

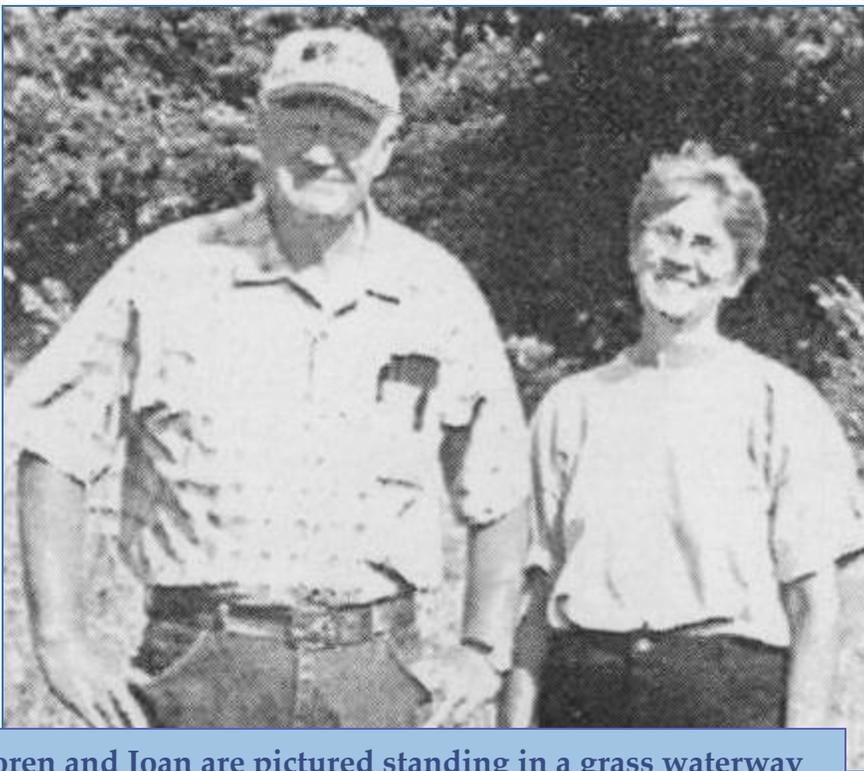
# Loren & Joan Brekke

## Honored as 2003 Outstanding Conservation Cooperators

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Loren and Joan Brekke, rural Hanska, were named the 2003 Outstanding Conservation Cooperators by the Brown Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Loren has been a lifelong resident of the Albin Township family farm that has land bordering Lake Hanska. He assumed the farming operation after his father's death. He and his wife, Joan, have raised three daughters on the farm. The land is planted to a corn and soybean rotation.



Loren and Joan are pictured standing in a grass waterway with their field windbreak in the background.

The farm's proximity to the lake allowed Loren to pursue hobbies of hunting and fishing. It also nurtured a respect and love for nature, the lake and its watershed. This is evident in the many conservation efforts made to preserve the lake and the watershed. Loren and his brother ripped much of the farm's bordering lakeshore and ditch with field rock to prevent erosion. He helped create a sedimentation pond on J.D. #5 near the lake's outlet. Grass waterways, CRP, ditch and lake buffers, rock tile inlets, hickenbottom intakes and mini-dams were installed to prevent field

erosion. Two miles of field windbreaks as well as many new trees in the farmstead windbreak help fight wind erosion. The SWCD and NRCS provided assistance with the installation of many of these projects. Loren hasn't moldboard plowed for about 35 years and is in a minimum tillage mode. No fall tillage is done on the bean stubble and cornstalks are disked.

Loren and Joan recently enrolled two parcels totaling 38.8 acres into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), a conservation program administered by the Brown

Soil and Water Conservation District. These acres are enrolled into permanent easements and are seeded into native grass and forbs. They are slated to have wetlands restored on them.

Not all of Loren's conservation efforts are in erosion control. He is a wildlife advocate and has put out wren, blue bird, wood duck and martin houses for the birds. Turkeys were fed for many years around Omsrud Lake and pheasants are fed on snowy years. He installs and removes the dock, cuts the grass and picks up the trash at Godahl Point on Lake Hanska.

The Brekkes have been tireless volunteers for the development of Lake Hanska. According to Lore, the biggest accomplishment is "getting Lake Hanska put back on the map." The lake had not been stocked for years due to fish freeze out and no interest was expressed in wildlife development. Dredging was needed to restore the lake. Loren measured the water depth in the upper 8 miles of the lake. Chuck Enter, a great supporter of the project who now serves as Brown County Administrator, drilled holes in a grid to measure water depth through the ice on the lower mile of the lake to calculate how much fill area would be needed. Promoting the lake dredging found Loren on the radio and TV, in the halls of the Capitol visiting with legislators and in the offices of DNR and MPCA personnel from Mankato to Rochester. The idea was presented to landowners and the Brown County Commissioners and the project was finally approved. "Dredge delivery was one of the happier days of my life," states Loren. He humbly adds, "This was the culmination of the work of hundreds of people throughout the state." The DNR planned to stock the lake with northerns, panfish and bass and Loren persuaded them to also add walleyes to the list. His 25 years of secchi disk readings on the lake indicated that the water was much clearer in the dredging areas. He obtained a permit from the DNR allowing him to trap northern fingerlings in Mulligan Slough and released them into Lake Hanska. Also released were northerns and walleyes trapped below the dam. The fish no longer freeze out and the wildlife is making great strides in the area. According to Brekke, only the duck population is lagging. He feels more landowners need to develop small wetlands in their marginal lands around the lake. Most ducks will not reproduce on the larger lake. His measurements also provided it feasible to dredge a canal marina for the park campground.

Besides the various Lake Hanska Groups (Sportsmen's Club, the Support Group and the Improvement and Conservation Council), Loren has held or holds offices in the Godahl Recreation Association, Nelson & Albin Mercantile Associations, the St. James School District, the Brown County REA and the Albin Lutheran Church both as Trustee and Bible Study Teacher. Personal and family hobbies include golfing, fishing, hunting, boating, and family picnics at Lake Hanska and sightseeing with Joan.

Loren and Jean were recognized along with other Minnesota Outstanding Conservation Cooperators at the Minnesota Association of Conservation Districts Convention held November 30<sup>th</sup>-December 2<sup>nd</sup> in Bloomington.