

BROWN SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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Sleepy Eye, MN 56085

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www.brownsxcdmn.org

This annual report highlights activities participated in and program work completed throughout 2025. For more details on any of the district’s programs mentioned in this report, visit www.brownsxcdmn.org

ABOUT US

The Brown Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a local unit of government established under state law to carry out conservation programs at the local level. Our district has been working with Brown County landowners since 1958 to help them manage and protect land and water resources.

BROWN SWCD SUPERVISORS

Craig Fischer, Chair	Albin, Lake Hanska, and Linden Townships
Mark Wellner, Vice-Chair	Burnstown, North Star, and Stately Townships
Brad Augustin, Secretary	Bashaw, Leavenworth, and Mulligan Townships
Bill Eckstein, Treasurer	Eden, Home, Prairieville, and Stark Townships
Rae Runck, PRI	Cottonwood, Milford, and Sigel Townships

BROWN SWCD STAFF

Melanie Krueger, District Manager
Mary Beth Botz, Conservation Technician
Teddy Giefer, Conservation Technician
Hailey Olson, Conservation Technician
Isabella Portner, Conservation Technician
Jarín Spence, Conservation Technician

PARTNERSHIPS AND COOPERATING AGENCIES

Brown County
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)
USDA – Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service
South Central Technical Service Area
Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD)
Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA)
Redwood Cottonwood Rivers Control Area (RCRCA)
Pheasants Forever
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition
National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Minnesota Department of Agriculture
University of Minnesota Extension

EDUCATION AND PROMOTION

Highlights of the many outreach events and activities that Brown SWCD participated in throughout the year:

- Recognized Bill Vogel as 2025 Outstanding Conservationist in Brown County
- Hwy 14 Tour – CLASIC, Lamberton workshop co-host
- Hosted a booth at the Farm-City Hub Club Farm Show event in New Ulm
- Assisted in a booth at Farmfest in cooperation with Area 5 and 6 SWCDs
- Rainfall Simulator demonstration at Sleepy Eye’s Party in the Park event
- Hosted a Grassland Management Workshop in partnership with DNR and Pheasants Forever
- Monthly radio spots on KNUJ with presentations on all of the district’s programs
- Promoted NACD Stewardship Week theme - ‘Home is Where the Habitat Is’
- Youth education classroom presentations on conservation, soil health, and AIS prevention
- Facebook posts about various topics such as AIS Prevention, Soil Health program, MAWQCP program and certified producers, funding availability for conservation practices, conservation easements, tree program, events and general conservation information



Brown Soil & Water Conservation District

269 followers • 49 following

Brown SWCD works with local landowners and other units of government to carry out and install soil and water conservation programs and practices.

Following ▾

Message



AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS) PREVENTION



The main focus of our activities this year were community outreach and education to spread awareness of AIS prevention. The district emphasized outreach through multiple channels, including radio ads and monthly spots on KNUJ, targeted digital advertising at local lakes and park accesses, and contributions to video and social media campaigns. District staff also partnered with local libraries and schools to deliver presentations to students on AIS and prevention methods. The district continued to attend local fishing events and distribute promotional materials to local businesses.

TREE PROGRAM

There were 50 customers and 3,947 trees sold through the district's annual tree sales program this year. Many landowners worked with staff to design windbreaks and shelterbelt replacements on their properties.



MAWQCP PROGRAM

Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is a voluntary program for producers. Brown County currently has 10 certified producers with 5 of them newly certified this past year. Staff completed four targeted mailings promoting the program reaching 129 producers and assisted several landowners with questions, certification process steps, and potential endorsements to existing certified producers. In addition, outreach materials and articles were developed for mailings and website content.

COST SHARE PROJECTS



Through the cost share programs, financial assistance or incentive payments totaling \$42,518.90 were paid to landowners for completion of the conservation projects listed below.

- Grassed Waterway – 2 installed
- Water & Sediment Control Basin (WASCOB) – 1 installed
- Weed Management – 109 acres leafy spurge sprayed
- CRP Incentive – 35.64 acres re-enrolled
- SSTS Incentive – 3 septic systems replaced
- Well Decommissioning – 1 well sealed

Funding for the projects was provided by the Watonwan Watershed Based Implementation Funding grant, the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Watershed Based Implementation Funding grant, or the SWCD's local cost share grant programs.

In addition, SWCD staff also completed the following tasks:

- Contracted 3 shoreline projects for completion in 2026
- Completed 41 annual project site inspections
- Conducted 8 site visits to assess erosion concerns and began initial planning for conservation practices
- Completed targeted outreach mailings for grassed waterway, grade stabilization, and WASCOB conservation projects



SOIL HEALTH PROGRAM



Multiple funding sources combined with targeted outreach efforts allowed the district's employees to accomplish numerous tasks for the benefit of soil health in Brown County.

- Worked with 25 producers to implement 2,525.5 acres of cover crops
- Contracted with 5 producers for strip-till management on 684 acres next spring
- Enrolled 1 producer into the SCTSA Peer-To-Peer Mentorship program
- Developed and promoted the RCPP Soil Health Practices Grant Program for Brown SWCD
- Attended various soil health events, workshops and trainings to further enhance technical expertise and expand the professional soil health network in Brown County
- Developed outreach materials for soil health programs and practices
- Co-hosted Hwy 14 Tour – CLASIC, Lambertson workshop
- Rainfall simulator demonstration at one event in Sleepy Eye

EASEMENT PROGRAM

Through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement program, the SWCD completed enrollment of four permanent conservation easement projects totaling 137.83 acres.

In addition, eight new program applications were submitted and approved for funding, which will ultimately add another 430.76 acres of wetland and native vegetation easement acres in the county.

Staff also worked with two landowners to complete vegetation enhancement projects on their easements, including work such as voluntary tree removal, prescribed burns, and reseeded to increase plant diversity. Two additional landowners were accepted into the program and have enhancement work scheduled for 2026.

Annual site inspections were conducted on 81 easements, and various other program tasks were completed throughout the year, primarily consisting of boundary postings, processing ownership changes, and monitoring haying agreement activities.



BUFFER PROGRAM



Annual buffer compliance monitoring was completed on 1,111 parcels this year, with 51 of them considered non-compliant due to minimum buffer widths not being met. That converts to a 98% compliance rate in Brown County with the Buffer Law requirements as of 12/31/2025.

SWCD staff continually work with landowners to provide technical guidance on how to maintain compliance with the MN Buffer Law requirements, which include a 16.5ft minimum buffer width on public ditches and a 30ft minimum, 50ft average, buffer width on public waters.

WETLAND CONSERVATION ACT (WCA)

A Brown SWCD employee serves as a member on the Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) for the Wetland Conservation Act. In 2025, approximately 15 TEP submissions were reviewed and the staff member obtained Certified Minnesota Wetland Professional In-Training status.

WALK IN ACCESS PROGRAM

During 2025, a targeted mailing was sent to 26 landowners promoting sign-up into the Walk-In Access (WIA) program. One new site was enrolled, and five sites were re-enrolled during the program sign-up period. In Brown County there are 11 locations, totaling 1,033 acres enrolled in the WIA program.



PILOT POLLINATOR EDUCATION PROJECT

In collaboration with BWSR, the SWCD developed a pilot program for pollinator education targeted at middle school students. The program combines classroom instruction with outdoor activities stressing the importance of biodiversity. Three science teachers in Brown County received guidance on how to integrate the 8-day curriculum into their ecology lessons with several options for growing pollinator-friendly native plants. BWSR plans to promote the program statewide through inter-agency collaboration and on its website.