



Long-time partnerships result in environmental improvements, success in SW Minnesota

February 2014 Snapshots



Since 1987, local governments have been working together to better the waters and soil in southwestern Minnesota. Those partnerships are still going strong today, creating environmental improvements and serving as a model for other organizations across the state.

The number and scope of the projects completed since the beginning of this partnership has been incredible, and one of the best benefits to these projects are the Landowners who want to do additional projects and their neighbors who take notice of the results and want to do projects of their own.

The Joint Powers Board uniting Rock and Nobles Counties, the respective Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and the Kanaranzi-Little Rock Watershed District was originally started as a federal project to address major erosion and flooding through conservation practices with individual landowner contracts.

Having projects on the landscape that are 30 years old, and still work, is a testament to the success of the projects, quality engineering and partnerships associated with this Watershed Project.

Recognizing that success, the federal government later provided additional funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in September 2009 and January 2010 for conservation practices such as terraces, waterways and water and sediment control basins to reduce erosion and to mitigate flood damages. Twenty-six projects were completed through ARRA funding.

Mark Hiles, Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Conservationist, said that the program garnered so much interest from landowners that the demand far exceeded available federal funds. "The Nobles SWCD was able to use a BWSR Clean Water Fund grant to leverage additional federal funds and landowner participation," Hiles said. "This program has been a huge success, demonstrating targeted on-the-ground conservation to prevent additional pollution from entering already-impaired waters in Minnesota."

The Clean Water Fund project wrapped up in December 2012, resulting in construction of eight grassed waterways, a shoreline protection project, 18 water and sediment control basins and a clean water diversion project. Nearly 4,000 pounds of phosphorus and sediment were saved from entering waterways through these projects.

What's next? The outpouring of landowner support and funding requests in the Kanaranzi – Little Rock Watershed has only increased since the influx of the ARRA and CWF Funding. The Nobles SWCD, NRCS and KLR partnership is still looking for additional ways to fund projects, either through Federal EQIP funding, State cost-share, Clean Water Funds or KLR local Levy. The Nobles SWCD currently has over \$750,000 worth of landowner estimates for erosion control practices that are looking for funding.



Photos: (L) Jane Steffl (SWCD Contracting Officer) and Stephanie McLain (NRCS District Conservationist) collaborate on educational opportunity at the ARRA field tour in the fall of 2010. (R) A landowner receives assistance on his farm as a result of federal ARRA funding, which was later used to leverage Clean Water Fund dollars for similar projects.