





CONSERVATION CONNECTION

A report of Minnehaha Conservation District

A publication of the
Minnehaha Conservation District

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The Minnehaha Conservation District Board of Supervisors meets on the second Monday of every month at 3:00 pm. Meeting times are subject to change. Visit our website for exact dates and times: <http://minnehahacd.org>.

All programs and services of the US Department Of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Minnehaha Conservation District are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis of race, color, sex, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, veteran status or other protected class.

ABOUT THE DISTRICT

Created in 1941, Minnehaha Conservation District administers resource conservation within the boundaries of Minnehaha County in southeastern South Dakota. The District is self-governed and has the authority to enter into working agreements with government agencies and private citizens to carry out its purposes. MCD will consult with, and make recommendations to, all agencies or organizations helping to promote conservation activities to coordinate efforts into comprehensive conservation programs in Minnehaha County.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2025

- 55 acres of trees were machine planted for farmsteads, feedlots, field windbreaks, and wildlife habitats.
- The survival rate for new plantings was 92%.
- Approx. 85 producers/landowners participated in grass seeding over 1,200 acres throughout Minnehaha County, with: alfalfa, cool season grass, native grass, and cover crops.
- 14,650 bare root and potted trees were sold, with approx. 212 customers purchasing and 55 acres machine planted.
- The City of Sioux Falls continued a valued partnership, receiving services such as soil sampling and assisting in various urban conservation efforts, like our Prairie and Pollinator Garden Program and a community garden space that is continuing to be developed.
- Outreach efforts: The Big Sioux River Project, Conservation in the City, Grill & Grow, Big Sioux Stewardship Summit, SDSU Specialty Crop Field Day, Queen Bee Day, Pollinator Day at Good Earth, Holiday Trees at Good Earth, various Earth Day events, state technical meetings, various conferences, local talks, our website, social media, and our annual tree flyer.
- Educational activities: 32nd Annual Sioux Empire Water Festival (area 4th graders), Dewey C. Gevik Outdoor Learning Center, Range and Land Judging contest for FFA students, Arbor Day contest, State Speech contest, Stewardship Week, Earth Team volunteers, Conservation Craft Kits, other urban conservation outreach and handouts, and various projects with local community groups to enhance habitat.

SERVICES OFFERED BY THE MINNEHAHA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- All varieties of grass seed available (native, crops, traditional lawn, etc.)
- Fabric Installation
- Habitat development through wildlife plot and pollinator seeding
- Native grass seeding for: tree rows, waterways, terraces, pastures, and yards
- No-till drill seeding for: soybeans, alfalfa, oats, and wheat
- Shelterbelt rehabilitation and brush removal
- Tilling for tree planting or grass seeding preparation
- Tree plantings for: shelterbelts, windbreaks, and wildlife plantings (machine only)
- Weed control (mechanical and chemical)

SHELTERBELT REHABILITATION AND BRUSH REMOVAL

Although initially needed for assisting in weed suppression, maintaining the health of trees in shelterbelts requires properly cutting away fabric as the trees grow. If this is not done, the material can hold in too much moisture near the trunk or strangle the growing trees/cause girdling roots. Fabric should be cut by the time it is within an inch of a tree's trunk and is at risk of killing the tree once a person cannot get at least two fingers EASILY in and out of the fabric edge. Typically, fabric needs to be cut around year 5 after installation, but it should be inspected annually in late spring or fall to verify shelterbelt health.



If wanting help in maintaining a shelterbelt, Minnehaha Conservation District offers technical assistance through advising on next steps and providing conservation services, including cleaning up tree rows through brush removal. Please contact us to discuss your property.

DEWEY C. GEVIK OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTER

If out near Wall Lake, do not forget to stop by the Dewey C. Gevik Outdoor Learning Center. Created to help filter the water flowing into Wall Lake, this area is regularly tested with other local sites by Friends of the Big Sioux River, with results continually showing positive impacts to water quality of Wall Lake. Additionally, this learning area showcases natural resource conservation, featuring: rock crossings, shelterbelts, native grass plantings, observation decks, and more. MCD is continuing to make improvements/additions to enhance the experience for those visiting, with continued work in adding a digital kiosk and increased trail signage with help from the SD Soil Health Coalition. We also want to say thank you for the continued support from various volunteer groups.



SEASONAL HELP NEEDED

Minnehaha Conservation District (MCD) regularly needs seasonal help to assist with tree planting, fabric work, seeding, order fulfillment, and other tasks each summer. Interested parties must be comfortable in agricultural settings, be able to regularly lift/move items up to 50 lbs., negotiate tough terrain, and be comfortable working primarily outdoors. Individuals must have strong public relations skills, a valid driver's license, pass any necessary background check requirements, understand the operation of farming equipment, and should be age 16 or older to apply.

For further information or to apply for this position, please contact MCD at info@minnehahacd.org, or call (605)336-1527.



Sioux Empire Water Festival

This past year marked our 32nd event as we welcomed area 4th grade students to the University of Sioux Falls once more for the Sioux Empire Water Festival (SEWF). Over 2,300 students flooded the campus in early March to take part in learning all about anything you can think of regarding water, from how important it is to our local prairie ecosystem to “panning for gold”. This is done through a mix of classroom sessions, a large exhibit hall, and competing in Quiz Bowl via an online resource leading up to the event. The SEWF continues to be a highlight for MCD each year as we really enjoy contributing to the community in this way. We also want to endlessly thank our presenters, volunteers, and planning committee that continue to make it possible for this to happen.

Become A Sioux Empire Water Festival Volunteer

Minnehaha Conservation District regularly needs help putting on the Sioux Empire Water Festival. This year’s event is happening March 3-4. Volunteers assist with tasks like daily set-up, clean-up, staffing hospitality tables, and running education stations. Volunteers are asked to work at least a half day (8:30AM-11:30AM for the morning session, or 11:30AM-2:30PM for the afternoon session), or support both shifts and come for the full event time (8:30AM-2:30PM). All volunteers will receive a gift and refreshments throughout the day as a thank you for their help. Volunteers helping for a full day will also receive lunch.

If interested, please contact Alina Krone-Hedman at minnehaha.urbanconservation@gmail.com, or call (605) 595-8052.

AVAILABLE ASSISTANCE THROUGH NRCS

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical assistance and offers several financial assistance opportunities through USDA conservation programs, such as: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Contact the Minnehaha NRCS office to start the planning process and ask about what opportunities might be out there to address your resource concerns or sign up for announcements on Farmers.gov.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):

Applications can be continuously taken at local NRCS offices. NRCS provides conservation planning and cost share assistance to help implement conservation practices on a variety of resource concerns. Contact your local office to inquire about eligible practices.

For additional information, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/EQIP

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):

Applications can be continuously taken at local NRCS offices. This conservation program is built to assist producers in taking their operation to the next level by implementing enhancements. Consider this program if looking to perform agricultural improvements or experiment with new ideas.

For additional information, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/CSP

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP):

Applications can be continuously taken at local NRCS offices. NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands through agricultural land easements (ALE) or wetland reserve easements (WRE). ALE allows eligible partners financial assistance to protect agricultural and conservation uses of eligible lands. WRE helps restore, protect, and enhance wetlands and associated upland acres.

For additional information, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/ACEP

BIG SIOUX RIVER PROJECT

SRAM/RBI STACK PROGRAM



Big Sioux River Project

The Big Sioux River Project is continuing partnership with the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources to offer a combined Seasonal Riparian Area Management (SRAM) and Riparian Buffer Initiative (RBI) Stack program for marginal pastureland.

SRAM and RBI are flexible innovative conservation programs designed for producers to increase soil health, pasture vigor, forage biomass, and overall herd health. The goal is to restore water quality in the Big Sioux River watershed by decreasing the bacteria, sediment, and nutrient loading in the water. Grazing livestock with fresh and clean drinking water leads to healthier herds, resulting in an increased rate of gain, which ultimately provides a greater return on investment. The SRAM/RBI Stack program can result in direct benefits to livestock health, pasture health, and improved stream health and stability.

General requirements for enrollment:

- SRAM/RBI Stack program participants defer grazing on enrolled acres in riparian areas adjacent to creeks and rivers, from April 1st - September 30th of each contracted year.
- Enrolled acres of pasture can be hayed during the summer months so long as a 4"-6" stubble height is maintained.
- Grazing is allowed for the entire pasture, including SRAM area, between October 1st - March 31st.
- Producers are not required to fence SRAM area but are required to provide an alternative water source for livestock if grazing is planned. The BSRP can provide cost share for new water developments and fencing projects at 75% of cost if needed.

Payments:

- Landowners who enter a contract will receive a one-time up-front payment in full on enrolled pastureland for the lifetime of the contract (10 years).
- Operators/Renters can split the payment with landowners within the contract, if agreed, at a defined percentage to each entity or individuals.
- The SRAM/RBI Stack payment of **\$178.85/acre/year** will extend out to 120 feet from the edge of the riverbank of eligible streams. Additional eligible acres (up to the 100-year floodplain) will qualify for payment of **\$140.00/acre/year** in accordance with 319 guidelines through the SRAM program.
- Example: 25 acres SRAM/RBI Stack = 25 acres x \$178.85 x 10 years = \$44,712.50
 - Additional 25 acres SRAM = 25 acres x \$140.00 x 10 years = \$35,000.00

****** The total for this example of 50 acres enrolled for 10 years would = \$79,712.50 ******

SRAM/RBI funding is currently available to those landowners who own or operate riparian pastureland immediately adjacent to the Big Sioux River, Skunk Creek, West Skunk Creek, Colton Creek, Willow Creek, West Pipestone Creek, Pipestone Creek, Split Rock Creek, and Beaver Creek to name a few. Please contact the Big Sioux River Project (BSRP) for more information. **Enrollment is currently open.**

Contact the Big Sioux River Project to learn more and enroll in SRAM for 2026!

www.bigsioxriver.com | (605) 759-2650

ENGINEERING MEETS ECOLOGY: FLOATING WETLANDS TAKE ROOT IN SIOUX FALLS

Emily Oyos, Friends of the Big Sioux River Education & Outreach Manager

Earlier this year, Friends of the Big Sioux River and CNH Industrial's Sioux Falls Sustainability Committee launched floating eco-islands at Covell Lake in Sioux Falls. Floating eco-islands are sustainable, constructed wetlands that consist of a platform base filled with native plants. Once placed in a waterbody, the plants' roots help filter and clean the water, create habitats for aquatic species, and add biodiversity to an urban river setting.

These human-made structures were designed and constructed by CNH engineers Sienna Mayer and John Waltz. They consist of 4-inch PVC pipes glued together to form four 6' x 7' structures. Coco coir—a natural fiber extracted from coconut husks—was wrapped in burlap fabric and placed between each set of PVC pipes to serve as a growing medium for the plants while they become established. As the plants grow, their roots begin to dangle below the island panels, where they receive necessary nutrients from the water.

In addition to designing and building the physical structure, the team also determined plans for which plants to grow on the island. The FBSR team researched plant species that are native to eastern South Dakota, attract pollinators, and were used successfully in other floating islands in the Midwest. After a list of around 100 plant species was compiled, they were then placed in a virtual plot based on their varying growing requirements. Taller plants were placed in the middle, with shorter plants placed around the outside of each island. Two islands contained wetland-focused plants, while the other two islands contained prairie-focused plants. Native plants were sourced and purchased from nurseries in the Midwest, including Allendan Seed Company in Winterset, Iowa and Prairie Moon Nursery in Winona, Minnesota.

On Friday, June 6, 2025, after almost a year of planning, the islands were finally able to be installed at Covell Lake! The native plants were carefully placed in the coco coir burlap sacks according to the planting plan. Bird netting was then placed over the top of each island to prevent ducks and geese from pulling up the plants while they become established. The islands were floated down the lake and anchored to one of the small natural islands across from the Terrace Park Japanese Gardens. A trail camera was then set up to observe the plant growth and wildlife happenings on the island at all times of the day.

After one growing season, the team has gathered some preliminary results to inform future island design and construction. 1) The islands are well constructed and withstand South Dakota weather conditions. However, they are extremely heavy, so a smaller design should be considered in the future. 2) Wetland plants survive better under these conditions compared to prairie plants. Future islands should consist primarily of native wetland plants, and a study should be conducted to record their nutrient uptake abilities. 3) The plants attract native wildlife. So far, ducks, turtles, insect pollinators, and fish have all been observed taking advantage of the floating eco-island plants or their roots!

Overall, this is an excellent example of environmental advocates and engineering experts coming together to enrich and sustain the Sioux Falls area's natural resources and wildlife. Both organizations hope that these floating eco-islands not only directly impact water quality but also serve as an educational tool for the Sioux Falls community. The next time you are at Covell Lake, make sure to check out these one-of-a-kind floating habitats!



Some of the FBSR & CNH team.



One of the floating habitats.

CREATING CONSERVATION CONNECTIONS AT PASQUE HILL ON BEAVER CREEK

Alina Krone-Hedman, Minnehaha Conservation District Urban Conservation Education Coordinator



Mary Lou Lacey leads one of the learning stations.

The air is charged with excitement as hundreds of students anxiously await the signal. A few giggles escape, but all stand at attention with eyes glued to Jeff Zimprich, the target of their much-awaited game. Any second, the pollinator balls they all carefully constructed earlier in the day will get to be hurled into the field where he stands, planting habitat for local pollinators. A breeze gently blows, his raised hand falls, and suddenly the sky is full of soil and seeds. A perfect final memory of what the day held.

While growing up in northern Wisconsin, much of my education took place outside (so long as the snow cooperated), and to this day I still have a tree core I received from a field trip. In the backyard of my childhood home, my brother's tree he received in 2nd grade now stands around 15 feet tall. I also can never go near a garden without faintly hearing my grandma yell at me to leave the worms alone or believing, just for a second, I can smell the strawberries picked at my aunt's farm. These experiences shaped my views on stewardship and created a lasting bond with the land; one I would not have if not given the opportunities I was. It is this sense of connection that Jeff and Kim Zimprich are fostering through their work at Pasque Hill on Beaver Creek.



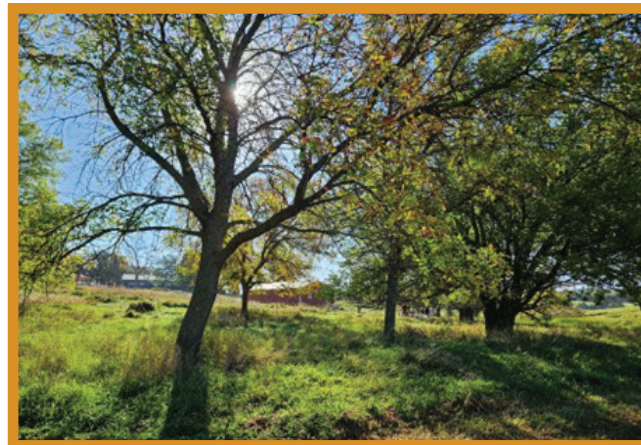
Students enjoying their chance to throw pollinator balls.

Throughout the last few years, local school groups have been able to take part in an education program coordinated with the 157-acre farm. The experiential learning event consists of groups attending either in the morning or afternoon, where they are given as many possibilities as time allows to physically engage with the conservation space. Each session has several education stations students walk to throughout the property, led by conservation professionals. Once at these stations, participants have their senses engaged while various conservation topics regarding soil, water, air, plants, and animals are discussed. When these sessions conclude, the students then come back together to review the day and take part in several culminating activities before departing.

To analyze what was learned, students receive pre and post visit tests. However, the greatest gauge of the impact being made is how the students open up as the field day goes on. Some students arrive apprehensive to be out in the field, but after playing a game about pollinators, touching native grass, or digging through soil, they really start to take interest in why everything being talked about is so important. You begin to hear more questions and see them looking around as connections form, each student taking away at least one thing they will talk about later. One thing that may lead to them wanting to learn more or do more.

It is this spark that Jeff Zimprich himself is all too familiar with, as the very property that is now known as Pasque Hill on Beaver Creek helped inspire his career in conservation. Over 40 years of service all started with a boy climbing the hills at his family farm, with his favorite time being when he could gaze upon the blooming pasque flowers in spring. Now, with the doors being opened for the next generation to learn about caring for our natural resources, it is exciting to see what may come. Maybe someday we will be reading how for one of them, it all started with a pollinator ball.

To learn more about Pasque Hill on Beaver Creek, visit their website at www.pasquehillonbeavercreek.com.



A beautiful day at Pasque Hill on Beaver Creek.



Minnehaha Conservation District

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Check out our website: <https://minnehahacd.org>

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