

# Koochiching Conservation

Spring 2022

## In This Issue

Cooperative Weed Management	2
Zebra Mussels in Rainy Lake	3
Supervisor Committees/Staff Contacts	3
Little Fork River Erosion Assessment	4
Jackfish Bay Cattail Removal Grant	5
MASWCD Awards	6-7
NRCS Corner	8-9
Tree Order Form	(See Insert)
Native Plant Order Form	(See Insert)

## 2022 TREE AND NATIVE PLANT SALE

**ORDER FORMS INSIDE!**



### Order Deadlines:

Annual Tree Sale: April 22  
Native Plant Sale: May 6

### Pickup Dates:

Annual Tree Sale: May 4/5  
Native Plant Sale: May 29



The 2022 Tree and Native Plant Sale order forms are enclosed and we are ready to start taking orders! You'll see many of your favorite species and kits along with some new ones as well.

As usual, we've sought out the best stock for the best prices and we're very happy to offer a reduced prices on the majority of our conifers in the tree sale and an expanded selection of native plant bundles for this year.

For more detailed species descriptions, printable order forms, or email links to submit an order online, check out our sale webpages at:

**Tree sale:** <https://koochichingswcd.org/tree-sales/>

**Native Plant Sale:** <https://koochichingswcd.org/nativeplantsale/>

And as always, if you'd like some help choosing species or developing a planting plan give us a call at 218-283-6742 or email to: [james.aasen@co.koochiching.mn.us](mailto:james.aasen@co.koochiching.mn.us)

# 2022 KCCWMA PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

In the Spring of 2021, the Koochiching County Cooperative Weed Management Area (KCCWMA) partnership saw another good year of progress targeting invasive terrestrial species on critical private properties in and around the International Falls and Ranier areas. The project was made possible through a Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) grant that funds terrestrial invasive weed control projects and the implementation of cooperative weed management area plans.

In 2021 project managers again focused efforts on smaller private properties in residential areas with high concentrations of potentially hazardous invasive species like wild parsnip that could spread into neighboring residential or recreational zones. The project focused on a core area where private and city property was thoroughly infested, and control efforts could work with all the landowners to tackle the entire area.

In addition, grant funds were used to purchase and encourage the use of buckthorn herbicide stump applicators which are free for landowner checkout and use. This herbicide application strategy is a safe and strategic way to ensure that mature buckthorn shrubs do not stump sprout after cutting. These simple dabbers also alleviate the risk of herbicide affecting nearby native plants and the surrounding ecology of the site.



***Schafer describes what is being done for a leafy spurge infestation on County Road 119***

***Left to right: Koochiching SWCD Forester, James Aasen; Jeff Siira, MN Department of Agriculture Agronomy Regulatory Advisor; Koochiching Land & Forestry Assistant Land Commissioner, Danae Schafer; Paul Mathiwetz, MNDOT Spraying Operator; Victoria Jari, DNR Forestry Specialist***

In late summer, KCCWMA partners from Koochiching County Lands and Forests and Highway departments, MNDOT, MN DNR Forestry, MN Department of Agriculture, and the SWCD met for a field meeting near Ericsburg (see photo on left). Several established invasive sites—like wild parsnip and Canada thistle—and emerging problem species—like leafy spurge, meadow and spotted knapweeds—were discussed. Biological

control measures and traditional herbicide applications are being conducted on these sites and species. Field meetings like these are great ways to share successes and challenges between partners responsible for managing adjacent lands and infrastructure.

The KCCWMA and Koochiching SWCD are dedicated to controlling invasive species in our region to maintain the ecology and biodiversity of our private and public lands. If you have or need help identifying invasive species on your property, contact the Koochiching SWCD at 218-283-6742 or [james.aasen@co.koochiching.mn.us](mailto:james.aasen@co.koochiching.mn.us) for advice, we're happy to help.

## District Supervisors

Richard Dreher	Chair
Al Linder	Vice-Chair
George Aitchison	Secretary
Ralph Lewis	Treasurer
Eldon Voigt	Member

## REGULAR MEETING TIMES:

May to October: 7:00 p.m.

November to April: 6:00 p.m.

## District Staff

**Pam Tomevi**—District Administrator  
[pam.tomevi@co.koochiching.mn.us](mailto:pam.tomevi@co.koochiching.mn.us)  
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**Eric Olson**—Resource Conservationist  
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218-283-6742

**Jolén Simon**—Program Coordinator  
[jolen.simon@co.koochiching.mn.us](mailto:jolen.simon@co.koochiching.mn.us)  
218-283-1180

## COMMITTEES:

**Budget Committee-** *Ralph Lewis & Eldon Voigt*

**Personnel Committee-** *Richard Dreher & Ralph Lewis*

**Education/Public Relations Committee-** *Al Linder & Richard Dreher*

## SPECIAL ACTIVITIES:

**North Central MN Joint Powers Board-** *Al Linder*

**Laurentian RC&D Council-** *Al Linder*

**Big Fork River Board-** *George Aitchison*

**Littlefork/Rat Root River Board-** *George Aitchison*

**MN SWCD Forestry Association-** *Eldon Voigt*

**Int'l Watershed Advisory Committee-** *Eldon Voigt & Ralph Lewis*

**Wood Ash Committee-** *Al Linder & Richard Dreher*

*The mission of the Koochiching SWCD is to conserve and protect the soil and water resources by educating and assisting land users in Koochiching County in being good stewards of the land and its natural resources.*



## ZEBRA MUSSELS IN RAINY LAKE

Despite efforts by multiple agencies and over many years, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has confirmed zebra mussel larvae are in Rainy Lake near International Falls. In July 2021, the DNR took 5 samples. Zebra mussel larvae (veligers) were identified in four of these samples taken. This study was done in response to a single adult zebra mussel having been found. At that time, no veligers were identified. This new discovery suggests that there is a reproducing zebra mussel population within Rainy Lake. Koochiching SWCD will continue to work with Koochiching County and the DNR in order to monitor the situation.

### WHERE DO ZEBRA MUSSELS COME FROM AND WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

Zebra mussels are native to Eastern Europe and Western Russia. They tend to outcompete native species for food and habitat, cut the feet of people swimming in affected areas, and clog boat motors.

### WHAT CAN I DO?

Boats should be cleaned, drained, and dried before moving to other waterbodies. Keep in mind that other surfaces should be cleaned to avoid adults and larvae from attaching to objects such as docks, bilges, bait buckets, and live wells. There will be assistance on Rainy Lake to check boats and to decontaminate if needed.

More information will be shared as available.

For further questions, contact Sam Soderman at (218) 283-1176 or [sam.soderman@co.koochiching.mn.us](mailto:sam.soderman@co.koochiching.mn.us).

# LITTLE FORK RIVER EROSION ASSESSMENT CONTINUES



***Koochiching SWCD Water Resource Specialist, Sam Soderman collects a soil sample in a wetland.***

2021 was a very busy year for field work, especially for the Little Fork River Watershed Sediment Erosion Assessment Project. This project is being led by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the Minnesota Pollution and Control Agency (MPCA) with support from the Koochiching SWCD and North St. Louis SWCD to address a 105-mile stretch that is impaired for turbidity (suspended soil particles in water). While it has been established that there is an excess of sediment present in the Little Fork River, it's been unknown how to proceed in reducing it to acceptable levels. Identifying sediment sources is the first step in targeting sediment-laden stream reaches for projects.

## **What is Sediment Fingerprinting?**

The sediment fingerprinting process is an analysis of sediment that can attribute the particles' source to different locations in the watershed. The procedure establishes a set of physical and/or chemical properties (tracers) based on samples collected in upland or channel locations identified as potential sources of sediment. These properties are unique

for each location within the watershed. Fluvial sediment samples (sediment transferred by a river system) exhibit a composite, or "fingerprint" of source properties. Through statistical procedures, the target sediment properties can be matched to their respective upland or channel source "fingerprints". Determining the sources (erosion sites) and sinks (deposit locations) of sediment is important in developing strategies to reduce sediment loads to water bodies impaired by turbidity.

## **Progress in 2021**

Sediment sampling occurred throughout the watershed in 2021 and will continue into 2022 to distinguish the origin of sediment in the Little Fork River. Staff from all four organizations will be collecting samples starting at ice out 2022 and continuing throughout the summer.

2021 sampling yielded 163 samples consisting of Upland, in-stream, and event based samples throughout the watershed. This sampling was done on county, state, federal, and private lands and will be analyzed this winter and spring. The event-based samples (those having to do with run-off and rain events) will be collected in the spring and summer of 2022 due to drought conditions throughout the watershed this past summer. These samples require a 1-inch rainfall event that influences the flow of the rivers substantially. Koochiching SWCD staff is excited to partner with USGS, MPCA, North St. Louis SWCD, and Itasca SWCD to complete the sampling work this coming summer.

Updates will follow as more information is gathered on this very important project.



***North St. Louis SWCD staff, Phil Norvitch, assisting with a geomorphic assessment to evaluate channel stability.***

# JACKFISH BAY CATTAIL REMOVAL PROJECT APPROVED

Koochiching SWCD began working with the Rainy Lake Property Owners Association (RLPOA) in late 2020 to draft a project proposal for cattail removal in the Jackfish Bay area. In the fall of 2021, a grant application was submitted through the Conservation Legacy Partners Grant (CPL) program. In December 2021, Koochiching SWCD was notified that the application had been approved for funding.

## WHAT IS THE PROJECT?

The two groups sought funding to restore 9 acres of wetlands on Rainy Lake, MN at the juncture of Koochiching County Road 134 (CR 134) and Elks Bay. The site has been significantly impaired by the infestation and dominance of non-native hybrid cattails. The infestation has been accelerated by loss of natural water flow from past road construction and a legacy of privately owned septic systems that were poorly suited to the soil conditions. The consequences have been the displacement of native aquatic plant species, degradation of habitat for waterfowl and fish, and the creation of floating navigational hazards. Restoration of this 9-acre wetland will remove floating mats of invasive hybrid cattail, enhance natural aquatic habitat, and re-establish a more natural water flow. Left unchecked, non-native hybrid cattails will continue to dominate and spread through the area. The project comprises three main activities: To enhance water flow, an existing 48-inch circular culvert will be replaced by five or six 58-inch arch profile culverts which were selected over larger culverts to avoid raising or widening the roadway. Next, utilizing methods tested at Voyageurs National Park, nine acres of hybrid cattails will be removed utilizing a combination of prescribed burning above ice during frozen lake conditions followed by mechanical removal of the remaining biomass during open water. Finally, approximately 2 acres of the restored area will be seeded with native aquatic vegetation and, if viable, wild rice.

An integrated approach of removing hybrid cattails and restoring native plant species, coupled with re-establishing natural water flow and nutrient reduction following the completion of the Jackfish Bay Sewer Project offers the best chance to restore the native plant community and create a more sustainable habitat supporting fish and wildlife native to the location. In 2022, permits and contracts will be obtained to plan for work to occur in 2023.

## WHY ARE NON-NATIVE HYBRID CATTAILS A PROBLEM?

Non-native hybrid cattails grow taller, faster and more densely than the native species that they outcompete and displace. Dense stands of hybrid cattails block sunlight and reduce dissolved oxygen which makes poor habitat for fish spawning. The dense hybrid monoculture also provides poor habitat for predator fish like northern pike, poor cover for marsh waterbirds, poor nesting sites for waterfowl, and is a poor source of nutrition for wildlife.

Do you have questions? Contact Eric Olson, Resource Conservationist, at 218-283-1175 or [eric.olson@co.koochiching.mn.us](mailto:eric.olson@co.koochiching.mn.us).



*Planned cattail removal and waterflow enhancement will occur on this site located on County Road 134.*

# COMMUNITY CONSERVATIONISTS OF THE YEAR: POLAR POLERS SKI CLUB



*Left to Right: Liz and Steve Johnson, Holly Holler, Burgess Eberhardt, Dave Skwarok*

The Polar Polers have been doing wonderful things in our outdoor community and we noticed! Meet the 2021 winners of the Koochiching County Community Conservationist of the Year (see photo left).

A community non-profit ski club, the Polar Polers have been maintaining and improving the ski trail at Tilson Creek for many years. In 2019, the group developed a plan to build a ½ mile board walk over a black spruce peat bog wetland complex portion of the ski trail creating a four-season hiking opportunity for the community. The boardwalk protects the sensitive ecology of this wetland, adjacent to Rainy Lake, from erosion caused by foot traffic and the grooming equipment necessary for ski trail upkeep on increasingly vulnerable wetland forest communities. The trail system design (map pictured below) uses the natural rocky topography around Rainy Lake to minimize wetland, ephemeral stream, and shoreline impacts and allow natural freshet runoff in the spring.

The Polar Polers’ relationships with other organizations enabled them to apply for the Federal Recreational Trail Program Grant, administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), used to create the boardwalk. Community fundraising efforts fully supported the 25% grant match needed, totaling \$37,500, ALL raised from local businesses and individuals. The Minnesota Conservation Corps environmental youth program built the boardwalk. The “Grant-in-Aid” trail system is locally maintained year-round by the Polar Polers volunteer members due to reduced state recreation budgets. To increase access and recreation opportunities, trails maintained by the group have been connected with the those of Voyageur’s National Park, Minnesota’s only National Park.

The group worked with DNR professionals to develop ecological interpretive signs scattered around the trails, providing information regarding wildlife, forest community, and the area’s history as they travel by sites of particular interest. Recreational activity is tracked with a trail counter and shares data with other agencies to assess participation and new potential opportunities.

With the completion of the boardwalk, the trail system is now accessible by scooters and wheelchairs due to the ADA compliant design.

The Polar Polers have proven to be incredibly committed to both conservation, outdoor recreation, and community building. Their projects, outreach, and volunteerism have increased outdoor participation in this rural and often underserved part of the state. The group has a wonderful reputation in the area and deserves to be recognized for the part they are playing to provide access and encourage people to get outdoors.



*Ski Trail Map*

# FOREST STEWARD OF THE YEAR: WAYNE RASMUSSEN



*MASWCD Annual Convention, 2021*

*Left: Wayne Rasmussen*

*Right: Eldon Voigt, SWCD Supervisor*

Wayne Rasmussen was nominated for his work on his 280-acre property, which has been in his family since 1906 (wow!). He is working on estate planning to ensure the heritage of conservation continues into the next generation. For the past 12 years, Wayne has been planting trees on this land. In that time, he has planted approximately 7,000 trees of many different native species. His thoughtful forest management decisions take into account the native plant communities, wildlife needs, and the natural hydrology of the area. Wayne and his family have also undertaken specific wildlife beneficial projects such as winter hinge cutting aspen for wildlife browse, planting and encouraging native berries for forage, multi-stage aspen forest management, three miles of trails planted into legumes for forage, and pollinator habitat.

The Rasmussens use forestry best management practices (BMPs) to ensure sensitive forested wetlands and buffers are reserved when

harvests occur. Fire breaks have been placed between his land and the adjacent property 300 yards long and 25 feet wide. Wayne regularly monitors the forest for insect and disease issues and takes quick action when a problem is identified including a jack pine bud worm mitigation cut recently. Tree diversity is encouraged through his species selection during tree planting making the forest more resilient to insect and disease impacts. Bud capping seedlings for protection is completed every year on 1000+ vulnerable seedlings. The Rasmussen property is enrolled in the 50-year Sustainable Forest Initiative Act for ensured long-term forest protection. He has participated in the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program regularly for decades.

Wayne undertakes many forest management and wildlife habitat projects every year including invasive species identification and control, ditch flowage and erosion control, Sharp-tailed Grouse lek maintenance and brush management, and wildlife berry species planting and natural encouragement. American chestnuts are being planted from a proven local source for wildlife forage, which may prove to be a climate resilient species for this area in the future. Future project plans include a wildlife pond and forest edge pollinator planting that will offer multi-season tree and shrub blooming and ground level forb forage and habitat.

The Rasmussen family continues to exemplify what it means to be a good forest steward. The conscientious projects they began three generations ago have continued and expanded...setting a great example for future family generations. The SWCD has always appreciated the Rasmussen family's cooperation and innovation and looks forward to being involved in many more projects to come.

In addition to being selected as the county's top 2021 forest steward by the Koochiching SWCD, Wayne was also chosen as the top 2021 forest steward for the state, recently receiving the **2021 Outstanding Forest Steward Award** which is co-sponsored by the MN DNR-Division of Forestry and the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD). Please join us in congratulating Wayne on this huge accomplishment!



*Wildlife forage planting.*

# NRCS Corner: Conservation Reserve Program

By: William Lee, Soil Conservationist – NRCS Baudette Field Office



The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was signed into law in 1985 primarily to control soil erosion, improve/protect water quality, provide wildlife habitat, stabilize commodity markets by removing marginal yielding or environmentally sensitive ground out of production and providing income support for farmers all while holding this ground in ready reserve in case of a national or global food shortage.

CRP is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) by taking offers, completing eligibility assessments, managing contracts, and

managing payments. Administration of CRP is also shared with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) that oversees the field work in land eligibility, conservation planning and implementation on the ground. CRP offers a wide variety of practices to implement on cropland and grassland acres. The annual rental rates can vary based on the physical county the land is in, soil type etc. Cost share is designed to be around 50% of the cost of installation and incentive payments will vary based on type of CRP and the variety of incentive. CRP rentals rates last year experienced a large increase nationwide and has gained some attention. We would like to see an increase in CRP interest in our area that would not only benefit our producers with payment and compensation for conservation practices but also provide a great benefit to the land itself and wildlife.

## **Continuous CRP (CCRP):**

Is for cropland producers that want to establish vegetative practices that control erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat through a variety of practice options. Land offered for continuous CRP does have to meet certain cropping history and land control requirements. Some additional specific criteria for this type of CCRP are:

- Noncompetitive funding if the producer and land are eligible, enrollment is automatic
- Haying or grazing may be allowed for some practices in emergency or drought conditions
- Signup and practice incentive payments as well as installation cost-share may apply
- Some potential practices that are common in our area include:
  - \* Filter strip
  - \* Riparian buffer
  - \* Wetland restoration for both flood plains and non-flood plain areas
  - \* Windbreaks, shelterbelts and living snow fences
  - \* Pollinator habitats



## General CRP:

Is a very versatile type of the CRP that has many of the same requirements as Continuous CRP. Enrollment in General CRP is not automatic, competitive funding is determined based on scores using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI).

- Haying or grazing may be allowed for some practices in emergency or drought conditions
- Climate-Smart Incentive provide a 3-10% incentive for practices that sequester carbon
- A wide variety of practice can be implemented through general CRP, some of which can even be accompanied by wild-life food plots that are a part of the contract including but not limited to:
  - \* Native and introduce grasses/forbs
  - \* Softwood and hardwood tree plantings
  - \* Pollinator habits
  - \* Rare and declining species
  - \* Wildlife habitat plantings that include a mix of grasses and trees/shrubs

## Grasslands CRP:

Is a working lands programs that allows livestock producers to still graze livestock, hay and harvest seed on their land while receiving annual rental payments like other types of CRP. Restrictions during the primary nesting season do apply. Applications are ranked based on several factors.

- Contracts can be either 10 or 15 years in duration
- The minimum per acre rental rate for these types of contracts is \$15.00
- Land offered cannot have more than 5% tree canopy
- Cost share is available for grazing infrastructure such as interior fencing and watering facilities



This information is all very general in nature and will vary depending on each situation please contact your local USDA Service Center for more information. Additional eligibility criteria may also apply. Finding out if your land is eligible or submitting an offer for CRP does not cost the producer anything and is non-binding. We would be happy to give you information on CRP and information on other conservation programs or financial assistance programs we have available. Please give us a call and chat with us about the conservation or production goals you have for your land.

**Baudette USDA Center (NRCS contact)**

**218-634-2757 ext. 3**

**Roseau USDA Center (FSA Contact)**

**218-463-2452 Ext. 2**

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USDA-NRCS is an equal opportunity provider and employer*



# SOIL & WATER

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**Annual Tree and  
Native Plant Sale  
Order Forms Inside!**



## **BENEFICIAL USE WOOD ASH PROGRAM**

**Is your soil pH  
too low?**

*THE BENEFICIAL USE WOOD ASH  
PROGRAM IS A FREE PROGRAM  
FOR FARMERS OFFERED BY:*

- *PACKAGING CORPORATION OF AMERICA (PCA)*
- *THE KOOCHICHING SWCD*
- *D.H. CONTRACTING, LLC*

### **Program Provides:**

- **Cost savings for farmers**
- **Reduction in purchased lime and fertilizer usage**
- **Improvement in crop economics**

### **Program Details:**

- **Soil tests done year round**
- **Soil packets available at the SWCD office**

### **Contacts:**

**Eric Olson (SWCD)  
218-183-1175**

**Destry Hell  
DH Contracting, LLC  
218-244-2234**



[www.koochichingswcd.org/wood-ash](http://www.koochichingswcd.org/wood-ash)