



## **Mille Lacs Soil & Water Conservation District**

### **2017 Program Highlights**

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2017 was an exciting year for Mille Lacs SWCD, we added two new faces to our team (Ms. Kuchenbaker, Administrative Assistant and Ms. Maslowski, Watershed Coordinator). Local Capacity grants from the state Clean Water Fund allowed the District to embark on additional projects and provide increased response to the needs of residents, landowners, townships, and cities. This has put the District in a strong financial, organizational, and technical position to continue our work to protect and restore our shared natural resources.

#### **Mille Lacs Lake Initiative to Improve Water Quality**

- ❖ Provided technical assistance to the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group to develop a lake stewardship program called Compass that will publically recognize lakeshore landowners for good work that they are doing to protect the health of Mille Lacs Lake. Ms. Harmony Maslowski was hired to provide watershed coordination for Compass. She is working as the Administrator of the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group to help them address water quality goals.
- ❖ Planned the Lake Health Conference to protect the Lake from aquatic invasive species.

#### **General Citizen Outreach**

- ❖ Provided local, non-regulatory information and technical support for inquiries from approximately 200 members of the public.

#### **District Activities to Improve Soil Health and Diversity in Our Forests.**

- ❖ 7,875 native trees and shrubs were planted by private landowners for conservation purposes and 475 were donated to the FFA Program.
- ❖ Soil health in our county and neighboring counties were improved by the rental of the no-till drills. The Tye No-Till Drill was rented 14 times and planted 92 acres. The Truax No-Till Drill was rented 18 times and planted 253 acres.

#### **Groundwater Protection to Increase Water Quality**

- ❖ Hosted three free events where 46 individuals tested well water for nitrates. If nitrates are higher than 10 ppm this contaminant can cause serious health problems in infants and pregnant women.
- ❖ Sealed six unused wells to permanently prevent chemicals and nutrients from directly entering groundwater.
- ❖ Three AgBMP loans were issued to help local residents to upgrade their non-compliant septic systems.

#### **Conservation Education & Outreach**

- ❖ Organized the annual Conservation Awareness Day for over 250 elementary students from around Mille Lacs County to learn about the importance of conserving natural resources and what they can do to help.
- ❖ Assisted in the annual Envirothon, an annual environmentally themed academic competition for high school aged students, which had 21 student teams from eight area high schools.
- ❖ Engaged directly with residents by regularly posting on Facebook (193 total followers, which has an increase of 51 followers from last year), providing information at the County Fair, and publishing

numerous articles in the local papers. Updated and improved the function of the website. Updated the logo.

### **State Water Quality Initiatives**

- ❖ Assisted Mille Lacs County landowners meet state requirement of the buffer law by identifying 250 parcels for review and conducting landowner outreach. Mr. Field found that 73 parcels were not in compliance, in which 23 were along public drainage ditches and 50 along public waters. Mr. Field received 45 conditional compliance waivers, leaving only five currently non-compliant. Those five have been handed over to Environmental Recourses.
- ❖ Continued close partnership with Mille Lacs County to implement the Wetland Conservation Act and update the County Local Water Management Plan.

### **Noxious Weed Control**

- ❖ Worked with the County, townships, and cities to control noxious weeds in public rights-of-way, emphasizing non-chemical methods to protect both groundwater and neighboring agriculture.