



Partnerships, education moves work forward in Washington County

2013 Soil and Water Stewardship Week



Riggs presents about rain gardens to citizens at the Washington County Fair.

Growing up hunting and fishing with his dad, Jay Riggs has always enjoyed spending time in the outdoors. By the time he was a senior in college at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Riggs fell in love with natural resource management and chose to make a career out of it.

Armed with a B.S. in biology and psychology and a M.S. in natural resource management, Riggs has spent the last seven years as the district manager at the Washington Conservation District.

“Coming from the Dakota SWCD as an urban conservationist, the district manager position offered me the challenge and opportunity to lead an organization. We have very high quality lakes, natural areas, and the St. Croix River in Washington County – it’s a great place to work,” Riggs said.

Washington Conservation District, one of Minnesota’s 90 SWCDs, was established in 1942 to enhance, protect, and preserve the natural resources of Washington County through conservation projects, technical guidance, and educational services to citizens and local government.

During his time at the district, Riggs said that working with the area partners to establish an education program has been one of the most notable achievements.

“Cities and watershed districts in the area recognized the need to better collaborate on implementing the municipal stormwater (MS4) program,” Riggs said. “In order to meet water quality goals, we identified a gap in the area of education and worked together to develop a collaborative funding program.”

Today, Washington County is one of the few conservation districts that has an educator on staff. Funding for the position is split between 18 different partners in the area. Riggs added that education fits in well to promote conservation programs on the ground. “There are three legs to the stool in conservation,” Riggs said. “Technical assistance, cost share and education. Education is like the accelerator cable for our BMP programs – we target areas to implement BMPs and then work to educate landowners. That education drives demand for technical assistance and cost share projects.”

In Washington County’s diverse landscape – roughly 20 percent of the land is agricultural and 26 percent is urban, with the rest being natural areas and water - Riggs says that prioritization is really important. “Our biggest challenge is to find ways to most efficiently implement natural resources efforts and to work together with as many partners as possible to concentrate on core goals,” Riggs said. “We have a team of experts who work closely with local governments to ensure there’s no overlap. We focus on getting the biggest bang for the buck.”

Jay Riggs is one of five SWCD staff members that the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is profiling as a part of the 2013 Soil and Water Stewardship week. To learn more, follow [@MNBWSR](#) or like us at www.facebook.co/MNBWSR