

# Murray SWCD Annual Report 2016



**Murray Soil and Water Conservation District**  
2740 22nd St.  
Slayton, MN 56172  
507-836-6990

## District Staff

### District Secretary

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### District Technician

Craig Christensen  
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## NRCS Staff

Brian Christiansen-  
District Conservationist

Cheryl Heard  
Soil Conservationist

Allisa Wendland-  
Soil Conservation Technician

## SWP/PO Staff

Mike Skoglund-Southwest Prairie  
Technical Service Area  
Civil Engineering Technician

Ben Mathys-Southwest Prairie  
Technical Service Area- Junior  
Technician

## Farm Bill Assistant

Megan Howell- Farm Bill Assis-  
tance Technician

## Mission & History of the Murray Soil and Water Conservation District

**Vision:** The vision of the Murray Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is Helping People Help the Land.

**Mission:** The Mission of the Murray Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is to protect, enhance and conserve the natural resources of Murray County.

**History:** The Murray SWCD was established in 1954 to address the Natural Resource Protection needs of land users in the area and encourage the preservation and conservation of the resources.

Today, the SWCD assists not only rural but urban landowners with various programs and information needed to protect the soil, water and air quality. The importance of these goals and the accomplishment will be easily measured in the future through a sound and healthy economy and resources both human and wildlife.

SWCD's are political subdivisions of the State established under Minnesota Statute 103C. Each SWCD is governed by a board of elected supervisors. The SWCD Board and Staff are unique in that they live & work in the county and watersheds. The work and de-

isions that are made affect themselves, their families, their neighbors and friends. With these ties, the decisions made are for the good of the local resources, economy and future generations.

In making sound guidelines for our programs, we are protecting the county, watersheds, and ultimately our state and nation.

The SWCD's partner with other resource agencies to ensure that programs and funds are best utilized and actions are coordinated to best suit the needs of the area.

**Murray SWCD Board Meetings are held every 2nd Thursday of the Month at 2:30 p.m. at the USDA Service Center located at 2740 22nd St. Slayton, MN.**

### 2016 Board Meetings

January 14  
January 25-Special Mtg  
February 1-Special Mtg  
February 11  
March 10

April 4-Special Mtg  
April 14  
May 12  
June 9  
July 13  
August 11  
September 1-Special Mtg

September 8  
October 10  
November 10  
December 8  
December 27-Special Mtg



## **Murray SWCD Services**

### **State Cost-Share**

The State Cost Share Program was established in 1977 and is administered locally by the Murray Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). The State Cost Share Program provides financial assistance to landowners for installing conservation practices that protect and improve water quality by controlling soil erosion and reducing sedimentation.

The program provides up to 75% of the total eligible costs of a practice

### **District Tree Program**

Available to landowners in Murray County. Conservation grade trees can be purchased from the district. SWCD staff also provides a tree planting program for those who are interested.

Farmstead shelterbelts, field windbreaks, living snow fences and other wildlife plantings can be designed and planted by SWCD staff.

For more information on tree plantings please contact our office at 507-836-6990 ext.3

### **Tree matting currently available in Murray County**

Murray SWCD has a tree matting machine that lays a continuous layer of six foot wide black fabric over your new trees rows. The fabric resists tearing, puncturing and weed penetration, while allowing air and water to get to the tree roots. When the fabric is used properly, it prevents weeds from growing around the trees reducing weed competition, so you may see better growth rates and tree survivability. Using the mat reduces the need for mowing, tilling and pulling weeds by hand.

### **Ground Water Level Monitoring Program:**

The Murray SWCD measures the water level (monitor) in a total of 4 non-irrigation observation wells at an interval of once monthly.

### **Well Sealing**

The Murray SWCD works with the Murray County Environmental Services Office and with the Watershed Districts of Murray County for cost-share funding for the sealing of unused wells.

Please Contact our office for more information on well sealing at 507-836-6990 ext.3

### **Precipitation Monitoring**

The SWCD in conjunction with the State Climatology Office monitors site specific precipitation throughout Murray County. The data collected provides citizens and the State of Minnesota with important precipitation information and weather history

### **Wetland Conservation Act Program**

When most people think of wetlands, they think of swampy, marshy areas complete with ducks and cattails. While those areas are in fact wetlands, there are many other wetlands that look very different, and can be completely dry for the majority of the year. Some wetlands support trees and shrubs, while other wetlands may even be farmed. Murray Soil and Water Conservation District staff provides technical support for local governments, county departments, and citizens with wetland and water related questions.

An estimated 11 million acres of wetland areas have been lost over the past 100 years, leaving only about 7.5 million acres, which represents a 60% loss. Wetlands provide many important benefits, which have become more apparent as wetland numbers have decreased. Some wetland benefits include:>

- Storage areas for excess waters during floods.
- Filtering of sediments and nutrients before they enter lakes, rivers, and streams

- Fish and wildlife habitat
- Public recreation

Commercial uses

The SWCD assists cities, townships, citizens, and County departments in the administration of the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act. The SWCD staff provides technical assistance and acts as the clearing house for wetland and water related activities throughout Murray County.

### **Minnesota Department of Agriculture — Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program**

The District has a working partnership with the MN Department of Agriculture to help promote the MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program to all landowners/operators throughout Murray County.

This is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Those who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified and in turn obtain regulatory certainty for a period of ten years.

### **Buffer Initiative**

A monumental turning point in protecting Minnesota's waters occurred in June 2015 with the passing of the Buffer Initiative by the Minnesota Legislature and Governor Dayton. This statute will require landowners to have a 50-foot buffer on all public waters by November 2017 and 16.5-feet on all public ditches by November 2018.

What are the options for our landowners? There are several program opportunities that are available for our landowners to receive payment for these buffers, such as CRP, possibly RIM, EQIP, CSP, State Cost-Share, etc. Or a landowner can choose to install their own buffer.

The Murray SWCD is here to help we can help identify potential waters, program opportunities, and provide technical advice.

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## ***Murray SWCD Education***

### **Environmental Fair:**

The 5th and 6th Grade Environmental Fair has been held every fall for 20 years at a local fairgrounds in southwestern Minnesota educating area youth about natural resources. In 2016 the Environmental Fair was held at the Murray County Fairgrounds in Slayton, Minnesota with 950 students attending the fair.

### **Annual Envirothon:**

This event is held annually in the spring for all Area V (11 county area) students grades 9-12 at Camden State Park, near Lynd, MN. The envirothon is a competitive event, which provides students an opportunity to work together to solve environmental problems in an outdoor setting. Each four or five member team attends learning stations covering forestry, aquatics, soils, wildlife, and each year's chosen current issue. Natural Resources professionals are at each station using hands-on examples and the outdoors to test the teams' knowledge of each topic. Information about the competition is sent to each school in the 11 county area.

### **Stewardship Week:**

The Stewardship Week was April 26th- May 3rd, 2015. The theme was "Local Heroes-Your Hardworking Pollinators", encouraging citizens, schools and communities to develop and maintain habitat areas using good conservation practices.

### **Newsletters:**

A Newsletter is mailed countywide to Murray County landowners and operators in December. Newsletters include current available programs, special announcements, staff changes, and much more.

### **Murray County Fair Booth:**

Check us out each year at the fair! We usually have drawings and information about soil and water conservation at our fair booth held at the Murray County Fair in Slayton, Minnesota in August.



# **Year's Highlights January 1, 2016 - December 31, 2016**

**January-** Murray SWCD started off the new calendar year with the development of the District's 2016 Annual Work Plan. There are 14 applications for Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and 35 applications for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The Board reviewed the 2016 Murray SWCD budget as presented and approved by the County Commissioners.

**February-** Presentations were given to fifth and sixth grade students at Murray County Central, St. Paul's Lutheran and Fulda Elementary schools to promote the conservation poster contest. The theme of the 2016 poster contest was "Community Waters". The Murray SWCD 2016 Annual Plan was reviewed and approved by the Board. The Murray SWCD Supervisors and Staff attended the Southwest Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWMASWCD) meeting in Marshall on February 18.

**March-** The Board approved a Flood Recovery Cost-Share application for a waterway. Murray County has 32 Conservation Stewardship Program contracts that will expire in 2016. Steinman, Christensen, and Lewis attended the Legislative Days in St. Paul on March 21-22, 2016.

**April-** The Poster contest for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students was judged. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> place posters were from Fulda Elementary School. The Board reviewed the District Rental Rates for 2016. The Murray SWCD put their annual report in the newspaper. The Murray SWCD Board approved hiring a new District Manager. The Board approved a Flood Recovery State Cost-Share application for a waterway. Lewis completed the FY18-19 Biennial Budget Request (BBR) for the Murray SWCD. Cooperators picked up trees they had ordered for their conservation tree practices on April 29, 2016. The Murray SWCD has 3 Supervisors who are up for election.

**May-** Murray County has 61 Conservation Stewardship Program applications for 2016. The Board approved sponsoring up to 4 kids to attend the Long Lake Conservation Camp. The filing period for Murray SWCD Supervisors is May 17-May 31, 2016. The Murray SWCD approved a resolution to support the Missouri River Basin One Watershed One Plan. The Board approved the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership Grant application.

**June-** Supervisors and Staff attended the South West Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWMASWCD) Area V meeting on June 16, 2016. The Local Work Group meeting was held on June 9, 2016. The Murray SWCD received the grant for a Farm Bill Assistant employee. The Murray SWCD employees attended a Buffer update meeting on June 14, 2016. The Board approved payment of State Cost-Share for basins. The Board set the FY17 State Cost-Share reimbursement rate at 75% of the total cost. The Board approved signing the FY17 Ground Water Level Monitoring Agreement with the DNR.

**July-** Arrangements were made for a fair booth at the Murray County Fair. The District will be the Fiscal Agent for the Southwest Prairie Technical Service Area. The Board reviewed the Murray SWCD proposed budget for 2017. The Murray SWCD approved payment for a shelterbelt. The Board approved payment of Flood Recovery Cost-Share for an Embankment Pond repair. Brian Luchtenberg was nominated as the Murray SWCD Outstanding Conservationist.

**August-** Supervisors and staff worked in the fair booth which displayed information on the Buffer Program at the Murray County Fair. The Board signed the FY 2017 grant with the Board of Water and Soil Resources. Two Flood Recovery Cost-Share applications were approved for basins and a pond repair. The Murray SWCD staff mailed out over 500 letters to landowners regarding the Buffer Program.

**September-** The staff helped with the Environmental Fair for sixth grade students, which was held at the Murray County Fairgrounds in Slayton, MN with over 900 students attending the fair. The Board reviewed Memorandums of Understandings that the district has with other organizations and agencies. The Murray SWCD office has been getting about 20 contacts a day in the office regarding the Buffer program. The Murray SWCD Board approved the FY2017 State of Minnesota 2014 Flood Recovery-Phase 3B grant agreement in the amount of \$79,250.

**October-** The Murray SWCD Staff attended the Board of Water and Soil Resource (BWSR) academy on October 24-26, 2016. The Board discussed the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts proposed 2016 resolutions. A State Cost-Share application for basins was approved. The Board approved Flood Recovery Cost-

Share payment for a waterway. The new Farm Bill Assistant-Megan Howell was introduced to the Murray SWCD Board.

**November-** Supervisors and Staff attended the Southwest Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWMASWCD) Area V meeting in Marshall, MN on November 17, 2016. The Murray SWCD Board promoted Shelly Lewis as the District Administrator and Craig Christensen as the Program Manager. Douglas Goodrich is the new Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Board Conservationist. The Murray SWCD accepted the FY17 Buffer Implementation grant in the amount of \$30,000. Two State Cost-Share applications for waterways were approved.

**December-** Three Supervisors and 2 staff attended the Annual Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) Convention in Bloomington, MN on December 4-6, 2016. The SWCD's volunteer rain gauge monitors were recognized with a token of appreciation. The Board approved payment of a State Cost-Share contract for basins. The Murray SWCD advertised for a new District Technician. A Flood Recovery Cost-Share contract for basins was approved for payment.

**The Murray SWCD would like to say THANK YOU to the Murray County Commissioners, NRCS, FSA, DNR, Heron Lake Watershed District, the County Environmental Service staff and the Murray County Local Chapter Pheasants Forever for the tremendous amount of support, commitment, and leadership demonstrated towards the grass roots level of conservation being achieved through the Murray SWCD.**

# 2016 Accomplishments

## *State Cost-Share*

**2 -Contracts completed**

- Terraces
- Basins

## *Flood Recovery State Cost-Share*

**2-Contracts completed**

- Pond Repairs

## *Flood Recovery State Cost-Share Phase 2*

**3-Contracts completed**

- Sediment Basins
- 2-Waterways

## *EQIP-\$247,100 Obligated- 1230 acres*

**11 Contracts**

- 7-Cover Crop
- Livestock Rotational Grazing System
- Pond
- No Till/Strip Till
- High Tunne System

## *CSP-\$1.4 Million Obligated*

- 56 Contracts
- 39,873 Acres (Cropped & Pastureland)

## *Farm Bill Assistance Activity*

- 1-RIM Riparian Buffer Contract-118.1 Acres

## *CRP*

- 1,174 Acres- 105 Contracts



***Murray SWCD, NRCS, SWPTSA, & Pheasants Forever Staff:***



***Left to Right-Back: Craig Christensen (District Technician), Ben Matthys (SWPTSA Technician), Brian Christiansen (NRCS), Shelly Lewis (District Secretary), Mike Skoglund (SWPTSA Senior Technician)***

***Front: Megan Howell (Farm Bill Assistant), Allisa Wendland (NRCS Soil Conservationist Tech), Cheryl Heard (NRCS Soil Conservationist)***