

Wadena County Soil & Water Conservation District

www.wadenaswcd.org | 4 Alfred Street NE, Wadena, MN 56482 | 218-632-4201

2024 Year In Review



WADENA
Soil & Water
Conservation District

Soil and Water Programs

Agriculture

Irrigation Scheduling Program

Our irrigation scheduling program is designed to provide advice and an educated guess to producers on when to turn their irrigator(s) on. A technician conducts weekly field checks to gather the soil moisture status, crop water use, and crop growth stage of each field which is reported back to the producer.

By providing good soil moisture data, farmers are better able to apply and conserve water. This helps protect water quantity as well as water quality by limiting the amount of nitrogen fertilizers that are leached into our groundwater. This information also reminds producers when they need to irrigate so they do not experience unnecessary yield loss due to moisture stress.

This year, the Wadena SWCD helped provide assistance to 29 producers across Wadena, East Otter Tail, and Todd counties in 74 fields of corn, soybeans, edible beans, alfalfa, oats, and wheat. Overall, technical assistance provided for 7,300 irrigated acres across the three counties.



2024 Weather Summary

At the start of the growing season, the Wadena SWCD witnessed large rain events after a rather dry winter. The early moisture was appreciated through it did create some challenging planting conditions. These conditions were steady for the first half of the summer before the rain finally quit. This resulted in a different set of difficulties as mid-to-late summer is a crucial time for crops to receive adequate moisture as they are beginning to reach maturity. Additionally, cover crop establishment became difficult in some cases. Fortunately, producers with irrigation access were able to water their covers, providing a much needed jump start throughout the warmer fall.





Cereal Rye planting in Thomastown Township.

Cover crops are forbs, grasses, or legumes planted for seasonal vegetative cover that can prevent soil erosion, increase soil organic matter, cycle nutrients, suppress weeds, provide livestock forage, and minimize compaction in annual cropping systems.

Cover crops can be an important part of a rotation as some cash crops produce limited soil cover, leaving agricultural fields almost bare until the next cropping season. Bare soil is susceptible to erosion due to a number of weather conditions such as rainfall, snowmelt, or wind.

This year, the Wadena SWCD funded 7 local producers to implement cover crops over 1,012.5 acres in the county. The most common cover crop planted was a single species of either cereal rye or oats for ease of establishment and termination while still preventing erosion. Other common mixes were a cereal grain mixed with either legumes or a brassica to help with nutrient cycling and other soil health benefits.

A vetch, turnip, and oat cover crop mix (left) in Rockwood Township, a pea and cereal rye cover crop mix (middle) in Aldrich Township, and a cereal rye cover crop (right) planting in Wadena Township.



Project Details

Practice:

- Cover Crops

Target Waters:

- Redeye, Wing, and Leaf Rivers

Project Implementation:

- Fall of 2024

Components:

- Winter Cereal Rye
- Oats
- Several species mixes

Benefits:

- Maintain or increase soil health and organic matter
- Increase water quality by utilizing excess soil nutrients
- Manage nutrients
- Improve soil moisture efficiency

Partners:

- Landowner
- Wadena SWCD

Watersheds:

- Redeye

Agricultural Project Highlight—Ag Waste Pit Closures



Ag Waste Pit in Thomastown Township.

The Wadena SWCD has been working with landowners to help close their unused and unwanted manure pits in the county. Runoff and seepage from manure pits can contribute to surface and groundwater pollution.

The process starts with the removal of all manure and liquid in the ag waste pit to be applied on upland areas. All visibly contaminated soils must be removed for pits with earth floors by the landowner while ones with concrete floor or liners can work with the SWCD to dispose of the material. Afterward, the Wadena SWCD verifies these processes are completed and give the approval for the manure pit to be filled in. The landowner must then establish a perennial cover on the site for at least 5 years and notify the county feedlot officer or MPCA that the ag waste pit is permanently closed.

This year, the Wadena SWCD has helped close 6 manure pits. Five were located in the Redeye Watershed and one in the Crow Wing Watershed. The total cost of closing these pits totaled \$104,000 and the Soil and Water covered \$78,000 of it in cost-share.

Project Details

Practice:

- Waste Facility Closure

Target Waters:

- Hay Creek, Wing and Leaf Rivers

Project Implementation:

- 2024

Components:

- Drain pit if full of liquid
- Remove contaminated soils and dispose elsewhere
- Refill pit with material and seed entire work area

Benefits:

- Protect water quality and groundwater resources
- Eliminate human and livestock safety hazards

Partners:

- Landowner
- Wadena SWCD
- USDA—NRCS
- TSA 1 Engineers

Watersheds:

- Redeye and Crow Wing



Far left: Contractor working on removing contaminated soils of a pit in North Germany Township

Left: A completed pit closure in Thomastown Township

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program



The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP), which originated in 2014, is a voluntary process that certifies farming operations utilizing conservation-minded practices to protect water quality throughout the state for a duration of 10 years. Throughout that time, certified producers are deemed compliant with any new water quality rules and maintain priority for technical assistance to implement more practices that promote water quality.

In 2024, the North Central Area MAWQCP Team certified a total of 20 farming operations, including Wadena R.D. Offutt which farms 9,700 acres across four different counties. Currently, Wadena County has 16 MAWQCP certified farming operations.

The MAWQCP Team also assisted 10 area producers with their Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Grant Fund Contracts which involved various conservation practices such as pasture seeding, livestock watering facilities, stream crossings, cover crops, and irrigation water management.

Besides achieving water quality certified status within the MAWQCP, certified producers also have an opportunity to receive up to five endorsements: Climate Smart, Soil Health, Wildlife, Integrated Pest Management, and Irrigation Water Management—a relatively new extension of the program.



These achievements provide additional recognition to those who are going above and beyond to integrate conversation into their farming operations. This year, the irrigation water management endorsement was given to 6 producers in Wadena and East Otter Tail counties for their participation in the Minnesota Irrigator Program (MIP). One of which was Tom Schulz (Wadena County), resulting in Schulz achieving all five types of MAWQCP endorsements.

To learn more about the program, or to begin your farming operation's certification process, please contact our office.



MAWQCP certified producers in Wadena County.

Soil and Water Programs

Forestry

Forest Stewardship Planning Assistance

Are you a forest landowner interested in knowing more about trees or the health of your forest stand?

Our office has a certified plan writer, Anne Oldakowski, who can develop forest management plans to help you actively manage your private forest land in Wadena, Todd, and Otter Tail counties. These 10-year plans help landowners manage their forests for multiple purposes in order to benefit both the landowners' goals and the environment. It is a fee based program depending on the amount of acres, with the current cost being \$9/acre plus an additional \$300 to write the plan. This cost includes not only a plan, but also a walk through of your property with Anne, answers to your forestry questions, and a binder including information on managing your property with practices tied to your property's legacy.

In 2024, Anne created 7 different plans, totaling 857 acres. Two of these plans were written for landowners in Todd County, 2 in Otter Tail County, and 4 in Wadena County.



Anne Oldakowski reviewing a management plan with a Wadena County landowner.

Tree Program

ONLINE TREE STORE

Our Tree Store opens each year on January 1st! See real time availability and pay with a credit card on our online store. Check out our website for more details.



In 2024, nearly 62,000 trees were sold between East Otter Tail and Wadena counties through our tree program. Of those trees, 22,525 of them were planted for landowners in Wadena County. We also sold approximately 280 acres of native grass seed and planted 163 acres of native prairie for 15 landowners. Finally, our drill rental program helped landowners seed over 650 acres of perennial cover.

Equipment Rental—Tree Planter

With funding aid from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), the Wadena SWCD was able to purchase our very own tree planter! This planter will become available for Wadena County residents to rent for the 2025 season and beyond! Rental rates are still being determined.



Outstanding Conservationist



From Left to Right: Savanna Anderson, SWCD Technician, Brad and MaryDee Kempe, and Anne Oldakowski, SWCD Assistant Manager/Forestry Technician

Brad and MaryDee Kempe were chosen to receive our 2024 Outstanding Conservationist Award! Annually, the Wadena SWCD recognizes local cooperators for their contributions for the betterment of our natural resources.

Brad is the third generation to farm their land which was first established by his grandfather in 1946. The Kempes have since integrated conservation practices on their farm with the assistance of the local Wadena Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and SWCD. Some of these practices included conservation crop rotation, irrigation water management, and upgrading their irrigation system to low-pressure sprinklers.

Overall, the Kempes received this honor due to their outstanding stewardship efforts to aid in the enhancement of their farm's soil health, protecting water resources, and displaying their goal of preserving their land for future generations.

Nitrate Testing

Nicole Lundeen, SWCD Watershed Planner and Coordinator, providing nitrate results for a water sample brought in by a local landowner.



The Wadena SWCD conducted three nitrate clinics this summer in Verndale, Sebeka, and Menahga. At these clinics, landowners are welcomed to bring in water samples from their homes to test for nitrates, free of charge. Approximately 62 water samples were tested during the three clinics.

This service is also available to any landowner during our normal business hours.

Joint Commissioner Virtual Tour

The Wadena SWCD hosted an unique virtual tour with our local legislators, the Wadena County Commissioners, and the Soil and Water Conservation District Board in October. The tour consisted of all county programs, services, and funding the Wadena SWCD provides to Wadena County residents.

To take the tour yourself, click the 'about us' tab on our website!



Education and Outreach

Area 8 Tour

Every year, one county in the Area 8 region of Minnesota is chosen to host an area meeting and tour highlighting completed county projects. Area 8 consists of Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake of the Woods, and Wadena SWCDs.

This September, the Wadena SWCD and Board had the honor of showcasing 8 local projects to 40 tour participants including area SWCDs, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) personnel. The tour featured completed easements, a Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) certified producer, our irrigation scheduling program, a tree planting, a forest stewardship plan, and an ag-waste pit closure.



Conservation Days

Each year, the Wadena SWCD hosts Conservation Days for area 5th and 6th graders at Old Wadena Park and Campground. This year, students rotated between seven different stations, learning about Nature, Old Wadena History, Water, Trapping, Forestry, Soils, and Wildlife. Our presenters included office staff, local conservation officers, the National Trappers Association, and NRCS staff, among others. From the two-day event, approximately 300 students across six area schools participated to learn about local natural resources outside the classroom. Thank you to all who make this educational event possible!



Eligible Practices

- Conservation Crop Rotation (328)
- Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till (329) ; Reduced Till (345)
- Cover Crop (340)
- Silvopasture (381)
- Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390)
- Riparian Forest Buffer (391)
- Nutrient Management (590)
- Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)
- Pasture and Hay Planting (512)
- Prescribed Grazing (528)
- Feed Management (592)



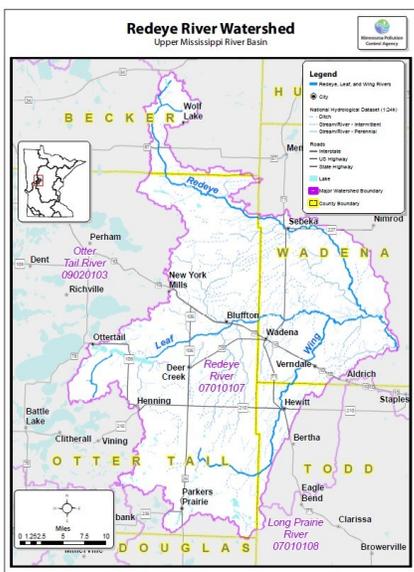
Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture

Wadena SWCD was one of the eight selected in Minnesota to participate in the Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture Pilot Program being led by Virginia Tech University. This pilot program provides incentives to reward farmers and ranchers for adopting climate-smart agricultural practices. The goals of the pilot program are to enhance agriculture productivity, benefit producers, and improve climate resilience.

During the 3-year pilot program \$80 million will be made available to partners in Minnesota, Virginia, Arkansas, and North Dakota. Producers in participating districts may be eligible to receive \$100 per acre or animal unit by voluntarily implementing practices that sequester carbon, improve soil health, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve water quality conservation.

We hosted a meeting at the Central Lakes College campus to promote the program and explain eligibility requirements to local producers prior to the 2024 application period of July 15th through August 16th. In total, we had 23 producers apply and 15 chosen to enroll in the program.

The second application period will open in January of 2025, with a third sign-up set for late spring. If interested, contact our office to learn more.



Redeye River Watershed

The Redeye River One Watershed One Plan is in year four of installing projects to improve water quality. Overall, implementation is moving in the right direction toward our 10-year watershed goals. In 2024, watershed cost-share funds have established:

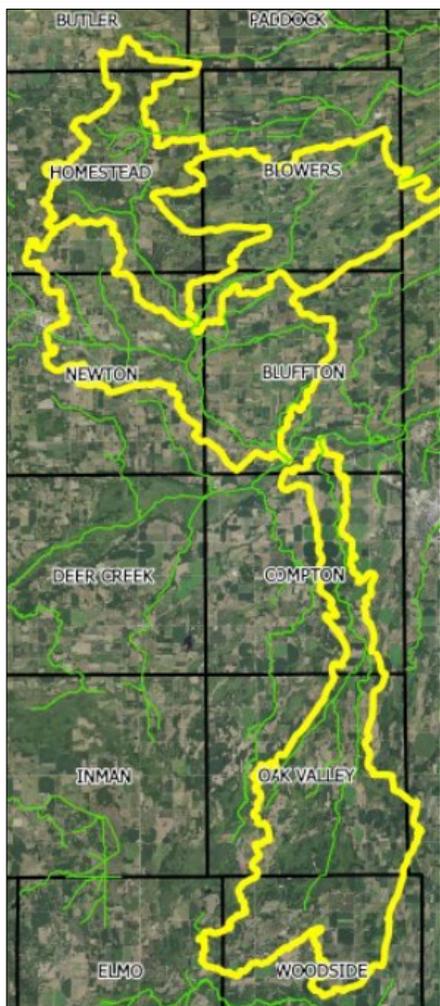
- A heavy use protection area with a watering facility for a grazing system
- 2 forest stewardship plans, totaling 207 acres
- 2 cover crop contracts totaling 480 acres
- 1 irrigation water management plan on 51 acres
- 2 ag waste pit closures
- 1 prescribed grazing plan on 80 acres



These accomplishments were made possible by neighboring Soil and Water Conservation Districts partnering together to provide information to landowners about potential projects in the Redeye River watershed.

For more information on the plan, visit the EOTSWCD webpage and follow the watershed link: <https://www.eotswcd.org/one/> or contact our Watershed Planner, Nicole Lundeen at 218-228-2383.

Bluff/Oak Creek Sub-watershed



The Wadena SWCD currently has funding available to address water resource concerns within the Bluff/Oak Creek Sub-watershed as it is impaired with E.coli bacteria. This subwatershed is located in the Redeye Watershed.

Producers in this sub-watershed are eligible for up to 75% cost-share to install best management practices to help improve water quality. Contracted projects must be maintained for the duration of 3-10 years, depending on the practice, and are reimbursement based—requiring estimates and invoices prior to payments.

This year, cost-share funds have helped install:

- 1 prescribed grazing plan totaling 66 acres
- 2 cover crop contracts totaling 53 acres
- 1 ag waste pit closure

This grant is in cooperation with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and will expire in 2026.

Eligible practices include:

- Prescribed grazing
- Manure Management
- Heavy-Use Exclusion
- Filter strips
- Cover Crops
- Alternative Water Facility
- Waste Facility Closure



New Partnership—Soil Health Specialist

Hello! My name is Alyssa Scheve, the Todd/Wadena/East Otter Tail SWCD's Soil Health Practitioner.

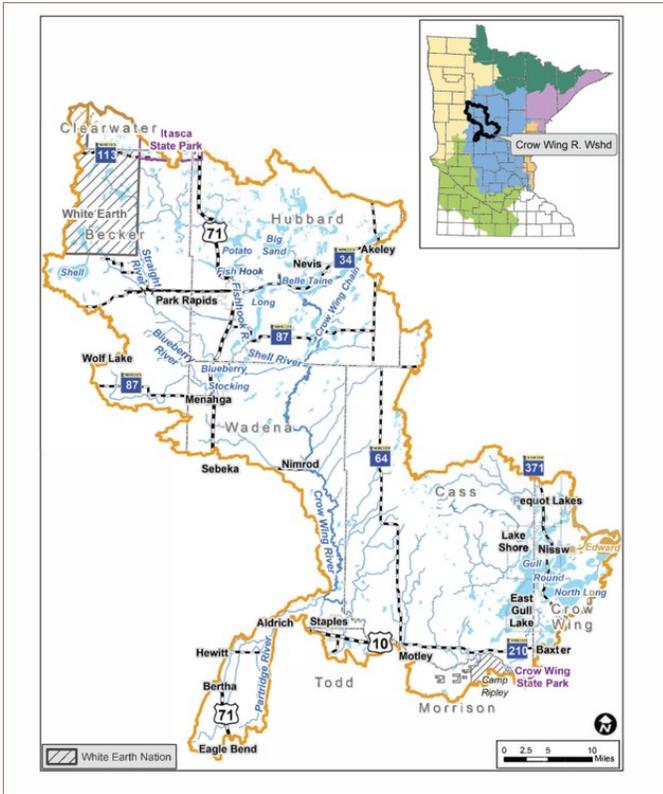
I was raised in southeast North Dakota on a diversified crop and livestock operation consisting of corn, soybeans, edible beans, cattle, and hogs. I graduated from North Dakota State University with a bachelor of science degree in Animal Science, Agriculture Communication, and Extension Education.

I look forward to helping area producers learn more about what happens underfoot to help surface growth become more sustainable. In this position, I can assist landowners with all soil health aspects from in-field tests, cover crops, crop rotations, livestock grazing, and more!

My office is based out of the Todd County USDA Service Center in Long Prairie. My contact information is Alyssa.scheve@co.todd.mn.us, (320) 732-6618 x3 and (320) 874-1812. Please reach out with all your soil health concerns and I look forward to working with you!



Crow Wing River Watershed



After a year of planning, the Crow Wing River One Watershed One Plan will be approved in 2025 by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). Twelve local partners have worked together to develop this management plan between Becker, Cass, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Todd, and Wadena Counties and SWCDs.

Priorities in the plan will address water quality concerns and the overall protection of water resources which is reflected in the plan's vision statement: "The Crow Wing Watershed was a historic transportation route and provided the necessities of life for generations. Today, we blend agriculture, forestry, tourism, and the lake communities to protect our story and preserve resources for future generations."

Funding will be made available to the involved SWCDs in late 2025. Over half (52%) of Wadena County is covered by the watershed.



LCCMR: Watershed & Forest Restoration Project

The Wadena SWCD is a part of a pilot project within the Redeye River Watershed to increase tree plantings and easements. This LCCMR pilot program is in cooperation with the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to provide both technical and financial assistance to private landowners in the Redeye, Long Prairie, and Rum River Watersheds which will end in 2025. The goal of this project is to protect water quality by reforesting open lands on private tracts that were once forested. This is because forests and well-vegetated land serve as natural sponges that both filter and retain stormwater.

In order to be eligible for a cost-shared tree planting in any of the 3 participating watersheds within this program, a landowner must have a current forest stewardship plan and be enrolled in a 20 or 50 year Sustainable Forest Incentive Act Covenant (SFIA) or a conservation easement.

Contact our office if interested in learning more about this program.



Natural Resources Conservation Service

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)



The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program designed to assist producers with promoting agricultural production while addressing natural resource concerns. With EQIP, landowners receive technical and financial assistance to install conservation practices to optimize environmental benefits on their property. In 2024, 16 new contracts were enrolled, treating 1,838 acres across Wadena County.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that helps agriculture and forest producers maintain their existing conservation practices while also adopting additional conservation activities on their land. This year, 7 new contracts were enrolled, treating 5,227 acres throughout the county.

Outreach Highlight—Pasture Walks



Area producers learning about grazing management and infrastructure at pasture walks located in Wadena and Todd Counties.

In partnership with the Crow Wing Forage Basin Council, the Wadena NRCS hosted two pasture walks that showcased grazing infrastructure and management for local producers. One walk was held in May and the other in September, garnering approximately 80 attendees between the two events.

New Employee—Cody Vleck



I am the new Soil Conservationist with the Wadena NRCS. My role is to provide technical assistance and work with producers to implement conservation practices on a variety of crop and forest lands. I am originally from the Brainerd Lakes Area and just graduated last spring from Bemidji State University with an Environmental Studies Degree.

In my free time, I enjoy hunting, camping, and spending time with friends and family.



From left to right: Cody Vleck, Soil Conservationist; Sunnie Fenstermaker, Administrative Support Assistant; Joshua Hanson, District Conservationist Team Leader; and Ivan Reinke, District Conservationist



Aerial photo of two planting areas.

Last year, a landowner stopped in our office with the desire to plant trees on his family’s property. After discussing his goals it was determined that NRCS’s EQIP program was the best fit.

Wadena SWCD and NRCS staff worked together to create a planting design to meet the landowner’s goals while also matching tree species with their respective soil types.

In total, 29,080 red pines and 5,000 white spruce trees were planted this spring across 48.6 acres. The landowner rented a tree planter and hired our tree planting crew to install trees in early May. The landowner also bud capped all the planted pines.

Next year, an additional 1,540 red maples, 425 tamaracks, 425 black spruce, and another 425 white spruces will be installed per the conservation planting plan. Tree tubes will be positioned around the maples to aid in their survival from wildlife munching.

Project Details

Practice:

- Tree & Shrub Establishment

Target Waters:

- Redeye River

Project Implementation:

- 2024
- 2025

Components:

- 29,080 red pine trees
- 5,425 white spruce trees
- 1,540 red maple trees
- 425 tamarack trees
- 425 black spruce trees

Benefits:

- Improve habitat for desired wildlife species
- Control erosion
- Sequester and store carbon

Partners:

- Landowner
- Wadena SWCD
- USDA—NRCS



Watershed:

- Redeye



Far left: Aerial photo of Wadena SWCD tree planting crew installing red pines.

Left: Landowner and his tree planting team installing red pines in another location on the property.

County Programs

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

Inspectors were stationed at Blueberry, Spirit, Stocking, and Lower Twin Lake accesses from May through September to conduct watercraft inspections. Inspections typically take 5-10 minutes, consist of survey questions, and help educate anglers and recreationists on where and how to Clean, Drain, and Dry their water-related equipment. These actions are essential in removing plants and vegetation to help ensure spreading invasives are not transported to other waterbodies within Minnesota. Overall, a total of 1,107 inspections were performed between the 4 public accesses with 4.88% of inspections finding and removing a plant or animal species. A detailed summary report based on survey responses can be found on our website.



County Agriculture Inspector

The Minnesota Noxious Weed Law requires land owners to control all noxious weeds on your property! If you need help with identification or managing a population, contact our office. For more information on Noxious Weeds, please visit the MDA Noxious Weed List webpage.

We offer Pesticide Applicator testing through the Minnesota Department of Agricultural (MDA). To Schedule an Appointment, please call 218-632-4201.



Pictured above is Leafy Spurge (left) and Plumeless Thistle (right)

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

The Wetland Conservation Act is a law enacted in 1991 that strives to protect and restore Minnesota’s wetlands. It regulates draining, filling, and some excavations that take place in wetlands across the state. In 2024, we helped 27 landowners with their work around wetlands.

If you are planning some dirt work and think it may impact a wetland, call our office!

Feedlots

In 2024, we completed our required 7% of Wadena County feedlot inspections. We have also begun to reach out to producers who need to re-register their feedlot prior to the end of 2025. We will be holding a producer registration event in the spring to assist producers with this process. Registration forms, as well as manure test kits, are always available in our office.

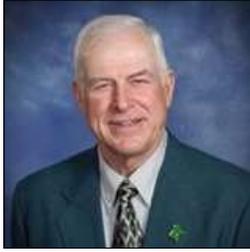
As a reminder, every feedlot in Wadena County is required to be registered by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Landowners must register as a feedlot if they own 50+ animals units or keep their animals in a bare lot, for any portion of the year.



Wadena SWCD Board of Supervisors



Ken Berg
Secretary



Tom Schulz
Vice Chairman



Jerry Kern
Public Relations



Brett Dailey
Treasurer



Bruce Juntunen
Board Chairman



Wadena SWCD Board Meetings are open to the public and held every 3rd Monday of the month at 7:30am. Check out our website for more information.

Soil and Water Staff

District Manager: Darren Newville

Asst Mgr., Forestry and Water Resource Tech:

Anne Oldakowski

District Technician: Alyson Levig

District Technician: Savanna Anderson

Administrative Secretary: Chantal Tougas

Water Planner/Watershed Coordinator: Nicole Lundeen

Our Mission

The Wadena Soil and Water Conservation District seeks to achieve and maintain the highest quality and quantity of natural resources possible through wise stewardship for now and the future within the limits of human and financial means available.



Wadena SWCD
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