

# Arbor Day invigorates Pine SWCD forestry

*Arbor Day is not like other holidays. Each of those reposes on the past, while Arbor Day reposes for the future.*

— J. Sterling Morton, Nebraska newspaper editor, former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

ASKOV — Pine County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff members borrowed a page from history when they highlighted a forestry program through a community tree planting tied to Arbor Day.

Now recognized nationwide, Arbor Day got its start after J. Sterling

Morton moved from Michigan to the vast plains of the Nebraska Territory in 1854, and encouraged settlers to plant trees for beautification and environmental benefits. The first Arbor Day was April 10, 1872. The state of Nebraska later



recognized Arbor Day as April 22, Morton's birthday.

Fast-forward more than 160 years to Pine County, Minnesota, where, in 2015, Pine SWCD supervisors recognized a need to make forestry related conservation assistance available to Pine County residents.

Under the board's direction, Pine SWCD staff applied for a Clean Water Fund accelerated implementation grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to achieve more forestry conservation.

Four years after its successful application — and with additional



**Top:** An Arbor Day tree-planting event in Askov this spring was made possible with a grant from Pine SWCD. The event, which gave staff a way to connect with residents, drew a mix of city employees, students and master gardeners. **Left:** Former state Sen. Becky Lourey welcomed volunteers. **Courtesy Photos**

financial support from a Clean Water funded local capacity grant — the SWCD staff has written stewardship plans for 82 landowners, affecting nearly 8,400 acres. Pine SWCD also has provided technical support to private landowners.

In Pine County, the plans — also known as Woodland Stewardship Plans — are typically written for 80-acre parcels. Some are written for parcels as large as 400 acres.

A Woodland Stewardship Plan registered with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may qualify a landowner for tax breaks. The plan is one element of the DNR's Forest Stewardship Program, which works with public and private foresters who offer advice and education, cost-share and stewardship plans. Goals might include timber harvest, trail improvement, beautification or wildlife habitat improvement.

Pine SWCD forester Paul Swanson said many Pine County landowners who enroll in the voluntary program live in the Twin Cities. Many have one goal: Improve hunting land.

“They’re mostly looking for wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities. They want to manage their property for a quality hunting experience. That often results in them doing some kind of forest management in order to maintain healthy conditions.”

Managing for white-tailed deer can result in a mix of forest cover (including oak trees) plus wildlife openings and food plots. Managing for grouse can result in re-setting a mature aspen forestland.

Following a plan’s recommendations is optional.

“It’s a blueprint for your property based on your end goals, but it’s up to them whether they want to follow through with the management,” Swanson said.

Swanson saw an opportunity to expand the SWCD’s programing even further. He thought the SWCD could help municipalities in Pine County, which don’t have staff foresters. In keeping with the Arbor Day tradition, Swanson made a proposal to the SWCD board:

A \$500 grant available to municipalities in Pine County would encourage them to host a community Arbor Day event. The money would pay for trees and supplies. Swanson would



More than 20 people turned out for the Arbor Day tree-planting event in Askov this spring. Pine SWCD forester Paul Swanson provided advice about what tree species to plant where.

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— Paul Swanson,  
Pine SWCD forester



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provide advice about species selection, planting techniques and suitable sites.

Community members would plant the trees.

Askov applied first, and received the grant in April. The city saw the grant as an opportunity to unite community members, learn about trees and provide environmental benefits.

“The idea was to help enhance their urban setting,” Swanson said. “There’s social benefits. People that are around more green are happier. There are environmental benefits. They can help

improve air quality, reduce storm runoff. (Trees help) soil infiltration.”

A flyer inserted with monthly water bills notified all residents of the event.

On April 26, former state Sen. Becky Lourey and Askov Mayor Paul Paulson kicked off the Arbor Day event. More than 20 community members attended — including high school students, young children, University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener program volunteers and city public utility staff. National Arbor Day is the last Friday in April.

In two city parks — one

well-established, one under development — volunteers planted red maples, swamp white oaks and hackberry trees.

“The swamp white oak and hackberry don’t traditionally grow this far north. We’re trying to establish things for the future, and with a warming climate these (species) are what we’re probably going to see more of up here,” Swanson said.

Pine SWCD staff used the event to share with community members its commitment to preserving and protecting the county’s soil and water resources. One of the district’s goals is to educate residents about conservation principles and practices, and to help implement those practices.

“Since it was so successful, we’re talking about having similar events in the future with other cities,” Swanson said.