

2019

Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Annual Report



Flagging a buffer so the producer will be in compliance with the Minnesota Buffer Law.



Staff observing a controlled drainage project.



Resource Conservationist, Lindsey Zeitler surveying the core trench of the County Ditch 8 project.



Wetland Restoration completed in the Fall of 2019.

From the Chairman

Another challenging weather year for our staff and local producers/landowners made for some difficulty getting projects installed. There were several cover crop fields planted, and we did get the CD8 project mostly completed with the help of all the landowners, contractor, Freeborn County, and Turtle Creek Watershed District. This project consists of two (2) waterways, one (1) side inlet structure, and two (2) water and sediment control basins.



We also incurred some staff changes that I think will benefit us. We were able to hire a Conservation Reserve Enhancement (CREP) Specialist last fall and another person will start in January 1, 2020 who is very familiar with the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) and will be in our office to assist landowners seeking certification.

Our SWCD work continues with Freeborn County and the Turtle Creek Watershed District in the compliance of the MN Buffer Law. The Buffer Law compliance policy is posted on our SWCD web page. There are a handful of landowners needing compliance that have been working with our staff. After a final review in the spring of 2020 those parcels that have not met the compliance of the MN Buffer Law will be turned over to the County staff for enforcement. Our SWCD staff have been tasked with spot checking these parcels every 3 years to make sure they are still in compliance with the MN Buffer Law.

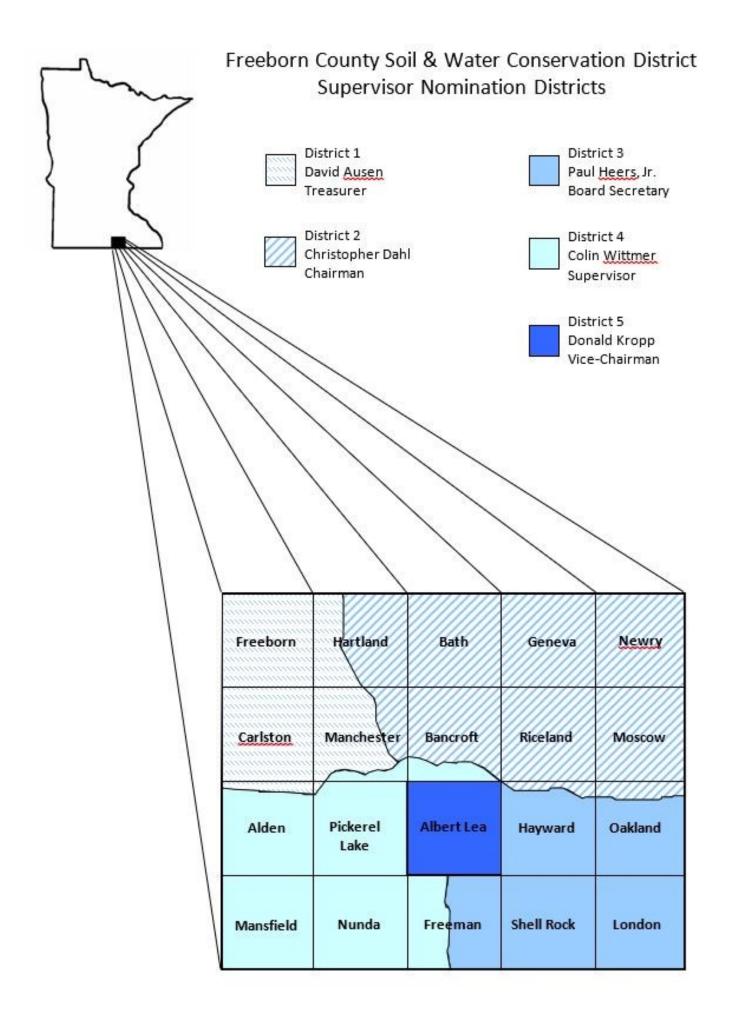
MN Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP3) had a limited sign up of only a few months, but the interest in the program remained strong. We had 8 new applications totaling approximately 835 acres and increased interest in applying once the 2020 sign up begins.

The Cedar River and Wapsipinicon Watershed – One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) effort has been approved by the state and will be at the implementation stage later in 2020. The Shell Rock River and Winnebago Watershed planning effort started in 2019 and is right on schedule. The LeSueur Watershed partners are also having discussions about applying for a planning grant in 2020. Our staff and supervisors have been part of this planning process.

On behalf of our SWCD Board of Supervisors, I would like to thank all the local agencies, organizations, other local units of government and individuals that work in cooperation with us to deliver conservation programs and "put conservation on the land" in 2019. They include the following:

Landowners & operators	Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA)	
Freeborn County Board of Commissioners	Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, MN Waterfowl Assn.	
Freeborn County Environmental Services	MN DNR US Fish & Wildlife, Shell Rock River Watershed District	
Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR)	Martin SWCD, Turtle Creek Watershed District, Mower SWCD	
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Cedar River Watershed District, and others	
USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)	MN Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), MN Dept. of Ag (MDA)	
SE Tech Support Joint Powers Board	Freeborn Area Soil Health Team	

We hereby submit the following Annual Report of Freeborn County Soil and Water Conservation Activities for calendar year 2019.



Services Provided by Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District

- Engineering planning, layout and construction supervision of conservation practices such as waterways, water and sediment control basins, and grade stabilizing structures.
- Administration of the State Cost-Share Program for conservation practices.
- Administration of the ReInvest in Minnesota Easement Program.
- Administration of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Easement Program.
- Maintenance supervision of the Minnesota River Watershed (CREP I) area of northwest Freeborn County.
- Farmstead and field windbreak design, species selection, tree sales, on site layout and planting equipment rental.
- Assisting with the implementation of the Ag Best Management Practices loan program. These funds are made available through the State Revolving Fund and are administered by the MN Dept. of Ag.
- Assisting landowners with compliance issues with the Minnesota WetlandConservation Act (WCA), which was passed in 1991. This may include reviewing maps, etc. to determine potential applicability of the Act or discussing alternatives in cooperation with the LGU and Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) Membership.
- Conservation compliance planning and assistance with other aspects of the current Farm Bill.
- Consultations for the Rural Finance Authority Young Farmer Program.
- Assisting and working cooperatively with various conservation partners.

Mission Statement:

To serve the residents of Freeborn County by creating an awareness of soil and water resource concerns, by offering practical alternatives to manage these concerns, and by providing technical assistance (as local resources allow) to apply and maintain best management practices (BMPs) that impact water quality while sustaining soil productivity and land-user profits.

Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District

SWCD Board Members:

L to R Colin Wittmer, Supervisor Paul Heers Jr., Board Secretary Donald Kropp, Vice-Chair David Ausen, Treasurer Christopher Dahl, Chairman

SWCD Staff L to R Brenda Lageson, District Manager Lindsey Zeitler, Resource Conservationist Brittany Dawson, District Technician Chad Billat, Private Land Biologist



Gary Kurer, District Conservationist - pictured Joel Alicea-Hernandez, Soil Con Karen Stensrude, Sinew Clerk Barbra Marshall, Farm Bill Tech





*Technical Assistance was furnished to the district by NRCS MN:

Troy Daniell, Assistant State Conservationist, FO Elizabeth Oolman, Agricultural Engineer Jim Fritz, Area Resource Conservationist Dan Nath, Area Resource Soil Scientist Charlie Blackburn, Civil Engineering Technician Christiane Roy, GIS Specialist Jeff Koster, Area Biologist Thomas Chris Parrott, ITS Robin Stevenson, Area Admin. Coord.

Annual Report Highlights -

2019 Freeborn County Outstanding Conservationist honored...

Sean and Steve Kraushaar from Glenville, MN were recently honored as the Outstanding Conservationists at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts held on December 10th, 2019.

They were selected by the Freeborn County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) for this award. The Freeborn County SWCD nominates a landowner(s), operator(s), or a group every year for their efforts in the implementation of conservation practices on their land and improving our natural resources.

Steven and Sean Kraushaar, a father/son operation, from Glenville farm 1,500 acres. They have a corn-soybean rotation in which they, utilize cover crops, ridge-tilling, hogs, and manure application. The

Kraushaar's are in their fourth year of a CSP contract focusing on cover crops, variable rate fertilizer application, soil testing, and stalk testing for nitrogen. Steve and Sean are certified with the MAWQCP program and were named Freeborn County's Farm Family of the Year for 2019. Soil erosion is reduced on their land because of the many buffers, grassed waterways, and water and sediment control basins present on their land. Off the farm, Steve is a Cedar River Watershed District supervisor, while Sean is on the Freeborn County Planning and Zoning committee. When not farming you can see them enjoying their tractors and cars. The Kraushaar's are great examples of being good stewards of the land.

Through their efforts, the Kraushaar's have shown just what great land stewards they are.

Legislative Day at the Capitol - 2019...

March 6, brought the opportunity for soil and water conservation districts from across the state to collaborate with senators and representatives at the capitol to discuss issues concerning SWCDs. Dave Ausen, SWCD Treasurer, Brenda Lageson, SWCD Manager, and Lindsey Zeitler, District Technician attended the legislative day. SWCD staff also attended a legislative briefing where legislators and state officials discussed current issues.



Minnesota Capital from the Senate Building

Topics covered under with the 2019 MASWCD legislative platform where; capacity funding through the general fund, statutory funding authority, technical updates to Minnesota

Statute 103C – SWCD law, support recommendations from the Clean Water Council regarding biennial Clean Water Fund appropriations, and support the Annual Outdoor Heritage Fund appropriations set forth by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Freeborn SWCD staff had two scheduled meetings one with Senator Dan Sparks and the other with Representative

Peggy Bennett. Aside from discussing platform issues, meeting with legislators provided the opportunity to share what SWCDs have been doing across the State, through the use of annual reports and newsletters.



Sean, Kristina, Linda, & Steven at Outstanding Conservationist Award Program with Paula Mohr from the Farmer Magazine



Dave Ausen, SWCD Treasurer; Brenda Lageson, District Manager; and Lindsey Zeitler, Resource Conservationist with Senator Dan Sparks

SWCD Fair Booth...



Freeborn SWCD booth at the Freeborn County Fair

The Freeborn County SWCD fair booth was on display at the Freeborn County fair in 2019. Located in the conservation building, the fair booth had a vast diversity of information on display. There was information on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), such as what is eligible and program objectives. The Winnebago watershed WRAPS project was present showing the different things we are doing within the watershed such as public meetings, tillage transects, and landowner/operator interviews. Soil health information was presented through the use of the Soil your Undies display and a flyer for an upcoming soil health event. Additional information about pollinators, wild parsnip, the district tree program, and the SWCD drill rental were present. Fair goers had the option

to take home handouts and informational flyers about various programs.

The fair booth is a great way to inform the public on current events and pertinent information.

Annual Tree Program. . .

The Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District's annual tree program provides local urban, and rural landowners an opportunity to obtain good quality trees at an affordable price. The SWCD offers over 30 species of trees that are suited for conservation practices such as shelterbelts and wildlife plantings. Along with trees, the SWCD offers tree mats, fertilizer packets, and tree tubes to help increase planting success. For large shelterbelts or windbreak plantings, the SWCD has a tree planter available for rent. The SWCD offers landowners planning assistance that includes site specific tree recommendations, spacing recommendations, and maintenance advice.



Organization of tress after their delivery.

Over 8,800 trees and shrubs were planted throughout the Freeborn County area through the SWCD's tree program in 2019. The SWCD sold many bare root trees along with potted evergreen and deciduous trees. Each of the trees sold will provide financial, aesthetic, wildlife, soil, water, and air quality benefits for years to come.

Southeast Area 7 Envirothon. . .



Shown above students identifying trees as part of the Forestry station.

Each year our SWCD along with nine (9) neighboring SWCDs sponsor a SE Area Envirothon where high school students compete in five (5) environmental stations consisting of Soils, Water Resources, Forestry, Wildlife, and a current event. The area event was held at Byron Sportsman's Club, Byron, MN on May 8th. The 2019 current event was "Agriculture and the Environment". The students also give an oral presentation on that current event. This past year teams from Goodhue High School took 1st and 2nd place with John Marshall taking 3rd place. 1st – 3rd place teams went to the state competition that was held at the Oliver Kelley Farm near Elk River, MN on May 20th.

One Watershed One Plan . .

Our SWCD is very active in One Watershed, One Plan efforts in two planning areas; Cedar River and Wapsipinicon watersheds, the other is the Shell Rock River and Winnebago watersheds, and a third one is being discussed in the LeSueur watershed which will likely be applied for in 2020.

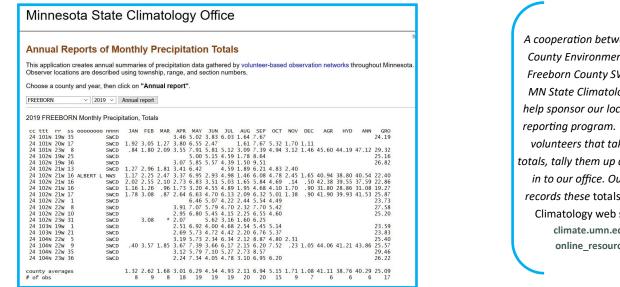
The Cedar and Wapsipinicon plan was approved by the state in Dec. of 2019. Next steps are to have the local governing boards approve to adopt the plan with implementation starting later in 2020. In the Shell Rock and Winnebago partners are in the early processes of planning and are well on track.



Outlines of the watersheds that are working to implement One Watershed One Plans in Freeborn County.

Once these plans are fully implemented, they will replace individual water plans. The funding for priority areas/ projects will be non-competitive grant dollars and available to all partners without creating another unit of government. These plans are good for 10 years.

Volunteer Rain Gauge Network. . .



A cooperation between Freeborn County Environmental Services, Freeborn County SWCD and the MN State Climatology Network help sponsor our local rain gauge reporting program. We have 20 + volunteers that take daily rain totals, tally them up and send them in to our office. Our staff then records these totals on the State Climatology web site. http:// climate.umn.edu/doc/ online_resources.htm

Winnebago Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS)...



Outline of the Winnebago Watershed

This is a legislative mandate to the MPCA to address water quality on a major watershed basis with a 10-year cycle. The MPCA is working on completing the WRAPS for the Winnebago Watershed. The Freeborn SWCD is working with MPCA and Freeborn County Drainage Authority to provide some background information for the WRAPS process. The WRAPS includes a summary of the status of the water quality within the watershed and the monitoring work that has been completed. Anything that does not meet standards is identified with long term goals of meeting those standards. Stakeholders identify combinations of best management practices to achieve those goals in the long term and also identify 10 year milestone targets. Freeborn SWCD is a participant in the WRAPS process and is also identified as a source of technical and financial assistance. The WRAPS in the Winnebago Watershed is expected to be completed in 2020. In conjunction with the WRAPS the SWCD has been doing landowner interviews, tillage transects, public meetings, and focusing BMP installation within the watershed. In 2019 the first controlled drainage system was installed in Freeborn county and the Winnebago Watershed. The information was used to develop the WRAPS.

Soil Health Team...

The Soil Health Team turned 5 years old in March. The Team is made up of local producers, private businesses, and government organizations interested in promoting soil health techniques. Team meetings were held monthly to plan events and provide soil health education to the team. In January of 2019 the Freeborn Area Soil Health Team held its 5th Annual Soil Health Winter Workshop in Albert Lea. March 2019 brought the opportunity for the Soil Health Team to partner with other local soil health teams and SWCDs to hold a spring workshop in Owatonna, MN. Coordination from the Soil Health Team helped bring a Cover Crop 101 tour to Southern Minnesota. Fall 2019 the Freeborn Area Soil Health Team held a Soil Health Journey bus tour.



Producers listening to a speaker during the 2019 Soil Health Journey Fall Bus Tour

Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance "GBERBA"...



Major Watershed s Part of the Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance

The Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA) has continued to be a valuable organization for applying and receiving grants that the Freeborn SWCD and landowners can utilize for conservation work. The SWCD was able to implement a cover crop project with the cost share coming from a grant obtained by GBERBA. SWCD staff worked with several landowners in the GBERBA area to identify potential conservation issues and work towards solutions. Some of the proposed solutions will likely use GBERBA cost share funds to implement BMPs such as grade stabilization structures and waterways. GBERBA facilitates sharing of ideas among LGU's through technical meetings, policy meetings, and guest speakers.

State Cost Share Program. . .

Landowners were paid a total of \$66,511 in state cost share dollars in calendar year 2019.

A summary of RIM, RIM/WRP, WRP, and EWP Easements closed to date 12/31/2019

Perpetual Easements		
Five (5) RIM Riparian Easements	318.0	acres
Six (6) RIM Marginal Ag Land Easements	87.1	acres
Eleven (11) Permanent Wetland Preserve (PWP) Easements	221.8	acres
Twelve (12) RIM Wetland Restoration Easements	304.5	acres
Nineteen (19) CREP Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	612.0	acres
Thirteen (13) CREP II Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	557.0	acres
Thirteen (13) CREP III Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	789.7	acres
Fifty-one (51) RIM/WRP Wetland Restoration Easements	4,073.0	acres
Forty-four (44) WRP Wetland Restoration Easements	2,853.6	acres
Five (5) EWP Emergency Watershed Protection	250.2	acres
TOTAL	10,066.9	acres

Buffer Law. . .

2019 was quite the year for SWCD's and the Minnesota Buffer Law. Freeborn SWCD staff were busy working with landowners to bring them into compliance. Staff tried to find alternative practices that would work with specific landowners. Alternative practices applied consisted of using the 393 NRCS filter strip practice standard, no-till/strip till with cover crops, site inlet drainage, and negative slope on ditch banks. Poor planting conditions in 2019 forced SWCD staff to delay working with landowners to achieve compliance until conditions improve. With the buffer law now active for a couple of years the SWCD staff will start doing yearly monitoring on 1/3 of the parcels.



Buffer installed in 2019 on a public waters stream using buffer cost-share dollars

Capacity Funding...



Cover crop implemented using Capacity Funding in 2019.

In 2019 the Capacity funding continued to help assist landowners with cost share for cover crops. Six (6) contracts were planted on year 3 of a 3-year contract on 40 or less acres per contract per year. Capacity funding was also used to purchase two iPADs for staff to take out in the field and to One Watershed, One Plan meetings. Capacity funding kept staff busy with project inspections, CRP plans, tree customers, soil health, buffer assistance, and water planning. The Freeborn SWCD no-till drill program is still assisting local producers/landowners with native grass, pasture, and notill soybean plantings. Approximately 300 acres of land was seeded with the drill in 2019. Plantings ranged from wetland plantings, buffer strips, Reinvest in Minnesota easement plantings, waterways, and pasture enhancements. The SWCD again thanks the legislators for the capacity funding as it has allowed Freeborn SWCD to take a big step toward meeting our goals and accomplishing our mission.

MAWQCP...

Interest in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) has continued; to date there are 26 producers certified throughout Freeborn County and with a new addition to our staff we hope to increase the number of producers enrolled and certified through MAWQCP. MAWQCP takes a whole farm approach to conservation and improving water quality by looking at all owned and rented acres and evaluating them based on a variety of categories.



Producers who become certified are guaranteed Ag Certainty, 10 years in which they are deemed in compliance with any new water quality regulations the state creates. The program

is non-regulatory and certifications are completed on a voluntary basis, with a signed application being an invitation to come out and talk with a producer. Financial and technical assistance are available for those producers who are certified or who are actively pursuing certification. For more information stop by the SWCD office.

DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST 2019 REPORT

By Gary D. Kurer, District Conservationist, USDA-NRCS



CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (CTA) AND CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

<u>Environmental Quality Incentive Program</u>: Twenty-three (23) conservation plans were developed and accepted for financial assistance in FY 2019 for EQIP totaling \$148,226. Two (2) of the contracts for obligated funds were for Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP) and one (1) was for an Energy Plan.

<u>Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)</u>: Six (6) new CSP applications were approved for a total of \$353,220 obligated for a 5-year period on 3,020.4 cropland acres.

<u>Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)</u>: Conducted 58 CRP plans for 2018 re-enrollments and new-enrollments. Conducted on-site eligibility investigations for continuous CRP practices such as windbreaks, grassed waterways, filter strips, native habitat for pollinators, and wetland restoration. Conducted 10% or 14 spot checks for CRP status reviews and practice certifications and all were in compliance.

<u>Outreach</u>: Coordinated the outreach and preparation of a local work group meeting for Freeborn County in August 2019. NRCS staff gave a presentation on NRCS programs for the Corn-Soybean Growers Association. NRCS attended and presented information at soil health workshops.

USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex (including gender identity and expression), marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

Conservation Easements...

<u>Reinvest in Minnesota/Wetland Restoration Easements (RIM/WRE):</u> There were approximately 265 acres of wetland restoration completed on 9 RIM/WRP easements and approximately 215 acres of native seeding completed on 6 RIM/WRP easements. There was also 620 acres of prescribed burning, herbaceous weed control, and brush management completed on 9 RIM/WRP easements.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP): We had 10 CREP easements close with approximately 790 acres and 8 new accepted applications totaling approximately 835 acres. Wetland Restorations were completed on 4 easements totaling approximately 110 acres. Native seedings were also completed on 4 CREP easements totaling approximately 295 acres.

<u>Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)</u>: There were 30 acres of wetland restorations and 30 acres of herbaceous weed control completed on 2 RIM easements.



Estimated Level of Conservation Assistance for Calendar Year 2019

ITEM-EQIP PRACTICE	PLANNED 2019	APPLIED 2019	EXPENDED EQIP FUNDS 2019
Cover Crops	2670.3 acres	2670.3 acres	\$ 115,067
Grassed Waterways	5.5 each	1.0 each	\$ 2496
Subsurface Drain	3565 feet	0 feet	\$ 0
Residue Management: No-Till/Strip Till/Mulch Till	0 acres	0 acres	\$ 0
Grade Stabilization Structures	0 each	0 each	\$ 0
Prescribed Grazing	51 acres	51 acres	\$ 1,264
Heavy Use Area Protection	0 each	0 each	\$ 0
Livestock Pipeline	0 feet	0 feet	\$ 0
Fence (perimeter and/or interior)	0 feet	0 feet	\$ 0
Watering Facilities	0 each	0 each	\$ 0
CNMP-CAP's	3 each	3 each	\$ 0
Water and Sediment Control Basins	3 each	2 each	\$ 5,794
Underground Outlets	490 each	0 each	\$ 0
Diversions	0 each	0 each	\$ 0
Critical Area Planting and Mulching	5.5 acres	1.0 acres	\$ 436
Seasonal High Tunnel for Crops	0 each	0 each	\$ 0
Water Wells	0 each	O each	\$ 0
Pumping Plants	0 each	0 each	\$ 0
Obstruction Removal	0.4 each	0 each	\$ 0
Wetland Restoration CP-23A sign-ups for CRP/CREP	835 acres	835 acres	
Wetland Restoration CP-23A CRP/CREP Seeded	295 acres	295 acres	
Farmable Wetland and Buffer CP-27 & 28 sites for CRP	6 each	6 each	
Filter Strips CP-21 for Re-Enrolled CRP/CREP	13 each	13 each	
Farmstead Windbreaks/Shelterbelts CP-16 CRP	0 each	0 each	
Grassed Waterways CP-8 CRP	12 each	12 each	
Wetland Restoration—WRP	265 acres	265 acres	
Prescribed Burn—WRP	190 acres	190 acres	
Native Seeding—WRP	215 acres	215 acres	
Pest Management (herbaceous weed control) - WRP	265 acres	265 acres	
Tree Removal—WRP	165 acres	165 acres	
CSP Cover Crop Enhancements	3594.3 acres		
Totals for 2019 EQIP	See Above	See Above	\$ 166, 190
Totals for 2019 CSP	23,118 acres	23, 118 acres	\$ 476, 095
Totals for 2019 CRP	CRP & WRP	data not availat	ole at this time

reported by Gary Kurer, NRCS District Conservationist

BALANCE SHEET	<u>2019</u>
Assets	A
Cash and Investments	\$1,210,908
Total Assets	\$1,210,908
Liabilities	
Unearned Revenue	\$462,789
Total Liabilities	\$462,789
Fund Balance	
Nonspendable - Inventory	\$234,335
Assigned - Compensated Absences	\$9,954
Unassigned	\$503,830
Total Fund Balance	\$748,119
Total Liabilities and Fund Balance	\$1,210,908
Unrestricted Fund Balance	\$503,830
Annual Cost of District Operations	\$284,251
Monthly Cost of District Operations	\$23,688
PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT	<u>2019</u>
Revenues	
Intergovernmental	
County	\$170,000
Federal	\$6,600
State Grant	\$275,147
Total Intergovernmental	\$451,747
Charges for Services	\$98,059
Misc Interest Earnings	\$4,734
Misc Other	\$42,528
Total Miscellaneous	\$47,262
Total Revenues	\$597,068
Expenditures	
District Operations	
Personnel Services	\$210,779
Other Services and Charges	\$70,555
Supplies	\$1,151
Capital Outlay-depr.	\$1,766
Total District Operations	\$284,251
Project Expenditures	
District	\$51 <i>,</i> 564
State	\$136,871
Total Project Expenditures	\$188,435
	4
Total Expenditures	\$472,686

2019 Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District - unaudited