BUFFERS!
By Aaron Habermehl

Minnesota Statute §103F.48 requires water resource protection requirements (buffers) on public waters and public drainage systems. Buffers are areas of perennial vegetation adjacent to all (indicated) bodies of water that are intended to protect water resources of the state from runoff pollution, stabilize soils, shores and banks and protect or provide riparian corridors.

Required buffers on Public Waters (50’) must be in place by November 01, 2017; buffers on Public Drainage systems (16.5’) must be in place by November 01, 2018. If a landowner is out of compliance with the requirement, the County or Watershed District will provide a correction letter (notification provided to the [state] Board of Water and Soil Resources [BWSR] with potential Administrative Penalty Order [APO]) and work with the landowner on a reasonable timetable for completion. SWCDs are not the enforcement entity regarding buffers under MN Statute.

Minnesota DNR has released a public “buffer protection map” (updated November 2016) www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers that identifies areas that require permanent vegetative buffers. Landowners are encouraged to visit SWCD technical staff for assistance in determination of buffer requirements. West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District (with Watershed District, Drainage Authority and landowner assistance) has extensively reviewed the DNR map and submitted (to DNR) indicated reaches that involve changes in watercourses or possible error. Discrepancies involving Public Drainage (County, Jurisdictional and Watershed Ditches) must be indicated and submitted by the Drainage Authority. 

Landowners are ultimately accountable for the installation and maintenance of buffers as identified on the DNR buffer protection map.

West Polk SWCD staff are available to: assist with any inquires relative to buffer legislation/requirements and qualified to identify multiple options for compliance with direction. Federal Agencies (FSA, NRCS) administer various programs that provide cost share and potential annual payments (CRP, EQIP) for implementation and maintenance of buffer/filter strips, although availability of programs is questionable after buffer regulatory deadlines. It is our certain intention to assist you with technical guidance and field all inquiries. A self-initiative approach to compliance (without any State or Federal program assistance or compensation) allows a landowner to determine the seed mix of perennial vegetation for establishment and required maintenance of buffer obligation.

Please view www.westpolkswcd.com buffers page and utilize direct links to BWSR, DNR and Minnesota Farm Bureau web pages for current available information regarding buffers or visit our field office West Polk SWCD: (co-located with NRCS) 528 Strander Ave. Crookston, MN. East Polk SWCD: Bjella Building, 240 Cleveland Ave, McIntosh, MN.
Father and son, Bruce and Troy Newhouse (BTN Farms), of Fisher, MN have successfully completed Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) assessment and implementation of requirements to achieve Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification status: the first certified farm operation in West Polk County.

Mr. Newhouse (Bruce) explained their reasoning for investigation/initiation of the certification process- “We feel strongly that stewardship is one of our primary responsibilities as farmers; certification as a measure of how we were doing seemed appropriate”. MDA evaluation identified specific goals and practices for the Newhouse operation “to gain certification and make sure we’re doing everything that we can environmentally and be fiscally responsible as well”. Both Bruce and Troy stated how the program provided a beneficial evaluation of farm management and serves as an effective tool- “to measure what we we’re doing and where we could improve”. “We take stewardship seriously, as do our neighbors, we think it’s important that the public knows it”. Bruce and Troy Newhouse affirmed advantages of field-by-field assessment; with a local MDA specialist, they conducted “a farm tour and ranked every field accordingly”. “For myself and Troy, as farmers we did not feel it (the assessment) was much of an intrusion; we’re proud of what we do” commented Mr. Newhouse.

BTN Farm operation qualifies for 10 years of regulatory certainty: deemed in compliance with any forthcoming water quality rules or laws including Minnesota “buffer” statute. Stewardship is a consistent endeavor of BTN Farms with operation conducted “as environmentally friendly as possible; it is nice to have a little reaffirmation of that”.

Polk County Soil and Water Conservation Districts certainly encourage producers to learn about the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program. This program certifies farmers for managing the land within their operation in a way that protects water quality (MDA). Producers and landowners who need to make changes are eligible to receive priority access to MAWQCP- dedicated financial and technical assistance (MDA). Certified producers also receive (10) years of regulatory certainty (MDA).

If you are interested in the MAWQCP please contact East Polk SWCD, 240 Cleveland Ave SW, McIntosh, MN or telephone Cathy Rasch (Area Certification Specialist) 218-563-2777.
West Polk SWCD 2017 Tree Program  
By Duane Steinbrink

It’s that time of year to place a tree order for next spring; please use the enclosed tree order form. The deadline to place an order is **FEBRUARY 15TH 2017** and all orders need to be **PAID IN FULL** before any trees can be released. West Polk SWCD will have limited stock for tree sales, accordingly orders/inquiries placed after **FEBRUARY 15TH 2017** may not be fulfilled. The minimum order is one bundle (25 trees), potted spruce trees are sold individually; West Polk SWCD does not accept any responsibility for the survival of any trees. The trees are delivered to us around the end of April to the beginning of May depending upon weather. We will notify you by post card with a date and time to pick up trees or you can check our website at [www.westpolkswcd.com](http://www.westpolkswcd.com).

If you need assistance in designing a windbreak, it is best to stop by our office as we have GIS maps to determine row length, space needed, number of trees, and cost estimate of the project. Please call our office at 218-281-6070 to schedule an appointment.

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Something to Consider When Installing Your Buffer  
By Duane Steinbrink

Do you need a Surface Water Inlet pipe (SWI) to control erosion at the outlet of your field ditches entering a water course or to prevent flooding of field?

There are a number of funding sources available you can access to help with costs.

FSA provides cost-share when enrolled in the continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP). You would need to seed a minimum 33’-120’ maximum grass buffer along the watercourse. Funding would cover up to 90% of structure, seed, seeding, mowing for establishing the cover and an annual payment for a 10-15 year contract. You would need to contact the Farm Service Agency to find out if you qualify at 218-281-2809.

NRCS provides funding for grade stabilization and water control structures using the EQIP program. Call 218-281-1445 ext. 3

West Polk SWCD provides up to 75% cost-share for grade stabilization structures. Call 218-281-6070.
Call our office if you have questions in regards to Buffers or Conservation practices. Our office will assist with the survey, design, construction layout and installation.

Conservation Project Monies Available  

By Nicole Bernd

Through the Erosion Control and Water Management (State Cost-Share) Program landowners, occupiers, entities and others can request financial and technical assistance from the West Polk SWCD to implement state-approved conservation practices. Approved projects may receive up to 75% cost share of the total estimated cost. The projects that have been selected by the West Polk SWCD to target high-priority erosion and water quality concerns are:

1. Grade Stabilization
2. Unused Well Sealing
3. Streambank Stabilization
4. Buffer Strips
5. Windbreak installation and maintenance (tube enclosures, chemical application). If you have any questions or have a project in mind, please contact the SWCD staff at 218.281.6070 ext 4.

The purpose of this program is to have West Polk SWCD help local landowners or land occupiers offset the costs of installing conservation practices that protect and improve water quality by controlling soil erosion and reducing sedimentation.
Elliot Solheim, Crookston MN will be representing District 4 of West Polk County. District 4 includes the following Townships;
- Lowell
- Crookston
- Gentilly
- Andover
- Fairfax
- Kertsonville

SWCDs have been working with landowners to conserve soil and water since 1938. SWCD supervisors set conservation policies for the district and represent the organization. Supervisors carry a four year term as elected officials.

What does it take to be a soil and water conservation district Supervisor?

Soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) are special purpose units of government that manage natural resource programs. Minnesota's 90 SWCDs cover the entire state; their boundaries usually coincide with the county lines. Each SWCD is run by a board of five elected Supervisors.

To be a Supervisor, you need:

**Knowledge:** Supervisors must have - or be willing to learn - some basic knowledge to effectively carry out their responsibilities. They must understand: some of the fundamentals about the environment and how it works, the relationship between land use decisions and the environment, the effect environmental decisions have on other aspects of our lives, and local concerns, attitudes and needs.

**Concern:** Supervisors must be concerned about: local conservation needs, maintaining and improving water quality and protecting our soil.

**Leadership:** Supervisors must be willing to take an active leadership role in the community. This can involve: setting local conservation priorities developing, implementing, and evaluating programs to meet those goals; educate and inform friends, neighbors, landowners, operators, general public, and local, state and federal legislators on conservation issues and programs; working with other local government units, state and federal agencies, and other elected officials; setting a positive example; taking unpopular stands; balancing economic needs with environmental concerns; and sacrificing short-term gains for long-term benefits.

Visit us on our website page at https://www.westpolkswcd.com
Clean Water Land & Legacy Grant Opportunities = Projects in West Polk County
By Nicole Bernd

Through the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), West Polk SWCD is encouraged to apply for available grants through the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment for projects with the purpose of protecting, enhancing, and restoring water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams, and protecting groundwater and drinking water sources from degradation.

If you or someone you know may have a potential project, please contact us at the District office at 218-281-6070 ext. 4. For more detailed information, visit the BWSR web site at: www.bwsr.state.mn.us/cleanwaterfund

To see completed and ongoing water quality projects in West Polk County funded through the Clean Water Legacy fund, please visit our website – www.westpolkswcd.com/clean-water-legacy-fund.html and/or our Facebook Page – West Polk SWCD.

Clean Water Legacy Sand Hill River Watershed Projects and Practices Grant. Total Grant Awarded - $475,000. Installation of 16 rock riffles and 2 rock arch rapids to control the grade and stabilize the 5 miles of channelized reach of the Sand Hill River.

FY17 Clean Water Legacy Funding Received
By Nicole Bernd

West Polk SWCD received funding from the FY17 Clean Water Legacy fund in the amount of $103,000.00 for the installation of one grade stabilization structure within the channel which outlets into the Burnham Creek channel and two side water inlets with buffers. The eroded portion of the project area is approximately down cut 6-8’ at the proposed structure site to the head cut 500’ upstream where it meets the constructed channel grade. Two side water inlets with buffers will be installed upstream, placed on the south side of the reach to control two existing field drainages where gully erosion and sediment deposition is presently active. The erosion control project will stabilize the existing main channel which flows to Burnham Creek.
MPCA Feedlot Re-Registration in 2017 for West Polk County
By Nicole Bernd

Re-registration requires owners of registered feedlots or manure storage areas to provide general and changed information about their operation, such as name and address, facility location, type of operation, number of animal units and distance to surface water. It is designed to facilitate regulation without requiring detailed operating permits for smaller feedlots under 300 animal units.

Owners of the following operations must register:
- Feedlots located in shoreland, and that maintain 10 animal units or more.
- Feedlots located outside of shoreland, and that maintain 50 animal units or more.

For re-registration you will be contacted by your County Feedlot Officer via mail, phone and/or email to complete the re-registration process by December 31, 2017. Owners who are unsure if they are registered may confirm their status by calling the West Polk County Feedlot Officer at 218-281-6070 ext 4.

Registration is not required for pasture-only operations; however, pasture operations with a feedlot component must register the feedlot portion of the operation. For further information regarding feedlots within pasture operations, contact the West Polk County Feedlot Officer.

Visit us on our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/WPSWCD/

AgBMP Low Interest Loan Program
By Nicole Bernd

West Polk SWCD partners with the MN Department of Agriculture in the AgBMP Loan Program.

This is a water quality program that provides low interest loans to farmers, rural landowners, and agriculture supply businesses to implement water quality improvement projects, including:
- Septic Systems
- Conservation Tillage Equipment
- Manure Management Equipment
- Feedlot Improvements
- Any other practice that solves a pollution problem.

*NEW - this low interest loan is now available to help landowners finance well repairs, replacement wells, or water treatment equipment to provide safe drinking water or solve potential pollution problems that effect wells. Please contact the office for local project approval.
State Approval in the Horizon

By Nicole Bernd

Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans address water quality and flooding as well as drinking water, groundwater, and habitat issues. The plans build on existing efforts, current local water plans, local knowledge, and the best available science. Planning advisory committees involve staff from state agencies and watershed organizations, farm groups, fishing and hunting interests, cities, businesses, and citizens. The initiative brings together a partnership of Counties, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and Watershed Districts to create a shared action plan for water management. The roots of the program were conceived by a consortium of local governments seeking to streamline water planning requirements in Minnesota. (Board of Water and Soil Resources)

November 22, 2016, Public Hearings were conducted in the counties of Pennington, Red Lake and West Polk to discuss comments received for the draft Red Lake River One Watershed One Plan (RLR 1W1P) followed by the approval from the RLR 1W1P Policy Committee December 21, 2016.

Once approval has been received by each County and SWCD Board within the planning area, the Red Lake River One Watershed One Plan will be submitted to the Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR) for review/comment with anticipation of State approval April 26, 2017.

For more information on the Red Lake River One Watershed One Plan, please visit our website at http://westpolkswcd.com/1w1p.html
Welcome to the Web Soil Survey
USDA Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Web Soil Survey (WSS) provides soil data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey. It is operated by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and provides access to the largest natural resource information system in the world. NRCS has soil maps and data available online for more than 95 percent of the nation’s counties and anticipates having 100 percent in the near future. The site is updated and maintained online as the single authoritative source of soil survey information.

Soil surveys can be used for general farm, local, and wider area planning. Onsite investigation is needed in some cases, such as soil quality assessments and certain conservation and engineering applications. For more detailed information, contact your local USDA Service Center or your NRCS State Soil Scientist.

https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm

EQIP
Environmental Quality Incentive Program
Natural Resource Conservation Service

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in order to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation or improved or created wildlife habitat. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service offers voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs that benefit agricultural producers and the environment.

How to apply
Visit your local USDA Service Center to apply or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted.

NRCS will help eligible producers develop an EQIP plan of operations, which will become the basis of the EQIP contract.
EQIP applications will be ranked based on a number of factors, including the environmental benefits and cost effectiveness of the proposal.

For more information on MN NRCS Conservation Programs, please contact the NRCS Crookston Field Office, at 218-281-1445.
ORDER YOUR TREES BY FEBRUARY 15TH, 2017.
SUBMIT YOUR PAYMENT WITH YOUR ORDER
QUESTIONS contact: AARON HABERMEHL
aaron.habermehl@mn.nacdnet.net 218-281-6070 ext. 106 or
DUANE STEINBRINK duane.steinbrink@mn.nacdnet.net
218-281-6070 ext. 121