NOVEMBER 2025

WRIGHT SWCD NEWS

Fall Newsletter of Wright Soil & Water Conservation District

2025 Outstanding Conservationist: The City of Cokato

Wright Soil and Water Conservation District is proud to name The City of Cokato as our county's 2025 Outstanding Conservationist of the Year at the annual Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's annual convention December 3rd, 2025.

The City of Cokato has been able to think above and beyond their own city limits and into their effects on downstream water resources. City Administrator Brad Potter started engaging with Wright SWCD in 2021, targeting and identifying several potential projects, and has since partnered with us to bring in $1.4 million dollars in grant funds. In turn, 660 feet of County Ditch 7 was stabilized, a 3.65 acre wetland was created, a 2 acre stormwater pond was created, 11.3 acres of native prairie established, and 22.63 acre feet of flood storage was created.

Pictured left to right: Brad Potter-City Administrator, Carl Harju-Cokato Mayor, Jeff DeGrote-Public Works Director in front of the 3.65 acre wetland that was created.

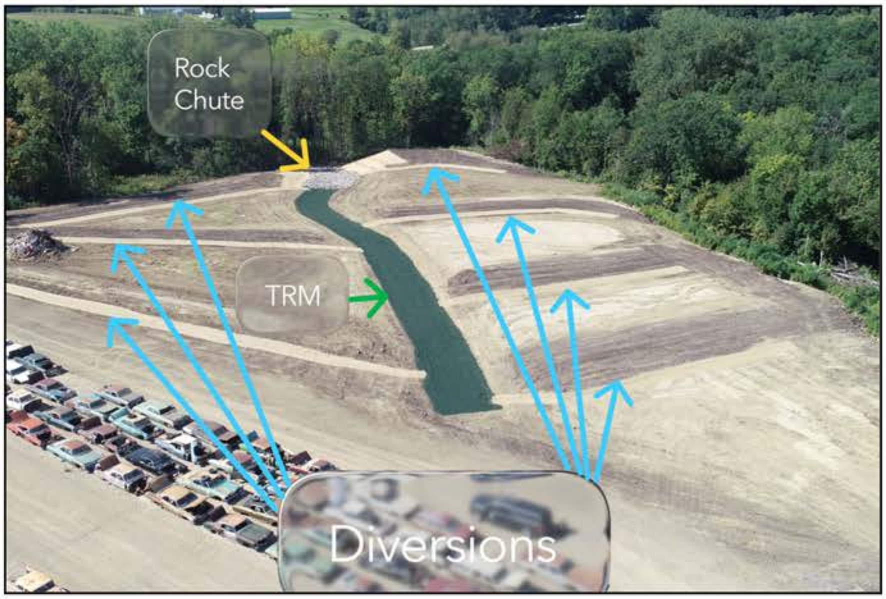
Wright SWCD admires the City of Cokato for their continued efforts towards conservation.

This issue:

Project Highlight: County Ditch 19 Gully Stabilization

Running water can make deep channels or ravines which may start off only inches deep, but over time or further downstream end up being tens of feet deep, better known as gullies. Some causes of gullies include steepness of land slope, soil texture, rainfall intensity, land mismanagement, and biotic interference with natural vegetation. This County Ditch 19 (CD19) project focuses on preventing further land damage and soil loss. Benefits of this gully stabilization include improving water quality, less frequent ditch maintenance, prevention of the gully getting bigger, and maintaining natural habitats for plants and animals.

The outlet of the pre-existing gully in this CD19 project was deep enough to stand in!



Aerial image of completed project with arrows pointing to structural elements added.

The scope of this project is to break up the watershed with diversions which will direct the flow to a turf reinforcement mat (TRM) and stabilize the outlet with a rock chute. Erosion control blanket was installed at the toe of diversions to prevent erosion until vegetation establishes. TRM is a more permanent, non-degradable mat made of synthetic fibers intended to provide immediate erosion control and enhance vegetation establishment for more severe slopes and channelized applications. Finally, at the outlet of the project which receives the most erosive flows is rip rap. The rock chute dissipates the water's energy and slows it down providing instant protection once installed.

Outlet of rock chute at end of project.

The combined efforts of this design will help stabilize soil and prevent the gully from eroding further into the property, stopping sediment from entering CD19. This project demonstrated the effectiveness of an integrated approach to erosion management. While structural elements like rip rap provide immediate stabilization and protection against high energy flows, the long-term success of the project is hinged on the establishment of vegetation. Vegetative cover enhances soil stability, minimizes surface erosion, and improves water quality. The erosion control blanket and TRM play a critical role in allowing vegetation to grow in challenging environments of highly concentrated flows. The completion of this gully stabilization project in August has given it a chance to establish some vegetation before the first frost.

ROCKFORD RAIN GARDEN

The Rain Gardens near the south entrance of the Rockford Middle School, with assistance from the SWCD, were originally constructed in two phases in 2009 and 2013. They serve as retention and infiltration basins for water runoff from the sidewalk and building roof. Infiltrating this water is an important practice to reduce the load on the city stormwater system and ultimately the Crow River. Since the native soil was mostly clay, a special soil mix of sand and compost was installed as a base for the rain gardens to allow infiltration and storage.

Typical design components of a raingarden and its benefits.


Dan Nadeau with students planting native plants in the Rockford Middle School raingarden.

Recently, new drainage piping was added to the raingarden so that overflow on the sidewalk is prevented and vegetation can establish well within the basins. On September 23, SWCD staff members Eric Mattson and Dan Nadeau, led a planting effort with students to reestablish specifically selected native plants in the areas disturbed by construction.

We look forward to seeing next year's plant growth and use of the outdoor classroom area that the rain garden provides!

WATERWAY MAINTENANCE TIPS

Fall is a great time to perform waterway maintenance. By repairing and maintaining your waterway after harvest, you'll have one less thing you have to worry about when spring conditions arrive. Waterways require regular maintenance to function properly and protect your fields.

<u>Here are 10 easy operation and maintenance tips we recommend for your grass waterways:</u>

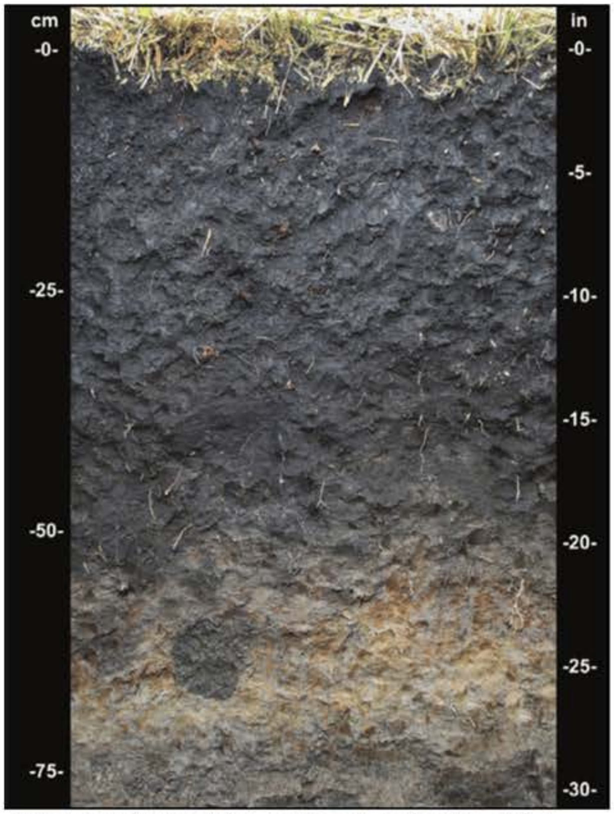
1. Remove sediment deposits to maintain the waterway's capacity.
2. Avoid using herbicides that could be harmful to vegetation in or adjacent to the waterway.
3. Prevent trees and brush from growing within waterway.
4. Mow waterways as needed to maintain a healthy, vigorous sod height of 6 inches. In order to promote bird nesting, avoid mowing during nesting periods (May 15- August 1).
5. Do not use waterway as a field road.
6. Avoid crossing the waterway with heavy equipment during wet periods as this can cause ruts.
7. Repair any broken or damaged subsurface drainage system adjacent or in the waterway.
8. When establishing vegetation, protect the waterway from concentrated flows by mechanical means of stabilization, such as mulching or erosion control blanket.
9. Fence off the waterway from livestock during wet periods to avoid damage.
10. Apply fertilizer as needed to maintain the desired species composition and stand density of the waterway.

By implementing a solid maintenance plan, you can avoid costly repairs in the future, improve water quality, and support a healthy, sustainable farming practice.

Left: Before waterway - Right: After waterway installation

WETLAND INDICATORS – HYDRIC SOILS

Hydric soils are soils that form under conditions of saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic (oxygen-poor) conditions. Because plant roots and soil microbes need oxygen, this lack of it creates unique chemical changes that distinguish hydric soils from upland soils. These changes also shape which plants can grow, favoring water-loving species like sedges, bulrushes, and cattails. Hydric soils aren't just a sign of wetlands, they are vital to how wetlands function. They store and filter water, trap carbon, and provide habitat for countless microorganisms and plant species.



"Thick Dark Surface" is a hydric soil defined by a thick layer of dark soil with a depleted soil below. The depleted layer begins around 20 inches in this example.

"Redox Dark Surface" is a hydric soil defined by the presence of redoximorphic features (rust colors) within the top foot of a soil profile. Notice the patches of rust (redox features) throughout the soil.

"Histosol" is a hydric soil defined by a thick layer of muck or peat within the top 32 inches of a soil profile. The dead plant material is still evident due to prolonged periods of saturation.

Hydric soils can be identified by color, smell, and texture. For example, the presence of rust (pockets of red/brown mottling within the soil) is an indicator of periodic wetting and drying of the soil. Prolonged periods of saturation can also result in the accumulation of organic material over time, forming histosols (muck and peat). Some common hydric soils found in Wright County are pictured on this page.

MASWCD Leadership Program Graduates

The Wright Soil and Water Conservation District is proud to congratulate Alicia O'Hare, Water Resource Specialist for successfully completing a one-year leadership development program sponsored by the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD).

The 2024-2025 MASWCD Leadership Program brought together 21 participants from across the state to strengthen their leadership capacity for conservation work in Minnesota. The group was comprised of local SWCD staff, board members, and staff from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The group met for seven in-depth multi-day sessions focused on leadership topics including: building personal leadership skills, developing shared vision, practicing ethical leadership, strengthening team leadership, growing emotional intelligence, and communicating to make a difference.

This was the 15th class to complete the statewide leadership program, and these graduates join more than 337 staff, including five from Wright SWCD, and elected supervisors from county, state, and federal agencies working in conservation who have also completed it. The content is designed and delivered by University of Minnesota Extension staff in partnership with the president of Leadership Tools consulting firm. For further information about the MASWCD Leadership Program, contact the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts at 651-690-9028 or visit the MASWCD website at www.maswcd.org.

MASWCD Leadership Program Class of 2025

Alicia O'Hare with Certificate of Accomplishment

"I would like to thank our Board of Supervisors and the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts for the opportunity to join the Leadership Training cohort of 2025. I learned several things about myself and my working style. Personally, I work best in small group settings, and I tend to focus on data. Then I was given tools to help utilize my personal traits in the most productive ways. Now I know it is best for me to schedule small group meetings and while I can use data, I should bring along a narrative. I would also like to thank our instructors Lisa Hinz and Donna Rae Scheffert for their marvelous lessons. Finally, thank you to all my colleagues who also participated in the program. You all made it a fun and productive experience." - Alicia O'Hare

Did you miss us?
If so, here are our recent event summaries.

Feeding Alternatives Forages Event

Event held on August 19th, 2025, at Goldview Farms, Waverly MN

The Wright Soil and Water Conservation District, in partnership with University of Minnesota Extension and Centra Sota Cooperative, hosted an educational field event at Goldview Farms focused on alternative forages and soil health. Robert Westman, Nutrition and Management Consultant with United Farmers Cooperative (UFC), shared insights on feeding a variety of alternative forages – covering nutritional benefits, harvest timing, and performance outcomes for dairy operations. Amy Robak and Carolyn Remer with Centra Sota Cooperative, along with Eric Mattson from Wright SWCD, demonstrated soil health assessment tools and discussed how cover crops contribute to overall soil health. Host, Pat Bakeberg also shared his firsthand experiences using cover crops as a forage, discussing what has worked on his farm, lessons learned, and how those experiences guide his future management plans.

CRP Management Workshop

Event held on September 17th, 2025
Hosted by Missy Kirby, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist

The CRP Mid Contract Management meeting was held on September 17th. There were 10 attendees. There was a lot of discussion between landowners regarding different management activities that have worked or have not worked for them. This was a great opportunity for landowners to hear different ideas from their fellow CRP landowners. Since then, Missy has followed up with site visit requests from the landowners in attendance and worked with them to come up with a plan to manage their CRP. A few of those being interseeding an area that was not successful due to being planted during a drought and helping a landowner get in contact with the local fire department to do a prescribed burn for tree management. This is the second year in a row Missy has hosted this event. Whether we help one landowner or we help a dozen, this is a useful workshop for people to get our undivided attention about management and we can tackle the CRP problems they are having head on.

Wright Soil and Water Conservation District

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