This past summer, the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) worked with the Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa field crews to improve water quality in Stearns County. The field crews provided maintenance on recently installed conservation practices in which the SWCD provided technical and financial assistance to landowners. These practices consist of native plantings in association with shoreland restorations, prairie establishment, as well as rain gardens. New native plantings require vigilant maintenance during the first 3 years. Once the natives become established there is very little additional work needed.

“The maintenance provided by the field crew is important to the success of these types of conservation practices,” said SWCD Water Resources Specialist Wayne Cymbaluk. “When conservation practices are viewed as an amenity, the public is more willing to adopt and install conservation practices on their own land.”

The crew members managed weeds, planted trees and shrubs, and reseeded project areas on 36 project sites throughout Stearns County. They also educated landowners on plant identification and care. They helped property owners build confidence in their ability to continue with the maintenance for the success of their projects.

“When we started our work at the beginning of the summer, many of the sites were overrun with weeds,” said Conservation Corps Crew Leader Mark Johnson. “It was really rewarding to revisit some of those sites at the end of the summer and see mostly thriving native plants.”

The SWCD was awarded Clean Water Funds to support the work provided by the Conservation Corps, which is part of the 2008 Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

West Central Technical Service Area (WCTSA) Report: Construction Safety

Fall is the season of construction and harvest, which means there can be more field activities for conservation staff. Now (and always!) is a good time to get a reminder on safety when working on construction and farm sites. This is recently brought to the forefront after a tragic farm accident in Stearns County. Some key tips and safety procedures follow:

- Proper protective equipment - While on active job sites always wear a safety vest, glasses, hard hat, and hearing protection.
- Work clear of running machinery and make eye contact with the equipment operator. Remember you may not be visible to the person operating the machinery!
- Trench safety – Don’t enter a trench if does not look safe or meet required slopes.
- Confined spaces – Don’t enter sumps, pits or other confined areas without proper equipment.
- Wear appropriate fall protection. It is required if fall exposure is 6 feet or greater.
- Do not wear loose clothing or jewelry which may get caught in moving machinery.
- Wear work clothes that provide protection against the natural elements.
- Be aware of utilities and use/verify the Gopher One Call system.

Fall is a great time of year, so enjoy it and stay safe!