

Red Lake County SWCD makes strides using Clean Water Funds

October Snapshots 2017

Prior to 2010, the Red Lake County SWCD completed on average about one erosion control project per year. “Limited funding limited us to smaller projects, or we had to save State Cost Share funds for 2-3 years to do a larger project,” said Tanya Hanson, District Manager. Because the project funding was so restrained, the District focused on other activities including education, technical assistance for field drainage, and administration of regulatory duties delegated from the County. While the district staff was doing what they could with the resources they had, they also knew there were erosion control issues that weren’t being addressed.



Erosion site identified and prioritized by the Erosion Site Inventory in 2010.

In March of 2010, the SWCD completed the latest generation of the Red Lake County Local Water Management Plan. This plan recognized the additional funding that the Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment would provide, and put more emphasis on identifying priority erosion sites and completing projects to address them. Following adoption of the plan, the SWCD completed their first Erosion Site Inventory to identify areas of erosion, and then began grouping and prioritizing the sites by subwatershed. This inventory helped the District secure three Competitive Clean Water Fund grants in 2011.

Since 2011, the SWCD has received 13 Clean Water Fund grants totalling over \$1 million. In comparison, they received only a little over \$40,000 in State Cost Share over that same time period. Using this funding, the District has been able to work with many different landowners to fix erosion problems. These projects have reduced sediment loss by over 13,000 tons annually.



Grassed waterway and drop structure completed in 2012.

Without the Clean Water Funds a vast majority of that sediment would still be entering the waters of Red Lake County today.

“We would never be where we are at now without the Clean Water Funds, Jim Hest (Red River Valley Conservation Service Area Engineer), and willing landowners,” Hanson said. “The County and the Red Lake Watershed District have also been instrumental in providing technical assistance and some of the required match, and those partnerships have been greatly enhanced through this experience.”

The SWCD has also looked to other outside funding sources to help provide the needed match for these grants, and received two grants from the Minnesota Association of Resource Conservation and Development’s Enbridge Ecofootprint Grant Program totalling over \$150,000. All this additional funding has not only helped the soil and water resources in the area, but also accounts for economic benefits by providing a hefty workload to the contractors in this small county in northwest Minnesota.

Even with all of the success, there is still plenty of work to be completed, but the SWCD feels they are ready to handle this workload. The District is a partner in the Red Lake River One Watershed, One Plan which used the Prioritize, Target, and Measure Application (PTMApp) to further prioritize and target their work, and they are excited about the opportunities to use non-competitive funding to fund the activities included in that plan. The District is also in the process of finalizing an inventory that identifies and prioritizes the buffer and side water inlet needs along all of the County’s public drainage systems. The SWCD Capacity funding has provided a new level of stability that the SWCD has not had in the past and the Red Lake SWCD is looking forward to putting projects on the ground for years to come.