

Cultivating trust among farmers



Rock Soil and Water Conservation District Assistant Director Doug Bos (right) visits with BWSR Southern Region Manager Ed Lenz during the 2018 BWSR Board Tour. **Photo Credit:** Mary Juhl, BWSR

Rock SWCD
Assistant
Director Doug
Bos named 2021
Outstanding
Soil and Water
Conservation
District Employee

Before encouraging Rock County farmers to try cover crops, Doug Bos tried them himself.

Bos farms 100 acres of corn, soybeans and alfalfa in addition to working his day job as Rock Soil and Water Conservation District's (SWCD) assistant director.

"When you're in this type of job, it's all about developing trust with the farmers you serve," Bos said. "When I promote something, I speak from experience. (Farming) keeps me connected to the practical applications we're trying to promote."

The Minnesota Board of Water and

Soil Resources (BWSR) named Bos the 2021 Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee on Dec. 13 during the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) annual convention.

Bos joined the SWCD — which is housed within Rock County's Land Management Office — in 1996. His responsibilities include overseeing implementation of conservation practices, water planning, coordinating grants, and coordinating the county's disaster recovery assistance program.

"Doug possesses a drive and a

passion for many parts of his job, particularly when it comes to surface and groundwater resources,” said Eric Hartman, Rock County Land Management Office director. “He’s got a knack for being able to talk to people from a number of walks of life, and he has the ability to support and embrace change.”

Protecting drinking water is a common theme in Bos’ work. Nitrate levels trend high in Rock County while wells run shallow, creating a need for wellhead protection. Rock SWCD staff coordinated with Rock County Rural Water (RCRW) to develop wellhead protection plans. RCRW supplies about half of the county’s residents with drinking water.

Cover crops offer another tool to reduce high nitrate levels. Bos helped to launch a series of soil health field days that started five years ago and has included four field days plus two winter workshops to date. Bos said the series’ goal is to show Rock County landowners how cover crops and related soil health practices work with their soil types and conditions.

“The highest priority is giving our local producers examples and ideas of what they can do with soil health,” Bos said. “People talk best in small groups, and if you can get agronomists, landowners and conservation staff in the same room, everyone benefits.”

Bos grew up on a dairy farm near the Rock County town of Hills.

“Being raised on a dairy farm really helped me be able to understand how farmers think and where they come



Rock SWCD Assistant Director Doug Bos speaks during a Clean Water Council tour of Rock County Rural Water near Luverne on Sept. 13. **Photo Credit:** Clean Water Council

from,” Bos said.

Arlyn Gehrke, Rock SWCD GIS specialist and engineering technician, has known Bos for more than 30 years.

“We know the farmers, we know their families and we have a really strong rapport with landowners,” Gehrke said of Rock SWCD staff. “We have the best of both worlds. It’s great to have the reliability and trust that comes from having experienced staff (like Bos).”

Gehrke said Bos excels at forming relationships with conservation professionals at both the state and local levels. These connections were especially helpful during the planning and ongoing implementation process for the Missouri River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, developed via BWSR’s One Watershed, One Plan program (1W1P).

“We saw that the future in obtaining funding to support conservation in the state was going to be based on 1W1P,” Hartman said. “Doug as a water planner naturally took the ball and ran with it and was instrumental in pushing it forward.”

BWSR’s board approved the Missouri River Comprehensive Watershed Plan in October 2019 and allocated \$1.32 million in Watershed-based Implementation Funding (WBIF) for fiscal years 2020-21. The partnership is slated to receive an additional \$1.32 million in WBIF for fiscal years 2022-23. Bos said that funding provided cost-share for over 50 conservation projects.

Asked about his advice to young professionals starting their careers in natural resources, Bos had this to say:

“To the young people



coming into the conservation field: There will be opportunities for you that we are not even aware of yet. If you have perseverance to work through the challenges, that will bring great rewards later on. There are great people in this occupation.”

Each year, BWSR celebrates the excellent work accomplished by local government staff to advance conservation efforts across the state. In addition to recognizing Bos, BWSR presented the Outstanding Watershed District Employee award to Cedar River Watershed District Project Manager Cody Fox during the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts’ annual conference on Dec. 3.