



2018-2019 Biennial Report to the Minnesota Legislature

10/15/2020

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources
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As requested by Minnesota Statute 3.197: This report cost approximately \$ 4,900 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

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Letter from the Board Chair

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' mission is to improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners. Over the course of the 2018-2019 biennium we have worked in close partnership with the local governments and private landowners we serve to implement conservation programs that are making a difference for our state's soil and water resources.

The Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) protected over 7,800 acres of environmentally sensitive land through permanent conservation easements this biennium. The MN CREP is a state-federal partnership targeting areas of southern and western Minnesota with water quality challenges. These critical lands provide benefits for water quality, habitat, and wildlife in perpetuity.

Our Clean Water Fund Competitive Grant program continues to deliver local conservation through local government implementation. Additional Clean Water Fund investment in soil and water conservation district capacity funding means that every part of the state benefits from more boots-on-the-ground conservation.

Minnesota's Buffer Law requires perennial vegetative buffers on public waters and public ditches. BWSR staff provided program implementation support and enforcement support to local governments, and enforcement for areas that opted out of local enforcement. At the end of the biennium, statewide compliance was 98%.

This biennium also saw significant progress in the water management transition driven by *One Watershed, One Plan*. The goal of aligning local planning and implementation with state strategies into plans built largely around the state's major watersheds is closer to reality with five approved plans and a total of 30 participating planning partnerships.

In FY 2018, BWSR established the Watershed-based Implementation Funding approach. Watershed-based funding is an alternative to the traditional project-by-project competitive grant process that allows collaborating local governments to pursue timely solutions based on a watershed's highest priority needs. BWSR approved \$8.7 million for the Watershed-based Funding Pilot Program, which was granted to One Watershed, One Plan watersheds and local governments in the seven-county metro area.

Working together with our federal, state, and local partners, we continue to work toward better outcomes. We're proud to share some of the highlights of those efforts with you, our legislative partners, as we work together to protect and restore Minnesota's natural resources.



Gerald Van Amburg, Chair
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Executive Summary

Over the 2018-2019 biennium, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) worked diligently to continue effective stewardship of the funds Minnesotans entrust us with. Through close working relationships with government at the local, state, and federal level, and the private landowners we serve, we advanced the state toward its natural resource goals. As directed by Minnesota state law, this report, which covers agency work between July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2019, contains several recommendations for program or policy changes to improve state and local efforts in water and soil resources management. Those recommendations focus on FY20-21 and include:

Conservation Easements

- 1) Secure remaining state contribution towards MN CREP, thereby leveraging the maximum federal funding.
- 2) Continue existing ACUB and Northern Forest Protection partnerships and secure adequate funding.
- 3) Develop the RIM Grasslands program, based on needs in the state's prairie and pheasant plans.

Minnesota's Buffer Law

- 4) Continue funding SWCDs to support the statutorily obligated responsibility to assist landowners with compliance. This work is critical to maintaining an on the ground presence for the program and its continued success.
- 5) Continue to provide and adapt support provided to local governments and landowners. Efforts are underway to ensure local governments are fulfilling their statutory and elected obligations to implement and enforce the Buffer Law.
- 6) Enforce the Buffer Law in areas of the state where no local entity has accepted jurisdiction for enforcement.

Wetland Conservation Act

- 7) Make a recommendation to the Legislature on whether the state should complete an application to implement the water and wetland regulations under section 404 of the U.S. Clean Water Act (Assumption.)
- 8) Advance In-Lieu Fee (ILF) instrument and begin development of associated compensation planning frameworks in each service area.
- 9) Implement the ILF program to more efficiently deliver wetland credits for road projects.

Local Conservation Delivery

- 10) Work with metro partners to determine the best strategy for distributing metro based-watershed implementation funding.
- 11) Continue to work with local partners to develop 1W1P plans to meet target deadlines for statewide coverage.
- 12) Work with SWCD partners to develop strategies that ensure their capacity funding is stable and predictable.

Engineering

13) Promote enhanced technical assistance relationships between SWCD, TSA, BWSR and NRCS engineers for improved training coordination and conservation outcomes.

14) Increase training collaboration between SWCD, TSA and BWSR engineers. This allows SWCD and TSA staff to take the next steps toward achieving Job Approval Authority and helps build a skilled conservation workforce.

Resource Conservation

15) Build Lawns to Legumes program and seek continuation of funds. Determine feasibility of rural lawn augmentation to expand scope of program.

16) Develop habitat-friendly solar program and secure funding for program support.

17) Revise state seed mixes.

18) Expand BWSR's climate adaptation work and participate in state efforts in developing recommendations and planning around natural and working lands issues.

Organizational Effectiveness

19) Develop a process for tracking LGU technical training needs, documenting credentials and certifications, and finding on-the-job training opportunities

20) Develop protocols for evaluating watershed-based plan implementation through the PRAP program

21) Enhance use of online training opportunities for local government partners for providing efficiencies of time and flexibility.

22) Seek s new TTCP contribution agreement to extend the work of coordinated state, local, and federal technical training and credentialing.

Other Policy and Administration

23) Work with MNIT to meet critical security needs for BWSR web applications and databases.

24) Launch an Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers program to build a more inclusive workforce.

Agency Profile

Mission

The mission of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is to improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners. The board is the state's administrative agency for 88 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), 46 watershed districts, 23 metropolitan watershed management organizations, and 80 county water managers. BWSR sets a policy agenda designed to enhance service delivery through our local government partners.

Because 78 percent of the state's land is held in private ownership, BWSR's focus on private lands is critical to attaining the state's goals for clean water, clean air, and abundant fish and wildlife. These lands — Minnesota's farms, forests, and urban areas — contribute greatly to the production of environmental goods and benefits including cleaner air and water, fish and wildlife habitat, and preservation of open spaces.



Business Model

Our agency has a unique business model that is designed to:

- Operate as an efficient state-level source of technical and financial assistance to local government conservation and environmental protection delivery systems.
- Target implementation of conservation practices and projects that support local goals and meet state objectives.
- Focus on Minnesota's private lands.

Statewide Outcomes

During the biennium, the Dayton Administration prioritized statewide natural resource and environment outcomes. BWSR contributes to the statewide outcome of “a clean, healthy environment with sustainable uses of natural resources” by providing targeted resource planning, protecting and restoring important water and habitat resources, and ensuring compliance with environmental laws, rules, and regulations. We also contribute to the statewide outcome of “efficient and accountable government services” by maximizing local and federal partnerships and evaluating the effectiveness of local governments and conservation outcomes.

Core Functions and Strategies

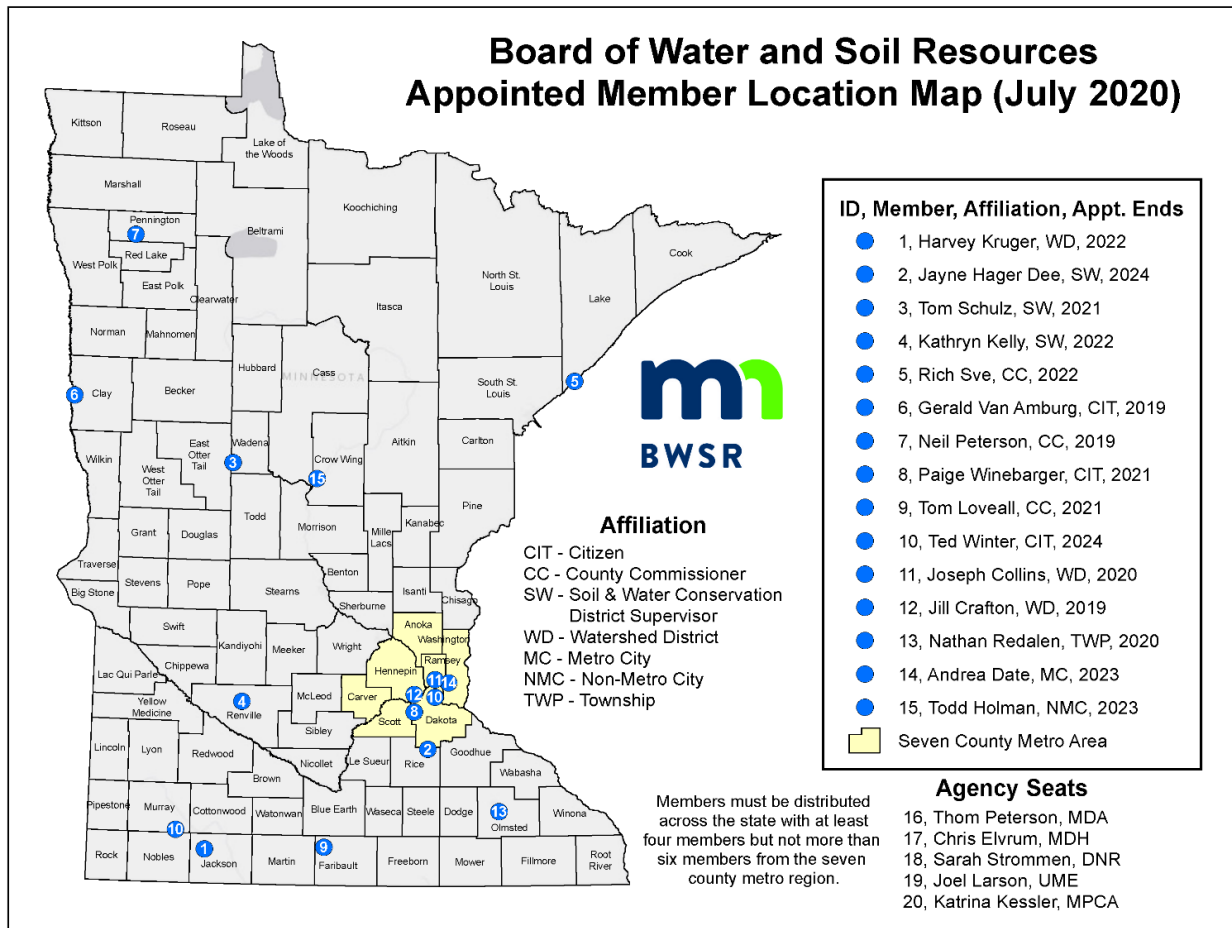
Our mission is implemented through the following core functions:

- Serve as the state soil conservation agency.

- Direct private land soil and water conservation programs through the actions of soil and water conservation districts, counties, cities, townships, watershed districts, and water management organizations.
- Link water resource planning with comprehensive land use planning.
- Resolve water policy conflicts and issues.
- Oversee comprehensive local water management.
- Provide the forum (through the board) for local issues, priorities, and opportunities to be incorporated into state public policy.
- Coordinate state and federal resources to realize local priorities.
- Administer implementation of laws: Wetland Conservation Act and riparian protection.

We accomplish our mission by focusing on the following strategic areas of impact:

- Pursuing organizational excellence.
- Enhancing local government unit capacity.
- Strengthening local governance.
- Transitioning to watershed-based planning, management, and funding.
- Establishing and reporting clear, tangible measures and outcomes.
- Broadening and enhancing conservation partnerships.
- Integrating human dimensions into BWSR planning and programs.
- Communicating strategically.



Board Membership

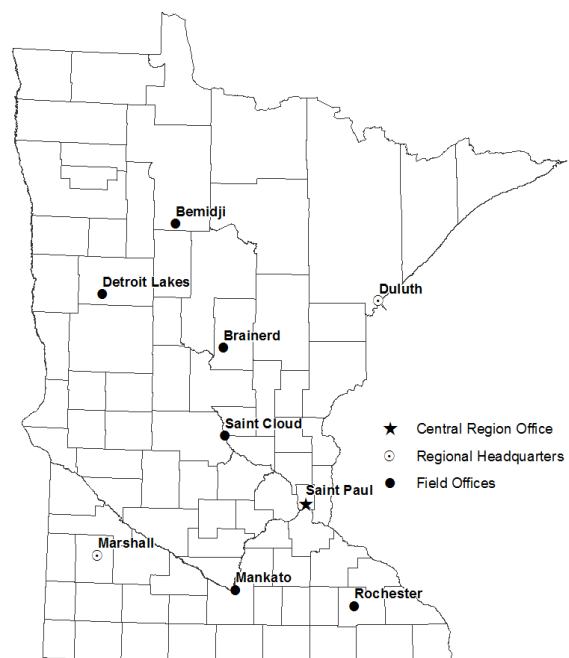
BWSR's Board consists of 20 members including local government representatives, state agencies, and citizens. The makeup of the board is set by Minnesota statute, and includes three county commissioners; three soil and water conservation district supervisors; three watershed district or watershed management organization representatives; three citizens; one township officer; two elected city officials, one of whom must be from the metro area; and Commissioners or designees from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and the University of Minnesota Extension Services. Board members, including the board chair, are appointed by the governor to four-year terms.

The board sets a policy agenda designed to enhance service delivery through local governments. During the biennium, the board managed work through 11 program and region-based committees. Those committees are:

- Administrative Advisory Committee
- Audit and Oversight Committee
- Buffers, Soil and Drainage Committee
- Dispute Resolution Committee
- Grants Program and Policy Committee
- RIM Reserve Committee
- Water Management and Strategic Planning Committee
- Wetland Conservation Committee
- Northern Region Committee
- Central Region Committee
- Southern Region Committee

Staff

At the end of the biennium (June 30, 2019), BWSR's 126 staff members were working in 10 offices throughout the state with offices in Bemidji, Brainerd, Detroit Lakes, Duluth, Mankato, Marshall, New Ulm, Rochester, St. Cloud, and St. Paul (central office and Conservation Easement Section office). Agency staff provide technical, financial, and administrative assistance to local governments to plan and implement agency policy and programs on private lands.



Authorities

The legal authority for the Board of Water and Soil Resources comes from the following Minnesota Statutes:

M.S. 103A (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103A>)

M.S. 103B (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103B>)

M.S. 103C (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103C>)

M.S. 103D (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103D>)

M.S. 103E (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103E>)

M.S. 103F (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103F>)

M.S. 103G (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103G>)

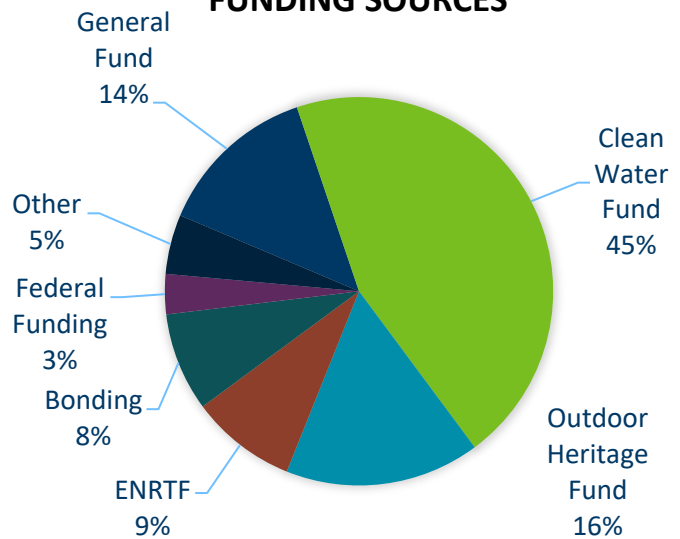
Budget Overview

The majority of BWSR’s funding is from Legislative appropriations through the biennial budget process. Our appropriations come from five major sources: General Fund, Bonding, Clean Water Fund, Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and Outdoor Heritage Fund.

BWSR has statutory authority to receive funds outside of legislative appropriations. During the biennium, we received federal and other funds including interagency transfers and special revenue funds.

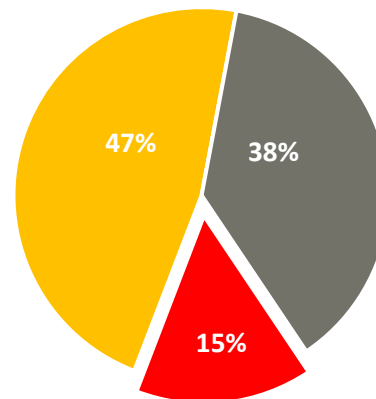
Appropriations for FY 18-19 Biennium	
General Fund	\$28,486,000
Clean Water Fund	\$95,508,000
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$34,414,000
Bonding	\$17,400,000
ENRTF	\$18,717,000
Federal Funding	\$7,079,924
Other	\$10,513,340
Total	\$212,118,264

FY 18-19 APPROPRIATIONS AND FUNDING SOURCES



Pass-through for FY 18-19 Biennium	
Grants to local governments	\$99,993,354
Easements and Restoration	\$79,802,514
Administration and Programs	\$32,322,396
Total	\$212,118,264

FY 18-19 PASS-THROUGH



■ Grants to LGUs ■ Easements and Restoration ■ Agency Operations

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Appropriations

Funding for the following projects was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). These appropriations span two years (generally). Appropriations for the FY 18-19 biennium totaled \$18.717 million and funded the projects in the table below.

ENRTF Projects appropriated during the FY 18-19 Biennium	
CREP Outreach and Implementation	\$6,000,000
CREP*	\$10,771,000
Lake Agnes Treatment	\$600,000
Drainage Records Modernization	\$540,000
Lawns to Legumes**	\$806,000



* This project totaled \$13.5 million with \$2.729 million in FY 17, \$5.771 million in FY 18, and \$5 million in FY 19.

** The Lawns to Legumes project totaled \$900,000 with \$806,000 in FY 19, and \$94,000 in FY20.

Outdoor Heritage Fund Appropriations

Funding for the following projects was provided by the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature and recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.



OHF Projects appropriated during the FY 18-19 Biennium	
RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water – Phases VII & VIII	\$10,333,000
Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape ACUB Protection Program – Phase VII	\$1,229,000
RIM Wetlands Partnership – Phases VIII & IX	\$20,398,000
Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Program	\$750,000
Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Partnership – Phases III & IV	\$1,704,000

Conservation Easements

Overview

The Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Easement Program is critical to meeting the state’s goals to protect and improve water quality and wildlife habitat and reduce flooding. RIM Reserve focuses on restoring drained wetlands, protecting important riparian and groundwater areas, and establishing native vegetation. RIM Reserve conservation easements permanently protect, restore, and manage resources while retaining private ownership and is the largest non-federal private lands permanent protection program in the country.

Conservation Easements FY 18-19 Funding Sources	
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$34,414,000
Clean Water Fund	\$18,250,000
Bonding	\$10,000,000
Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund	\$16,771,000
Total	\$81,333,000

The RIM Reserve program uses a local delivery system based on federal, state, and local priorities for successful implementation. It is unique in funding, leveraging local, state, and federal resources including the Outdoor Heritage Fund, Clean Water Fund, Bonding, Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and federal funding. The work of SWCDs is critical to the success of the program.

During the FY 18-19 biennium, the primary focus of the Conservation Easement Section was the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP). MN CREP is a state-federal partnership targeting permanent conservation easements in areas of southern and western Minnesota with water quality challenges. Additional details on MN CREP are provided below.

Results that work for Minnesota

Studies show increased land retirement results in increased environmental benefits, from reductions in soil erosion and decreased phosphorus and nitrogen loading to greater biological diversity. Buffers are a key strategy for nitrogen reduction, as confirmed by an MPCA study showing the two most effective treatments for nitrogen reduction are converting riparian land currently planted in corn into grass and putting perennials in areas where corn grows only marginally.

RIM Reserve is also an economic driver. Easement programs that restore wetlands and grasslands require a broad range of skilled workers in the public and private sectors throughout Minnesota. A federal economic assessment¹ by David Buland, USDA-NRCS Regional Economist, found that for every \$107,000 spent on



¹ References for this assessment and other USDA-NRCS IMPLAN analyses are available at: <http://www.economics.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/implan/>.

easement-based conservation projects, one job is created or maintained. Applying this model to the \$81.3 million in conservation easement funding this biennium, approximately 758 jobs were created or maintained.

At-a-Glance

The primary focus areas of the RIM program are:

- MN CREP
- Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB)
- Northern Forest and Drinking Water Protection

Easement Program	Number of Easements (FY 18-19)	Acres Protected (FY 18-19)
MN CREP	187	7,870
Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB)	77	6,160
Northern Forest and Drinking Water Protection	32	3,040
Total	296	17,070

Biennial accomplishments include:

- Securing 296 easements through three different focus areas, protecting over 17,000 acres across the state.
- Seventy-seven ACUB easements were funded during the biennium, protecting 6,160 acres. Shortly before the biennium, ACUB became part of the federal Sentinel Landscapes program — a federal, state, local, and private sector collaboration that preserves agricultural lands and restores and protects wildlife habitat while helping to sustain military readiness. Camp Ripley was the sixth federally designated Sentinel Landscape in the U.S. and the first at a National Guard facility. Sentinel Landscapes sustain compatible land use for military operations while providing conservation and working-land benefits. The ACUB program operates within that designated landscape. The designation brought additional federal funding, new partnerships, and a broader focus within a 10-mile radius of Camp Ripley.
- In 2019, the ACUB program at Camp Ripley passed the 30,000 acres protected mark.

MN CREP



The Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) is focused on reducing nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment; protecting vulnerable drinking water; and enhancing grassland and wetland habitats. MN CREP uses the RIM Reserve easement program in conjunction with the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The two funding sources are primarily used for payments to landowners who enroll in the program. A multi-year program, the agreement between the state and the USDA has a maximum enrollment of 60,000 acres. All enrolled acres are prioritized and targeted for water quality and habitat.

MN CREP is focused on four water quality conservation practices over a 54-county program area:

- Buffers (filter strips)
- Wetland restoration – non- floodplain
- Wetland restoration - floodplain
- Wellhead protection areas

MN CREP Funding

Over the FY 18-19 biennium, \$16.25 million in Clean Water Fund appropriations were designated for MN CREP including \$9.75 million in funding for riparian buffer easements and \$3.5 million in funding for wellhead protection easements. \$30.73 million in Outdoor Heritage Fund appropriations were designated for MN CREP in the biennium including funding for wetland restorations and buffers. \$17.5 million was appropriated from ENRTF. This funding includes both MN CREP easement funding as well as outreach and implementation funds. An additional \$10 million was appropriated from the general obligation bond proceeds.

MN CREP Outcomes

Sign-ups for MN CREP began in May 2017. Converting land cover from annual cropland to perennial vegetation provides significant nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment load reductions. Modeled estimates of these reductions are:

- 19,000 pounds of total phosphorus/year
- 1,200,000 pounds of total nitrogen/year
- 123,000 tons of sediment/year

1ST MN CREP EASEMENT



The first recorded MN CREP easement was a filter strip on the Robert and Cathy VanderLinden farm in Redwood County. Although the family was only required to buffer Judicial Ditch 32 with a 16.5 ft wide strip, they chose to enroll 90 ft filter strips in MN CREP. The wider filter strip improves water quality and provides habitat benefits.

Landowners, Redwood SWCD and BWSR staff, and legislators gathered for a celebration in June 2018 to celebrate the first MN CREP easement. At left, Janet VanderLinden photographs the filter strip on the land her brother Robert farms.

In 2018, we made programmatic changes to MN CREP to account for market forces and offer appropriate compensation to landowners in the current agricultural economy. These changes resulted in increased

landowner interest and a more competitive program. Generally, in each successive application period during the biennium, BWSR received more applications than during the previous application period.

Additional benefits include enhanced wildlife habitat, increased water storage, and reduced flooding. During the biennium, 187 MN CREP easements were recorded, protecting 7,870 acres. More than 75% of the recorded easements included wetland restoration practices.

Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB)

Conservation easements adjacent to Camp Ripley in central Minnesota preserve fish and wildlife habitat while protecting the Minnesota National Guard's 52,830-acre regional training center from development that could impede its operations and mission. The partnership between Morrison SWCD, Camp Ripley, and BWSR has brought more than \$40 million of funding to Morrison, Crow Wing, and Cass counties over the past 13 years, working with approximately 300 landowners. In 2019, the program passed the 30,000 acres protected mark.



The ACUB program limits infringement within a 3-mile radius of Camp Ripley by purchasing development rights through permanent conservation easements. Landowners retain the right to continue current land-use activities including farming or hunting, depending on the source of the funds.

BWSR works with partners to solicit funds from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (\$1,229,000 received in FY 18-19) and the National Guard Bureau (\$7,677,295 received in FY 18-19) and executes easements that permanently protect land from future development.

The Minnesota National Guard estimated Camp Ripley's economic impact at more than \$294 million in 2017. The estimate includes payroll, projects, local contracts, food, and the ACUB program. During the biennium, 77 easements were recorded on 6,160 acres with state and federal funding.

Northern Forest and Drinking Water Protection

There are several RIM Reserve programs that work with partners to protect habitat that is within important watersheds and along important watercourses that provide drinking water to the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

BWSR works with local partners in conjunction with the Mississippi Headwaters Board to protect riparian areas along the upper 400 miles of the Mississippi River. This program protects important habitat that benefits a wide variety of sensitive species and protects important source water areas for metro cities.



The Pine and Crow Wing Rivers have been identified as two of the most important source water tributaries to the Mississippi River. Using Clean Water Funds, BWSR works with local partners to protect important riparian areas along these two rivers.

The Wild Rice Shoreland Protection program, led by BWSR and supported by local partners, protects riparian areas on designated wild rice lakes. Wild rice is one of the most important (and impacted) resources for a wide variety of wildlife. Additionally, wild rice is the state grain of Minnesota and is culturally significant to members of the Ojibwe and Dakota nations.

These programs use Outdoor Heritage Funds and Clean Water Funds to achieve multiple benefits that protect habitat, water quality, and support abundant wildlife populations. Working in the northern forest area provides opportunity to focus on high quality resources that already exist and do not need substantial restoration work in a landscape where land values (and thus easement costs) are generally lower than in the agricultural and urban areas of the state. Protecting these resources now prevents the need for more expensive acquisition and restoration efforts in the future. During the biennium, 32 easements were recorded on 3,040 acres through these smaller protection programs.

Status Report

Past Recommendations	Status
Secure federal match by achieving the state’s funding commitment for the MN CREP through all available legislative sources such as: Outdoor Heritage Fund and Clean Water Fund, Capital Investment Fund, and Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.	✓ <i>Significant progress was made on securing the state’s funding commitment of \$175 million to unlock up to \$350 million federal payments to landowners. At the end of FY 20, the remaining state contribution needed is \$16.5 million.</i>
Develop, implement, and support a locally based MN CREP program (in the designated 54 county area) with local governments, farmers, and other landowners.	✓ <i>There are ongoing efforts to address this recommendation. Program modifications during 2018 have increased program enrollment. Financial support and training for local government staff continues.</i>

Recommendations for FY 20-21

- 1) Secure remaining state contribution towards MN CREP, thereby leveraging the maximum federal funding.
- 2) Continue existing ACUB and Northern Forest Protection partnerships and secure adequate funding.
- 3) Develop the RIM Grasslands program, based on needs in the state's prairie and pheasant plans.

Minnesota's Buffer Law

Overview

Minnesota's Buffer Law requires perennial vegetative buffers of up to 50 feet along lakes, rivers, and streams and buffers of 16.5 feet along public ditches. These buffers help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment. The deadline for implementation for buffers on public waters was November 1, 2017. The deadline for public ditches was November 1, 2018. The law provides flexibility for landowners to install alternative practices with equivalent water quality benefits that are based on the Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guide.



The Buffer Law signed into law by Governor Dayton in June 2015 was amended in 2016 and 2017. The amendments enacted in 2017 clarify the application of the buffer requirement to public waters, provides additional statutory authority for alternative practices, addresses concerns over the potential spread of invasive species, including Palmer Amaranth, through buffer establishment, establishes a Riparian Protection Aid Program to fund local government Buffer Law enforcement and implementation, and allowed landowners to be granted a compliance waiver until July 1, 2018 when they have filed a compliance plan with their local soil and water conservation district. More information on how the map was made can be found on the [DNR Buffer Mapping website](#).

Results that work for Minnesota

Over the biennium, the agency:

- As of July 2019, the statewide compliance rate increased to 98%. This increase represents more than 40,000 additional parcels validated as compliant by local SWCDs or being brought into compliance by the respective landowners with assistance from SWCDs over the biennium.
- Enforcement work began in several counties and watershed districts around the state on lands not yet in compliance.

At-a-Glance

Program Implementation Support

BWSR works to develop and maintain various aspects of program implementation guidance and support documents. In addition, BWSR provided training and outreach to local government staff and landowners on these aspects of the program. BWSR also plays a role in assisting facilitation between local governments at the request of those looking for agency or state perspective. One key aspect of this role is acting as a repository for what local governments are doing that is working so they can be used as resources by others in similar situations or with similar programmatic hurdles. BWSR maintains and hosts a statewide implementation tracking system

used by SWCDs to monitor landowner progress toward compliance with the law and to meet their statutory obligation to track progress.

Local Government Enforcement Support

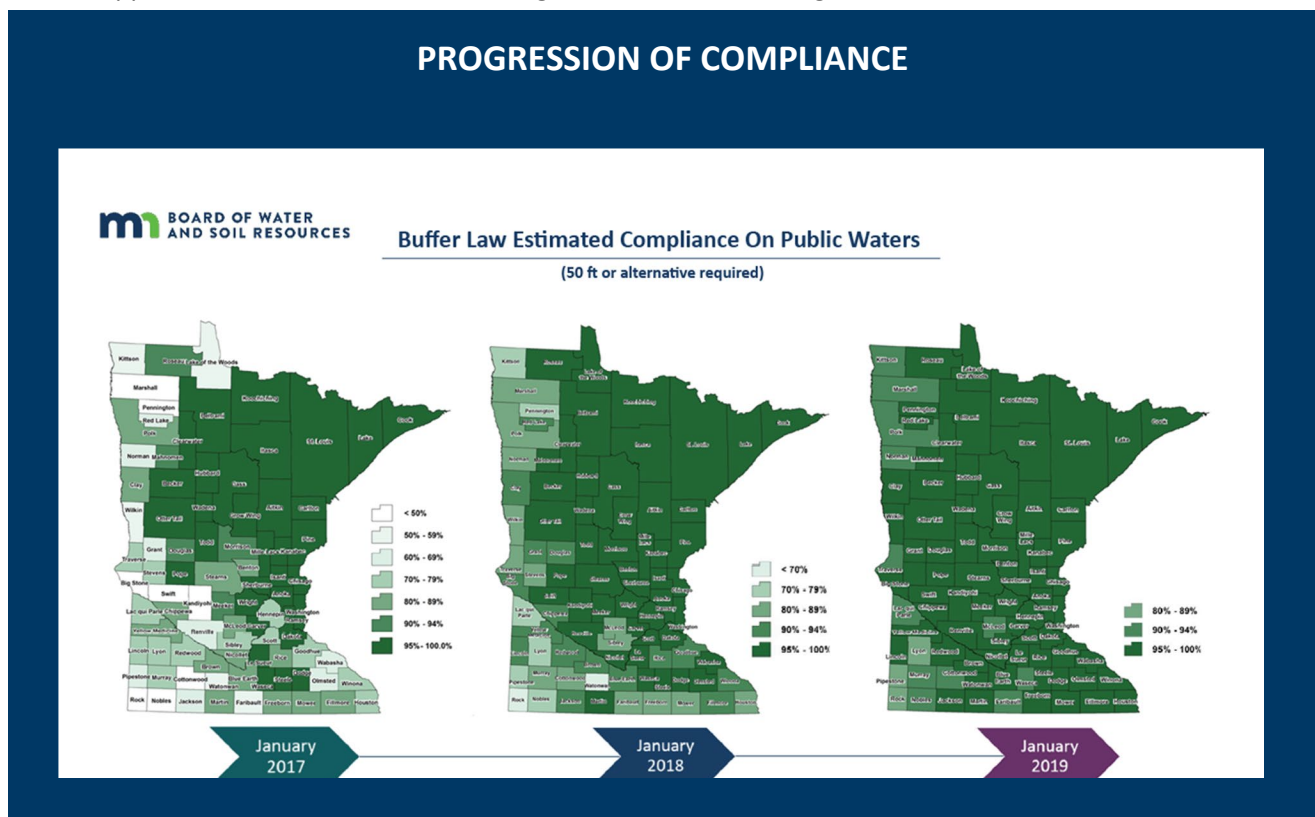
BWSR has developed model ordinances and rules for counties and watershed districts that have elected to enforce the Buffer Law locally. We review these local official controls to ensure they can provide adequate procedures to effectively enforce the law as written. As requested, BWSR also provided general programmatic support and coordination between local enforcement entities and SWCDs.

Enforcement for areas without local government election of enforcement

The Buffer Law allows local enforcement as an elected option by Counties or Watershed Districts (WDs). In the areas where County or WD has not elected local enforcement, BWSR is responsible for enforcement in coordination with those SWCDs who identify noncompliance. BWSR receives notifications of noncompliance from SWCDs. BWSR communicates with the landowners, develops corrective action notices, and if needed, develops and issues administrative penalty orders for parcels which are not brought into compliance.

Compliance

The goal of the law is to promote voluntary compliance to the extent practicable. BWSR’s efforts related to the program support listed above are centered on providing options to local governments and landowners that both fit their specific situation, but also meet the compliance standards established by the law. Even in instances where BWSR is the enforcement entity, we have made efforts to communicate with non-compliant landowners and tailor our approach in each SWCD to respect their preferred level of effort to assist landowners who are implementing the law on their properties. Compliance is key, but obtaining compliance takes a variable and flexible approach from the landowner, local government, and state government.



Status Report

Past Recommendations	Status
Continue providing riparian aid to local governments electing enforcement of the Buffer Law and ensure compliance in those counties who defer enforcement to the state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>14 Watershed Districts and 75 Counties have elected jurisdiction and are certified each year to receive Riparian Aid payments from the Department of Revenue</i>
Identify alternative practices and other proactive opportunities to support landowners and ditch authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>BWSR adopted a list of “common alternative practices” which includes 7 different suites of practices established by the NRCS</i> ✓ <i>BWSR has adopted “other alternative practices” developed by private industry, commodity groups, and the University of Minnesota. These include the Land O Lakes buffer builder tool and the Decision Support Tool.</i>

Recommendations for FY 20-21

- 4) Continue funding SWCDs to support the statutorily obligated responsibility to assist landowners with compliance. This work is critical to maintaining an on the ground presence for the program and its continued success.
- 5) Continue to provide and adapt support provided to local governments. Efforts are underway to ensure Local Governments are fulfilling their statutory and elected obligations to implement and enforce the Buffer Law.
- 6) Enforce the Buffer Law in areas of the state where no local entity has accepted jurisdiction for enforcement.

Wetland Conservation Act

Overview

The Minnesota Legislature enacted the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) in 1991 to help mitigate the loss of wetlands in Minnesota. BWSR's role is to implement the law to protect wetland resources, because it is in the public's interest to:

1. Achieve no net loss of Minnesota's existing wetlands;
2. Increase the quantity, quality, and biological diversity of Minnesota's wetlands by restoring or enhancing diminished or drained wetlands;
3. Avoid direct or indirect impacts from activities that destroy or diminish wetlands; and
4. Replace wetland values where avoidance of activity is not feasible and prudent.



The Wetland Conservation Act regulatory program plays a key role in meeting these public policy objectives.

During the biennium, we continued work on WCA rulemaking, including completion of several technical review group meetings which vetted potential rule changes and policy initiatives. Coordination with the St. Paul District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) resulted in the development of joint policy and guidance including a new mechanism for crediting of wetland banks in agricultural settings. In 2018, BWSR and an interagency team developed a stream quantification tool for Minnesota. This effort was funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and resulted in a tool that can be used for implementation of some aspects of wetland and stream regulatory programs.

BWSR also applied for and received funding from the EPA that supplements legislative funding to develop a 404 Assumption application to allow the state to assume the Clean Water Action Section 404 program from the Corps. We also received grants to develop a web-based long-term monitoring data storage system as part of an updated wetland banking database, continued research into long-term vegetative success of wetland banks, and new research on the long-term hydrologic success of wetland banks. In 2019, we established a new certification program for Minnesota wetland professionals. The program was transferred from the University of Minnesota to BWSR, and we subsequently expanded and updated the program to better align with the needs of our local partners.

Results that work for Minnesota

Our biennial accomplishments include:

- Established new certification program for wetland professionals.
- Completed technical advisory group meetings on new rule and policy initiatives.
- Developed (with other agencies) a stream quantification tool for stream restoration assessment in Minnesota.
- Applied for and received grants for wetland bank database development, research on hydrology and vegetation success of mitigation banks, and preparation of 404 Assumption application.

At-a-Glance

The primary components of the Wetland Conservation Act program are:

- Local Government Unit Implementation
- The Minnesota Wetland Bank
- Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program
- Long-term Monitoring of Wetland Bank Sites
- BWSR Oversight and Appeals

Local Government Unit Implementation

There are approximately 269 local governments units (LGUs) implementing the Wetland Conservation Act in Minnesota. In 2018, local governments reviewed and processed approximately 2,300 applications for activities in wetlands. Substantial progress was made on completion of policy development and technical resources. A few examples include:

- Guidance on crediting of wetland banks in agricultural landscapes.
- Completion of assumable waters analysis (May 3, 2018)
- Technical Advisory Group Meetings (summer 2018)

The Minnesota Wetland Bank

Wetland banking provides a source of replacement wetlands — principally from restoring previously drained wetlands — that are used by individuals and road authorities to replace impacted wetlands as required by the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). The program aims to facilitate wetland mitigation to offset public values that are lost due to unavoidable wetland impacts. Using a private-market system of buying and selling credits, wetland banking provides an effective mechanism to replace lost wetland functions, which in turn allows necessary land uses and land use changes to occur.

AG WETLAND BANKING

While there are many conservation programs in Minnesota to restore wetlands, the Ag Bank is one that is truly unique. The Ag Bank was established in 2012 in partnership with NRCS as a subset of the standard wetland banking program, and was created specifically to replace wetlands drained or filled for agricultural purposes. It provides coordinated, consistent wetland mitigation under the Federal Farm Program and the WCA.

The Ag Bank allows owners of agricultural lands to drain certain wetlands in exchange for purchasing wetland credits from other landowners. The Ag Bank has been in strong demand since its creation.

Minnesota’s wetland banking system continues to be one of the largest and most active in the country. During calendar years 2017 and 2018, BWSR staff processed an average of 310 wetland credit withdrawal transactions per year — not including those initiated by us for the Local Government Road Wetland Replacement Program. The wetland bank market continued to grow, responding to increased demand as evidenced by the submission of a record 85 separate wetland bank documents for agency review in 2018 and the approval of an additional 20 wetland bank plans during the biennium. We continued serving as a facilitator for the agricultural wetland banking market by assisting three landowners in obtaining approval for their wetland banks and providing technical support to several others under an agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

In May 2019, Minnesota hosted the National Mitigation and Ecosystem Banking Conference and our staff played a significant role in showcasing Minnesota’s wetland bank market. One staff member served on the conference’s regional planning team and seven others presented during the conference or guiding visits to BWSR wetland banks. Executive Director John Jaschke spoke about the Minnesota wetland banking program as an invited speaker during one of the conference’s lunchtime sessions.

The Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program

A unique subset of the banking program is the Local Government Road Wetland Replacement Program (LGRWRP). The program was developed in 1996 to meet the statutory obligations that transfer responsibility for replacing wetlands from the local road authority to BWSR under certain circumstances. The program typically provides wetland mitigation for over 100 separate road projects requiring the generation of approximately 170 credits each year. We have effectively leveraged bond funds and a partnership with MNDOT to provide high quality wetland mitigation to replace impacts from local and state road projects.



A local road project may have unavoidable wetland impacts



Restored wetlands generate credits to mitigate local road project impacts

Although the program continues to meet the needs of local road authorities, we are faced with a current credit deficit and a substantial debt of credits to MNDOT due to inadequate funding, increased demand resulting from substantive road infrastructure improvements in recent years, and increased land costs for mitigation. Credit balances statewide have been declining for the past 10 years and reached their lowest levels during this period at the end of biennium. Using a bonding appropriation from 2017, we initiated seven new wetland projects in five different bank service areas (BSA) and completed the planning and design process for three other projects. Most of these projects will be constructed by the close of 2020 and will be providing credits to the LGRWRP through 2026. An additional suite of projects will be supported through a \$6.7 million bonding appropriation passed in 2018.

We continue to pursue approval of an in-lieu fee program from the Corps of Engineers that will improve our ability to efficiently deliver wetland credits for local road projects. The next step in the review process is the submittal of a draft program instrument and compensation planning framework for each of the watersheds where the program will operate. We have completed the planning frameworks for the St. Croix River and Middle Mississippi River Watersheds (BSAs 6 and 7) and began the process for completing the plans for the Minnesota River and Upper Red River Watersheds (BSAs 9 and 4).

Long-term Monitoring of Wetland Bank Sites

We inspect wetlands in the Minnesota Wetland Bank to ensure that they continue to provide wetland functions and values according to their respective bank plan, and to ensure compliance with recorded easement restrictions and covenants. Our staff monitor the ecological integrity of privately held banking sites and provide technical support during the establishment of BWSR-held accounts, including maintenance and monitoring of BWSR-held accounts after establishment.

In 2018-19, our staff inspected approximately 50 wetland banks as part of our long-term vegetative success study and monitored six BWSR-sponsored road mitigation bank sites to direct adaptive management efforts for successful restoration and credit allocation. We also responded to approximately 10 public reports of easement compliance issues and worked with landowners to bring the sites back into compliance without the need for further action.

Status Report

Past Recommendations	Status
Engage partners to pursue Section 404 Assumption (including any necessary statute changes), which would make state wetland regulation more efficient and cost-effective.	✓ <i>BWSR obtained funding from legislature and grant funds from EPA to pursue 404 Assumption feasibility via application from the state.</i>

<p>Develop and provide a needed option for landowners to participate in the Wetland Bank by establishing an In-Lieu Fee program statewide.</p>	<p>✓ <i>In process; ILF instrument being finalized, CPFs being developed and finalized.</i></p>
<p>Identify an ongoing, stable funding source to fulfill the state’s statutory requirement for the Local Roads Wetland Replacement Program, which mitigates wetland impacts of road projects.</p>	<p>✓ <i>Still pursuing. Supplemental funding provided last biennium kept program solvent for two years.</i></p>

Recommendations for FY 20-21

- 7) Make a recommendation to the Legislature on whether the state should complete an application to implement the water and wetland regulations under Section 404 of the U.S. Clean Water Act (Assumption.)
- 8) Advance In-Lieu Fee (ILF) instrument and begin development of associated compensation planning frameworks in each service area.
- 9) Implement the ILF program to more efficiently deliver wetland credits for road projects.

Featured Story: New Wetland Professional Certification Program for Minnesota

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) leads a new wetland certification program offering more flexibility in training options for wetland professionals across the state starting in 2020. It replaces the Wetland Delineator Certification Program (WDCP), which formed in 2002.

Functioning as a partnership between the University of Minnesota (UMN) and BWSR, the WDCP has trained thousands and certified hundreds of professionals in wetland delineation. The UMN and BWSR decided to transfer the work fully to BWSR in 2020, because the agency has ample resources for wetland training and education.

The Minnesota Wetland Professional certification Program (MWPCP) is a step forward in the evolution of BWSR's training of local government staff and other wetland professionals implementing the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). Training related to the MWPCP will merge with BWSR's wetland regional training conducted over the past two years. Les Lemm, BWSR's WCA coordinator, said he anticipated a seamless transition from the UMN to BWSR while broadening the scope of available training. "One primary goal of the new MWPCP program is to make training and certification more available and cost-effective for WCA local government and soil and water conservation districts' staff," Lemm said.

BWSR wetland specialists Ben Meyer and David Demmer will lead the new program, with assistance from BWSR's wetland training team and wetland program assistant Amy Waters. The MWPCP strives to maintain the level of knowledge and expertise of those who conduct and review professional work associated with wetland regulatory compliance. This includes identifying and delineating wetlands and reviewing and assisting applicants and landowners in complying with state wetland regulations.

The MWPCP will provide the following:

- More stability for implementing the WCA through standardized training, experience and educational requirements
- Increased efficiency of the regulatory process

- Greater protection for landowners and other consumers by providing a base level of required knowledge and ongoing training for certified wetland professionals who conduct and review regulatory work on private and public land

- An incentive for wetland professionals to maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills.

"This certification program enables wetland professionals in Minnesota to assure service excellence via field training and continued learning to benefit the people and natural resources of the state," BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke said.

Like the WDCP its replacing, the new program is voluntary. The new program sets a goal in the industry to establish a standard for individuals working on wetland regulatory compliance in Minnesota. The scope of the MWPCP provides wetland professionals with a broad framework. MWPCP certification will indicate that an individual has the fundamental understanding of the basic technical tools, rules, policies and guidance associated with wetland regulations and delineation in Minnesota.

To gain certification, wetland professionals must understand wetland identification and delineation, wetland restoration, state and federal wetland regulations, wetland functional assessment, and wetland monitoring. Those who acquire certification must earn 18 continuing education hours over a three-year period to remain certified. A variety of activities are accepted for continuing education credits, including training courses, webinars, online training, field trips, conferences and seminars. The transition between the WDCP and MWPCP includes an opt-in period for current certified professionals in good standing to have their certification carry forward. These professionals will still need to complete continuing education credits to maintain their certification.

Given the amount of interest and level of participation, Lemm said BWSR wetlands staff is optimistic that by collaborating with its partners, the new program will continue to meet the demand for relevant and accessible technical wetland training.

Local Conservation Delivery

Overview

BWSR’s achieves success through the work of and partnerships with local governments to meet state objectives for clean water, productive soil, and abundant fish and wildlife habitat and maintain local capacity to protect and enhance Minnesota’s water and soil resources. We work to achieve these goals by implementing targeted projects and practices on private lands to prevent soil erosion and pollution from entering surface and ground water.

In order to have effective implementation of programs and projects that protect and enhance Minnesota’s water and soil resources, we need to have:

- technically capable staff,
- local plans that prioritize restoration and protection,
- targeted funding,
- collaboration with local partners, and
- assurance that technical and capacity needs are met.

BWSR plays a role in program development of statutory requirements, oversight, training, accountability, and working with local partners to ensure the technical resources and local capacity are available to efficiently develop local water management plans.

Local Conservation Delivery encompasses the importance of effective water management planning at the local level and the impact of implementation at the local level on improving and protecting the water resources identified in local water management plans.

Highlights include partnerships in these programs:

Clean Water Fund	General Fund	Federal Contribution Agreement (USDA-NRCS)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects and Practices • Buffer Implementation • SWCD Capacity • Watershed-based Funding • Conservation Engineering Assistance • Buffer Cost Share • One Watershed, One Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-share • Natural Resource Block Grants • General Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Training • Conservation Planning

Results that work for Minnesota

Local Conservation Delivery is central to BWSR’s work. Agency programs that assist landowners and local government have resulted in improved local watershed management plans that prioritize and target resources to areas that will result in less sediment and nutrients entering our lakes, rivers, and streams; healthier fish and wildlife habitat; and a slowing of wetland losses.

In FY 18-19, we funded 81 grants through the competitive Projects and Practices grant program, 12 One Watershed, One Plan planning grants, 89 Buffer Cost-Share grants, 178 Buffer Implementation grants, 178 SWCD Capacity grants, five Watershed-based Funding grants, 16 TSA-AIG grants, and six Technical Training grants. These grants resulted in 1,325 Best Management Practices being implemented on the landscape.

These projects and conservation practices addressed waterbodies with 47 impairments, eight drinking water/groundwater projects, and 19 projects focused on protection. Funding for this work comes multiple funding sources; Clean Water Fund, General Fund, and federal contribution agreements.

Biennial accomplishments for Local Water Management Implementation include:

- Installing more than 1,325 best management practices.
- Implementing practices responsible for keeping an estimated 50,876 tons of sediment and 35,537 pounds of phosphorus from entering Minnesota’s lakes, streams, and rivers.
- Developing 30 Comprehensive Water Management Plans approved or in progress.

At-a-Glance

The primary components of Local Conservation Delivery are:

- Clean Water Fund Competitive Grants
- Natural Resources Block Grants
- SWCD Programs and Operations Grants
- Conservation Cost Share
- Soil and Water Conservation District Capacity Funding

Clean Water Fund Competitive Grants

In the FY 18-19 biennium, our agency’s Competitive Grants Program included Projects and Practices and the Multipurpose Drainage Management Program. The goal of our Clean Water Fund (CWF) competitive grants program is to help meet statewide water quality goals through the prevention and reduction of non-point source pollution. These awards include public and private projects and involve Minnesotans who voluntarily engage in these activities.

Program	Total Funding FY 18-19
Natural Resources Block Grants	
- Comp. Local Water Management	\$2,275,304
- Wetland Conservation Act	\$3,812,958
- Shoreland Management	\$754,738
- SSTS	\$5,731,762
SWCD Programs and Operations	
- Conservation Delivery	\$3,530,002
- Nonpoint Engineering Assistance	\$2,120,000
Conservation Cost Share	\$2,399,998
Total	\$20,624,762
Soil and Water Conservation District Capacity Funding	
Total	\$21,026,784
Total	\$41,651,546

The Competitive Grants program works through Minnesota’s local governments to fund projects that are prioritized and targeted to the most critical source areas, allowing us to be strategic in granting funds that meet local water quality goals within the larger scope of Minnesota’s clean water efforts.

To receive BWSR Clean Water Funds, a project must meet one of the purposes specified in the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment:

- Protect, enhance, or restore water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams; and/or
- Protect groundwater and drinking water sources from degradation.

In FY 18-19, BWSR funded 81 grants totaling \$20,497,329 through the competitive projects and practices grant program.

Clean Water Fund Applications Funded per Grant Program				
Grant Program	Applications Funded		Total Funds Awarded	
	FY 18	FY 19	FY 18	FY 19
BWSR Board Approval, Dec. 2017, Dec. 2018				
Projects and Practices	24	36	\$6,184,844	\$11,685,070
Accelerated Implementation	0	12	\$-	\$1,382,915
Multipurpose Drainage Management	5	4	\$634,500	\$610,000
Total	29	52	\$6,819,344	\$13,677,985

Natural Resources Block Grants

We recognize that meeting Minnesota’s land and water conservation goals depends on local governments having the capacity and skills to fulfill both state obligations and local expectations. The Natural Resources Block Grant programs provide state funding to ensure counties have the financial means to effectively implement state programs such as local water planning and the Wetland Conservation Act. This program is an umbrella under which five grants reside that help offset the costs to counties of the following state natural resource programs:

- Comprehensive Local Water Management
- Wetland Conservation Act
- Shoreland Management
- Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (Clean Water Funds)

Counties must have a BWSR-approved and locally adopted Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan to be eligible. Bundling these grants into one grant agreement has allowed for a more efficient delivery mechanism for counties.

Soil and Water Conservation District Capacity Funding

\$22 million was appropriated over the biennium to support SWCDs. This funding recognizes the role these local governments play in providing technical assistance to private landowners. It also recognizes new demands for SWCD services from:

- 1) Increases in CWF on-the-ground implementation dollars,

- 2) Technical support for Minnesota’s buffer law,
- 3) Expansion of soil loss limits law statewide,
- 4) Implementation of the Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, and
- 5) A growing role in land-related groundwater issues.



The funding focuses on increasing SWCD capacity to address four resource concern areas — soil erosion, riparian zone management, water storage and treatment, and excess nutrients. Eligible activity

categories include staffing, cost share/incentives, and technology/capital equipment. In FY 2016, grantees completed an initial request identifying their funding needs and the connection to their state-approved, locally adopted plan. These funds are intended to fill gaps in local capacity, increase delivery of essential conservation services, and accomplish critical soil and water conservation goals consistent with the following principles:

- Expand the level and/or variety of technical services districts and TSAs can deliver.
- Increase the amount of existing, targeted, and priority services necessary to address outreach to landowners and assist landowners in meeting land and water regulatory requirements.
- Extend high priority programs funded by short-term grant funds that are expiring.
- Add to, improve, or develop staff skills so that skills better align with resource priorities identified by the district board.

Capacity funding has increased responsiveness of SWCDs to their landowners and has put more conservation on the ground. Whether investing in staff or equipment or conservation funding, the capacity dollars have enabled these local governments — who have the closest connection to landowners — to be more proactive and responsive in meeting their needs.

Conservation Cost-Share

These grants help conservation districts provide funding for a variety of on-the-ground projects that address state conservation objectives.

Specifically, these projects address:

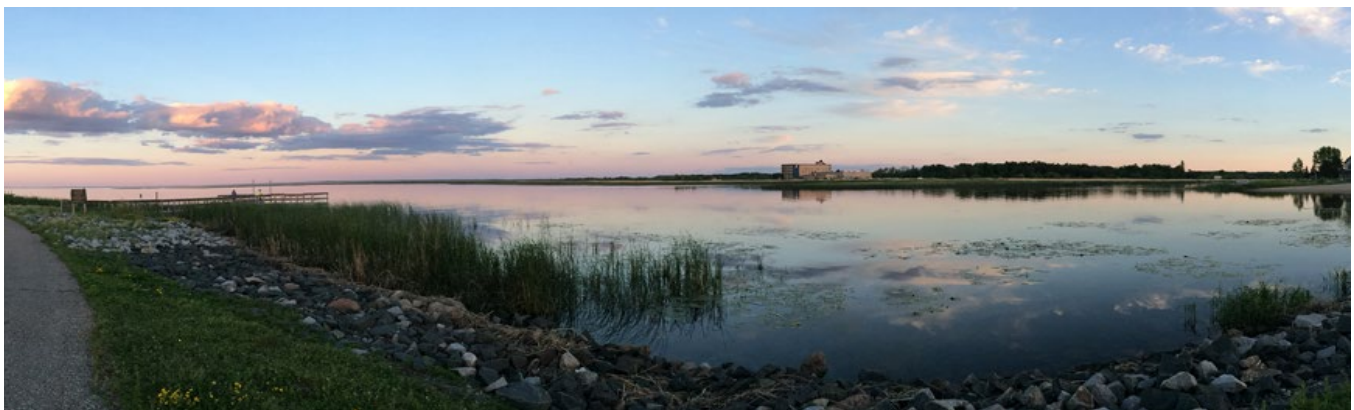
- **Keeping water on the land:** Restoring natural hydrology and reducing runoff is achieved by restoring wetlands, installing raingardens, constructing stormwater treatment ponds, and implementing conservation drainage practices.

- **Maintaining healthy soils:** Healthy soils are supported through conservation tillage and erosion control projects.
- **Reducing pollutants in surface and ground water:** Reducing pollution in sensitive ecological areas is accomplished by upgrading feedlots and subsurface sewage treatment systems and sealing abandoned wells.
- **Ensuring biological diversity:** Protection of native plants and animals and their habitats is accomplished through the installation of permanent buffers of native vegetation and cooperative weed management programs that address invasive species management.
- **Maintaining stream integrity:** Healthy stream hydrology and abundant fish populations are achieved through streambank and shore stabilization.



One Watershed, One Plan

The vision of the *One Watershed, One Plan* program is to align local water planning on major watershed boundaries with state strategies towards prioritized, targeted and measurable implementation plans. This program builds on current local water plans, state and local knowledge, and a systematic, science-based approach to watershed management. The resulting plans address the largest threats and provide the greatest environmental benefits to each watershed.



In 2015, the Minnesota Legislature passed Minnesota Statutes § 103B.801, the Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning Program. This legislation defined the purposes and further outlined the structure for the *One Watershed, One Plan* program. It also directed BWSR to develop a transition plan with a goal of completing

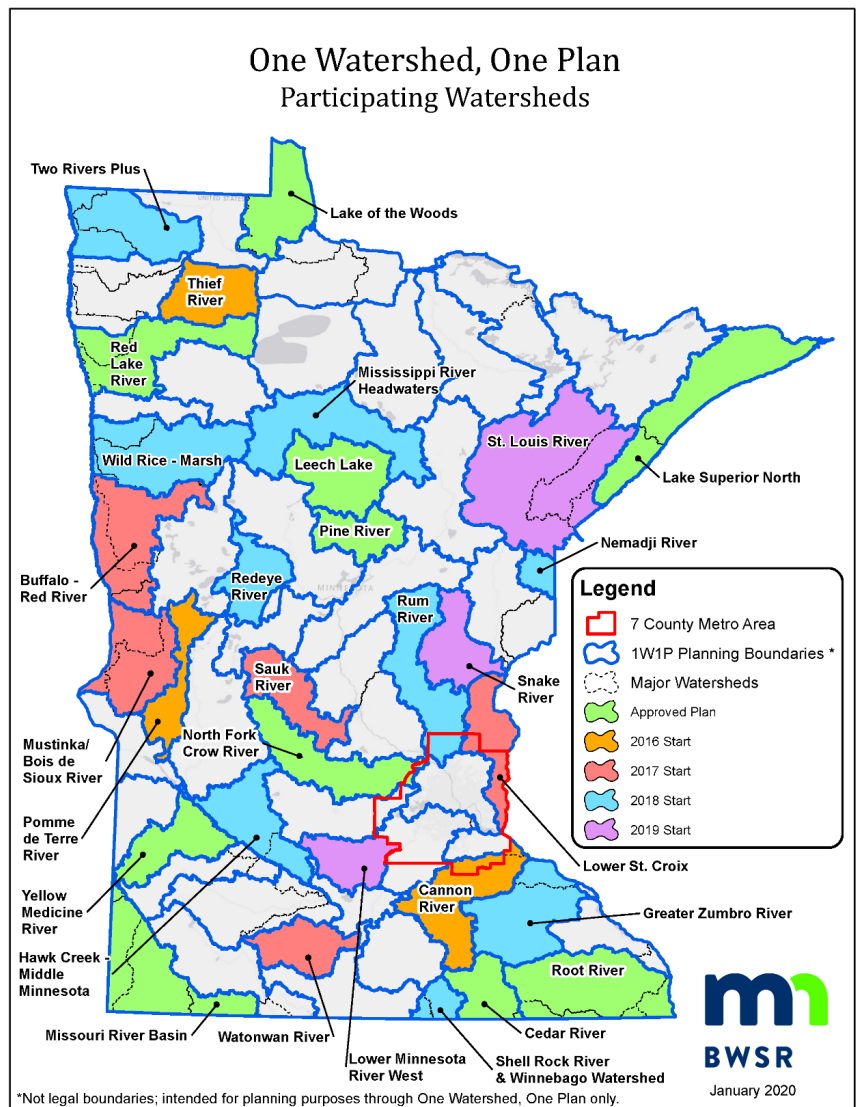
the statewide transition to comprehensive watershed management plans by 2025. Achieving the goal requires starting approximately seven planning efforts each year.

In 2016, the BWSR board adopted policies for Operating Procedures and Plan Content Requirements, which were based on lessons learned from five pilot planning areas. The pilot watershed groups started planning in 2014 and 2015, with all five pilot watershed plans currently approved and implementation is underway. The board approved planning grants for 12 new watershed planning areas in 2018 and 2019, bringing the total number of participating planning areas to 30. This is consistent with the pace of progress outlined in the One Watershed, One Plan Transition Plan.

Watershed-Based Implementation Funding

In FY 2018, BWSR established the Watershed-based Funding approach. Watershed-based funding is an alternative to the traditional project-by-project competitive grant processes often used to fund water quality improvement projects. This funding approach allows collaborating local governments to pursue timely solutions based on a watershed’s highest priority needs.

The approach depends on comprehensive watershed management plans developed by local partnerships under the One Watershed, One Plan program or the Metropolitan Surface Water or Groundwater Management framework to provide assurance that actions are prioritized, targeted, and measurable. BWSR began moving toward watershed-based funding to accelerate water management outcomes, enhance accountability and improve consistency and efficiency across the state. This approach allows more projects to be implemented and helps local governments spend limited resources where they are most needed.



Watershed-based funding is grounded in the Minnesota Water Management Framework, a comprehensive approach to water management. It is supported by the Association of Minnesota Counties, the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts.

In FY 2018, the BWSR board approved \$8.7 million for the Watershed-based Funding Pilot Program, which was granted through allocations to the five One Watershed, One Plan pilot watersheds and to local governments in the seven-county Metro Area. These funds were used to implement the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans developed under the One Watershed, One Plan program or metro water management plan. Grant recipients include Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties, and the following watersheds: Root, Yellow Medicine, Lake Superior, Red Lake, and North Fork Crow.

Technical Service Areas – Nonpoint Engineering Assistance Grants

In May 2018, BWSR’s Board approved FY 2018 and 2019 CWF non-competitive grant allocations developed to enhance technical assistance to deliver essential engineering and technical services through Technical Service Areas.



These funds invest in building the capacity of Non-Point Engineering Assistance TSA Joint Powers Boards to increase the capacity of soil and water conservation districts to provide highly skilled technical and

engineering assistance to landowners. TSAs use these funds to invest in building regional capacity across the state to efficiently accelerate on-the-ground projects and practices that improve or protect water resources.

In the FY 18-19 biennium, BWSR’s Board awarded grants totaling \$2,980,000 distributed among the eight TSAs.

Pass-Through Grant Management

This area includes pass-through funding for local water entities, including Minnesota River Basin Area II, the Red River Basin Commission, Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (CCMI), and the Lower Minnesota Watershed District. During this biennium, the following grants were issued:

Grant Recipient	Funding source	FY 18-19
Minnesota River Basin Area II	General Fund	\$280,000
Red River Basin Commission	General Fund	\$200,000
Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa	Clean Water Fund	\$500,000
Lower MN River Watershed District	General Fund	\$480,000

CONSERVATION CORPS OF MINNESOTA AND IOWA



During the most recently completed service term in MN, 551 CCMI crew members worked on nearly 400 conservation projects.

BWSR's CWF appropriation pays for crews' labor costs. Local government units submit applications for work projects, and often provide matching funds.

"It's been a huge help for water quality in the state because many of the partners we work with –

SWCDs and watershed districts – tell us this is work they need to get done but don't have the staff or funds for. It leverages funds from multiple sources to meet the tipping point to have a project happen." - Brian Miller, St. Paul-based program director

Status Report

Past Recommendations	Status
Accelerate the pace of progress for the transition to watershed-based management planning through the One Watershed, One Plan program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>In 2018-2019, the pace of progress toward the development of comprehensive watershed management plans under the One Watershed, One Plan program has remained about the same as previous years. In FY18-19, we funded 12 new watershed planning areas.</i>

<p>Work with our local soil and water conservation district partners to develop strategies that ensure their funding is predictable and stable.</p>	<p>✓ <i>BWSR has work with MASWCD and local SWCDs to consider strategies for stable and predictable funding of SWCD operations. BWSR continues to work with SWCD partners to develop funding strategies.</i></p>
<p>Engage local government and other partners to design transition from competitive grant funding to targeted watershed-based grant funding.</p>	<p>✓ <i>BWSR initiated an engagement process with local government partners to develop an approach for watershed-based funding. The transition to watershed-based funding was implemented in FY2018-2019. BWSR established the Watershed-based Funding Pilot Program, providing grants to the One Watershed, One Plan pilot watershed and the seven-county metropolitan area local water management entities.</i></p>

Recommendations for FY 20-21

- 10) Work with metro partners to determine the best strategy for distributing metro based-watershed implementation funding.
- 11) Continue to work with local partners to develop 1W1P plans to meet target deadlines for statewide coverage.
- 12) Work with SWCD partners to develop strategies that ensure their capacity funding is stable and predictable.

Engineering

Overview

In December 2019, the Technical Services Section was split into the Engineering Section and the Resource Conservation Section. Therefore, the following summary for FY 18-19 includes some overlap with the Resource Conservation Section summary in this biennial report.

The Technical Services Section scope of services involved engineering and ecological science technical support to other BWSR sections, staff, and clientele regarding BWSR programs, policies, and functions. This involved technical coordination and consultation with BWSR conservation partners, including soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts, counties, other state and federal agencies, the University of Minnesota, and Minnesota State University - Mankato. Ecological science technical services are now provided via the Resource Conservation Section, while engineering technical services are now housed in the Engineering Section.



During the biennium, the engineering trainers within the Technical Services Section developed training materials and executed training workshops for the Technical Training and Certification Program (TTCP) partnership. This partnership was formed with soil and water conservation districts and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its goal is technical capacity development, including helping partnership staff earn job approval authority. This involved coordination with BWSR's Organizational Effectiveness Section, NRCS, and SWCDs.

The Engineering Section also provides direct engineering support for design and implementation of conservation practices including wetland restorations under the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve and associated partnership programs, as well as for the Local Road Wetland Replacement and general Wetland Mitigation Banking programs. These services involve project evaluations, site investigation, design, construction oversight, and assistance with developing and implementing program policies and technical standards.

Per an interagency Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - St. Paul District (Corps), BWSR engineering staff also provide review of all proposed compensatory mitigation wetland banks in Minnesota. State statute (103D.611) also requires that BWSR review and provide an advisory report on all watershed district projects and this work is completed by engineering section staff.

Other functions and services include:

- Technical support for BWSR grants programs, local water planning, and natural disaster response;
- Coordinate the stakeholder Drainage Work Group (DWG, now led by the Resource Conservation Section, with Chief Engineer participation), and coordinate the interagency Drainage Management Team (DMT);
- Participate on a variety of technical advisory committees; and

- Provide other outreach and support to BWSR clientele.

Results that work for Minnesota

Our biennial accomplishments include:

- Planned and delivered 32 engineering trainings on high priority conservation practices, engineering analysis and design tools, and job approval authority. Coordinated with the Technical Training and Certification Program Coordinator, NRCS, and SWCDs.
- Surveyed and evaluated 30,000 acres of conservation easements for RIM Reserve, MN CREP, and the Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program.
- 12,000 acres of wetland restoration completed or ready for completion.
- Reviewed 15 103D.611 projects and 60 wetland designs.

At-a-Glance

Engineering

BWSR engineering staff worked in a number of capacities, including wetland restoration site investigation, design and construction management in support of agency programs and initiatives; review and consultation for all Wetland Banking Program private wetland banking projects; advisory review for watershed district projects; and consultation and coordination with local government partners around disaster relief response efforts to assist private landowners with erosion control and water quality restoration and protection projects and practices.



Wetland restoration project implementation: Provided engineering services in support of wetland restoration and other conservation practices located on state held conservation easements (through both RIM/MN CREP and the Local Road Wetland Replacement Programs). Approximately 350 BWSR led engineering projects were either surveyed, evaluated, designed and/or constructed during the biennium.

Engineering review of private wetland mitigation bank projects: Reviewed and provided agency comments to both Wetland Conservation Act and Corp of Engineer's regulatory staff for approximately 60 private consultant design reports and construction plans for proposed private wetland mitigation projects around the state.

Advisory review of watershed district project engineer's reports: Reviewed and provided advisory reports to watershed district managers for approximately 15 watershed district project engineer's reports for flood damage reduction, drainage, and water quality.

Participate on a variety of technical advisory committees: This included the Clean Water Research Program; Erosion and Stormwater Management Certification Program; Minnesota Recovers Task Force; Silver Jackets; and the Red River Flood Damage Reduction Work Group, Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee.

Status Report

Past Recommendations	Status
<p>Facilitate the development of practical solution-based recommendations about drainage law to the legislature with a broad array of agricultural, conservation, government, and other groups.</p>	<p>✓ <i>During the 2018-2019 biennium, the Drainage Work Group developed several clarifications of Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 103E Drainage, including the addition of an option for drainage system repair costs to be apportioned to all property contributing runoff and sediment to the drainage system. These revisions were debated by the legislature and adopted in 2018 and 2019.</i></p>

Recommendations for FY 20-21

- 13) Promote enhanced technical assistance relationships between SWCD, TSA, BWSR and NRCS engineers for improved training coordination and conservation outcomes.
- 14) Increase training collaboration between SWCD, TSA and BWSR engineers. This allows SWCD and TSA staff to take the next steps toward achieving Job Approval Authority and helps build a skilled conservation workforce.

Resource Conservation

Overview

The Resource Conservation Section encompasses efforts that cross various other sections within the agency. The Buffer Program work is found within this section; those accomplishments are identified elsewhere in this report.

Two staff who are a part of the Technical Training and Certification program are also housed in this section; that program is discussed in more detail in the Organizational Effectiveness section of this report.

Agency regulatory appeals for the Wetland Conservation Act and the buffer program are administered by the Resource Conservation Section; however, any appeals details are found in those respective sections of this report.



Program areas that are found within this section are the Lawns to Legumes (L2L) program, Minnesota Office of Soil Health (MOSH), Drainage Work Group, and activities related to vegetative invasive species, pollinators/state seed mixes and climate related efforts. While these areas do overlap with other areas of our work, these topics will be discussed in more detail in this section of the biennial report.

Results that work for Minnesota

The Resource Conservation Section is a new organizational structure within the Board of Water and Soil Resources. The structure of the section establishes an area of the agency which crosses over various other agency programs and efforts. The structure was instituted in January 2019.

Biennium accomplishments include:

- Developed structure of the L2L program
- Established MOSH, a collaboration with the University of Minnesota Water Resources Center working towards building common ground for water quality and agricultural production

At-a-Glance

Major programs within this section include:

- Lawns to Legumes
- Minnesota Office of Soil Health (MOSH)
- Native Vegetation and Landscape Ecology

- Climate
- Drainage Work Group

Lawns to Legumes

Lawns to Legumes offers a combination of workshops, coaching, planting guides, and cost-share funding for installing pollinator-friendly native plantings in residential yards. The program also campaigns to raise awareness for pollinator habitat projects and is establishing demonstration neighborhoods that showcase best practices.

Funding is provided by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and is targeted in priority areas to benefit the Rusty patched bumblebee and other at-risk species.



Minnesota Office of Soil Health (MOSH)

The Minnesota Office for Soil Health was formed in 2017 as a collaboration between the Board of Water and Soil Resources and the University of Minnesota Water Resources Center. MOSH’s mission is to protect and improve soil resources and water quality by developing the knowledge, skills and abilities of local experts to more effectively promote sustainable soil and land management. MOSH works towards healthy farms and healthy ecosystems by delivering soil education, promoting grower networks, and researching best practices.



Details of the principals MOSH works to fulfill as well as programmatic and educational accomplishments can be found at <https://mosh.umn.edu/>

Native Vegetation and Landscape Ecology

Numerous resources have been built and maintained related Native Vegetation and Landscape ecology over the two years this report covers. Several examples of the resources which have been developed/updated are listed below. BWSR staff are also starting to set the stage for review and update of several state seed mixes in the next two years as well.



- [Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines](#) (January 2019)
- [Buffer Establishment and Management Toolbox](#)
- [Landscape Resiliency Toolbox](#)
- [Pollinator Toolbox](#)

Climate

BWSR staff participated on the Interagency Climate Adaptation Team, including organizing a stakeholder forum on “Building Resiliency to Extreme Precipitation in Minnesota.” A report summarizing the results of this effort is posted on the BWSR website under “[Landscape Resiliency and Climate Change](#).” Staff also began calculating the reductions in greenhouse gas emission resulting from conservation practices funded through BWSR’s grant and easement programs. The results were summarized in an updated [Climate Change Trends and Action Plan](#), published in September 2019. The related [Climate Resiliency Toolbox](#) was also updated.

Drainage Management

BWSR facilitated the stakeholder Drainage Work Group (DWG), established in 2006, which works to build consensus recommendations around drainage law updates. We also facilitate the interagency Drainage Management Team (DMT) to coordinate sharing of drainage management information about pertinent research, reports and programs involving state and federal agencies, the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State University – Mankato. These efforts



resulted in a set of recommendations for legislative consideration during the 2018 legislative session. The recommendations were approved and signed into law as a result of the Work Group's efforts.

- [Recommendations for Accelerating Public Drainage System Acquisition and Establishment of Buffer Strips and Alternative Practices: A Report to the Legislature \(February 1, 2018\) \(pdf\)](#)
- Coordinated and facilitated 19 stakeholder Drainage Work Group meetings and 12 Interagency Drainage Management Team meetings.

We began developing the "Understanding Minnesota Public Drainage Law" document and coordinated the DMT to enhance interagency mutual understanding of drainage issues. At the end of this biennium, the coordination of the DWG was moved to the Resource Conservation Section, with representation from the Engineering Section.

An Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund grant enabled BWSR to facilitate statewide modernization of public drainage records under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 103E, and integrate new specifications into existing drainage records modernization guidelines through matching cost-share grants to drainage authorities.

Technical support for BWSR grant programs, local water planning, and disaster response: Drainage staff assisted ongoing development, updates and technical support of BWSR program policies and procedures, including Clean Water Fund Projects and Practices, and the Multipurpose Drainage Management programs; One Watershed, One Plan; and the BWSR Disaster Recovery and Assistance Program.

Outreach to BWSR clientele: Drainage staff provided outreach to clientele through presentations on drainage, drainage law, the Technical Training and Certification Program, and Job Approval Authority at various venues:

- The Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD) annual meetings in 2017, 2018, and 2019
- The Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District (MASWCD) annual conference
- Minnesota Association of Drainage Inspectors (MADI)
- Minnesota Viewers Association (MVA)
- The Greater Blue Earth River Basin Association (GBERBA)
- MASWCD Area meetings
- Minnesota State University Mankato Water Storage Forum regarding water storage at different scales.
- BWSR-NRCS-SWCD Technical Service Area joint engineering meetings

Recommendations for FY 20-21

- 15) Build Lawns to Legumes program and seek continuation of funds. Determine feasibility of rural lawn augmentation to expand scope of program.
- 16) Develop habitat-friendly solar program and secure funding for program support.
- 17) Revise state seed mixes.
- 18) Expand BWSR's climate adaptation work and participate in state efforts in developing recommendations and planning around natural and working lands issues.

Organizational Effectiveness

Overview

Staff in BWSR's Organizational Effectiveness Section work to enhance BWSR's overall effectiveness — internally as an agency and externally as we serve local partners. This is done by leading and supporting operational and strategic planning, communication, training, performance review, compliance, and internal control efforts.

Results that work for Minnesota

Over the biennium, BWSR expanded the training opportunities provided through the Technical Training and Certification Program. We also improved how we share the positive impact Clean Water Fund dollars are making on Minnesota's natural resources and transitioned the delivery and tracking of mandatory training for BWSR staff to a learning management system.



Biennial accomplishments include:

- Provided high quality training for 400 local government staff each year at the annual BWSR Academy, which provides skills and opportunities for these partners to improve the delivery of conservation work in Minnesota.
- Provided 8,493 hours of technical training to 1,592 local government partner staff through the Technical Training and Certification Program.
- Created and distributed 161 stories featuring the work of BWSR and our local government partners with the purpose of providing a greater understanding of conservation goals and outcomes.
- Increased social media outreach and connected with BWSR's audience through innovative strategies. By the end of the biennium, BWSR had 1,600 Twitter followers, 1,312 Facebook followers, and 824 Instagram followers.
- Assessed and tracked basic performance standards of 239 local government partners. 94% of our partners are in full compliance, an increase of 8% over the last biennium. 60 standard Level II and 3 Level III performance reviews were completed in the biennium.
- Awarded six partners with PRAP Assistance Grants, totaling approximately \$38,000.

At-a-Glance

Major programs include:

- Training

- BWSR Academy
- Technical Training and Certification Program
- Communications
- Internal Controls
- Grants Monitoring, Reconciliation and Verification
- Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP)

Training

The importance of supporting our local government partners to effectively carry out their role in conservation and water quality efforts is done through an intentional and systematic approach by BWSR. Our program theory is based on the premise that when high quality and intentional training is provided to our local government partners, they are more successful in implementing their work to improve and protect Minnesota’s water and soil resources. Local government staff evaluations of BWSR Academy consistently mention the value of and benefit they receive from attending BWSR Academy. However, not all training can occur at BWSR Academy and BWSR frequently offers other training opportunities either in person or online through webinars and pre-recorded modules. We provide training information and updates through our monthly publication Train Tracks to over 2,100 subscribers.

BWSR Academy

Since the last Biennial Report, BWSR Academy has provided training to over 800 local government partner staff. BWSR Academy is an annual three-day statewide training event. The objective is to provide high quality training for local government staff that maintains and improves the delivery of conservation work and meets the shared expectations of BWSR and local resource management boards. BWSR Academy’s priority is offering training sessions that improve technical skills and administrative expertise useful in implementing BWSR-sponsored programs or those activities directly related to BWSR programs. Additionally, we offer sessions dedicated to value-added skills as identified by our local government partners. Each year, we have more than 500 suggestions for sessions from our local government partners, local organizational partners, agencies represented on the BWSR Board, and BWSR staff.



Technical Training and Certification Program

Addressing local conservation priorities through the establishment of conservation practices and land management on private lands in Minnesota is critical to achieving state and federal goals for clean and sustainable water resources, healthy and sustainable soil resources, and abundant fish and wildlife. Conservation Technical Assistance requires statewide, core technical assistance capabilities, as well as capabilities tailored to the local priority resource concerns and conservation practices found in the diverse landscapes of Minnesota. Training and certification are key quality assurance elements of an effective conservation delivery system and are addressed by the Technical Training and Certification Program.



BWSR, the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have committed to providing resources for the Technical Training and Certification Program (TTCP). During this biennium, the Partnership hired a coordinator, two training engineers, and two training conservationists to implement the TTCP Strategy, which provides a framework for development of training and credentialing for the technical knowledge and skills required to address local conservation needs.

Major program activities this biennium include:

- Piloted a training needs assessment and Individual Development Plan process for collecting training information from SWCD and NRCS staff.
- Delivered priority training needed by conservation partners; 1,592 individuals received 8,493 hours of training.
- Distributed Area Technical Training Team grants, \$10,000 to each of six Area Technical Training Teams, to address local technical priority training needs; resulted in 23 training sessions for 450 students.
- Created technical training cadre including two training engineers and two training conservationists.

Communications

BWSR's communications work strives to generate an understanding of and support for agency programs and initiatives while promoting Minnesota's broader conservation goals. Communications staff use a combination of storytelling, digital outreach, internal services, and quality assurance measures to ensure that communications products and activities further BWSR's mission.

Storytelling and digital outreach: Subscriptions to BWSR GovDelivery bulletins (regular newsletters and announcements) increased by 23.7% during the biennium. Between July 1, 2017 and June 19, 2019, BWSR communications staff produced and distributed a total of 161 articles detailing BWSR's work and the work of our partners (60 Clean Water Fund stories, 101 Snapshots newsletter stories). BWSR amplified its social media reach, ending the biennium with 1,660 Twitter followers, 1,312 Facebook page likes, and 824 Instagram followers.

BWSR communications staff maintain strong working relationships with local and state media outlets. All Clean Water Fund stories produced by BWSR's Information Officer are pitched to appropriate local media and are regularly printed by outlets throughout the state. Our communications staff proactively approach the media to provide entry points for reporting on conservation issues. This collaborative relationship with the media resulted in BWSR being mentioned in news articles 2,397 times during the biennium, plus 135 direct reprints of BWSR articles.

Internal services and quality assurance measures: BWSR Communications staff works closely with BWSR staff across all sections to ensure communications products are consistent, thorough, and meet agency and reporting requirements.

Internal services include website content management, creating and updating fact sheets on behalf of program staff, creating handouts for use at annual BWSR events such as the Board Tour and BWSR Academy, preparing staff to speak to the media and providing communications orientation to new staff. Communications staff also provides support to BWSR leadership by drafting presentations and talking points and assisting with media interviews.

Quality assurance measures include reviewing and finalizing legislative reports, training BWSR staff on communications policies, and applying consistent branding and formatting across all communication products.



Overall, BWSR expanded and improved communication efforts during the 2018-2019 biennium. New digital communications platforms and tactics were introduced, while existing publications were refined to engage a broader audience. Communications activities helped tell BWSR stories and supported BWSR programs by providing effective materials and resources.

Major communications activities and accomplishments over the biennium include:

- Initiated ongoing production and distribution of stories focused on conservation work and outcomes made possible by the Clean Water Fund.
- Successfully redesigned and launched BWSR's website to be more user friendly. Used new website to create online archives of major BWSR publications such as Snapshots, Featured Plant and Clean Water Fund stories. Articles reprinted by 135 known media sources.
- Launched Medium blog in December 2017 to feature conservation stories; posted 29 articles during the biennium.
- Launched BWSR Instagram account to increase social media reach. Gained 824 followers by May 2019, reaching a different audience than typical (primarily metro-based followers).
- Executed a \$40,000 grant from the McKnight Foundation for Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) outreach efforts.
- Introduced new strategies to further engage with BWSR's audience via social media, such as conservation-themed social media contests.
- Brought BWSR communications products into full compliance with state branding requirements.
- Added new FTE (Information Officer) to communications staff

Internal Controls

The State of Minnesota's internal control framework requires agencies to design, implement, and maintain an effective system of internal control within the agency. Agencies must have a strong system of internal controls to maintain the public trust and confidence needed to ensure continued support for state programs. Internal controls are the backbone of efficient and effective government. Risk assessments are the second of five components that make up the state of Minnesota's adopted internal control standards. Risk assessments are vital to proactively identifying the risks an agency faces as it seeks to achieve its goals. Risk assessments include "the identification and analysis of the risks relevant to the achievement of the organization's mission and objectives, which forms the basis for determining how the risks should be managed." Risk assessments can help an agency focus its control efforts on those processes that are most critical to accomplishing its mission, or where the impact of something "going wrong" would be most felt. By taking apart a process or procedure to identify where the risks or gaps are, they can also help speed up or fortify inefficient or ineffective processes.

Major Internal Control program activities this biennium includes:

- Completed an MMB mandated three-year phased risk assessment process to align the reporting from all required executive branches. During this time, BWSR reviewed authorizing state statutes, and 68 business processes, and prioritized six business processes during the next biennium as risk mitigation projects.
- Transitioned three state mandated training to an in-house process for managing and tracking

Grants Monitoring, Reconciliation and Verification

These procedures provide a variety of tools to Board Conservationists that can be use when monitoring grants and working with grantees. The agency has also established a Grants Monitoring Work Group and Grants team that monitors OGM policies and guidance and makes recommendations about agency grant policies.

Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP)

PRAP is primarily a performance assessment activity conducted by BWSR. The subjects of the assessments are the local governmental units (LGUs) delivering BWSR's water and land conservation programs. The process is designed to evaluate how well LGUs are implementing their long-range plans. The types of LGUs reviewed include SWCDs, WDs, WMOs, and county-level water management. PRAP was authorized by the legislature (Statute 103B.102) in 2007. BWSR prepares an annual PRAP report for the Minnesota Legislature outlining the results of the previous year's program activities and a general assessment of the performance of LGUs that provide land and water conservation services. Find more information on the program website:

<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/prap>

Major PRAP program activities this biennium includes incorporating metrics for WCA program implementation responsibilities into the review process, developing protocol and performance standards for evaluating TSA performance, and updating performance standards and guidance for Level II PRAP reviews.

Status Report

Past Recommendations	Status
Build a skilled workforce, capable of meeting the challenges and opportunities of technical conservation practice survey, design, and construction.	✓ <i>In process. Continued building and supporting partnership between MACDE, MASWCD, BWSR and NRCS to increase training opportunities for conservation professionals in Minnesota.</i>
Increase capabilities to help farmers, landowners, and local governments tell the story of the Legacy Fund impacts.	✓ <i>In process – hired an information officer to write stories featuring the projects and practices funded through the Clean Water Legacy amendment dollars.</i>

Recommendations for FY 20-21

- 19) Develop a process for tracking LGU technical training needs, documenting credentials and certifications, and finding on-the-job training opportunities
- 20) Develop protocols for evaluating watershed-based plan implementation through the PRAP program
- 21) Enhance use of online training opportunities for local government partners for providing efficiencies of time and flexibility.
- 22) Seek a new TTCP contribution agreement to extend the work of coordinated state, local, and federal technical training and credentialing.

Other Policy and Administration

Overview

The goal of this program is to advance the agency mission by providing high quality, timely and cost-effective operational and administrative support. In addition to providing support to agency staff, we provide direct support to BWSR's 20-member Board, as well as support and information to external partners such as local governments, non-governmental and other community groups, businesses, legislators, and citizens. BWSR's agency operations have been historically lean with a focus on getting resources out to local governments.



At-a-Glance

Major programs within this section include:

- Administrative Services (Human Resources and Financial Services)
- Legislative Relations
- Information Technology
- Board Operations

Administrative Services

This program area provides budgeting, payroll, purchasing, human resources, labor relations, fleet service, and financial reporting services to the agency. During the FY 18-19 biennium, these functions continued to support our agency's 126 staff in 10 offices located throughout Minnesota.

Legislative Relations

Implementation of Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment passed in 2008 has continued to increase our agency's responsibilities, as well as the expectations for BWSR to advise legislative decisions. During the 2018-2019 biennium, we continued working with staff and members of the Clean Water Council, Outdoor Heritage Council, and Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources in addition to being a resource to the Legislature itself.

Board Operations

During the 18-19 biennium, BWSR's Board continued to provide direction and oversight on policy development, grant funds to implement the state's conservation programs, and regulatory decisions. BWSR's goal is to operate transparently — and we take seriously our responsibility as stewards of state resources.

Information Technology

As required by statute, the agency contracts with MN.IT Enterprise for information technology operations and program support. During the FY 18-19 biennium we realigned MNIT@BWSR staffing, working towards increased efficiencies and budgets by pooling services.

Status Report

Past Recommendations	Status
Pursue mentorship-based and other programs that support a diverse workforce.	✓ <i>Coordinated with DNR on multiagency effort securing ENRTF grant funds for developing a strategic program to reduce barriers and increase diversity in environmental careers in the state workforce.</i>
Increase base General fund appropriations so that the agency can meet its statutory requirements and deliver services expected by our local government partners.	✓ <i>Completed. BWSR's General Fund base budget increased by \$3 million in the FY 18- 19 biennium over the FY 16-17 biennium.</i>

Recommendations for FY 20-21

- 23) Work with MNIT to meet critical security needs for BWSR web applications and databases.
- 24) Launch an Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers program to build a more inclusive workforce.