



East Otter Tail

Soil & Water Conservation District

**2025
Year In Review**

SWCD Programs

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



Mitchell Janson (R) checks cover crop with landowner.



Mitchell Janson visiting with landowner.

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.

East Otter Tail SWCD worked with 30 local producers to implement a total of 6,068 acres of cover crops, with 2,673 acres funded from the soil health RCPP grant and 3,395 acres funded from local SWCD grants.

Reduced Tillage

East Otter Tail also works with producers to implement conservation tillage practices. Reduced tillage limits soil disturbance to preserve structure, reduce erosion, improve water infiltration and retention, and increase soil organic matter. We had three contracts for strip-till on 266 acres and three contracts for no-till on 267 acres.

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 provided technical assistance to 27 producers across Wadena, East Otter Tail, and Todd counties in 61 fields of corn, soybeans, edible beans, alfalfa, oats, and wheat.

2025 was one of the better growing seasons we have had in recent years. Much of our work area received consistent and timely rain at important stages for the crops. That moisture carried into early fall as producers started planting cover crops where once again, we had a longer, warmer fall which paired well with the moisture, and we saw great growth in most of the cover crops.



Peter Hendrickx checks precipitation and soil moisture for irrigation scheduling.

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.



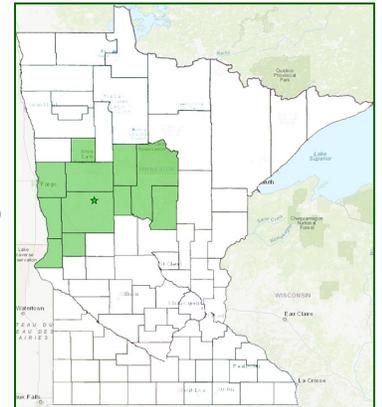
The Hockett family.

In 2025 another 20 farming operations were certified by the North Central Area MAWQCP team, including the farming operations of Tim Hockett and Alan Westad of East Otter Tail County. Currently, East Otter Tail County has 45 MAWQCP certified farming operations. Three producers in the North Central Area were also recertified for MAWQCP for an additional 10 years.

The MAWQCP team also assisted eight 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 conservation into their farming operations. This year, the irrigation water management endorsement was given to 2 producers with 6 additional producers earning various other endorsements. Contact our office to begin your farming operation’s certification process or to learn more about the program.



2025 Outstanding Conservationist



Alan Westad (L) and Jim Lahn, MAWQCP Area Certification Specialist for EOT SWCD.

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.

This year, the SWCD selected Alan Westad for the East Otter Tail Outstanding Conservationist award. Alan Westad’s farm in rural Parkers Prairie is the embodiment of the family farm. Upon retirement from his career in the Army, Alan returned to raise cattle on the 320 acre farm. Alan was recognized for his commitment to land stewardship and improving his land, utilizing rotational grazing for his pastureland and crop rotation and cover crops on his cropland to protect and improve soil health. Alan’s farm became a Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certified earlier in 2025.

SWCD Programs

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 \$10/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 2025, Anne created 13 different plans, totaling 1,400 acres. These plans were written for landowners in Todd, Otter Tail, and Wadena counties.

SWCD Custom Services



Tanner Schmitz tilling a site for tree planting.



Anne Oldakowski and intern Sam Kopveiler on the tree planter.



Marcie Peeters installing fabric over trees.



Custom seeding with the Haybuster no-till drill.

We planted 15,200 trees between East Otter Tail and Wadena counties for 13 landowners. We also offer fabric installation for tree plantings and roto-tilling for tree planting site prep and smaller pollinator sites.

We sold approximately 85 acres worth of seed to 17 landowners for conservation plantings. We planted approximately 62 acres of native grasses and forbs for seven landowners in East Otter Tail and Wadena counties through our custom seeding program.

Contact Tanner Schmitz at 218-228-2371 for more information on our custom services.

Equipment Rental



We have a 10 foot no-till Haybuster drill, an ATV Dew Drop 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.

Last year, the Haybuster drill was rented by 50 landowners, the Dew Drop was rented by 9 landowners, and tree planters were rented by 12 landowners.

Contact us for more information about the rental equipment and to schedule.



Tree, Plant, and Seed Sales

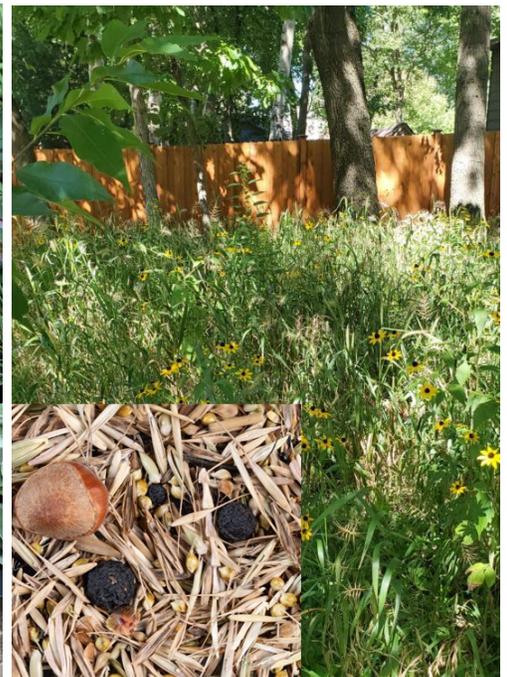
We expanded our online store to include more plant kit options and added native seed mix packets last year. In 2025 we sold 56,675 trees between East Otter Tail and Wadena Counties to approximately 530 landowners.

A total of 37 plant kits (36 plants/kit) and 40 packets of native seed mix were sold in 2025.

More plant kit and seed options will be available in 2026, as well as a limited number of rain barrels.



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



Shoreline

With assistance from the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa and Wadena and West Otter Tail SWCD staff, 14 shoreline projects were completed on 12 lakes or rivers in Otter Tail County, totaling 24,800 square feet of restored shoreline for 2025. To accomplish this feat, our crew installed 8,400 native grass and flower plugs, 25 coir logs, 19,800 square feet of erosion control fabric, and 15 pounds of native seed to stabilize vulnerable shorelines.

Each year the SWCD applies to host a crew from the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, an organization that



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



Our summer interns, staff, and Conservation Corps crew installed 14 shoreline projects in 2025.

employs youth and young adults for seasonal jobs in conservation. We were again fortunate in 2025 to have a crew spend two weeks working on shoreline projects with our staff. Their assistance allows us to complete many more projects than we'd be able to otherwise. To find out more about the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, visit www.conservationcorps.org.



Pollution Reduction Benefits

Native plantings prevent shoreline pollution by acting as a natural buffer that filters runoff, absorbs excess nutrients (like phosphorus), and stabilizes soil with deep roots to prevent erosion. These plants trap sediment, fertilizers, and pesticides before they reach the water, reducing algae blooms and improving overall water quality.

2025 shoreline projects prevented 8.45 tons/year of sediment and 9.19 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.



Algae bloom on Big Pine Lake.

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.



Native Plant Kits

Through our annual native plant kits sales, we sold 37 kits totaling 1,332 plant plugs. Thank you for incorporating native plants into your gardens!

If you have been thinking about a rain garden or pollinator garden, our 2026 online store has eleven plant kits and nine different seed mixes available that can be ordered through the end of April.



Update on our native garden along Coney St W. at our office in Perham: with diligent care, our little garden is doing well and was providing food and habitat for pollinators throughout the summer. Drive by and check out the progress next spring! If you'd like more information on creating your own pollinator garden, feel free to stop in and visit us. You can also check out <https://bluethumb.org/> for ideas and resources.





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 43 applications received in 2025 with 17 contracts funded for \$3.3 million obligated, covering 4,300 acres in Otter Tail 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. There were 12 applications received with seven contracts funded for a total of \$618,000 obligated and covering 4,300 acres.

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. A total of 64 contracts were approved in 2025 covering approximately 950 acres.

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.



Perham NRCS field office staff: Olivia Schmitz, Troy Baumgard, and Lawrence Mettler (now Detroit Lakes office).

County Ag Inspector

Enforcement of the Minnesota noxious weed law is the responsibility of county and municipal governments. The County Ag Inspector position was established to provide technical support and supervision in the enforcement of this law in each county. It's important to remember that the law requires landowners to control all noxious weeds on their property! If you need assistance with identification or control options we're here to help.

Contact Peter Hendrickx at 218-228-2378 for more information.



Wild Parsnip



Spotted Knapweed



Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture

East Otter Tail SWCD was one of the 8 SWCDs selected in Minnesota in 2024 to participate in the Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture Pilot Program being led by Virginia Tech University. This pilot program provided incentives to reward farmers and ranchers for adopting climate-smart agricultural practices. The goals of the pilot program were to enhance agriculture productivity, benefit producers, and improve climate resilience. Enrolled participants will 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.

Over all three sign up periods we worked with 109 local producers to implement conservation practices on 17,126.6 acres in East Otter Tail county. Producers chose a variety of practices including cover crops, reduced tillage, no till, prescribed grazing, pasture and hay planting, and nutrient management. Thank you to all who participated and were patient as we worked through the program's hiccups.



A planned grazing system is an orderly sequence of grazing and resting pastures, leading to improved grass conditions, which increase livestock production, improves wildlife habitat, reduces soil erosion, and conserves water.



Conservation tillage, strip till/no till, leaves crop residue in the fields to help keep the soil covered and improve soil health over time.



Tanner Schmitz recording a culvert elevation.

Culvert Inventory

Over the past two years, staff from the East Otter Tail and Wadena Soil & Water Conservation Districts have completed a physical inventory of culverts located along public roads within the Red Eye River Watershed. This project was supported through funding from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and fulfills a priority action identified in the Red Eye Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.

For this project, SWCD staff drove and surveyed roads throughout the watershed using GPS equipment and digital mapping tools. At each culvert, staff recorded GPS coordinates, invert elevations, culvert size and type, and the general condition. This work was done to support local road authorities in planning maintenance, identifying undersized or failing structures, and coordinating replacement needs across jurisdictions.

Using this information, a web-based map was developed to share the results of the inventory with townships and other road authorities. We do want to note that there are likely additional culverts that were not located due to being buried, obscured by vegetation, or positioned in less visible areas. The map can be viewed using the following link: bit.ly/culvert-map

Redeye River Watershed

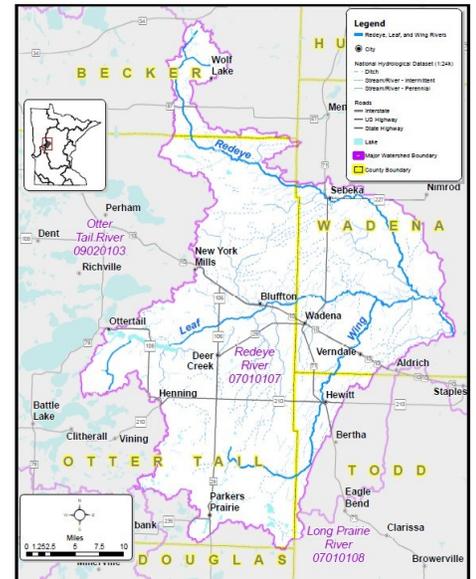
The Redeye River 1W1P is on year five of implementing projects on the ground to improve water quality in the watershed. In 2025, the Redeye watershed implementation team went through the Board of Water and Soil Resource's (BWSR) Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) which assessed the performance of local units of government responsible for the conservation of water and related land resources. These assessments occur when Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP) has reached the 5-year plan evaluation checkpoint. The Redeye Watershed final PRAP report is located on our website.

2025 East Otter Tail SWCD Projects:

- 1 forest stewardship plan for 80 acres
- 1 abandoned well sealed
- 4 irrigation water management (Irrigation Scheduling) contracts on a total of 1,526 acres
- 9 cover crop contracts on a total of 1,373 acres
- 1 critical area (shoreline) planting on West Leaf Lake
- 1 ag waste pit closure
- 1 heavy use protection area on 283 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 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.

In 2025, cost-share funds have helped install:

- One heavy use protection area for 283 acres

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



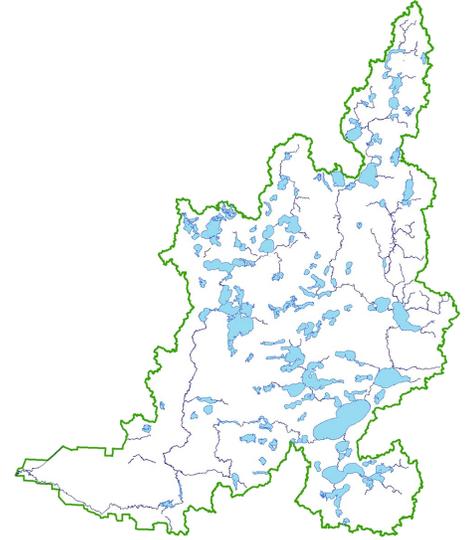
Otter Tail River Watershed

The Otter Tail River 1W1P is on year three of implementing projects on the ground to improve water quality in the watershed. We and our partners have been installing projects to improve water quality and continue to work toward our 10-year watershed goals. In 2025, watershed cost-share funds have been used by East Otter Tail SWCD to provide for:



- 4 Forest Stewardship Plans for 774 acres
- 1 not till contract on 120 acres
- 5 Cover Crop Contracts total of 740.5 acres
- 5 shoreline plantings: 1 on Rose Lake, 2 on Paul Lake, 1 on Big Pine Lake, and 1 on Rush Lake
- 1 grade stabilization project on the Otter Tail river
- 2 Ag Waste Pit Closures

Overall, 55 projects were completed by five 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.



Summer Internships

The SWCD has been able to provide summer internships to post-secondary students interested in conservation for the past several years. Interns get a hands on experience assisting staff in a variety of areas. If you know a student who may be interested in an internship, have them check our website for future positions!

This year we hired Sam Kopveiler as our 2025 summer intern. Sam assisted staff with shoreline restorations, irrigation scheduling routes, culvert inventorying, tree planting, and numerous other day-to-day responsibilities. Thank you Sam for all your hard work this year!



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.

Ag In The Classroom

Ag in the Classroom is held every year in New York Mills Elementary and every other year in Perham Elementary. Our great volunteer presenters represented local livestock, dairy, and crop farms, NRCS, FFA and U of M Extension. We had approximately 75 students participate this year in New York Mills.



Conservation Days

Our 2026 Conservation Days event was again 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 474 students from nine schools from across Otter Tail county who learned about rivers, forestry, fish, recycling, water quality, and soils.



Water Testing



Interns Sam and Connor (Wadena SWCD) testing a water sample for a well owner.

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 Perham, Ottertail, and Parkers Prairie in 2025 as well as our annual Perham Middle School nitrate testing/presentation for the 6th graders. We tested a total of 171 water samples for nitrate at our community clinics and Water samples may also be



Chantal Tougas and Nicole Lundeen testing water samples brought by students.

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.

Soil Health Field Day

This summer, the East Otter Tail and Wadena SWCDs hosted a field day for local farmers called The Future of Tillage: A Strip Till Event. This field day was a collaboration between both SWCD districts, as well as Alyssa Scheve, the shared soil health specialist with EOT, Todd, and Wadena Counties. The Minnesota Soil Health Coalition and Anna Cates from UMN Extension were also present teach during the event. The 20 participants at this event learned about the benefits of roots for building and maintaining soil health as well as soil aggregate stability testing. They also heard from farmers actively practicing strip till and observed a live demonstration on how to plant into strip till. This field day sparked great discussion throughout, with farmers asking questions and learning from each other to further their knowledge on strip till practices and learn how to adapt tillage machinery for this purpose.



From this field day, 44% of participants said they were moderately or very likely to try out strip till in their operation, and several participants noted that this was "very informative" and a "very good event."



Education & Outreach

Pollinator & Pints

Our team hosted a new educational event titled Pollinators & Pints at the Continental Divide Brew Pub in New York Mills on Saturday, June 21st during the 2025 National Pollinator Week. The gathering highlighted a Pollinator Pocket-Garden Design Workshop inside the New York Mills Regional Cultural Center where attendees learned about native plants that can be curated into visually appealing gardens. These native gardens double as essential pollinator habitat, providing larval host sites and high-quality nutrients to native pollinators.



Peter Hendrickx at the East Otter Tail SWCD table.

On the patio, the Roots & Wings Forest School provided a pollinator potion craft for children to mix imaginative ingredients with native wildflower seeds. Inside the Brew Pub, Bucks Mill Brewing Buzz Lightbeer was on tap, made with locally sourced honey. Pollinator themed trivia added to attendees' amazement and

newfound knowledge of these small yet vital organisms. The event wrapped up with door prizes of items like a rain barrel, flowering tree seedlings, potted native wildflowers, and more.

We were pleased with the turnout and fun. Stay tuned for details on our second annual Pollinators & Pints event!



Olivia Olson (Extension) and Marcie Peeters presenting on native plant/rain garden design.



Breakfast on the Farm

Breakfast on the Farm is one of our favorite events of the year. The 2025 event was hosted by Palubiki Farms. Approximately 1100 people came out to enjoy breakfast and the activities. The SWCD staff pitches in to help the planning committee with everything from setup to serving pancakes and we also have the opportunity to educate the community about what we do.





East Otter Tail and Wadena SWCD staff: (Front) Anne Oldakowski, Alyson Levig, Nicole Lundeen, (Middle) Kristi Rorah, Chantal Tougas, Olivia Olson (Extension), Savanna Anderson, Darren Newville, (Back) Marcie Peeters, Jim Lahn, Tanner Schmitz, Peter Hendrickx, Pete Guck, and Mitchell Janson.

Staff Contacts:

District Manager: Darren Newville
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Asst Manager/Forestry: Anne Oldakowski
Anne.Oldakowski@wadena.mnswcd.org

Riparian Conservation Specialist: Pete Guck
Pete.Guck@eot.mnswcd.org

Farm Bill Technician: Tanner Schmitz
Tanner.Schmitz@eot.mnswcd.org

Administrative Secretary: Chantal Tougas
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Agricultural Conservation Specialist: Mitchell Janson
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Area Certification Specialist: Jim Lahn
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Water Planner/Watershed Coordinator: Nicole Lundeen
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Administrative/ Ed & Outreach Assistant: Kristi Rorah
Kristi.Rorah@eot.mnswcd.org

Agricultural Conservation Planner: Peter Hendrickx
Peter.Hendrickx@eot.mnswcd.org

2025 EOT SWCD Budget Summary

Income

County Revenue	\$232,400.00
NRBG	\$73,349.00
State Revenue	\$2,089,552.00
Federal Revenue	\$0
Other Government Income	\$52,956.00
Charges for Services	\$595,355.00
Miscellaneous Income	\$144,737.00
Total Income	\$3,188,349.00

Expense

County Expenses	\$490.00
Project Expenditures (State)	\$1,239,240.00
Payroll Expenses	\$1,275,996.00
District Operations Expense	\$224,171.00
District Project Expenditures	\$159,198.00
Building Expense-Bldg Acct Only	\$37,594.00
Total Expense	\$2,936,689.00

To be verified by Audit.

SWCD Supervisors



Bruce Albright
District 1



Wayne Enger
District 2



Lyle Dittmann
District 3



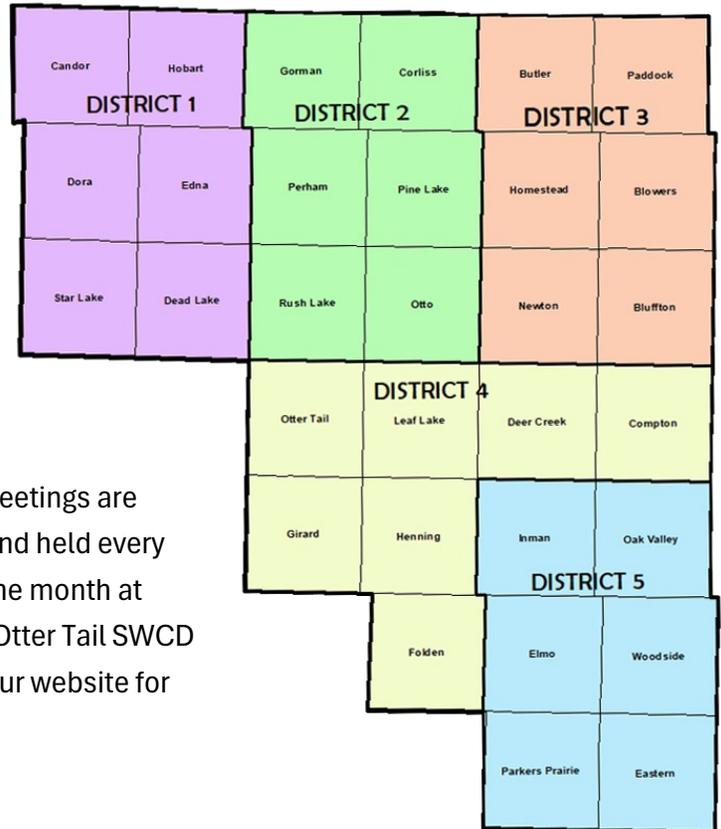
Terry Greenwaldt
District 4



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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