

# Murray SWCD Annual Report 2024



**Murray Soil and Water Conservation District**  
2740 22nd St.  
Slayton, MN 56172  
507-836-6990

## District Staff

### **District Administrator**

Shelly Lewis  
507-836-6990 ext.102  
slewis@co.murray.mn.us

### **Program Manager**

Craig Christensen  
507-836-6990 ext. 117  
cchristensen@co.murray.mn.us

### **Resource Specialist**

Danielle Kuball  
507-836-6990 ext. 114  
Danielle.Kuball@co.murray.mn.us

## SWPJO Staff

Mike Skoglund-Southwest Prairie  
Technical Service Area Civil Engineering Technician

## NRCS Staff

Cheryl Heard  
District Conservationist/Team Lead

Allisa Wendland- District  
Conservationist

Nancy Sauder-Aces Contractor

Zach Ruppert Soil Conservationist

Joe Kaseforth  
Soil Conservation Technician

## **Mission & History of the Murray Soil and Water Conservation District**

**Vision:** The vision of the Murray Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is Helping People Help the Land.

**Mission:** The Mission of the Murray Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is to protect, enhance and conserve the natural resources of Murray County.

**History:** The Murray SWCD was established in 1954 to address the Natural Resource Protection needs of land users in the area and encourage the preservation and conservation of the resources. Today, the SWCD assists not

only rural but urban landowners with various programs and information needed to protect the soil, water and air quality. The importance of these goals and the accomplishment will be easily measured in the future through a sound and healthy economy and resources both human and wildlife.

SWCD's are political subdivisions of the State established under Minnesota Statute 103C. Each SWCD is governed by a board of elected supervisors. The SWCD Board and Staff are unique in that they live & work in the county and watersheds. The work and decisions that are made affect

themselves, their families, their neighbors and friends. With these ties, the decisions made are for the good of the local resources, economy and future generations.

In making sound guidelines for our programs, we are protecting the county, watersheds, and ultimately our state and nation.

The SWCD's partner with other resource agencies to ensure that programs and funds are best utilized and actions are coordinated to best suit the needs of the area.

**Murray SWCD Board Meetings are held every 2nd Thursday of the Month at 1:30 p.m. at the USDA Service Center located at 2740 22nd St. Slayton, MN.**

### 2024 Board Meetings

January 11  
February 08  
March 14  
April 11-No Meeting  
May 09

June 13  
July 11  
August 08  
September 12  
October 10  
November 14  
December 12

**Supervisors**

Paul Posthuma-District I (Ellsborough, Skandia, Cameron, and Lowville) **Vice Chairman**

1419 80th Ave.  
Hadley, MN 56151  
Phone:507-879-3102

Jason Miller-District II (Lake Sarah, Mason, Slayton, and Iona) **Secretary**

2 North Shore Drive  
Garvin, MN 56132  
Phone:507-829-9460

Anthony Conrad-District III (Shetek, Holly, Murray, and Dovray) **P.R.&I.**

1622 260th Ave.  
Currie, MN 56123  
Phone:507-360-4871

Mona Henkels-District IV (Lime Lake, Des Moines River, Bondin, and Belfast) **Chairman**

330 235th Ave.  
Fulda, MN 56131  
Phone:507-425-3117

Karen Hurd-District V (Chanarambie, Leeds, Moulton, and Fenton) **Treasurer**

1116 50th Ave.  
Lake Wilson, MN 56151  
651-368-0744

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□ *Left to Right* □  
□ **Karen Hurd, Mona Henkels** □  
□ **Back: Jason Miller, Paul** □  
□ **Posthuma, Anthony Conrad** □  
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## **Murray SWCD Services**

### **Conservation Contracts**

The Conservation Contracts Program is administered locally by the Murray Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). The Conservation Contracts Program provides financial assistance to landowners for installing conservation practices that protect and improve water quality by controlling soil erosion and reducing sedimentation.

The program provides up to 75% of the total eligible costs of a practice

### **District Tree Program**

Available to landowners in Murray County. Conservation grade trees can be purchased from the district.

Farmstead shelterbelts, field windbreaks, living snow fences and other wildlife plantings can be designed by the Program Manager.

For more information on tree plantings please contact our office at 507-836-6990 ext.3.

### **Ground Water Level Monitoring Program:**

The Murray SWCD measures the water level (monitor) in a total of 5 non-irrigation observation wells at an interval of once monthly.

### **Well Sealing**

The Murray SWCD works with the Murray County Environmental Services Office and with the Watershed Districts of Murray County for cost-share funding for the sealing of unused wells.

Please Contact our office for more information on well sealing at 507-836-6990 ext.3

### **Precipitation Monitoring**

The SWCD in conjunction with the State Climatology Office monitors site specific precipitation throughout Murray County. The data collected provides citizens and the State of Minnesota with important precipitation information and weather history

### **Minnesota Department of Agriculture — Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program**

The District has a working partnership with the MN Department of Agriculture to help promote the MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program to all landowners/operators throughout Murray County.

This is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Those who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified and in turn obtain regulatory certainty for a period of ten years.

### **Wetland Conservation Act Program**

When most people think of wetlands, they think of swampy, marshy areas complete with ducks and cattails. While those areas are in fact wetlands, there are many other wetlands that look very different, and can be completely dry for the majority of the year. Some wetlands support trees and shrubs, while other wetlands may even be farmed. Murray Soil and Water Conservation District staff provides technical support for local governments, county departments, and citizens with wetland and water related questions.

An estimated 11 million acres of wetland areas have been lost over the past 100 years, leaving only about 7.5 million acres, which represents a 60% loss. Wetlands provide many important benefits, which have become more apparent as wetland numbers have decreased. Some wetland benefits include:>

- Storage areas for excess waters during floods.
- Filtering of sediments and nutrients before they enter lakes, rivers, and streams
- Fish and wildlife habitat
- Public recreation

#### Commercial uses

The SWCD assists cities, townships, citizens, and County departments in the administration of the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act. The SWCD staff provides technical assistance and acts as the clearing house for wetland and water related activities throughout Murray County.

#### **Buffer Initiative**

A monumental turning point in protecting Minnesota's waters occurred in June 2015 with the passing of the Buffer Initiative by the Minnesota Legislature and Governor Dayton. This statute required landowners to have a 50-foot buffer on all public waters by November 2017 and 16.5-feet on all public ditches by November 2018.

The Murray SWCD helped to identify potential waters, program opportunities, and provide technical advice.

#### **CREP & RIM Program:**

The Murray SWCD recently completed three Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) projects that will create lasting soil and water conservation on more than 149.3 total acres and improve prairie habitat for wildlife, including pheasants.

CREP & RIM restorations help by retaining water on the landscape to reduce flooding, nutrient transport and sedimentation to streams. Varying in size from 36 acres to 76 acres, local landowners each enrolled in this program and worked with the Murray SWCD to develop water storage and runoff solutions unique to their landscape, such as re-routing drain tile, adding tile breaks to restore hydrology and repairing dams. In total, Murray SWCD and local landowners have voluntarily enrolled a total of 162 CREP and RIM easements.

Minnesota CREP's objectives include: enrolling riparian buffers, increasing infiltration, providing flood mitigation and restoring hydrology. Filter Strips, Wetland Restorations and Wellhead Protection Areas are the three main practices eligible for sign-up. The payment rates range from \$7,690.46-\$14,000.00/acre with all payments dependent on individual township value. The SWCD can give payment estimates on any land that may fit the program. Minnesota has already accepted 575 applications for approximately 31,000 acres of marginal land. Interested landowners should stop or call the SWCD office for more information.

#### **Murray SWCD Soil Health Cost-Share Program:**

Murray SWCD will be implementing a new cost share program for soil health that includes practices such as tillage management and cover crops. Practices will require a 3 year contract that includes an up front, lump sum payment, along with an operation and maintenance plan. Cost share will follow the NRCS EQIP flat payment rates for applicable practices. For more information, please contact the SWCD office.

# Murray County 1W1P

In 2012, Minnesota passed legislation that changed the way counties and SWCDs traditionally completed local water plans. One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) is a statewide effort that combines local entities that would otherwise have separate local water plans based on county boundaries. The 1W1P effort addresses that fact the water does not stop at county boundaries, it continues throughout several counties and jurisdictions within a watershed.

## **Missouri 1W1P:**

This comprehensive plan receives 1.3 million per funding cycle. One cycle has been completed and utilized \$1.1 million to fund over 50 projects across participating counties. These projects consisted of soil erosion prevention practices such as waterways and water and control sediment basins (WSCBs). Counties involved with this plan are Lincoln, Pipestone, Murray, Rock, Nobles, and Jackson.

## **Des Moines 1W1P:**

This comprehensive plan was completed in the fall of 2022. Once the plan goes through its final approval, implementation efforts will begin immediately. This plan is set to receive \$1.4 million per funding cycle with over \$1.2 million dedicated to projects and practices. Counties involved with this plan are Lyon, Murray, Cottonwood, Nobles, Jackson, and Martin. Interested landowners are encouraged to contact their local SWCD office for more information about how to apply for cost share contracts.

## **Cottonwood 1W1P:**

The Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan began in April 2023 with planning grant funds awarded by BWSR, through the One Watershed One Plan program, in late August of 2022. Grant Administration/Coordination and Fiscal Management is being provided by the Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area.

The counties of Brown, Cottonwood, Lyon, Murray and Redwood, their respective SWCDs, Area II MN River Basin Projects, RCRA and the City of Springfield comprise the 13 members of this Memorandum of Agreement ([link](#)). Blue Earth County and SWCD, and Yellow Medicine County and SWCD have opted out of the planning due to having <5% of their counties within the watershed boundary. The Policy Committee (see below) meets the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 2:00 PM at the Springfield Area Community Center. Information pertaining to the Policy Committee can be found below.

As the effort evolves, we will be establishing Advisory Committees: technical and citizen. If you would like to serve on either committee, please contact Kerry Netzke at 507-532-1325.

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## ***Murray SWCD Education***

### **Environmental Fair:**

The 5th and 6th Grade Environmental Fair has been held every fall for 25 years at a local fairgrounds in southwestern Minnesota educating area youth about natural resources. In 2023 the Environmental Fair was held at the Lyon County Fair Grounds.

### **Stewardship Week:**

The Stewardship Week was April 30th- May 7th, 2023. The theme was “**One Water**” Healthy watersheds provide critical services, such as clean drinking water, productive fisheries, and outdoor recreation, that support our economies, environment, and quality of life.

### **Newsletters:**

A Newsletter is mailed countywide to Murray County landowners and operators in December. Newsletters include current available programs, special announcements, staff changes, and much more.

### **Murray County Fair Booth:**

Check us out each year at the fair! We usually have drawings and information about soil and water conservation at our fair booth held at the Murray County Fair in Slayton, Minnesota in August.

### **CREP Program:**

The Murray SWCD recently completed five Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) projects that will create lasting soil and water conservation on more than 400 total acres and improve prairie habitat for wildlife, including pheasants.

Wetland restorations help by retaining water on the landscape to reduce flooding, nutrient transport and sedimentation to streams. Varying in size from 28.3 acres to 153.8 acres, local landowners each enrolled in this program and worked with the Murray SWCD to develop water storage and runoff solutions unique to their landscape, such as re-routing drain tile, adding tile breaks to restore hydrology and repairing dams. In total, Murray SWCD and local landowners have voluntarily enrolled a total of 158 CREP and RIM easements.

Minnesota CREP's objectives include: enrolling riparian buffers, increasing infiltration, providing flood mitigation and restoring hydrology. Filter Strips, Wetland Restorations and Wellhead Protection Areas are the three main practices eligible for sign-up. The payment rates range from \$7,690.46-\$9,726.86/acre with all payments dependent on individual township value. The SWCD can give payment estimates on any land that may fit the program. Minnesota has already accepted 575 applications for approximately 31,000 acres of marginal land. Interested landowners should stop or call the SWCD office for more information.

### **Murray SWCD Soil Health Cost-Share Program:**

Murray SWCD will be implementing a new cost share program for soil health that includes practices such as tillage management and cover crops. Practices will require a 3 year contract that includes an up front, lump sum payment, along with an operation and maintenance plan. Cost share will follow the NRCS EQIP flat payment rates for applicable practices. For more information, please contact the SWCD office.

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# **Year's Highlights January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024**

**January-** Murray SWCD started off the new calendar year with the development of the District's 2024 Annual Work Plan. The Board approved the 2024 Contract for services for the District Administrator to be the Financial Coordinator/Administrative Assistant for the Southwest Prairie Technical Service Area (SWPTSA). The SWCD Board approved a contract for Water and Sediment Control Basins. The staff attended the Des Moines River 1W1P meeting on January 18, 2024, in Windom.

**February-** The Supervisors and Staff attended the Southwest Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWMASWCD) Area V meeting in Marshall. A Water and Sediment Control Basin and a Waterway project was approved by the Board. The District Administrator reported on 20 grants for year end.

**March-** Lewis, Henkels, and Christensen attended the 2024 MASWCD Legislative Briefing and Day at the Capitol on March 12-13, 2024. The Supervisors approved the 2024 Murray SWCD Annual Plan. The staff attended the Des Moines River 1W1P meeting on March 21, 2024. The Board approved 4 applications from landowners for 7 waterways. The Board approved 2 applications for a Water and Sediment Control Basin and Cover Crops.

**April-** No meeting

**May-** The Board approved an application for a Waterway. The district sold 7,100 trees and completed 20 planting projects. The staff attended the Des Moines River 1W1P meeting in Windom on May 16, 2024.

**June-** The Supervisors and Staff attended the SWMASWCD Area V meeting on June 14, 2024, in Windom. The SWCD Board reviewed and approved the 2025 Murray SWCD budget. The Murray SWCD paid landowners for completed projects which included a Water and Sediment Control Basin and a Waterway. The Board approved a cost-share application for a Stream-bank & Shoreline Protection. The staff attended the Des Moines River 1W1P meeting in Windom on June 20, 2024.

**July-** The Board approved the well reading agreement to read five observation wells located in Murray County. The Staff attended the Des Moines River 1W1P meeting in Windom on July 18, 2024. Three cost-share projects were approved at the meeting and will be forwarded to the Des Moines River 1W1P for funding.

**August-** The Murray SWCD hired a new Resource Specialist, Danielle Kuball. Supervisors and Staff worked at the SWCD booth during the Murray County Fair. The program manager is working on 4 easements for the RIM/CREP program. The supervisors and staff attended a soil health field day on August 28, 2024.

**September-** The Memorandums of Understanding between the Murray SWCD and other agencies were reviewed by the Board. The board approved the work plan for the Soil Health Grant in the amount of \$120,000. The Environmental Fair was held in Marshall on September 24-25, 2024. A cost-share project for streambank & shoreline protection was reviewed and approved for payment. Supervisors and Staff attended the Southwest Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWMASWCD) Area V meeting.

**October-** Lewis, Christensen and Kuball attended the Board of Water and Soil Resource academy at Cragun's Resort in Brainerd. The Board approved a resolution to submit, adopt and implement the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The Board reviewed the SWCD tree, drill & packer reports. The packer was used on 360 acres and the drills were used on 751 acres.

**November-** The Board approved vouchers from landowners for completed cost-share projects for water and sediment control basins and cover corps. The staff attended the Des Moines River 1W1P on November 21, 2024. The Supervisors attended the RCRCA legislative gathering on November 20, 2024 in Springfield.

**December-** The District administrator, Resource Specialist and Supervisor Henkels attended the Annual Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) Convention. The SWCD's volunteer rain gauge monitors were recognized with a token of appreciation. The District sent out a newsletter to over 900 land operators in Murray County. A cost-share payment was made to a landowner for a Waterway. The Board approved the vouchers for two projects which included Water & Sediment Control Basins and a Waterway.

**The Murray SWCD would like to say THANK YOU to the Murray County Commissioners, NRCS, FSA, DNR, Heron Lake Watershed District, and the County Environmental Service staff for the tremendous amount of support, commitment, and leadership demonstrated towards the grass roots level of conservation being achieved through the Murray SWCD.**

# **2024 Accomplishments**

## **Capacity Cost-Share**

Contracts completed

- 2-Water and Sediment Control Basins
- Waterways
- Streambank project

## **Des Moines River 1W1P (Murray SWCD Projects)**

- 6-Waterways
- 17-WASCOB (Water & Sediment Control Basins)
- 3-Cover Crop Contracts

**3-CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) & RIM (Reinvest in Minnesota) Easements acquired for a total of 149.3 acres and \$887,259 paid to landowners from the State**

**Murray Soil and Water Conservation District sold 7,100 trees & completed 20 planting projects**

## **NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service)**

### **EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentive Program)**

\$1.9 million Obligated- 1,921 acres

6 Contracts

### **CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program)-\$550,000Obligated**

- 5 New Contracts
- 2636 Acres (Cropped, Pastureland, Associated Ag Land, and Farmstead)

### **CRP (Conservation Reserve Program)**

- 1,493 Acres– 109 Contracts



***Murray SWCD, NRCS, and SWPTSA:***



***Back: Craig Christensen, Mike Skoglund, & Joe Kaseforth***

***Front: Cheryl Heard, Allisa Wendland, Zach Ruppert, Shelly Lewis, Nancy Sauder, & Danielle Kuball.***