



Building capacity in Rock County

March 2016 Snapshots



Nestled in the most southwest corner of Minnesota, Rock County is predominantly farmland, and selling conservation has at times been challenging. With the passage of the Legacy Amendment and the ability to pursue Clean Water Funds, the Rock SWCD was able to accelerate its work with landowners and producers to get conservation on the ground. Over the years, the Rock SWCD received Clean Water Funds to address feedlot problems, sewage treatment, and support an engineer the district shares with others in their Technical Service Area.

With support from the Clean Water Fund, the district began focusing on developing technology and mapping capabilities that would allow them to be more strategic in their conservation work, performing terrain analysis and using other data to determine where best management practices (BMPs) would be most effective within the county. Armed with these analyses, the district began working with landowners in those targeted locations to begin the implementation process.

“The Clean Water Fund really created a lot of opportunities for us,” Doug Bos, Rock SWCD/Land Management Assistant Director said. “We’ve got projects completed that wouldn’t have been possible without it.”

Then historic rains fell, again and again. In 2014 and 2015, the county experienced significant flooding – a 500-year rain event – that hit the landscape particularly hard. Planned projects came to a screeching halt as flood recovery took priority. For Bos, though, there was one small silver lining in the heavy rains.

“When the rains hit, the office phone starts ringing off the hook.”

As farmers in the area recognized the limitations of the practices they were using to prevent flooding and erosion, they turned to the SWCD for help.

Disaster appropriations provided some relief as a stop-gap, but the Clean Water Fund has been what has kept long-term work moving forward. Even then, there was simply more work than the district could reasonably accomplish. After the 2014 flooding, the district had more than 100 requests from landowners for conservation practices. They simply couldn’t keep up.

That’s why the capacity dollars that were included in the FY 2016-2017 Clean Water Fund appropriations are a game-changer for the SWCD, and many others like it.

“It’s huge for us,” Bos said. “With Clean Water Fund support we’ve been able to target and prioritize projects so we can put them in the ground where they’re going to make the biggest difference, but we haven’t had the staff to be able to get this work moving.”

The Legislature’s \$22 million appropriation over the biennium, \$11 million annually through the Clean Water Fund, means that each district is getting an additional \$100,000 to increase their ability to provide technical



Rock SWCD’s Doug Bos meets with agency staff about Clean Water Fund projects.

assistance to landowners. The Technical Service Area that supports Rock and other SWCDs in the region received \$241,000 for FY 2016 as well to increase the work they are able to do for the districts.

The support that the district has already gotten from its Technical Service Area engineering staff and Shared Services grants has been crucial in helping them get to this point, but those additional resources have allowed the district to hire a new conservation technician who will survey and design conservation projects to meet the county's significant landowner demand.

"The need for these practices is not going away, and our agricultural producers recognize that if these heavy rains become the norm, they're going to need to be more proactive," Bos said. "The capacity dollars mean we can deliver what they need, which benefits both the farmers and the environment."