Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District

Nature Talks
October 2026

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Sherburne SWCD

Nitrate Well Water Test Kits for Clear Lake and Haven Township Residents

Sherburne SWCD will provide a limited number of Nitrate well testing kits to interested residents of Clear Lake and Haven townships at no cost to the resident, clink the link below to learn more!

Water Sample Drop Off Event:
December 7th 2:00 - 5:00pm

Clear Lake: 7938 116th Street, SE. Clear Lake, MN 55319
Haven: 4230 45th Avenue SE St Cloud MN 56304

Well Water Test Kit Info

Women In Ag Night

December 10th, 2026

Doors open at 4:30 for crafting and networking
Coyote Moon Grille, St. Cloud

Please join us for an evening celebrating women in agriculture!

Presentations include:
- A Shared Harvest: Habitat to Nourish both People and Wildlife
- Importance of Drinking Water Protection for Private Wells
- Farm Succession Planning: How to Start the Conversation and Tools to Move Forward

Reserve your spot today!
mwagner@sherburneswcd.org or 763-220-3434 x 105
More details to come!

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Pruning with a Purpose

For landowners, pruning is one of the most effective tools for shaping long term tree health and reducing future costs. Good pruning promotes strong branch structure, improves airflow, and prevents breakage during storms. Poor pruning, however, can weaken trees, invite decay, and create hazards. By following a few core principles and timing your work correctly, you can help your trees survive and thrive for decades to come.

The first rule of effective pruning is understanding where and how to make pruning cuts. Every branch should be removed at the branch collar—the slightly swollen area where a limb attaches to a larger branch or trunk. Cutting here allows the tree to seal off the wound naturally. Never make “flush cuts,” which slice directly into the trunk, and never leave long stubs, which cannot close properly and will decay over time. When removing larger limbs, always use the three cut method: an undercut several inches out from the collar, a top cut slightly farther out to remove the weight of the branch, and then a final cut at the collar to cleanly finish the wound. This technique prevents bark from tearing into healthy wood.

Timing your pruning is just as important as technique. For most trees, late winter through early spring is the ideal period. Trees are dormant, wounds close more efficiently, and insects that spread disease are inactive. Prune only what is necessary—branches that are dead, diseased, crossing, rubbing, or growing inward toward the canopy. Structural pruning on young trees pays off significantly: identify a strong central leader, remove competing leaders early, and thin out narrowly attached branches before they become large and hazardous. Mature trees, by contrast, should only be pruned lightly unless a certified arborist is involved, as aggressive pruning can destabilize them.

Finally, prune with intention. Think about the future shape and structural integrity of the tree, not just what it looks like today. Avoid removing more than 25 percent of the live crown in a single season, and take extra care not to “lion-tail” branches by removing all inner growth. Trees rely on these inner branches for strength and resilience. Regular inspections throughout the year will help you catch problems early, but stick to dormant-season pruning unless you are dealing with hazards or broken limbs.

For more information on pruning and answers to tree health related questions, please contact David Wick 763-220-3434 ext. 102 or dwick@sherburneswcd.org

SWCD Poster Contest

Each year the SWCD hosts a poster contest for 5th grade students throughout the County. The students are presented with a theme in which they are to design a poster around. The theme for 2027 is “From Source to Sea: Every Drop Has a Journey,” The purpose of this contest is to provide students with a creative way to gain a better appreciation for the environment. Prizes are awarded to the top 4 posters. Area 5th grade teachers, homeschool parents or Co-op’s interested in participating should contact **Franny at fgerde@sherburneswcd.org.**

The Lasting Value of Restoring Wetlands

Swamp. Wasteland. Mosquito breeding ground. Wetlands have often been cast in a negative light as a nuisance or wasted space in the landscape. Historically, vast stretches of wetlands have been drained or altered without thinking twice of potential consequences. However today, restoring these aquatic ecosystems is recognized as one of the most cost-effective and impactful conservation efforts that can be done.

View of wetland Area

Wetlands perform critical natural functions such as filtering nutrients, sediment, and other pollutants. They also absorb snowmelt and heavy rainfall which reduces downstream flooding. Finally, wetlands offer critical and diverse habitat for waterfowl, pollinators, amphibians, and mammals. Restoring a degraded wetland may involve re-establishing the natural cycle or flow of water to it as well as enhancing native vegetation. Common approaches include breaking drainage tile lines or constructing low-profile earthen berms to retain water to a pre-determined elevation. Careful consideration is given to nearby structures, adjacent agricultural fields, and neighboring properties so that any retained water does not cause undesired impacts. With hydrology restored, the wetland is then seeded with beneficial native vegetation.

Through a partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Sherburne SWCD is working with several landowners to restore wetlands in the county. All site evaluations and designs are free of charge and the experienced SWCD and USFWS staff navigate the permitting process on behalf of the landowners. Finally, for qualifying projects often grant funding can be secured to help with installation.

Restoring wetlands is a great way to increase the wildlife habitat value to your property and the surrounding area as well as contribute towards improved water quality and flood prevention in the surrounding watershed. **For more information on wetland restorations, contact Sherburne SWCD Senior Water Resource Specialist Dan Cibulka, dcibulka@sherburneswcd.org.**

SWCD Tree Sale

The Sherburne SWCD will hold its annual tree sale to promote tree planting in Sherburne County. In addition to tree sales, native plant kits and seed mixes are available for purchase. Planting trees can boost property value and conserve energy by shading homes in summer and blocking cold winds in winter. Orders will be available for pick-up during the first week of May at the SWCD office in Elk River. Stock is limited, so order early to secure popular species!

Accepting orders starting January 5th

Interested in planting trees and shrubs for pollinators and wildlife?
Check out David's webinar on Beneficial Trees and Shrubs for Pollinators and Wildlife Here.

SWCD Tree Sale
Click here and visit our Tree Sale page for more info.

SWCD at the Wildlife Festival

On September 26, SWCD staff hosted a vendor booth at the annual Wildlife Festival at the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. Staff were on hand throughout the event to talk with attendees about a wide range of conservation topics, from habitat restoration to land management practices. Free private well water testing for nitrates was offered, providing homeowners with quick and valuable information about their drinking water. Younger visitors also enjoyed a hands on craft station where they created artwork using vegetable stamping, adding a fun and creative element to the day.

Thank you to everyone who stopped by the SWCD booth, staff always appreciate the opportunity to connect with the community and support conservation education. We hope to see you next year!

Miranda Wagner and Franny Gerde

Agroforestry: Trees as Part of the Farm

Cattle grazing in the woods.

Trees and shrubs are commonly relied on in windbreaks and shelterbelts, as well as for shade in pastures and backyards, but there is a variety of other applications where we can put trees to work for us. This is the idea of agroforestry—to combine strategies of agriculture and forestry for improving productivity, economic returns, and environmental quality on the land.

Agroforestry can include practices like forest farming, alley cropping, silvopasture, riparian buffers, and windbreaks. Forest farming involves the cultivation of high-value specialty crops, including timber, fruits, nuts, and mushrooms, in a strategic design to provide suitable shade and employ multi-tiered canopy structures to maximize productivity. Silvopasture integrates trees and forages for grazing livestock to create a balanced system of feed and shelter provisioning while protecting soil resources, enhancing wildlife habitat, and sequestering carbon. On the cropland side, alley cropping is a method of planting trees or shrubs wide enough to accommodate planter and harvester passes so that grain, forage, or other agronomic crops can be grown in the 'alleys' between trees or shrubs. Alley cropping can act as a strategy to diversify income with nuts, fruits, or biofuel crops, as well as prevent soil erosion and enhance wildlife habitat.

Windbreaks and riparian buffers are used as tools to prevent erosion by wind and water, respectively, or snow loading and drifting. However, they can be multifunctional; by selecting the right species for desired wildlife or, in some cases, even produce marketable fruits and nuts.

To learn more about agroforestry practices contact:
Galen Bergquist, NRCS Soil Conservationist galen.bergquist@usda.gov; 612-477-2422 or
David Wick, Sherburne SWCD Resource Conservationist dwick@sherburneswcd.org; 763-220-3434 x 102

Fall Yard Care for Pollinators

Pollinators have been a major topic of concern in recent years as we learn more about the decline of many species, including the iconic Monarch butterfly. While planting pollinator friendly flowers has helped increase populations, there are many other simple ways to support pollinators right in your own yard.

Unlike Monarchs, most pollinators do not migrate south for the winter. They remain here in Minnesota and depend on specific natural conditions to survive the cold months. As you begin fall yard cleanup, consider a few small changes that can make a big difference.

One of the most valuable overwintering habitats is leaf litter. Many homeowners rake and bag leaves each fall, but those leaves provide cover for many pollinators and other beneficial insects such as butterflies, moths, beetles, and fireflies. Aside from cover for insects, leaves also act as natural mulch, improve soil health, and provides winter protection for plants.

Another important habitat feature is spent flower stalks. Typical garden cleanup involves cutting stems to the ground, but about 30% of Minnesota's native bees use hollow stems of flowers and shrubs to lay their eggs. Some overwinter inside these stems and emerge in spring to forage. You don't need to eliminate cutting entirely but by simply leaving 8–10 inches of stem can greatly benefit these bees.

Lastly, even small bare patches of soil can help. Many native bees nest in the ground, but fear not, they are solitary and do not form colonies like wasps or hornets. Allowing a few undisturbed spots creates the nesting habitat they need.

We rely on pollinators and right now, they are relying on us. By making a few easy changes to fall yard care, we can help ensure a healthy pollinator population and continue enjoying our fluttering and buzzing visitors for years to come.

For more information on making your yard more pollinator friendly, contact Franny Gerde at fgerde@sherburneswcd.org or 763-220-3434 x104.

Conservation Comedy

Why don't ghosts like rain?

Because it dampens their spirits.

SWCD Election Information

On November 3rd, voters in Sherburne County will head to the polls to elect, among other positions, Supervisors for the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). Positions on this year's ballot will include Jason Selvog running for District 4 and Chris Jurek running for District 2. SWCDs are local units of government, and Supervisors are elected to four year terms. The terms are staggered so either two or three Supervisors are up for election each two years. Candidates are elected county-wide, but must reside in one of the nomination districts up for election.

Supervisors play an important role in how the community deals with a wide variety of resource managementissues, including wetlands, water quality, and soil erosion. Serving as a supervisor is a terrific opportunityfor people who want a voice in how we manage our environment. SWCD's are special purpose units of government that manage and direct conservation programs, such as the State Cost-Share program and the Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment Cost-Share program. Supervisors meet monthly to discuss the business of the SWCD, including state grant allocations to landowners, district conservation priorities, coordination with other local units of government and state agencies, and legislative priorities. Supervisors do not receive a salary but do receive compensation for attending meetings and are reimbursed for expenses.

For more infomation on SWCD Supervisors, follow the link to this video.

Meet the Candidates

Supervisor Chris Jurek

Chris Jurek is running for reelection in District 2. District 2 contains Big Lake Township, and Orrock Township. She and her husband Luke have 2 children and currently reside in Big Lake. Chris is employed as a Aquatic biologist at Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and has over 20 years of experience in the natural resource field working at the federal, state, tribal and a local units of government. She has served as an SWCD Supervisor since 2023. During her free time, Chris enjoys watching her son playing sports, skiing, camping, scrapbooking, gardening, mountain biking, boating and going to festivals.

Supervisor Jason Selvog

Jason Selvog is running for reelection in District 4 and has served as an SWCD Supervisor since 2011. Jason's represents the areas of: Becker Township, Palmer Township, and Santiago Township. He and his wife Kathy currently reside in Clear Lake with their two children . Jason is employed as a Wildlife Habitat Specialist by Stearns SWCD. He also is involved in the Stearns County Chapter of Pheasants Forever and is a member of the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society. During his free time, Jason enjoys hunting spending time with his family, watching the Vikings and admits to being a fantasy football junkie.

Remember to vote for SWCD Supervisor at the November 3 Election!

Crops of Sherburne County

Most of Sherburne County falls into the historic glacial outwash plain that deposited sandy sediments here during the last glacial melting event that occurred roughly 10,000 years ago. Following that glacial retreat the climate would have supported a vibrant short grass prairie on the western half of the county, transitioning into an oak savanna on the fringe to a pine dominated forested area on the extreme northeastern portion of the county. These elogical communities developed the soil into what is utilized by our farming community today.

Because, these sandy soils dominate our landscape, almost 45% of all agricultural acres in the county are irrigated. This investment in infrastructure in our county's fields also sets up our farmers to have some great control over their growing system and management. These added levers, paired with our sandy soil, have armed our farmers with the ability to produce some high value crops and have paved the way for Sherburne County to be the #1 ranked producer of potatoes and specialty vegetables in the state and the 81st ranked county in the US. Over 9,000 acres of potatoes are planted each year in Sherburne County. Other crops that are grown on a large scale in our county include over 24,000 acres of corn, 13,000 acres of soybeans, 9,000 acres of dry edible beans and other specialty vegetables, as well as many acres of sod, and seed corn. Not far behind, ranked 3rd in the state is Christmas tree production, characterized as a short rotation woody crop and produced primarily in the eastern portion of the county, this holiday staple brings in over $700,000 in revenue for the county.

When looking at animal agriculture in the county, beef cattle by far exceeds all other animal agriculture, making up 65% of all livestock related revenue generated in the county. The production of dairy, hog, sheep and goats are present in the county but do not make up significant portions of the county's agriculture revenue. Poultry production has a very small role in the counties agriculture scene and has seen a large decline in production over the past few decades.

According to 2022 census data Sherburne County farms generated a total of $120,592,000 in revenue from 494 farms, 96% of which are family farms that call Sherburne County home. These farms provide jobs, local food, and economic stimulus that surround these operations right here in our community.

Sherburne County Agriculture Profile

Wetland Violations

Avoiding wetland violations in Sherburne County is essential for protecting natural resources and staying in compliance with state and federal regulations. Wetlands provide critical benefits such as flood reduction, water quality improvement, and wildlife habitat, making them a key part of the county's landscape. Because these areas can be difficult to identify, landowners and developers are encouraged to seek guidance early in the planning process to avoid accidental impacts.

The most effective way to prevent violations is to obtain a wetland review before beginning any land disturbing activity. Sherburne County operates under the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) and County ordinance, which requires that excavation, filling, grading, or drainage in or near wetlands be approved through a formal process. Working with the county's Planning and Zoning office helps ensure proper permits are in place. Even small projects—such as driveway expansions, outbuildings, landscaping, or creating a pond—can trigger wetland rules, making early communication essential.

Beyond regulatory compliance, responsible planning helps protect landowners from enforcement actions, costly restoration requirements, and project delays. Did you know that violations that can't be restored may require purchasing wetland credits. For example, if the violation was 5,000 SF of impacts, those need to be replaced at a 4:1 ratio, so at about $2.75 per SF of credits a landowner could be on the hook for about $55,000 in replacement costs.

By coordinating with Sherburne County staff, hiring qualified wetland professionals, and staying informed about WCA standards, residents and developers can move projects forward smoothly while safeguarding the county's natural resources. Taking a proactive approach is the best way to support both property goals and long term environmental health.

Questions? Contact Matt Danzl with Sherburne County Planning and Zoning (763) 765-4463 or Matt.Danzl@co.sherburne.mn.us

Summer Project Highlights

Enjoy this look back with Sherburne SWCD technical staff as they share a few of their favorite projects from the 2026 field season!

Drinking Water Grant

The Drinking Water 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. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has defined Wellhead Protection Areas and Drinking Water Management Areas for the cities of Clear Lake, Becker, and Big Lake which are the focus of the project area. Additional eligible areas are Haven, Palmer, Clear Lake, Santiago, Becker and Big Lake Townships.

Urban Practices
- Turf Conversion to Native Plants
- Well Sealing

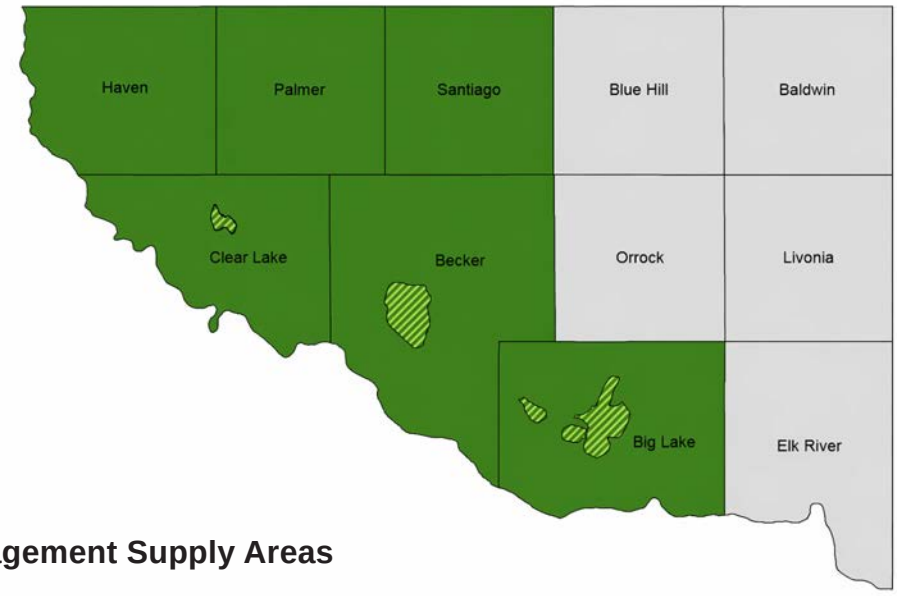
Agricultural Practices
- Cover Crops
- Irrigation Water Management
- Irrigation Sprinkler Upgrades, Including Variable Rate Technology
- Soil Moisture Sensors
- Perennial Cover and Prairie Restoration
- Reduced Tillage

Eligible Areas

For more information pleasecontact:
Franny Gerde
fgerde@sherburneswcd.org

Miranda Wagner
mwagner@sherburneswcd.org

Not in the project area?
Give us a call
for other District program eligibility.
763-220-3434



Eligible Townships

Drinking Water Management Supply Areas

SWCD Calendar Events

Oct 31	**Daylight Saving Time Ends**
Nov 11	**Office Closed in Observance of Veterans Day**
Nov 26-27	**Office Closed in Observance of Thanksgiving**
Dec 10	**Women in Ag Event**
Dec 24-25	**Office Closed in Observance of Christmas**