

Nature Talks

Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District

Nature Talks
March 2024

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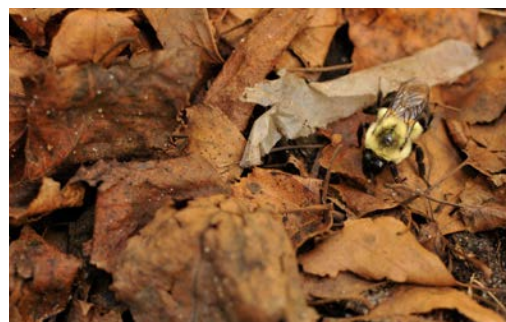
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Sherburne
SWCD

Spring Clean Up

It seems that we may be quickly approaching spring with warmer temperatures and little snow cover which might motivate gardeners to get into their yards a little earlier than normal, but this is your friendly reminder to BEE patient! Pollinators and other beneficial insects might not be as eager to emerge, regardless of what the groundhog did or did not see. Many butterfly species overwinter in leaf litter or other plant debris in their chrysalis state and rely on that plant matter to protect them from the elements and predators until



temperatures are just right for them to emerge. Several bee species also over winter in leaf litter including many bumblebee queens, with some also hiding in old plant stems or downed logs and branches. These essential pollinators are the reason we have beautiful blooms and ripe fruit and vegetables from gardens each year, delaying spring cleanup is just one way we can help them on their way! Typically, it is best to wait to perform typical spring garden cleanup like cutting back old growth, removing leaves, and adding new plants until soil temperatures are on average around 50 degrees.

However, now is a great time to make a game plan for the 2024 gardening season by researching new pollinator friendly plants to add, seeking out native nurseries for native plant stock or making a fun sign to inform neighbors of your native habitat. Your local pollinators will thank you!

If you would like to learn more about adding pollinator habitat to your yard, contact Franny at 763-220-3434 x104 or fgerde@sherburneswcd.org.

Annual Poster Contest

Each year the SWCD hosts the annual poster contest for area 5th graders. The contest offers the students a creative way to learn about a conservation related topic, chosen by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). This year's theme is "May the Forest be with you Always". In a galaxy very, very near, the students learned about the different types of forests in Minnesota and their importance to our daily lives. SWCD staff provided an in-person presentation or digital recording to 6 schools in Sherburne County, reaching approximately 700 students. The top 4 posters will be selected in March and the top 4 students win a monetary prize. *Good luck 5th graders!*



How Does a Mild Winter Impact Minnesota Lakes and Streams?

The winter of 2023-2024 has thus far been historic in many ways. As of mid-February 2024, each of the winter months have set unique records according to retired University of Minnesota Extension climatologist and meteorologist Mark Seeley on his blog WeatherTalk:

- November 2023 saw over two-thirds of the days measuring warmer than normal in Minnesota.
- December 2023 was the warmest in recorded state climate history, averaging over 14°F above normal on a statewide basis.
- January 2023 was exceptionally warm and dry. As a whole, the month ranked as the 10th warmest in state history with temperatures 7°F above normal. The last week in January however averaged 24°F above normal. Minneapolis-St. Paul reported just 0.13 inches of precipitation in January, St. Cloud 0.20 inches, Redwood Falls with 0.10 inches, and Faribault 0.20 inches.
- The December 2023 / January 2024 combination ranks as the warmest in recorded state history.
- Warm trends continued into early February, with many places exceeding a daytime high of 50°F.

The plants, animals and ecosystems in Minnesota have become accustomed to our four season “schedule,” lakes, for example, have adapted to the predictable succession of climate events. An early spring can disrupt the emergence of zooplankton, a crustacean that is a vital food source for young fish. Even slight temperature changes can alter habitat shifts, particularly for fish that thrive in cold water such as walleye and favor warm-water loving fish such as bass and bluegill. Winter impacts non-native species too; evidence in Minnesota lakes suggests that longer winters with greater early-season snowfall suppress curly-leaf pondweed the following summer. Current climate models indicate warmer and shorter winters which would favor curly-leaf pondweed.

Water levels are also likely to be impacted following a warmer winter. Evaporation occurs from open water during both the summer and winter months; when lakes are covered with ice for a longer period, evaporation is greatly reduced. However, a shorter winter results in more opportunity for evaporation, meaning more water loss to the atmosphere. More snow on the landscape results in spring melting restoring lake and stream levels, as well as replenishing groundwater reserves once the soil thaws. Lack of snow means that lakes and streams will enter the traditionally dryer summer months with lower water levels. These lower water levels could spell trouble for recreation as well as increased water temperatures and struggling aquatic animals if river and stream channels are reduced.

Like many things in life, moderation is key. Stable, predictable summers and winters with normal conditions allow our ecosystems to go through their growing and resting periods. Extremes at either end cause stress to our native elements and may favor aggressive non-native species to thrive. Resilient ecosystems can absorb the effects of climactic change, reorganize and adapt to a new environment. To this end, any of the SWCD’s projects incorporate resiliency by planting a diverse array of species, building to accommodate temperature and precipitation extremes, and planning to accommodate an anticipated shift in local climate.



Rum River low water conditions in 2023.

For more information on the conditions of lakes or streams in Sherburne County, please contact Dan Cibulka at dcibulka@sherburneswcd.org or 763-220-3434 extension 103.

Metro Area Envirothon 2024

The Envirothon program has been held in Minnesota since 1993; an outdoor environmental learning competition for middle and high school students. Students compete in groups of 5 by visiting learning stations staffed by local natural resource professionals with topics in forestry, aquatics, soils, wildlife, and a rotating current events issue. High school teams are required to give a presentation on the current events topic as well. The top 3 teams from each Area Envirothon advance to the State Envirothon.

This year, the Metro Area Envirothon will be held at the Isaak Walton League MN Valley Chapter located in Bloomington, MN on April 25th. SWCDs in the 11 County Metro are coordinating with area schools and natural resources professionals to plan an outstanding event for students eager to learn more about Minnesota's natural resources.



If you are a middle or high school teacher interested in registering a team for this year's competition, contact Franny Gerde for more information at fgerde@sherburneswcd.org or 763-220-3434 x104.



SPARK Stem Conference

The SPARK STEM Conference is a hands-on experiential learning for 3rd-8th grade students hosted by Resource Training and Solutions in St. Cloud. Sherburne SWCD staff along with colleagues from Stearns and Benton SWCDs hosted a session on Soils 101. Students learned the key characteristics of soil and how it forms, and they were encouraged to get their hands dirty and learn how to describe and classify soil using the soil texture triangle and Munsell color book. Lastly, the students got to experience the true diversity of soil by using soil paint as a coloring medium to create artwork.



Join us for Conservation Happy Hour

Have a question about your trees?
Concerns about your lake shore?
Interested in planting a prairie?

Chat with staff members and get answers on your forestry, prairie, water quality and soil health related questions.



Conservation Happy Hour

Thursday, March 7th
5:00 - 7:00pm
Sunken Ship Brewery
Princeton

Hosted by the staff from Mille Lacs, Isanti and Sherburne SWCDs



Grab a beverage and join us!

Winter Conservation Day

WINTER CONSERVATION DAY 2024

March 5, 2024

Coyote Moon Grille | St. Cloud, MN

Agenda & additional details on reverse side



Featuring Soil Health Experts:



Dr. Liz Haney

Co-developer of the Haney Soil Test



Stephanie McClain

MN NRCS State Soil Health Specialist

Panel Discussion with Liz Haney,
Stephanie McClain, TJ Kartes, CSC
Crop Advisor

SPACE IS LIMITED! REGISTER TODAY!
CENTRASOTA.COM/SOILHEALTH

Scan QR code to RSVP



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Drinking Water Subgrant

The SWCD was recently awarded a Clean Water Fund Grant from the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). This grant is aimed at the reduction of nitrates and a decrease in the use of groundwater by promoting and implementing best management practices in both urban and rural landscapes. Sherburne County's unique geology and high surficial water table allows for efficient groundwater recharge but also creates vulnerability for groundwater contamination. The priority areas for this grant include the Wellhead Protection Areas and Drinking Water Management Areas for the cities of Clear Lake, Becker, and Big Lake with additional eligible areas of Haven, Palmer, Clear Lake, Becker, and Big Lake Townships.



Smart irrigation controller technology which allows for customized irrigation schedules based on local weather conditions. Credit: U of M Extension Turfgrass Sciences

Projects such as irrigation water management, cover crops, perennial cover, turf management and prairie plantings are just a few examples of how the SWCD, cities, and townships will work towards reducing nitrates in drinking water.

More information on how to apply for projects will be available on the SWCD website this spring, if you would like more information or to see if you are within the eligible project area contact the SWCD at 763-220-3434.

Signup Reopened for Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)



This article can be found in its entirety by visiting the USDA Farm Service Agency website at fsa.usda.gov/news-room

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) began accepting applications for the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (Continuous CRP) on January 12, 2024. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers and landowners interested in conservation opportunities for their land, in exchange for yearly rental payments, to consider the enrollment options available through Continuous CRP, which also includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) offered by FSA partners.

To submit an offer, producers should contact the FSA at their local USDA Service Center by July 31, 2024, in order to have an offer effective by October 1, 2024. To ensure enrollment acreages do not exceed the statutory cap, FSA will accept offers from producers on a first-come, first-served basis and will return offers for approval in batches throughout the year. Additionally, producers with acres enrolled in Continuous CRP set to expire September 30, 2024, can offer acres for re-enrollment. A producer can both enroll new acres into Continuous CRP and re-enroll any acres expiring September 30, 2024.

If you are interested in learning more about CRP, please contact the Elk River FSA/NRCS Service Center at (763) 241-1150 ext. 2 for FSA, (763) 241-1170 ext. 3 for NRCS.



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Conservation Comedy



What do you call an Irish Spider?

Well Testing

The SWCD is still accepting applications for cost share on comprehensive private well testing. Well testing will include at a minimum: Coliform Bacteria, Nitrates, Arsenic, and Lead from a certified water testing lab. Financial assistance will be offered at 50% for one test per residence, not to exceed \$100. Well testing for wells eligible for cost sharing must be located within Sherburne County and used currently for drinking water. Water testing required by the State or County is not eligible for cost share assistance. First priority will be given to wells located within a delineated Well Head Protection area. This is a reimbursement program. Tests are only eligible after a board approved agreement. The private well testing assistance program is in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Health.

For more information or to contact staff, visit
<https://www.sherburneswcd.org/well-testing-funds.html>
or call Miranda at 763-220-3434 ext 105.



Meet the SWCD Staff



My name is David Wick and I serve as a Resource Conservationist for the Sherburne SWCD. I am originally from Rochester, MN but have called Sherburne County home for the last 4 years. I hold a Bachelors Degree in Environmental Science with a double minor in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Plant Science from the University of Wisconsin-Stout. While at UW-Stout, I tutored multiple GIS classes and worked on black ash swamp research. After working for a year as a Forester in Douglas County Wisconsin, I joined Sherburne SWCD in March of 2020.

At the SWCD I am responsible for everything that is tree and forest related. This ranges from a diseased individual tree all the way up to managing large acreage forests. I also assist with the application of the Wetland Conservation Act to prevent impacts to wetlands.

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my wife Maddie and our corgi Norman. Our summers are filled with weekends at the cabin fishing, swimming, and enjoying being outside. During the winter I enjoy cross country and downhill skiing, ice fishing, and sampling the newest breweries in the area.



**Questions about tree disease
or forestry management?
Contact David at
(763) 220-3434 ext. 102 or
dwick@sherburneswcd.org.**

SWCD Tree and Plant Sale



The Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District is holding its annual tree sale to encourage tree planting in Sherburne County. The Tree Sale program originated in order to provide landowners with an affordable and convenient way to purchase trees and shrubs for conservation practices, such as, windbreaks, shelterbelts, living snowfences, scenic buffers, and wildlife habitat.

Trees

Bare root seedlings are easy to plant, grow quickly and come in bundles of 25. Many of the species being offered provide food and shelter for birds and wildlife year round. Additionally, trees can increase the value of your property and conserve energy by shading your house in summer and sheltering it from cold winds in winter. Tree orders will be available for pick-up the beginning of May at our office on Jackson Ave in Elk River. Stock is limited and orders are entered on a first-come, first-serve basis.



Native Plants

The SWCD is offering native plant kits and seed mixes during this year's tree sale. All plants and seeds are provided through Minnesota Native Landscapes and are specifically chosen to flourish in our Sherburne County soils. Plants and seed will be available for pick up during our regular tree sale pick up dates.



Tree and Plant Sale pick up is scheduled for May 3-4.

More info will be sent out in April.

SWCD Tree Sale

[Click here and visit our Tree Sale page for more info.](#)

SWCD Calendar Events

March 5	Winter Conservation Day
March 7	Conservation Happy Hour
April 25	Envirothon
May 3-4	Tree & Plant Sale Pick Up
May 27	Memorial Day (Office Closed)



SWCD Hiring District Technician

The Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is accepting applications for a District Technician. This position is responsible for performing a variety of tasks toward implementation and installation of conservation practices, environmental monitoring and environmental education under the policies established by the SWCD. This position will assist existing staff with water resource monitoring, natural resource inventories, provide technical assistance to landowners, project installation support, BMP inspections, invasive species management, assist landowners with habitat management, and assist lead staff with outreach, education and volunteer coordination activities.

For more information on the District Technician position click here



Lakeshore Property Workshop



Buying Lakeshore Property 101 is a great workshop for anyone looking to buy a cabin, lake property, or even new lake residents.

At this workshop, you will learn about the different types of lakes and how to confidently select a lake that suits your needs. We will also cover all the basics of lake living, including ways to prevent algae growth, steps to protect your property, and any other questions you may have. Then, there will be a Q&A panel of realtors who can give you tips and tricks for buying a lake property!

**Join us! March 19th, 6:00 -7:30 at Central Park, in Ramsey
(7925 161st Ave NW, Ramsey)**

To RSVP contact: 763-689-3271 or Lgodfrey@isantiSWCD.org

Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District

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