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MINNESOTA BULLETIN NO. 260-4-9

SUBJECT: INF – CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Purpose: To distribute the January – March issue of Current Developments.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2004.

State Conservationist's Message

Since the passage of the 2002 Farm Bill, the Conservation Security Program (CSP) has received a lot of attention from agricultural producers and environmental groups from throughout the country. Realizing the importance of obtaining public input on the proposed rule, NRCS held a total of seven CSP listening sessions throughout Minnesota during the months of January and February. Making meetings accessible to farmers and folks who were interested in CSP was the key and as a result, close to 280 people attended the seven listening sessions.



Minnesota's final CSP listening session was held in Rosemount at the University of Minnesota Extension Office. A special effort was made to invite Hmong farmers to the meeting. The power point presentations that were given included both English and Hmong language. Throughout the sessions, dialogue was interpreted so that all attendees understood and were aware of what was being communicated about CSP. The interaction and dialogue that occurred throughout the meeting was positive and showed the extra effort on outreach was appreciated. NRCS was able to provide these participants with not only information about CSP but also, the participants learned more about NRCS and about the technical assistance which can be received through NRCS field offices in Minnesota.



WILLIAM HUNT
State Conservationist

DIST: AE

**Ever Heard of a Ha-Ha? “New” Conservation Practice?
Submitted by Sonia Maassel Jacobsen**

Though a ha-ha might elicit a giggle, if not a guffaw, simply because of its funny name, the word’s meaning is totally serious. Back in jolly old England, a ha-ha was a large trench dug as a barrier to keep livestock from roaming. It was constructed with one gently sloping side and one vertical side into which a retaining wall was built, giving the structure its alternate name “sunken fence”. Through this tomfoolery with the natural landscape, landowners gained an uninterrupted view of their property while keeping in the cows. But guests, unaware of a ha-ha’s existence, would find it no laughing matter if they fell into one. The ha-ha itself has fallen out of use in most landscape designs, though they are often found in zoos. Wherever a drop of more than 30 inches is required, a fence is necessary. While ha-has are thought to have originated in France, the ha-ha’s most notable application is found at the Gardens of Stowe, Buckinghamshire, England, designed by Charles Bridgeman, constructed in 1725, and still standing today.

Taken from “*Insider Lingo*” by Gina Gensing, which appeared in the March-April 2004 issue of *Architecture Minnesota*.

**News From Public Affairs
Jottings from Julie MacSwain, Public Affairs Specialist**

- Public affairs are something that each and every one of us should be concerned about. As an employee of NRCS, we have numerous activities and projects that we have accomplished in a positive fashion. It is important that we share with others these noteworthy conservation accomplishments. This can be accomplished in several ways such as providing news releases to our local papers, sharing these results at public meetings and local work groups, etc. If you think you have a project and/or activity that could be shared on our Minnesota NRCS web site, please e-mail them to me. NRCS National Headquarters is always looking for conservation stories for *NRCS TODAY*. Simply let me know if you have a story that is worthy of sharing. Your efforts are appreciated.
- The Minnesota Annual Report for FY 2003 has been posted on the MN NRCS web site: To locate the report simply go to: <http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov> *CLICK in on NEWS* located at the top of the Web page. *This is the location where you will find 4 PDF files with the Annual Report.*
- Over the last several months you have no doubt seen several of the feature articles that have appeared on the NRCS Minnesota web site My.nrcs and NRCS today. If you have any suggestions on what might be some additional features that could be shared, please let me know. Your ideas and contributions are certainly appreciated.

**Public Meeting Held to Discuss the Upper Pelican River Watershed Project.
Submitted by Brett Coleman, State Office**

On January 8, approximately 75 people attended a night meeting in Detroit Lakes to hear what the representatives from the Pelican River Watershed District (PRWD), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service had to say about the phosphorus levels in the surface water within the Upper Pelican River Watershed. The PRWD has requested PL-566 Watershed Planning Assistance to address nutrient issues within Detroit and Floyd Lakes in Becker County.

The meeting started with an introduction by the Dennis Kral, PRWD President, explaining the need for public participation in the planning process. A presentation by Tim James, MPCA, followed explaining the current water quality conditions and what the condition of the watershed could be in the future if things are not corrected. The estimated future conditions were based upon the trends observed from actual water quality data that have been collected over the past seven years. The other presentation was by Bill Lorenzen, NRCS - Water Resource Staff. The PL-566 process was explained to the group along with how the NRCS-WRS and their partners would analyze the problem. Bill's talk concluded with showing the group what work has already been completed on the project. After all the presentations were done, Dennis Kral opened the floor for questions. The questions ranged from project timeline to who will pay for the implementation of a plan.



**National Volunteer Week
Submitted by Cutrina Moreland, ETV Coordinator**

National Volunteer Week (April 18 – 24, 2004) is a 30-year tradition and designates a special time to recognize and celebrate the tremendous efforts of volunteers. Since its inception, presidents, mayors and other officials have signed proclamations and have participated in this highly visible, nationwide initiative. This year's theme is *Earth Team Volunteers – Planting the Seeds of Tomorrow*.

NRCS Celebrates National Volunteer Week

The Earth Team – NRCS's volunteer program is for individuals interested in making a difference by conserving the nation's natural resources. Earth Team volunteers help NRCS conservationists provide conservation technical assistance to landowners and teach others about conservation. They also assist youth groups, professional societies or civic groups with local projects on water quality, community beautification and erosion control. In addition, volunteers work in NRCS offices to provide clerical assistance, organize computer data, prepare newsletters or educate others about natural resource conservation. Nationally in fiscal year 2003, more than 43,800 Earth Team volunteers donated more than one million hours to conservation. Their contributions were valued at more than \$16.5 million.



Minnesota Celebrates National Volunteer Week

The Earth Team – In Minnesota’s fiscal year 2003, more than 1,100 volunteers donated over 55,133 hours to conservation.

On April 22, from 10 a.m. to noon, NRCS Earth Team volunteers will be removing trash, weeds and putting up wood duck houses throughout Hidden Falls Park in St. Paul. Partners will include the Farm Service Agency, the Park and Recreation Department, staff and students from Harding High School, and others.

Federal Women’s Program Sandra Jerzak, Chair

Federal Women’s Program Report

- Our FWP committee met on January 14 at the State Office Conference Room. We reviewed our Plan of Operation and talked about *jump starting* the Career Coaching Program as well as the Mentoring Program. We are working on a survey for employees to complete on their work environment and career. Our theme for our FWP newsletter is “*Hopes and Possibilities*” which is a spin-off of the March Women’s History Month theme.
- Please welcome Deanna Anderson to Minnesota. She left Wisconsin for the MLRA position in Rochester. She also came with another hat to wear and that is the Midwest Regional FWP Coordinator position. We are glad to have you in Minnesota!
- I have the taped HBO program *Iron Jawed Angels*. This show recounted the struggle of suffragists who fought for the passage of the 19th Amendment – women’s right to vote. Anyone interested in checking out this video should contact Sandy Jerzak at the Marshall Area Office.
- Sandy Jerzak, FWPM, presented Richard Laddusire with a certificate of appreciation and a Terry Redlin mug for his position as the FWP advisor. We wish him the best of luck in his new position.

March is Women History Month.

- Click on www.fordham.edu/halsall/women/womensbook.html and www.nwhm.org

Scholarship Opportunities for Chinese Americans

- The Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) is teaming up with the Avon Foundation to disperse fifteen scholarships of \$2,000 each. The scholarships will be awarded to Asian Pacific American (APA) women who will be entering their first year of college. Within the last eight years, OCA has awarded over 1,300 scholarships to financially disadvantaged students through its various scholarship programs. Since 1955, the Avon Foundation (<http://www.avoncompany.com/women>) has shown its commitment to women through an expanding network of life enhancing programs that promote economic empowerment for women. For more information on OCA's scholarship programs (eligible for women and men) and the Avon scholarship (women only) and an

application, students may go to OCA's website at <http://www.ocanatl.org>. The deadline for applying to the 2004 OCA-Avon Foundation Scholarship Program is May 1, 2004.

Why Are Your Perfect Images Not Perfect? By Julie MacSwain, Public Affairs Specialist

The following article was found on http://www.usda.gov/agency/oc/design/d_notes.html

With the recent addition of digital photos to Minnesota's NRCS Current Developments, more and more folks are asking the questions about how to use digital photos. This article seemed to answer a great deal of the questions. If you are out surfing the Internet and you find what appears to be the perfect image for your next publication, you quickly grab a disk, download a copy and with great satisfaction rush the image to the designer working on your document. However, your designer does not share your excitement. In fact, the person rejects the image citing *low resolution* and *poor reproduction quality* and other terms that do not mean much to you. So why is your *perfect* image not perfect after all?



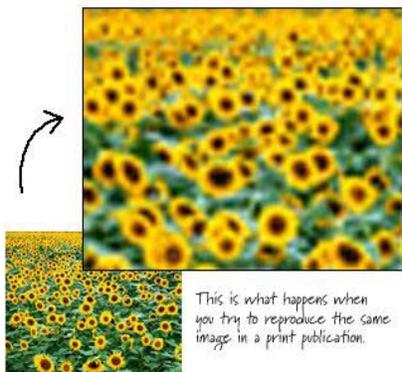
JPEG image downloaded from Internet

In an increasingly digital world, it is very tempting to abandon traditional image media (slides, transparencies, photo prints) in lieu of the digital image. And why not? Virtually every website in existence today, both private and commercial, offers the interested user access to photos on practically any subject imaginable. In this respect, the Internet seems like the ideal place to browse around for that perfect image.

Take a look at this image of a field of sunflowers. It is beautiful and looks great on your monitor. However, it looks great because it has been optimized for screen

viewing. This same image will not look as good when printed in your next 4-color publication. Here is why.

When you publish on the web, your output medium is not paper but a monitor. Monitors are low resolution devices that require small, low resolution images. To optimize an image for use on the web, the resolution (the sharpness or clarity of an image as defined by the number of dots of



This is what happens when you try to reproduce the same image in a print publication.

color per inch or *dpi*) is reduced to the smallest dpi ratio possible (usually 72 dpi), the color palette is reduced from a potential 16.7 million colors to 256 or less and the image is finally compressed into a GIF or JPG format, usually resulting in the loss of some image detail. So, when the image you downloaded from the Internet is reproduced in a 4-color publication, the result is less than desirable. As seen below, the same sunflower image will become blurry and pixelated. There will be a significant loss of color depth and image detail. So what should you do now? Well, if

researching images on the Internet is the most desirable way for you to find images for your print publications, simply limit your search to quality stock photography company websites. These sites have powerful keyword driven search engines and usually offer thousands of high quality, high resolution images for free.

AREA 1

Glen Kajewski, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Glen Kajewski, Randy Huelskamp, and Cari Rebische interviewed potential SCEP employees at the University of Minnesota Crookston campus in January after assisting Gloria Larson from the State Office at their second Annual Job Fair.

On February 13th, Russ Johnsrud, DC for Hubbard County, served as a judge at the Laporte School Science Fair. This was the 18th Annual Event and Johnsrud has judged at each one.

With the onset of the EQIP signup, there has been a quite a bit of interest in the new 442 Practice in Hubbard County. This is the practice that will assist landowners with the conversion of their high pressure irrigation systems to low pressure. This will help with irrigation efficiency resulting in water conservation.

DC Johnsrud will again coordinate articles from the Service Center (NRCS, FSA, and SWCD) for the special Ag Week edition of the Park Rapids Enterprise.

Giziibii RC&D is again partnering with the Blandin Foundation and several other partners to host the second annual event promoting special forest products culminating in a 2-day marketplace where vendors can showcase and sell their products.

Giziibii RC&D received a grant from the North Country Health Services Foundation for the formation of the Oshki-Bawaajigan Dance Troupe. This is a program for Indians and non-Indians designed to help keep youth off drugs and alcohol and in school via the use of traditional Indian song, dance, and lessons taken from the rich Native American culture.

Jan Kaspari has been hired by the Pennington SWCD on a half-time basis for the position of water plan coordinator. Jan also serves as the Marshall County Water Plan Coordinator.

Field offices throughout the Area have been busy providing information and taking applications for the EQIP signup.

Pembina Trail RC&D will again be coordinating the Dead Animal Pickup in six Northwestern Minnesota counties.

An Organic Short Course for Agricultural Professionals is being planned by the Pembina Trail RC&D. This course will be scheduled for the summer of 2004.

Adam Woltjer started working in the McIntosh office on February 9th as a Soil Conservation Technician. Adam is a 2001 graduate of the University of Minnesota - Crookston Campus. He and his wife Kelly live in Mahnomen.

AREA 2

James Ayres, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Congratulations and welcome to Jon Frie and Michael Steinhauer, who were recently selected for the SCT positions in Wheaton and Breckenridge, respectively. Jon hails from the St. Cloud area, graduating from St. Cloud State University while Mike recently graduated from the University of Minnesota at Crookston. Please join me in welcoming both Jon and Michael to Area II!

The Traverse County SWCD has been busy hiring additional technical staff as well. Matt Grunig was hired as their new SWCD Technician and joined the staff at the Wheaton Field Office on March 8th. Matt graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in animal ecology. Welcome, Matt, to Area II and the great State of Minnesota!

Area II was unsuccessful in filling our Grazing Specialist Position, scheduled to be located in the Detroit Lakes Field Office. The position will soon be readvertised along with the Grand Rapids grazing position.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES:

District Conservationist Jim Fritz, reports that the local work group has made closure of abandoned manure pits a priority practice and the Long Prairie FO staff is working with the County feedlot officer and are expecting at least 20 landowners to sign up for this new EQIP practice.

Perham DC, Bruce Becker, reports planned prairie grass plantings for 2004 and 2005 have increased significantly with 1000 acres scheduled for 2004 and 1500 acres in 2005.

On March 3rd, DC Reetz entertained Joe McCloskey and several county officials in discussions about completing an update soil survey for Crow Wing County. As a result of the Area Appraisal, it was agreed that a soil survey project leader position would be advertised and filled to begin the legend development for an impending start of a soil survey for Crow Wing County.

Approximately 75 certified crop advisors and irrigators attended the 35th Annual Central MN Irrigation Clinic and Ag. Professional Workshop at Wadena where DC Aldeen spoke about the benefits of a soil survey and its use in addressing soil erosion and water quality issues utilizing USDA Programs.

Stan Musielewicz reports that the Little Falls LWG took a multi-faceted approach to setting local EQIP priorities by targeting 5 county watersheds along with the selecting Closure of Abandoned Waste Facilities (709), well decommissioning (351) and all woodland practices (factor H) as local priorities.

Bob (3) Cubed – Bob, Bob and Bob (Honeman, Usgaard and Koltes) teamed up to complete the 1st WRP plan for Grant County utilizing toolkit. The new WRP easement tool, along with the toolkit extensions, was used with Arc View to develop the plan map on the 400+ acre easement.

OTHER:

The Perham FO and the Fergus Falls Area Offices both recently moved to new locations while the Morris, Glenwood, Wadena and Detroit Lakes FO’s were remodeled to accommodate increased space needs. The dust has settled and the paint has dried just in time for the next EQIP and CRP signups.

During the week of March 1 – 5, the entire area went through an appraisal with all Area II Offices participating and having State Office visitors help evaluate our conservation effectiveness. Thanks to all who helped and participated!

The Brainerd Jaycees held their annual fishing derby on Gull Lake where 12,000 people registered for this year’s event that brings “big bucks” into the local economy each year. The first place prize winner receives a brand new pickup truck!

Speaking of fish, the Alexandria Service Center recently held their annual fish fry, a great social activity that helps maintain internal building relations, eases the stress caused by program pressures plus “feeds the hungry” according to DC Mark Dybdal. Not to be outdone, the Area Office staff appears to have been successful in “buying down” the number of agreed to items in their Area Appraisal write-up by putting on a great fish fry of their own. (Just Kidding). Many of the State Office Appraisal Team participated in the March 3rd fish fry which was also a great social event and a great opportunity to talk about things other than work. A good time was had by all!

AREA 3

Kevin Daw, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

PEOPLE

- Tom Gervais has started as the Soil Conservation Technician in the Duluth Field Office.
- Linda Lund has started as the Area Administrative Coordinator in the Duluth Area
- Gary Schmiedlin has started as the Area Resource Conservationist in the Duluth Area Office.
- Brian Sandberg has been selected as the Area Information Technology Specialist in the Duluth Area office. Brian will start in April. A special thanks to Cathy McCormack for helping us with our IT needs.
- Soil Conservationist, Korey Werk, is leaving NRCS to pursue his fortunes in real estate and GIS consulting.
- Soil Scientist, Gary Nelson, retired in February.

Best wishes to everyone as you pursue your new career moves.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

Training! Training! Training! Field employees in Area 3 received training on ProTracts, PRS, SCIMS, LRA, CSP, Geodata Management, and Organic Production. In addition, all employees received mandatory training in First Aid/CPR, as well as all CR/EO subjects identified in the MN Civil Rights Corrective Action Plan.

All EQIP Local Work Groups have developed their priority ranking and are off and running on signups. Several tribal projects are in development.

The Mora Service Center has moved into a brand new home. Onanegozie RC&D has joined with the NRCS, SWCD and IMPACK Engineering. The facility is also home to FSA and the Regional Extension Center.

The Pine County Soil Survey is moving forward. The County Board adopted a commitment of funds in February. An LCMR funding proposal has been submitted. NRCS has advertised for office space to house a Project Leader. The State Conservationist approved hiring a Project Leader last October.

Joe McCloskey will be working with the Human Resources staff to release the vacancy announcement.

DC Paul Sandstrom is working with a local farmer and Laurentian RC&D to establish a community gardening project with the Fond du Lac Band Gitigaan Gardening Club.

Laurentian and Onanegozie RC&D are assisting Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College and Tribal leaders with the implementation of the Eco-Manufacturing Development project. An industrial park site has been secured along with major investors. The site will feature a Renewable Resources Refinery producing green power from biomass. The refinery will supply power, steam, hydrogen and other raw materials to businesses in the industrial park. Several companies have already committed. The site will also feature housing and a business campus for the training of tribal and other regional students in various aspects of these new technologies.

AREA 4

Timothy Wilson, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Carver County Farm Service Agency and NRCS hosted a Conservation Forum. Representatives from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources - Wildlife and Forestry, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Soil and Water Conservation District, along with the FSA and NRCS discussed their different programs and how the various programs could be used together. It was a great success and we will be meeting again with more agencies.

AREA 5

Michael Appel, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

~AREA 5 Happenings~

Has spring sprung? The warm temperatures have melted most of the snow in our area. Everyone is itching to get outside to begin another season of construction activities.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) and EQIP have taken most of the field offices time the past months. All offices conducted county work group meetings as well as the area work group. Several counties are promoting EQIP through various means. The Redwood Office made several small town visits that have resulted in 30 sign-up so far and 34 on the waiting list.

A CSP listening session was held in Montevideo on the 30th of January. There were over 80 people who braved the minus 25 degree weather to attend.

Several of our DC's are busy developing nutrient management and conservation plans to get their certification in place. I myself have just finished my first comprehensive nutrient management plan. They are not kidding when they claim that it will take 40 plus hours to complete.

RC&D

Brian Christiansen, DC in Slayton, is the Acting Coordinator for the Coteau Des Prairies RC&D. He has been busy working on retooling the application that was submitted to Secretary Ann Veneman. The RC&D recently provided a grant to the Westbrook-Walnut Grove School District for a Wellness Center.

Soils

Kamara Holmes and Leah Black, soil scientists at the Area office, have made significant progress on the Nobles County soil survey updates.

Kim Steffen was out to review Area Soil Specialist workload and activities.

Ray Genrich, Joe Kristoff, Kamara Holmes and Leah Black have spent numerous hours preparing for the upcoming Soil Technology Workshop.

Engineering

Several training sessions have or will be completed this winter by the staff. There are several EQIP applications requesting a roof structure for the feedlot. The problem is that we do not have enough TSP's to cover the requests.

The Canby Handicap dock and walk at Del Clarke Lake is scheduled for construction this spring.

Relations

We are in the process of working with the Upper Sioux Indian Community to do a resource inventory of the Reservation. In addition, we are meeting on March 23 with tribal representatives to discuss the inventory and plans for a Harmony Workshop and scheduling cultural resources training with them.

Anniversaries

Four Soil and Water Conservation Districts will be celebrating 50 years of conservation: Chippewa, Big Stone, Murray and Nobles. The Chippewa SWCD will have a program and banquet on April 2, 2004. The Lincoln SWCD is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

Area Office

We need more space! We are working with Laurie Otte on our office space needs. We have looked at a few potential office sites and will be considering a building expansion with the present landowners. Bid packages should be out soon. Laurie was also a guest speaker at our February DC/Tech meeting to discuss space issues with the field offices.

Personnel

Jeff Kjorness, Soil Conservationist in Worthington, has accepted the DC position in Olivia, Renville County.

Jamie Thomazin, DC in Clarkfield, has accepted the GS-12 DC position in Marshall.

Lance Smith, Area Range Management Specialist in Western South Dakota, has accepted the Grazing Specialist position in Marshall.

Summer Interns and WAE's: We will be bringing on several summer interns so our offices will be full of eager learners.

Cheryl Isder, Soil Conservationist, will be located in Slayton.

Shantel Spielmann, Soil Conservationist, has been assigned to the Ivanhoe field office.

Kari Good, Soil Conservationist, will be located in the Worthington field office.

Casey Thomazin, Soil Conservationist, will begin his duty at the Montevideo field office. (Yes, he is Jamie's son.)

Nathan Blankers, Soil Conservationist, will be stationed in Pipestone, MN.

Mariela Rodriquez, Soil Conservationist, will be located at the Ortonville field office.

Alvin Howell, Soil Conservationist, will work out of the Marshall Area office.

Thomas Kost - WAE Soil Conservation Aid, Marshall AO

Travis Kesteloot – WAE Soil Conservation Aid, Marshall FO.

We are accepting applications for the SCT position in Luverne until March 26, 2004.

A Nobles SWCD board member, Mike Perkins, passed away suddenly of a heart attack. Mike was a supervisor for the Nobles SWCD board for two years. He was only 34 years old.

AREA 6

Ken Luttner, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Personnel

- It is official! After 32 years of dedicated service, Steve Maurice, DC in Martin County retired in January of this year. March 3, 2004, was Bill Geary's last day as an NRCS employee. After 36 years and 8 months of dedicated service he joined Steve Maurice in the retirement rank. We wish both of them the Best of Luck and enjoyment in retirement. They are currently Earth Team Volunteers.
- Jeff Kjorness begins his career as a District Conservationist in Olivia, on April 19, 2004, welcome back to Area 6 Jeff. Jeff is currently a soil conservationist at the Worthington FO. Mike Taylor, DC Willmar; Dale Johnson, DC Litchfield; and Dennis Reimers, DC Glencoe will all be looking forward to having Jeff report to duty.

- Brenda Tonn has returned to work after a serious snowmobile accident while on vacation in Wyoming. She is recovering well.
- Amy Stratton, Three Rivers RC&D Coordinator, was named the State Civil Rights Coordinator.
- Randy Nelson, Prairie County RC&D Coordinator, was named Safety Chair for Area 6.
- Anna Figueroa, MLRA soil scientist, felt it was time to move on and ended her service.
- All DC's are Certified Conservation Planners.
- Steve Breaker, DC LeCenter, completed his training and is now a Certified Nutrient Management Specialist also. Congratulations Steve.
- Jason Sickmann, DC Blue Earth, and Steve Becker, AE, attended the NRCS Leadership Development Program (LDP) Conference in Madison, WI as part of their LDP training.

Conservation Activities

Larry Schmidt, ARC, and Steve Breaker, DC LeCenter, attended ProTracts *Train the Trainer Training* and held ProTracts training for all field employees in Area 6.

Many Landowners in Sibley County are still spreading the word on Continuous CRP, however, interest in this program is down from last year. Also in Sibley County; on March 15, Scott Kudelka began working for the High Island phase II CWP as the Coordinator of the Rush River Assessment Project. The Project is flowing smoothly and Scott Matteson has started a new web site for Rush River at http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/major/lowminn/subshed/rush/rr_index.html

In Brown County, NRCS, FSA and SWCD met with representatives of MnDOT for a meeting on Living Snow fences. They reviewed eligibility, cost-share, locations and design.

Greg Tennant, DC in Brown County is on a landscaping committee for a local putting green golf course. This is an 18-hole miniature golf course with a different environmental theme for each hole. Native species are being utilized as much as possible.

Interest in the CCRP remains strong in Kandiyohi County. Filter strips and wetland restorations are the most popular practices. There are 1350 CRP contracts totaling 37,000 acres in Kandiyohi County.

A conservation news letter was sent to all operators in Kandiyohi County last month that highlighted the various conservation programs available. This letter generated a lot of interest in the EQIP program. They have applications totaling almost \$200,000.

In Faribault County, Jason Sickmann, DC, served as a judge for the Blue Earth Area's Science Fair for 4th and 5th grade students. Judges were divided into three person committees and judged 10 projects. Each person on the committee interviewed, scored and ranked the same 10 projects. Then as a committee they determined the overall winner of the 10 projects. The winner from each committee moved onto the regional science fair competition. The projects ranged from which type of tissue is best for your septic system to which surface type creates the most friction. Jason said it was great to see so many environmentally related projects and to see the enthusiasm for the science fair.

Meeker County now has the ability to down load digitized soil surveys.

Prairie Country RC&D

Through a U. S. Forest Service *Rural Development Forestry Grant*, Prairie Country RC&D, with assistance from DNR-Forestry, will be conducting an inventory of the red cedar resource in the Prairie Country Area. The initial inventory, conducted by photo imagery analysis, will be ground truthed in six counties this spring. If the inventory indicates that adequate acres of red cedar are present, market development of the resource will be pursued.

The Prairie Country RC&D Council recently adopted two alternative energy projects. The first involves the communities of Clara City, Maynard and Sacred Heart who have come together to pursue a joint wind energy project. The project proposes to install one or more wind turbines to provide electricity to the three communities and surrounding farms. The second project involves installing a methane digester on a dairy farm in Meeker County. Methane from the 500 cow dairy operation would be used to power the farm and excess electricity would be sold to the local rural electric cooperative. Prairie Country RC&D will be involved in fund seeking and grant writing for both projects.

Prairie Country RC&D is assisting the Big Bend church and several local partners to obtain additional local support and seek funding for the large streambank stabilization project located on the Chippewa River in Northern Chippewa County. The severe streambank erosion is threatening the church cemetery and up to 740 grave sites. Total project costs are estimated at \$490,000 with the Army Corps of Engineers proposing to cover 65% and the Minnesota DNR 17 1/2% of the costs. The remaining 17 1/2%, or \$85,750, will need to be covered locally. Prairie Country is assisting the local sponsors with fund seeking and grant writing efforts.

AREA 7

John Nicholson, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Colin Williams, SCT from Lewiston, has been writing articles for outdoor magazines, highlighting assistance that NRCS provides to landowners. To date, he has had articles published in "Whitetails" a quarterly magazine of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association as well as in a Bluffland Whitetails quarterly newsletter. He is also writing a monthly article called "Conservation Profile" in Outdoor News, highlighting assistance available from us. Each month will feature a different county as well as an article on the Whitewater River Watershed Project.

Doug Keene and Rick Grooters-Fillmore County SWCD, and Bob Joachim-Fillmore County NRCS, are the first SWCD/NRCS technicians in the state to be awarded their Certified Conservation Planning status. Bob Joachim also received an Outstanding Performance Rating Award for his performance from October 2002 through September 2003 from John Nicholson, Assistant State Conservationist, F.O.

EQIP interest has been very high throughout Area 7, with numerous offices reporting upwards of 50 applications. With the high numbers of applications, it will be a very busy year of conservation application.

Area 7 has a new Public Affairs Specialist, Karen Buckley from Champaign, Illinois. Karen brings over 7 years of private sector and non-profit professional experience in Public Relations and Marketing. Karen started with us on March 22. Welcome to the Area 7 and Minnesota NRCS team, Karen.

Mike Muzzy, District Conservationist at the Austin field office, participated in the Freeborn-Mower-Steele Tri-County Career Fair on March 23. Conservation was one of 25 career areas presented to over 600 students. Mike utilized power point to provide information on NRCS careers to over 100 students.
