

Huron Soil and Water Conservation District

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HURON COUNTY DITCH MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

2010 ANNUAL REPORT

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WRITTEN & SUBMITTED BY

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HURON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

DITCH MAINTENANCE REPORT FOR 2010

By Don Ruffing, Ditch Maintenance Supervisor

As we say good bye to 2010 and welcome in 2011, I'm reminded of the need to write another report on the status of the county ditch maintenance program. In 2010 our main focus was vegetation management and silt removal. The vegetation management activities included brush and weed spraying, cattail spraying and tree removal. The ditch maintenance department and several area contractors completed silt removal work on sixteen projects. We also completed spoil leveling work on twenty projects. Adequate tile and drainage ditch maintenance will continue to be a basic component of the management plan needed to provide adequate grain production for feed and fuel. Our plan to increase carryover balances over the past several years has been successful. The total fund ending balance is now at 6.2% up from the 1.8 % at the end of 2007. Our plan going forward is to collect assessments sufficient to cover the annual expenses and to keep the carryover balance around 7%.

We continued to do the following things in 2010 to improve communications:

Owners or advisory committees assisted the SWCD in the annual inspection of twenty-eight projects.

Using personal contacts and newsletters, we inform owners about the benefits of forming advisory committees, installing grass berms and answer questions about the maintenance program.

We did the following things to reduce maintenance costs:

Continued to encourage owners that qualify for assessment reductions to apply for them. Filter strips, no-till and systematic tile drainage are some conservation practices that reduce run off, sedimentation and qualify for an assessment reduction. Qualified owners benefit by paying reduced assessments. The whole group ultimately benefits by reducing the need for silt removal and improving water quality.

Brush and cattail spraying was done in 2010. Brush spraying is planned for 2011. No spraying is planned for 2012 as that will be our next no spray year. We save money by getting price quotes only once, instead of three times, in each three year spray cycle.

Land owners on five tile main projects did the annual inspection in 2010. Land owners do their own inspection for four years and then on the fifth year a joint inspection is completed.

Owners can apply for one or more of the following assessment reductions:

- 20% - Install berms along the entire portion of the ditch on a parcel. Ten foot minimum widths at the narrowest point measured perpendicular to the top of the bank. The berm must be seeded to grass and maintained annually, either by mowing or spraying to control brush and weeds. Three berm applications were approved this year. A total of forty-four berm reductions from thirty-seven owners on twenty-five groups are now on file.
- 20% - No-till planting practices for corn and soybeans. Defined as less than one third of the surface tilled for corn and at least 30 percent crop residue on the surface after planting for all crops. The establishment of a permanent vegetative cover and trees on Conservation Reserve Program land also qualified for this 20% reduction. One new application was approved this year. A total of six applications are on file, from three owners, on six groups.
- 10% - Systematic tile drainage installed on crop land. Tile spacings of fifty feet or less and proof of installation by aerial photograph or as-built plans are required. The owner is also required to maintain the system and the outlet pipe in the future. One new application was approved this year. A total of ten tile reductions are on file, from four owners, on nine groups.

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- 10% - The owner or operator is following a Resource Management Systems (RMS) plan which meets National Resource Conservation Service standards.
- A total of sixty conservation reductions are on file, from thirty-seven owners, on twenty-seven groups.

To better accommodate the needs of advisory committees and individual owners, we are continuing to do the following.

Owners can make applications to do their own maintenance work. An owner's assessment is then reduced to compensate him for the work done. Eleven owners filed fifteen applications on twelve projects, to do their own maintenance work in 2010. Eleven assessment reductions were finalized for the 2011 assessments. These eleven reductions involved seven owners on ten groups.

Owners doing their own maintenance work may use materials paid for by the project fund when:

1. Work is identified as needed during the annual inspection or in consultation with the ditch maintenance supervisor.
2. Work is performed according to SWCD specifications.
3. The project advisory committee, if one exists, agrees to this process.

The Huron SWCD has a rock picker that can be used by owners along a maintenance ditch to clean up rocks left after bottom clean out and spoil leveling work has been completed. A ten foot box scraper is also available to additional leveling and dirt moving. A deposit is required, but the use of the rock picker and box scraper will be free.

Owners, who meet certain requirements, can be paid as "contractors" to do maintenance work. All contractors doing ditch maintenance work must comply with the following requirements:

1. Provide a certificate of liability insurance.
2. Provide a certificate of worker's compensation coverage.
3. Provide an affidavit of contractor or supplier of non delinquency of personal property taxes.
4. Install work according to SWCD specifications.
5. Be willing and able to work anywhere on a project.
6. If an advisory committee exists, must have their approval to work on a project.

This past year marks the thirty-eight year of Huron County Ditch Maintenance Program operation. Seventy of the eighty-eight groups on the county ditch maintenance program received some type of maintenance work this year.

2010 ditch bank erosion control work:

- We installed four tile outlet pipes on four groups.
- We repaired fifteen bank washouts on six groups. Rock was used at all locations.
- We repaired twenty-eight bank washouts with dirt on six groups.
- We used 601-C rip-rap to line nine hundred-ninety feet of ditch bank on nine projects.
- We installed five splash pads on four groups.
- We made repairs on thirteen structures on six projects. The structures repaired are as follows: two rock chutes, three outlet pipes, five riser pipes, two catch basins and one splash pad.

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- We completed ditch bank seeding on fourteen groups.
- We repaired fifty feet of ditch bank on one project by shaping and seeding.
- We installed fourteen rock structures on eight groups.

The following activities highlighted our vegetation control work

- We performed brush cutting and tree removal work on thirteen groups
- Townsend Tree Service sprayed brush and weeds on twenty-five projects.
- We sprayed brush, weeds and cattails on fifty-three projects.

The following activities were also completed:

- SWCD personnel completed silt bar removal on 2,590' of ditch on nine groups.
- We hired contractors to complete 23,700' of bottom clean out work on seven ditch projects.
- SWCD personnel and contractors leveled spoils on twenty projects.
- We completed stone and debris removal work on seven groups.
- We installed rip-rap to repair three hundred ten feet of ditch bottom on two projects.
- We installed one access pipe on one group.
- We installed three surface drains on three projects.
- We installed a total of fourteen animal guards on tile outlet pipes on seven groups.
- We completed fourteen parcel splits on eight groups.
- We completed the annual inspections for all eighty-eight projects in the spring.
- We repaired one hundred eighty feet of tile on two groups.
- We installed two riser pipes on one group.
- We reviewed the maintenance bases on forty-three groups.

Ditch maintenance funds expended in 2010 totaled \$140,952.80. The average cost per acre of watershed drained was \$2.53 and the five-year average cost per acre was \$2.40. The average cost per mile of ditch was \$1,262.23 and the average cost per mile for the last five years was \$1,197.47.

No new projects were added to the program. Currently, eighty-eight groups are being served by the county ditch maintenance program. These projects consist of seventy-one open ditches, ten tile mains, three grass waterways and four subdivisions. The total length of these improvements is 111.67 miles and they service over 55,802 acres of watershed.

The Huron SWCD is committed to meeting landowner needs. We welcome any comments and suggestions for improving the program. Please call Don Ruffing, Ditch Maintenance Supervisor, at 419-668-4113 ext. 3 with your questions about the maintenance program.