

2026

KOOCHICHING

Conservation

TREES

Every year we work hard to improve and expand the availability of premium seedlings and tree planting supplies for the best prices and this year is no exception. You'll see your tried and true favorite species as well as new offerings.

This year we have easy-to-plant soil plug options for yellow birch and silver maple, a new variety of crabapple-Midwest, and brought back the popular and delicious Canadian Elderberry. We've also expanded our inventory of Vigilis tree shelters which are the best we've worked with. These 5' tree tubes not only protect your seedling investments from deer, hare, and anything else that may want them for dinner, but they also encourage rapid vertical growth! See page 6 for more information!

Additionally, if you're considering the benefits of a large tree planting for your property such as wildlife habitat, soil and water benefits, forest health, and future timber income, we have multiple cost-share opportunities for projects of an acre or more. Reach out and we can discuss the current programs available.

Order forms inside!

Order by: April 17
Pickup by: April 29 -30

Photo Credit: Courtney Knutson



NATIVE PLANTS

We have pre-order plant kits and seeds to suit your needs! Native plants brighten your property, conserve soil, reduce runoff, improve water retention, and bring wildlife to your window. Back again this year are blueberry shrubs and our Forager's Kit of edible plants! We are working hard to keep prices affordable. If you are looking for a real bargain, check out our seed mixes including the NEW pollinator mix from Pheasants Forever.

We are once again hosting a native plant pop-up sale! If you're hesitant to purchase a native plant kit without seeing them first, come see them for yourself. You are sure to find one to take home with you!

Order by: May 1
Pickup by: May 28
Popup Sale: May 29

2025 CONSERVATION BY THE NUMBERS

We were very busy in 2025! Here's a glimpse into what we've been working on throughout the year.



164 Water Quality Samples Collected



764 Acres of Woodland Stewardship Assistance



12,985 Sq. Ft of Native Plant and Seed Coverage Distributed



52,035 Sq. Ft of Shoreline Restoration Practices



23.2 Acres of Trees Planted



20,181 Trees and Shrubs Distributed



612 Youth Participants in Environmental Education Events



250 lbs of Wild Rice Seeded



40.23 Acres of Invasive Species Treated

ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST RESULTS

The response to our 2nd Annual Photo Contest was phenomenal (20 participants contributing a whopping 85 entries!), making it very difficult to choose the top three winners!

Thank you to all for sharing their beautiful work! Be sure to take Koochiching County photos all year to enter the next photo contest in fall of 2026 and watch our Instagram and Facebook for the announcement in early November!

2026
Winners!



Julie Fandel



Gordy Lindgren



Marlys Grindall

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.

DISTRICT SUPERVISORS

Jody Reller	Chair
Ralph Lewis	Vice-Chair
George Aitchison	Secretary
Eldon Voigt	Treasurer
Mary-Jean Becker	Member

Regular Meeting Times

First Monday of
each month
8:30 a.m.
Cobblestone Hotel

DISTRICT STAFF

Pam Tomevi	District Administrator
Austin Wallin	Resource Conservationist
Austin Vinar	Clean Water Forester
James Aasen	Watershed Coordinator
Jolen Simon	Program Coordinator

COMMITTEES

Budget	Ralph Lewis/Eldon Voigt
Personnel	Ralph Lewis/George Aitchison
Education/Public Relations	Jody Reller/Mary-Jean Becker

TSA 8 North Central MN JPB	Jody Reller
Laurentian RC&D Council	Jody Reller
Big Fork River Board	George Aitchison/Mary-Jean Beckerr
Little Fork/Rat Root River Board	Jody Reller/George Aitchison
MN SWCD Forestry Association	Eldon Voigt

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

NORTHOME SCHOOL PLACES AGAIN IN ENVIROTHON!

By Jolen Simon

Each year, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) around the nation take part in an event called the “Envirothon”, an outdoor learning event where high school students (grades 9-12) and junior high students (grades 6-8) attend five sessions on environmental issues.

In 2025, there were five teams in the Senior Division (two from Northome) and 13 teams in the Junior Division (two from Northome). In the Senior Division, Northome took 2nd and 4th places, and in the Junior Division, Northome teams took 4th and 10th places. Let’s give a hand to our local Koochiching County teams!

Thank you to our 2025 sponsors: Rainy Lake Sportfishing Club, Border Bank of Int’l Falls, Coca-Cola Bottling, 1st National Bank of Deerwood, and the Koochiching County Farm Bureau.

Our Area VIII planning team looks forward to another successful Area VIII event in Bemidji State Park for 2026.



2025 Northome Teams and coach, Jim Schneider



Austin Vinar

Clean Water Forester

We are pleased to announce that Austin Vinar joined our team on October 6, 2025 as our new Clean Water Forester.

His primary responsibilities are writing forest stewardship plans, leading the water sampling program, developing forestry projects, and operating drones. Austin was raised here in Koochiching County and was previously employed in logging, construction, and natural resource management. He is excited to continue serving the community in this position. In his free time, Austin enjoys spending time outdoors with his wife and family.



Eve Hemstad

2025 Summer Youth Intern

Over the summer of 2025, we were pleased to host Eve Hemstad, our first ever Summer Youth Intern!

Eve is a high school student in International Falls. Last summer she was able to gain a variety of hands-on experiences in natural resource management working along side Koochiching SWCD staff.

Eve plans to continue her education in environmental science. In her free time, she enjoys canoeing, camping and just being outside with family and friends.

Native Plant Pop Up Sale!
at the location formerly known as **ON the Rocks** 412 3rd St
May 29, 2026
 3:00-7:00 p.m.
 or until sold out

Come check out our six packs of native plugs, seed mixes and the popular blueberry plants!
6-packs: \$15 each
 Species selected do well in a wide range of locations and provide attractive blooms.

Back this year!

ADD RICE HULLS

Rice hulls increase the volume of the seed mix making it easier to spread an even layer of seeds and mix the different seeds more evenly.

500 square feet: \$10
1,000 square feet: \$15

TREE TUBES-PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT!

By Austin Vinar

As we look forward to spring tree planting, one thing people investing in seedlings consider is the survival of their new planting. There are several options for protecting your young trees, but let's explore why we recommend tree tubes. These polymer tubes are roughly 3"-5" diameter and up to 60" tall, and they are installed around the new seedlings and staked in place.

Here are just some of the benefits that this product provides your hardwood seedlings:

- **Browse protection.** Many of us enjoy having wildlife living on our properties, but there is no doubt that they add challenges when trying to keep our seedlings alive. We recommend at least 60" tubes to protect seedlings from both hares and deer. Once the seedlings emerge from the top of a 60" tube, they are out of reach for deer browsing.
- **Height.** Tree tubes restrict lateral growth, forcing the tree to grow up and towards the light. This improves height growth dramatically, and many landowners report several times as much growth as seedlings without tubes within the first couple of years.
- **Climate control.** These tubes create a micro-climate for the seedling, much like a mini greenhouse, that help your seedlings survive and grow rapidly.

These factors combine to make a big difference in overall survival, and in many cases it is worth planting fewer trees and providing them with good protection rather than planting more and leaving them unprotected. Koochiching SWCD has Vigilis tree tubes in stock and you can order them on the same form as your saplings.



Koochiching SWCD staff install tree tubes.

KOOCHICHING COOPERATIVE WEED MANAGEMENT AREA (KCWMA) 2025-2026

By James Aasen

The Koochiching Cooperative Weed Management Area (KCWMA) continued to build on past successes, and we expanded our partnerships in 2025. Our spring coordination meeting continues to grow every year with 21 weed and invasive species staff attendees this past year representing 15 land managing agencies and departments. These meetings highlight shared priority areas and species of concern. Discussions related to timing of herbicide and mowing are conducted as well as conversations related to new methods of control such as bio-controls or new products. In general, the KCWMA membership felt that wild parsnip control in 2024 had made great progress on many roadsides due to this coordination and weather. Concerns over emerging threats such as meadow and spotted knapweed and leafy spurge were discussed. Invasive European buckthorn continues to be a hot topic with public outreach and education being a key objective.

In addition to CWMA coordination, the Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) also manages a cost-share program available to



Buckthorn cut and ready to be chipped by the City of International Falls.

landowners for controlling invasive species on their property. We work with landowners to correctly identify invasive species, measure the extent of spread, and then coordinate the most effective method of control and cost-sharing the expense of those control efforts. In 2025 we assisted landowners to control 39.5 acres of wild parsnip infestation in areas which were determined to be high priority for the KCWMA partnership. We also worked with the City of International Falls to address a buckthorn invaded park on the banks of the Rainy River. The spread of buckthorn throughout this shoreline has displaced native trees and shrubs and has been further degraded by deer and beaver browse occurring on essential shoreline plant species. Local contractors and SWCD technical staff cut and staged an acre of mature shrubs to then be chipped and disposed of by International Falls public works crews. In spring 2026, the SWCD will work with the City of International Falls to plant trees and native ground vegetation to help compete with any residual seed and help stabilize any eroding shoreline in the project area.



Clean Water Forester Austin Vinar hauls cut buckthorn up the bank of the Rainy River.

CONSERVATION PROJECT COST-SHARE AND DESIGN ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

By James Aasen

The KSWCD is happy to announce that for 2026 we have cost-share available for a wide variety of conservation projects including large tree plantings, native vegetation and pollinator plots, shoreline erosion stabilization, agricultural conservation practices, invasive species control, and forest stewardship plan development for qualifying projects.

Even if you're not sure about what project would work best, if you have natural resource concerns or objectives that you would like to achieve on your property, contact us and we can help you develop your ideas into a full-fledged project from design and mapping to contracting and installation.



Koochiching SWCD staff stand by a pollinator planting installed summer 2025.



Koochiching SWCD installing tree tubes for a local landowner.

**If you have questions about cost share,
please reach out to:
Watershed Coordinator, James Aasen
218-283-6742
james.aasen@co.koochiching.mn.us.**



Did you know?

**RAINY LAKE IS THE
5TH DEEPEST LAKE
IN MINNESOTA?!**

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/faq/mnfacts/water.html>

AGRICULTURAL DRONE SERVICES

By Austin Wallin

We are excited to announce the addition of an agricultural drone to our conservation toolbox! **Our drone has the capacity to carry 7 gallons of herbicide or 50 pounds of seed at a time.** It is ideal for smaller fields but also has the ability to tackle larger fields. We are able to seed anything from small native seeds to larger cover crop seeds. This will help to reduce the compaction and rutting issues of conventional equipment, especially in those low spots of your field. The landowner will provide the seed mix and we'll take care of the rest! We have also completed the permitting process to spray herbicide. The staff can help with herbicide selection and purchase the herbicide if needed. If the landowner supplies the herbicide, it must have been purchased in last two years and herbicide information must be shared with KSWCD staff prior to application.



Manufacturer photo: The DJI AGRAS T30 Agriculture Crop Protection Drone

If noxious weeds have taken over your field or pasture, let's get them taken care of! Cost share may also be available. Give Austin Wallin a call at 218-283-1175 for more information or to start arranging your project.

NEW DISTRICT IV SUPERVISOR: MARY-JEAN BECKER



Mary-Jean Becker, District IV Supervisor

We've had some changes on our Board of Supervisors this past year! After years of valuable service, Richard Dreher stepped down from his District IV position—we thank him for all of his hard work serving his district. After a formal application process, we are excited to welcome Mary-Jean Becker of Big Falls as our new District IV Supervisor.

Mary-Jean and her husband have owned property in the county for over 25 years. Prior to becoming a supervisor, Mary-Jean has connected with the SWCD throughout the years for advice on erosion control, tree planting projects, and native plant restoration. She appreciates the knowledgeable, helpful, friendly and hard-working staff that have helped her along with projects.



KEEP IT CLEAN: PROTECTING OUR LAKES THIS WINTER

By Jolen Simon

The **Keep It Clean** campaign began on Lake of the Woods in 2012 to tackle a growing concern: the safe removal and disposal of garbage and human waste from frozen lakes. What started as a local initiative has now become a statewide movement. As word spread about this unique partnership, more lakes across Minnesota have come on board.

Today, the Keep It Clean Coalition has grown from just three founding organizations to **84 member organizations representing over 1,500 lakes** as of December 2025. Rainy Lake proudly joined the coalition last year, reinforcing our commitment to preserving the beauty and health of our waters.

Local Partners

Rainy Lake’s efforts are supported by an incredible network of partners, including:

- International Falls, Ranier & Rainy Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Koochiching Soil & Water Conservation District (KSWCD)
- Koochiching County
- Voyageurs National Park
- Voyageurs Conservancy
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Rainy Lake Sportfishing Club
- Travis Thompson – Plowing out stations
- Crandall’s Septic – Porta-Potties servicing
- Friend’s Garbage Service – Donated 4 garbage bins

What’s Happening in 2026

To keep Rainy Lake clean and enjoyable for everyone, here’s what we’re doing this winter:

- **Five 3’x5’ Keep It Clean signs** installed at key ice road entrances and stations: Rainy Lake City, Sand Bay, Rainy River (Nelson Park in Birchdale), Ash River, and Kabetogama.
- **Port-a-potties** at Sand Bay and Rainy Lake City, serviced by Crandall’s Septic Pumping.
- **Garbage cans** donated by Friend’s Garbage Service, monitored by KSWCD and partners.
- **Community outreach** through “Big Fish” radio sponsorship for the Ice Fishing Derby, plus on-site education during the event, and newspaper coverage.

Why It Matters

Winter recreation is a cherished tradition in Minnesota, but it comes with responsibility. By working together, we can ensure our lakes remain pristine for generations to come. Whether you’re fishing, snowmobiling, or simply enjoying the view, please remember to:

Keep It Clean!



Pictured: Rest stations and educational signage on Rainy Lake and Rainy River.

ONE WATERSHED, ONE PLAN UPDATES

By Pam Tomevi, District Administrator



Last year at this time, the Rainy River-Rainy Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (RR-RLCWMP) Partnership (Koochiching Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), Koochiching County, City of International Falls, and City of Ranier) was awaiting state approval of the final plan and drafting an application to secure our Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) – provided through the Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment as an

alternative to the traditional project-by-project competitive process often used to fund water quality improvement projects. This funding allows collaborating local governments to pursue timely solutions based on a watershed's highest priority needs.

Since last March, the final 10-year plan has been approved and a WBIF grant has been secured for project implementation in the amount of \$558,419 with a 10% match requirement of \$55,842. These grant funds cover a 2-year period, expiring on December 31, 2027. Additional biennial WBIF grants will be sought in the coming years to implement activities throughout the 10-year lifespan of the plan. To learn more about this watershed plan and the activities we will be focusing on over the coming years, please visit https://koochichingswcd.org/rrrl_1w1p/.

During this same time last year, new partnerships began preparing to develop comprehensive watershed management plans for the Little Fork River and Big Fork River watersheds. Led by the Koochiching SWCD, the Little Fork River Watershed planning partnership has a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and includes Koochiching SWCD, Koochiching County, North St. Louis SWCD, St. Louis County, Itasca SWCD, Itasca County City of Littlefork, and City of Cook. Also invited to join the planning partnership is the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa.



Led by the Itasca SWCD, the Big Fork River Watershed planning partnership has a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and includes Itasca SWCD, Itasca County, Koochiching SWCD, Koochiching County, and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Also invited to join the planning partnership is the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, and the City of Big Falls.

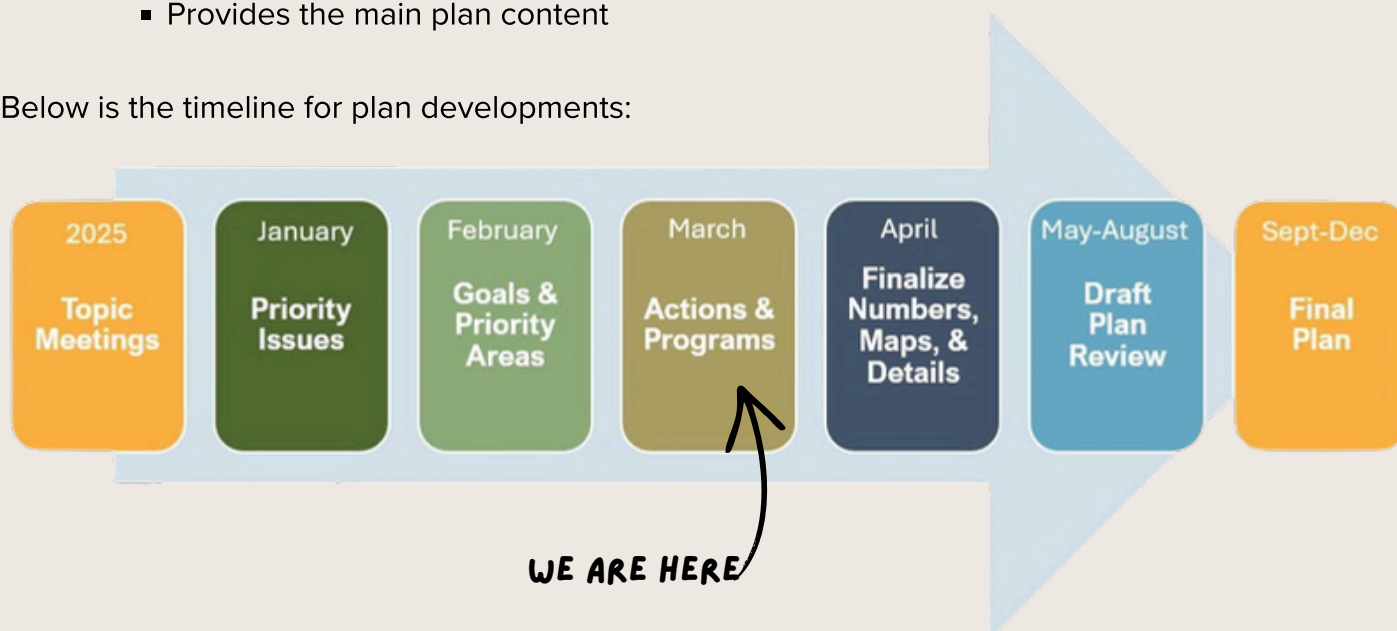
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ONE WATERSHED, ONE PLAN UPDATES (*Continued*)

Who else is involved?

- **Anyone** who lives, works, or recreates in the watershed is welcome to participate in the planning process
- **Policy Committee**
 - Decision-making group of the planning partnership
 - One representative from each participating government unit (signed the Planning MOA)
 - Responsibilities:
 - Approve plan content
 - Guide overall direction of the planning process
 - Adopt the final Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan
- **Steering Committee**
 - Staff from each participating government unit and BWSR representative(s)
 - Provide day-to-day organization and coordination
 - Active throughout the planning process on all levels
- **Advisory Committee**
 - Professional and community topic experts
 - Provide technical input and local perspective
 - Collaborate to identify:
 - Resource issues and concerns in the watershed
 - Action strategies to address those concerns
 - List of measurable goals to track progress
 - Provides the main plan content

Below is the timeline for plan developments:



To stay updated or to become directly involved in the planning process, please call or email Pam Tomevi, District Administrator at 218-283-1174 pam.tomevi@co.koochiching.mn.us or visit our website at <https://koochichingswcd.org/comprehensive-local-water-management-planning/>

WOOD ASH PROGRAM

By Austin Wallin

Whether you are new to the wood ash program or have been using it for years, we welcome you to send in your soil samples! We have soil kits in our office that you can pick up or we'll mail them to you! As always, you can use any lab you choose as long as the test includes the following: pH, buffer pH, Phosphorus, Potassium, soluble salts, organic matter. If your field is more than 40 acres you will need multiple samples with no more than 40 acres per sample. We've been told that hay crops are much better with ash application!

To qualify for wood ash, your pH must be at or below 7.1. Other qualifying factors will be taken into consideration such as field portions which are within 200' of water courses and waterbodies and a slope of greater than 6%. It can (but may not) take between 1-2 years to receive wood ash so sample your fields early. A soil sample/permit is valid for a period of three years from the day the field was sampled. Feel free to call Austin Wallin at 218-283-1175 to begin the process.



SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR CONSERVATION PARTNERS





SOIL & WATER

CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Serving Koochiching County since 1954

501 3rd Street, Suit 100
International Falls, MN 56649



ANNUAL SALE
**TREES & NATIVE
PLANTS**

ORDER FORMS INSIDE!

WOOD ASH PROGRAM LOW SOIL PH?



1 FREE DELIVERY WITHIN 90 MILES

2 FREE SPREADING WITHIN 50 MILES

3 FREE SOIL SAMPLE
KITS AVAILABLE AT:
**KOOCHICHING SWCD
501 3RD STREET, STE 100
INT'L FALLS, MN 56649
218-283-1180**

FOR PROGRAM QUESTIONS: www.koochichingswcd.org/wood-ash



**AUSTIN WALLIN
218-283-1175**



**WAYNE WOLD
218-285-5753**



**DESTRY HELL
218-244-2234**