in their pre-convention ballot voting.

The Resolutions/Policy Committee also considered a request from a member District in regard to clarification of procedures for consideration and adoption of resolutions at the Area level. The Committee then provided a

recommendation on procedure to the MASWCD Board. The MASWCD Board adopted the following statement on September 14 in order to clarify procedures for submitting resolutions (new wording is underlined): *“Resolutions are to be developed and passed first by a local district, and then must be submitted to and approved by the MASWCD Area Association of which that district is a member. An SWCD must be a MASWCD member in good standing in order to be eligible to submit a resolution.”* This guidance will be implemented for the 2012 resolution process.

All SWCD members can be proud of the efforts of their colleagues, as conscientious consideration was given to all resolutions. Thank you to all members of the Resolution Committee for your time, energy and thought to this important work of the organization. As you know, resolutions approved by the organization at the annual convention provide the MASWCD Board and staff direction in setting priorities for the coming year. 🇺🇸



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District Capacity Task Force Report

Loyal Fisher, Chair, Renville SWCD Supervisor, MASWCD South Central Director

A high priority for the Association is to continue to assist SWCDs with district capacity efforts. During the February MASWCD board retreat, the board of directors made a decision to develop a ***District Self Assessment tool*** for SWCDs to assess work and increase district capacity. This tool will replace the District Capacity Score Sheet that was part of our awards program. The purpose of this tool is to stimulate leadership within the SWCD to go above and beyond the base capacity.

A workgroup of district peers meet during 2011 to refurbish an assessment tool. The Association thanks the District Capacity Task Force members Loyal Fisher, MASWCD Area Director & Task Force Committee Chair; Taralee Latozke, Renville SWCD Technician; Felicia Brockoff, Carver SWCD Administrative Assistant; Susan Shaw, Mille Lacs SWCD District Manager; Mary Jo Truchon, Anoka SWCD Supervisor; and Advisor Don Buckhout, BWSR Performance Review and Assessment.

The MASWCD District Self Assessment tool will be shared with the districts in early 2012. Stay tuned for more information.... 🇺🇸



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Finance Committee Report

by Tom Schulz, Chair, Wadena SWCD Supervisor
MASWCD Secretary/Treasurer & MASWCD North Central Area 8 Director

The MASWCD Finance Committee met by conference call this spring to consider requests by dues hardship requests by districts throughout the state. The Committee made its recommendation to the full board after carefully considering the districts' individual financial circumstances.


The Committee next met in July to review the finances for 2011 fiscal year and to recommend the budget for the next year. The committee was pleased to find that financial performance of the Association for the current year was such that the revenues exceeded the expenses by a margin that reversed the deficit of the two past years. This was great news and was accomplished by running a tight ship to control expenses and by the staff securing contracts for services rendered to districts. Unfortunately, for the coming year there is no sure plan for securing additional contracts, thus the budget shows the deficit which was exacerbated by rising health care costs for the MASWCD staff. The Finance Committee is pleased to report that the number of districts that have chosen not to pay any of their dues assessment or to belong to the Association has decreased by one district. It is the plan of the Association Treasurer to meet individually with the remaining non paying dues district as well as the Area Director to try and resolve this problem. The Association is better served when all of the districts are fully participating in our work of advocating for conservation and districts.

The Committee was also tasked by the MASWCD Board of Directors to make recommendations about the use of the

Association's 503c (nonprofit) status by individual districts. The Committee consists of mostly area treasurers and the board also asked the committee to examine issues regarding consistency, transparency and accountability with respect to finances of the MASWCD Areas. After studying the current practices of Area Treasurers, the Committee recommended the following:

- Prepare an Area Treasurer's Checklist to detail:
 - ◇ Financial reviews, how often, who reviews, data reviewed
 - ◇ Employer Identification Number (EIN) tracking/maintenance
 - ◇ Income and expense reports at aAea meetings
 - ◇ Issuance of correct 1099s or W-2s for Area Directors
 - ◇ Transfer of duties of treasurer upon election or disability/death
- Use Association's 503c non profit only for Association activities
- Research issues of liability for Area officers or Association for Area activities.

The Board agreed with our recommendations and we are expecting to bring all the above tasks to completion by late summer 2012.

The members of the Finance Committee are to be commended for their service to the Association. Their frank discussion and willingness to take on assigned tasks speaks well of their dedication to and support of our Association. 

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As part of our mission, the Association provides a forum for SWCDs to share information, deliberate policy and enhance programs to assist districts with their mission. The MASWCD committee structure offers members the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Association and provide expertise to benefit the Association and their peers. The Association extends a note of appreciation to our committee members and advisors for their work in 2011.

Executive Director's Report

by LeAnn Buck, MASWCD Executive Director



An annual report is a time to both reflect on the past and look to the future.

Just over one year ago, after the public went to the polls, change was in the air. As one of my colleagues stated, “The public sentiment is for less government.” Three years ago, Minnesota citizens voted to increase the sales tax and constitutionally dedicate revenue for outdoor programs, clean water and the arts and cultural heritage. Added to the mix, across the country the recession brought about the largest downfall in state revenues on record and states, including Minnesota, are just beginning the path to a slow recovery.

Obviously those trends have an impact on the work of our Association, SWCDs, and partner agencies. In April a federal government shutdown was averted at the last minute but we did experience a state government shutdown in July. For SWCDs, who utilize local, state and federal funding to meet the conservation needs of landowners, it was not business as usual.

During this challenging time, the Association continued to advocate on behalf of the districts and our “boots on the ground” attitude of making conservation happen. The Association was also a source of information for our members on the activities of federal and state policy makers and how their decisions impacted the district programs.

The bright spot in the state policy dialogue is the continued support for programmatic funding through the Clean Water Fund. The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), through its work with local government, received the largest Clean Water Funding allocation to date. The SWCDs reputation for getting conservation projects on the ground was a large factor for the continued support of district activities to improve Minnesota’s lakes and rivers.

This year BWSR, MASWCD and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) hosted the 25th Reinvest In Minnesota Reserve anniversary event. The ceremony, held September 21st in the Steele SWCD, honored not only those with the foresight to start the private lands conservation easement program in 1986, but also those who have continued to support it through its first 25 years. The Anniversary event showcased the SWCD partnership with NRCS and the ability to leverage federal Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) funding for one of the premier wetland restoration programs in the country. The event elevated the role of all SWCDs to restore and protect our valuable resources.

Throughout this year, one of our strongest partnerships includes our work with the Association of Minnesota Counties and the

Association of Watershed Districts. Our organizations are committed to working together to advocate for our members and the role of local government with water management and land related practices.

The Association’s other key partners include the leadership from the BWSR, NRCS and our National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). As in the past and now into the future, our Association continues to address public conservation policy through our commitment to working together and utilizing our diverse strengths.

The above mentioned items are only a snapshot of Association activities. The Association continues to meet the needs of our members by conducting training for members, providing a forum for policy discussions, informational area meetings, participating in national association activities, and policy dialogues with environmental, conservation and agricultural organizations.

As we look to the future, your association will be working in several SWCD program arenas including: support for shared district services; increased dialogue related to targeting of conservation practices; policy discussions for federal conservation programs through the next farm bill; enhancing educational opportunities for our members; and balancing the local autonomy of districts while at the same time providing a strong systematic approach with local conservation delivery.

SWCDs serve as stewards of publically funded conservation programs. District staff are talented professionals providing conservation services to landowners throughout the Minnesota. Given the public nature of these services, it is prudent to have continued public oversight provided by a group of informed citizens. Citizen SWCD boards provide transparency, an essential element for the prioritization, design and delivery of public conservation services.

The State Association is a reflection of the local district leadership. The MASWCD Board of Directors and committee members are to be commended for their collective work on behalf of all our members. I want to extend a special thank you to the Association’s staff Sheila Vanney and Stefanie Martinez for their dedication to the Association. It is a privilege and honor to work with a talented team of board members and staff who work to provide you with services, programs, educational opportunities and forums to enhance conservation policy. 🇺🇸