



Pennington SWCD Takes the Lead

February 2014 Snapshots



Working in partnership with local government units, state and federal agencies, and other organizations is central to BWSR's mission to improve and protect Minnesota's soil and water resources. A key component of that partnership is the relationship-building that happens person-to-person and organization-to-organization over time. The people at the Pennington Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) have a deep understanding of the importance of making and maintaining these connections, as demonstrated at their December 2013 board meeting.

For well over fifteen years, the Pennington SWCD has invited their elected officials to join them at their December board meeting. The invitation started after some of the district supervisors attended a legislative day in St. Paul and realized there was more opportunity for focused conversation back in the district than at the capitol. There is no agenda for their attendance other than to give them the opportunity to talk about conservation and get a chance to learn more about the work going on in the district. There is so much good and thoughtful discussion during their time together that what starts as an hour often becomes two.

"So much is demanded of them when they are in St. Paul," District Coordinator Barb Molskness said. "They have been very eager to learn about our projects and it's been a great chance to get to know each other better."

While the program is informal, staff do prepare a presentation that brings their representatives up to speed on projects underway in the district, as well as outline the projects they hope to complete in the coming year if they successfully acquire funding. Given how busy they are when they're in session, it is a welcome chance to focus on conservation without other distractions. Representatives from the NRCS and BWSR were also a part of the conversation.

"Over the years we've been able to make strong connections and build trust," District Manager Bryan Malone said. "Now if something comes up during a legislative session we're comfortable calling our legislators up to give them our perspective, and they know we're here as a reliable resource, too."

That's a significant return on investment. Strong partnerships flourish with open communication, and the time spent and the rapport developed make these relationships healthier. It's a great model for engagement, and one other LGUs might consider trying for themselves.

Don't be intimidated, Malone advised. Legislators are just people, too, and they want to hear and learn from their constituents. Ultimately, everyone involved is working for the same outcome: a stronger Minnesota.



Sitting (l to r): Ricky Peterson (Supervisor), Brenda Szymanski (Supervisor), Bryan Malone (District Manager), Kathy Fillmore (NRCS).
Standing (l to r): Barb Molskness (District Coordinator), Linda Hanson (Supervisor), Ron Shelito (BWSR), Greg Hilgeman (Supervisor), Deb Kiel (State Representative), Dan Fabian (State Representative), Peter Nelson (Water Plan Coordinator).