CHISAGO SWCD NAMED TOP CONSERVATION DISTRICT IN MINNESOTA FOR 2012

ST. PAUL — The Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) has named Chisago SWCD as the 2012 Conservation District of the Year. The award was announced at the 76th MASWCD Annual Meeting, held Dec. 2-4 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.

Chisago SWCD has provided outstanding leadership in a wide array of areas. First and foremost, the SWCD has a very strong board and staff working relationship. The district values the “team” approach for addressing the conservation activities in their county. The board continues to invest in their employees through their support for staff training opportunities. The SWCD staff is proactive and utilizes available local, area, state and federal training venues to help maintain a high level of technical expertise. Chisago SWCD maintains technical approval authority for all SWCD technical staff. The board members participate in Association educational activities as well.

Another strong asset for this district is their ability to partner with other local, area, state and federal agencies to accomplish the district’s mission. Examples of the district’s partnering activities include working with their neighboring SWCDs to implement the Clean Water grant program, the non point engineering program and the landscape restoration program. The SWCD also partners with their county on a number of items to streamline their operations. This includes sharing staff and office space with their county, payroll support and insurance benefit packages for district staff.

The evidence of their partnership ultimately is highlighted on the landscape. In 2011, the SWCD utilized $358,000 in State Clean Water Fund grant dollars and leveraged an additional $470,000 of cost share fund dollars to implement best management practices for wetland, shoreland, stormwater, forestry and agriculture projects. The district also promotes bioenergy development using native and alternative plants to protect water quality and improve wildlife habitat.

Chisago SWCD has been proactive in addressing water quality monitoring and conservation assessments within their district. The District develops water quality assessments to improve their capacity to target and prioritize best management practices. An example of their work includes an inventory of gully erosion sites along a vital river in their county. The inventory work is being utilized to contact landowners and begin the process of developing a plan to implement conservation practices and correct erosion problems along the river.

Chisago SWCD is also a shining example of incorporating civic engagement in all that they do. The SWCDs provides outreach activities through numerous venues including:

- Conducting Local Farmer Focus Groups;
- Conducting Non Point Education for Municipal Officials Workshops;
- Working with 250 volunteers to conduct a water festival for over 650 5th grade students; and
- Partnering with their County’s Master Gardeners to host an annual event for 120 citizens.

As one supporter of the district noted, “the SWCDs is worthy of great recognitions of all of their success. They are well respected in their county by landowners as well as other government agencies. Any award for their hard work would be warranted.” Congratulations to the Chisago SWCD board and staff!