



# Conservation is 'all in the family' for Mike Hirst

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## 2013 Soil and Water Stewardship Week

Mike Hirst first learned about conservation at an early age. From parents who took him exploring in the outdoors, to grandparents who farmed small grains and raised beef cattle and another grandmother who dedicated her career to conservation, Hirst found a natural fit as a resource technician at the Lake of the Woods SWCD.

"My family and friends really shaped who I am today," Hirst said. "I spent a lot of time outdoors and developed hobbies, including fishing, gardening, skiing, canoeing, camping, hiking and hunting. My teachers, especially science teachers, had a big impact on me through high school and college."

Hirst earned a bachelor's degree in geology and water resources from the University of North Dakota and grabbed the opportunity to return home to work in the area he grew up in nearly nine years ago.

The Lake of the Woods SWCD, started in 1952, provides for the adoption of sound water quality, proper land use, and soil conservation practices on all lands in the District, assists with the development of a prosperous agricultural economy, and fosters other community development for the general welfare and security of the people of the District.

"This job allows me to work with local people to address real issues and to make an impact at a state, national and international level. The job changes every day, from year to year," Hirst said.

Most recently, Hirst has been working on the "Keep It Clean – Lake of the Woods" initiative. A partnership between the SWCD, County, Tourism Bureau, DNR, Friends of Zippel Bay State Park and local resorts, the project addresses litter leftover on Lake of the Woods from the winter angling season, which was a significant issue in the spring of 2012. Though the project is not yet completed in 2013, more than 450 cubic yards of trash have already been hauled away from county dumpsters at lake accesses.

"This first year was a learning experience and we are excited to get feedback from our partners to make this initiative even better in the future," Hirst said. "The main focus is for Lake of the Woods, but we also hope our efforts will help to provide a template to address similar issues on other lakes throughout the state."

Hirst said his passion for his job is what keeps him motivated, and that exceptional 'can-do' co-workers, and a 'think outside of the box' district manager and Board allow for trying new things and exploring new areas in the conservation world.

*Mike Hirst 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).*



*Hirst tests water quality on the Rainy River, winter 2013.*