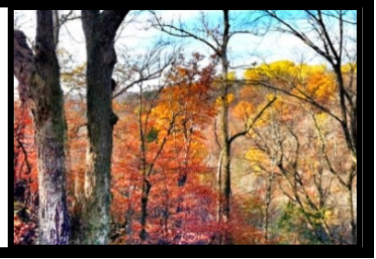




CONSERVATION TODAY

Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District & USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Summer 2017



1st Sibley County Farm Certified in the MAWQCP

Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) would like to recognize the Thies family farm to be the first in the county to earn their certification under the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP).

MAWQCP certifies farmers and landowners for protecting water quality through a comprehensive whole-farm assessment that puts farmers together with local professionals to determine where risks to water quality exist on their farm, and empowers them to fix those risks once found. The program is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect Minnesota's lakes and rivers. Farm owners and operators who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified. In return, producers are assured that their operation meets the state's water quality goals and standards for a period of 10 years.

The Thies family farm, south of Arlington, consists of Kevin and Kathleen along with their son Sam. They grow a mix of corn, soybeans, sweet corn, and peas, in addition to raising beef cattle.

Kathleen noted that she had first heard about this program at a meeting she attended. She spoke with a MAWQCP Certification Specialist after that meeting to inquire more. Several months and two site visits later, the Thies' are now certified. A few minor management practices allowed them to meet the requirements. They have now moved towards conservation tillage by adding a mulch ripper, are grid soil sampling, split applying nitrogen, and pursuing a nutrient management plan (CAP 104) through the USDA's EQIP program. The Thies' have already been utilizing cover crops but plan on diversifying their seed mixes. Thies' stated, "This program has really opened our eyes to new farming techniques and the entire MAWQCP process was much simpler than we expected".

If you are interested in becoming certified, the first step is to fill out a program application. The next step is to meet with an MAWQCP Area Certification Specialist to review current baseline farm management practice information. The gathered information is then put into an online assessment tool followed by field verification. Certified farms must have a score equal to or greater than 8.5 out of 10 on the assessment tool, and must address resource concerns identified during the field verification. Farmers who apply become eligible to receive priority status for technical and financial assistance which can be used to address resource concerns (if identified) on their farms which helps achieve MAWQCP certification.

The MAWQCP is managed by the MN Dept. of Agriculture in partnership with local SWCDs and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The Sibley SWCD and NRCS are excited about this program's potential to help landowners and operators demonstrate their commitment to clean water and to accelerate the adoption of conservation practices where needed.



Office Staff:

Sibley SWCD

Joel Wurscher
District Manager

Vacant
District Technician

Coleton Draeger
Watershed Coordinator

Ron Otto
Water Planner/
Watershed Technician

Savannah Zippel
Intern

SWCD Board Members

Kathleen Thies - District 1

Paul Wiemann - District 2

Loren Evenson - District 3

Wayne Grams - District 4

Robert Nielsen - District 5

USDA-NRCS

April Sullivan,
District Conservationist

Chris Schmidt,
Soil Conservationist

Vacant,
Soil Conservation Technician

Board Meetings

2nd Tuesday of
each month
4:00 pm
USDA Service Center

Office Hours

Monday—Friday
8:00 am—4:30 pm



Prep for CREP

By Daniel Mahoney

Are you one of many Minnesota agricultural landowners that care about conservation, bio-diversity, wildlife, pollinators, or water quality? Do you have land that you would like to see providing habitat for wildlife, non-game species and pollinators? Does reducing nitrates in drinking water, restoring hydrology, or mitigating flooding interest you? MN CREP may be something for you to consider.

The Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) is a voluntary, federal-state funded natural resource conservation program that is targeted at protecting environmentally sensitive land. CREP is an offshoot of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the nation's largest private-land conservation program. Administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), CREP targets state-identified, high-priority conservation issues. During the current CREP enrollment period that started on May 15, 2017 Minnesota is focusing on four Conservation Practices (CP):

- Grass Filter Strips (CRP CP-21)
- Wetland Restoration- Non Floodplain (CRP CP-23A)
- Wetland Restoration- Floodplain (CRP CP-23)
- Wellhead Protection Areas (CRP CP-2)

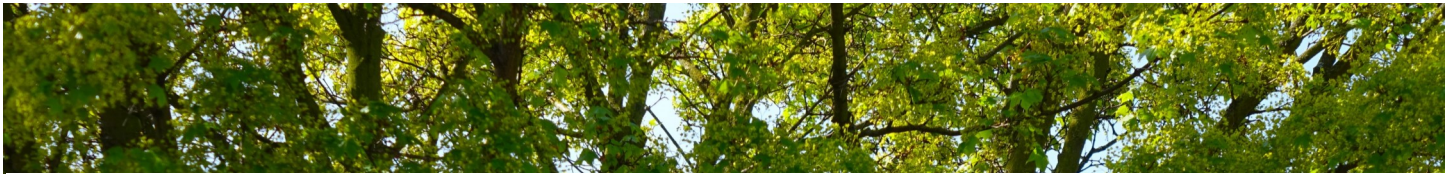


Five Minnesota state agencies have come together to support MN CREP, including Board of Water and Soil Resources, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Department of Natural Resources and Pollution Control Agency. MN CREP participants will voluntarily retire environmentally sensitive land using the nationally-recognized Re-Invest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program. Land enrolled in MN CREP will be placed under a permanent easement protecting the conservation status of the land enrolled. This is accomplished through permanent protection by establishing conservation practices via payments to farmers and agricultural land owners.

Land enrolled in MN CREP requires a minimum offer size of 8 acres. Contracts require an initial 14-15 year CRP contract. CRP payment rates are based upon soil types within an offers acreage. Offers will receive an additional 60 percent incentive payment over CRP base soil rental rates. In addition the state will provide a one-time perpetual conservation easement payment after deducting the landowner's CRP annual payments. CRP contracts enrolled in MN CREP are not eligible for reenrollment in CRP due to permanent easements under Re-invest In Minnesota.

Enrollment will be offered on a continuous basis starting May 15, 2017 and continues until acreage enrollment limitation is reached, enrollment is suspended, the MN CREP Agreement is terminated, authority for CCC to enroll lands in CRP expires, or is otherwise ended, or September 30, 2026, whichever comes first. An environmental score for each offer will be calculated by local Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The Board of Water and Soil Resources will rank all applications and propose minimum environmental scores. Offers not accepted during the current batching period may be accepted if the offer has not expired at the time of consideration.

The Sibley County FSA, NRCS and SWCD will be holding an informational session for those interested in MN CREP on July 26, 2017 at 2 p.m. at the Sibley County Service Center, 111 8th St. Gaylord, MN 55334. For additional information on MN CREP please contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District or USDA Farm Service Agency office. To find your local office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. The Sibley County USDA Service Center can be reached via phone at 507-237-2948.



Clear Lake – The Ability to Improve

By Coleton Draeger

For those who do not know, Clear Lake is located on the western edge of Sibley County, and is one of the premier lakes within Sibley County's boundaries. Primary activities for this lake include swimming, fishing, recreational boating, waterfowl hunting, and trapping furbearers. Clear lake is a public lake, with 2 different public accesses and has a maximum depth of 8.5 feet covering 493 acres. Fish species present include; Black Bullhead, Black Crappie, Blue Gill, Orange spotted Sunfish, Walleye, Yellow Perch, Bigmouth Buffalo, Common Carp, and White Sucker. Portions of this lake on the southern and northern edges offer excellent nesting habitat for waterfowl as well. Clear Lake has a dam on the southeast side of the lake which is the starting point, or head waters, for Judicial Ditch 1A. From Judicial Ditch 1A, the waterway travels approximately 15 miles before it drains into the south branch of the Rush River.

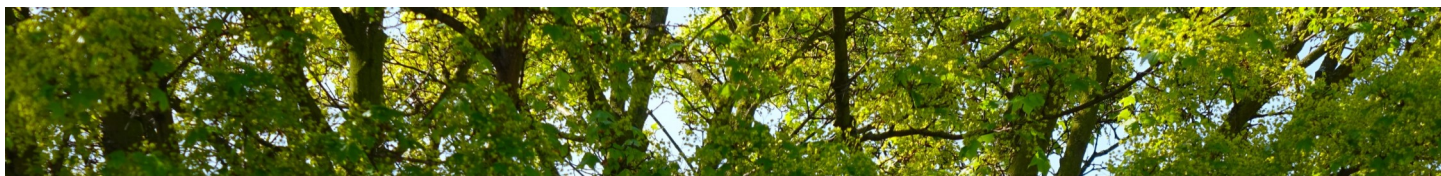


During the months of March and April 2017, Clear Lake's dam was under construction, being replaced with a more modern and lake friendly water level control structure. This structure is now fully implemented and offers many management options for the lake. Abilities of the structure can be looked at in a few different ways; it acts as a fixed crest structure when all planks are in use, as the planks get removed the structure has the ability to drop the lake levels (if needed), and the structure acts as a barrier to deter invasive carp. The ability to adjust the water level of the lake can help reduce rough fish and re-gain lost native shoreline vegetation. There is currently no plan to reduce lake levels at this time, but with the ability to manage the lake in a conservation minded way, it offers an exceptional future for the longevity and productivity of Clear Lake. This newly implemented structure should have a life span greater than 60 years.



Sibley County Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) Loan Program

Looking to manage your subsurface sewage? The Sibley County Ag BMP loan program may be an option for you if there are no other programs that fit your situation. Sibley County administers the loan program through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Additional requirements include a completed application, an approved septic plan, and a septic system permit. Taxes on the property cannot be delinquent. A loan can be up to 10 years in length with a 3% interest rate on any unpaid balance. Stop by the SWCD Office or call Ron Otto at 507-237-5435 ext. 105 for any questions or to pick up an application.



WRAPS Project

By Bryan Spindler, MPCA



The Lower Minnesota River Watershed WRAPS public participation project is underway. This project is a joint effort between Sibley, Nicollet, McLeod, Le Sueur and Rice counties along with local SWCDs and MPCA. We aim to hear from local watershed residents about your questions and concerns regarding watershed issues in the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. Our first meeting will include a presentation by Jon Lore, Watershed Specialist with the Minnesota DNR, who will talk hydrology, geomorphology, and connectivity in the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. The presentation will be followed by discussion and an opportunity for you to talk with your local county and SWCD staff. The meeting will be on July 26th from 1-3 pm at the Ney

Nature Center, 28238 Nature Center Lane Henderson, MN 56044. Everyone interested is encouraged to attend. Come learn something new, and refreshments will be provided. More informational meetings will be announced during this project, so stay tuned for more regarding this important project.

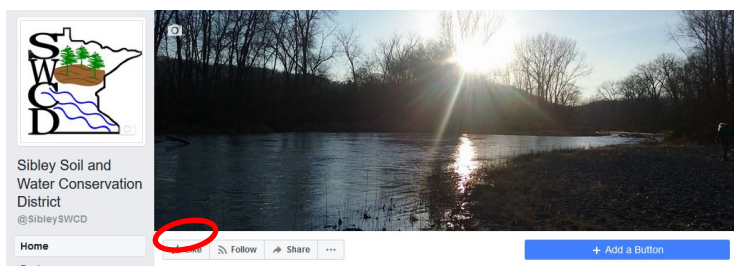
The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) has also completed the monitoring and assessment report for the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. This report documents water quality assessment decisions made in 2016 regarding the results of MPCA's 2014 Intensive Watershed Monitoring study on the tributary streams and lakes of the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. One hundred-seventeen unique stream reaches and one hundred and three lakes were assessed as part of the study. Eighty-four percent of stream reaches assessed for aquatic life failed to meet standards, and ninety four percent of stream reaches assessed for aquatic recreation failed to meet standards. Fifty-seven percent of lakes assessed for aquatic life failed to meet standards and fifty five percent of lakes assessed for aquatic recreation failed to meet standards. Four lakes: Crystal, McMahan, Mitchell and Bryant were removed from the impaired waters list due to successful restoration efforts. A true demonstration that through cooperation and efficient use of best management practices, improvements to water quality can become possible.

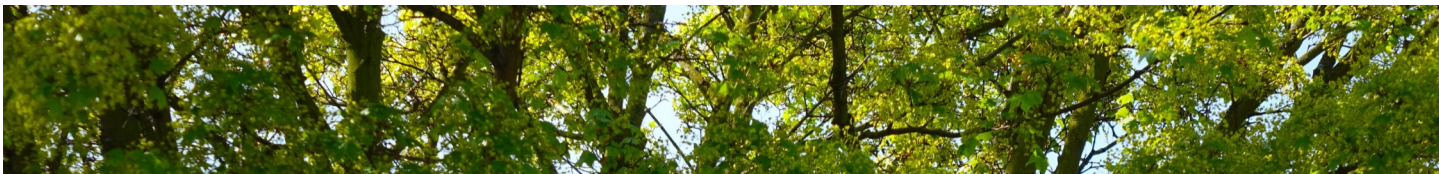
For more information, please see the report located at:

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/wq-ws3-07020012b.pdf>

SWCD Outreach

Outreach efforts are in full swing here are the SWCD office. We now have an official Facebook page. Give us a 'like' for conservation updates, educational tidbits, and upcoming date announcements. Also, be sure to stop in and say hello to us August 2-6th at the Sibley County Fair. We will have a booth, located in the commercial building.





The State of Sibley County Fisheries

A Collaboration with MN DNR and Sibley SWCD

The DNR stocked just over 2 million walleye fry in Lake Titlow to attempt walleye rearing during the spring of 2017. The intent is to use the lake as a source for rearing walleyes as young-of-years (fingerlings) and then as yearlings after their second growing season. Beyond those sizes, the fish are not really valuable to us for stocking power and any remaining fish that carryover can provide a fishing boom. There's no way for the DNR to net out all of the stocked walleye, so if no winterkill occurs for 2-3 years, anglers might have a chance at some fair walleye fishing. This is the first time the DNR has ever tried Titlow, so it will be a learning experience for everyone.

Stocking on High Island occurred again this year as well with walleye fry in the spring of 2017, to the tune of a little over 2 million fry. It was also stocked with fry in 2016. DNR staff netted out 2,331 pounds of fingerlings last year; the fish ran large, anywhere from 11 to 14 fish to the pound. High Island is realizing diminished returns and the need for drawdown for fish and wildlife benefits is increasing as years go by without a winterkill. At some point, a return to the drawdown prescriptions in the management plan will need to occur and involvement with local partners will have to ramp up. Residents must remember with a lake like this and the scope of its intent to provide walleye for stocking efforts, drawdowns are a common effort and can become necessary. Without a healthy system, the success of this task can be limiting.

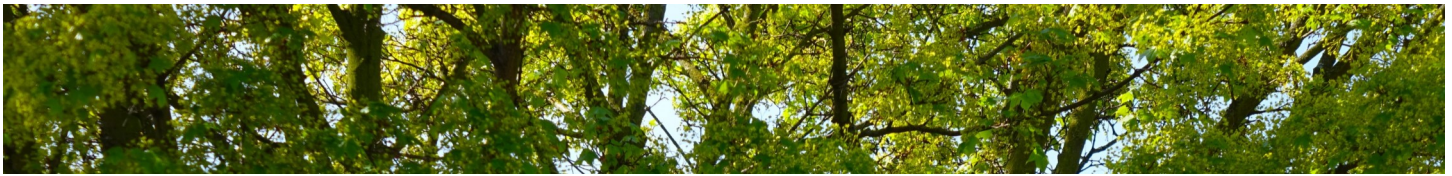
A number of stocking opportunities in Sibley County may be present in years to come. Besides Titlow and High Island, DNR staff are exploring other rearing options for the future and know they will need to work with the county on water level management at Clear Lake by Gibbon.

As mentioned, the fish that are stocked will never be completely netted out, therefore fishing opportunities can be plentiful. Many reports of excellent walleye fishing have been noted over the past several years on High Island Lake thanks to the stocking efforts that have occurred. With this becoming more popular in Sibley County lakes, fishing opportunities are likely to become more abundant. If you decide to take part in some of the fishing opportunities that are becoming more available in Sibley County, please remember to abide by the regulations set by the MN DNR, and only keep the allowed limit of 6 walleyes (only 1 over 20 inches), bring your life jacket, and to take a kid fishing whenever possible.

Sibley County's lakes are currently Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) free, let's try to keep it this way! Remember to remove all weeds from the bunks of your trailer and props of your boats, and to pull your drain plug before transport. Try to keep the saying "Clean, Drain, and Dry" in the back of your mind as a reminder to complete these simple tasks to protect our waters. If we want to be able to utilize our local lakes for years to come, these additional tasks become a must when thinking about the health and longevity of our bodies of water in Sibley County. If you ever come across AIS in a Sibley County lake or stream, please do not hesitate to contact the Sibley SWCD or MN DNR for further investigation.



Ed and Colton Goettl with Walleyes caught on High Island Lake.



NRCS Announces EQIP Signup for Fiscal Year 2018

Agricultural producers looking to solve natural resource problems on their farms will want to plan ahead and sign-up for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funding. USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced that farmers interested in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) need to apply by August 18, 2017, for funding in 2018.

EQIP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers. These contracts provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air, and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.

Applications for EQIP are accepted on a continuous basis, however, NRCS establishes application acceptance or submission deadline dates for evaluation and ranking of eligible applications. Contracts will be awarded to producers' with the highest rankings until funds are exhausted.

To learn more about EQIP, contact the Gaylord NRCS Field Office or visit the MN NRCS website.

A few examples of practices that are available through EQIP are:



Cover Crops



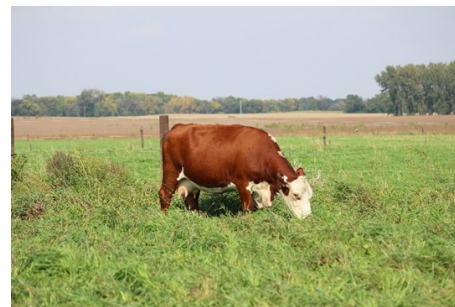
Waste Facility Closure (Ag Waste Pits)



Strip-till/no-till



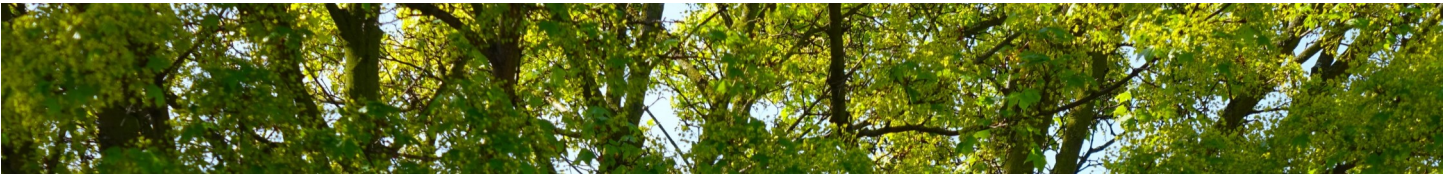
Animal Mortality Facility



Rotational Grazing System



Erosion Structures: water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization, terraces, diversions, grassed waterways



Sibley SWCD will be Moving to a New Office

The Sibley County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) will be moving to a new office location in 2017.

112 5th St.
Gaylord, MN 55334

All offices differ in services but work interdependently to ensure conservation and agricultural needs are being met. All three offices will be under one roof, but services and programs need not be confused with each other.

Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District

- Funded by Sibley Co. and the Minnesota State government.
- Conservation efforts managed on private lands.
- Administers programs such as;
 - Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)
 - Conservation Reserve Easement Program (CREP)
 - Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)
 - Minnesota Buffer Law
 - State Cost Share (SCS)
 - Flood Relief (FR)
 - Tree Program

Natural Resource Conservation Service

- Funded by the United States Department of Agriculture.
- Provides farmers with financial and technical assistance to voluntarily put conservation on the ground.
- Administers programs such as;
 - Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP)
 - CRP—Technical
 - HEL/Wetland Compliance
 - Conservation Technical Assistance

Farm Service Agency

- Funded by the United States Department of Agriculture
- Offers loans, conservation payments, commodity price support and disaster relief.
- Administers programs such as;
 - Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Loans
 - Commodity Loans
 - Livestock Indemnity Program
 - Organic Certification Cost Share

SWCD Staff

Joel Wurscher

District Manager

Ron Otto

Water Planner/Watershed Technician

Coleton Draeger

Watershed Coordinator

NRCS Staff

April Sullivan

Sibley/Nicollet District Conservationist

Chris Schmidt

Sibley/Nicollet Soil Conservationist

FSA Staff

Daniel Mahoney

County Executive Director

Angee Mayer

Program Technician

Wendy Bigaouette

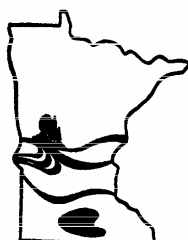
Program Technician

Gabriel Power

Program Technician

Sibley SWCD and NRCS
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Gaylord, MN 55334

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SIBLEY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Upcoming Dates:

July 26th 2017—CREP Open house, WRAPS event
Aug 2-6th 2017—Sibley County Fair
Sept 4th 2017—Labor day/office closed
Aug 18th 2017—EQUIP Deadline

Board Meetings: Aug 8th, Sept 12th, Oct 10th

Conservation Today is published by the Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District and the USDA NRCS-Gaylord 111 6th Street Gaylord, MN 55334. For more information regarding this newsletter, contact (507) 237-5435 Extension #3.

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