



Wright SWCD ditch work tackles water-quality, ag concerns: ‘They’re not mutually exclusive’

July 2017 Snapshot

Joint Ditch 15 wasn’t draining as efficiently as it once did.

Because JD 15 is the headwater of Cokato Lake, Sucker Creek and – ultimately – the North Fork Crow River, the effects rippled well beyond landowners within the ditch system. The North Fork Crow River feeds into the Mississippi River, which supplies drinking water to about 1 million Twin Citians. Those resources are impaired due to sediment and excess nutrients. A significant source of the impairments: sedimentation and erosion throughout the ditch system.



Andrew Grean, wetland specialist with Wright County SWCD, surveys damage in 2015 along Joint Ditch 15 about five miles south of Cokato. A severe example of erosion, an estimated 33 tons of sediment has been lost from the site over the years. Photo Credit: Wright County SWCD

“The Wright SWCD acted as the ditch inspector for a few years. We were aware of issues on that ditch system specifically related to erosion. We knew that producers were being affected by erosion that was occurring in that ditch system. We were also aware of water quality issues downstream,” said Andrew Grean, Wright County SWCD wetland specialist.

“Any time we find an opportunity where we can address two issues at once – especially in terms of the agricultural community and water quality – that jumps to the top of our list,” Grean said. The Wright County Soil & Water Conservation District wanted to find solutions. SWCD staff determined the effects on local landowners and downstream users was enough to make the resource a higher priority.

Two state grants helped Wright County SWCD succeed. The first, a \$7,200 Soil Erosion and Drainage Law Compliance Program (SEDLCP) grant, allowed it to inventory the JD 15 system for side-inlet locations, and document the status of vegetated buffers (before the State Buffer Law was established). An implementation list was prioritized based on the severity of the erosion.

Awarded in Fiscal Year 2013, the grant put Clean Water Fund dollars to work. The SWCD contributed an \$1,800 in-kind match.



The inventory documented 36 sites suitable for side-inlet control structures. A second grant, a \$139,700 Multipurpose Drainage Management (MDM) grant, has identified specific on-the-ground projects to implement. Awarded in Fiscal Year 2016, it uses Clean Water Fund dollars. Matching funds totaled \$34,925 – including \$20,955 in federal dollars, the rest from landowners.

Results of the JD 15 inventory were presented to landowners to promote voluntary adoption of buffers and best-management practices.

Implementation of best-management practices along JD 15 and within its watershed will reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients transported downstream. It'll reduce the rate at which water enters JD 15.

SWCD staff has been working with landowners to apply for federal funds. To date, landowners have signed up for about a dozen practices, including water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization structures and grassed waterways.

“A lot of times, drainage of farmland is assumed to be bad for water quality. They're not mutually exclusive. Having drainage and water quality projects, they can work together,” Grean said.

With about \$2,500 in remaining SEDLCP grant funds, Wright County SWCD went on to inventory the County Ditch 10 system. That project is nearly complete.

The SWCD has partnered with the Wright County Drainage Authority, leveraging local funds – \$20,000 from the SWCD and \$20,000 from Wright County – to contract with an engineering firm to complete a larger-scale study of the CD 10 system. That study will identify projects to improve drainage and water quality.

“It's really led to more projects and more collaboration between us and the (Wright County Drainage Authority) as well,” Grean said.

This program is a prime example of Wright County SWCD prioritizing a resource concern that addresses local needs. The SWCD has demonstrated success by partnering and leveraging money through state and federal funding streams.

This initiative builds upon Wright County SWCD projects to stabilize gullies within the North Fork Crow River watershed that date to 2013. Those projects were largely funded by three Clean Water Fund grants.

Overview of County Ditch 10 Side Inlet and Buffer Inventory
Wright County

