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EIGHT NAMED AS FINALISTS FOR STATE’S 2018 OUTSTANDING CONSERVATIONIST AWARD

ST. PAUL — The Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) has named the finalists for the state’s 2018 Outstanding Conservationist Award.

The winner will be announced at the 82nd annual MASWCD Annual Meeting, at a luncheon on Dec. 11. The award ceremony is the culminating event of the three day conference, Dec. 9-11, at the Doubletree by Hilton Bloomington - Minneapolis South in Bloomington, Minn. The award program recognizes farm families, individuals, conservation organizations, and other groups for their accomplishments in implementing conservation practices and improving Minnesota’s natural resources.

The program is sponsored by MASWCD, with support from The Farmer magazine. Editors and news directors are encouraged to follow up with the Soil and Water Conservation District contacts listed for feature and interview opportunities. The information was gathered from the nomination forms submitted to MASWCD by individual conservation districts. The finalists are noted below, with additional background information attached. Higher resolution photos are available upon request.

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<th>MASWCD Area</th>
<th>Finalist</th>
<th>Nominating SWCD</th>
<th>SWCD Contact</th>
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<tr>
<td>Northwest Area 1</td>
<td>Andy Dombeck&lt;br&gt;Wadena MN</td>
<td>East Otter Tail SWCD</td>
<td>Darren Newville 218-346-9105</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Central Area 2</td>
<td>Kevin and Ellen Roers&lt;br&gt;Garfield MN</td>
<td>Douglas SWCD</td>
<td>Jerome Haggenmiller 320-763-3191</td>
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<td>Northeast Area 3</td>
<td>Alan Finifrock&lt;br&gt;Cloquet MN</td>
<td>Carlton SWCD</td>
<td>Brad Matlack 218-384-3891</td>
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<td>Metro Area 4</td>
<td>Petersen Farms of Rush City, Inc.&lt;br&gt;Rush City MN</td>
<td>Chisago SWCD</td>
<td>Craig Mell 651-674-2333</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwest Area 5</td>
<td>Bruce Tiffany&lt;br&gt;Redwood Falls MN</td>
<td>Redwood SWCD</td>
<td>Marilyn Bernhardson 507-637-2427 x3</td>
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<td>South Central Area 6</td>
<td>Gerald Lorenz&lt;br&gt;Sherburn MN</td>
<td>Martin SWCD</td>
<td>Ashley Brekke 507-235-6680</td>
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<td>Southeast Area 7</td>
<td>Josh and Stephanie Dahl&lt;br&gt;Rushford MN</td>
<td>Root River SWCD</td>
<td>David Walter 507-724-5261 x3</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Central Area 8</td>
<td>John Forrest – Rotary Club of Brainerd&lt;br&gt;Brainerd MN</td>
<td>Crow Wing SWCD</td>
<td>Melissa Barrick 218-828-6197</td>
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Background on Andy Dombeck:

Andy operates a 204-acre irrigated farm in eastern Otter Tail County where he typically grows corn and soybeans. However, he has raised field peas and cereal rye in recent years. Andy was recently certified through the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. He utilizes a strip-till system for row crop operation and does some no-till planting of soybeans. Andy also utilizes multiple split applications of nitrogen fertilizer, including strip-till fertilizer application at a 6” - 7” depth, on the sandy loam texture soils on his farm.

Andy utilizes the East Otter Tail SWCD’s irrigation scheduler program and has worked with the SWCD to do nutrient trials the past 3 years. He has also recently adopted the practice of planting cover crops. The East Otter Tail SWCD appreciates Andy’s commitment to Conservation.

Background on Kevin and Ellen Roers:

The Roers operate a dairy, beef, and grain operation. Crops grown include corn, beans, small grain, and alfalfa. In the fall of 2017 the Roers installed 4 water and sediment control basins to gully erosion. Kevin intends to install additional water and sediment control basins in the future to address erosion.

To better manage pastures the Roers installed a prescribed grazing system on 101 acres of pasture with 7 paddocks, water well and underground pipeline with 6 different water locations in the pasture. The Roers use conservation tillage on acres farmed and have also used cover crops to prevent soil erosion on the acres they farm. The Roers dedication to conservation is shown on the conservation practices installed on their farm.
Background on Alan Finifrock:

The Finifrocks have cared for their forest lands for decades by planting trees, creating wildlife habitat, growing timber and controlling buckthorn. They have shared experiences, knowledge and their stewardship ethic with family and other landowners through forest management activities, and by leading and assisting with forestry field days and workshops. They are the 2018 MN Tree Farmers of the year.

Alan and Sharon take a long and broad view of forest stewardship. They are shining examples of good forest managers.

Background on Petersen Farms of Rush City, Inc.:

The Petersen’s, implement strip till farming on all of their cropland, the strips are installed in the spring approximately 48 hours prior to planting. All fields are grid soil sampled once every three years and tissue tests are conducted yearly to help refine plant nutrient needs. Fertilizer is applied utilizing variable rate technology and split applied through three different applications throughout the growing season. Buffers have been installed along the entire two miles of the Public Ditch on their farm and in 2017 they were certified as a Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certified farm.

The Chisago SWCD would like to thank Petersen Farms of Rush City for making conservation an important part of their daily lives on their land.

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Background on Bruce Tiffany

Bruce Tiffany and his wife Ann operate a large grain operation on the banks of the Redwood River, raising corn and soybeans. Bruce started farming at the young age of eleven when he rented his first 20 acres and has been farming for the last 50 years. Over the years, they have maintained and extended the riparian areas and buffers along the Redwood River. They have also constructed nine erosion control structures on their operation.

Bruce and Ann are dedicated advocates in the Ag community as well as the general Redwood Falls area. The Tiffany’s understand that conservation benefits the land and are very willing to share their story of farming and conservation with anyone willing to listen.

Background on Gerald Lorenz:

Gerald Lorenz is a great advocate for local source native prairie species. He has collected seed and propagated thousands of local ecotype prairie vegetation. Gerald owns and manages 285 acres of cropland. He requires his tenants to use no-till on hills and vulnerable soils and seeds cover crops himself. He is the first in the County to require soil health practices as part of his land rental agreement. Gerald keeps 5 bee hives and is passionate about honeybees and pollinators. Gerald has worked with the district on multiple Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and other projects.

Gerald is always willing to try something new, evidenced by his tile water treatment project, pulling tile water to the surface using a windmill, then treating the water with a series of wetlands.

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Background on Josh and Stephanie Dahl:

The Dahl family operates a dairy and diversified crop operation raising corn, cereal grains, and hay. They milk 150 cows and raise young stock on their rolling, ridge top farm. The Dahls own 531 acres of which 420 is tillable. Some of these acres have been in the family since 1890 and consist of a mix of forestland, pasture, and crop land. In the past year, the Dahls have implemented numerous best management practices including several grade stabilization structures, thousands of feet of waterway, a liquid manure basin, and others as part of the "Root River Field to Stream Partnership."

The Dahls are excellent stewards of the land and believe that conservation improvements can benefit the farm both environmentally and through improved efficiencies.

Background on John Forrest:

From 2012-2017, John Forrest and the Brainerd Rotary Club have partnered with the MN DNR, City of Brainerd, private landowners and foundations, to acquire 100 acres, 1,971 feet of the Mississippi River, and 1,225 feet of Little Buffalo Creek. Now Rotary Riverside Park is 190 acres and estimated one mile of the Mississippi River frontage. “We’re deeding this land to the city for public use for ever and ever and ever” said Forrest. In 2017-2018, John and Rotarians worked with the SWCD to restore 11.25 acres into a native prairie seed bank for the community. This included: buckthorn removal, prescribed burn, innovative solarization project, and 10,000 native plugs planting.

These projects have leveraged over $100,000 in grants, private donations, and Rotarian funds. John and Rotarians have been the catalyst to protect and restore this land for future generations to enjoy.

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