



# Turning a passion for the environment into a career

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## 2013 Soil and Water Stewardship Week



*Thiemann took on the role as Lake SWCD manager in 2012.*

Jennifer Thiemann's enthusiasm for her job is apparent to anyone who meets her. Only one year into her role as the Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) manager, Thiemann talks animatedly about her experiences, most notably managing the aftermath of the 2012 northeast Minnesota floods.

"I conducted more than 50 flood damage assessments between Knife River and Silver Bay. The week immediately after the flood was especially memorable," Thiemann said. "Damage and debris were everywhere. Some landowners were overrun with emotion and brought to tears, looking for any help possible."

In the months since the flood, Lake SWCD requested and received state flood relief funding from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources in excess of \$500,000 for 27 different landowner projects.

Thiemann reflected on two specific projects, which included helping a retired couple rebuild their lost septic drainfield so they could use indoor plumbing again, and rebuilding a private bridge so that a family of four could access their home.

"Because there were not any FEMA flood zones established in Lake County, nobody had flood insurance and most people didn't know how they would afford repairs. Despite the damage and despair, it has been an amazing opportunity to work for Lake SWCD through this disaster and be able to touch so many lives in a positive way," she said.

Growing up on a river and always loving the water and woods, Thiemann realized in college that she could turn her passion for the environment into a career. After spending five years working as an environmental consultant around the country, she took the job at Lake SWCD which, to her, provides "the best of all worlds ... working at my local SWCD allows me to conduct technical field work using the latest methods and technologies, implement conservation projects that result in direct improvements to water quality and provides the opportunity to be a positive part of our community," Thiemann said.

Lake SWCD, one of Minnesota's 90 SWCDs, was established in 1965 to assist landowners with natural resource issues. SWCDs across the state work in both urban and rural settings, with landowners and with other units of government, to carry out a program for the conservation, use, and development of soil, water, and related resources.

Thiemann enjoys that the SWCD's mission is to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners. "We assist those who want and need our help, but we aren't a regulatory agency and don't have to deal with issuing permits or violation notices," she said, adding, "I love my job! I also love exploring parts of the county that I would never have seen unless working at the Lake SWCD. It's also nice having a flexible schedule, great coworkers, and great partnerships with other agencies."

*Jennifer Thiemann 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.com/MNBWSR](http://www.facebook.com/MNBWSR).*