

South Branch Root River Watershed Project  
January 11, 2006 Meeting Notes

In attendance: Lee Ganske (MPCA), Mark White (Forestville/Mystery Cave), Vaughn Snook (MN DNR Lanesboro Area Fisheries), John Mulvihill (Fountain farmer), Virgil Moeller (Spring Valley farmer), Keith Vorhees (Clayton Twp), Bill Sweetser (Bennington Twp), Jerry Schwarz (Spring Valley farmer), Mark Dittrich and Mark Zumwinkle (MDA), Jeff Green (DNR Waters), Ron Holty and Jim Holty (Spring Grove farmers), Jim Christie (Racine farmer), Paul Kottschade (Spring Valley farmer), Donna Rasmussen (Fillmore SWCD)

Introductions

Aerial seeding of winter rye and other cover crop practices: Andy Hart, Olmsted SWCD Supervisor and farmer from near Elgin, has been using cover crops for several years in his farming system and has cooperated with the MN Department of Ag on a couple of demonstration projects, the most recent being aerial seeding of winter rye on about 300 acres. He has applied for two more grants to do additional demonstration projects. The aerial seeding demonstration he helped to organize included farmers who aerial seeded cover crops into corn silage, sweet corn, soybeans, and field corn. Scott's Helicopter Service in LeSueur was hired to do the seeding on August 30th. It takes about a minute to load the seed into the pods on each side of the helicopter. Seeding rate was at 50 pounds per acre. The helicopter cost is about \$12/acre and seed is about \$6/acre. A 40-acre field can be seeded in about an hour. The growth on the sweet corn and soybean fields was best, although the rye did not interfere with soybean harvesting. The field corn seeding could have been planted earlier (August 1<sup>st</sup>) to get better growth. There was some traffic damage to the corn silage seeding due to wet weather. Seeding in 15" rows did not have good growth, but it may come in the spring. Some fields were grazed both fall and spring without too much overkill. Rye continues to grow if the root is below the frost line. Growth really takes off in the spring, so it needs to be controlled either by grazing, herbicides, mowing, or even rolling it down before it gets too tall; otherwise it forms root balls like sod. Rye suppresses weed growth (an allelopathic effect), so it can reduce corn yields by as much as 10 bushels per acre. A video and DVD about the project are being made to hand out at the AgriNews Farm Show on March 21 and 22.

Barley or oats can be planted with a grain drill or broadcast seeder after canning crops are harvested to get 100% cover by fall which is good fall and spring erosion control. A drill does give better soil to seed contact. Some graze the grain in the fall or round bale it for feed. The oats mellow out the soils, and a crop can be no-tilled into the residue in the spring. Seeding with a drill can take as much as a day for 40 acres plus the farmer's time, fuel for the tractor, etc. Aerial seeding frees up time during the busier harvest period when it may be difficult to get seeding done plus the seed is on early enough to get good growth established.

Andy also participated in a regional effort through the Basin Alliance for the Lower Mississippi in Minnesota (BALMM) to develop regional strategies for encouraging the use of cover crops. That group developed two handouts for farmers that outline various ways to incorporate cover crops into a variety of farming systems for both conventional crops and canning crops.

As well as the South Branch cover crop incentive payment, the Fillmore SWCD is also planning to begin a cover crop incentive payment. Cover crops are also beneficial for the Conservation Security Program. EQIP also has payments for cover crops.

BREAK

Draft 2006 MPCA Impaired Waters list: The MPCA just released the draft list of the impaired waters in the state to be submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency. The list is updated every two years. The list has 396 water bodies that could be added to the existing list including two streams in the South Branch watershed for turbidity (Forestville Creek and JD #1) based on Citizen Stream Monitoring Program data. The question arose about the effect the cleanup project might have on JD#1 and whether or not a ditch is meant to be fishable and swimmable.

About 2/3 of the list are streams that are impaired for fish consumption due to mercury concentrations. Six segments of the Middle Branch of the Root River are on the list for mercury.

The formal public comment period is open from January 23 to February 24<sup>th</sup>. A public meeting is scheduled in Rochester for February 8<sup>th</sup> at the MPCA office in Rochester.

Upcoming educational activities and opportunities:

Ag professionals: MDA FANMAP report and the new nitrogen recommendations will be presented to those consultants who help farmers decide what their nutrient needs are for the next cropping season.

Homeowners' septic system operation and maintenance: Fillmore County holds classes every two months for people receiving the \$300 grant if they have replaced a system that is an imminent public health threat. We are discussing holding one of the next workshops in Ostrander, possibly in April or June.

Nutrient management planning: County feedlot office is planning small group workshops for farmers to do nutrient management plans. Each workshop can hold up to 15 participants. The first are scheduled for Feb. 7-9 from 10 to 2 each day to do handwritten plans. Additional workshops will be planned for computerized plans using MS Excel and Access. Producers with over 300 animal units are required to have a nutrient management plan this year.

Updates:

New Look at Livestock Initiative: Final changes have been made to the Power Point presentation after review by members of the committee and representatives of Farm Bureau at the last meeting on January 4. Several other groups were invited but there were no representatives there. Arrangements have been made to show the presentation to the Fillmore County Cattlemen, Houston County Cattlemen, and the Fillmore County Pork Producers.

Water quality monitoring: Plans are in the works to re-establish the monitoring station on Co. Rd. 14 in Mower County on JD#1. The station at Forestville will be getting a phone connection paid by MN Dept. of Ag so that the real time data can be accessed by phone. This aids in timing sample collections so that they are taken at the appropriate time during the hydrograph.

The web page for the watershed project is getting set up on the Fillmore County website. It should be accessible soon. Information on the site will include contact information, program information, the Phase I Diagnostic Study final report, monitoring data, links to other agencies, newsletters, meeting agendas and notes, and pictures.

The next meeting will be Thursday, March 9. The meeting place is yet to be determined, but will likely be in Ostrander. Wednesday meetings will be on the third Wednesday rather than the second since that is the regular meeting night for the SWCD Board.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.