



Bernhardson: 40 years at Redwood SWCD and going strong

2013 Soil and Water Stewardship Week

Nearly 40 years ago, Marilyn Bernhardson had no idea what a soil and water conservation district did, but she applied to be the district clerk anyway.

"I got into this field by accident," Bernhardson said. "I was working at another job, but not enjoying it. I saw the job posting at the Redwood SWCD, applied, and received an offer at 11 p.m. on a Thursday night from the Board Chair, asking me to start the next day!"

Today, Bernhardson is one of the most seasoned SWCD managers across the state. After a few years as the district clerk, she went back to school at Southwest State University for agricultural business and later became the district

administrator. During her tenure, she was a founding board member of the Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE), she chaired the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District (MASWCD) Legislative Committee, she is currently serving her second term on the Clean Water Council.

Over the years, Bernhardson recalls how conservation has changed. "At the beginning, the tree program was all we did and everyone thought we were the federal government," she said. "Then in 1976, the state cost share program started and from then on, it's been one thing after another. SWCDs evolved into their own right and we are now seen as the local unit of government that has the trust of landowners." She added that Redwood County has really good stewards in the area who recognize the benefits and importance of conservation practices.

Bernhardson said her favorite program has been the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Program, noting, "It changed conservation as we knew in in our county. RIM has permanently protected thousands of acres in Redwood County and has brought back some of our much needed wetland acres." She credits the RIM program for complementing the county's water management plan and helping to achieve water quality goals. The Redwood SWCD, established in 1953 to serve the conservation needs of the county, has always been one of the top counties in the state for its number of RIM easements, according to the Board of Water and Soil Resources records.

Bernhardson said that she enjoys working with legislators and legislative issues, but that the best part of her job is working with landowners and partners to improve the natural resources in the county. "When that best management practice is installed and you know that you have helped to improve water quality in the state, you can't help but feel good," she said. "I have also met and enjoy working with some wonderful people at the local, state and federal level."

Bernhardson will celebrate her 40th year working at the Redwood SWCD in October 2013 and shows no signs of slowing down. "I know there is still a lot of work to be done, and feel lucky that I can still be a part of such a great movement," she said.



Redwood SWCD and NRCS staff. Back row –Steven Schemel, Dave Voigt and Brian Pfaff. Front Row– Kristy Zajac, Marilyn Bernhardson and Kari Clouse.

Marilyn Bernhardson is one of five SWCD staff members that the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is profiling as a part of the 2013 Soil and Water Stewardship week. To learn more, follow @MNBWSR or like us at www.facebook.com/MNBWSR.