

Minnesota Wildlifers,

Welcome to the June 2021 edition of the Prairie/Farmland Newsletter. Enjoy!

Remember - we'd love for you to share any relevant content with us for inclusion in the next edition. Please send those items to either Jake (jcnelson8487@gmail.com) or Nicole (ndavros@gmail.com). And if you have any issues you'd like to investigate further with the committee, let Jake know.

Grassland/Farmland Wildlife, Habitat, Farming, Soil Health, & Federal Conservation Programs

- [Cosby named Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief](#) - Terry Cosby, a longtime employee of the Department of Agriculture, has been picked as the next chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Most recently, Cosby was the state conservationist for Ohio and has been serving as acting chief of NRCS. He'll officially assume the role on Monday, USDA announced Wednesday. His career at USDA began over 42 years ago in 1979 as a student trainee in Iowa, according to the department.
- [Minnesota roundtable covers all-around benefits of soil health](#) - The discussion was led by Heidi Roop, assistant professor and extension specialist at the University of Minnesota's Department of Soil, Water and Climate, with the goal of discussing ways that farms in the state can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and expand soil health practices. Included in the discussion were Anna Cates, soil health extension specialist at the University of Minnesota; Kristin Duncan, owner and partner at Highland Family Farms; John Jaschke, executive director of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources; and Lance Klessig, resources specialist with the Winona Soil and Water Conservation District.
- [New type of wheat draws pollutants from soil, water in Minnesota](#) - Kernza, which was developed in Kansas after decades of breeding, has roots that grow twice as long as the common annual wheats grown throughout the United States, and many times longer and thicker than the roots of corn and soybeans found on most of Minnesota's farmland. The perennial wheat, called Kernza, was grown just west of Brainerd on a few acres immediately surrounding wells within corn and soybean fields. Over the past three years, it cut nitrate contamination from the cornfields by 96% and from soybeans by 86%.
- [20 Minnesota SWCDs selected for precision irrigation](#) - The project will provide financial and technical support to farmers who adopt precision irrigation and nitrogen management practices to help address groundwater quality and quantity issues. The SWCDS are Becker, Benton, Cass, Dakota, Douglas, East Otter Tail, Grant, Hubbard, Kandiyohi, Meeker, Morrison, Pope, Sherburne, Stearns, Stevens, Swift, Todd, Wadena, Washington and West Otter Tail.
- [Citizen-legislative committee on resources still being steered by politics](#) - The constitutional amendment that dedicates 40% of net lottery proceeds for environment and conservation projects sunsets Dec. 31, 2024. For this good and necessary work to continue — and most of it is good and necessary — voters must approve a new amendment, probably in November 2023 or 2024.
- [Pipestone SWCD targets nitrates](#) (PDF) The latest in an ongoing effort to reduce nitrate levels within drinking water supply management areas offers farmers an incentive to plant cover crops and perennial vegetation such as alfalfa.

Pollinators and Insects

- [NO MOW MAY: Rochester launches new campaign to support pollinators](#) - "This is found to be one of the times of the year that pollinators are the most vulnerable," said Alison Litchy, Rochester Parks and Recreation Department Urban Forestry Program Coordinator. "So they have the least amount of resources. So without mowing, you're increasing the amount of habitat and food for these pollinators to use while they are most vulnerable."
- [MN Zoo working to restore two endangered butterfly species](#) - "So when we hear the word endangered species we often think about species that are far away," Nordmeyer said. "The Dakota Skippers and the Poweshiek Skipperling, really, we are in triage mode. So species like the Poweshiek Skipperling, maybe global population - fewer than a 150 animals left. And right now we have about a 1/3 of that at the MN Zoo."
- [Bumblebees bite plants to make them flower early, surprising scientists](#) - researchers noticed buff-tailed bumblebees making tiny incisions in the leaves of their greenhouse plants. The insects didn't seem to be carrying off the bits of leaves to their nests or ingesting them. Suspecting the bees were inducing the plants to flower, the team set up a series of experiments. The results show that when pollen sources are scarce, such as in a greenhouse or during early spring, bumblebees can force plants to bloom up to a month earlier than usual.

Pesticides and Invasive Species

- [Palmer Amaranth Found In Polk Co. Mn](#) - The MDA collected a sample of the screenings material and determined by genetic testing that it was contaminated with Palmer amaranth seed. The field was scouted, and MDA staff found several dead Palmer amaranth plants on the field's edge remaining from last year, suggesting the plants had grown and matured.
- [Report: EPA officials improperly influenced dicamba decision](#) - Dicamba is found in several products and used on tens of millions of acres of soybeans and cotton nationwide. It has been the subject of multiple lawsuits, mostly by farmers whose crops are not dicamba-resistant, but whose land sits next to farms using the weedkiller. The lawsuits claim that wind blows dicamba onto their land, damaging and often killing their crops.

Webinars, Podcasts, Videos, Social Media, & Other Events

- [PF's Train the Trainer Events](#) (PDF) - Join Pheasants Forever Staff and partners on some unique field training opportunities throughout the state of Minnesota this 2021 season. These trainings are open to all NRCS, SWCD, and FSA staff within the state of Minnesota. To comply with COVID protocols, space in each session is capped at 20 participants.
- FREE [Plant Native Prairie webinar](#) hosted by the Scott Soil and Water Conservation District on July 14th 6:30-7:30pm. Learn about native prairie site preparation, how to start and maintain your planting, and talk about cost share opportunities for conservation projects.

Other Topics (including those outside of our prairie region)

- [Pheasants Forever And Partners Expand Western Minnesota Habitat Complex In Clay County](#) - Pheasants Forever and dedicated partners recently completed the acquisition and restoration of 160 acres in western Minnesota as an addition to the Gruhl Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Now open to public hunting, the addition to Gruhl WMA features 11 wetlands and more than 100 acres of restored grasslands that are home to pheasants, waterfowl, and the region's iconic greater prairie chicken. This project was made possible by contributions from the following partners: Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society, Clay County Pheasants Forever, Michael & Dianne Fillmore, SCHEELS, & Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
- [Why is the USDA Turning a Blind Eye to Drained Wetlands in the Prairie Potholes?](#) - Last week, the Government Accountability Office released a study that revealed U.S. Department of Agriculture wetland specialists only reported a fraction of the wetland compliance violations that they encountered. Of the 417,000 tracts of land subject to swampbuster in the Dakotas, the GAO found that the Natural Resources Conservation Service had reported less than five violations between 2014 and 2018, indicative of a nearly non-existent enforcement regime. NRCS wetland specialists explained that they do not report potential violations unless it is on a tract of land being inspected. Any wetland drainage visible across property lines, in view of the road, or on aerial imagery is not reported because doing so would undermine the relationships between landowners and the NRCS field staff providing technical assistance.
- [Prairie chickens are dying out on the Great Plains. Biden's efforts to save them could spark fight on key oil patch](#) - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials proposed listing as endangered a portion of the lesser prairie-chicken's population living in Texas and New Mexico, whose range overlaps with the oil- and gas-rich Permian Basin. The agency stopped short of awarding the same protections to the birds' northern population, in Oklahoma and Kansas, on the grounds that their numbers had declined less drastically.