



2025 Outstanding Conservationist **~ Claire Bender & Sue Ramthun ~**



Winona County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) selected Claire Bender and Sue Ramthun of Chatfield, MN as the Winona County 2025 Outstanding Conservationist for their outstanding conservation journey. Claire and Sue began their journey in 2003 when they purchased their property which was primarily forested land with a cabin and stream. They have since expanded their land to include forest and agricultural areas.

With the help from a friend and guidance from the DNR, they identified resource concerns on their land which led them to managing invasive species, establishing native prairie and planting over 225 trees and shrubs. Claire and Sue's conservation journey has also included a stream improvement project, waterway construction to reduce erosion, and two grade stabilization structures to stabilize gullies.

In 2024, Claire and Sue hosted a Trout Stream Field Day on their property, allowing attendees an up-close look at the impact of their conservation efforts in action.

Claire and Sue shared with SWCD Staff: "We are grateful for the opportunity to preserve, protect and improve this property. We are grateful for the trusted relationships we have made with Winona County SWCD, DNR, Hiawatha MN Trout Unlimited, and our neighbors."

"Claire and Sue have shown that they view the land as a resource to protect and nurture. They have stepped outside of their comfort zone to complete these conservation practices and trusted the help from local conservationists." said Abbi Hoffman. "We knew that Claire and Sue deserved this recognition and are happy to award them with the 2025 Outstanding Conservationist award. We are fortunate for all of the work they have done to protect land within Winona County and are proud to recognize them. Their work will help preserve the land for future generations to come."

Claire and Sue, thank you for your hard work of implementing conservation practices and your dedication to being good stewards of the land in Winona County!

