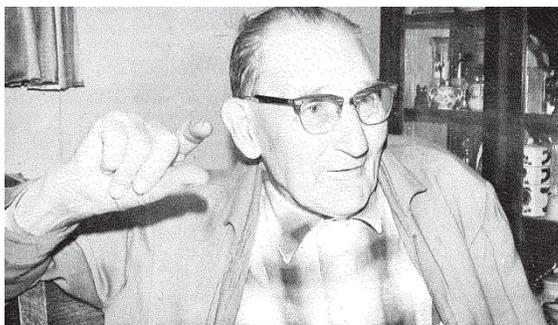




# The state's first SWCD, Winona County, celebrates 75<sup>th</sup> year of service

July 2013 Snapshots



Minnesota's first soil and water conservation district is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2013, the first in the state to do so.

Established in 1938 around three Winona County watersheds, the Burns–Homer–Pleasant Soil Conservation District became the first conservation district in the State, and was eventually renamed the Winona County SWCD in 1986 after a series of consolidations.

The establishment of a conservation district in Winona County began in 1934 and 1935 with construction of demonstration sites by the Soil Erosion Service (now the NRCS). Federal money and manpower went into experimental practices such as terracing, strip cropping, grade stabilization structures and re-forestation, creating dramatic results. The surrounding landscape changed from heavily eroded, worn-out soils, to some of the most productive areas in the county.



Top: Clint Dabelstein was the Burns-Homer-Pleasant SWCD supervisor from 1938 until 1985, photo courtesy of Winona Daily News. Bottom: The Winona County SWCD staff in 2013.

During this time, the Soil Erosion Service recognized the value and importance of having locally-led conservation groups liaise between the federal government and landowners. This was also recognized by the Minnesota legislature, who passed the Enabling Act in 1937, allowing the formation of soil and water conservation districts.

So what's changed in 75 years? Daryl Buck, Winona SWCD District Manager, said historically, the Winona County SWCD has been known for providing technical assistance to individual landowners.

"Today, we also provide technical assistance to the county, cities, townships, watershed districts, schools, and even state agencies. To be effective within our county, our services and collaboration must go beyond watershed and even county boundaries," Buck said. "Our goal is to help both landowners and LGUs know and understand some of the concerns and options related to erosion, sedimentation and water quality when making decisions."

Though the clientele has expanded, Buck said some of the issues are similar. "The extreme weather conditions, flooding and erosion back in the 1930s and 1940s led to the formation of the original soil conservation districts. In recent years, we've experienced similar extremes -- the 2007 and 2010 flood events, the 2012 drought and now one of the wettest springs on record," Buck said. "We're also seeing a drastic decline in crop diversity, fewer perennial crops, fewer contour strips, increased corn and beans, and an increase in erosion, sedimentation and flooding."

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources recognized Winona County SWCD's milestone in May. For more information, visit the Winona County SWCD website: <http://www.winonaswcd.org/index.htm>.