



Scott Soil and Water Conservation District

*"Helping Scott County Citizens Protect and Preserve
Natural Resources since 1941"*

Scott SWCD receives \$2.5 million to restore nature's "kidneys"

The Scott Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was awarded a five-year, \$2.5 million grant to restore wetlands in portions of Scott, Rice and Le Sueur Counties. Wetlands are one of our most precious natural resources. They attenuate runoff that helps reduce downstream flooding, and they provide critical habitat for ducks, song birds and a plethora of other wildlife. One of their more important functions, however, is helping keep sediment, nutrients and other pollutants out of our lakes, rivers and streams. This ability to filter runoff is why wetlands are referred to as "nature's kidneys."

The grant funds will be passed along to landowners willing to restore and permanently protect wetlands that have been drained, filled or otherwise compromised. Typical payments will range from \$5,000 to \$7,000 per acre, plus the majority of construction costs. Construction typically consists of building berms, plugging ditches, blocking drain tile lines and/or planting suitable vegetation.

Scott County has lost more than 70 percent of its wetlands since its early settlement, giving way to cropland and urban development. The value of our agriculture and growth-related industries has brought thousands of jobs and economic prosperity. Draining and filling wetlands, however, comes at a cost. Rain and snowmelt runs off the land at higher volumes and greater speeds. This, in turn, accelerates the erosion of stream banks, ravines (large gullies) and cropland. It also increases the severity and frequency of flooding.

Recent scientific studies by the Scott Watershed Management Organization (WMO) identified the loss of wetlands as one of the top reasons water quality in Sand Creek is not meeting standards. According to the study, returning restorable wetlands to their original function is one of the most cost-effective ways to improve water quality and aquatic habitat in Sand Creek and its tributaries, including Raven and Porter Creeks. In the Spring Lake and Prior Lake drainage area, wetland restoration is considered critical for moderating lake levels and reducing pollutants that negatively impact recreational uses.

The grant was awarded by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS), through its Wetland Restoration and Enhancement Program (WREP). The Scott SWCD was the only WREP grant recipient in Minnesota. Staff is currently working with Minnesota NRCS officials to finish developing program guidelines and details.

Both cropland and non-cropland wetlands are eligible. So, whether you're a farmer considering retiring wet or frequently flooded cropland or a landowner with low areas that seem to have limited wildlife or aesthetic value, this may be a perfect opportunity. The incentive rates for cropland are based on 100% of the local 2a-Tillable land value set by the Tax Assessor's office. Payment is made upon recording of a permanent conservation easement. An additional \$275 to \$500 per acre is being provided to offset the time and inconvenience associated with paperwork and other program enrollment requirements. Please contact the Scott SWCD at (952) 492-5425 to learn more about this program or see if you qualify.