



# ANNUAL REPORT 2021

## West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District

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# INTRODUCTION

## Organizational History of West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District

Soil Conservation Districts are legal subdivisions of the State of Minnesota. They are established under the Soil Conservation Law of 1937, Chapter 40, in response to devastating soil erosion conditions which existed in the United States during the late 1920s and 1930s. (Recodify to Chapter 103C).



### *Minn. Statutes 103C.005 SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION POLICY*

*Maintaining and enhancing the quality of soil and water for the environmental and economic benefits they produce, preventing degradation, and restoring degraded soil and water resources of this state contribute greatly to the health, safety, economic well-being, and general welfare of this state and its citizens. Land occupiers have the responsibility to implement practices that conserve the soil and water resources of the state. Soil and water conservation measures implemented on private lands in this state provide benefits to the general public by reducing erosion, sedimentation, siltation, water pollution, and damages caused by floods. The soil and water conservation policy of the state is to encourage land occupiers to conserve soil, water, and the natural resources they support through the implementation of practices that:*

*(1) control or prevent erosion, sedimentation, siltation, and related pollution in order to preserve natural resources; (2) ensure continued soil productivity; (3) protect water quality; (4) prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs; (5) reduce damages caused by floods; (6) preserve wildlife; (7) protect the tax base; and (8) protect public lands and waters.*

West Polk SWCD was organized in 1957 by landowners to provide a local organization through which they could work cooperatively with any local, state, or federal units of government to conserve soil and water resources.

The District defines its cooperators as individuals or agencies, which reside within or manage land within the District boundaries, and who are involved in planning and applying proper land use treatment. It encourages people to work together as small groups or larger watershed organizations to solve problems, which require community action.

The District has and will continue to plan, develop, and supply technical materials to units of government that will be useful for land use, zoning, roadside erosion, water management problems, and watersheds.

The District will continue to emphasize to cities and the county a greater need for information on soils, water, drainage, parks, recreation, and land use development.

In 1957, the West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District, in developing its work plan, stated the following: "The purpose of the district is to conserve, maintain and improve the soil and water resources on all farms within the district." Today, the District's goals primarily are the same; however, we recognize that changes in agriculture, rural development, local economics, and assistance to municipalities have expanded these responsibilities.

***Our Mission:***

***To assist the citizens of Western Polk County, in accordance with M.S. Chapter 103, in the preservation and protection of our soil and water resources; thereby, ensuring the quality of the environmental and economic base of Polk County.***

# OPERATIONAL FUNDING

## SWCD Funding

Minnesota's SWCDs receive financial, technical, and educational support from a number of nonprofit, private, federal and state agencies in addition to county government. They also receive direct or in-kind operational support from other public and private organizations. Local government support is vital to district operations to continue to carry out district programs.

West Polk SWCD relies on a variety of external state and local funding sources to ensure its continuing operations. To increase operations to meet West Polk County's local concerns or to address local resource needs, the district board and staff must pursue additional funding through watershed-based implementation funding, competitive grants, contracted services, or inter-governmental transfers.

## County Allocation

West Polk SWCD receives an annual funding allocation from the Polk County Board of Commissioners, which comes from local tax revenue. There is not a standard or formulated amount that a county board must allocate to support the SWCD general budget. The SWCD must present a proposed budget, including any requested funds to its county board annually.

## County Levy

A county may levy amounts necessary to pay the reasonable costs to SWCDs of administering and implementing priority programs identified in an approved and adopted plan or a comprehensive watershed management plan (MINN. STAT. 103B.3363).

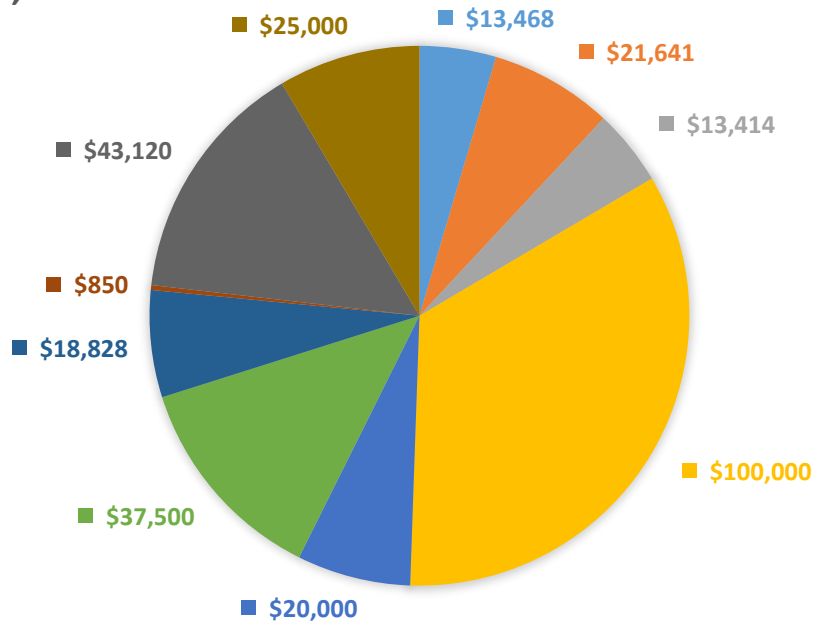
## SWCD Value to the County

West Polk SWCD leverages state and federal dollars, as well as private funding into Polk County to support the local economy; community and future generations by providing sustainable management of our land and water resources. Each year the West Polk SWCD reports to the Polk County Board of Commissioners the Return on Investment to show what the residents and the County received for every dollar invested into the SWCD.

## Financial Summary

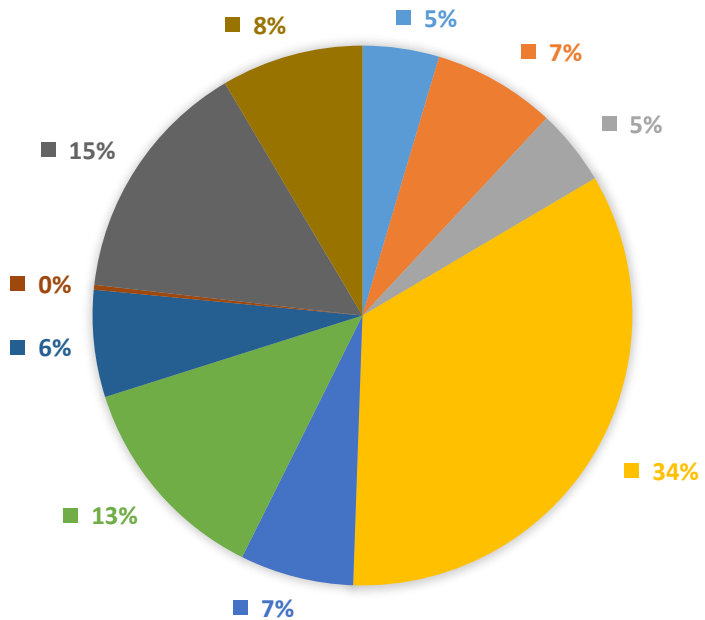
### 2021 FUNDING: \$293,821

- Local Water Management
- Wetland Conservation Act
- State Cost Share
- SWCD Local Capacity
- Clean Water Legacy
- Buffer Law
- Conservation Delivery
- Easement Delivery
- County Allocation
- Tree Program



### 2021 BUDGET PERCENTAGES

- Local Water Management
- Wetland Conservation Act
- State Cost Share
- SWCD Local Capacity
- Clean Water Legacy
- Buffer Law
- Conservation Delivery
- Easement Delivery
- County Allocation
- Tree Program





# ONE WATERSHED ONE PLAN (1W1P)

## Implementation and Planning in West Polk County



Parnell Impoundment, located east of Euclid, Minnesota

West Polk County consists of four major watersheds: Red Lake River, Middle-Snake-Tamarac River, Sand Hill River, and the Wild Rice-Marsh watersheds.

The MN Board of Water and Soil Resources 1W1P program brings together MN's water authorities: SWCDs, counties, watershed districts and cities to collaborate for the improvement of water quality through projects. These projects are part of an implementation structure that accelerates conservation practices on the ground to improve water quality faster than previous efforts. These partners have longstanding, trustworthy relationships with agricultural producers, private landowners, and partnering local government entities within the watershed to ensure participation.

West Polk SWCD staff and supervisors continue to be an active partner of the steering committees, advisory committees, policy committees and facilitation with four 1W1P efforts. Status and funding is as follows:

- Red Lake River (RLR) 1W1P - Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF)
  - FY20-21 \$1,071,149
- Wild Rice-Marsh (WRM) 1W1P - Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF)
  - FY20-21 \$1,371,259
- Middle-Snake-Tamarac River (MSTR) 1W1P - planning process (planning grant)
  - FY21 \$232,295
- Sand Hill River (SHR) 1W1P - planning process (planning grant)
  - YTBD

## Projects Completed in West Polk County with 1W1P funding in 2021

### RLR 1W1P Burnham Creek Russia 13 Project

West Polk SWCD surveyed channel for clean-out and discovered several head cuts. Discussion was had to find funding to repair the head-cutting of the outlet to Burnham Creek (RLWD-42 PL566 Project). Project repaired outlet and seeded a 50' buffer.



Final Project cost - \$46,344.90

Total RLR 1W1P cost share at 75% - \$34, 758.68

Total Red Lake Watershed District cost share - \$11,586.22



## RLR 1W1P Roome Township Section 2

A large gully was head cutting into cropland. An engineering request was submitted to the Red River Valley Conservation Service Area/Technical Service Area. The landowner and operator requested assistance from the West Polk SWCD to repair a large gully entering Unnamed Public Waters 60020a and a tributary to the Red Lake River.

### Before



### After



Final Project cost - \$11,330

Total RLR 1W1P cost share at 75% - 8,497.50

Landowner contribution at 25% - \$2,832.50

# DISTRICT PROGRAMS

## Tree Program

2021 was another successful year for West Polk SWCD's tree program. 136 customers purchased a total of 13,404 tree and shrub seedlings for large and small conservation projects. Of these, 5,425 were machine-planted by the district.

Planting Type	Number of Projects	Total Size of Projects
Farmstead Windbreaks	7	>2.75 row miles
Field Windbreaks	2	1 row mile
Wildlife Plantings	3	7.7 acres



Twenty-nine species were made available to district residents for the spring tree sale. The species we offer are selected for their ability to tolerate our lacustrine soils and cold, dry



climate while providing erosion control, wildlife habitat, snow management and energy conservation.

West Polk SWCD also celebrated Arbor Day by providing a virtual presentation to Crookston's Highland Elementary 4<sup>th</sup> grade class. The presentation focuses on showing students the importance of wildlife habitat and how creating a home for animals can be fun and easy in any size yard. 100 bare root trees and shrubs were donated and given to students to plant at home.

After the annual spring sale, West Polk's tree program continues into summer with on-site assistance for landowners' tree concerns. In 2021, dozens of visits were conducted to meet with landowners and offer technical assistance for planning future plantings, windbreak renovation, wildlife habitat improvement and disease diagnosis.



## Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

Administration of the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) as Local Government Unit (LGU) for West Polk County consistently engages multiple disciplines and demands knowledgeable communication and relationship development/integrity.

WCA LGU's must (seek to) be informed of potential projects where regulated wetland impacts may occur. Entities (or individuals) considering projects in proximity to wet areas or involving potential wetland impacts are obligated (and strongly encouraged) to contact the WCA LGU before any work is performed to avoid/minimize (costly) violations.

The Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act rules differ from those of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) or the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) programs. Failure to comply with the MN WCA may result in a violation that requires restoration to pre-altered condition. A Joint Application process exists to address possible impacts to MN wetland resources. Among the duties/function of WCA LGUs is assisting Applicant's in navigating the WCA application process. The basic requirement is that "wetlands must not be drained or filled, wholly or partially, unless replaced by restoring or creating wetland areas of at least equal public value under an approved replacement plan" MN §103G.222, subd. 1(a). Analyses in depth, including factors such as land use history/intentions must be weighed in context with WCA Rules and Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) recommendations in LGU Decisions and this often involves compounded scrutiny from co-administering agencies, governing bodies, and residents.

2021 was no exception. If a project involves drain tiling, please note that around wetlands, there are setbacks based on soil types that must be determined; the WCA LGU can assist Applicants in determining/employing setback distances/depths. West Polk SWCD wishes to express gratitude for the delegation and privilege of local administration of the MN Wetland Conservation Act and extends thanks to all that assist in, endeavor to continue, and/or inquire regarding protection of our state's wetland resources.



## Buffer Law Implementation Program



West Polk SWCD's 2021 buffer monitoring campaign came to a close last fall and once again this year continued the trend of more parcels being brought into compliance with the state law.

Last year district technicians evaluated a total of 662 parcels of cropland abutting West Polk's waterways. 241 of these are on public waters and were looked at using a combination of aerial imagery and field checks. The remaining 421 parcels abut public ditches and were evaluated onsite. Twenty-nine parcels were found to have insufficient or degraded buffers and were handed over to Polk County for enforcement. Of these, six had been seeded and brought into compliance before the end of the 2021 growing season. West Polk technicians also measured and marked the extent of the proposed buffer in eighteen parcels (at the operator's request) to show where additional buffer was needed.

### Local Water Management Program

The West Polk SWCD local water management program (LWMP) identifies local water quality resource concerns in West Polk County. This program provides technical/financial opportunities for water quality restoration, protection, and management and environmental education/outreach based on the Polk County Comprehensive Water Plan (approved/adopted 1990), Red Lake River One Watershed One Plan (2017) and the Wild Rice-Marsh One Watershed One Plan (2020).

## Environmental Education

Crookston Highland Elementary 4<sup>th</sup> graders were one out of 22 area schools that participated in the annual Northwest Minnesota Water Festival in September of 2021 at the Marshall



county fairgrounds in Warren MN, and the Polk County fairgrounds in Fertile, MN. Students take part in interactive learning stations that are all about our valued water resources. Water quality, ground and spring water, flooding, aquatic invasive species, and watersheds are addressed, as well as casting and fish painting. Local soil and water conservation districts, state, federal and county agencies, watershed districts, and other volunteers present and assist at each station. Total of 490 4<sup>th</sup> graders were given this wonderful opportunity and interaction.

## Crookston Ox Cart Days

The District collaborated with the Polk County Historical Society on the history of conservation and water of Polk County for the 2021 Crookston Ox Cart Days held in August. Historical items of conversation were displayed along with history of soil conservation and services offered by the West Polk SWCD. This all was on display at the Carnegie Library, which is listed under the National Register of Historic Places.



Displays inside  
Carnegie Library



Carnegie Library, est. 1907, Crookston MN

## Polk County Fair

In July of every year, the Polk County Fair opens to the public and has been entertaining families for over 115 years. West Polk SWCD presents a booth every year showcasing not only projects but also the services provided to the public.



## Erosion Control and Water Management Program

State funds are provided to SWCDs to share the cost of systems or practices for erosion control, sedimentation control, or water quality improvements that are designed to protect and



improve soil and water resources. Through this program land occupiers can request financial and technical assistance for the implementation of conservation practices. West Polk SWCD receives an annual amount of \$13,414 for cost share assistance up to 75% percent. In 2021, \$1,861.25 was spent at 50% cost share for sealing 3 unused wells and \$11,408.75 was spent at 75% cost share for installing 3 grade stabilization structures.

### Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Program



West Polk SWCD cooperates with local landowners and Minnesota's Board of Water and Soil Resources to administer the state's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) conservation program. Through RIM, landowners are paid to retire marginal or ecologically valuable cropland and return it to its natural state. Taking these acres out of crop production and reestablishing native vegetation protects water quality, reduces soil erosion and restores wildlife habitat.

Through the RIM program, over 600 acres of cropland have returned to native habitat in West Polk county since the program's inception in 1986. Much of this land lies at the mouth of the Grand Marais Creek, where its original channel was restored in 2015. This restoration reduces streambank erosion and has reunited more than 20 miles of valuable fish spawning habitat with the Red River after being cut off for over 100 years. The native vegetation



established through RIM on adjacent easements helps protect this riparian ecosystem by reducing sedimentation and pollution from nearby cropland.

West Polk SWCD staff regularly monitors RIM easements for encroachment and weed outbreaks, including over 80 acres in 2021. We work with landowners and cooperating agencies to bring issues to their attention and offer them technical advice to ensure that easements continue to meet their intended conservation goals.

## Clean Water Legacy Projects

On November 4, 2008, Minnesota voters approved the Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment to the constitution to protect drinking water sources; protect, enhance, and restore wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game, and wildlife habitat; preserve arts and cultural heritage; support parks and trails; and protect, enhance, and restore lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater.

Glacial Ridge Prairie Core Area Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA)



***“Clean water is fundamental to the health and well-being of the people who call Minnesota home.”***

West Polk SWCD collaborated and created a partnership with the members of the Glacial Ridge Local Technical Team through the Minnesota Conservation Prairie Plan. This partnership developed a Planning Group that constructed the Glacial Ridge Prairie Core Area CISMA Strategic Plan. This plan consists of management strategies including education/outreach, implementation, cost share incentives and monitoring efforts.

In August of 2021, a Invasive Weed Management Workshop was organized and conducted by the Glacial Ridge Prairie Core Area CISMA Planning Group. This workshop focused on 4 prominent noxious weeds; leafy spruce; wild parsnip; spotted knapweed and common tansy. Local weed policies, noxious weed identification, management strategies and eradication methods were the discussion topics. A field visit to identify these 4 noxious weeds was also

conducted. The Planning Group followed-up with the attendees (~25) by sending out thank you post cards. The Planning Group is currently organizing a second workshop for late summer of 2022.



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To learn more about other services and opportunities that West Polk SWCD has to offer, please visit our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/WPSWCD/](https://www.facebook.com/WPSWCD/) or scan the QR code to our website.

