

JANUARY 2026

WRIGHT SWCD NEWS

Winter Newsletter of Wright Soil & Water
Conservation District

Table of Contents

Tile Outlet Maintenance.....	02
Signs of Conservation.....	03
Smart Salting.....	04
2026 Tree Price List.....	05
2025 Photo Contest Winners.....	06
SWCD Supervisors.....	07
Farm Family of the Year Nominations.....	08



Why Snow Matters

As many Minnesotans could tell you, we have a love/hate relationship with snow. When it's cold we want it warm and when it's warm, we want it cold. Snow matters in Minnesota because it shapes our state's water/ecosystems, agriculture, and economy in ways that go far beyond winter weather.

1. Water and ecosystems

Natural water storage: Snowpack acts like a slow-release reservoir. As it melts in Spring, it replenishes rivers, lakes, wetlands, and groundwater.

Soil protection: Snow cover insulates the ground, preventing deep freezing that can damage plant roots and beneficial soil organisms.

Wildlife survival: Snow creates cover for small animals, influences migration, hibernation, and food access for species like deer, foxes, and owls.

Cooling effect: Snow reflects sunlight, helping keep temperatures cooler and slowing early warming.

2. Agriculture

Spring moisture: Gradual snowmelt provides early-season moisture for crops, reducing reliance on spring rain which sometimes can be hard to find in MN.

Pest and disease control: Sustained cold and snow help limit insects and plant diseases that would otherwise thrive.

Winter protection for crops: Snow insulates winter wheat, alfalfa, and perennial plants from extreme cold.

3. Economy

Winter recreation: Snow supports skiing, snowmobiling, snow sculptures, and ice fishing.

Forestry: Logging on frozen snow-covered ground allows heavy equipment to operate with less damage to the forest floor.

Local jobs: Snow management, equipment sales, tourism, and seasonal businesses depend on it.

In short, snow isn't just something Minnesota's endure, it's a starting block of the state's natural systems, economy, and identity.

Resources: Why it matters – National Snow and Ice Data Center

Tile Outlet Maintenance



Photo Caption: Water and Sediment Basin on the edge of Butler Lake

When soils freeze, water infiltration slows or stops. Snowmelt or winter rain can move quickly across the soil surface increasing runoff risk. Tile drainage systems may still flow during winter thaw events, making tile outlet maintenance especially important. Keeping these outlets clear and free-flowing limits the risk of your system being jeopardized.



Photo Caption: Above- Side Inlet on CD-31, Woodland Twp

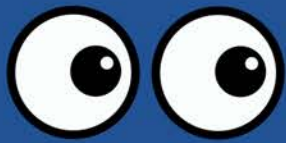


Photo Caption: Waterway Outlet in French Lake Twp

If a water and sediment basin is installed as part of your drainage system, the outlet plays an important role in the design elevation and storage capacity that basin is designed for. A couple things to be checking regarding your outlet in your drainage system are ice buildup, snow drifts and trees. Winter can be a great time to remove trees over your outlet and stop tree roots from damaging your pipe. A slow trickle of water can freeze your pipes outlet. Check to see the rodent guard is in place to prevent rodents from making a home or getting stuck in the outlet. Periodically checking your outlets can help catch these problems early by limiting the chances of an overtopping basin or a damaged drainage system when those thaw cycles start.



Below- Basin Outlet in private ditch, Cokato Twp



Signs of Conservation



On Agricultural and Rural Lands

- **Buffer Strips and Native Plantings:** Areas of native grasses and forbs planted along waterways and field borders (often as part of the Minnesota Buffer Law or the MN CREP program), which filter water, prevent erosion, and provide essential habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.
- **Strip Till or No-Till Fields:** Fields where the soil is not tilled (or tilled less intensively) to maintain soil health, reduce erosion, and increase microbial activity.
- **Cover Crop:** A fast-growing crop planted between cash crops and/or over winter to prevent erosion, improve microbial activity, enhance nutrient recycling and availability, and suppress weeds.
- **Conservation Easements:** Land enrolled in long-term protection programs like the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve, which restores marginal agricultural land to natural cover.
- **Well Sealing and Septic System Upgrades:** Sealed unused wells and upgraded non-compliant septic systems protect groundwater resources from contamination.
- **Forestry Management:** Practices such as tree planting and the installation of farmstead and field windbreaks.



Photo Caption: Above - strip-till implement in Buffalo Township
Below - RIM sign posted at one of the 53 easements in Wright County



Photo Caption: Above - BWSR sponsored Lawns to Legumes program for pollinator-friendly native plantings in residential lawns
Below - Rockford Middle School rain garden



In Urban and Suburban Areas

- **Rain Gardens:** Constructed and planted rain gardens on various sites to manage stormwater runoff.
- **Pollinator Gardens:** Lawns to Legumes is a program for installing pollinator-friendly native plantings to provide essential habitat in residential lawns. Pollinators play a key role in pollinating food crops and native plants.
- **Erosion Control Measures:** Visible projects designed to prevent soil from washing into waterways. Including but not limited to stormwater pond modifications.

As Minnesota prepares for a cold, snowy winter, MPCA urges smart salting practices

Article from MPCA, published Dec. 8, 2025

Snow and ice have arrived in Minnesota, and that brings the winter chore of clearing pavement — sometimes with salt. In a typical winter, Minnesotans scatter approximately 404,000 tons of chloride-containing salt on our paved surfaces. When the snow melts or it rains, salt, which contains chloride, runs into storm drains and into nearby lakes, rivers, and groundwater. Salt is commonly over-applied, sending chloride into our waterways and wreaking havoc for fish and other wildlife. Not only does salt damage our infrastructure and plants, but it is also harmful to our waters. In fact, some waterways have so much chloride, they have been added to the [state's impaired waters list](#). Minnesotans can do their part this winter by minimizing salt use and using other tools to get the job done.



Applying excess salt not only increases the environmental harm but also wastes money. Photo by Andrew Lazur.

Here are some salting tips that will reduce the amount of pollution that ends up in our lakes:

- **Shovel and scrape.** The more snow and ice you remove, the less salt is needed to be effective. [Watch this video about tools, techniques, and products](#) that you can use to keep your driveways and sidewalks safe while protecting our waters. And make sure to take breaks and don't overexert yourself.
- **Know what you're buying.** There are no labeling requirements for deicer packaging. Beware of labeling claims such as "environmentally friendly" or "pet friendly" because no testing of deicers has been done to prove they are safe or will work in all conditions. It is the buyer's responsibility to fully research products and make decisions accordingly, so don't waste your money on something that won't work.
- **Temperatures below 15°F are too cold for salt.** Most salts stop working at this temperature. Use sand for traction instead, but remember that sand does not melt ice.
- **Use the right amount.** That crunch from sidewalk salt under your feet does not signify safety. People often think using more salt means more melting and safer conditions, but this is not true. Around 12 ounces — enough to fill a coffee mug — effectively treats a 20-foot driveway or 10 sidewalk squares (about 1,000 square feet). Aim to apply salt evenly and use only in critical areas. Using more than the recommended is simply a waste, costing you money.
- **Sweep up visible salt on dry surfaces.** Leftover salt is no longer doing any work and will just be washed away into local waters. You can keep it to reuse later, saving you money. When the correct of salt amount is used, there should not be any visible salt left behind.
- **Wear proper footwear.** Wear shoes or boots with good traction and pay attention to where you are walking, avoiding icy spots, if possible. Take it slow and give yourself extra time to get where you're going.

There are many ways to provide safe winter conditions and minimize impacts to the environment. The MPCA offers Smart Salting trainings for winter maintenance professionals, property managers, and others on how to provide safe surfaces in winter and minimize harmful environmental impacts. Those who hire professionals to manage snow and ice in winter should hire a trained and certified Smart-Salting contractor. The MPCA list of certified Smart Salters can be found on the MPCA's [Smart Salting training webpage](#).

2026 Tree Price List



Wright Soil & Water Conservation District

311 Brighton Ave S. Suite C
Buffalo, MN 55313
763-682-1933 ext. 3

Email: eric.mattson@mn.nacdn.net
wrightswcd.org/tree-program-store

The Wright SWCD Tree Program offers inexpensive bareroot tree seedlings each spring. Order soon, supplies are limited!

ONLINE ORDERS DUE Monday, April 13th

Bare Root Seedlings sold in bundles of 25

	Species	Size	Price
Shrubs	Cherry, Sand	18-24"	\$45.00
	Cranberry, Highbush	18-24"	\$45.00
	Dogwood, Silky	18-24"	\$45.00
	Honeysuckle, Dwarf Bush	12-18"	\$45.00
	Indigo, False	18-24"	\$45.00
	Lilac, Common Purple	18-24"	\$45.00
	Ninebark	12-18"	\$45.00
Small Deciduous	Rose, Pasture	12-18"	\$45.00
	Crabapple, Dolgo	12-18"	\$45.00
	Maple, Mountain	18-24"	\$45.00
	Serviceberry, Downy	18-24"	\$45.00
Large Deciduous	Willow, Pussy	18-24"	\$45.00
	Birch, River	18-24"	\$45.00
	Chestnut, Chinese	12-18"	\$45.00
	Hickory, Shagbark	6-12"	\$45.00
	Maple, Red	18-24"	\$45.00
	Maple, Sugar	18-24"	\$45.00
	Oak, Northern Pin	12-18"	\$45.00
Conifers	Oak, Swamp White	12-18"	\$45.00
	Arborvitae, Techny	6-12" (rc-1)	\$45.00
	Fir, Balsam	10-15" (2-1)	\$45.00
	Pine, Ponderosa	7-15" (2-2)	\$45.00
	Pine, White	7-14" (2-1)	\$45.00
Variety Pack	Spruce, 'Black Hills'	10-18" (2-2)	\$45.00
	Spruce, Norway	10-16" (2-1)	\$45.00
Native Fruit - 10 Pack- 2 each of:			
Allegheny Serviceberry, Black Chokeberry, Black Elderberry, Pin Cherry, Red Raspberry			\$45.00
Native Seed Mixes	Savanna - 25-60% tree cover	covers 1,000 sq ft	\$65.00
	Pollinator - dry/mesic	covers 1,000 sq ft	\$65.00
Native Plant Kits	Part-Shade Garden Kit - 6 species, 36 plants		\$70.00
	Sunny Pollinator Kit - 6 species, 36 plants		\$70.00

ONLINE STORE
Use QR code:



~ 2025 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS ~

From January 1 through December 1, Wright SWCD sponsors a photo contest in Wright County to obtain pictures to be used in our publications.

The contest has four categories for photos to be entered into:

1. Landscape & Wildlife - photos entries should represent the natural environment that can be found on one of our many landscapes in Wright County such as prairie, forest, lakes, wetlands, etc.
2. Active Recreation - photos entered in this category should showcase the active recreational opportunities offered in Wright County. Activities may include, but not limited to: canoeing, kayaking, boating, swimming, tubing, hiking, wading, fishing, and hunting.
3. Humorous or Unusual Observation - this category allows you to use your imagination. Entries can include unusual wildlife, recreation catches, or just an unusual photo.
4. Conservation Efforts - depictions of conservation practices at work on the landscape such as tree plantings, native vegetation, clean-up efforts, water sampling, cropland conservation.

One 1st and 2nd place winner will be chosen in each of the 4 categories, as voted on by staff and Wright SWCD Supervisors. 1st place winners receive \$100 and 2nd place winners receive \$50. Details of the contest can be found at www.wrightswcd.org/photo-contest



Conservation Efforts



Humorous or Unusual Observation



Landscape & Wildlife



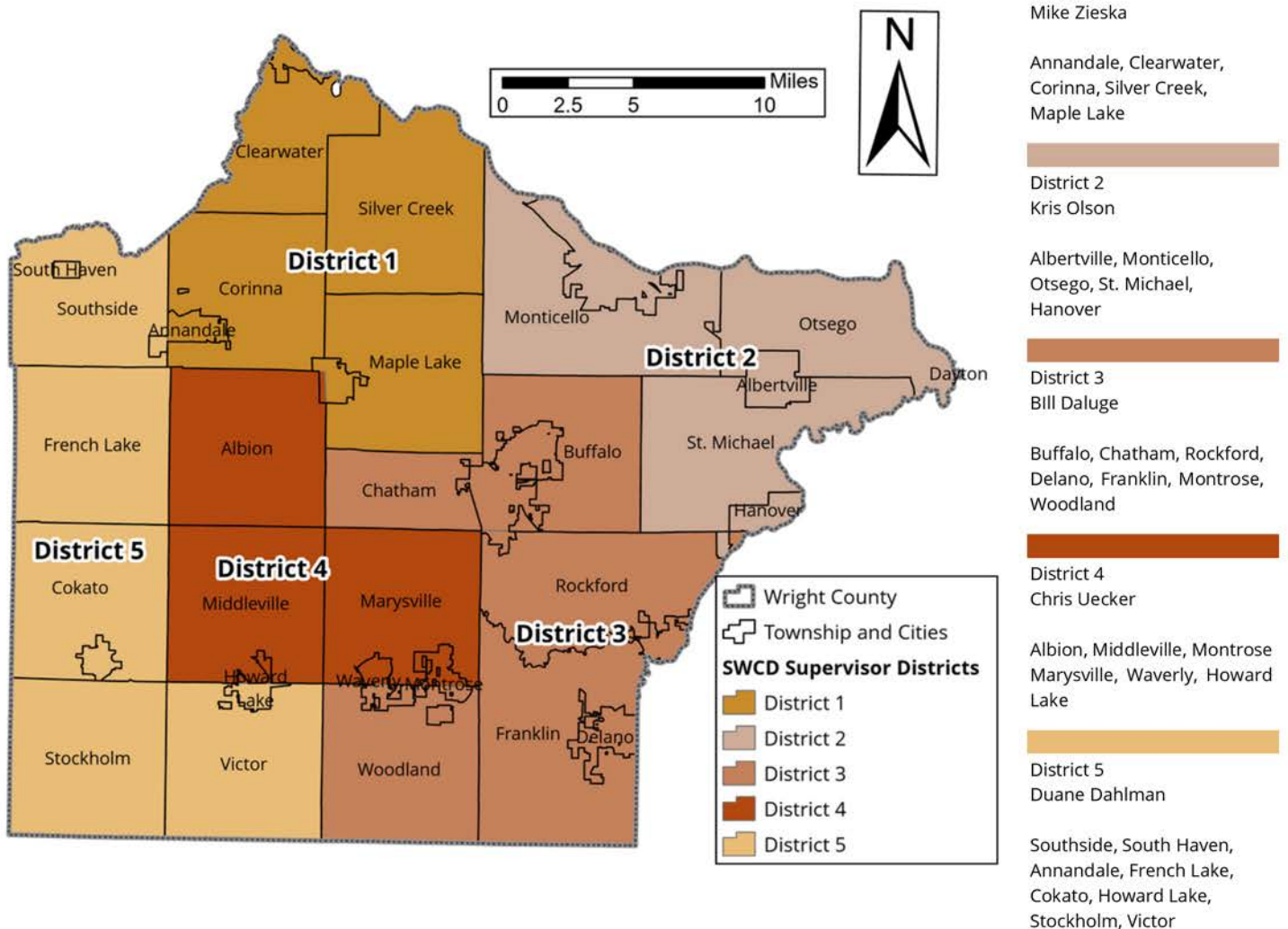
Active Recreation

SWCD Supervisors

The Wright SWCD's Board is comprised of five Supervisors who are elected by nomination districts on the county wide general election. Supervisor terms are staggered every four years. Supervisors receive a per diem of \$75 per board meeting and meet once a month to set goals, policies, and priorities for the District.



Back Row (left to right): Bill Daluge – Supervisor, Duane Dahlman – Vice Chair, Mike Zieska – Secretary/Treasurer.
Front Row (left to right): Kris Olson – Supervisor, Chris Uecker – Chair.





UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

2025 Wright County Farm Family of the Year



Matter Family Farm

Call for nominations for Farm Family of the Year in Wright, McLeod and Meeker counties University of Minnesota Extension

The Farm Family Recognition Program honors farm families from throughout Minnesota for their contributions to the agriculture industry and their local communities. This program exists through the continued support of and coordination by University of Minnesota Extension, the College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences, and the College of Veterinary Medicine.

Each year, one family from each Wright, McLeod, and Meeker County is recognized as the Farm Families of the Year. To select the families, we solicit nominations from key stakeholders and agribusinesses in the community. The nominations are then reviewed by the Wright, McLeod or Meeker County Extension Committee - Farm Family of the Year sub-committee, who is responsible for selecting the new Farm Family of the Year.

Please utilize the nomination form to nominate future farm families for recognition. Send your completed nomination form to the county in which the nominee lives (Wright, McLeod and/or Meeker County) by Friday, February 27, 2026. If you have any questions in Wright County or McLeod County, please contact Taylor Herbert at therbert@umn.edu or 612.394.5229. In Meeker County, please contact Karen Johnson at ande9495@umn.edu or 320-693-5275. Thank you for your help.

Nomination Form: z.umn.edu/WMMFarmFamily



311 BRIGHTON AVE SOUTH, SUITE C
BUFFALO, MN 55313
763-682-1933 ext. 3