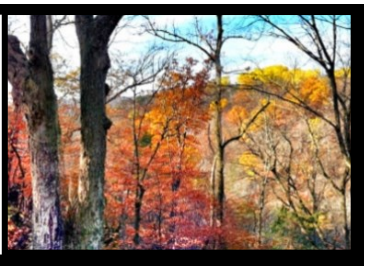
CONSERVATION TODAY

Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District & USDA

Winter 2026



2025 Conservationist of the Year

On 1,100 acres outside of Gibbon, Keith and his wife, Shelby, raise three energetic sons and a farm full of innovation. Corn, soybeans, and finishing hogs are their staples, with pork sold through a local CSA. As a Saddle Butte Ag cover crop dealer, Keith's commitment to soil health runs deep.

After 15 years of farming, the Hartmanns embraced strip-till, no-till, and cover crops across most fields, while using minimal tillage only on manure-applied acres. Their approach is rooted in stopping erosion and making every field pass more efficient. Inspired by prairie ecosystems, Keith built a cover crop interseeder in 2016. This allows living roots to continually feed the soil, even after the corn stops growing. That discovery shifted his focus; soil became an active farm partner, not just dirt.

Pictured: Keith and Shelby Hartmann with their three sons, Skye, Rhys, and Croix.

By consistently using cover crops and reducing tillage, the Hartmanns built strong, resilient soils that remain productive even with less fuel and labor. The economic benefits are evident, and spending more time with family makes it even better. Their advice? "Build deep soil structure, avoid deep tillage unless there is real compaction, and let nature assist. Patience rewards those whose soil biology flourishes," said Hartmann.

Keith is also a peer-to-peer soil health mentor, where his goal is simple: share conservation know-how and encourage others to use these practices as a flexible tool for success. Through blending heritage and innovation, the Hartmanns prove that smart soil management leads to healthy land, thriving harvests, and a strong future for Minnesota farming.

Sibley Soil & Water Conservation District

Sibley SWCD

Joel Wurscher,
District Manager

Jeremy Buckentin,
Senior District Technician

Jack Bushman,
Water Resources Coordinator

Tara O'Brien,
Conservation Technician

Hayley Thies
Operations Specialist

SWCD Board

Kathleen Thies - District 1

Paul Wiemann - District 2

Loren Evenson - District 3

Wayne Grams - District 4

Robert Nielsen - District 5

Board Meetings

Second Tuesday of each Month
4 p.m.,
USDA Conference Room

USDA

USDA - NRCS

Jacob Stich,
Team Lead

Chris Engh,
District Conservationist

Nicole Baumann,
Agronomist

Office Hours

Monday - Friday
8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Wetlands: Nature's Unsung Heroes

Pictured: A wetland located in Green Isle Township.

In a world not so far away, lives a vast and mysterious network of enchanted lands known as wetlands. To the untrained eye, they look like soggy patches of earth and reeds, buzzing with insects and humming with frogs. The truth is these lands are the Earth's vital guardians, its living, breathing organs.

Wetlands are no ordinary places. They are the Earth's secret caretakers, each one keeping the world alive and well. They are the kidneys of the planet, filtering the water that flows through them. Every drop is being cleaned and purified as the wetlands gently trap pollutants and soak up excess nutrients, allowing clean water to flow freely once more. Their lungs work quietly, managing water like air, absorbing moisture in heavy rains and breathing it out slowly during dry spells. In doing so, they protect towns from floods and keep rivers singing their steady songs. Like the liver, these sacred lands break down the world's waste, turning toxic elements into harmless whispers. Meanwhile, their thick grasses and twisting roots form barriers like skin, shielding shorelines and providing refuge for creatures great and small.

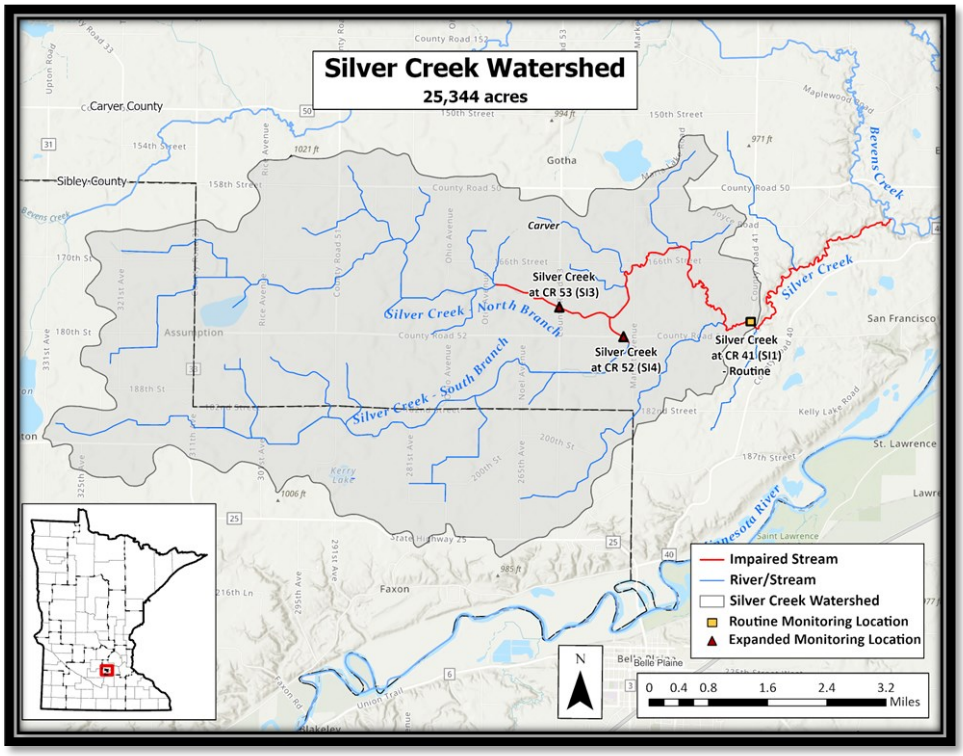
Across wetlands, life flourishes with creatures of every kind. Fish, birds, reptiles, frogs, and even furry forest dwellers find food, shelter, and safe places to raise their young. Among them are many rare and threatened beings who rely on the wetlands to survive. Migrating birds pause their journeys to rest, feed, and grow their young. People come to fish its waters, snap photos of its wonders, and stand in quiet awe as the sun rises over its mirrored surfaces. Even livelihoods are protected from storms and floods, doing work that no machine or man-made system can match.

However, all is not well. Bit by bit and piece by piece, over 90 percent of these sacred lands were drained, paved over, or forgotten. As they disappear, water becomes murkier, floods become fiercer, and forests become silent.

Still, the wetlands do not complain. Like true heroes, they continue to give all they have, cleaning, sheltering, and protecting. The fate of wetlands lies in the hands of those who still walk on earth. If these living lands are to survive, they must be seen for what they truly are, not wastelands, but lifelands. Organs of the planet. Unsung heroes.

High Levels of Acetochlor in Silver Creek

Silver Creek, with its headwaters in the Northeast corner of Sibley County, flows through Carver County before making its way to Bevens Creek and the Minnesota River. Routine water monitoring found elevated levels of acetochlor within its lower reaches. Acetochlor, the active ingredient in herbicides like Tripleflex, Warrant, Harness, and SureStart, is applied in May and early June. This application window coincides with spring rain, creating the potential for runoff issues. High levels of acetochlor can be harmful to aquatic plants and organisms.



As producers look forward to 2026, those in the 25,000-acre Silver Creek watershed are encouraged to review their weed management plan and discuss altered native herbicide options or application methods with Agronomists.

Please contact the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) for a full list of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and additional acetochlor impairment information at:

Ptu.mda@state.mn.us or scan the QR code.

Win A Black Hills Spruce Tree!

Get entered in a drawing for a 2 –gallon Black Hills Spruce Tree by following our Facebook page and commenting on one of our tree posts January 1st through March 1st. The winner will be announced March 5th via Facebook.

Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District

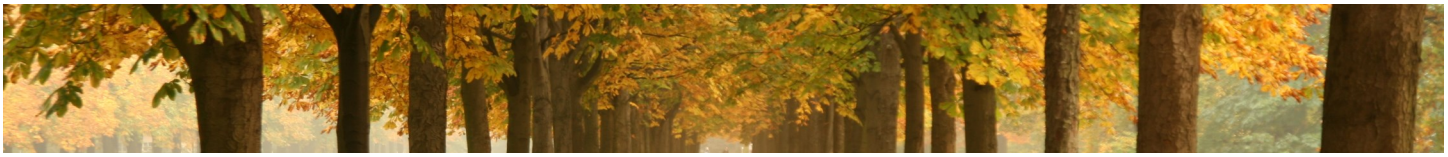
https://www.facebook.com/SibleySoilandWaterConservationDistrict/

Free Well Water Testing Available for Private Well Users in Sibley & Nicollet Counties

Well water test kits for Nitrates, Manganese, Lead, Arsenic, and Coliform Bacteria are available for free at the Sibley SWCD and Nicollet SWCD offices.

CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

YOUR Clean Water Fund AT WORK



Protecting the Land in Henderson Township

Pictured: A grade stabilization structure being constructed in Henderson Township.

In the heart of Henderson Township, a quiet transformation is taking place. Fields that once battled erosion and runoff are now supported by new conservation systems designed to heal the land, most notably, a grade stabilization structure and a network of carefully contoured grassed waterways. Backed by Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) and the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), this effort brings together landowners and conservation partners to promote practices that sustain both farming and the environment.

The grade stabilization structure is a large earthen embankment with a drop pipe constructed to stop the advancement of gullies and prevent ravine erosion. By slowing and safely directing runoff, the structure protects valuable topsoil, reduces flooding, and prevents sediment and nutrients from entering nearby streams and rivers. These improvements not only enhance water quality but also help maintain the long-term productivity and resilience of local farmland.

Working hand in hand with the grade stabilization structure are the newly established grassed waterways. They take soil and water conservation a step further. These gently contoured channels are planted with dense, deep-rooted vegetation that guides surface runoff through natural drainage paths. The grass stabilizes the soil, filters out silt before it reaches waterways, and provides a safe outlet for excess water during heavy rain. In addition, they provide forage for hay or grazing, create wildlife habitats and travel corridors, and facilitate the movement of farm equipment across sloped areas.

Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) within the Lower Minnesota River West is supported by the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment. Grade stabilization structures are eligible for up to 90% cost-share and 100% when combined with EQIP funding. Grassed waterways are also cost-shared at the same rates or can be funded through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), depending on the scenario.

Together, these conservation practices are strengthening soil and water health, improving local streams, and protecting Henderson Township's agricultural landscape for future generations. This project highlights the power of collaboration among landowners, conservation districts, and partner agencies, showing that working together can keep the land productive and the water clean for years to come.

CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

YOUR Clean Water Fund AT WORK

2026 TREE/PLANT PROGRAM - ORDER FORM

Sibley Soil & Water Conservation District

Sibley SWCD, 112 5th St., PO BOX 161 Gaylord, MN 55334 (507) 702 7077

Order Deadline: March 31st, 2026

ORDER # _____ office use only

Name: **Phone:**

Address: **City:** **Zip:**

Trees

Type	Price	Species	Size	Quantity	Total ($)
Potted 1 Quart Conifers	**$6.00 / Potted Tree**	Black Hills Spruce	8" to 12"		$
		Colorado Spruce	8" to 16"		$
		Norway Spruce	8" to 18"		$
		Red Pine	5" to 10"		$
		Eastern White Pine	5" to 8"		$
		American Arborvitae	6" to 12"		$
Potted 2 Gallon Conifers	**$18.00 / Potted Tree**	Black Hills Spruce	18" to 24"		$
		Norway Spruce	18" to 24"		$
		Eastern White Pine	18" to 24"		$
		American Arborvitae	18" to 24"		$
Bundled Large Trees	**$40.00 / Bundle of 25**	Black Walnut	12" to 18"		$
		Sugar Maple	18" to 24"		$
		Red Maple	18" to 24"		$
		Swamp White Oak	18" to 24"		$
		Red Oak	18" to 24"		$
		Norway Poplar	18" to 24"		$
		Hackberry ***New***	18" to 24"		$
Bundled Small Trees & Shrubs	**$40.00 / Bundle of 25**	American Hazelnut	12" to 18"		$
		Nanking Cherry	12" to 18"		$
		Common Lilac	18" to 24"		$
		Red Osier Dogwood	18" to 24"		$
		Flame Willow	12" to 18"		$
		Red Splendor Crabapple	12" to 18"		$

Native Seed Mixes

Pollinator Mix	**$30.00 / Bag**	Grasses, sedges and 30+ species of wildflowers. Best for dry to mesic soils. Height: 2-3'	100 Sq. Ft.		$
	$80.00 / Bag	Grasses, sedges and 30+ species of wildflowers. Best for dry to mesic soils. Height: 2-3'	1000 Sq. Ft.		$
	$240.00 / Bag	Grasses, sedges and 30+ species of wildflowers. Best for dry to mesic soils. Height: 2-3'	5000 Sq. Ft.		$
Septic Mound Mix	**$80.00 / Bag**	A great way to add beneficial native habitat and colorful appeal to septic mounds. Height 1-3 feet	1000 Sq. Ft.		$

Order Totals

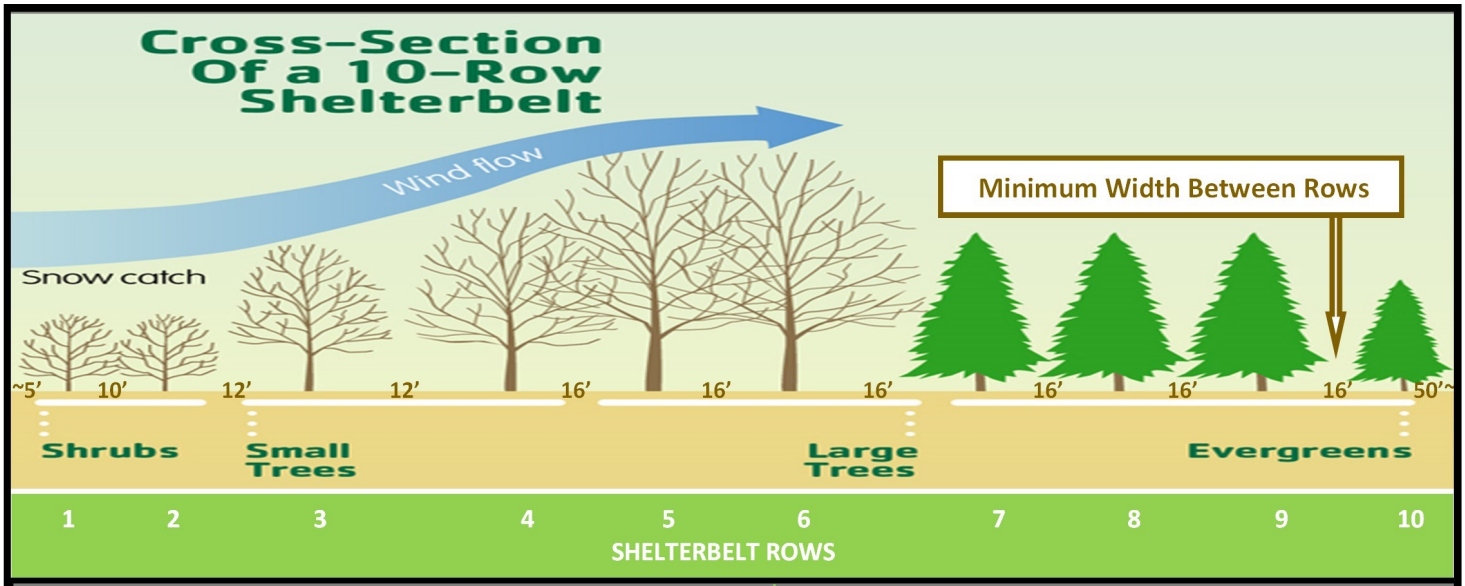
Notice:

Payment is due in full at time of order, no refunds for orders cancelled after February 25th, 2026. Plant availability and sizes are subject to change. Trees and seed will be available near the end of April 2026. **You will be notified of your pickup day and time for your order via USPS postcard.** Please send order form with payment to:

Sibley SWCD, 112 5th Street, PO Box 161, Gaylord, MN 55334.

We also accept online orders at www.sibleyswcd.org/tree program

SUB TOTAL	$
SALES TAX (Sub total x 0.07375)	$
TOTAL DUE (Sub total + sales tax)	$



Shelterbelt Layout Strategy

Rows 1-2—Shrubs: Plants in these first rows are planted 3 to 6 feet apart within the row and 10 to 15 feet between the rows. (Lilac, Dogwood, Flame Willow)

Rows 3-4—Tall Shrub/Small Tree: Seedlings are planted 5-16 feet apart (Tall Shrubs)/8-16 feet apart (Small Trees) in the row and 12 to 16 feet from the shrub row. Row four should be 12 to 16 feet from row three. (Flame Willow, Cherry, Hazelnut, Crab)

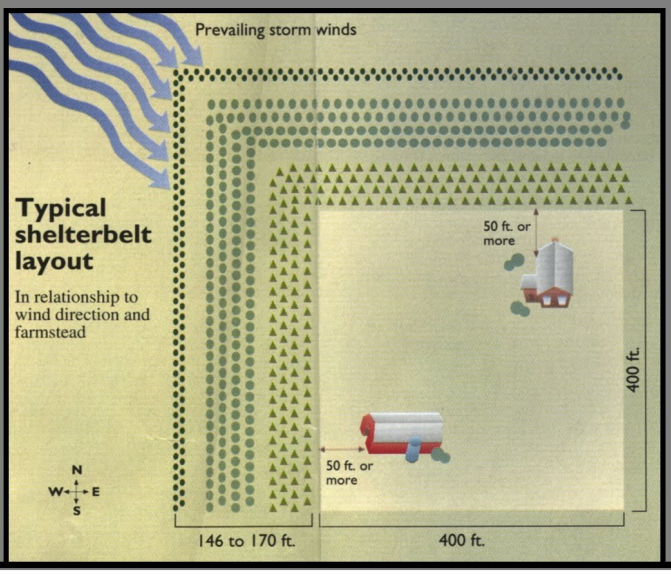
Rows 5-6—Tall Deciduous Tree: Row five should be spaced 16-20 feet behind row four. Row six should be spaced 16 to 20 feet behind row five. Trees should be planted 10 to 20 feet apart within the row. (Walnut, Maple, Oak, Poplar, Hackberry)

Rows 7-8—Tall Conifer: Row seven should be spaced 16 to 20 feet behind row six, and row eight, 16 to 20 feet from row seven. Trees should be planted 10 to 20 feet apart within the row (Norway Spruce, Red or White Pine)

Rows 9-10—Medium Conifer: These last rows are both located 16 to 20 feet from the previous row and trees are planted 10 to 20 feet apart within the row.
(Black Hills/Colorado Spruce, Arborvitae)

Recommended Windbreak Designs by Width:

# of Rows	Min. Width	Rec'd Combination:
10 Rows	185 feet	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
9 Rows	169 feet	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10
8 Rows	153 feet	1,2,3,4,5,7,9,10
7 Rows	137 feet	1,2,3,4,7,8,9 or 1,2,3,5,7,8,9
6 Rows	121 feet	1,2,3,7,8,9 or 1,3,5,7,8,9
5 Rows	109-111 feet	1,2,4,7,8 or 1,3,7,8,9
4 Rows	93-99 feet	1,2,7,8 or 1,4,7,8
3 Rows	83-90 feet	1,7,8 or 7,8,9



Species	Type	Height	Width	Preferences
Black Hills Spruce	Conifer	30-60'	15-25'	Variety of soils
Colorado Spruce	Conifer	50-75'	10-20'	Well drained soils
Norway Spruce	Conifer	60-90'	20-30'	Variety of soils
Red Pine	Conifer	80-120'	20-30'	Well drained soils
White Pine	Conifer	80-130'	20-40'	Well drained soils
Am. Arborvitae	Conifer	15-35'	6-20'	Variety of soils
Black Walnut	Broadleaf	50-75'	50-70'	Variety of soils
Sugar Maple	Broadleaf	60-75'	40-50'	Loamy soils
Red Maple	Broadleaf	40-60'	30-40'	Variety of soils
Sw. White Oak	Broadleaf	50-80'	50-80'	Variety of soils

Species	Type	Height	Width	Preferences
Red Oak	Broadleaf	60-75'	35-45'	Variety of soils
Norway Poplar	Broadleaf	40-60'	20-35'	Variety
Hackberry	Broadleaf	40-60'	40-60'	Variety
Am. Hazelnut	Broadleaf	15-18'	10-12'	Loamy soils
Nanking Cherry	Broadleaf	6-10'	12-15'	Loamy soils
Common Lilac	Broadleaf	8-15'	6-12'	Variety of soils
Redosier Dogwood	Broadleaf	7-9'	8-12'	Variety of soils
Flame Willow	Broadleaf	15-20'	5-15'	Variety of soils
R. Splendor Crab	Broadleaf	15-25'	15-25'	Variety of soils
Common Ninebark	Broadleaf	6-10'	6-10'	Variety of soils

Beauty or Beast?
The Hidden Danger of Invasive Species

Invasive species are animals, plants, or other living things that are brought into places where they don't naturally live. At first, they might seem harmless, but they can cause serious harm to the environment. The damage they do often isn't noticed right away, which is why they are considered a hidden danger to ecosystems.

Pictured: Zebra Mussels.

Some of these species are intentionally introduced. For example, certain garden plants or exotic animals are sometimes introduced because they are attractive or seem helpful. However, once they enter the wild, they can spread quickly and dominate natural habitats. A good example is purple loosestrife, a plant once used in landscaping that has now invaded many wetlands. These species may appear lovely or seem useful, but they often cause more harm than good by taking over space that native species need to survive.

Invasive species compete with native plants and animals for resources like food, water, and space. Because they usually grow faster or adapt more easily, they push out the local species. This decreases biodiversity and throws off the natural balance in the environment. For instance, Asian carp in American rivers reproduce quickly and eat most of the food, leaving native fish struggling. Zebra mussels are a type of invasive animal that upsets the balance in lakes. They clean out too many nutrients from the water, and although you might not notice right away, this can eventually make the lake less healthy for fish and other living things.

Dealing with invasive species is very expensive. They harm farms, forests, and water systems, and controlling them costs billions each year. Once invasive species spread, they're very hard to remove completely, and sometimes, it's impossible.

Invasive species may not seem dangerous at first glance, but their impact on the environment, economy, and even human health can be huge. They slowly take over ecosystems, hurt native species, and change the natural balance. Because their effects often go unnoticed until serious damage is done, they truly are a hidden danger that needs more attention and action to prevent future harm.

Lower Minnesota River West Watershed

https://www.facebook.com/LowerMinnesotaRiverWest/

Lower Minnesota River West
HICWD McLeod Nicollet Sibley

CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

YOUR Clean Water Fund AT WORK

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