

Annual board tour highlights wellhead protection



Nobles County SWCD District Manager John Shea (left) and BWSR Clean Water Specialist Mark Hiles (right) explain how Summit Lake in Nobles County was restored in 2017. Once a natural lake, the site was drained in the early 1900s and farmed for much of the 20th century. **Photo Credits:** Mary Juhl, BWSR

At nine sites in Rock and Nobles counties, board members, conservation staff and partners come face to face with local conservation and water quality improvement projects



The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) Board of Directors got a firsthand look at conservation projects in Rock and Nobles counties Aug. 22 during their annual tour.

This year's tour focused on wellhead protection and flood recovery efforts in the southern region of the state. Tour locations spotlight different regions of Minnesota each year. The stops highlight the unique opportunities and challenges faced

by conservation professionals and landowners who collaborate to safeguard Minnesota's water and soil resources.

"Conservation practices are best implemented by local professionals and landowners who understand the unique needs of the area where they work and live," BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke said. "The board tour allows attendees to hear how conservation



One tour stop showed a stream bank restoration site along the Rock River in Luverne. The project prevented the stream from cutting a path through an old landfill site after severe flooding in 2014.



Left: Tour participants take a hay ride on David Wessel's property in Rock County to view nitrogen management improvements. **Right:** Russ Hoogendoorn, engineer for the Southwest Prairie Technical Service Area, discusses a stream bank resotation project in Luverne.

Photo Credits: Mary Juhl, BWSR

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— John Jaschke, BWSR executive director

partnerships positively impact communities from the people who play a hands-on role in pursuing local conservation and water quality improvement projects.”

The tour kicked off with a stop at a wellhead site in Worthington, where Worthington Water Superintendent Eric Roos explained how local wells benefit nearby residential and industrial properties. Roos said the rural wells supply 3 million gallons of drinkable water per day to Worthington-area residents and businesses.

Roos discussed the ways in which the area’s abundant groundwater resources helped his community flourish.

“Worthington wouldn’t be what it is today if not for the ground we’re standing on here,” Roos said at the wellhead site.

The tour group also visited the recently restored Summit Lake in Nobles County. A collaboration between the Nobles County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) and BWSR enabled the restoration of this nearly 300-acre shallow lake in 2017.

Once a natural lake, the site was drained in the early 1900s and served as farmland for most of the 20th century. Restoration was made possible when the land was enrolled in the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Program, which aims to protect and improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, and enhance fish and wildlife habitat on privately owned lands. The Nobles County SWCD purchased the land in 2015. Project plans were completed in 2016,

followed by successful restoration in 2017.

“This is a great example of a partnership between BWSR and an SWCD,” said BWSR Chief Engineering Manager Al Kean. “We’re really happy to be able to work with the SWCD and the watershed district as well.”

Other tour stops included a wellhead site in Adrian and the Rock County Rural Water District offices. A presentation in Luverne highlighted disaster recovery efforts after significant flooding in 2014. Local partners included the Okabena-Ocheda Watershed District, the Rock County SWCD, the Nobles County SWCD, the Minnesota Rural Water Association, and the Rock County Rural Water District.

The 20-member BWSR Board includes representatives from state agencies and local governments, plus citizens. The 2019 board tour is tentatively slated to take place in the Northern region of Minnesota.