

AN EDUCATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT – LYNDEN, WASHINGTON

Wolves of the Sky

By Beth Chisholm

A Whatcom County falconer uses his passion for raptors to aid local farmers and to protect birds of prey.



North American Falconers Association

The North American Falconers Association (NAFA) is a group of dedicated individuals who share common views in the welfare of raptors (birds of prey) in nature and in their careful employment in the sport of falconry. NAFA welcomes you to explore the world of raptors and the ancient sport of falconry.



Dan Pike with a peregrine falcon he calls Rambo.

Dan Pike has been in Whatcom County for just four years but he has quickly become known by area farmers for his falconry. On a hot sunny July evening I had the opportunity to visit him on his 10 acres in the Bertrand Creek

watershed where he raises Peregrine falcons, Harris Hawks, homing pigeons, and hunting dogs. With a permit from the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Dan currently houses and breeds north of Lynden a total of 15 raptors. Dan tells me that "Harris Hawks are considered by some to be the wolves of the sky because of the way that they hunt." Harris Hawks are very social animals, and they hunt in groups similar to wolves.

In our short visit Dan showed off his breeding pairs, and explained the life cycle, habitat requirements and survival rates of these beautiful birds. I quickly understood that falconry is much more than just sport, it is the art of hunting with trained raptors and dogs. He reminded me that at any time during hunting expeditions

his birds are free to go. But in his 15 years of falconry this has not been a problem, probably because some of these birds have imprinted on Dan—so they stick with him. All of Dan's animals are treated with the utmost care, and he will be the first to tell you that falconry is not a "hobby" but a way of life.

Once the courting and molting season is complete in mid-summer, Dan takes his Harris Hawks, peregrine falcons and goshawks to local farm fields. Dan releases the hawks to help

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Johnson Creek Project Enters Phase II

The second phase of the Johnson Creek cleaning and restoration plan will begin this summer with channel work in an additional three miles of stream. This ambitious project was spearheaded by Consolidated Drainage Improvement District #31 and involves many different agencies and organizations including Whatcom County Public Works and the Whatcom Conservation District.

Johnson Creek is an interesting stream with a colorful history. Draining north into the Fraser River system, it was long known as a productive fish stream and continues to provide habitat for several species of salmon. For the last 50 years Johnson Creek has been managed primarily as a drainage system to ensure productive agricultural lands. Johnson Creek also functions as an overflow channel for the Nooksack River during flood events.

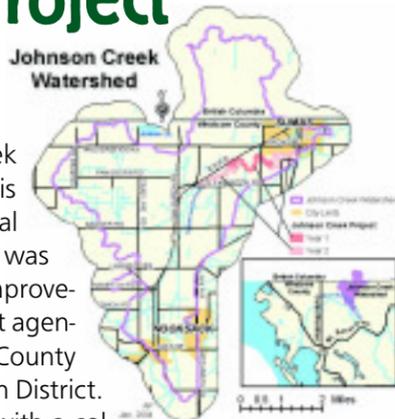


Johnson Creek this spring - its channel cleaned out and banks newly planted with shrubs and trees.

The Johnson Creek Restoration and Management Plan was created to improve drainage and fish habitat by restoring vegetative buffers along the stream. Last summer three miles of stream were cleaned of invasive grasses and accumulated sediments. Last winter stream banks were planted with native shrubs to complete Phase I of the project. The channel work has been successful, as fields were dry and tillable early in the spring.

Revegetation work takes place on the stream banks from ordinary high water mark to the top of the bank. Shrubs were planted on the banks and one row of trees was planted along the top of the highest bank. It is hoped that this planting plan will reduce or eliminate the re-growth of invasive grasses in the stream and improve wildlife habitat and water quality, while still allowing future equipment access should it once again become necessary.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



Water Quality in Sumas River Similar to Nooksack Tributaries

Sumas River Water Quality Up To Standards

For the past six years considerable effort has gone into improving water quality in the Nooksack River watershed, with the goal of reopening Portage Bay shellfish beds closed due to high fecal coliform (FC) counts. Those improvement efforts have been successful and late last year the Department of Health reopened most of Portage Bay's shellfish beds for commercial harvest. While the Nooksack has received a lot of favorable publicity about this, little has been said about how water quality

in the Sumas River and its tributaries has also improved. This is mainly because out flow from the Sumas enters Canada.



The fact is that FC counts for the two watersheds look very similar. Table 1 lists ten county streams by their respective watershed and FC count (geometric mean for samples measured in colonies per 100 milliliters). Water samples for both watersheds were collected and processed by the Northwest Indian College. Testing in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

EQIP Contracts

Over \$1,000,000 in Environmental Quality Incentive Program Contracts Will be Awarded to Whatcom County Producers this Year

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is a cost-share program administered by the USDA that provides funding to accomplish conservation goals on private land. EQIP contracts are offered to the high-

est scoring applicants in a ranking process that awards points based on an agricultural producer's willingness to complete practices considered necessary for protecting and improving

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT – Mission Statement: *The Whatcom Conservation District promotes conservation education and provides technical assistance to foster a healthy relationship between the environment and people.*

New CREP Technician Joins District Staff

In March 2004 Whatcom Conservation District welcomed Sonya Schaller to the District staff as a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) technician. Sonya works with the two CREP project managers to implement aspects of the program including marketing, enrollment, and project inspections.

Sonya received a Bachelor of Science degree from Western Washington University's Biology Department after graduating from Omak High School in Okanogan County. Her last five years of employment were with the USDA Forest Service doing fire and ecological field research based out of Seattle. Sonya's main focus and interest has been the botany and ecology of native plants.

Sonya recently moved back to



Whatcom County and enjoys working with the Conservation District staff in Lynden. She says working with landowners and CREP is a wonderful opportunity and one that has already enriched her career and life experience. She hopes to pursue her path in the field of resource conservation and dreams of owning a small farm in the future.

Lynden Christian High School Team Places Third in State Envirothon Competition



Lynden Christian High School's 2004 team celebrates! from left to right they are: Mr. Kevin LaFleur, Kate Steensma, Alice Vander Haak, Daniel Bergman, Jenna Vander Woude, and Tim Blok.

Congratulations to Lynden Christian High School's (LCHS) team who placed third out of a total of 18 teams in the May 2004 Washington State Envirothon competition hosted by the Okanogan Conservation District. LCHS had earlier in the year placed first in Whatcom County at the Northwest Regional level to qualify for the state level Envirothon competition. These accomplishments are even more impressive knowing that this was LCHS's first time participating in the Envirothon, the largest natural resource knowledge competition in North America.

In the Envirothon, students work in teams of five to rotate through a series of stations to conduct hands-

on investigations and to answer written questions about aquatic ecology, soils/land use, forestry, wildlife and a current environmental issue. Teams must also prepare and give an oral presentation on a current environmental issue, which this year was "Natural Resource Management in an Urban Environment".

LCHS team of five students was led by teachers Kevin LaFleur and Harlan Kredit. Team members were Daniel Bergman, Tim Blok, Kate Steensma, Alice Vander Haak, Jenna Vander Woude. Whatcom Conservation District looks forward to hosting next year's Northwest Regional Envirothon competition in March 2005!

EQIP continued from page 1

natural resources. Earlier this year 105 producers from Whatcom County, along with 55 producers from other northwestern Washington counties, completed the ranking process.

So far contracts totaling \$837,096 have been awarded to seven Whatcom producers. At least

one more producer is expected to join the list this year, bringing the total value of all contracts in Whatcom County to over \$1,000,000. EQIP funds will be used primarily to install manure storage and handling facilities and to improve habitat conditions for fish and wildlife.

Drayton Harbor Open House Celebrates Water Quality Improvement

On June 19th Whatcom Conservation District staff joined other individuals, groups and agencies at the Blaine Harbor Office for an open house and oyster feed to celebrate the June 2004 conditional re-opening of a portion of shellfish beds in Drayton Harbor. In 1995 WA State Department of Health closed a portion of Drayton Harbor shellfish beds due to bacterial contamination. The entire harbor was closed to shellfish harvesting in 1999.



Whatcom Conservation District and many other agencies, tribal and local governments, individuals, businesses and organizations have worked with the Drayton Harbor Shellfish Protection District Committee and watershed residents for many years to make improvements to pollution sources. Yet there is still work to do!

Marine water quality samples in Drayton Harbor have shown high fecal coliform bacteria readings following heavy rainfalls, but samples taken during dry weather have met state and federal health standards. This says that bacteria pollution sources in the watershed still exist and runoff

washes the pollutants into the harbor. The conditional approval in central Drayton Harbor is based on rainfall.

A rainfall of one-half inch or greater in a 24-hour period will close the area for five days (WA State Dept. of Health).

It is important for visitors and watershed residents to do their part to protect and improve the health of local waters by keeping animal waste out of streams, maintaining buffers of native vegetation along waterbodies, maintaining properly functioning septic systems, picking up after pets, and properly disposing of boat waste. Find out other great information about Whatcom County's marine and shellfish resources at <http://whatcom-mrc.wsu.edu/>.

Berries, Ice Cream and Stories Down by the Stream!

If you have ever lived in the Tenmile Creek Watershed (Laurel area), or know stories of Tenmile Creek, Fourmile Creek, Deer Creek, or Silver Springs (Crystal Springs), this evening of storytelling and ice cream is for you. We need your participation to make this evening social event even more successful!



Brian Flowers, a local professional storyteller, will lead this story telling event for the whole family. Learn about the Tenmile Creek Watershed, which includes Tenmile Creek, Fourmile Creek, Deer Creek, Silver Springs (Crystal Springs), etc., through shared stories. Come to listen and also to share your bit of history, and have it documented for future generations. Meet Tenmile Creek Watershed neighbors – old and new. Enjoy an old-fashioned Ice Cream Social down by the creek!

The date for the event has been tentatively set for Friday, August 27, 2004 from 6:30-8:30 pm at the Tenmile Creek behind the Tenmile Elementary School. Look for further notice in local newspapers or please call Dorie Belisle for confirmation (398-9187).

Upcoming Events

COME JOIN THE WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT AT THESE GREAT SUMMER EVENTS:

Annual Kids Fest 2004 • August 7

City of Bellingham's Annual Kids Fest 2004 Saturday August 7th at Civic Field. Look for the Whatcom Conservation District booth and our interactive watershed model and learn about watersheds and Whatcom County Agriculture

Northwest Washington • Fair August 16-21

Help support local agriculture – visit this year's Northwest Washington Fair, August 16-21st. Don't forget to visit the award winning "Farming for Life" exhibit in the beautiful Mt. Baker Rotary Building.

Bertrand Creek WID Open House • September 17

The Agricultural Preservation Committee will host a Bertrand Creek Watershed Improvement District (WID) informational open house on September 17th. The Whatcom Conservation District will present information about the Bertrand Salmon Habitat Survey. Check out our website for more details.

World Water Quality Monitoring Day • October 15

NATION-WIDE STUDY TO BEGIN THIS FALL Agricultural Air Emissions To Be Regulated



In an effort to address agricultural air emissions, a national study will begin this September and will continue for two years. According to Cornell University's PRO-DAIRY Program, the EPA, USDA and a team of university scientists overseen by the Federation of Animal Science Societies will monitor air emissions from dairy, pork, egg and meat-bird poultry farms across the country. At the conclusion of the study EPA will use the information gathered to set air emissions policies, to identify exceedance thresholds, and to regulate excessive livestock and poultry air emissions.

Existing air emissions laws already have specific thresholds for who has to comply with requirements. However, this monitoring is needed because government agencies have not "calibrated" farm production systems to know what size farms and what manure handling procedures produce air emissions that exceed thresholds for the regulated pollutants. Regulated air pollutants that will be monitored include ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, particulate matter (e.g. dust), nitrous oxides and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) such as methane. Odor will not be regulated.

Prior to the beginning of the air emission study individual producers will need to make this decision: Do I want to enter a consent agreement that offers me "safe harbor" from any past and current violations of air emissions laws or do I want to go it alone? The advantage of entering into the agreement is that it will help protect the producer from EPA, state and citizen lawsuits without admitting guilt. The disadvantage is that livestock producers will be assessed a fee of \$200 or \$500 to participate in the agreement based on size of their herd (less than or more than 700 cows).

After the study is completed many agricultural producers in Whatcom County (dairies in particular) will probably be affected to at least some degree by changes in air emission regulations. Existing laws require that all emissions of hazardous substances from a facility need to be reported to the EPA if they exceed 100 pounds in any 24-hour period.

Ammonia is considered by EPA to be a hazardous substance. It is currently estimated that a group of between 200 and 500 cows emit more than 100 pounds of ammonia daily. It isn't clear at this time whether emissions from field manure applications, which are referred to as "fugitive emissions," will be included in determining a facility's daily total emissions. Permits will probably only be required for facilities that are a "major source" of pollution. Those are facilities that contribute more than 100 tons annually - an emission level that may possibly be reached by only the very largest dairies in the county.

Once the study is over, results will be published in "look up" charts that producers will use to determine if their farm size and manure management methods require them to comply with air laws. Producers below emission thresholds will only have to send in a certification to the EPA stating they are not subject to air laws. Most producers above an emission threshold will be granted additional time to come into compliance with the law. If emissions continue above a threshold they will need to file pollutant release forms. Producers contributing the highest level of pollutants may have to apply for a permit and/or install controls on their farm.

The following website provides more information: www.prodairyfacilities.cornell.edu (click on "Air Emission").

Johnson Creek continued from page 1

Phase II will begin this summer with more channel cleaning beginning at Clearbrook Road and finishing at Cherry Street in the City of Sumas. Crews will then stabilize the banks with seed and straw matting to prevent erosion. Revegetation work will begin this fall and will con-



Johnson Creek as it appeared last year prior to sediment removal and revegetation.

tinue until spring 2005. Thanks to all the participating agencies helping to make this project a reality and a big thanks to the 30 different landowners who have granted access to their land and have agreed to restoration work on their section of stream.



Notice how much wider the stream channel appears in this photo than in the prerestoration photo to the left. Dredge spoils are stacked in the field and the banks are lined with straw mats to prevent erosion.

Red Cedars Hit Hard by Winter Injury

After the District's March 2004 plant sale, a number of our customers reported experiencing very low survival rates (less than 10%) in the western red cedar seedlings they purchased from us. Many also lost more Douglas fir than would be typically expected. To compensate customers for these losses, the District will supply them with replacement trees next spring.

After some research we believe these trees failed to survive due to weather-related injury that occurred last fall. Seedling trees are more sensitive to sudden changes in temperature than are mature trees. Last October the weather suddenly changed from warmer and wetter than average to colder than normal during the first part of November. Trees that suffer weather-related injury often look normal for a time and it is only after they are re-planted that the negative effects become apparent.

The nursery that supplied our trees was not the only one that experienced survival problems for these species. Tree growers and restoration contractors that purchased trees from other nurseries also experienced poor seedling survival rates this spring. What's more, winter injury wasn't restricted just to seedlings. We have also observed some sites (especially exposed ones) this spring where most of the western red cedars that were planted over the past several years died.



Several lessons were learned from this experience:

- * For other species of seedlings planted this spring, losses were closer to normal (10% mortality or less). This underscores why it is important to diversify plantings (reforestation, habitat restoration, ornamental landscaping, etc.) with a number of species (deciduous as well as evergreen) and not become overly reliant on just one or two.

- * There are no guarantees or certainty when working with nature - just ask a farmer!

- * Western red cedar is not as adaptable as other species. They do their best in deep, moist soil on sites where they are protected from extended exposure to wind and where light is filtered.

- * A pre-planting viability test is needed for seedling evergreens to help determine survival potential.

RULES OF THE ROAD:

Washington State Commercial Vehicle Guide 2004-2005 Available at Conservation District

Want to stay legal while operating farm vehicles on state roads? The recently published Commercial Vehicle Guide provides answers for questions like this: When are farmers exempted from commercial driver's license requirements? How

wide does a farm implement have to be to require a permit? And of course this one: Farm permit fees. Pick up copies at the Whatcom Conservation District office at 6975 Hannegan Road located near Hinote's Corner.

Sumas River continued from page 1

the Nooksack watershed began in 1998, while testing for the Sumas Watershed began in 2002. The average for the Nooksack's tributaries was 33 FC col./100 mL, while the average for

100 mL. Since 37 dairies are currently operating within the Sumas drainage (20% of the county's total) and dairy farming is the predominant land use, there is good reason to believe that

Table 1. Water Sample Results

| Waterbody | Watershed | geo. mean (col./100 mL) Fecal coliform |
|---------------------------|-----------|---|
| Bertrand Creek | Nooksack | 23 |
| Fishtrap Creek | Nooksack | 47 |
| Johnson Creek | Sumas | 18 |
| Kamm Creek (Slough) | Nooksack | 44 |
| Nooksack River (Marietta) | Nooksack | 8 |
| Pangborn Creek | Sumas | 47 |
| Scott Ditch | Nooksack | 22 |
| Squaw Creek | Sumas | 33 |
| Sumas River (Jones Rd) | Sumas | 44 |
| Ten Mile Creek | Nooksack | 28 |

Sumas River streams was 36 FC col./100 mL. Freshwater is considered Class A (excellent) if the geo. mean FC count does not exceed 100 col./

these lower FC counts are a result of the improvements in manure handling and management that have been made over the last several years.

District Receives Grant for Ten Mile Watershed Restoration - Phase III

Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) was recently awarded a grant of \$250,000 from the Centennial Clean Water Fund (CCWF) administered by the Washington State Department of Ecology to implement Phase III of landowner education and riparian restoration efforts in the Ten Mile Creek watershed. Phase III of riparian restoration and education in the watershed will continue work toward the goal of improving water quality and water quantity to restore critical spawning and rearing habitats for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed Chinook salmon and bull trout and for Coho salmon (a candidate species for federal ESA listing).

Riparian restoration will focus on the upper reaches of Four Mile Creek, a tributary to Ten Mile Creek. The activities will include removing invasive, non-native reed canary grass, planting native species along the stream bank, and implementing filter strips adjacent to the planted areas. This will improve stream flow, increase dissolved oxygen levels, create shade to help lower water temperatures, and reduce the potential for animal waste and sediments to enter the watercourse.

Education will include meeting

with Ten Mile Creek watershed residents to discuss watershed and water quality concepts, effects of land management activities on the health of local streams, and actions other Ten Mile watershed residents are taking to improve water quality. Phase III funding will also emphasize the importance of maintaining on-site septic systems.

For the past three years WCD has successfully led the efforts of the first two phases of the Ten Mile Creek watershed pilot project, guiding the project manager Dorie Belisle, who is a resident landowner/farmer in the watershed. Through phases I, II, and III a total of 27 landowners will have participated in planting their riparian areas. This project that promotes proactive, site-specific improvements will demonstrate that better functioning stream systems (i.e., free of reed canary grass, intact buffer of native plant material, functioning filter strip) on western Washington farmland can improve water quality, water quantity, and fish habitat in our streams and thus be beneficial to farmers.

TENMILE CREEK
WATERSHED



Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lynden, WA
Permit #192

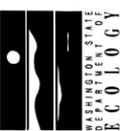


THIS NEWSLETTER is published by the Whatcom Conservation District with support from the Centennial Clean Water Fund under the authority of the Washington State Conservation Commission and the Washington State Department of Ecology. Call the district's office at (360) 354-2035 if you know of anyone who would like to be on the mailing list, or if you have articles of interest or questions concerning the Whatcom Conservation District.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE: <http://www.whatcomcd.org>

Whatcom Conservation District

6975 Hannegan Road
Lynden, Washington 98264
(360) 354-2035 • Fax (360) 354-4678
Email: wcd@whatcomcd.org



CREP Rule Revised:



New minimum buffer ranges from 35 to 100 feet

A rule change enacted this spring reduced the minimum forested buffer width necessary to be eligible for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) funds. Prior to the spring 2004 rule change, the minimum CREP buffer width in Whatcom County was between 75 and 130 feet. The new minimum buffer standard ranges from 35 to 100 feet along eligible channels without floodplains. The average buffer width has been around 150 feet for projects enrolled in Whatcom County.

CREP is the program that pays landowners, through establishment of 10-15 year contracts, to plant trees along streams in order to improve habitat conditions for salmon. The amount of rent paid to the landowner per acre is 200% of the rental rate for the soil type mapped in the contracted acreage. Locally through CREP the top soil rental rate is over \$400 per acre, with some lands eligible for an additional incentive. CREP pays for all costs associated with planting and maintaining program sites for up to five years.

If you are interested in CREP please contact the District office for more information.

You Need to be FIREWISE

Because our western Washington climate is moist and rainy for much of the year, we may not think that wildfire could pose a threat to our homes and businesses. But historically the Pacific Northwest region is an area where fire has played a prominent role in the natural environment. Recent examples such as the Carnation wildfire in August 2003 and the Darrington fire in June 2004 are reminders that large-scale fires do indeed happen in western Washington. This year's dry spring has led forest officials to predict an "intense fire season" for the region.

FIREWISE Communities is a program developed by the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program. The program includes workshops to improve safety, build awareness and partnerships, and encourage the integration of FIREWISE concepts into community and disaster mitigation



planning. In the coming months, Whatcom Conservation District will be working with Washington Department of Natural Resources and other conservation districts to heighten awareness of wildfire threat in western Washington and to coordinate FIREWISE workshops.

Whatcom Conservation District has copies of a publication called *Living with Fire - A Guide for the Homeowner* developed by the Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group. The *Living with Fire* guide provides excellent information about the fire environment and the steps for creating "defensible space" around your homes and farms. Defensible space is the area between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been modified to reduce the wildfire threat and to provide an opportunity for firefighters to effectively defend the house. Please call Andrea or Sonya (360-354-2035) and request a free copy of *Living With Fire* and look for information about FIREWISE events in the coming months.

Wolves of the Sky continued from page 1

deter the thousands of starlings (see information below about starlings) roosting in and around the county's dairy barns, or he brings his Jack Russell terriers and English pointer to flush out rabbits and other small animals. Then he watches his hawks hunt. Thanks to Dan, his fellow falconers, and to local farmers, this 4000 year-old tradition of falconry is alive in Whatcom County.

Dan feeds his raptors mostly domestically raised quail and starlings that he acquires from the local United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) starling trapping program. The starling trapping program is in its 6th year, and is currently being maintained by John Quanz. John is also well known by area farmers since he is the local USDA employee who operates the 31 active traps throughout Whatcom County.

Dan Pike is the North Pacific Regional Director of the North American Falconers Association, he lives in Lynden and can be reached at danpi@msn.com. If you are interested in more information about falconry visit www.n-a-f-a.org or www.wafalconry.org.

Why trap starlings?

The European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) is a non-native species that can carry disease and has been found to contaminate food sources on local dairy farms. Local farmers, with help from the county government, hire trappers from the USDA's Wildlife Services to get rid of the birds. Not to worry, I found out from John that these trapped starlings are provided with shelter, fresh water and are euthanized under direction of the USDA Wildlife Services.

Henry Bierlink of the Whatcom County Agriculture Preservation Committee (APC) estimates the program has killed 250,000 starlings since it began five years ago. Nationwide, Wildlife Services kills more than a million starlings a year.

Starlings are one of the most successful alien-species invasions

European Starling

(winter plumage)
by Larry McQueen



All of the European Starlings found today in North America-and they number in the 200 million range-are descendants of approximately 100 birds introduced in New York City's Central Park in the early 1890s.

ever documented. Today the shiny black birds have ousted bluebirds, woodpeckers, and other cavity-nesters in every state but Hawaii, and their numbers - estimated at more than 200 million nationwide - have grown to rival America's human population.

If you would like more information about the European Starling trapping program, you can reach John Quanz at 815-3785 or contact Henry Bierlink at the APC in Lynden at 354-1337.

WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Board of Supervisors

Robert Barker, Chair
Jerry Van Dellen, Vice-Chair
Rod Visser, Treasurer
Cornelius Timmermans & Randy Kinley, Supervisors

USDA-NRCS Staff

John Gillies, Resource Conservationist
Bill Bonsen, Technician
Travis Bouma, Technician
Erica Fifer, Engineer
Anitra Gorham, Soil Conservationist

District Staff

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| George Boggs, District Manager | Chris Clark, Technician | Andrew Phay, GIS Technician |
| Dawn Bekenyi, Admin. Asst. | Frank Corey, Technician | Sonya Schaller, Technician |
| Wayne Chaudiere, Technician | Sabina Gouran, Technician | Chuck Timblin, Technician |
| Beth Chisholm, Technician | Andrea Hood, Technician | |