

Nature Talks

Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District

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Soil Health Field Day



SWCD & NRCS recently hosted a Soil Health Field Day in Haven Township. Crop producers and other agricultural professionals listened to presentations, viewed interseeded cover crops, simulated rainfall demonstrations and had excellent discussion on how we can improve our soil.

The day was lead by North Dakota soil health specialist Jay Fuhrer. Jay presented on one of the biggest signs of healthy soil being that it's hidden from plain sight, protected from the elements by natural armor. He explained how No-till farming and minimal disturbance are ways of growing crops or pasture from year to year without disturbing the soil through tillage; healthy soils are built by planting directly into the stubble from the previous year's crop instead of plowing. The stubble acts like an armor, protecting soil from erosion and keeping the healthy topsoil in place.

Jay also provided the audience with a few simple tests they can preform on their own land to gather information on it's health. He highlighted information and data of the benefit of planting single and multispecies cover crops.

To wrap up the day attendees examined a demonstration interseeded cover crop planted with barley oats, cowpeas, turnip and radish in May. The cover crop was monitored by SWCD staff over the summer growing season, and then displayed for attendees at the field day. Sherburne SWCD would like to thank everyone who attended the Soil Health Field Day.



Jay Fuhrer, Yara Gonzalez,
Miranda Wagner, Bill Bronder

For more information on the topics discussed or the cover crop incentive program, contact Miranda at 763-241-1170 x 4.



2017 Conservation Cooperators

Sherburne SWCD has chosen Patrick Plant and Cindi Edwards-Plant as the 2017 Conservation Cooperators. For over 30 years, Patrick and Cindi have been dedicated lake stewards of their beloved Lake Orono. Individually, Patrick excels in strategic planning and leadership as well as long-term visioning and succession plan development. Cindi's exceptional talents lie in marketing, graphic design and writing for their lake association website and other materials.

Together, they regularly complete MPCA-sponsored water quality monitoring on the lake and are very active in the numerous AIS monitoring projects that Sherburne SWCD sponsors. Instead of pursuing cost-share from Sherburne SWCD, they instead sought only guidance as they wanted cost share funds to go towards other projects that would need incentive funds to complete. Their intent was to create a public demonstration site to show other potentially interested lake homeowners the shoreline restoration process and what final product looks like. In 2016-2017, Patrick and Cindi led their lake group through a structured lake management plan update process which incorporated much stakeholder input from lake residents, the City of Elk River, and locally elected officials.



Cindi Edwards-Plant and Patrick Plant

Patrick and Cindi have gone above and beyond the vision of protecting Lake Orono, in addition the two have been just as instrumental as members of a Coalition of Lake Association (COLA) steering committee and were amongst a team that successfully created the Sherburne County COLA. Continuing to serve as leaders on their new-found devotion to watershed-based planning and protection, both Patrick and Cindi elected to serve as Lake Orono delegates on the COLA board and Patrick was nominated as the Sherburne County COLA Chair.

Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District is proud to honor Patrick and Cindi as this year's Outstanding Conservation Cooperators.

2017 Elk River Clean Up

It was a chilly morning when 28 volunteers and 6 SWCD staff met for the 9th annual Elk River Watershed Cleanup. Volunteers met at Lakeside park in Big Lake to enjoy Caribou coffee and light snacks before heading out to one of 5 cleanup locations. An estimated 320 lbs of trash was removed from road sides along the Elk River and its tributaries. Weight of the trash was estimated using the MN DNR's Rubbish Weights Guide. Trash that was collected consisted of the usual suspects: fast food wrappers, coffee cups, aluminum cans, scrap metal, cardboard boxes, cigarette butts, plastic bottles, and newspaper. Some unusual items found were vinyl siding, tires and rims.



The SWCD would like to send out a Big Thank You to all of our volunteers, your hard work makes our lakes and rivers cleaner for everyone!

Next year we would like to have additional groups adopt sections of the Elk River! *If you know of any groups (i.e. boy scouts, girl scouts, church groups...) that may be interested in teaming up to clean up the Elk River have them contact Franny at (763) 241-1170 ext. 4.*

SWCD Tour of Practices and Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon



The Sherburne SWCD and NRCS office held a conservation tour on Thursday, September 7th. The tour highlighted some of the conservation projects completed in the county throughout the past year. Over 40 people attended the tour, including County Commissioners, State Representatives, Lake Association Board Members, County Planning Commission, and SWCD Supervisors. A tour bus ushered attendees to 5 different stops throughout the county. Highlights of the tour included; Aquatic Invasive Species presentation with the Sherburne County Water Patrol, stormwater management practices utilizing gravel infiltration beds and a slotted drain on Birch Lake, a tree pruning demonstration given by volunteer citizen pruners in Big Lake, a fun and educational exhibit on soil health and finished by visiting an established 5 acre native prairie in Becker. A special thanks to everyone who made our tour possible. Sherburne County Sheriff's Dept., Big Lake Township, Tom Hammer, The Friendly Buffalo, Stearns County SWCD, NRCS, Blue Thumb, Speco Charter Bus Company.



At the conclusion of the tour, volunteers and partners of Sherburne Conservation District were honored at an appreciation luncheon. The luncheon is SWCD's chance to recognize the contributions and assistance volunteers have provided to the District, which are an important part of conservation programming. Some of the events and programs they are utilized in are: rain gauge reading, Elk River clean up, citizen pruner, tree survey and zebra mussel monitoring. The SWCD would like to thank all of our volunteers for their countless hours of hard work, enthusiasm and dedication.



Sherburne SWCD is always looking for individuals and groups interested in volunteering to assist with projects. If you have an interest in natural resources, conservation, or just spending a few sunny days outdoors, we would love to have you join our team of volunteers. The roles of volunteers vary according to project needs. As a volunteer, you may assist with plantings, help staff with educational events and festivals, or lend a hand with other important project aspects. *If you are interested in volunteering please contact Andie our office at 763-241-1170 x 4.*



Nitrate Testing Available at the SWCD Office

Sherburne SWCD will now offer free well water testing at the Elk River office. Testing will be available from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday – Friday. The SWCD office is located at 14855 Highway 10 in Elk River. Nitrate is a common contaminant found in many wells throughout Minnesota. Shallow wells, dug wells, and wells with damaged or leaking casings are the most vulnerable to nitrate contamination. Major sources of nitrate contamination can be from fertilizers, animal waste, and human sewage.

It is highly recommended to test your drinking water supply on a regular basis. To take your sample, run your cold tap for three minutes then collect about one cup of water in a plastic baggie (double bag) or clean jar. Keep the water cool until it is ready to be tested. Water can be collected anytime within one day of testing. Testing will take place on site with results typically available within 5-10 minutes. Test results may remain anonymous. Water samples showing an elevated level of nitrate will be encouraged to retest for nitrates and bacteria at a certified water lab. The well water samples will only be tested for nitrate.

For more information, contact our office at 763-241-1170 x 4.



My Neighborhood Tree Program

The My Neighborhood Tree program is a community forest diversification project designed to improve the health and vitality of neighborhood tree populations. Eleven species of enhanced bare root trees were made available to targeted areas of the county for purchase. The root systems of these trees was strengthened through a natural conditioning process using gravel and water. This method of conditioning lessens transplant shock, provides for faster establishment, and promotes quicker growth. *For more information on the available tree programs the SWCD offers, please contact Gina at 763-567-5360.*



Sherburne Wildlife Refuge Fall Festival

Which native plant has really long roots?" ...This was one of the most popular questions asked at our booth last Saturday during the Annual Wildlife Refuge Fall Festival. SWCD team members Gina, Miranda and Yara from NRCS spent the sunny day fielding questions and cheering on festival goers during games of Pollinator Plink-O. About 1,500 visitors attended the annual celebration, hiking around to the various nature learning activities.



Gina Hugo, Yara Gonzalez, Miranda Wagner

This year's festival marks the 24th annual celebration of the community's Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, located near Zimmerman, contains over 30,000 acres of habitats ranging from wetlands to oak savanna. Roughly 100,000 people

visit the refuge each year, with more than 230 bird species, birding is a big draw. People also visit to hunt white-tailed deer and waterfowl.



To answer the question posed at the beginning of this article, one of our native plants with some really impressive roots is the Leadplant, its roots can grow to lengths of 15 feet deep in the soil!



Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District
14855 Highway 10
Elk River, MN 55330
763-241-1170 ext 4
www.sherburneswcd.org

