Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District

Quarterly News & Updates

August 2025 | Issue 21

Visit our Facebook and website for regular updates

Greetings Friends and Neighbors!

The Isanti SWCD publishes this Quarterly e-Newsletter to:

- Help keep you informed of what is happening locally that affects the health of natural resources in Isanti County
- Increase your understanding of what the SWCD does and how you can get involved in conservation
- Keep you informed on how Clean Water Fund tax amendment dollars are being spent locally

If you have any questions, please give us a call at **763-689-3271**.

Blue Lake Alum Treatment Update

The Isanti SWCD, in partnership with the Blue Lake Improvement District (BLID), is excited to share the promising results from our water quality monitoring following the alum treatments on Blue Lake.

The second and final application in September 2024 marked a significant milestone in our long-term efforts to combat high phosphorus levels. Since the initial treatment in September 2022, Blue Lake's water quality has continually improved!

Our monitoring shows a positive trend in key indicators for both Upper and Lower Blue Lake. We've seen fewer algae blooms, clear from a notable decrease in phosphorus, the nutrient that limits algae growth, as well as chlorophyll-a, a measure of algae concentration. Finally, the water's clarity has greatly improved, with increased Secchi transparency readings.

This success is a direct result of the alum treatment, which works by creating a protective layer on the lakebed that binds to phosphorus and prevents it from re-entering the water column. The effectiveness of this treatment is expected to last up to 25 years. However, its longevity can be impacted by disturbances to the lakebed, particularly from excessive boat motor actions and nutrient inputs from the surrounding land.

To ensure the long-term health of Blue Lake, we ask boaters to be mindful of their wake, as studies show that powerful boats can disturb the lake bottom even at depths of 20 feet, potentially damaging the protective alum layer. We also continue to work with landowners to install conservation projects, such as rain gardens and shoreline restorations, to reduce nutrient inputs from the drainage area.

For those interested in contributing to the health of Blue Lake, please contact the Isanti SWCD to learn about available cost-share opportunities for conservation projects.

To learn more about the Isanti SWCD's Blue Lake protection efforts, this video from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources provides an overview of the work: Blue Lake Alum Treatment

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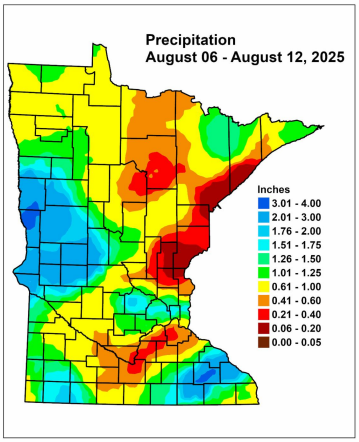
Seeking MNgage Volunteers!



In partnership with the DNR Minnesota State Climatology Office, we're currently looking for volunteers to participate in the Minnesota Volunteer Precipitation Observing Program.

The MNgage program, now run by the DNR Minnesota State Climatology Office, began in the late 1960's to track ground water in the Twin Cities. Today, measurements gathered by MNgage are used by a wide range of public and private agencies who are interested in rainfall and ground water statistics. Volunteers throughout the state collect daily precipitation amounts in their own backyards, which are sent to the DNR Climatology Office to create weekly and annual precipitation maps.

Precipitation measurements from volunteers are a valuable resource to help track differences in precipitation of local and statewide rain events. Individuals who are interested in weather and the quality of their data are crucial to this program. Volunteering with MNgage is a great opportunity for weather enthusiasts to get involved in collecting data that is used not only by the state, but local agencies and private individuals who rely on precipitation measurements.

If you're interested in volunteering in this program, please contact our office at (763)-689-3271. To learn more: dnr.state.mn.us

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Events

Annual Fall Festival - Irving & John Anderson County Park

Enjoy fun family activities, food, and music

Saturday, September 13: 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
27241 Furman St NE, North Branch, MN 55056
Learn more: Isanti County: 2025 Park Programs and Events

[Register here]

As Above, So Below Fest Returns!

Join Prairie Star Care Farm on **September 27, 2025**, from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm at Larson Hemsgård (6173 County Road 6 NW, Princeton, MN) for an unforgettable day of activities and performances that promise to engage and delight everyone!

Get your tickets today at PrairieStarCareFarm.org

Recent Projects

Isanti County's surface water is getting a boost this year thanks to several completed projects aimed at improving water quality and wildlife habitat. These efforts, made possible by enthusiastic and willing

For questions, reach Todd Kulaf:
Todd.Kulaf@mn.nacdnet.net

Completed Projects (top to bottom) - Paul's Lake, Spectacle Lake, Skogman Lake, Green

landowners, are key to protecting our local lakes for future generations.

Paul's Lake Shoreline Restoration

A private landowner, **Jane Anderson**, partnered with the Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to restore 350 square feet of shoreline on Paul's Lake. This project, funded in part by the Minnesota State Costshare program, will help stabilize soil, filter stormwater, and reduce phosphorus and sediment runoff, keeping the lake healthy for recreation and fishing.

Spectacle Lake Shoreline Restoration

In Wyanett Township, a dedicated landowner, **Pamela Darie**, collaborated with the Isanti SWCD to complete a shoreline restoration. With support from the Rum River Watershed Implementation Fund, this 350-square-foot project will improve water quality by stabilizing shoreline soils and filtering nutrients, while also creating vital wildlife habitat.

Skogman Lake Raingarden and Downspout Tile

Thanks to a partnership with a private landowner, **Jan Hasler**, in Cambridge Township, a new 400-square-foot raingarden and downspout tile was installed near Skogman Lake. This project, funded by the Rum River Watershed Implementation Fund, will capture and filter stormwater, significantly reducing pollutants while increasing flood storage and improving wildlife habitat.

Green Lake Wetland Restoration

A generous landowner, **Del Smith**, in Wyanett Township partnered with the Isanti SWCD to restore a wetland adjacent to Green Lake. This large-scale project, supported by multiple grants, will capture and filter excessive flow from a private ditch, helping to protect the lake's health and provide increased flood storage and wildlife habitat.

Lake)

Advancing Soil Health in Isanti County

The Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is excited to announce a new opportunity for farmers and producers in our area. We have received **$180,000 in federal grant funding** through the Advancing Soil Health in Minnesota Agriculture program to incentivize the adoption of soil health practices. This program, which runs through 2028, is a fantastic resource for improving the long-term productivity of your land while also benefiting our local environment. By adopting soil health practices, you can increase organic matter, reduce erosion, improve water quality, and increase profitability.

How to Participate

The SWCD will provide cost-share assistance for a variety of practices designed to enhance soil health. To be eligible, a practice must be an enhancement of existing management and result in a higher level of conservation than what has been implemented on a field in the past three years. This program prioritizes projects that address a resource concern, are located in a priority area, or are situated near a drinking water supply or surface water.

Eligible Practices:

- **Cover Crops:** Receive a flat rate of **$50 to $60 per acre** per year, depending on the number of species planted.
- **No-Till:** Get **$35 per acre** per year for implementing residue and tillage management.
- **Nutrient Management:** Receive **$20 per acre** per year for implementing nutrient management plans.
- **Prescribed Grazing:** Get **$80 per acre** per year for implementing a prescribed grazing plan.
- **Critical Area Planting:** 75% of cost up to $700/acre
- **Pasture & Hay planting:** 75% of cost up to $400/acre
- **Conservation Cover:** 75% of cost up to $600/acre
- **Filter Strip:** 75% of cost up to $700/acre
- **Forest Stand Improvement:** 75% of cost up to $700/acre
- **Tree and Shrub Establishment:** 75% of cost up to $12 each

Cost-share assistance is also available for other practices, including Critical Area Planting, Pasture & Hay Planting, and Conservation Cover, with up to **75% cost share**.

Interested in learning more? Please contact the Isanti SWCD office to discuss your options and see how you can benefit from this new funding. We are here to help you get started on a path toward better soil health.

New Funding Available to Help Improve Minnesota's Soil Health

These grants are available to individual producers, producer groups, and local governments to purchase or retrofit soil health equipment. Grants provide up to 50% cost-share, with a minimum award of $500 and a maximum award of $45,000. There is $4.36 million available statewide for this round of funding, which comes from the 2025 Minnesota Legislature and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Examples of eligible new or used equipment include, but are not limited to, no-till drills, air seeders, and strip tillage units.

The Request for Proposals and application link can be found at www.mda.state.mn.us/soil-health-grant once the application opens on August 1. **Applications are due August 29, 2025**. Awards will be announced by January 1, 2026.

Meet New Soil Health Mentors!

Need advice on a soil health project? Contact our new mentors who serve Isanti, Chisago, and Washington counties. Find your best match below!

1) Tim Behrends

Areas of Expertise: *No-till, cover crops, perennial plantings*

Contact: 651-437-1693

Tim started farming in 1980 after getting a BSB in Business Ag. He currently farms corn, soy, and rye for seed on 160 acres with his son, Sam, in the southern end of Washington County. He started no-tilling his acres 20 years ago and added cover crops shortly after. Tim made the switch because he was dealing with substantial soil erosion on his hillsides after every big rain. After no-till and cover crops, he noticed much less erosion and larger yields, so he kept going. He chose to be a mentor to help other farmers be more profitable and save soil. Outside of farming, you may find Tim up north on a Boundary Waters Canoe trip with family. He has completed 37 American Birkebeiner ski races.

2) Ryan Lind

Areas of Expertise: *No-till, strip till, vertical till, reduced till, cover crops, adding a small grain, crop rotation beyond corn-soy, nutrient management, pasture & hay plantings, grazing cover crops,*

perennial plantings, precision ag, soil health analysis

Contact: 612-760-0879 (Phone call is best)

Ryan co-owns and operates Ag Strategies, LLC, an independent crop consulting company in east central Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin, specializing in grid soil sampling, VRT precision ag, nutrient management, scouting, and agronomy consulting. Together with Garret Pearson, he also owns and operates Riverside Farms – 450 acres of no-till corn, soybeans, and small grains just southeast of Rush City. Ryan holds a bachelor's degree in Crop & Soils from UW-River Falls and is a Certified Crop Advisor in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Ryan uses soil health practices to help build production on his acres for his generation and the next, and to work towards the long-term goal of growing more with less commercial input. Outside of his work with Ag Strategies and Riverside Farms, he likes to spend time outdoors with his family and serves as a volunteer firefighter for Rush City.

3) Lance Petersen

Areas of Expertise: *Strip till, nutrient management, precision ag*

Contact: 612-532-0069 (Text is best)

Lance grew up on the family farm near Rush City, and now farms 900 acres of corn and soybeans with his dad, Chuck, and cousin, Rick. Lance has 15 years of experience with strip tilling, including modifying and custom building equipment to better meet the needs of farming on varied soils. Lance split-applies nutrients by banding dry in spring, planter-applying liquid fertilizer, and doing an in-season side dress of nitrogen. Lance uses soil health practices to increase profitability and efficiency of time in the cab and to limit off-field detriments to others. He also likes a good challenge and appreciates getting to design, prototype, and build new equipment. He chose to be a mentor after experiencing how tough it can be to find advice at the local level with these practices. When he's not farming, he likes to listen to live music, enjoy a rooftop patio, and river kayak the St. Croix.

4) Jon Schmitt

Areas of Expertise: *No-till, reduced till, cover crops, adding a small grain, crop rotation beyond corn-soy, prescribed grazing, pasture & hay plantings, grazing cover crops, perennial plantings*

Contact: 320-247-2795 (Call or text)

Jon grew up on a 100-cow dairy near Rice, MN. After getting his degree from the University of Minnesota in Agronomy and Dairy Production, he started working in the agronomy sector and is currently with Peterson's North Branch Mill. Jon is a certified crop advisor with experience in a wide range of management systems. He also farms 90 acres just south of Pine City in a corn/soy/rye rotation followed by multispecies cover crop. Jon uses soil health practices to reduce costs with tightening margins and because he believes farming with nature is a lot easier than fighting her. When he's not working with Peterson's or on the farm, Jon enjoys taking his wife and kids out on the lake.

5) Mike Slater

Areas of Expertise: *No-till, strip till, vertical till, cover crops, adding a small grain, crop rotation beyond corn-soy, pasture & hay planting*

Contact: 651-434-1209 or mvslater439@gmail.com

Mike grew up helping his grandparents on their hobby farm. When he got the itch to start farming himself, he began with 15 acres of hay and has expanded to 600 acres of corn, soy, rye, and hay in the Hugo/Scandia area. After getting degrees in Ag Communications & Marketing with an emphasis in Crops & Soils and in Animal Science with an emphasis in Beef Production from the University of Minnesota, he started working as a sales agronomist with Federated Co-op. His acres are predominantly no-till in a corn-corn-soy rotation, with rye and hay rotating in where fit. He started using no-till for timing reasons – needing to cut a pass out of the system to balance on-farm and off-farm work. After being surprised at how well the no-till system worked, particularly during the '22 and '23 droughts, he decided to stick with it. When he's not farming or working with Federated, Mike loves to travel, whether it's just driving around the state crop scouting or heading out of the state or country to see somewhere new.

For questions about the program, contact Ellen Badger Hanson, Ag Outreach Specialist for the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership at 651-401-3330 or Ellen.BadgerHanson@mn.nacdnet.net.

Need to do DIY tree care? Forestry Tool rental is available!

Contact Douglas Page at the Isanti SWCD
at 763-689-3271 or Douglas.Page@mn.nacdnet.net.

Be on the lookout for next year's Tree Sale!

Check our website around the new year to place your order.

Meet our new staff

Our new Natural Resources Program and Outreach Coordinator, Samrah Khan!

I'm Samrah, a specialist in conservation, climate education, and partnerships. I recently served as a Climate Impact AmeriCorps member at the Washington Conservation District, organizing numerous conservation

Meet our Summer Intern and now Temporary Technician, Matt Olson!

My name is Matt Olson, and I am a senior at St. Cloud State University. I am majoring in Environmental Science, with a minor in Geospatial Science. Having lived in Isanti my whole life, I am excited to have the opportunity

projects for all ages.

I've also led an urban forestry project in a high urban heat area in St. Paul, the 100 Trees Initiative. Outside of work, I volunteer at a climate education nonprofit where I help translate climate science materials to increase global access to conservation knowledge. I'm originally from Texas, and now live in Minneapolis, close to the U of M, with my husband and two kitty cats.

You can reach me at skhan@isantiswcd.org.

to see and contribute to conservation work in my area.

In my free time, I enjoy deer hunting, watching and attending rodeos, watching sports (especially hockey), and spending time outdoors. I also enjoy spending time with my family. I played hockey my whole life, and in 2016, I was playing junior hockey in Chicago where I suffered a spinal cord injury, which resulted in me being paralyzed from the shoulders down. Despite my hurdles, I aim to overcome physical limitations to pursue my goals in my education and my future career.

Findings from the SAFL Wakeboat Study

The official wakeboat study by the **University of Minnesota's Saint Anthony Falls Laboratory** found that recreational powerboats can significantly impact lakebeds and water quality through three distinct phenomena: bow/stern pressure waves, transverse waves, and propeller wash.

The study found that these forces can initiate sediment movement, uproot aquatic plants, and stir up sediment into the water column, particularly in shallower waters. Based on their findings, the SAFL recommends that:

1) All powerboats operating in planing or sustained displacement mode stay in depths of **10 feet or greater**

2) Wakeboats in semi-displacement (surfing) mode operate in **20 feet of water or greater**, and

3) All boaters go as **slowly as possible** when traveling in waters less than 10 feet deep.

To access the full report and explore the data, including compelling underwater videos, you can visit the University of Minnesota's Digital Conservancy: A Field Study of Recreational Powerboat Hydrodynamics and their Impacts on the Water Column and Lakebed

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An Engaging new Resource on Watersheds and Stormwater!

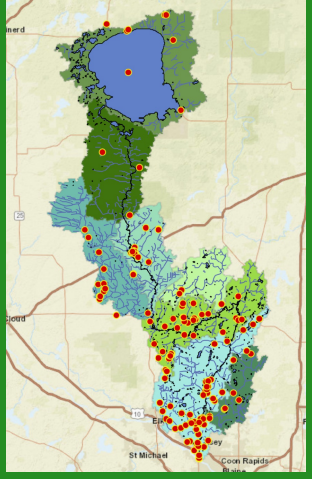
Anoka CD has new animated videos that explain complex concepts about watersheds and stormwater in simple terms using engaging animation. It benefits all ages, from an elementary classroom to a city council chamber. See below:

Our Watershed and Stormwater Connection

Our Stormwater Pond Connection

Rum River Watershed Partnership Project Map

The Rum River Watershed Partnership created a map to showcase all of the conservation projects installed throughout the watershed. The Rum River Watershed covers nearly 80% of Isanti County, excluding the southeastern portion. Significant project funding in Isanti County comes from the Rum River Watershed Partnership, which is supported by a grant from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. With this funding, we've implemented 320 acres of cover crops, completed four shoreline restorations on Blue Lake, restored two wetlands that benefit Green Lake, and hired a full-time shared Land Protection Specialist.



Contact

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