The MPCA provides financial and technical assistance to local government and other water resource managers to address nonpoint-source water pollution through the state Clean Water Partnership (CWP) and federal Clean Water Act Section 319 (Section 319) programs. Todd SWCD was recently awarded a grant to help reduce total phosphorus contributions from animal agriculture within the Osakis Lake Minor Watershed by providing cost-share assistance, technical assistance and engineered plans to installing best management practices for onsite feedlot fixes.

The goal stated within the Sauk River Watershed’s Comprehensive Plan is to be able to de-list the lake for nutrients by the year 2030 through reducing the annual total phosphorus load by 160-240 pounds. The projects proposed in this work plan would achieve 75% of this annual goal by preventing 140-200 pounds of phosphorus from reaching Osakis Lake through on-farm manure management.
Programs

- Coordinated 11 Todd County precipitation volunteer monthly monitor reports
- Monitored 13 observation wells for static water levels in Todd County
- Completed three Irrigation Conservation Plans for DNR
- Irrigation Scheduling Program, Stalk Nitrate Testing and Nutrient Management Initiative Plots delivered through East Otter Tail SWCD
- Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) in second year and Todd County certified three producers for a total of 5,637 acres certified in the county
- Buffer Initiative work has Todd County at 98% compliance through a combination of guidance documents, landowner discussions and technical support and the review of aerial photography
- Assisted MPCA in water quality monitoring in 11 lakes through the SWAG Grant
- Partnering with Crow Wing SWCD on the I’m 4 Forests Program
- Enrolled four Walk-In Access sites through the DNR
- Provided shoreland assistance to lake organizations, businesses, cities and individual property owners on BMPs, water quality considerations and Aquatic Invasive Species
- Promote clean drinking water through assisting cities in their Wellhead Protection Plans
- Supported wildlife and easement programs through Pheasants Forever position

Wetlands Conservation Act

- 31 Exemption Decisions
- 7 No Loss Decisions
- 7 Satisfactory Violation Restorations
- 1 Boundary/Type Decision
- 2 Local Road Replacement Concurrences
- 134 Site Visits
- 360 Wetland Related Questions/Contacts
- Hosted Monthly TEP Meetings

Feedlot Program

- Feedlot Inventory for 1196 Feedlots
- 4 Construction Short Forms (new buildings or expansions)
- 10 Interim Permits
- 285 Site Visits and 29 In-Office Meetings with Individual Producers
- 437 Feedlot Related Questions
- 3 Pit Closures
- 11 Air Quality Exemptions
- 14 Complaint Responses
- 10 Return to Compliance/Upgrades

Tree and Plant Sale Program

- 13,975 Trees
- 250 One Gallon Potted Stock
- 15 Native Plant Kits
**Best Management Practices Installed Projects**

**State Cost Share**
4 Domestic Well Sealings

**Local Capacity Funds**
1 Water and Sediment Control Basin

**MPCA 319 Grant**
1 Stream Restoration
2 Pond Closures
1 Ag Waste Management System (additional funding provided through the State Cost Share and Local Capacity Funds)

**CWP Swan River**
1 Shoreland Restoration

**AgBMP Loans**
5 Total for $302,284.85

**RIM Easement**
4 Contracts for 263.9 Acres

*Stream Restoration: Root Wad Installation*

*Ag Waste Management System: VTA Portion*

*Shoreland Restoration: CWP Swan River*
On a sunny afternoon in late August Kevin Ehnes took a break from loading sunflower seeds, destined to become bird seed, to tell the story of the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certified Ehnes Farms. Ehnes Farms is located outside of Eagle Bend and was established by Kevin’s Great Grandparents in 1914. Kevin took over the farm in 1977, shortly after finishing high school. He wasn’t fully up to taking on the entire farm at the time but jumped in with both feet has seen success in the long run. The farm earned its Century Farm title in 2014 after passing through multiple generations of Ehnes’. Currently Kevin and his wife Wannetta, who does much of the bookkeeping, live on and manage the land.

Ehnes farms was originally a diversified 180 acre farm like so many were in those days with both dairy and beef cattle along with other smaller animals and row crops. Over the years, the farm transitioned into just dairy and row crops until 1995 when they stopped milking.

Currently Ehnes farms is home to 30 cow-calf pairs, a handful of steers, and one very friendly dog. Kevin has added land to the original 180 acres and also rents to reach almost 900 tillable acres that he plants into a corn-soybean-wheat rotation or a number of different small grains.

When Kevin first took over the farm, the fields were all under conventional farming methods. Everything was tilled multiple times which left the fields black if there was no crop growing. For years Kevin watched as the wind and rain washed away his nutrient rich top soil thinking “something had to be done.” He contacted the SWCD for technical assistance to look into terraces or strip tillage but nothing quite fit his farm operation. He started using cover crops and increased his buffer strips but still observed erosion on some fields.

One of his landlords (and friend) suggested he try switching his conventional till practice into a no till practice. Kevin was not fond of the idea and didn’t see how it would work for his farm, but through persistence he was convinced to try it out with assistance from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Ehnes farms now is 100% no till and loving it. Becoming no till was not easy and there were many struggles, but as Kevin put it, “You have to want it to work, to make it work.” By changing to no till Kevin spends less time in the fields, even though harvesting is his favorite part of farming, and has more time for other farm chores, such as enjoying the quietness of the cows. A few of the benefits Kevin said he’s noticed in his fields is the elimination of erosion, water retention due to the increased organic matter (each 1% of organic matter holds up to 20,000 gallons of water per acre), and he no longer picks rocks! 10 years later and he’s very happy with the management changes he has made.

Kevin has always been active in the community. Historically he has been active on Co-Op boards, Church Committees, and the Farmers Union. Presently, Kevin is on the FSA Committee, involved with Todd County Extension, and assists with the popular annual Todd County Breakfast on the Farm event.

When asked what he would like his farm called, Kevin thought for a moment and said “Ehnes Farm, my wife, my mom, and my father have all done a lot for this farm and I would like to honor them as well.”
Recognition & Awards Continued

Meryl started work for Todd SWCD in 1966 – the year after the SWCD was formed. He started as a District Aide and grew in the position into a Conservation Technician. He worked for the District for 39 years. He remembers the job fondly as most every day was different and working with landowners was rewarding. Since then Meryl has continued to be very busy planting trees, enjoying the outdoors and most recently maintaining a vineyard.

In the early years staff worked on establishing contour strips for landowners as a measure to reduce soil erosion. These worked well and were in high demand and many 1000’s of acres were installed. Meryl commented that few of these original strips are in place any longer due to changes in farming practices and bigger equipment that is used on modern farms.

Each year for 39 years Meryl worked with landowners to plant trees. Some years this involved over a month of planting working long days on the planter. Tree planning started soon after the years planting was complete – leading toward the next years planting site projects. One year Meryl remembers planting trees on over 40 sites. He can still see some of the trees growing around the county. Meryl came back after retirement to drive tractor during tree planting season for the district. He also planted extensively on his own property and purchased a tree planter for his own use.

Meryl and Greg Ostrowski worked together to stake out feedlot and ag waste improvement projects – most were cost shared through NRCS. He assisted other agencies throughout the years with surveys and field measurements of shoreline erosion, field erosion, and water monitoring of ground and surface water.

Meryl was around for the start of many new developments during his 39 years. Feedlot Rules were developed and implemented statewide, Water Plans were developed and mandated statewide, and the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) was passed in the early 1990’s.

Meryl retired in 2006 but has not slowed down. When SWCD staff were preparing for the 50th Anniversary Meryl’s notes, memory and old news articles helped fill in gaps of the districts history. For the last two years his old fishing boat has been the boat SWCD staff have used for water quality monitoring on 11 lakes throughout the county. He said he likes the work the SWCD is currently doing – specifically mentioning the newsletter and Enviro-Fest.

Every year he still makes a point to plant trees saying Norway Pine is his favorite because it does so well in Todd County. Two years ago he lost a large planting in an accidental grass fire and replanted 500 transplants this spring. He laughed saying Greg Nolan and Marcia Rapatz actually did the planting but he had everything laid out exactly how he wanted it before they got there.

Meryl is an avid winter fisherman, deer hunter and outdoorsman. In his free time he also gardens with his wife Linda. They have vegetables, raspberries and native and cultivated plants around their property. Every week they also volunteer for the Food Pantry. Meryl drives 900-1000 pounds of food from Walmart to Long Prairie so they can restock the shelves.

Linda and Meryl also have 900 grape vines in their backyard to supply grapes for Dragon Willow Winery, a new business outside of Long Prairie that their daughter and son-in-law operate. Meryl helps maintain the vineyards at both locations by preserving the grounds, discouraging the turkeys and helping with the harvest.
One Watershed One Plan—Sauk River Watershed

Minnesota has a long history of water management by local government. One Watershed, One Plan is rooted in this history and in work initiated by the Local Government Water Roundtable (Association of Minnesota Counties, Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, and Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts) in 2011 which recommended that the local governments charged with water management responsibility should organize and develop focused implementation plans on watershed boundaries.

The local units of government (LGUs) of the Sauk River watershed are very supportive of developing a comprehensive management plan. Todd along with Douglas, Stearns, Pope and Meeker Counties have all met in January 2017 to discuss the 1W1P approach and all have agreed to move forward with the 1W1P process. Each county has provided a letter or a board resolution to verify their support for the 1W1P.

BWSR’s vision for One Watershed, One Plan is to align local water planning on major watershed boundaries with state strategies towards prioritized, targeted and measurable implementation plans – the next logical step in the evolution of water planning in Minnesota.

Mississippi River Brainerd and Sartell Watersheds—2016-2020

The Upper Mississippi River - Brainerd covers 1,079,950 acres (1,687 square miles) in the north central part of the Upper Mississippi River Basin in central Minnesota and encompasses all or parts of Aitkin, Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison and Todd counties.

Biological, chemistry and flow monitoring finished up in 2017 on several key stream reaches and lakes throughout the watershed. Results will be presented in both watershed’s TMDLs and be used to formulate Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies for the area.

Todd SWCD with the assistance from their Minnesota Conservation Corps volunteer Ethan Dahl (pictured) conducted the lake sampling for the Todd County portion of the watershed.

Minnesota Conservation Corps Intern

The Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriated funds to train and mentor future conservation professionals by providing apprenticeship service opportunities to soil and water conservation districts. Ethan Dahl, a student at the University of Wisconsin River Falls studying Geology served as an apprentice to Todd SWCD for the summer and helped with a variety of programs at the SWCD including AIS, water quality monitoring, resource concerns with forestry, riparian areas and feedlots.
Partners

West Central Technical Service Area (WCTSA)

- 22 Site Visits
- 18 Site Surveys
- 18 Preliminary Projects Designs
- 7 Final Project Designs
- Provided Construction Oversight on 6 Projects

Tri-County Irrigation

This year 16 Todd County fields were enrolled into the program from seven farmers. Wade Salo, the technician from East Otter Tail SWCD, worked with farmers to monitor the weather and soil moisture to give them a second opinion on whether they should irrigate or not.

Nutrient Management Initiative Plots & Stalk Nitrogen Program

There were four nutrient management initiative plots in Todd County this year. These plots are set-up in conjunction with the MDA for the intended purpose to be on-farm field trials. It helps farmers evaluate alternative nitrogen practices, highlight advancements in nitrogen management practices, and evaluate practices that may help reduce field nitrate loss. There are four producers enrolled in the stalk nitrate sampling program. Nathan Wiese from East Otter Tail is the Irrigation/Nutrient Management Specialist who delivers this program.

NRCS

- 2,077.7 Acres Continuous CRP in 81 Contracts
- 55.3 Acres Honey Bee Habitat in 2 Contracts
- 11 CSP Contracts
- 16 EQIP Contracts
- 6 Nutrient Management Plan
- 2 Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans
- 322 Acres of Nutrient Management
- 2800 Feet Livestock Pipeline
- 1 Pit Closure
- 31 Cover Crop Acres
- 589.3 Acres of Prescribed Grazing
- 1 Forest Management Plan
- 1 Water and Sediment Control Basin
- 84 Acres No Till
- 32,041 Feet Grazing System Fences

Data is unofficial and has not been reviewed.
Public Relations & Education

- Representatives on the One Watershed One Plan committees, Livestock Advisory’s Committee, Camp Ripley Landscape Stewardship Committee, City Wellhead Protection Planning, MPCA Watershed Approaches, Public Works Annual Permit Meeting, MACFO and Todd County Emergency Response Committee
- Annual Feedlot Meeting, 180 attendees
- Invitational Feedlot Tour, 25 attendees
- Annual River & Lake Day, 22 attendees for morning workshop and 15 for afternoon workshop
- 23rd Annual Enviro-Fest, 594 attendees (students, teachers & presenters)
- Attended Liaison, Local Work Group, NRCS Field Day and MN Forest Resource Council Legislative Tour
- Provided technical assistance to landowners through field site visits regarding BMPs for riparian, forest, wetland ecosystems and developed farmlands and urban areas
- Annual awards program for Outstanding Conservationist and Land Stewardship Awards
- Hosted Booths at the Todd County Fair, Breakfast on the Farm and LPGE High School Career Fair
- Presented at Lake Association meetings, area schools, area towns, Annual Township meeting, Corn and Soybean Growers meetings, Annual Contractor meeting and the Osakis Lake Landowner Meeting
- Partnered with GIS Department to offer hands-on topography training in area schools through the use of an Augmented Reality Sandbox
- Developed a SWCD informational board at the USDA FSA office
- 2 SWCD Newsletters, 8 newspaper articles, 6 news releases, website and Facebook pages
- Attended MASWCD Convention and Day at the Capital
- Monthly radio show on KEYL/Hot Rod Radio
The intent of the 2017 Feedlot Data Inventory was to update the status of livestock facilities in Todd County. The last inventory was conducted in 2001 by road travel. This year’s inventory was done with a combination of aerial photography review and follow-up by door-to-door site visits when sites were identified as not having registered.

Since 2001 time, the need for the inventory and the status of livestock farms has changed. Over the years, the number of neighborhood single family dairy farms have reduced while actual animal numbers have remained relatively steady. Equally noteworthy is the fact that many of the original neighborhood family farms had manure storage areas with installations dating back as far as the 1970’s. Over the years, these sites have not registered due to not having animals on site. However, the pits remain open, unused, and pose a threat to ground water, human and animal safety, and potentially to surface water quality as water captured in these pits remain high in nutrients. The increase in the local goat market in Todd County is notable as well. The swine industry appears to have declined over the years while poultry numbers appear to have remained stable. Due to an increase in potentially devastating or life-threatening zoonoses, viruses, and other animal disease epidemics, the Department of Agriculture has requested a database be kept of all livestock locations within the county, including backyard flocks.

Registration also offers some protections from rule and ordinance changes (basically the right to farm), the value of site registration for the retired farmer/landowner, the animal hobbyist, and the potential buyer’s market has increased significantly over the years, making Todd County properties more marketable.

**Staff and Boards**

**Board of Commissioners**

NRCS Office: Sabin Adams (Pheasants Forever), Russell Kleinschmidt, Darlene Drayna, Carol Wimmer

County Commissioners: Barb Becker, David Kircher, Gary Kneisl, Randy Neumann, Rod Erickson

SWCD Board: Tom Williamson, Dale Katterhagen, Kenneth Pesta, Norman Krause, Leland Buchholz

SWCD Staff: Tim Stieber, Deja Anton, Lew Noska (back), Sarah Katterhagen, Danielle Anderson, Shannon Wettstein (front)
**Year of the Buffer**

Todd County elected jurisdiction over enforcement of the state buffer law with the outreach and technical support being provided by Todd SWCD. Outreach included direct mailings, presentations at public meetings, open mic radio shows, and technical assistance both in office and on site. To date, Todd County has achieved 98% compliance through site visits and review of 2017 aerial photography. Of the landowners on public waters who still needed to install buffers on their property, 33 waivers were received giving them more time to come into compliance.

The law took effect November 1, 2017 for parcels on public waters. We are still one year out on Public Ditches with a November 1, 2018 date.

To view the 2017 SWCD Board Meeting Minutes, visit the Todd County website

http://www.co.todd.mn.us/