

Lac qui Parle Soil & Water Conservation District



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Madison MN 56256

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2014 Activities & Achievements

The Lac qui Parle Soil and Water Conservation District's **VISION** is *Lac qui Parle's natural resources wisely managed to provide a healthy environment for life*. The vision encompasses not only the natural environment but also the economic environment for the people of Lac qui Parle County.

The **MISSION** of the Soil and Water Conservation District is *to take available technical, financial, and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of local land users to help them protect Lac qui Parle's natural resources*. A degree of flexibility is needed to allow the District to use what resources become available to meet the needs of our local resource users as those needs arise.

The Lac qui Parle Soil and Water Conservation District was organized April 19, 1950.

District Supervisors

The LqP SWCD is governed by a five member Board of Supervisors who are elected by the voters of the County. The Board sets policy, hires employees, and is responsible to see that the operations of the District are run effectively and according to law and rule.

Ed RadermacherChairperson
Jeff JohnsonVice-chair
LeRoy SchuelkeSecretary
Bob Ludvigson....Treasurer
Tony Croatt...Publicity & Information



District Staff

Terry WittnebelDistrict Manager
Jacob Payne/Brian Zabel....District Technician
Sheri Laechelt....Program Assistant
Curtis Nordaune....District Engineering Tech
Gemma Schmitz.....PF Biologist

Assisted by NRCS Staff

Burton Hendrickson....District Conservationist
Jon Quast....Soil Conservation Technician
Micah Meyer.....Wetland Specialist
Ginger Drobny.....Administrative Assistant



Not pictured: Curtis Nordaune & Jon Quast

2014 Affiliate Memberships

With their financial support, these businesses and individuals supported LqP SWCD education and outreach activities this past year.

Conservation Leader Memberships:

Bellingham Farmers Co-op Elevator
Farmers Mutual Telephone
Klein Bank, Madison
Lac qui Parle Co-op Oil, Dawson & Madison
Lund Implement
Madison Bottling Company
Minnwest Bank, Dawson
Northern Plains Tiling
United Prairie Bank, Madison

Conservation Partners:

Bob & Julie Ludvigson
Jeff & Carla Johnson
Erickson Chevrolet, Dawson & Madison
Friend of Conservation Memberships:

Breberg Agency, Dawson
Peggy Crosby
Audrey Froiland—Memorial
Burton Hendrickson
Irene Maatz
Jeff Olson-Dekalb Seeds
Paul & Lori Schwendemann
Warren Trygestad-Pioneer Seeds

2014 District Manager's Report

Terry Wittnebel, District Manager

As I psyched myself to begin year end reports, I had the feeling the District might not have succeeded in meeting goals set at the beginning of 2014 in spite of being extremely busy! The year flew by, but what had we accomplished?

The Yellow Medicine River watershed was chosen as one of 5 pilot watersheds in the state funded to develop a "One Watershed One Plan". A small portion of southeastern Lac qui Parle County is in this watershed. The state wants plans like this, which are written for a geographic area rather than following a political boundary, replace the county Local Comprehensive Water Plans (like we just finished writing) over the next 10 years. Although the portion of our County in this watershed is small, we need to be at the table if we want our voice to be heard. I was there, and the experience will be valuable when our current plan expires in five years and is replaced by several plans that cross county lines.

Preparation within watersheds for developing the new One Watershed One Plan is choreographed by MPCA, and called Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies, or WRAPS. This is a summary of scientific data and implementation strategies and actions. The District participated in a couple of preliminary meetings held for the Lac qui Parle River watershed and the Upper Minnesota River watershed (the Yellow Bank River is part of this watershed), as well as WRAPS meetings for the Yellow Medicine River watershed. "Meetings" are often construed as a waste of time, but in reality these sessions are held to gather local on-the-ground knowledge and experiences which becomes part of the written plan. Time consuming, yes, but it's important that our voice is heard.

Between uncooperative weather and no experienced engineering staff in the office, not as much engineering activity took place. Again there have been staff changes. District Technician Jacob Payne was replaced by Brian Zabel. The vacant NRCS Conservation Technician position was filled by Jonathan Quast. Welcome!

Finally assembling the numbers in one place to report annual plan accomplishments was a good thing We got a lot more done than we thought! Check out the rest of this report.



Wetland Conservation Act

The Lac qui Parle Soil and Water Conservation District Technician is a member of the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP), as outlined in Minnesota statute. WCA regulations are administered by the county's Local Government Unit, the Yellow Bank Watershed District. The TEP is comprised of 4 representatives from different agencies and makes recommendations on technical matters such as road construction projects, wetland restorations, and WCA compliance regulations. The District Technicians attended 2 training courses for program updates.

In 2014, there were numerous site visits for Ag Wetland Banking as well as No Net Loss.

District Conservationist's 2014 Report

Burt Hendrickson, District Conservationist

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) had another very busy year serving the landowners and operators of Lac qui Parle County. The long awaited new Farm Bill was signed into law February 7, 2014, and this had a big impact on what we did and when we were able to do it.

NRCS promoted and conducted another EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program), WRP (Wetland Reserve Program), and the 5th CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program) plus the first option for renewal of CSP signups during the year. This resulted in 40 applications in these programs with 28 obligated agreements (8 EQIP, 20 CSP). The acres involved with these obligated agreements total 10,550.9. We also continued to complete or apply projects that were funded in previous year signups. There were conservation plans reported as applied on 10,892 acres. Applied practices resulted in improved soil quality on 7680 acres, and improved water quality on 8779 acres. Grazing land benefited was 630 acres, and wildlife habitat improvements were on 1934 acres. Some examples of practices reported as applied were: conservation tillage (no-till, strip till, mulch till), conservation crop rotation, conservation cover, nutrient management, pesticide management, restoration of declining habitat (prairie plantings), windbreak/shelterbelt establishment, water and sediment control basins, wetland restorations, fencing, prescribed grazing, mid management on CRP, and well decommissioning.

NRCS continued to work with landowners wanting to pursue CRP in Lac qui Parle County. There were a lot of contracts due to expire and a majority of people investigated their options related to re-enrollment. After the new Farm Bill was signed we were able to forge ahead. Even though there was no General CRP signup in 2014, the CCRP (Continuous Conservation Reserve Program) has many options available on a year round basis for landowners to explore or pursue. We completed 110 CCRP program eligibility determinations and developed conservation plans for 95 offers with 89 contracts approved. They involve practices such as filter strips, farmstead windbreaks, wetland restoration, prairie restoration, and a newer option called pollinator habitat. The cover established and/or re-established conserves soil, improves water quality, and provides wildlife habitat. The 2015 workload for CRP could be extensive again with a 138 contracts due to expire in Lac qui Parle County.

We continue to try to work with multiple groups and agencies which can provide additional funding options and a wider range of options for people interested in programs to conserve resources. The Local Work Group process has allowed all interested parties to have input and make suggestions for the EQIP program. We also worked closely with the Clean Water Partnership which has provided a source of additional funds to apply practices that provide improved water quality. Depending on the location in the county this has provided additional incentives to establish filter strips, install alternatives to replace open tile intakes, and provide cost share for water and sediment control structures and stream bank stabilization. The SWCD has pursued additional grant applications to try and secure additional funding for conservation activities also. We are also cooperating with other agency staff and adjacent counties to provide technical assistance and promotion of options that help carry out the Minnesota Prairie Plan. There was a County Commissioner Tour related to the Prairie Plan conducted in an attempt to clarify what was involved. Lac qui Parle County is blessed with some areas of remnant native prairie which is very rare, and this plan is trying to find ways to encourage landowners to preserve them if at all possible.

The swampbuster provisions of the Farm Bill are still a significant work load. The need to complete a certified wetland determination for all signed 1026 forms proposing activity such as tiling, ditching, modifying drainage, clearing trees, land leveling, placing fill etc. is ongoing with the additional staff from the previous year helping us to become current with the 1026's. The incoming rate has seemed to slow this year (244), but it is advised that people start their 1026 process well ahead of their planned activity to give some time needed to respond to most 1026's.

The upcoming year looks to have considerable additional activity. The new Farm Bill is here and there are still implementation issues being addressed related to it. The programs such as CSP and EQIP will have signups for interested people to apply for. Soil quality and drainage management are still big buzzwords, along with pollinator habitat, with initiatives related to them becoming available through the programs. Potential applicants for EQIP will need to become accustomed to the idea that we all have to plan further ahead. Many applications will have ranking incentives such as having a fully developed conservation plan already in hand. There are a couple new staff people in the office, and after a very long wait, have a new Soil Conservation Technician (Jon Quast) in place. We will all be learning together as the programs are unveiled, but we will continue to attempt to provide assistance to any or all interested landusers in Lac qui Parle County. We want to continue our "Helping People Help the Land".

Tree Program

Tree tubes were added to the services offered by the District. Tree tubes provide a microclimate allowing newly planted trees to establish more quickly.

EQIP & CRP Plantings

Farmstead	0	
<i># of trees</i>		
<i>feet of fabric</i>		

State Cost Share

Farmstead Shelterbelts	11	
<i># of trees</i>		1448
<i>feet of fabric</i>		11,920

Plantings with no Cost Share Assistance

Plantings	4	
<i># of trees</i>		630
<i>feet of fabric</i>		3087

Totals

	15	
PROJECTS		
TREES PLANTED		3777
TREES SOLD		
FABRIC (feet)		15,832
TREE TUBES SOLD		248



Grass Drill

Last winter the District Supervisors gathered to spend a day overhauling our grass drill. For the second year in a row, the number of acres doubled from the previous year, and happily producers reported no mechanical problems.

Rentals.....26
Acres.....443.5

DNR Observation Wells

The District, in partnership with the DNR, has an agreement to monitor 7 wells across the county in order to obtain groundwater data throughout the growing season. This practice has been ongoing since 1944, and the data is utilized to determine long term trends of irrigation and climate for water management plans in the coming years.



Engineering Projects 2014

PROJECT FUNDING SOURCES:

- STATE – state cost share program, SWCD
- EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program, NRCS
- Watershed – state & federal grants

Landowner - Project Type - Funding - Soil Saved/Year

Projects Completed

- A Grass Waterway CRP 23.75 Tons
- B Terrace Repair EQIP 159.60 Tons

Projects Started or Funded & Waiting Construction

- C 4 WASCBS EQIP/Watershed

Weather prevented more field work from being accomplished. In addition to projects above, the office has 9 requests from landowners to do field checks for potential projects. Most of these requests have been field checked, and some surveying and or design work has been done.



Walk In Access Program

This voluntary program is a great opportunity for hunters to have more hunting options available than public land alone. Enrollment is for all hunting seasons, one year at a time. Sites are posted with signs. Maps are available online and in the SWCD office. Sites currently enrolled in LQP County during 2014:

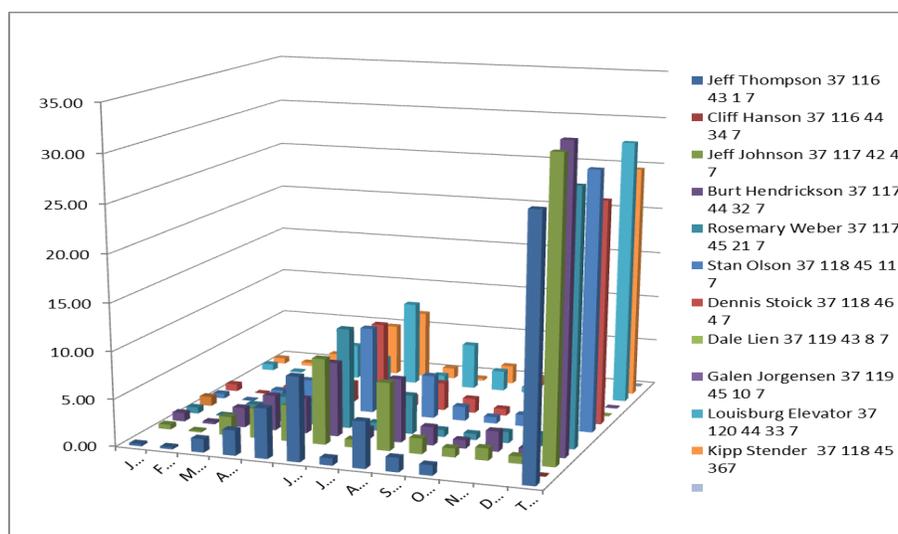
Sites.....10
Acres.....1235.7

Rain Gauge Program

In 2014 the LqP Soil and Water Conservation District started out with 12 volunteer rain gauge monitors. We currently have one open position in Lac qui Parle County. The monitors collect precipitation data daily and record it on their personalized data sheets. At the end of each month, the data sheets are sent to the LqP Soil and Water Conservation District, where the information is compiled and forwarded to the MN State Office of Climatology. The information is used for climate prediction and has a variety of uses, including crop disaster declarations. We are sincerely grateful to our dedicated monitors who faithfully measure and record precipitation 365 days a year, through rain, sleet and snow.

2014 Precipitation Totals

MONITORS	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	TOTAL
Jeff Thompson 37 116 43 17	0.24	0.22	1.43	2.66	5.28	8.85	0.76	4.90	1.50	1.09	1.29	0.88	29.10
Cliff Hanson 37 116 44 34 7													
Jeff Johnson 37 117 42 4 7	0.50	0.15	1.98	3.14	3.82	9.06	0.83	7.15	1.64	1.94	1.28	0.77	31.26
Burt Hendrickson 37 117 44 32 7	0.91	0.23	2.09	3.73	3.73	7.83	1.13	6.72	1.94	0.87	2.15	0.62	31.95
Rosemary Weber 37 117 45 21 7	0.65	0.08	1.60	2.75	2.46	10.66	0.84	4.14	0.75	0.65	1.18	1.24	27.00
Stan Olson 37 118 45 11 7	0.50	0.05	1.50	2.92	2.84	9.24	1.36	4.60	1.51	0.69	1.22	1.16	27.59
Dennis Stoick 37 118 46 4 7	0.76	0.00	1.06	3.09	2.12	8.93	1.15	2.98	1.53	0.72	1.09	0.47	23.90
Dale Lien 37 119 43 8 7													
Galen Jorgensen 37 119 45 10 7													
Louisburg Elevator 37 120 44 33 7	0.69	0.10	1.14	3.74	2.54	9.06	1.10	4.91	2.17	0.56	1.55	0.84	28.40
Kipp Stender 37 118 45 367	0.62	0.37	1.67	2.90	5.52	7.29	1.14	5.25	1.97	0.94	1.29	1.13	25.09



Education/Outreach Activities

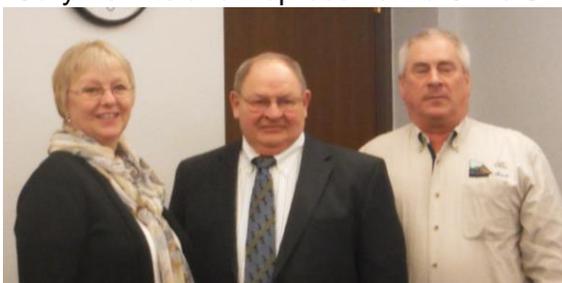
DATE	AUDIENCE	TOPIC	# PRESENTATIONS
2/8-9	Great W MN Get-Together	pollinators	continuous
3/15	ECFE Family Night	soil	continuous
3/24	Annual Township Officers	living snowfence	1(15 min).
4/23	Envirothon (Area II)	natural resources	continuous
	Local teams participated in this area, not enough registered for our own, grades 9-12		
4/27-5/4	all residents <i>Dig Deeper - Mysteries in the Soil</i>	Soil & Water Stewardship Week	continuous
4/22	Earth Day Scavenger Hunt	watershed community, Earth Day	
5/1	Envirothon	natural resources	continuous
	grades 9-12 from 11 county area - planned, promoted but cancelled because didn't meet minimum # team registrations		
5/14	LqP Valley 5 th	soil Soil Formation role play	3(45 min.)
5/19	MN Envirothon	natural resources	continuous
	state competition, 22 winning teams from area competitions, grades 9-12		
5/28, 30	Chippewa 5 th grade Field Day	trees Maple Seed mixup	16(25 min.)
5/28, 30	all 5 th /6 th graders	receive spruce trees (Chippewa field day)	
5/30	all kindergartners	receive native species tree (American Plum)	2(10 min.)
8/5	all residents statewide	Farmfest	
9/4	all residents	Tillage Solutions Field Day	soil compaction/soil health
9/4-7	LqP county fair	who we are & what we do Do You Know Us?	continuous
9/24-25	Environmental Fair	natural resources	continuous
	6 th graders from 11 county area		
11/18	2014 program participants	Thank You Event	
	Curtis Nordaune retirement, Outstanding Conservationist recognition, thanks to rain gauge monitors & affiliates		

In addition, this information or assistance was provided: serve on LqP Valley Community Ed Advisory Council; area Envirothon coordinator; city of Madison tree replacement project; donations to public & elementary libraries; arranged speaker for Cattlemen's Association annual meeting

News articles submitted to area newspapers are also used to inform the public on a variety of topics. A weekly live radio broadcast March through October was developed jointly with Water Plan, NRCS, LqPYB CWP, and the Environmental Office. The SWCD assumes the cost for NRCS broadcasts.



In February, Supervisor Bob Ludvigson and Manager Terry Wittnebel represented LqP SWCD at the MASWCD Legislative Briefing and Day at the Capitol where they discussed conservation concerns with Senator Gary Dahms and Representative Chris Swedinski.



Farm Bill Partnership

This initiative is a collaboration of the Board of Water and Soil Resources, DNR, Pheasants Forever, and the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. It helps fund the District technician for work implementing various federal and state conservation programs such as such as CCRP, CRP, WRP, WHIP, and RIM, that help improve water quality and increase wildlife habitat.



Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Partnership

Gemma Schmitz, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist

A new Federal Farm Bill was passed this year, so I was able to work on enrolling landowners in CRP, both new and expiring contracts. A Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Buffers signup was held in June, in which our office submitted 4 applications, but none were funded. A new RIM Grasslands signup was also announced in June, one application was submitted from our office for the Lac qui Parle Local Technical Team.

RIM Applications (approved).....1
Total Acres.....177.4

I have still been active with the Lac qui Parle LTT as they continue working to find quality restoration and enhancement projects to use their allotted money for. I have submitted many projects to the team that were approved for funding and will all be completed no later than June 2015.

Prescribed Burns.....4
Native Grass/Forb Inter Seeding.....1
Tree Removal.....1



Southwest Prairie Technical Service Area

As a member of the SWPrairie TSA, the LqP SWCD receives advanced engineering assistance for best management practice projects.

In 2014, SWPrairie engineers investigated 4 streambank stabilization sites in LqP County.

2014 Outstanding Conservationists



Mike and Rachel of rural Madison were named the 2014 Lac qui Parle Soil SWCD Outstanding Conservationists.

The Croatts operate a grain farm, producing primarily corn and soybeans with an occasional wheat rotation to control pests and to avoid applying pesticides. The effects on the water, soil, and environment have been considered in all of their farming decisions for their entire farming career. Most of their decisions are made because they believe it is the “right thing” to do and not for the recognition.

They do very little tillage and have a firm belief that the soil should always be

covered, which also helps them reach their desired percent of organic matter. They have replace open intakes with five alternative intakes, filter strips totaling thirteen acres have been installed, CRP acres are maintained and they use sheep to manage buckthorn and other invasive species in their shelterbelt. They have recently planted cover crops through the EQIP program, and look forward to seeing the results of the practice.



A plaque and “thanksgiving” basket were presented to them at the *Thank You Event* in November.

50 Years of Conservation Work



Curtis Nordaune officially retired after 50 years of conservation work in Lac qui Parle County.

Curtis spent additional years protecting resources in Cottonwood and Lincoln counties – truly his life’s work!

Pictured with Curtis are long-time coworkers Burt Hendrickson and Terry Witnebel.

Clean Water Fund Grants

The District has two successful Clean Water Fund Grant applications, and is joint recipient of a third. The grant period for all three grants ended 12/31/14. Little or no money remained to return to the state.

A **Clean Water Assistance Grant** in the amount of **\$53,533** was awarded to provide 75% cost share to retrofit well in pits with a pitless unit, fill the well pit with native soil material, move the pressure tank indoors, and allow the homeowner to continue using a serviceable well while safeguarding the source of their drinking water. Wells located in the floodplains were priority, and homeowners contacted by mail and phone followup. With only one completed application resulting from targeted individual contacts, and numerous individuals in the target area responding they had recently done this at their own expense, the program was opened county wide.

Sixteen projects were completed over the grant period, exhausting available funds. Residents and contractors both praised the program and benefits to groundwater.

An **Accelerated Implementation Grant** in the amount of **\$30,894** was used to employ an individual to work with the County Feedlot Officer to complete a Level 3 Feedlot survey. The SWCD oversees grant administration, but staff was under day to day supervision of the Feedlot Officer.

Onsite visits were made to all 239 sites, and MinnFARM calculations completed. 17 feedlots were found to be inactive. Updated manure management plans were reviewed, and information on various cost share funding programs to assist livestock producers was shared.

A **Targeted Drainage Water Management Grant** in the amount of **\$60,000** was awarded jointly to Yellow Medicine and LqP SWCDs to provide cost share or incentives for the installation of practices including denitrifying bioreactors, control drainage structures, and replacing open intakes with alternative inlets, and writing of drainage water management plans. Yellow Medicine is the fiscal agent. Applications from Lac qui Parle are below.

CAP plan..... 1 (plan complete)
Alternative intakes..... 6 applications.....18 open intakes replaced
Control structures.....1 application.....3 structures installed



Lac qui Parle Comprehensive Water Quality Management Plan

Terry Wittnebel, Water Plan Coordinator

The Lac qui Parle SWCD administers the Lac qui Parle County Comprehensive Water Quality Management Plan. The LqP SWCD District Manager serves as the Water Plan Coordinator. Water Plan activities are classed into three categories: Program Administration, Education Activities, and BMP Installation/Application.

Administration

Administrative funds cover the costs incurred by the SWCD for administering the County's Water Plan and the Ag Best Management Practices Low Interest Loan Program. Charges made by the SWCD are based on staff hours spent. Envelope and postage expenses are reported for payment, but the SWCD does not include copying costs, SWCD Board time, paper, labels, or other office supply costs.

The LqP County Commissioners reappointed 2013 Resource Commission members to serve again for 2014. Resource Commission provides oversight of Water Plan activities. The group met once to set budget and approve work plan. Per diem and mileage are paid for Commission members who are not reimbursed by their agency or organization but serve as members at large.

Three AgBMP loan applications for ag waste handling equipment were approved and processed. In addition there were several inquiries for well replacement. The program was promoted as part of booth displays and on radio programs during the year.

The Water Plan Coordinator attended several sessions pertaining to Water Plan activities at the BWSR Academy 10/28-30 and participated in scheduled TEAM meetings and other collaborative sessions with the Clean Water Partnership/Watershed staff including the beginning meetings for Lac qui Parle River watershed WRAPS

Education

Water Plan funds were used to support the annual Environmental Fair for 6th graders, an 11-county environmental learning event with a variety of water sessions, and to county and school libraries to purchase books about water. A tabletop display, two easels, and a promotional table covering for use at events were also purchased. Other education/outreach activities: a weekly radio program March through October included numerous water quality topics; promotion of SWCD Clean Water Fund grants to retrofit then close well pits and install Conservation/Controlled Drainage BMPs; SWCD booth at LqP County Fair on funding programs that assist with installation of BMPs protecting water quality; Water Plan booth used by LqPYB Watershed to share water quality information; staff assisted with Earth Day Scavenger Hunt. A workshop for women, *You Hold the Key, Unlocking the Mystery of Soil and Water*, was planned for August, but cancelled because of low registration.

BMP Application/Installation

Nineteen wells were decommissioned in 2014, another one was approved but projects not completed before the end of the year. Of those sealed with cost share, one was subject to flooding, 2 were hazardous, and 8 were near a feedlot/barnyard or septic. Cost share is provided at 75% not to exceed \$500/well. The projects were reported electronically to the Board of Water and Soil Resources. \$725.50 unencumbered project funds will be carried over to 2015.