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Contact: Sheila Vanney, MASWCD Assistant Director, 651-690-9028

WEST OTTER TAIL SWCD NAMED TOP CONSERVATION DISTRICT IN MINNESOTA FOR 2015

ST. PAUL — The Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) has named West Otter Tail SWCD as the 2015 Conservation District of the Year. The award was announced at the 79th MASWCD Annual Meeting, held Dec. 6-8 at the Doubletree by Hilton Bloomington - Minneapolis South. The award recognizes and stimulates leadership within the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to go above and beyond the base capacity.

West Otter Tail SWCD has provided outstanding leadership in a wide array of areas, including buffer implementation, staff sharing, and grant tracking.

Before there was a Governor’s Buffer Initiative and before any legislation directed them to do so, the West Otter Tail SWCD reached out to their neighboring district – East Otter Tail SWCD - and their county to develop a three phase, 9 year plan to move in the direction of 100% voluntary compliance with the existing shoreland buffer ordinance. Because of a great working relationship with the county commissioners and with the support of the SWCD board members, the County adopted the buffer initiative drafted jointly by the two SWCDs. The county supported the SWCDs financially to inventory, map and provide technical assistance to landowners who may be out of compliance. Only a half dozen counties have taken on this type of initiative to enforce the shoreland management buffer ordinance.

Something that accelerated the effectiveness of this buffer initiative, was the fact that West Otter Tail SWCD shares a shoreline specialist with East Otter Tail SWCD. Sharing staff between the two SWCDs has allowed them to maintain this specialization in staffing to better serve the public. Not only does West Otter Tail SWCD share a shoreline specialist, they also share the position of County Ag Inspector. And the West Otter Tail SWCD board makes it a priority to send staff to all possible trainings and workshops in order to increase the staff’s technical expertise.

Finally, West Otter Tail SWCD staff took the initiative to develop a multipurpose time tracking database that incorporates payroll, billable rates, and grant funds. Those involved in grant tracking and reporting can appreciate the value of this type of tool. This database allows for quality assurance for tracking grant funds and how staff are allocating their time to utilize grant funds. Because of this multipurpose database, other SWCDs have adopted the database and the state Board of Water and Soil Resources has incorporated it as part of their template for tracking grant funds.

MASWCD extends our congratulations to the West Otter Tail SWCD board and staff!

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Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
255 Kellogg Boulevard East, Suite 101, St. Paul MN 55101 | www.maswcd.org | 651-690-9028 | fax 651-690-9065