

BWSR Board tours Pomme de Terre projects



Collaboration took center stage on the annual tour, which featured locally led water-quality and soil-health efforts throughout a watershed that includes parts of six west-central Minnesota counties



The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) 2019 Board tour showcased projects throughout the Pomme de Terre River Watershed, which includes parts of six west-central counties: Big Stone, Stevens, Swift, Grant, Otter Tail and Douglas.

A common theme emerged on the narrated bus tour and during site stops: Collaboration and local partnerships are keys to resource management and protection. The Pomme de Terre River Association (PDTRA) collaborates with the six soil and water conservation districts and the six counties within its 874-square-mile watershed.



Top: The Drywood Creek restoration in Swift County was one stop on the Aug. 28 BWSR Board tour, which featured conservation projects throughout the Pomme de Terre River Watershed. A two-year, \$127,580 Pomme de Terre River Association Joint Powers Board project supported by two BWSR Clean Water Fund grants removed Drywood Dam in 2019, and then returned the creek to its historic corridor last fall. **Bottom:** Andy Albertsen discusses the Drywood Creek restoration.

Photo credits: Mary Juhl, BWSR

The Aug. 28 tour group included conservation professionals from local, state and federal government agencies.

“The Pomme de Terre has a really diverse landscape and geology, and you can really see that in the water quality,” Paul Wymar, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) watershed project manager, said during the tour. “Between the LGUs (local government agencies), SWCDs, counties and state working hand in hand, we’ve seen improvements in terms of sediment and water quality.”

Tour stops included the Drywood Creek restoration site in Swift County, conservation easements in multiple counties, and soil health plots in Grant County. Board tour destinations rotate to highlight different regions of the state.

BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke said the annual tour offers the BWSR Board and staff members a valuable opportunity to see how partnerships among local conservation staff and landowners are making a difference.

“Landowners and local government staff are the driving force behind conservation delivery in Minnesota because they understand the unique needs of the communities where they live and work,” Jaschke said. “The annual tour gives Board members a powerful opportunity to see firsthand how locally led efforts are making a positive impact on Minnesota’s waterways.”

In Swift County, the group spent about an hour at the Drywood Creek site southwest of Morris. Here, a two-year, \$127,580 Pomme de Terre River Association (PDTRA) Joint Powers Board project supported by two BWSR Clean Water Fund grants removed Drywood Dam in 2017, and then returned the creek to its historic corridor last fall. The creek is a tributary of the Pomme de Terre River, which flows into the Minnesota River.

The Drywood Creek project is one piece of the PDTRA’s ongoing effort to improve water quality within the watershed, which has drawn more than \$4.7 million in state and federal grants in the past 10 years. Projects installed as of this summer included 166 water and sediment control basins, 205 alternative



Clockwise from left: Grant County landowner Chad Rollofson (center) offers tour attendees a close look at his soil health cover crop test plots. Winter radishes begin to sprout in the soil health plots. Rollofson uses winter radishes as a cover crop. Rollofson planted 10 one-acre plots designed to compare soil health and economics between cover cropped no-till plots and conventionally tilled plots.

tile intakes (which filter water before it enters streams and rivers), 91 rain gardens, 273 acres of fenced livestock exclusions, 11 lakeshore protections and six manure pit closures.

“We’re all pretty proud of the partnerships we have here in the Pomme de Terre,” said Matt Solemsaas, Stevens SWCD district administrator.

The tour route between counties passed USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) easements. Since 2011, CRP and CCRP easements have brought nearly \$4.9 million in payments to retire 6,750 acres of marginal farmland within the watershed.

Chad Rollofson hosted the final tour stop on his Grant County farm. Three years ago, Rollofson planted 10 plots of 1 acre apiece to compare soil health

and economics between no-till plots in a wheat-corn-soybean rotation with a cover crop and conventionally tilled plots with a corn-soybean rotation.

In 2017, Clean Water Funds made possible a field day for local landowners to learn more about these soil health practices. Data gathered in 2018 from the test plots showed the majority of no-till plots outperformed the conventionally tilled plots in both yield and profit.

“Soil is one of those resources so many people overlook because we have a lot of it here,” Rollofson said. “I’m a believer that (improving soil health) can be done, and it can be done profitably to protect our soil and water resources.”

The 20-member BWSR Board includes representatives from state agencies and local governments, plus citizens.