



# East Otter Tail

## Soil & Water Conservation District

# 2024 Year In Review



District Supervisors and staff of the East Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District.

## Soil and Water Conservation District of the Year

The East Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was named SWCD of the Year at the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (MASWCD) annual two-day convention held in Bloomington, Minnesota, in early December.

“The purpose of the award is to recognize and inspire leadership within the SWCDs that go above and beyond the base capacity,” Sheila Vanney, assistant director of MASWCD said. “Three critical elements of a successful SWCD conservation delivery are considered for this award, including an engaged board, an effective manager, and a dedicated staff who are knowledgeable about local resources.”

The impressive list of accomplishments the East Otter Tail SWCD achieved to earn SWCD of the Year included their board of supervisors involvement with key stakeholders, such as county commissioners, as well as local legislators; the staff offering a wide range of conservation expertise in groundwater and forest management, shoreline protection, and soil health; and their district manager, Darren Newville, managing two SWCDs and securing funds for other SWCDs to work on irrigation issues with local producers.

Looking back, Newville remembers thinking ‘Wow, they’re talking about us!’ and ‘What am I going to say when we get onstage?’ as their list

of undertakings were being announced to attendees.

“We don’t do our work to get awards. We do it because we are passionate about conserving our soil and water resources,” Newville said. “To me, this award is a recognition by our state association that the work we’re doing is being recognized outside our local communities.

As the new year is on the horizon, the East Otter Tail SWCD plans to continue being locally proactive in assisting landowners and securing funds for conservation projects to protect resources for future generations.

The MASWCD convention provides its attendees opportunities to learn about the latest best management practices and technologies in environmental conservation.



# Agriculture

2024 started off with a rather dry winter but the beginning of the growing season turned wet, with significant rain events. The spring moisture was appreciated through it did create some challenging planting conditions. These moisture conditions held steady for the first half of the summer before the rain abruptly stopped. This resulted in a different set of challenges as mid-to-late summer is a crucial time for crops to receive adequate moisture as they're beginning to reach maturity. Additionally, cover crop establishment was affected by the lack of rain. Fortunately, producers with irrigation access were able to water their cover crops, providing a much needed jump start throughout the warmer fall.



Staff inspecting cover crop progress.

## Cover Crops

Cover crops are forbs, grasses, or legumes grown in rotation between cash crops to improve soil health and water quality. Some cash crops provide 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.

Cover crops are typically planted in the fall after the main crops are harvested and left to grow until the next crop is planted in the spring. Cover crops provide 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.



Mitchell Janson and Peter Hendrickx checking out cover crops planted last fall.

## Irrigation Scheduling

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.

The SWCD worked with 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 was provided for 7,300 irrigated acres.

East Otter Tail SWCD worked with 24 local producers to implement a total of 3,486 acres of cover crops. 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 mixes planted were a cereal grain with either legumes or a brassica to help with nutrient cycling and other soil health benefits.



Bare soil is susceptible to erosion.



# MAWQCP

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.

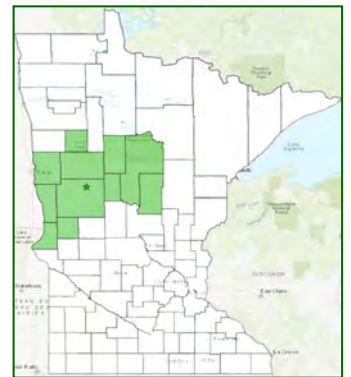


The Misegades family (also our 2023 outstanding conservationists).

In 2024, the North Central Area MAWQCP Team certified a total of 20 farming operations, including Back 9 Ranch, owned by Steve Misegades, who farms 7,000 acres. Currently, East Otter Tail County has 43 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 5 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 5 types of MAWQCP endorsements.

Contact our office to begin your farming operation's certification process or to learn more about the program.

## 2024 Outstanding Conservationist

Each year the East Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District selects a local producer as our Outstanding Conservationist of the year, recognizing their contributions to good conservation and stewardship. The Outstanding Conservationist for each SWCD is also recognized at the annual Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (MASWCD) convention in December.



Wendy and Forrest Briard.

This year, the SWCD selected Forrest and Wendy Briard of Briard's Dairy Farm for the East Otter Tail Outstanding Conservationist award. The Briards operate a 150 head dairy and manage over 2,500 acres of farmland, growing corn, kidney beans, potatoes and alfalfa. Over the years they have worked with the East Otter Tail SWCD and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff to implement conservation practices including cover crops, irrigation water management, tree planting, nutrient management, forestry, rotational grazing, and buffers. The Briards believe in the use of cover crops in conjunction with conservation tillage to promote soil health and prevent erosion on their fields. They have been a Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certified farm since 2017.



# Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture

East Otter Tail SWCD was one of the 8 SWCDs 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.

The first application period ran from July 15 through August 16 in 2024 and we had 89 producers apply. 74 applicants were chosen to enroll.



The list of eligible conservation practices include:

- Conservation Crop Rotation (328)
- Residue and Tillage Management, No Till (329)
- Cover Crop (340)
- Residue and Tillage Mgmt, Reduced Till (345)
- Silvopasture (381)
- Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390)
- Riparian Forest Buffer (391)
- Filter Strip (393)
- Nutrient Management (590)
- Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)
- Irrigation Water Management (449)
- Pasture and Hay Planting (512)

## Forest Stewardship Planning Assistance

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

A 10-year forest management plan helps landowners manage their forests for multiple purposes in order to benefit both the landowners' goals and the environment. Our fee based program depends on the number 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 Oldakowski, our certified plan writer, answers to your forestry questions, and a binder including information on managing your property with practices tied to your property's legacy. You may also be eligible for cost-share assistance.



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.

## County Ag Inspector

As a reminder, it's your responsibility as a landowner to control all noxious weeds on your property! If you need assistance with identification or control options we're here to help.



Purple Loosestrife



Spotted Knapweed

Contact Peter Hendrickx for more information: 218-228-2375





practices while also adopting additional conservation activities on their land. 28 applications were received with 13 contracts funded for a total of \$645,222 covering 4759.7 acres.

**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 financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices to optimize environmental benefits on their property. There were 26 applications with 18 contracts funded for \$824,593 covering 2,148.5 acres last year.

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that helps agriculture and forest producers maintain their existing conservation

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General**

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is managed by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). This voluntary program encourages producers to convert critical area acres to a perennial cover, including native grasses and trees, for an annual payment. Environmental benefits include increasing wildlife habitat, preventing erosion, and protecting water quality. 92 offers were received last year with 42 signed contracts.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven method of applying financial solutions on agricultural land to solve natural resource challenges. Last year 1 contract was signed and funded for \$11,094.

*Both East Otter Tail Soil & Water Conservation District and USDA are an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.*



# Trees and Seeds

## Tree Sales



Our online tree store continues to be a popular option to purchase SWCD trees. In 2024 we sold nearly 62,000 trees between East Otter Tail and Wadena Counties to approximately 450 landowners.



Scan with your phone to visit our tree store & sign up for our mailing list!

## SWCD Custom Services

We sold approximately 280 acres worth of seed to 40 landowners and planted 163 acres of native grasses and forbs for 15 landowners.

We planted 34,375 trees between the two counties as well as installing 18,800 linear feet of fabric and tilling prep for trees.



SWCD staff installing matting and planting trees.





## Equipment Rental



We have a 10 foot no-till Haybuster drill, an ATV Dewdrop no-till drill, and a tree planter available for rent on a first-come first-serve basis. Rates will be posted on our website for the coming year.

## Shoreline

With assistance from the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, 15 shoreline projects were completed on 11 lakes or rivers in Otter Tail County, totaling 22,404 square feet of restored shoreline for 2024. To accomplish this feat, our crew installed 9,330 native grass and flower plugs, 28 coir logs, 22,404 square feet of erosion control fabric, 12.5 pounds of native seed, and 85 feet of riprap to stabilize vulnerable shorelines.



It's all hands on deck, with staff from both the EOT and Wadena offices lending a hand for shoreline projects.

## Pollution Reduction Benefits

2024 shoreline projects prevented 7.86 tons/year of sediment and 9.3 lbs/year of phosphorus from entering our lakes and rivers. That may not sound like a lot, but consider that each pound of phosphorus that enters a body of water could lead to as much as 500 pounds of algae growth.



We were fortunate to host a crew from the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa again last June, who spent a couple weeks working on shoreline projects with our staff. Their assistance allows us to complete many more projects than we'd be able to otherwise.





## Technical Assistance

Are you interested in restoring your shoreline or protecting your lake's water quality? The shoreline specialists at East Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District offer free technical assistance to landowners concerned about natural resources on their properties. They will assess your property for ongoing erosion as it, along with stormwater, carry sediment and phosphorus into lakes which degrades water quality.

After viewing and discussing your shoreline, our specialists will develop a restoration design to stabilize the shore and filter pollutants to protect the lake. These plans promote and utilize natural shorelines of Minnesota native grasses and flowers whose deep roots help anchor the shoreline against waves and ice. Honeybees, butterflies, and other pollinators will also use these native plants for habitat or a food source.

East Otter Tail SWCD may have cost-share available for these projects that qualify within our priority areas, with up to 75% reimbursement on eligible costs.



Contact us for more information about protecting your shore. Scan the code to send a message or call our office.

CONTACT US



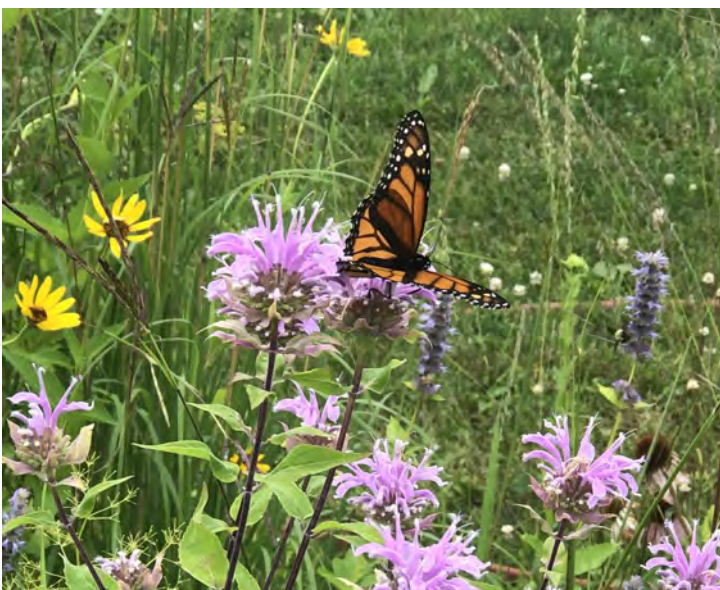
## Native Plant Kits

Through our annual native plant kit sales, we sold 45 kits totaling 1,620 plant plugs for 2024. Thank you for incorporating native plants into your garden!

If you have been thinking about a rain garden or pollinator garden, our 2025 online store has four plant kits and three different native seed mixes available that can be ordered through the end of April.



What do you do with a bare spot left after the removal of some asphalt? When you have staff that are all in on native plants and pollinators, you install native pollinator garden of course! Staff planned and planted a small native garden along Coney St W. at our office in Perham. The progress can seem slow the first couple of years, but those native plants are putting down their deep roots and preparing to do their job of holding the soil and filtering water. Feel free to stop by and check out the progress next spring in year two!







# Nitrate Testing

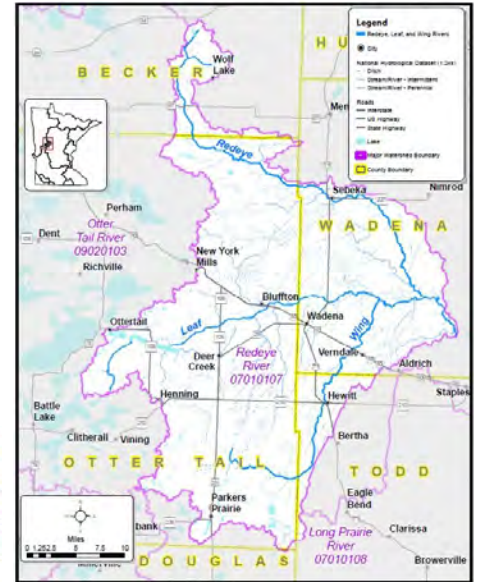
If you have a well as your source of drinking water, it's important to have your water tested regularly. We held three free clinics in 2024 where we tested a total of 171 water samples for nitrate. Water samples may also be brought to our office any time for testing.

For testing for other contaminants, such as arsenic, lead, or bacteria, etc., please visit the MN Dept of Health website to find a list of certified testing labs.

## 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.

## LCCMR: Watershed & Forest Restoration Project

The East Otter Tail 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.





# Bluff & Oak Creek Sub-watershed

The East Otter Tail 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. Producers may be 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:

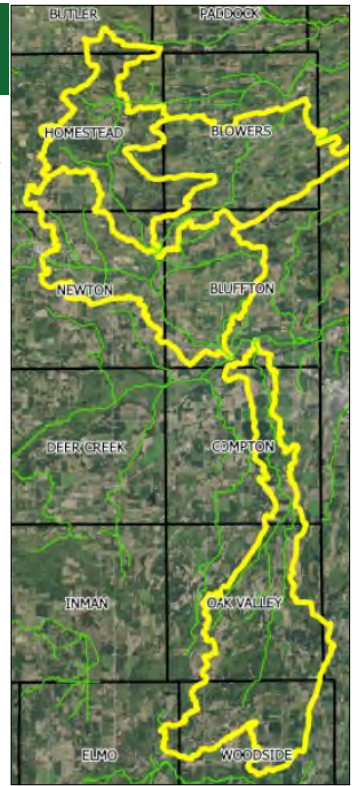
- 1 prescribed grazing plan totaling 66 acres
- 2 cover crop contracts totaling 53 acres
- 1 ag waste pit closure

*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

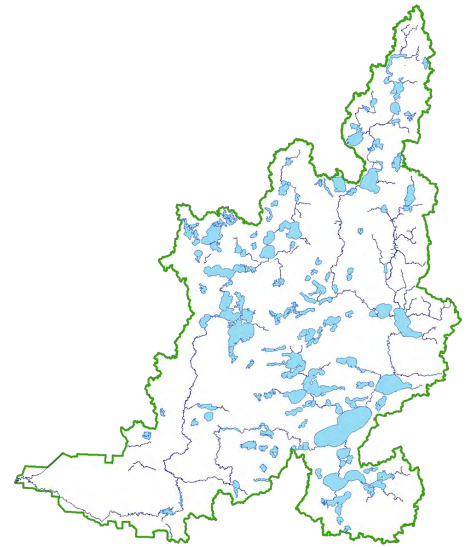


# Otter Tail River Watershed



The Otter Tail River One Watershed One Plan is in the second year of implementation. We and our partners have been installing projects to improve water quality and continue to work toward our 10-year watershed goals. In 2024, watershed cost-share funds have been used by East Otter Tail SWCD to provide for:

- 2 Ag Waste Pit Closures
- 2 Forest Stewardship Plans total of 248 acres
- 1 Tree and Shrub Establishment Practice on 9 acres
- 1 Prescribed Grazing on 10 acres
- 7 Cover Crop Contracts total of 665 acres
- 6 Irrigation Water Management Plans total 1,182 acres
- 1 Shoreline Protection Plan



Overall, 55 projects were completed by the 5 partner organizations, who have been working together to provide information to landowners about potential projects in the watershed. For more information on the plan, visit the EOT SWCD webpage and follow the watershed link: <https://www.eotswcd.org/one/> or contact our Watershed Planner, Nicole Lundeen at 218-228-2383.





# Education & Outreach

We host or assist with a number of education and outreach events each year. From small groups of producers/landowners to local groups, and the schools, our staff is out promoting conservation.



**Café Talks:** Staff held several café chats at different locations last year. The goal being to reach out to our area producers to inform them about available programs and funding. We also wanted to hear from them about their goals, concerns, and the challenges they are facing.



**Ag In The Classroom:** We held Ag in the Classroom in both Perham and New York Mills schools in 2024. Our great volunteer presenters represented local livestock, dairy, and crop farms, veterinary medicine, the NRCS, U of M Extension, and the FFA clubs. We had over 250 students participate this year.

**Conservation Days:** Our 2024 Conservation Days event was held at the DNR's Walker Lake Fish Hatchery. Our partnerships with the West Otter Tail SWCD, the DNR, NRCS, Otter Tail County, and U of M Extension always make this event a big success! We had 539 students from 9 schools from across Otter Tail county who learned about rivers, forestry, fish, recycling, water quality, and soils.



**Breakfast on the Farm** is one of our favorite events of the year. Last year's event was hosted by Mike and Sandy Dombeck. 1196 people signed the guestbook and enjoyed breakfast and the good weather. The SWCD pitches in to help the planning committee with everything from setup to serving pancakes and we also have the opportunity to educate about what we do.



# Staff Updates



Marcie Peeters joined us in 2024 as our Riparian Conservation Planner. Marcie has been busy assisting with our shoreland program and is also working with the Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture, state buffer law, the Wetland Conservation Act, and outreach.

Marcie grew up in a small farming community in northeast Otter Tail County and graduated from the University of Minnesota Duluth in 2021 with a B.S. in Environmental Sciences. Her youth spent in the woods, gardens, fields, and waters shaped a passion for protecting our natural resources. She enjoys camping, reading, tending to plants, and other simple joys in life. Marcie is happy to be serving her home community.

**Contact Marcie:**

marcie.peeters@eot.mnswcd.org  
218-228-2381



Peter Hendrickx also joined us in 2024 as our new Agricultural Conservation Planner. Peter is working with our ag programs including irrigation scheduling, the Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture, and the county ag inspector program.

Peter graduated from the University of Minnesota Crookston with a degree in Agricultural Education and taught Agriculture for four years before joining the SWCD. In his free time he enjoys doing anything outdoors, mainly hiking, camping, and golfing and a life goal is to visit all of the national parks.

**Contact Peter:**

peter.hendrickx@eot.mnswcd.org  
218-228-2375



East Otter Tail SWCD entered into a partnership with Todd and Wadena SWCDs in 2024 for a shared Soil Health Practitioner position. Alyssa Scheve, based out of the Todd County USDA Service Center in Long Prairie, can assist landowners with all soil health aspects from in-field tests, cover crops, crop rotations, livestock grazing, and more.

A graduate of North Dakota State University with a bachelor of science degree in Animal Science, Agriculture Communication, and Extension Education, Alyssa was raised in southeast North Dakota on a diversified crop and livestock operation consisting of corn, soybeans, edible beans, cattle, and hogs. Alyssa looks forward to helping area producers learn more about what happens underfoot to help surface growth become more sustainable. Please reach out with all your soil health concerns!

**Contact Alyssa:**

Alyssa.scheve@co.todd.mn.us  
320-732-6618 x3  
320-874-1812

## Our Staff:

District Manager: Darren Newville

Asst Manager/Forestry: Anne Oldakowski

Riparian Conservation Specialist: Pete Guck

Farm Bill Technician: Tanner Schmitz

Administrative Secretary: Chantal Tougas

Agricultural Conservation Specialist: Mitchell Janson

Area Certification Specialist: Jim Lahn

Water Planner/Watershed Coordinator: Nicole Lundeen

Administrative/ Ed & Outreach Assistant: Kristi Rorah

Riparian Conservation Planner: Marcie Peeters

Agricultural Conservation Planner: Peter Hendrickx



## 2024 EOT SWCD Budget Summary

### Income

County Revenue	\$226,483.37
NRBG	\$42,333.02
State Revenue	\$2,568,968.73
Federal Revenue	\$37,200.00
Other Government Income	\$57,264.80
Charges for Services	\$617,689.49
Miscellaneous Income	\$51,782.84
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$3,601,722.25</b>

### Expense

County Expenses	\$497.58
Project Expenditures (State)	\$1,456,192.74
Payroll Expenses	\$1,196,048.78
District Operations Expense	\$88,878.83
District Project Expenditures	\$150,698.23
Building Expense-Bldg Acct Only	\$32,374.86
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$2,924,691.02</b>

*To be verified by Audit.*

## SWCD Supervisors



Bruce Albright  
District 1



Wayne Enger  
District 2



Lyle Dittmann  
District 3



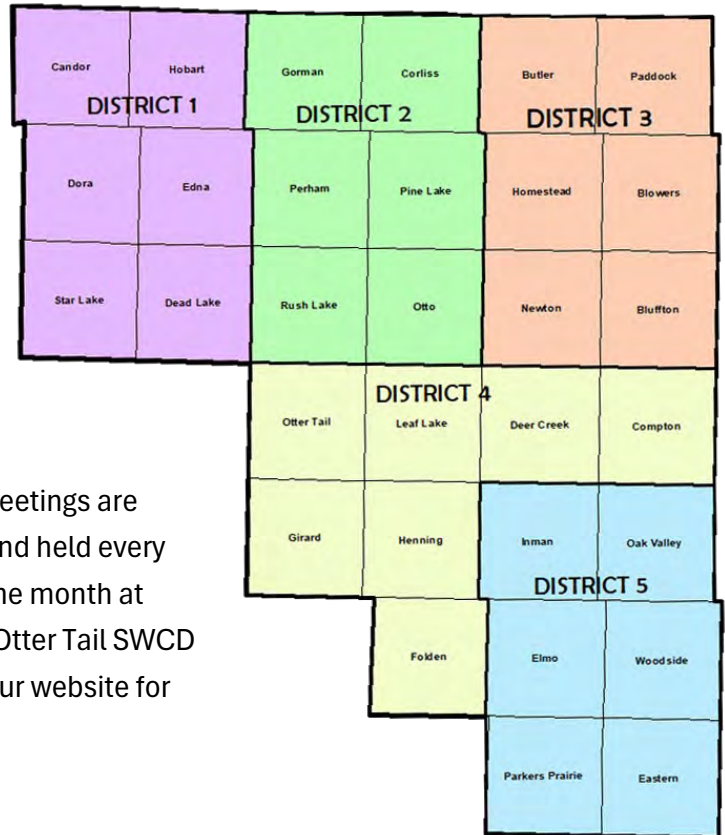
Terry Greenwaldt  
District 4



Steve Inwards  
District 5

EOT SWCD Board Meetings are open to the public and held every 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:30am at the East Otter Tail SWCD office. Please visit our website for more information.

### East Otter Tail SWCD Nomination Districts



## Our Mission

It shall be the mission of the Soil and Water Conservation District to conserve and protect the soil and water resources that were placed into our trust. Our quality of life and our environment depends on the partnership between our Board of Supervisors, its employees, and a willingness of land users to commit to good land use practices and management skills.



# East Otter Tail

## Soil & Water Conservation District

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[www.eotswcd.org](http://www.eotswcd.org)



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