



Pennington SWCD

June 2020

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP)



Joel Stolaas receiving his MAWQCP field sign from Glen Kajewski.

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Congratulations to Joel Stolaas, who was recently certified as a Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) producer in Pennington County.

Northwestern Minnesota Area Certification Specialist, Glen Kajewski, and Pennington SWCD staff are working with producers to identify water quality risks present on their farm and provide options to alleviate them. Through MAWQCP, producers are offered the opportunity to obtain special technical and financial assistance to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) that promote water quality. Some of these practices include side water inlets, field borders, cover crops, minimum tillage, and more.

Certified producers can have their stewardship recognized by proudly displaying their MAWQCP field sign or using their certified status to promote their farm. Certification also provides 10 years of regulatory compliance certainty with any new water quality rules or laws.

Updates to the program include three new endorsements for water quality certified producers: Soil Health, Integrated Pest Management, and Wildlife. Also new for producers in the Red Lake River Watershed, is an incentive payment of \$300 for assessment and \$200 for certification in priority areas.

Pennington SWCD is proud to have 15 applications and 12 certified producers in MAWQCP. Producer operations include livestock, cash crops, or a combination of both. Thank you all for your leadership in implementing conservation practices that protect our water!

If you are interested in learning more about MAWQCP, please stop by the SWCD office or call (218) 683-7075.



PENNINGTON SWCD
*Serving Pennington County
Since 1948*

Office Hours

7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. M-TH
7:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. F

Mission Statement

*Provide landowners with
technical assistance in
identifying and improving
resource issues.*

Board of Supervisors

Brenda Szymanski..... Chair
Ricky Peterson..... Vice-Chair
Linda Hanson Secretary
Greg Hilgeman Treasurer
Grant Nelson..... PR&I

Board meetings are held on
the third Tuesday of every
month at 9:00 a.m.

District Staff

Bryan Malone
District Manager
Barb Molskness
District Coordinator
Peter Nelson
Water Plan Coordinator
Donna Christianson
Outreach Coordinator
Bryanna Grefthen
District Technician
Matt Sorvig
Resource Technician
Jill Fejszes
Farm Bill Biologist

Assisted by NRCS

Nico Bennett.....
Resource Conservationist

Assisted by RRVCSA

Zach Foley.....
Engineering Technician

*An Equal Opportunity
Provider and Employer*

Welcome Nico

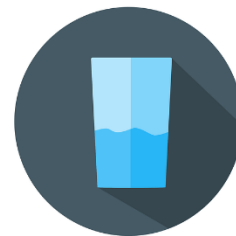


Nico Bennett comes to the Pennington County Field Office as a Resource Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. In Nico's 15 years with NRCS, he has worked in Pennington, Roseau, Marshall, and Polk Counties wearing many different hats: Soil Conservation Technician, Soil Conservationist, Acting District Conservationist, and Wetland Specialist. Nico is excited to be back in Pennington County and is looking forward to working with all the producers and partnering agencies.

In Nico's free time he enjoys running, fishing, SCUBA diving, volunteering as a firefighter/EMT, and planning the next adventure with his two daughters.

Well Water Testing

There are many possible well water contaminants and a common question from homeowners is what to test for? The Minnesota Department of health requires new wells to be tested for nitrates, coliform bacteria, and arsenic. The requirement for testing potable wells for arsenic began August 4, 2008, while the nitrate and coliform bacteria testing requirement began January 1, 1975.



When a new well is drilled, the contractor sends a sample to a certified lab to analyze nitrate, coliform bacteria, and arsenic levels. The results are sent to the MN Department of Health and the homeowner. Even if the results come back negative for bacteria and below drinking water standards for arsenic and nitrates, it's recommended to test for coliform bacteria annually and nitrates every other year. If an analysis of your well shows an elevated level of nitrates, this indicates other surface contaminants have the potential to affect your well water.

If levels are above drinking water standards, or you are concerned about contaminants, water filtration systems can be installed to remove contaminants to a safe drinking water level. One such system is a reverse osmosis (RO) system that reduces contaminants to a safe drinking water level if they are properly maintained. Contact the SWCD if you are interested in a well water test kit.

It All Started With An Acorn



“The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson’s quote was taken to heart by the late Dorothy Hanson, former kindergarten teacher at Northrup School. Each fall, Dorothy planted acorns in her classroom so students could help nurture and witness a “mighty oak in the making.”

Every spring, Dorothy would purchase SWCD trees. Former District Technician Gary Lane was curious about her annual purchase. After a few questions, he discovered she was giving them to her students and admired her idea. Gary asked the SWCD board to provide the trees free of charge. The board went one step further and donated trees to ALL kindergarten students in the county; thus, the beginning of the SWCD Arbor Day Program. Every year since then, our staff has made kindergarten classroom visits and distributed trees.

The story doesn’t end there. Dorothy passed away in 2005. At Dorothy’s funeral visitation, her daughter Katherine learned the SWCD was still donating trees to kindergartners. Later that year, Katherine contacted the SWCD regarding her desire to pay for future trees in her mom’s honor. The paperwork was completed to establish a fund, and the next spring Katherine accompanied Barb Molskness to the classrooms. They also helped plant a tree at Challenger Elementary School in Dorothy’s memory.

Over the years, thousands of trees have been distributed to kindergarten students in Pennington County. Some have grown to be special additions in beautiful yards. **Just think...this all began with a teacher planting an acorn!**



LeAnn Wilde’s kindergarten tree shortly after planting.

Look at what LeAnn’s (pink) and Kevin’s (white) trees look like now!

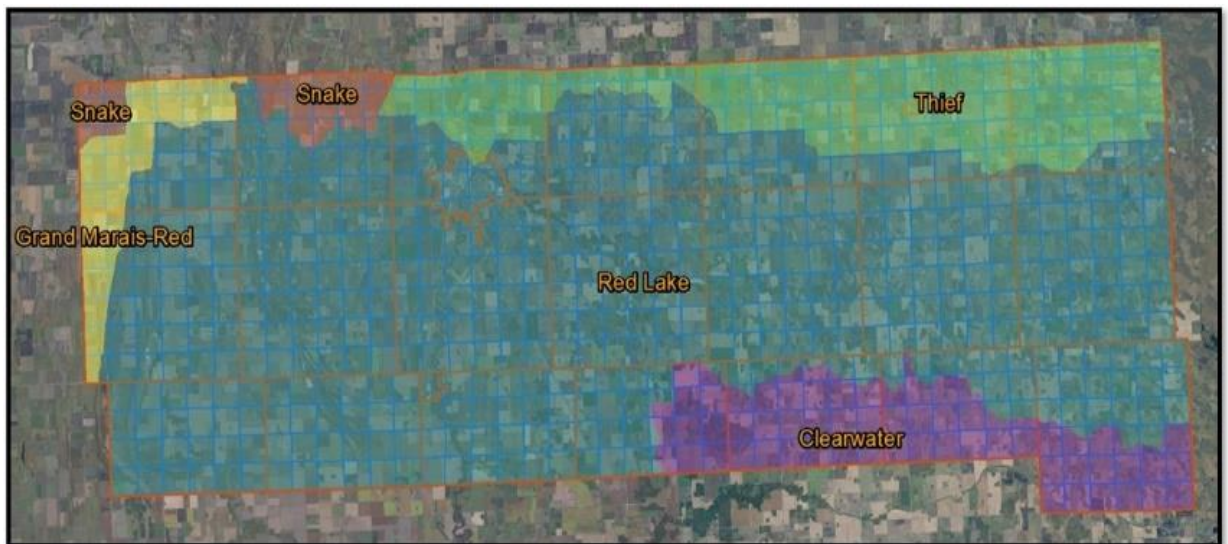
Kevin Wilde’s kindergarten tree after a few years of growth.

****Special Note:** Due to the 2020 Coronavirus, the SWCD was unable to make classroom visits and distribute trees this year. Plans are to visit and distribute trees to the kindergarten and 1st grade classrooms in the spring of 2021.

One Watershed One Plan (1W1P)

The Thief River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, also known as One Watershed One Plan (1W1P), was approved by the Board of Water and Soil Resources on March 25, 2020. The final step, prior to project implementation, is local adoption of the plan. The Marshall SWCD was appointed Plan Coordinator and the Red Lake Watershed District was appointed the fiscal agent for implementing the plan.

The completed plan will enable local partners access to a new source of state funding to implement conservation projects in the Thief River Watershed. A funding request will be submitted to the state for projects identified by SWCD, County, and Watershed District staff with approval from the Policy Committee. Some of the projects identified are stabilizing the outlet of JD23 in Marshall County at the Hillyer Bridge, streambank stabilization projects on the Thief River, cover crop practices in priority areas, and survey and design work on the outlet of JD30 in Pennington County. Local units of government participating in the Thief River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan include: Marshall, Beltrami, and Pennington Counties; Marshall, Beltrami, and Pennington SWCDs; and the Red Lake Watershed District.



The Red Lake River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was approved in 2017. The first round of funding to implement the plan was received in 2018 and another funding request has been submitted for 2020 and 2021. Grade stabilization structures, water and sediment control basins, and ditch outlet stabilization projects will be implemented with this next round of state funding. Priority locations for projects include the drainage areas of CD96, Black River, and the main stem of the Red Lake River downstream of Thief River Falls.

The Clearwater River Watershed is next in line for the One Watershed One Plan Program. Although the Clearwater River only flows through the county in sections 31 and 32 of Hickory Township, the watershed covers over 37,000 acres in parts of Hickory, Mayfield, Deer Park, and Wyandotte Townships. Major rivers within the Clearwater River Watershed include the Clearwater River, Lost River, Hill River, and Poplar River. A grant application to fund the plan is due June 12th, and applicants will be notified of funding by August 26, 2020.

“When the well’s dry, we know the worth of water.”

-Benjamin Franklin

It's just a low spot or is it?

An area can be a wetland even if it doesn't appear wet on the surface. Before you start an earth moving project, it's important to contact your local SWCD to:

- Find out if the land you intend to alter is a wetland
- Determine if the proposed activity has impacts to a wetland area
- Find alternatives to the proposed project in order to avoid wetland areas

Why? Minnesota wetlands are protected by State law.

It can be very difficult to identify wetlands. Some examples of projects that could potentially affect wetlands include:

- Filling a low area of a residential lot for a building or lawn
- Tiling wet areas of cultivated fields
- Digging a pond in a low area
- Cleaning out an old ditch or improving an existing ditch
- Adding fill for a crossing of a stream or wet swale

Start investigating your projects well in advance of moving earth with a visit to your local Soil and Water Conservation District to help you determine if wetlands may be a factor. For more information about wetlands in Minnesota, see the Board of Water and Soil Resources website at <https://bwsr.state.mn.us>, or the Pennington SWCD website at <https://www.penningtonswcd.org>.

Wetland
Conservation
Act



*Do you think this area
is a wetland?
Answer below CRP article
inside back cover.*

MAWQCP Informational Brunch

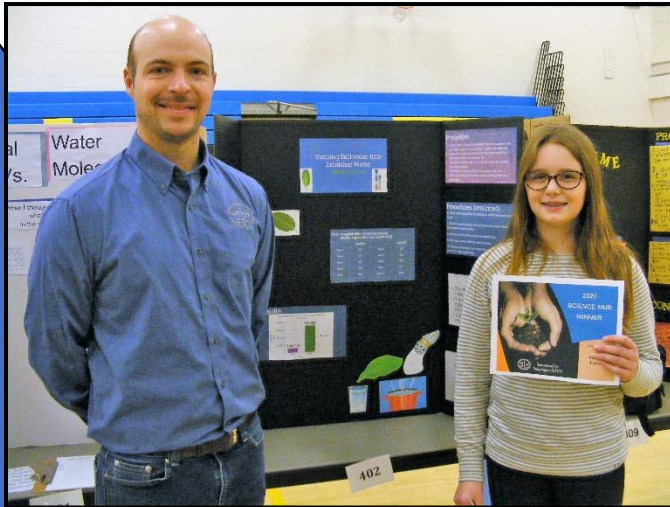
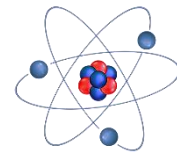
MAWQCP is the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. This program takes a whole farm approach to assessing water quality; with risk assessment on each individual parcel and crop.

On February 19th, the Pennington SWCD hosted a MAWQCP Informational Brunch for area producers. Area MAWQCP Certification Specialist, Glen Kajewski, highlighted the benefits of the program and how the certification process works. A few highlights included technical and financial assistance, regulatory certainty, whole farm assessment for water quality, and producer recognition. Three area producers took the next step by applying to become MAWQCP certified. Thanks to all who attended!



If you are interested in learning more about MAWQCP or would like to sign up for the program, contact Glen Kajewski at (218) 689-1502 or Matt at the Pennington SWCD (218) 683-7075.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION



The 2020 Science Fair Award was presented to Bethany Larson, a student at Franklin Middle School. The Pennington SWCD gives this award to the project that displays outstanding knowledge related to the conservation of soil or water. Bethany's project explored the question of what needs to happen to turn saltwater into drinking water. Bethany was awarded a certificate along with a \$50 cash prize from the Pennington SWCD by Water Plan Coordinator and judge, Peter Nelson.

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The Pennington SWCD sponsored a presentation by the Science Museum of Minnesota about one of our most precious natural resources – **“WATER.”** This year 150 fifth grade students from Challenger Elementary School attended the presentation by Science Museum staff member, Sam Horak. Sam stunned students when she turned a cup of water into solid matter.





Can We Count On You To CLEAN-DRAIN-DRY?

You may notice billboards, posters, and other advertising materials promoting Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) prevention, such as the CLEAN-DRAIN-DRY campaign. Most people know AIS are harmful to the environments they invade and that the spread of AIS can be prevented with the CLEAN-DRAIN-DRY method. However, do you know what it means to CLEAN-DRAIN-DRY properly? While CLEAN-DRAIN-DRY is a great catchphrase, not everyone knows what it really entails. Each action is described in more detail below:

- **CLEAN** – Be sure to remove any visible debris including vegetation, organisms, and mud from all equipment when it leaves the water. Debris should be removed from all equipment including the watercraft, trailer, docks, lifts, boots, hunting and fishing equipment, lifejackets, etc. *NOTE: It is illegal to transport any aquatic plant or invasive species on the roadway.*
- **DRAIN** – All water related equipment should be drained. This includes the boat and bait containers. Be sure to remove the drain plugs to drain the bilge and livewell prior to leaving an access. *NOTE: Remember to keep the drain plugs out while transporting the equipment, as it is against the law to transport water from Minnesota lakes and rivers, as well as, transport a watercraft without removing the drain plug.*
- **DRY** – Allow equipment to dry for at least five days before putting it into another body of water. If this is not possible, be sure to wipe the equipment dry before the next use. *NOTE: If you plan to move or sell equipment, such as docks and lifts, they must be left out of the water for 21 days before being placed into another waterbody.*
- **BONUS: DISPOSE** – Be sure to DISPOSE of any unwanted bait in the trash. Do not release unwanted bait in the water. Properly disposing of unwanted bait can help prevent the spread of AIS. If you keep or save bait for future use, be sure to replace the water in the bait container with bottled or tap water when you leave.

It is important to remember that these laws apply to all recreational use including kayaking, canoeing, waterfowl hunting, angling, etc. These quick and simple actions can help prevent new infestations of invasive species not only in Pennington County but across the state and even the nation. Don't be the cause of a new infestation. Can we count on you to CLEAN-DRAIN-DRY and DISPOSE properly? You can take the pledge to **CLEAN-DRAIN-DRY** today at <https://www.wildlifeforever.org/home/invasive-species/>. For more information about AIS and CLEAN-DRAIN-DRY, visit the Pennington SWCD or MN DNR website.



*Zebra mussels attached to a stick.
Please help stop the spread of AIS!*

Make a Plan to Extend Your Grazing Season

A major expense in most cattle operations is the cost of feed. Strategic management of your current pasture can help extend your grazing season and lower feed expenses. The University of Minnesota Extension suggests a beneficial way to utilize your land to its fullest potential is to establish a grazing plan.

In short, a grazing plan involves sectioning your pastures into several paddocks. Controlling how long the cattle are in each paddock allows you to manage how much residual stubble height remains and how long the rest period is for each paddock. Another benefit to rotating cattle through paddocks is that manure can be naturally spread more evenly across the entire pasture, possibly reducing your cost of manually spreading manure. The manure helps increase soil health by adding soil structure, nutrients, and organic matter. Improving soil health, leaving adequate stubble height, and allowing proper rest can help improve the quantity and quality of available forage in your pasture.

Other options that can be included in your grazing plan are utilizing cropland and incorporating cover crops. You can graze crop stubble or cover crops to help extend the grazing season. A bonus of grazing on cropland is the natural spread of manure across the field, improving your soil health for future years. Managing a grazing plan on your current operation could keep your cattle grazing in the pasture longer, improving your soil health, and reducing feed expenses.

For more information about grazing plans, check out the University of Minnesota Extension website or contact the Pennington SWCD office.



“The MPCA is a sponsoring agency with a grant supporting a portion of the delegated Pennington County Feedlot Program.”

Researchers at Kansas State University and the Kansas Forest Service are finding that windbreaks may actually pay their way on some farms. Reduced tillage has eased the concern of wind erosion and raised the question of whether windbreaks still provide a yield benefit.

A study of soybean and wheat yields, conducted from 1998 to 2015, monitored areas protected and unprotected by field windbreaks. They also estimated yield loss for the windbreak's footprint to assess if yield increases compensated for the area taken out of crop production.

Soybeans respond with yield increases of 16%, while wheat yields increased 10%. Yield increases were enough to compensate for the footprint taken out of production in 53% of the cases. Windbreaks of 1-2 tree rows, usually on the north edge of fields, compensate for the footprint 71% of the time and wide windbreaks, typically on the field's south edge, compensate 38% of the time.

The area of reduced yields close to the windbreaks are clearly visible, but the higher yield in the protected zone is less visible. Most yield benefit occurs in the protected area from roughly 3 to 20 times the height of the trees.

Producers can apply for financial assistance for renovating old windbreaks and for new windbreaks through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Excerpts from Larry Reichenberger's Article "Retree Rewards" in The Furrow Magazine

OLD STUDY

NEW VERSION

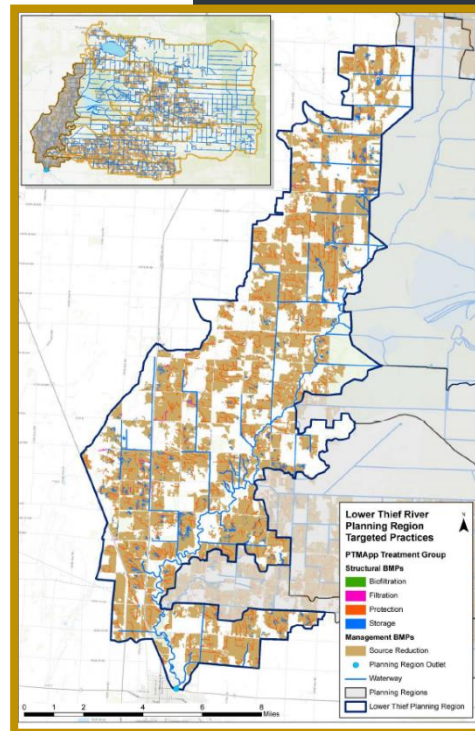
Thief River Grade Stabilization and Cover Crop Implementation

Pennington SWCD recently received a grant to help with the implementation of side water inlets and cover crops in priority locations of the Thief River Watershed. These areas include the Lower Thief River, JD30, JD18, and JD13. Project locations will be identified using the PTMApp and Ditch Inventory Data, followed by site visits and meeting with the landowner or operator.

Operators can apply for the District's Cover Crop Program if they fall within a priority area. Operators will be paid a flat rate to plant either single species or multi-species cover crops. The SWCD will work with operators to find cover crop species that work for their operation.

With this grant, 62 side water inlets will be installed at unstable outlets or where existing pipes are failing. The SWCD will survey and design these for landowners. Landowners and operators can enter into cost-share contracts and receive 75% reimbursement of project expenses. If they are willing to implement both side water inlets and cover crops, they would be eligible to receive 90% cost-share on the side water inlet project.

If you are interested in cover crops or side water inlets, please contact the Pennington SWCD at (218) 683-7075. For operators outside the prioritized areas, the District has programs to help you implement cover crops and side water inlets as well.



Three Supervisor Positions Up For Election in 2020

Supervisors play an important role in how our community deals with a wide variety of resource management issues including water quality, soil erosion, education of youth and adults on conservation, wetlands, and financial assistance programs.

This year, the Pennington SWCD has 3 Supervisor positions up for election: **District 1** - which includes the Townships of Numedal, Bray, Sanders, Polk Centre, and Black River; **District 4** - which includes the Townships of Goodridge, Reiner, Star, and Hickory; and **District 5** - which includes the Townships of River Falls, Wyandotte, Mayfield, and Deer Park.

District SWCD Supervisors serve four-year terms, meeting monthly to discuss the business of the SWCD. They do not receive a salary, but are compensated for attending meetings and reimbursed for expenses.



Anyone interested in running for Supervisor of the Pennington Soil and Water Conservation District should file at the County Auditor's Office from May 19 through June 2, 2020. Additional information about the SWCD can be found online at www.penningtonswcd.org or by calling the office at (218) 683-7075.

**E
Q
I
P**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides technical and financial assistance to producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion, and improved or created wildlife habitat.

Applications for EQIP financial assistance are accepted throughout the year. If your application is selected, you will enter into a contract with NRCS to receive financial assistance for the cost of implementing conservation practices. Payment rates for conservation practices are reviewed and set each fiscal year.

**C
S
P**

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers an opportunity for crop growers to enhance their agricultural operations while adopting conservation activities that can reduce energy use, improve soil health, and improve water quality. CSP can help you plan and implement conservation practices and enhancements that address natural resource concerns on your operation.

CSP helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. If you are already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, chances are CSP can help you find new ways to meet your goals. CSP contracts are for five years, with the option to renew for an additional five years.

If you have any questions or would like to fill out an application for either of these programs, please contact your local NRCS office at (218) 681-1612.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

The Conservation Reserve Program allows landowners to temporarily retire farmland by planting it to a grass mix. CRP creates wildlife habitat and helps control erosion by reducing water runoff and sedimentation. Contracts are drawn up for a 10-15-year term with landowners paid yearly based on a soil rental rate per acre. New land going into CRP is also eligible for signing incentive payments.

You can still apply for continuous CRP through August 21st. Offers are automatically accepted into the program if the landowner and producer meet the proper criteria. Cost-share is available to cover 50% of the installation cost.

Practices included in the continuous signup are:

CP 5A-Field Windbreak	CP 23-Wetland Restoration in Floodplain
CP 12-Wildlife Food Plot (only available with CP 23A)	CP 23A-Wetland Restoration Outside of Floodplain
CP 16A-Shelterbelt	CP 27/28-Farmable Wetlands/Buffer (Must be enrolled together)
CP 17A-Living Snow Fence	CP 42-Pollinator Habitat
CP 21-Filter Strips	CP 43-Prairie Strips
CP 22-Riparian Buffer	

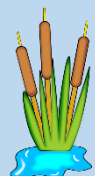
**C
R
P**

If you are interested in learning more about CRP and what practice might be a good fit for your land, please contact Jill Fejszes at the SWCD office.

Answer to WCA Article:



Yes, it is a wetland - The soybeans planted in this low spot were drowned out from water ponding there long enough to kill the plants, that is why there isn't any vegetation growing there. Farm Program rules probably do not have this area marked as a wetland but if someone wanted to do something other than farm it (such as build a road, or house, or pond), under WCA regulations it would be called a wetland.

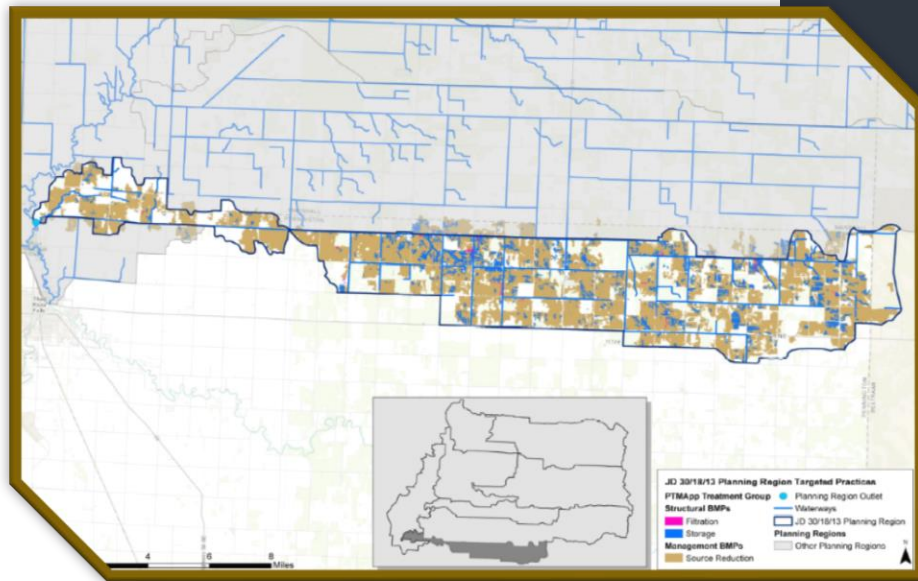


Prioritizing Locations for Conservation Practices

“There’s an App for that!”

In the conservation world there is a vast amount of data, reports, plans, and computer models to identify resource issues and to guide project implementation. This information is needed for project planning, supporting the validity of a project, project funding, and effectiveness of a project. Recent plans, including the Red Lake and Thief River One Watershed One Plans, utilized the most recent water monitoring data, reports, and computer models to guide project implementation. One of those models is the PTMApp.

PTMApp is a computer model that uses the best available data to estimate the amount of sediment, total nitrogen, and total phosphorus leaving the landscape and moving to a resource downstream. The model can also predict pollutant reductions by simulating the suitability and effectiveness of Best Management Practices (BMPs) on the landscape. Local and area conservation staff are being trained to use PTMApp to model a variety of different conservation scenarios from watershed-wide down to a field scale. The goal is to improve the efficiency of dollars spent on project implementation by working with landowners in priority locations to implement voluntary conservation practices. These practices include grassed waterways, side water inlets, cover crops, and filter strips to name a few.



Map of the JD30, JD18, and JD13 planning region identifying priority locations of various practices by different colors.



Buffer Reminder

Please make sure your buffers have been planted. Compliance checks will continue this summer. Any questions, call Matt Sorvig at (218) 683-7075.

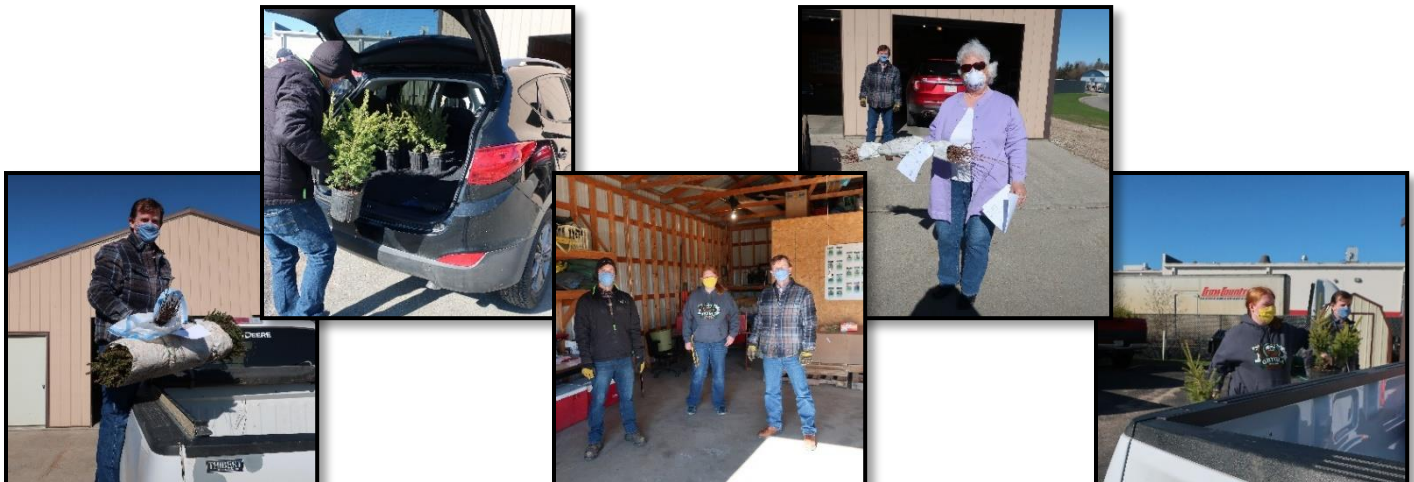


**PENNINGTON SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**
201 Sherwood Ave S, Suite 3
Thief River Falls, MN 56701-3400

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The supervisors and staff of Pennington SWCD want to assure you we are taking every precaution necessary to help keep you safe and control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The virus along with the governor's "Stay-at-Home" order really threw a wrench into our day-to-day activities. Working from home sometimes proved to be a challenge and many of the events that we had planned for this spring had to be canceled -- like our booths at the Home, Sports & Family Show and the Pennington County Fair, the SWCD Annual Banquet, Stewardship Week inserts, the Envirothon, and Arbor Day trees for the kindergarten classes. But one thing that stayed constant through it all was our tree sales, even though pick-up day looked a little different this year...



Thank you for your patience and understanding during this uncertain and constantly changing time.

Check out our website at: www.penningtonswcd.org