

Why Support a Soil and Water Conservation District - Advantages

I Single Focus:

- ◆ The 60-year mission of the SWCD is soil and water conservation, management and/or prevention of all forms of soil erosion: sheet, rill, ephemeral and gully. Good natural resource management begins with good soil management. Good soil management begins with keeping it in place every time it rains. The obvious result is good quality surface water. It follows naturally that the County's surface and groundwater plan reflects the same goals as the District's work plan.
- ◆ Annual goals stated in tangible land application of specific practices to improve water quality and reduce erosion.

II Uniquely structured:

- ◆ Elected Board reflects natural resource concerns of County residents and adopts natural resource management to changing land use practices.
- ◆ Non-regulatory:
 - Landowners freely cooperate, expanding and exercising their own commitment to stewardship.
 - Proven more productive than regulatory coercion.
 - Provides County an attractive "carrot" option to solve natural resource concerns with landowners and residents.

III Staff on the land with land owners:

- ◆ Motivated: Pay and performance ratings tied to measurable on land practice application with landowners.
- ◆ Staff regularly in field in touch with landowners discussing natural resource concerns and in tune to their needs. An "in the field" asset.
- ◆ District mission and structure leaves staff free of other "in house" job demands, clear to focus on application of natural resource management practices.
- ◆ Staff currently devotes many hours to assist County staff with in field reviews.
- ◆ Staff conducts several hundred annual field visits with different landowners to review and correct natural resource problems.
- ◆ Staff is uniquely qualified under USDA job approval authorities to provide engineering assistance for correcting resource problems. This arrangement is done under license agreements set up with the state society of Professional Engineers.

IV Staff Experienced and Qualified:

- ◆ All staff has 4 year Natural Resource management degrees from either Minnesota or Wisconsin and provides 110 years combined experienced in land application natural resource practices.
- ◆ Staff has obtained necessary certifications and training to meet changing face of the County i.e. Certified Professional Erosion and Sediment Control Specialists, Wetland Delineation Certification, Crop Advisor Certification.
- ◆ MPCA, BWSR, USDA, USFWS, MNDNR provide standards and specs for implementation of natural resource management practices to the District. The agencies recognize the technical competence of the SWCD staff.

- ◆ SWCDs, state-wide, share data on resource protection and initiate new treatment techniques continually testing and improving land treatment solutions to gain more cost effective means of improving water quality. for example:
 - Rock inlets for tile replacing surface inlets.
 - Bio-engineering, i.e. Fogarty, Francis, Nytes.
 - Filter strips - 200 miles applied since 1996.
- ◆ Plant materials testing for enhanced conservation practice performance is coordinated with the USDA plant materials center.
- ◆ Private suppliers provide material specs, handbooks, and even samples of their products relevant to land applied natural resource protection practices.
- ◆ Staff brings experience and an array of technical resources to bear on the many resource problems reviewed each year with County residents.
- ◆ Staff is technically accountable to the standards used. Annual inspections are made of applied practices to ensure continued quality.
- ◆ Most natural resource problems are not eye popping 100ft gullies. Most are combination of sheet and rill erosion and ephemeral and real gully erosion too small to warrant the attention of engineers or consultants, yet, by numbers alone add up to significant sediment sources severely damaging water quality. The District, by mission, structure and expertise are positioned to address these multiple problems:
 - They have the design standards.
 - They are on site.
 - They have the technical ability and landowner confidence to successfully address these problems.
 - This adds up to cost effective water plan implementation.
- ◆ The SWCD staff are the only staff with the knowledge, skills and ability to work effectively with, and apply to County lands:
 - waterways
 - stream bank protection (both bio and non bio)
 - gully head control
 - wetland restoration
 - terraces
 - w/s basins
 - feedlot pollution control
 - manure application plans
 - conservation crop rotation systems for sheet erosion control.
- ◆ SWCD staff has been on most farms in the county long before they become development proposals; this is a unique bank of site specific knowledge.

V Unique opportunities

- ◆ Knowing the land owners, knowing the land, knowing the solutions, and experience applying the solutions makes the SWCD staff uniquely and exceptionally qualified to apply practices and to create opportunities.
- ◆ Cost share dollars available to landowners (\$2,000,000.00 spent last 5 years on erosion and sediment control in the Co.) are tied to the engineering standards practiced by the SWCD. Practices may not be cost shared unless they meet the standards used by the SWCD.

- ◆ Able to coordinate resources from outside the County to on the ground implementation of the Plan:
 - Engineering time from USDA.
 - Engineering funds from NonPoint Engineering Assistance Program.
 - Cost share funds from USDA, State of MN, USFWS.
 - Outside staff time, e.g.: P.F., Hog producers, land owners, MN Extension, Dairy association, USDA, USFWS, MNDNR Depts. Forestry, Waters, Wildlife, MPCA, BWSR, Township boards, SWCD board, and dedicated landowners passing the word. Some of this time is professional, but much is voluntary, that is the advantage of a non-regulatory program for main-line Plan implementation.
 - Vehicles, maintenance and fuel from USDA.
 - Office supplies from USDA.
 - A call list of clients from USDA. FSA works annually with about 800 landowners and operators required to meet minimal conservation standard.
- ◆ SWCD staff has leveraged their knowledge of the county by conducting several Natural Resource inventories which have provided the County and others with detailed resource information unavailable from any other source at any where near the same cost: In all cases, outside assistance was leveraged to complete these inventories
 - Wetlands and drained basins.
 - Gully status in the Minnesota River Bluffs.
 - Bank erosion status of our streams and ditches.
 - Waterway and terrace needs on cropland.
 - HEL crop land.
 - Extent and impact of changing farm practices.
 - Status of all feedlots.
 - Soil survey.
- ◆ The District leverages additional resources to implement the action items of the County surface water plan. The county could do the work, once they acquire the on land experience, knowledge of the technical information, and the skill to apply it, but they are not set up to leverage the additional resources. How much time will be spent rebuilding what already works?
- ◆ The Water plan and the District annual plan are agreed to, the practices needed to implement it are understood, and the staff is trained and available to do it. It is being done. The SWCD has 60 years of dedicated, site specific experience. Current budget reduction proposals will undermine a proven program leading to a less efficient means of implementation.