



# East Polk Soil and Water Conservation District Newsletter

## Minnesota Buffer Law: Common Alternative Practices

The buffer law provides flexibility for alternative practices that may be better suited for some lands and landowners. Landowners also have the option to comply with the law by enrolling in the Agriculture Water Quality Certification Program. This program supports landowners by undertaking a comprehensive review of their entire operation to minimize water quality impacts.

### What Statute Says

“A landowner owning property adjacent to a water body identified in a buffer protection map and whose property is used for cultivation farming may meet the requirements... ..by adopting an alternative riparian water quality practice, or combination of structural, vegetative, and management practices, based on the Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guide or other practices approved by the board, or practices based on local conditions

approved by the local soil and water conservation district that are consistent with the Field Office Technical Guide, that provide water quality protection comparable to the buffer protection for the water body that the property abuts. Included in these practices are retention ponds and alternative measures that prevent overland flow to the water resource.” See §103F.48, Subd. 3.

### Buffer and Alternative Practices Benefits

Buffers provide multiple benefits for water quality, including stabilizing the bank, absorbing nutrients, preventing erosion and sedimentation into ditches, streams, rivers and lakes, and filtering pollutants such as excess pesticides and fertilizers. In some situations, alternative practices will provide comparable water quality benefits and may be more appropriate to fit site conditions and land management objectives.

## Common Alternative Practices

This “6 Pack” of common alternative practices were developed in response to and with suggestions from SWCD staff from around the state. These combinations are not intended to be the only implementation, or to address all scenarios. The common alternative practice examples include:

1. Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program
2. USDA-FOTG Practice Standards Filter Strip (393/391)
3. Grassed Waterway/Cultivated Watercourses
4. A. Negative Slopes or concentrated inflow B. Glacial Lake Plain Areas
5. Negative slopes or concentrated inflow
6. Conservation Tillage/Cover Crops with Vegetated Filter Strip

For more information please visit the Minnesota Buffer Law Web Page:

<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/minnesota-buffer-law>



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### Special points of interest

- Common Alternative Practices for the Buffer Law.
- 2020 NW MN Water Festival is going virtual this year.
- The East Polk SWCD is looking for a four-year supervisor position.
- Learn about our Lake Monitoring program.
- Learn about our Wetland Conservation Act program and what steps you need to take if you have a wetland on your property.
- Learn about our Rain Garden program and how a rain garden can help stop standing water and dead spots in your yard.



## Northwest Minnesota Water Festival

The Northwest Minnesota Water Festival began in 2001 and was held at Old Mill State Park. Since then, Red Lake, Kittson, Marshall, West Polk, Pennington, East Polk, Mahnommen, and Norman Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) have hosted this event each year.

They receive help from local conservation organizations such as Department of Natural Resources, Watershed Districts, International Water Institute, Pheasants Forever, Natural Resources Conservation Services, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, Minnesota Department Health and many others.

This is a 2 day festival that is typically held at the Fertile and Warren fairgrounds. At this event, fourth graders take part in interactive learning stations all about water resources.

### 2020 Northwest Minnesota Water Festival Update

The stations will look a little different this year as students will be participating this event virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Northwest region SWCDs' and other conservation organizations are working together to create packets so that each student can follow the activities whether they are at home or at school.

Each station will have a video and an activity that will help illustrate one of our topics. The topics this year include: watersheds, water quality, ground water, flooding, aquatic invasive species, aquatic life, the water cycle, and fish printing.

### Lakes we monitored in 2020:

- Union Lake
- Sarah Lake
- Kittleson Lake
- Badger Lake
- Cameron Lake
- Oak Lake
- Sandhill Lake
- Spring Lake
- Poplar Lake
- Turtle Lake
- Cross Lake
- Hill River Lake
- Whitefish Lake

## Lake Monitoring Program

The East Polk Soil and Water Conservation District have been monitoring lakes for three years. Our lake monitoring program consists of taking water samples and measuring turbidity.

The collection of water quality data is one way to begin to quantify the physical, chemical and biological condition of lake.

Each lake is unique due to many characteristics and variables that influence its makeup.

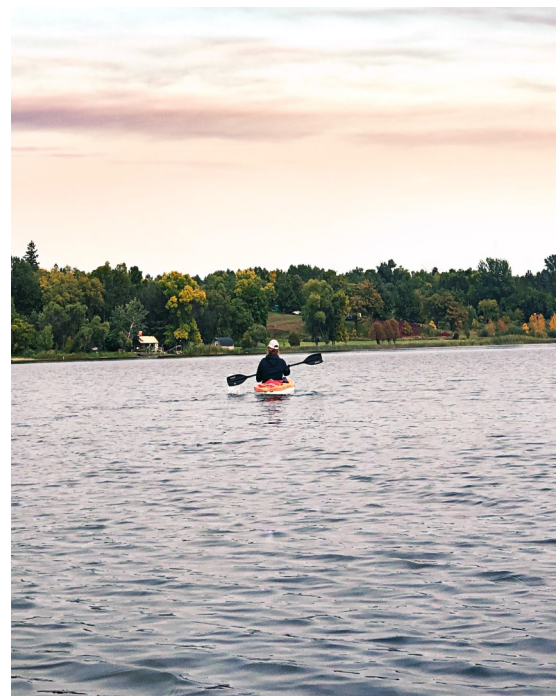
Over 1,000 Minnesota lakes have chosen to participate in the Lake Monitoring Program.

To find out more about our Lake Monitoring Program please visit the RMB webpage at:

<https://www.rmbel.info/lakes/>

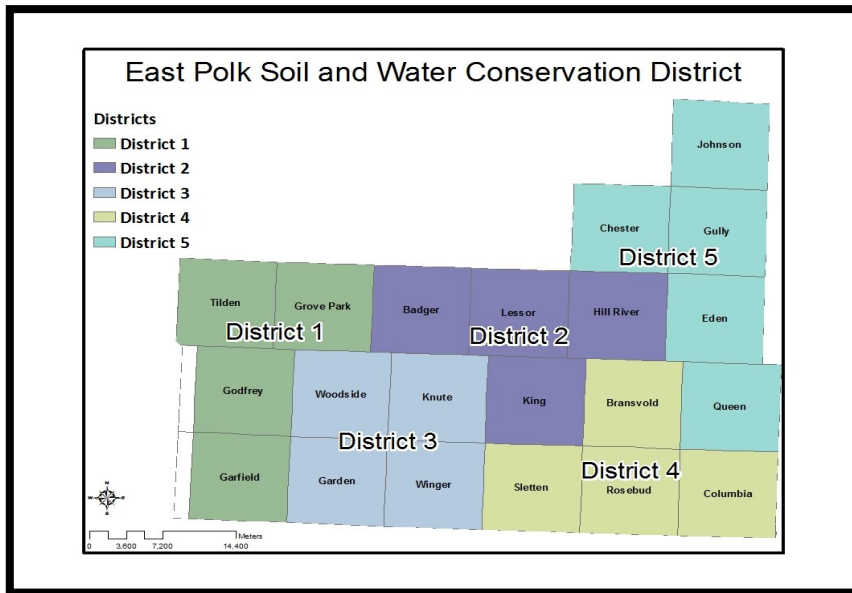
You can also check out the lakes database at:

<https://www.rmbel.info/data/>



# Supervisor Position at the East Polk SWCD

The East Polk Soil and Water Conservation District has a four-year elected supervisor position open starting in January 2021 for District 3 which is currently held by Al Bauer of Erskine, MN.



District 3 is comprised of Woodside, Garden, Knute, and Winger Townships.

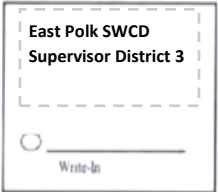


Supervisors play an important role in how the community deals with a wide variety of resource management issues, including wetlands, water quality, and soil erosion. SWCDs are special purpose units of government that manage and direct conservation programs, such as the State Cost-Share program and the Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment Cost-Share program.

Supervisors meet monthly to discuss the business of the SWCD, including state grant allocations to landowners, district conservation priorities, coordination with other local units of government and state and federal agencies. Supervisors do not receive a salary, although they do receive compensation for attending meetings and are reimbursed for expenses.

Since this is a vacancy, you need to place your name as a "write-in" on the Primary Election Ballot released November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. To be a write in you must register at the Polk County Courthouse in Crookston. Feel free to contact the East Polk SWCD office as we would be more than happy to talk to you about the Supervisor's Role for the District.

So, go talk to your family, friends and neighbors and tell them to vote for you on the November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 Primary General Election!

### How To Cast A Write-In Vote

- On your ballot, find the office for which the candidate is running
 
- Print the candidate's name on the Write-In line for that office
 
- Fill in the oval next to the candidate's name
 

## East Polk SWCD Board Members

**Ken Pederson**  
*Chairman*  
District 1:

Tilden Township  
Grove Park Township  
Godfrey Township  
Garfield Township

**Dave Kiecker**  
*Treasurer*  
District 2:

Badger Township  
Lessor Township  
Hill River Township  
King Township

**Al Bauer**  
*Vice Chairman*  
District 3:

Woodside Township  
Knute Township  
Winger Township  
Garden Township

**Scott Balstad**  
*Secretary*  
District 4:

Bransvold Township  
Setten Township  
Rosebud Township  
Columbia Township

**Larry Vettleson**  
*PR&I*  
District 5:

Johnson Township  
Gully Township  
Eden Township  
Queen Township  
Chester Township



## Projects Near Wetlands

A few suggestions if you have a project that might impact a wetland:

- Early in the process, contact your local SWCD. We can give you appropriate guidance.
- Fill out a General Projects Form. This form is available from your local SWCD office or from the Board of Soil and Water Resources Website: ([www.bwsr.state.mn.us/wetlands](http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/wetlands)).
- Before you purchase property for development, consider the existence of any wetlands and weigh the environmental impact and financial cost of disturbing those areas against the projects benefits.
- Thoroughly consider and document the alternatives you have considered to avoid wetland impacts.
- Consider the possible concerns of the community and the project's neighbors.
- If you proceed with a project, determine where the wetlands are and design your project accordingly.

**If you have any questions about the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) or need technical assistance please contact the East Polk SWCD.**

**Phone: 218-563-2777  
Email :[klein.eastpolk@gmail.com](mailto:klein.eastpolk@gmail.com)**

# Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

## What is a Wetland?

Wetlands are areas where water covers the soil or is present either at or near the surface of the soil all year or for very long periods of time during the year, including during the growing season. Often called “nurseries of life”, wetlands provide habitat for thousands of species of aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals. When rivers overflow, wetlands’ help to absorb and slow flood waters. Wetlands also absorb excess nutrients, sediment, and other pollutants before they reach rivers, lakes, and other water bodies. Wetlands are vulnerable to disturbance. Once altered, their functions often never returned to what they once were. Without protection, habitat and water quality can quickly degrade. This affects everyone down-stream. In the past, Wetlands were altered or drained without thought Minnesota has lost 50% of it’s wetlands’ since settlement.

## What are the regulations?

In Minnesota, wetlands are governed by both state and federal laws. The state law is called the Wetland Conservation Act. If you are planning any activity that will impact Wetlands , you must apply for a permit from multiple agencies. Luckily in Minnesota this is handled through the combined permit application. Certain types and sized of activity are exempt but you must still have a permit. The basic requirement is that “Wetlands must not be drained or filled, wholly or partially, unless replaced by restoring or creating wetland areas of at least equal public value under an approved replacement plan.

## The value of a wetland.

Wetlands serve a variety of functions and values beneficial to the general public and environment. The degree to which a wetland serves these functions depends on the hydrology, soil vegetation, size, and location of the wetland in the landscape. Although a wetland may not serve all functions, each wetland works in combination with other wetlands as part of a complex integrated system. Wetlands provide ground water recharge and discharge as well as flood and erosion control. They act as filters for cleaner water and lakes, and provide fish a habitat for spawning and for food. Wetlands are also habitat to all kinds of wildlife. Furthermore they create recreation and even income for some specialized industries.

## Wetland Types:

There are 8 wetland types. Some are easily identifiable by areas of standing water or tree growth.

- Seasonally Flooded Basin
- Inland Fresh Meadow
- Shallow Marsh
- Wooded Swaps
- Open Water
- Shrub Swamps
- Deep Marsh
- Bogs



## What defines a wetland?

Wetlands are defined by three factors:

1. Soils. Wetlands have mostly hydric soils. These are soils that developed in wet conditions.
2. Hydrology. Wetlands have standing water or saturated soil for at least part of the growing season.
3. Vegetation. Wetlands have vegetation adapted to wet soil conditions.

# MN BWSR– Featured Plant for the Month

## Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

**Description:** Common Milkweed is one of the most prevalent milkweed species in Minnesota. The native perennial feeds a wide range of pollinators including monarch butterflies, which can smell new flowers’ strong new scent from as far as a mile.

**Uses:** Common milk weed is a great addition to habitat projects because it benefits a wide range of insects and pollinators. Despite its toxicity, it serves as a larval host for the monarch butterfly, which feeds exclusively on species in the *Asclepias* genus. Its flowers provide high-quality nectar for bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Historically, the plant was used to treat pleurisy and other pulmonary ailments.

**Planting Recommendations:** Common milkweed prefers sunny, well-drained sites, and grows well in disturbed areas. One of the easiest milkweed species to establish, it spreads rapidly from seed or containers. It’s seeds require cold stratification before germinating, so its best to keep them in the freezer for four to six weeks before planting. Common milkweed is often seeded in larger pollinator meadows or prairie restorations. It can be added to pocket plantings, where it can be pulled out by hand if it is spread by rhizome becomes too aggressive. It’s height and the texture of it’s wide, toothless oblong leaves complement larger forbs and grasses such as Joe Pye weed, cut-leaf coneflower, New England aster and little bluestem.



For more information on the Common Milkweed please visit the MN BWSR website: <https://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2020-09/Featured%20Plant%20October%202020%20common%20milkweed.pdf>

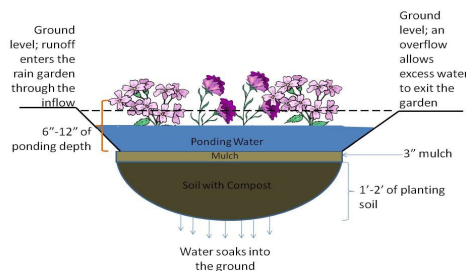
# Standing Water/Dead Spots in Your Yard?

This year a landowner contacted the East Polk SWCD with concerns about standing water in her backyard. Prairie Restorations and an East Polk SWCD technician went out to the site and found many dead spots in her back lot. Patchy dead spots can come from all sorts of directions, including fungal diseases such as brown patch and rust, animal digging, grub damage, dog urine, heat and drought. These conditions leave your yard the worse for wear.

The main culprit for standing water is compacted soil. Clay soil, in particular, prevents water from moving through the ground. As a result, you’ll see the puddles on the lawn. Grass stops growing because it cannot maneuver its roots through the dense soil for nutrients and air pockets and it effectively suffocates under the standing water. The landowner had an abundance of dead spots in low-lying areas which indicates a poorly graded yard. Water runoff becomes trapped on the grass because it cannot drain properly. If the water can’t drain away, it starts to cause problems for the grass and you’ll start to see dead patches.

Our solution was to add a rain garden in a low lying area where there appears to be a dead

spot. Rain gardens are simply shallow depressions underlaid with permeable materials and filled with native plants chosen for their ability to stand up to a good soaking and to thrive without fertilizers and pesticides. A rain garden can be whatever style the homeowner prefers, natural-looking or carefully manicured, filled with flowers, shrubs, trees, grasses, ground covers and ferns. It can be suited to sunshine or shade, and some are designed to attract birds and butterflies.



**For more information about our Rain Garden program or if you need technical assistance please contact the East Polk SWCD.**

**Phone: 218-563-2777**

**Email: [schommer.eastpolk@gmail.com](mailto:schommer.eastpolk@gmail.com)**



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**Marea Schommer**  
District Technician

Programs:  
Shoreline Restoration  
Rain Garden  
Tree Program

Rainfall/Stream/Lake Monitor

Email: [Schommer.eastpolk@gmail.com](mailto:Schommer.eastpolk@gmail.com)

**Call Us at:** 218-563-2777

**Visit our Website:**  
[www.eastpolkswcd.org](http://www.eastpolkswcd.org)

## East Polk Soil and Water Conservation District

### **Our Mission**

Our purpose is to assist landowners in applying proper practices for the conservation of soil erosion, land resource planning and development, utilization and management of the waters of the area, preserving our natural areas and the fish and wildlife which inhabit them.

### **A Resource for Landowners**

We partner with County, State and Federal assets to bring dollars back to the community for water and soil health.

We strive to build win-win scenarios for private landowners, the surrounding watersheds, and for our natural resources.

### **Keep the Land Productive**

While protection of natural resources is our focus, we also understand that private and working lands need to be used by landowners for landowners. We promote conservation practices that provide resource production at the same time.