



# 2021 Performance Review and Assistance Program

Report to the Minnesota Legislature

January 26, 2022

**Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources**

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This report has been prepared for the Minnesota State Legislature by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in partial fulfillment of Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B.102, subdivision 3.

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## **MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP)**

### **Executive Summary**

Since 2008, BWSR's Performance Review and Assistance Program has assessed the performance of the local units of government constituting Minnesota's local delivery system for conservation of water and related land resources. These local units of government include 88 soil and water conservation districts, 87 counties, 45 watershed districts and 18 watershed management organizations. The program goal is to assist these local government partners to be the best they can be in their management of Minnesota's land and water resources.

#### **PRAP focuses on three aspects of Local Governmental Unit (LGU) performance:**

- 1) Plan Implementation—how well an LGU's accomplishments meet planned objectives.
- 2) Compliance with performance standards—meeting administrative mandates and following best practices.
- 3) Collaboration and communication—the quality of partner and stakeholder relationships.

BWSR's PRAP uses four levels of review to assess performance ranging from statewide oversight in Level I, to a focus on individual LGU performance in Levels II and III, and to remediation in Level IV.

#### **2021 Program Summary**

- Completed 16 Level II performance reviews, falling short of the target of 17 set for 2021. The shortfall in this goal was due to the retirement of the PRAP Coordinator, hiring freeze, temporary assignment of a BWSR staff person to fill the role, and the reformat of the PRAP program to accommodate the ongoing transition toward watershed-based planning.
- Updated Performance Standards and guidance for soil and water conservation districts, counties, watershed districts and watershed management organizations. BWSR staff began using these performance standards for 2021 Level II PRAP Reviews.
- Designed a reformatted PRAP program and review structure for 2022. The new approach incorporates new assessment types and provides a basis for comprehensive watershed management plan reviews consistent with BWSR's 1W1P program.
- Initiated a pilot comprehensive watershed management plan assessment which will conclude in 2022.
- Tracked 238 LGUs' Level I performance.
- Provided PRAP Assistance Grants for 5 local government units.
- Continued review of Wetland Conservation Act program implementation as part of Level II assessments to measure local government unit compliance.
- Stressed the importance of measuring outcomes in all 16 Level II performance reviews conducted in 2021. Discussed ways of demonstrating resource outcomes resulting from plan implementation, and specific expectations for reporting resource outcomes by LGUs.

## 2021 Results of Annual Tracking of 238 LGUs' Plans and Reports (PRAP Level I)

Overall compliance with LGU plan revision and reporting requirements rose to 99% in 2021. All drainage buffer reports were submitted on time, and WMO compliance jumped to 100%, compared to 72% in 2020, 87% in 2019 and 89% in 2018. The most significant change in compliance was identified in SWCD annual audit submittals. This was a new requirement for SWCDs in 2020. Staff efforts will continue in 2022 to identify issues with the audit submittals and improve overall LGU compliance.

- **Long-range Plan Status:** the number of overdue plans is 2 in 2021 (*unchanged from 2 in 2020*).
  - Counties: One local water management plan is overdue (extension requested).
  - Soil and Water Conservation Districts: Full plan compliance in 2021.
  - Watershed Districts: One watershed management plan is overdue.
  - Watershed Management Organizations: No watershed management plans are overdue.
- **LGUs in Full Compliance with Level I Performance Standards: 88%.**
  - Soil & Water Conservation Districts: 82% compliance (72/88).
  - County Water Management: 95% compliance (83/87).
  - Watershed Districts: 84% compliance (38/45).
  - Watershed Management Organizations: 100% compliance (18/18).

## Selected PRAP Program Objectives for 2022

- Track 238 LGUs' Level I performance.
- Continue efforts to improve Level I performance review reporting of all LGUs through LGU cooperation and persistent follow-up by BWSR staff and increase compliance with SWCD audit requirements.
- Set target of 16 Level II performance reviews for 2022.
- Complete pilot watershed assessment in 2022.
- Evaluate and adapt watershed assessment process based on pilot review results.
- Implement new PRAP assessment format.
- Provide leadership in emphasizing the importance of measuring outcomes in PRAP Reviews, ways of demonstrating resource outcomes resulting from plan implementation, and set specific expectations for reporting resource outcomes by LGUs.
- Survey LGUs from 2018 and 2019 Level II PRAP reviews to track LGU implementation of PRAP recommendations.
- Continue monitoring and reviewing compliance with Action Items identified during a Level II review to measure progress toward the goal of 100% compliance within 18 months for required Action Items.
- Continue the promotion and use of PRAP Assistance Grants to enhance LGU organizational effectiveness.
- Train in new full-time PRAP coordinator.

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# What is the Performance Review & Assistance Program?

## Supporting Local Delivery of Conservation Services

PRAP is primarily a performance assessment activity conducted by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). The subjects of the assessments are the local governmental units (LGUs) that deliver BWSR's water and land conservation programs, and the process is designed to evaluate how well LGUs are implementing their long-range plans. The LGUs reviewed include soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), watershed districts (WDs), watershed management organizations (WMOs), and the water management function of counties—a total of 238 distinct organizations. PRAP, authorized in 2007 (see Appendix A), is coordinated by one BWSR staff member, with assistance from BWSR's 18 Board Conservationists and 3 regional managers, who routinely work with these LGUs.

## Guiding Principles

PRAP is based on and uses the following principles adopted by the BWSR Board.

- Pre-emptive
- Systematic
- Constructive
- Includes consequences
- Provides recognition for high performance
- Transparent
- Retains local ownership and autonomy
- Maintains proportionate expectations
- Preserves the state/local partnership
- Results in effective on-the-ground conservation

The principles set parameters for the program's purpose of helping LGUs to be the best they can be in their operational effectiveness. Of note is the principle of proportionate expectations. This means that LGUs are rated on the accomplishment of their own plan's objectives. Moreover, BWSR rates operational performance using both basic and high-performance standards specific to each type of LGU. (For more detail see <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/prap> )

## Current Multi-level Structure

PRAP has three operational components:

- performance review
- assistance
- reporting

The outgoing **performance review** structure for 2021 is applied at four levels.

**Level I** review is an annual tabulation of required plans and reports for all 238 LGUs. Level I review is conducted entirely by BWSR staff and does not require additional input from LGUs.

**Level II** is a routine, interactive review intended to cover all LGUs at least once every 10 years. A Level II review evaluates progress on plan implementation, operational effectiveness, and partner

relationships. This review includes assessing compliance with Level II performance standards. The maps on pages 3-4 show which LGUs have gone through a Level II review since the program started in 2008.

**Level III** is an in-depth assessment of an LGU's performance problems and issues. A Level III review is initiated by BWSR or the LGU and usually involves targeted assistance to address specific performance needs. Since 2008, BWSR has conducted Level III reviews for three LGUs at their request and in 2017 we completed two more. BWSR regularly monitors all LGUs for challenges that would necessitate a Level III review.

**Level IV** is for LGUs with significant performance deficiencies and includes BWSR Board action to assign penalties as authorized by statute. Levels I-III are designed to avoid the need for Level IV. To date there have not been any Level IV reviews.

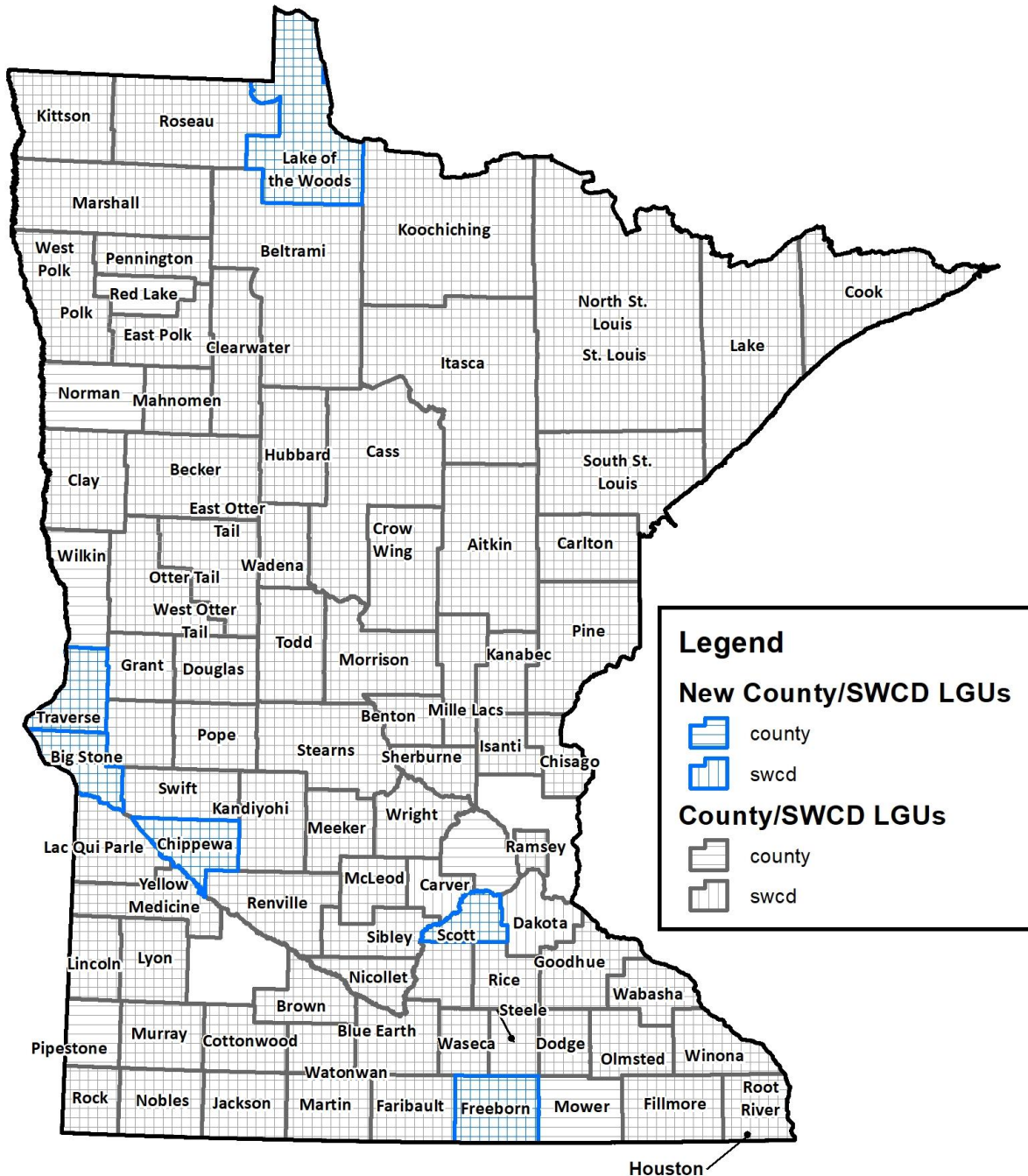
**Assistance** (pages 12-13). In 2012, BWSR began awarding PRAP assistance grants to assist LGUs in obtaining practical and financial assistance for organizational improvements or to address performance issues. The grants are typically used for consultant services for activities identified by the LGU or recommended by BWSR in a performance review. In 2021 BWSR awarded five PRAP assistance grants to LGUs and updated the application and grant award structure to accommodate new partnerships.

**Reporting** (pages 14-15) makes information about LGU performance accessible to the LGUs' stakeholders and constituents. Reporting methods specific to PRAP include links to performance review summaries and this annual report to the Legislature, which can be accessed via the PRAP page on BWSR's website <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/prap-legislative-reports>. In addition, the PRAP Coordinator presents results from Level II performance reviews to LGU boards at the completion of the review, and to additional boards/committees upon request.

### **Accountability: From Measuring Effort to Tracking Results**

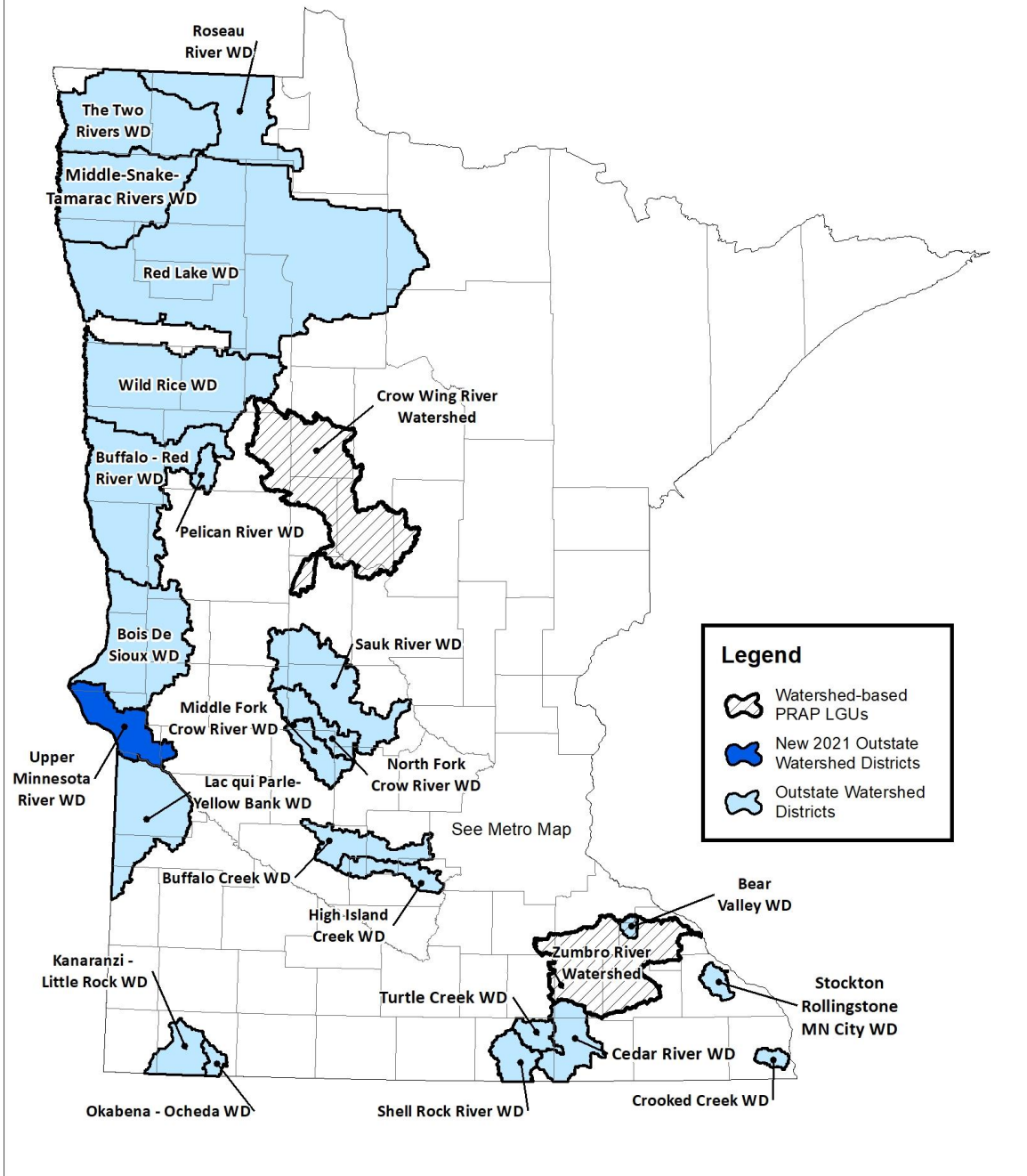
The administration of government programs necessitates a high degree of accountability. PRAP was developed, in part, to deliver on that demand by providing systematic local government performance review and then reporting results. In 2017, BWSR added review of local government unit's implementation of the Wetland Conservation Act program. In 2018, BWSR expanded the scope of PRAP to lay the groundwork for future evaluation of SWCD Technical Service Areas (TSA) and in 2021, initiated an assessment on the implementation of a comprehensive watershed management plan to be piloted and subsequently highlighted in the 2022 report.

## PRAP LGUs 2008 - 2021 Counties and SWCDs

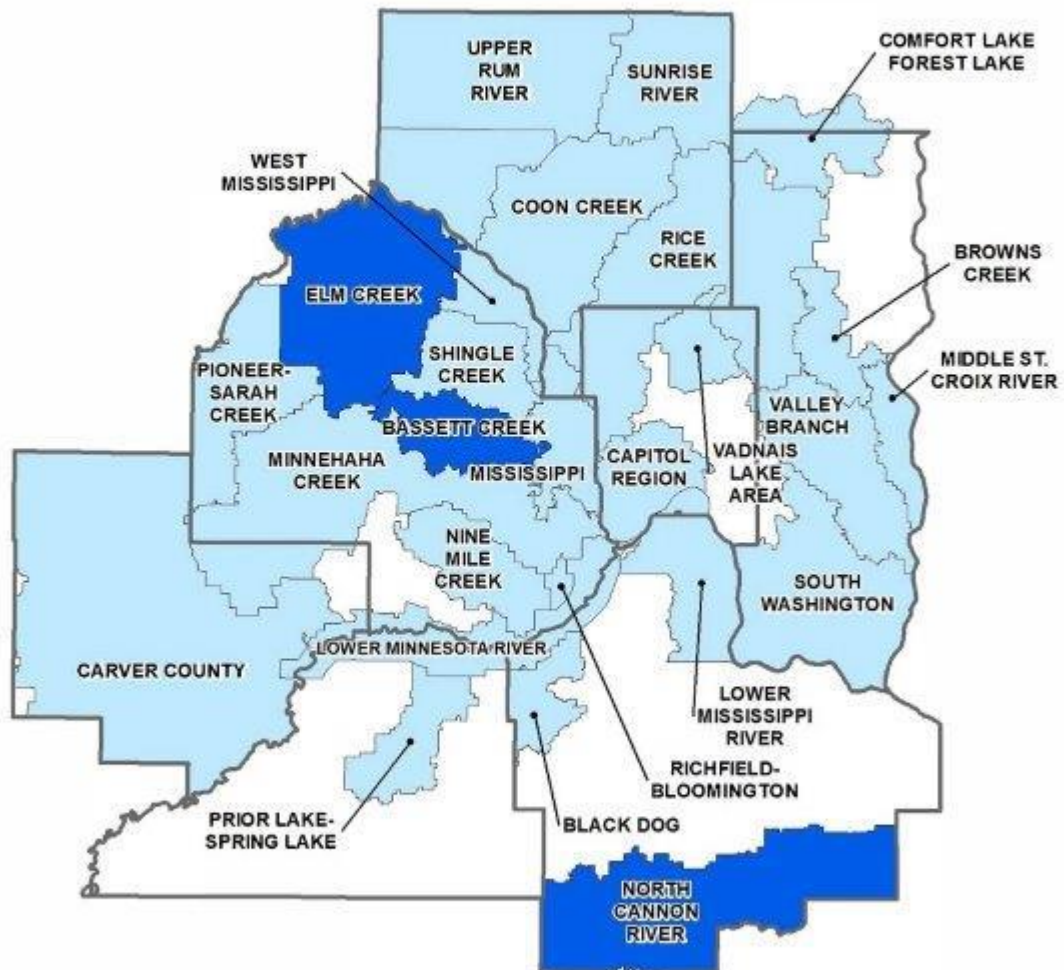


## PRAP LGUs 2008 - 2021



### Outstate Watershed Districts and Watersheds



## PRAP LGUs 2008-2021 Metro Watershed Districts and Management Organizations



### Legend

-  New 2021 Watershed Districts and Management Orgs
-  Metro Watershed Districts and Management Orgs

# Report on PRAP Performance

## BWSR's Accountability

BWSR continues to hold itself accountable for the objectives of the PRAP program. In consideration of that commitment, this section lists 2021 program activities with the corresponding objectives from the 2020 PRAP legislative report.

### PERFORMANCE REVIEW OBJECTIVES

What We Proposed	What We Did
Track 238 LGUs' Level I performance.	All LGUs were tracked for basic plan and reporting compliance. Overall, Level I performance dropped in 2021 to 88% compliance. This was in large part due to a change in SWCD audit requirements. Overdue long-range water management plans totaled 2 in 2021.
Continue efforts to improve Level I performance review reporting of all LGUs through cooperation and persistent follow up by BWSR staff.	WD compliance held steady in 2021 at 84%. In 2021 100% of Watershed Management Organizations met reporting or auditing requirements compared to just 72% compliance in 2020.
Set Target of 18 Level II performance reviews in 2021.	In 2021, 16 Level II performance reviews were completed. The shortfall in this goal was due to the retirement of the PRAP Coordinator, hiring freeze, temporary assignment of a BWSR staff person to fill the role, and the reformat of the PRAP program to accommodate the ongoing transition toward watershed-based planning.
Complete up to 2 Level III performance reviews, if needed, in 2021.	Discussed need for Level III performance reviews with BWSR Regional Managers and Organizational Effectiveness Manager and concluded that no Level III or IV reviews were needed in 2021.
Survey LGUs from 2018 Level II PRAP reviews to track LGU implementation of PRAP recommendations.	This activity was not conducted in 2021 to allow time for the PRAP coordinator to focus on building the process for comprehensive watershed-based plan reviews, and to redesign overall PRAP protocols. This work will resume in 2022.
Continue monitoring and reviewing compliance with Action Items identified during a Level II review. This will allow us to determine if we are meeting the goal of 100% compliance within 18 months established for required Action Items.	All Action Items identified during 2021 PRAP Level II reviews were assigned an 18-month timeline for completion.

Continue evaluating and updating protocol for PRAP Level I and Level II reviews for performance-based funding for implementation of watershed based One Watershed-One Plans.	The PRAP protocols were completely redesigned in 2021 for use starting in 2022. The redesign included a new category for comprehensive watershed management plan assessments, separation of organizational assessments to acknowledge participation in watershed planning and combining level III and IV assessments into one category.
Work with BWSR Water Planning Team to develop protocol for tracking, assessment, evaluation and reporting for One Watershed, One Plans.	PRAP Coordinator worked with the BWSR Assessment team and other internal teams to develop a pilot process for assessing watershed implementation for plans developed through the One Watershed One Plan program. A pilot assessment utilizing the new criteria will be conducted in 2022.

### ASSISTANCE OBJECTIVES

What We Proposed	What We Did
Continue the promotion and use of PRAP Assistance Grants to enhance LGU organizational effectiveness.	The PRAP assistance grant program was updated in 2021 to acknowledge the need for partnerships, newly formed or existing to access adequate assistance funding for their development. Beginning in 2021 partnerships are eligible for up to \$20,000 in assistance funds, while individual LGUs remain eligible for up to \$10,000. The first partnership to utilize the new structure was the Red River Valley Conservation Service Area – to define roles and responsibilities and conduct an in-depth workload analysis in response to new watershed-based implementation funding and associated required outcomes. Other LGUs funded in 2021 include Cook SWCD, Kandiyohi SWCD, North St. Louis SWCD, and Vadnais Lake Area WMO. Total grant funds awarded in 2021: \$40,730

### REPORTING OBJECTIVES

What We Proposed	What We Did
Provide leadership in communicating the importance of measuring outcomes in Level II performance reviews, ways of demonstrating resource outcomes resulting from plan implementation, and set specific expectations for reporting resource outcomes by LGUs.	All 16 Level II performance reviews included a review of the LGUs water plans for targets or objectives for resource outcomes and if outcomes are being reported. There were only a few plans in 2021 that had resource outcomes listed in their plans, and many of them had no reference at all to resource issues or measurable outcomes. This was our top recommendation for our LGUs in 2021, as outcomes will continue to be a requirement of the comprehensive watershed management plans developed via the One Watershed One Plan program.

## 2021 LGU Performance Review Results

### Level I Results

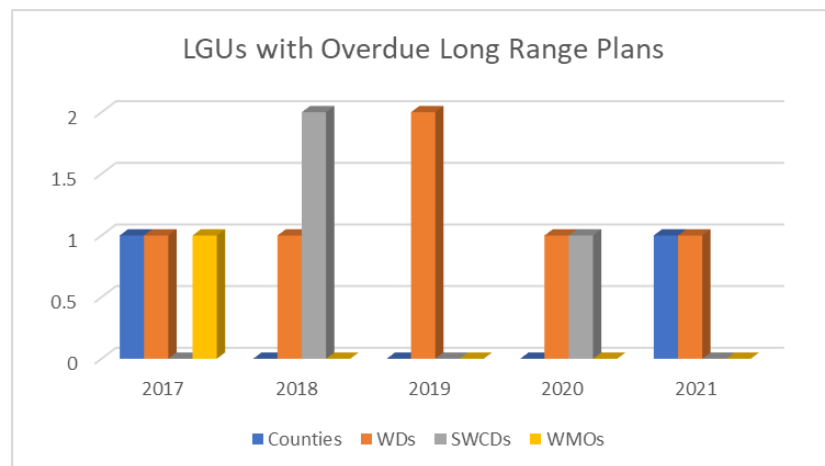
The Level I Performance Review monitors and tabulates all 238 LGUs' long-range plan updates and their annual reporting of activities, ditch buffer reports, grants, and finances. BWSR tracks these performance measures each year to provide oversight of legal and policy mandates, but also to screen LGUs for indications of potential problems. Chronic lateness in financial or grant reporting, for example, may be a symptom of operational issues that require BWSR assistance.

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
<b>238 LGUs</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>90%</b>
SWCDs (88)	82%	95%	96%	96%	93%
Counties (87)	95%	95%	100%	98%	94%
WMOs (18)	100%	72%	94%	89%	89%
WDs (45)	84%	84%	87%	87%	80%

Overall, LGU compliance with Level I standards dropped to 88% in 2021. BWSR began tightening Level I compliance tracking in 2013, and as can be seen in the table above, improvement in overall compliance occurred from 2016 through 2019. The drop in compliance in 2021 is in large part due to a change of SWCD audit requirements starting in year 2020.

### Long-range plans

BWSR's legislative mandate for PRAP includes a specific emphasis on evaluating progress in LGU plan implementation. Therefore, helping LGUs keep their plans current is basic to that review. Level I PRAP tracks whether LGUs are meeting their plan revision due dates. For the purposes of Level I reviews, LGUs that have been granted an extension for their plan revision are not considered to have an overdue plan.



### Many Local Water

Management plans were operating under extensions granted by the BWSR as LGUs continue transitioning to development of One Watershed One Plans. The number of overdue plans is 2 in 2021, unchanged from 2020. One Watershed District water management plan is overdue at the end of 2020 and one county local water plan had expired as of December 31, 2021. All other counties, soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts and watershed management organizations are operating under an approved or extended plan. Local government units without an approved water management plan are not eligible for Clean Water grant funds awarded by BWSR.

Appendix D (page 26) lists the LGUs whose plans are overdue for a plan revision.

### **Annual activity and grant report**

LGU annual reports are an important means of providing citizens and BWSR with information about LGU activities and grants expenditures. The Level I review tracks both missing and late reports.

In 2021, there was complete on-time submittal of drainage system buffer strip reports by both County and WD drainage authorities. Of the 96 LGUs that must submit annual buffer reports, 100% met the February 1, 2021 deadline, maintaining the 100% compliance achieved from 2015 through 2020. This continued compliance is attributed to persistent efforts by BWSR staff to contact LGUs with missing reports before the due date.

SWCDs and counties maintained a high level of compliance for on-time submittal of grant status reports via BWSR's on-line eLINK system, with 99% of LGUs meeting the deadline in 2021 compared with 98% in 2020, 98% in 2019, 97% in 2018, and 97% in 2017.

Watershed district compliance with the annual activity report requirement was slightly better in 2021 at 91% compliance compared with 89% in 2020, and 87% in 2019. Continued improvement in reporting will continue to be an objective of BWSR staff in 2022, with a goal of reaching 100% compliance.

Appendix E (page 27) contains more details about reporting.

### **Annual financial reports and audits**

Starting in 2020, all SWCDs were required to prepare annual audits of their financial record and submit audited financial statements to BWSR. In 2020, BWSR staff sent reminders to SWCD's of the new requirement. In 2021, additional reminders were not sent out because the rule had been in effect for more than a year. Unfortunately, compliance with this requirement dropped to 82% in 2021. In 2022, BWSR staff will diligently work with SWCDs to ensure they are meeting requirements of the Office of the State Auditor as well as relevant statutes and agency policies in 2022.

Watershed Districts and WMOs are also required to prepare annual audits. In 2021, 93% of WDs met the audit performance standard compared to 93% in 2020, 89% in 2019 and 91% in 2018. In 2021, 100% of WMOs met this standard, compared to just 72% in 2020. See Appendix F (page 28) for financial report and audit details.

BWSR does not track county audits because counties are accountable to the Office of the State Auditor.

### **Level II Performance Review Results**

The Level II performance review process is designed to give both BWSR and the individual LGUs an overall assessment of the LGU's effectiveness in both the delivery and the effects of their efforts in conservation. The review looks at the LGU's implementation of their plan's action items and their compliance with BWSR's operational performance standards. Level II reviews also include surveys of board members, staff, and partners to assess the LGU's effectiveness and existing relationships with other organizations.

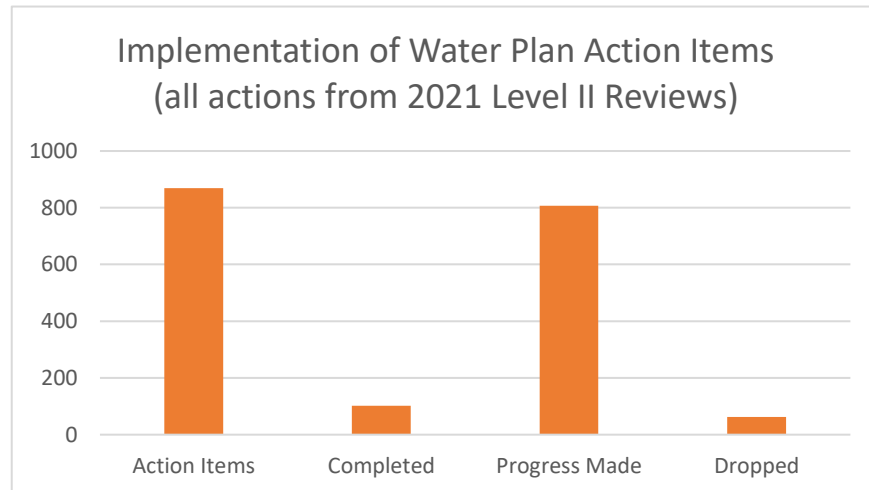
BWSR conducted standard Level II reviews of 16 LGUs in 2021: **Bassett Creek WMC, Big Stone SWCD, Big Stone County, Chippewa SWCD, Chippewa County, Elm Creek WMC, Freeborn SWCD, Freeborn County, Lake of the Woods SWCD, Lake of the Woods County, North Cannon River WMO, Scott SWCD, Scott County, Traverse SWCD, Traverse County, Upper Minnesota River WD.** (Yellow

Medicine River watershed assessment was initiated in 2021 but will be completed and highlighted in the 2022 report).

In the instances where the County and the SWCD share the same local water plan the reviews were conducted jointly. The remaining LGUs received individual reviews. Appendix G (pages 29-38) contains summaries of the performance review reports. Full reports are available from BWSR by request.

### Implementation of Water Plan Action Items

Each year BWSR regional and program staff meet to discuss which LGUs should be selected for PRAP reviews. Some of the factors considered include the expiration date of water plans, whether the LGU has had a review in the past and other factors such as recent LGU staff turnover.



For the 16 local government water plans reviewed in 2021, those plans identified a combined 869 action items. Of those action items, 807 had at least some progress made, with 102 actions being completed. 62 action items were not started or dropped. Ninety three percent of the total actions were implemented to some extent (either completed or ongoing). That is a high rate of implementation considering that most of the 10-year plans reviewed still had several years remaining to initiate additional projects.

### Common Recommendations in 2021

While none of the findings or conclusions from these reviews apply to all LGUs, there were general observations and commonly used recommendations to improve LGU performance worth noting.

**1. Resource Outcomes** – Most county water plans developed prior to 2015 did not include targets or objectives for resource outcomes. These County Local Water Management Plans were developed prior to the statewide focus on resource outcomes, so most plans did not include targets or objectives for resource outcomes. All the newer One Watershed One Plans and LGU water plans developed in past few years do include targets and objectives for resource outcomes.

**2. Citizen Participation** – Several local governments reviewed in 2021 were advised to improve participation in their Water Plan Advisory Task Force to ensure that agency and citizen representation is adequate and schedule enough meetings to efficiently develop comprehensive local water management plans through the 1W1P Program.

This recommendation recognizes the importance of keeping the water plan advisory task force engaged in both the watershed planning and implementation phases. The LGUs were encouraged to ensure that all local, state, and federal agencies and citizens involved in water management can

participate in these advisory groups. Some counties call task force meetings quarterly, however, at a minimum, the recommendation was made to have an annual meeting that would allow staff to communicate accomplishments in implementation of the plan for the past year and help prioritize projects for the coming year.

**3. Add Prioritized, Targeted and Measurable (PTM) specifics into water plan.** Each of the Level II PRAP reviews conducted in 2021 resulted in a recommendation that organizations include, or expand on existing use of Prioritized, Targeted and Measurable as criteria in their next water planning efforts. The PTM criteria are the new standard for One Watershed-One Plan efforts currently underway and beyond those projects, the degree to which these criteria are currently being used varies. Very few of the previous generation water plans acknowledged PTM when developing goals or objectives.

**4. Restructure plan organization.** Similar to the PTM issue, several plans were recommended to review current water quality and quantity issues and utilize a more straightforward plan structure in future plans to directly address those issues. Many plans included numerous action items grouped under broad categories, however they did not have a clear tie back to specific resources of concern but were merely a catalog of practices addressed to one of the general categories. Future plans, especially those created via the 1W1P program will need to reach a higher bar in addressing specific issues and associated measurable outcomes.

**5. Encourage strong participation and leadership in development and implementation of One Watershed One Plans (1W1P).** This recommendation focused on leadership in implementation of 1W1Ps where they have already been developed. For the rest of the SWCDs and counties that were reviewed in 2021, recommendations focused on strong participation and leadership in development of the 1W1P within their counties.

**6. Recommendation to conduct a strategic assessment of the SWCD (or county department) to determine whether existing mission, goals and staff capacity are enough to meet the demands for conservation services in the district.** This recommendation focused on the increasing expectations and SWCD responsibilities in recent years. To meet new conservation challenges and to manage the workload associated with an increase in watershed-dedicated funding the SWCDs were encouraged to consider conducting a strategic assessment of the to determine whether existing mission, goals and staff capacity are enough to meet the conservation needs in their respective jurisdictions. This recommendation recognizes that even the most competent organizations will need to determine if higher expectations and dollar amounts will cause workloads to exceed staffing resources over an extended period and offers assistance through the PRAP assistance grants to help identify those potential needs.

**7. Evaluate, maintain, or improve implementation of the Wetland Conservation Act.** 2021 was the fifth year that Level II reviews included an evaluation of the LGU's performance in implementing the Wetland Conservation Act. In general, most local government units were doing a good job implementing the program. However, the Level II reviews did identify several weaknesses in LGU implementation of the program. Examples of Wetland Conservation Act recommendations provided to LGUs in 2021, included update flawed LGU resolutions adopting the program, to clarify wetland appeal processes and to improve coordination with DNR Enforcement.

### Action Items

During a Level II or Level III review, the LGU's compliance with performance standards is reviewed. Action items are based on the LGU's lack of compliance with BWSR's basic practice performance standards. LGU's are given an Action Item in the PRAP Report to address lack of compliance with one or more basic standards.

All Action Items identified during 2021 PRAP Level II reviews were assigned a 6-month timeline for completion. BWSR will follow up with LGUs to verify completion within 18 months. The PRAP follow-up survey demonstrated that all the action items included for 2017 LGUs were implemented within 18 months (*sixteen total action items*).

### Level III Implementation Results

No Level III reviews were completed in 2021 as there was no expressed desire by BCs or regional supervisors to conduct this level of review on any LGUs.

### Level IV Results

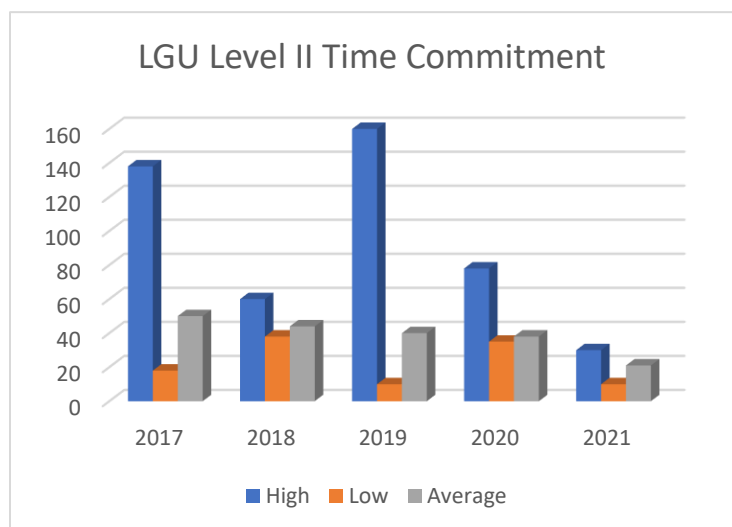
No Level IV actions were conducted in 2021.

### Performance Review Time

BWSR tracks the time spent by LGUs in a performance review as a substitute for accounting their financial costs. Factors affecting an LGU's time include the number of action items in their long-range plan, the number of staff who help with data collection, and the ready availability of performance data.

In 2021 LGU staff spent an average of about 20 hours on their Level II review, lower than the previous years. Not including overall performance review administration and process development, BWSR staff spent an average of 82 hours for each Level II performance review, about the same as in 2019.

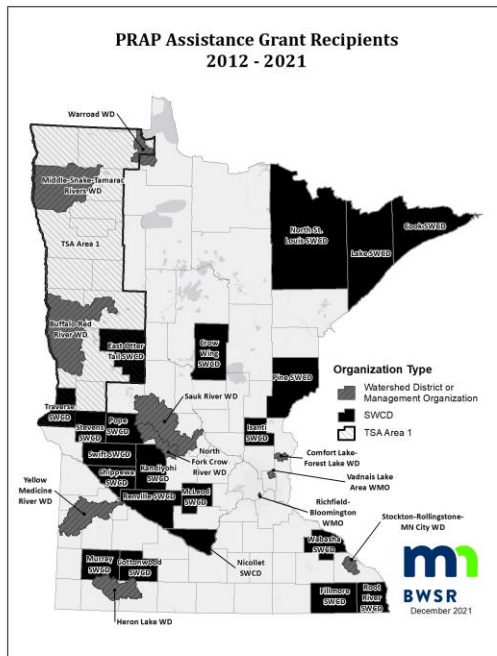
While BWSR seeks to maintain a balance between getting good information and minimizing the LGU time required to provide it. Our goal is to gather as much pertinent information as needed to assess the performance of the LGU and offer realistic and useful recommendations for improving performance.



## Assistance Services to Local Governments

### PRAP Assistance Program

In 2012, BWSR developed the PRAP Assistance program to provide financial assistance to LGUs for improving operating performance and executing planned goals and objectives. Since the program started, more than \$190,000 has been awarded to LGUs around Minnesota. Priority is given to applicants submitting projects related to eligible PRAP Level II and Level III recommendations, but other organizations are also eligible. The grants are made on a cost-share, reimbursement basis with a cap of \$10,000 per single LGU or \$20,000 for partnerships that agree to apply as a group (new for 2021). The application process requires basic information about the need, the proposed use of funds, a timeline, and the source of match dollars. BWSR staff assess the LGU need as part of the application review process, and grants are awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis if funds are available.



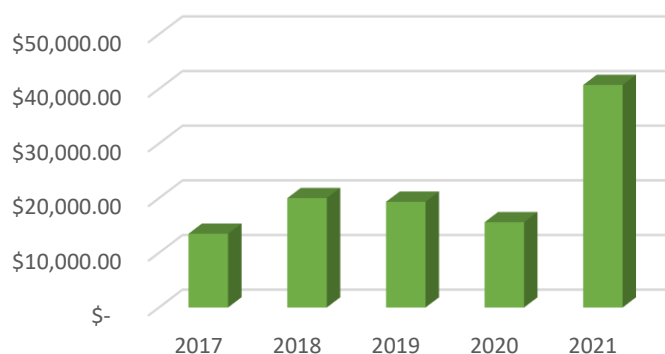
In 2015, the BWSR Board delegated authority to the Executive Director to award grants or contracts for the purpose of assisting LGUs in making organizational improvements (see resolution in Appendix B). The Executive Director regularly informs Board members of assistance grant status.

In calendar year 2021, PRAP Assistance Grants were provided for Cook SWCD, Kandiyohi SWCD, North St. Louis SWCD, Area 1 TSA, and Vadnais Lake Area WMO. Board Conservationists were encouraged to work with LGUs who could benefit from PRAP Assistance grants. LGUs undergoing a Level II PRAP review were also notified of PRAP assistance funding when recommendations were made for activities that would be eligible for PRAP funds.

The awarded funds will be used for the development of operating policies, organizational assessments, strategic planning, and goal setting.

In 2021 BWSR changed some of the application requirements for PRAP assistance funds and provided more clarity about what types of activities and expenses are eligible for the grants. The board order was also updated to reflect two new changes to the grant program; an increase to \$20,000 for

### PRAP Assistance Funds Awarded 2017-2021



partnerships that apply for assistance funding (Area 1 TSA was the first). And a \$50,000 annual cap on PRAP assistance awards was also removed to accommodate the potential for more partnership applications and because the funding sources utilized for PRAP assistance grants can change periodically and have unpredictable expiration dates. The application information for PRAP assistance grants can be found in Appendix C (pg. 24-25).

Potential applicants can find information on the BWSR website

<http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/PRAP/index.html>.

# Reporting

## Purpose of Reporting

BWSR reports on LGU performance to:

- meet the legislative mandate to provide the public with information about the performance of their local water management entities, and
- provide information that will encourage LGUs to learn from one another about methods and programs that produce the most effective results.

## Report Types

PRAP either relies on or generates different types of reports to achieve the purposes listed above.

### LGU-Generated

These include information posted on the LGU websites and the required or voluntary reports submitted to BWSR, other units of government, and the public about fiscal status, plans, programs, and activities. These all serve as a means of communicating what each LGU is achieving and allow stakeholders to make their own evaluations of LGU performance. PRAP tracks submittal of required, self-generated LGU reports in the Level I review process.

### BWSR Website

The BWSR website contains a webpage devoted to PRAP information. The site provides background information on the program including:

- Guiding principles for the program
  - a description of the 4 Levels of PRAP
  - Application information for PRAP grants
  - Background on the PRAP Legislative Report
  - Description of Level I Reporting
- For more information see: <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/prap>

The BWSR website also includes regularly updated maps of long-range plan status by LGU type. Visitors to the PRAP webpage can find general program information, tables of current performance standards by LGU type, summaries of Level II performance review reports, and copies of annual legislative reports.

### Performance Review Reports

BWSR prepares a report containing findings, conclusions, and recommendations for each LGU subject of a Level II or Level III performance review. The LGU lead staff and board, or water plan task force members receive a draft of the report to which they are invited to submit comments. BWSR then sends a final report to the LGU. A one-page summary from each review is included in the annual legislative report (see Appendices G and H).

### Annual Legislative Report

As required by statute, BWSR prepares an annual report for the legislature containing the results of the previous year's program activities and a general assessment of the performance of the LGUs providing land and water conservation services and programs. These reports are reviewed and approved by the BWSR board and then sent to the chairpersons of the senate and house environmental policy committees, to statewide LGU associations and to the office of the legislative auditor.

### Recognition for Exemplary Performance

The PRAP Guiding Principles include a provision for recognizing exemplary LGU performance. Each year this legislative report highlights those LGUs that are recognized by their peers or other organizations for

their contribution to Minnesota's resource management and protection, as well as service to their local clientele. (See Appendix I, page 47).

For those LGUs that undergo a Level II performance review, their report lists "commendations" for compliance with each high-performance standard, demonstrating practices over and above basic requirements. All 2021 standard Level II LGUs received such commendations.

## Program Conclusions and Future Direction

### Conclusions from 2021 Reviews

**All Action Items identified during 2021 PRAP Level II reviews were assigned a 6-month timeline for completion.** BWSR was not able to follow up with the LGUs who participated in 2019 Level II reviews to verify completion of action items due to the vacancy in the PRAP Coordinator Position. The last PRAP local government unit follow-up survey conducted in 2019 demonstrated that all the action items included for 2017 LGUs were implemented within 18 months (16 total action items assigned in 2017).

**A common recommendation for several local government units in 2021 was to conduct a strategic assessment** of the LGU to determine whether existing mission, goals and staff capacity are sufficient to meet the demands and need for conservation services in the district. This recommendation was used where there appeared to be underperformance of the LGU due to shortage of staff or lack of focus on targeted land treatment and resource improvement.

### **Evaluate, maintain, or improve implementation of the Wetland Conservation Act.**

2021 was the fifth year that Level II reviews included an evaluation of the LGU's performance in implementing the Wetland Conservation Act. In general, most local government units were doing a good job implementing the program. However, the Level II reviews did identify several weaknesses in LGU implementation of the program. Examples of Wetland Conservation Act recommendations provided to LGUs in 2021, included:

- To pass a new clarifying resolution for delegation of responsibilities for the Wetland Conservation Act,
- To develop policies for documenting "informal" exemption determinations that include noticing technical evaluation panel members.
- To review and ensure that County policies and ordinances are consistent with WCA by updating ordinances and office procedures.

**Reminders and incentives contribute significantly to on-time reporting by LGUs.** Overall reporting performance and plan status increased in 2021. Buffer strip reporting was maintained at full LGU compliance after reaching 100% compliance in 2015 through 2020 which can be attributed to close attention from BWSR staff. In the last year WMO overall compliance jumped up to 100% in 2021 compared to just 72% in 2020. WD overall compliance maintained the same 84% in 2021.

### Future Direction

#### **New Structure – for implementation starting in 2022**

In 2021, BWSR staff redesigned the existing structure of the PRAP program to better accommodate the ongoing statewide transition from county-based water planning to watershed-based planning and partnerships. The new structure will be implemented starting in 2022 and is summarized below:

The **Basic Standards** summary takes the place of the current "Level I" annual tabulation of required plans and reports for 238 LGUs. This summary will continue to be collected solely by BWSR staff and will be updated annually for this report.

**Watershed Assessment** is the newest addition to PRAP and was developed to accommodate the transition of local county water planning to watershed-based comprehensive plans via LGU partnerships. This assessment type will be used when groups have implemented their approved watershed-based plans for 5-7 years and is designed to closely follow our current “Level II” process, but on a much larger, more comprehensive scale.

**Organizational Assessments** are now subdivided into two distinct categories: Routine Assessments, and Special Assessments.

- **Routine Assessments** take the place of our current “Level II” assessments. Many of our individual LGUs will be implementing a comprehensive watershed management plan, and in those cases plan progress will be removed from the assessment. These assessments will continue as previously designed, on a 10-year rotation for all 238 LGUs.
- **Special Assessments** are conducted on an as needed basis and include an in-depth assessment of an LGU’s performance in response to identified issues. Special Assessments are used to provide targeted assistance to an LGU to address specific performance needs. In situations where an LGU has significant performance deficiencies, penalties as authorized by statute may be assigned. A Special Assessment can be initiated by BWSR, or the LGU. Special Assessments will replace current “Level III” and “Level IV” reviews for 2022.

## PRAP Program Objectives for 2022

- Track 238 LGUs’ Level I performance.
- Continue efforts to improve Level I performance review reporting of all LGUs through LGU cooperation and persistent follow-up by BWSR staff and increase compliance with SWCD audit requirements.
- Set target of 16 Level II performance reviews for 2022.
- Conduct pilot watershed-based assessment, evaluate, and adapt process based on pilot review results.
- Implement new PRAP Program assessment format (Basic, Watershed-based, Organizational)
- Provide leadership in emphasizing the importance of measuring outcomes in PRAP Reviews, ways of demonstrating resource outcomes resulting from plan implementation, and set specific expectations for reporting resource outcomes by LGUs.
- Survey LGUs from 2018 and 2019 Level II PRAP reviews to track LGU implementation of PRAP recommendations.
- Continue monitoring and reviewing compliance with Action Items identified during a Level II review to measure progress toward the goal of 100% compliance within 18 months for required Action Items.
- Continue the promotion and use of PRAP Assistance Grants to enhance LGU organizational effectiveness.
- Train in new full-time PRAP coordinator.

## Appendix A

### PRAP Authorizing Legislation

#### 103B.102, Minnesota Statutes 2013

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#### **103B.102 LOCAL WATER MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT.**

##### **Subdivision 1. Findings; improving accountability and oversight.**

The legislature finds that a process is needed to monitor the performance and activities of local water management entities. The process should be preemptive so that problems can be identified early and systematically. Underperforming entities should be provided assistance and direction for improving performance in a reasonable time frame.

##### **Subd. 2. Definitions.**

For the purposes of this section, "local water management entities" means watershed districts, soil and water conservation districts, metropolitan water management organizations, and counties operating separately or jointly in their role as local water management authorities under chapter 103B, 103C, 103D, or 103G and chapter 114D.

##### **Subd. 3. Evaluation and report.**

The Board of Water and Soil Resources shall evaluate performance, financial, and activity information for each local water management entity. The board shall evaluate the entities' progress in accomplishing their adopted plans on a regular basis as determined by the board based on budget and operations of the local water management entity, but not less than once every ten years. The board shall maintain a summary of local water management entity performance on the board's Web site. Beginning February 1, 2008, and annually thereafter, the board shall provide an analysis of local water management entity performance to the chairs of the house of representatives and senate committees having jurisdiction over environment and natural resources policy.

##### **Subd. 4. Corrective actions.**

(a) In addition to other authorities, the Board of Water and Soil Resources may, based on its evaluation in subdivision 3, reduce, withhold, or redirect grants and other funding if the local water management entity has not corrected deficiencies as prescribed in a notice from the board within one year from the date of the notice.

(b) The board may defer a decision on a termination petition filed under section [103B.221](#), [103C.225](#), or [103D.271](#) for up to one year to conduct or update the evaluation under subdivision 3 or to communicate the results of the evaluation to petitioners or to local and state government agencies.

##### **History:**

[2007 c 57 art 1 s 104](#); [2013 c 143 art 4 s 1](#)

# Appendix B

## Board Authorization of Delegation for PRAP Assistance Grants



BOARD DECISION # 21-22

### BOARD ORDER

#### Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) Assistance Service Grants

#### PURPOSE

Authorize PRAP Assistance services and delegate approval of payment to the Executive Director.

#### FINDINGS OF FACT / RECITALS

1. The Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) regularly monitors and evaluates the performance and activities of local water management entities and provides assistance in improving performance under the authorities and requirements of Minnesota Statutes §103B.102.
2. In December 2018, the Board through Resolution #18-71 "approved the allocation of designated or available funds to eligible local water management entities and reconfirmed the delegation of authority to the Executive Director to approve individual PRAP Assistance grants up to \$10,000 requires that program awards are reported to the Board at least once per year."
3. The Board continues to receive requests for PRAP assistance services to address operational or service delivery needs identified through a PRAP assessment or specialized assistance request noting an increase in requests from multiple entities or partnerships.
4. The Board has authorities under Minnesota Statutes §103B.3369 and 103B.101 to award grants and contracts to accomplish water and related land resources management.
5. The Grants Program and Policy Committee, at their August 11, 2021 meeting, reviewed this request and recommended the Board approve this order.

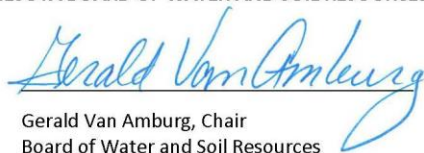
#### ORDER

The Board hereby:

1. Approves the allocation of designated or available funds, consistent with the appropriation of the designated or available funds, to eligible local government water management entities for fulfilling the provisions of Minnesota Statutes §103B.102.
2. Confirms the delegation of authority to the Executive Director to approve PRAP Assistance grants or contracts up to \$10,000 per contract for single entity requests and \$20,000 for projects that involve multiple entities or partnerships and requires that program awards are reported to the Board at least once per year.
3. Establishes that all PRAP Assistance awards be cost shared by the grantee at a percentage determined by the Executive Director.
4. Authorizes staff to enter into grant agreements or contracts for these purposes.
5. Establishes that this order replaces previous Board resolution #18-71.

Dated at Austin, Minnesota, this August 26, 2021.

MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES

  
 Gerald Van Amburg, Chair  
 Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: August 26, 2021

## Appendix C

### PRAP Assistance Grant Application Information

The PRAP Assistance program provides financial assistance to LGUs to improve operating performance and execution of planned goals and objectives. Funding priority is given to activities recommended as part of a Level II, III or IV PRAP review.

**Examples of eligible activities:** facilitation, mediation or consulting services related to organizational improvement such as reorganizations/mergers, strategic planning, organizational development, assessments for shared services, benchmarking, non-routine audits, and staff and board capacity assessments.

**Activities that are not eligible for grant funds, or to be used as LGU match:** Technology upgrades (computer equipment, software, smartphones, etc.), infrastructure improvements (vehicles, office remodel, furniture), staff performance incentives (bonuses, rewards program), basic staff training (BWSR Academy fees and expenses; Wetland Delineator Certification, subjects offered at BWSR Academy, training for promotion, basic computer training), water planning, conservation practices design or installation, publication or publicity materials, food & refreshments, (other than costs associated with meetings and conferences where the primary purpose is an approved, eligible grant activity) lodging, staff salaries, and regular board member per diems.

**Note:** Board member per diems and associated expenses outside of regular meetings, and associated with an approved, eligible activity are eligible for grant funds or can be used as match.

**Grant Limit:** \$10,000 for individual LGUs, \$20,000 for LGU partnerships. In most cases a 50 percent cash match will be required.

**Who May Apply:** County water management/environmental services; SWCDs; watershed districts; watershed management organizations. In some cases, LGU joint powers associations or boards, or other types of LGU water management partnerships will be eligible for grants. Priority is given to applicants submitting projects related to eligible PRAP Level II, III, or IV recommendations.

**Terms:** BWSR pays its share of the LGU's eligible expenditures as reimbursement for expenses incurred by the LGU after the execution date of the grant agreement. Reporting and reimbursement requirements are also described in the agreement. Grant agreements are processed through BWSR's eLINK system.

**How to Apply:** Submit an email request to the PRAP Coordinator with the following information:

- 1) Description, purpose, and scope of work for the proposed activity (If the activity or services will be contracted, do you have a contracting procedure in by-laws or operating guidelines?)
- 2) Expected products or deliverables
- 3) Desired outcome or result

- 4) Does this activity address any recommendations associated with a recent Level II, III or IV PRAP Assessment? If so, describe how.
- 5) How has your Board indicated support for this project? How will they be kept involved?
- 6) Duration of activity: proposed start and end dates
- 7) Itemized Project Budget including
  - a. Amount of request
  - b. Source of funds to be used for match (cannot be state money nor in-kind)
  - c. Total project budget
- 8) Have you submitted other funding requests for this activity? If yes, to whom and when?
- 9) Provide name and contact information for the person who will be managing the grant agreement and providing evidence of expenditures for reimbursement.

## **Appendix D**

### **Level I: 2021 LGU Long-Range Plan Status as of December 31, 2021**

#### **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

(Districts have a choice of option A or B)

**A. Current Resolution Adopting County Local Water Management Plan**

All resolutions are current.

**B. Current District Comprehensive Plan**

All comprehensive plans are current.

#### **Counties**

**Local Water Management Plan Revision Overdue: Plan Revision in Progress**

- Mahnomon County extension in progress.

#### **Watershed Districts**

**10-Year Watershed Management Plan Revision Overdue: Plan Revision in Progress**

- High Island Creek Watershed District is overdue

#### **Watershed Management Organizations**

- All plans are current

## **Appendix E**

### **Level I: Status of Annual Reports for 2020**

as of December 31, 2021

#### **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

##### **eLINK Status Reports of Grant Expenditures**

- All reports submitted on time

#### **Counties**

##### **Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Reports**

All reports submitted on time.

##### **eLINK Status Reports of Grant Expenditures**

###### **Late Reports:**

- Dakota County

#### **Watershed Districts**

##### **Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Reports**

All reports submitted on time.

##### **Annual Activity Reports Not Submitted (or submitted late):**

- Ramsey Washington WD
- Lower Minnesota WD
- Joe River WD
- Warroad River WD

#### **Metro Joint Powers Watershed Management Organizations**

##### **Annual Activity Reports not submitted (or submitted late):**

All reports submitted on time.

## **Appendix F**

### **Level I: Status of Financial Reports and Audits for 2020 as of December 31, 2021**

#### **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

##### **Annual Audits**

##### **Annual Audits Not Submitted (or submitted late)**

- Aitkin SWCD
- Crow Wing SWCD
- Goodhue SWCD
- Martin SWCD
- Murray SWCD
- Nobles SWCD
- West Otter Tail SWCD
- Pipestone SWCD
- West Polk SWCD
- Rock SWCD
- Root River SWCD
- North St. Louis SWCD
- South St. Louis SWCD
- Wabasha SWCD
- Washington CD
- Anoka CD

#### **Watershed Districts**

##### **Annual Audits Not Completed (or submitted late):**

- Stockton Rollingstone – Minnesota City WD
- Crooked Creek WD
- Joe River WD

#### **Metro Joint Powers Watershed Management Organizations**

##### **Annual Audits Not Submitted (or submitted late):**

All audits submitted on time

# Appendix G

## Standard Level II Performance Review Final Report Summaries

### Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission



#### Key Findings and Conclusions

The Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, rules, the Wetlands Conservation Act, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and administrative consultants are viewed very favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing their watershed management plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the metro area have created the necessity to forge stronger working relationships among partners to improve local water management within the watershed, and the switch to comprehensive watershed management plans throughout the state means new

opportunities for increased prioritization of projects and available funding.

The Bassett Creek WMC is commended for meeting all of the basic performance standards including having data practices policies, updated capital improvement program, and completing required annual reports. They are also commended for their effective administration of the Wetlands Conservation Act, and also for meeting several high performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

#### Resource Outcomes

The current Bassett Creek watershed management plan did not have clearly stated measurable resource outcomes which is included as one of BWSRs recommendations for future planning efforts.

#### Commendations:

**The Bassett Creek WMC is commended for meeting all of their applicable basic standards as well as 8 of 11 high performance standards. Bassett Creek WMC is also commended for their excellent plan implementation progress with progress noted for 115 of 122 action items.**

#### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Prioritize developing an education and outreach strategy for BCWMC constituents

Recommendation 2 – Conduct a review of the BCWMC capital improvement program (CIP)

Recommendation 3 – Develop clear, measurable goals and actions for future plan implementation

Recommendation 4 – Prioritize all training opportunities for staff implementing WCA

Recommendation 5 – Consider a WCA appeals fee and clarify the appeals process

#### Action Items:

Bassett Creek WMC had no action items to address.

## Big Stone County and Big Stone Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Big Stone Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Big Stone County should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing their local water management plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the region have created the necessity to forge new working relationships among partners to improve local water management in Big Stone County, specifically with the Upper Minnesota River

WD as was pointed out numerous times in the surveys. The opportunity for participation in the development of One Watershed, One Plans provides collaboration opportunities for Big Stone SWCD, County, and partners to reorient water planning efforts to focus on specific problems and priorities for the local waterbodies. Big Stone SWCD and County are both commended for meeting all of their basic performance standards including having data practices policies, staff training plans, and completing required annual reports. They are commended for their effective administration of the Wetlands Conservation Act, and also for meeting several high performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Resource Outcomes:

The current Big Stone County local water management plan did not have clearly stated measurable resource outcomes which is included as one of BWSRs recommendations for future planning efforts.

### Commendations:

**The Big Stone Soil and Water Conservation District is commended for meeting 13 of 22 high performance standards for SWCDs and the Big Stone County is commended for meeting 9 of 12 high performance standards.**

### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Joint Recommendation: Continue to refine Prioritized, Targeted, and Measurable criteria for Goals and Objectives in water management throughout Big Stone County.

Recommendation 2 – Joint Recommendation: Improve communication and coordination between the SWCD and County, and with agency partners.

Recommendation 3 – Joint Recommendation: Conduct a detailed staff compensation and workload analysis.

Recommendation 4 – SWCD Recommendation: Develop detailed training strategies for newer staff as they are hired for the SWCD.

Recommendation 5 – WCA: Attend Regional WCA trainings.

Recommendation 6 – WCA: Schedule Regular TEP meetings.

Recommendation 7 – WCA: Improve documentation of issuing extensions, and also improve documentation of TEP findings.

### Action Items:

Big Stone County and the Big Stone SWCD had no action items to address at the time of this report.

## Chippewa County and Chippewa Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Chippewa SWCD and Chippewa County should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing the Chippewa County Local Water Management Plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the region have created the necessity to forge new working relationships among partners to collaborate to address local water management issues and improve conservation delivery in Chippewa County. The opportunity for participation in the development of comprehensive watershed management plans through the One Watershed,

One Plan program provides additional collaboration opportunities for Chippewa SWCD, County, and partners to focus on specific problems and priorities for the local waterbodies.

Chippewa SWCD and Chippewa County are both commended for meeting all of their basic performance standards including having data practices policies, staff training plans, and completing required annual reports. They are commended for their effective administration of the Wetlands Conservation Act, and also for meeting several high performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Resource Outcomes:

The current Chippewa County local water management plan did not have clearly stated measurable resource outcomes which is included as one of BWSRs recommendations for future planning efforts.

### Commendations:

**The Chippewa Soil and Water Conservation District is commended for meeting 15 of 21 high performance standards for SWCDs and Chippewa County is commended for meeting 12 of 15 high performance standards.**

### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Joint Recommendation: Continue to refine prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria for goals and objectives in water management throughout Chippewa County

Recommendation 2 – SWCD Recommendation: Develop a strategy to manage the Chippewa SWCD reserve fund balance

Recommendation 3 – SWCD Recommendation: Conduct an operational analysis for workspace and potential future SWCD growth

Recommendation 4 – SWCD Recommendation: Develop or enhance communication and outreach strategies to connect with partners

Recommendation 5 – County Recommendation: Develop or enhance communication and outreach strategies to connect with partners

### Action Items:

Chippewa County and the Chippewa SWCD did not have any action items to address at the time of this report.

## Elm Creek Watershed Management Commission



### Key Findings and Conclusions

The Elm Creek Watershed Management Commission should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, rules, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and administrative consultants are viewed very favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing their watershed management plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the metro area have created the necessity to forge stronger working relationships among partners to improve local water management within the watershed, and the switch to comprehensive watershed management plans throughout the state means new

opportunities for increased prioritization of projects and available funding.

The Elm Creek WMC is commended for meeting several high performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Resource Outcomes:

The Elm Creek watershed management plan did include TMDL reductions as part of their goal identification process, however there were few actions that tied directly to those goals and a recommendation was made in this report for Elm Creek WMC to develop more clear resource outcomes as part of future planning efforts.

### Commendations:

**The Elm Creek WMC is commended for meeting 9 out of 11 applicable High Performance Standards.**

### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Develop clear prioritized, targeted, and measurable actions for future watershed management plans

Recommendation 2 – Complete an internal analysis of the ECWMC Capital Improvement Program

Recommendation 3 – Conduct a review of the ECWMC regulatory program requirements and standards

Recommendation 4 – Assess and develop a coordinated communication and outreach strategy for engaging individual landowners

### Action Items:

Elm Creek WMC did not have a data practices policy at the time of this report. Elm Creek was given six months to address this issue with follow-up assistance from BWSR staff.

## Freeborn County and Freeborn Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Freeborn SWCD and Freeborn County should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing the Freeborn County Local Water Management Plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the region have created the necessity to forge new working relationships among partners to collaborate to address local water management issues and improve conservation delivery in Freeborn County. The opportunity for participation in the development of comprehensive watershed management plans through the One Watershed,

One Plan program provides additional collaboration opportunities for Freeborn SWCD, Freeborn County, and partners to focus on specific problems and priorities for the local waterbodies.

Freeborn SWCD and Freeborn County are both commended for meeting all of their basic performance standards including having data practices policies, staff training plans, and completing required annual reports. They are commended for their effective administration of the Wetlands Conservation Act, and also for meeting several high-performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Resource Outcomes

The Freeborn County local water management plan did not contain specifically identified measurable resource outcomes which was a recommendation made in this report by BWSR staff. It is recognized that Freeborn County and SWCD are actively engaged in a comprehensive watershed management plan effort via the 1W1P program which requires measurable outcomes to be addressed in the plan.

### Commendations

**The Freeborn SWCD is commended for achieving 15 of 22 high performance standards, and Freeborn County is commended for achieving six out of 13 applicable high performance standards.**

### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – SWCD Recommendation: Engage in a strategic planning effort to address several issues of significance to Freeborn SWCD operations

1a. Develop or enhance communication and outreach strategies to connect with partners

1b. Develop a strategy to manage the Freeborn SWCD reserve fund balance

1c. Conduct a workload analysis to assess the need for future staff, current staff workload, and gaps analysis

Recommendation 2 – County Recommendation: Obtain stakeholder input annually or on a regular schedule

Recommendation 3 – Joint Recommendation: Continue to refine prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria for goals and objectives in water management throughout Freeborn County

Recommendation 4 – WCA Recommendation: Administration

Recommendation 5 – WCA Recommendation: Execution and Coordination

### Action Items:

Freeborn County and the Freeborn SWCD did not have any action items to address at the time of this report.

## Lake of the Woods County and Lake of the Woods Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Lake of the Woods Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Lake of the Woods County should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners who had many great comments to contribute to the report and they have made significant progress toward implementing their local water management plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the region have created the necessity to forge new working relationships among partners to improve local water management in Lake of the Woods County. The opportunity for participation in the development of One Watershed, One Plans provides numerous collaboration opportunities for the local water management entities and partners to reorient water planning efforts to focus on specific problems and priorities for the local waterbodies.

Lake of the Woods SWCD and County are both highly commended for meeting all of their basic performance standards including having data practices policies, staff training plans, and completing required annual reports. They met all basic WCA standards, and they also met several high performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Resource Outcomes

The Lake of the Woods county local water management plan did contain a few specific measurable resource outcomes, however they were not the focus of the action item development, therefore it was recommended by BWSR staff that measurable resource outcomes are identified in future planning efforts.

### Commendations

**The Lake of the Woods SWCD is commended for achieving 16 of 22 high performance standards and Lake of the Woods County is commended for achieving eight of 15 applicable high performance standards.**

### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Joint Recommendation: Continue to refine Prioritized, Targeted, and Measurable criteria for Goals and Objectives in water management throughout Lake of the Woods County

Recommendation 2 – Joint Recommendation: Identify potential gaps in communication with customers and partners

Recommendation 3 – Joint Recommendation: Conduct a workload analysis of current and projected work and determine staff capacity and expertise needed

Recommendation 4 – WCA: Provide a copy or pass a resolution clearly identifying the local appeals process.

### Action Items:

Lake of the Woods County and the Lake of the Woods SWCD had no action items to be address at the time of this report.

## North Cannon River Watershed Management Organization



### Key Findings and Conclusions

The North Cannon River Watershed Management Organization (NCRWMO) should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and staff are viewed favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing their watershed management plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the metro area have created the necessity to forge stronger working relationships among partners to improve local water management within the watershed, and new opportunities for increased prioritization of projects and available funding.

The NCRWMO is commended for meeting most of the applicable basic performance standards including completing required annual reports, maintaining an updated management plan, and keeping a dedicated website up to-date on projects and programs. They are also commended for meeting some high performance standards, including monitoring key water resources and maintaining cooperative partnerships.

### Resource Outcomes

The North Cannon River watershed management plan did not contain specific resource outcomes. Some, but not all action items in the plan were tied to TMDL reductions. BWSR staff recommends they identify specific resource outcomes in future planning efforts.

### Commendations:

**The North Cannon River WMO is commended for achieving three of eight applicable high performance standards.**

### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Develop clear prioritized, targeted, and measurable actions for future watershed management plans

Recommendation 2 – Combine utilization of an Advisory Committee with a periodic review of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

Recommendation 3 – Conduct a strategic planning exercise to analyze organizational needs for future operations

### Action Items: North Cannon River WMO had three action items to address.

- Non-current data practices policy (6 months to correct)
- No regular review of Capital Improvement (6 months to correct)
- No functioning advisory committee (follow-up by BWSR staff annually)

## Scott County and Scott Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Scott SWCD and Scott County should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing each organization's respective local comprehensive and water management plans.

Ongoing water management challenges in the region have created the necessity to forge new working relationships among partners to collaborate to address local water management issues and improve conservation delivery in

Scott County. The opportunity for participation in the development of comprehensive watershed management plans through the One Watershed, One Plan program provides additional collaboration opportunities for Scott SWCD, County, and partners to focus on specific problems and priorities for the local waterbodies.

Scott SWCD and Scott County are both commended for meeting all of their basic performance standards including having data practices policies, staff training plans, and completing required annual reports. They are commended for their effective administration of the Wetlands Conservation Act, and also for meeting several high performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Resource Outcomes:

For this review we analyzed progress toward the Scott SWCD comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan did not identify specific resource outcomes, however Scott SWCD and Scott County are actively engaged in the implementation of the Scott Watershed Management Organization watershed management plan and are active partners in current comprehensive watershed management plan efforts via the 1W1P program.

### Commendations:

**The Scott Soil and Water Conservation District is commended for meeting 18 of 22 high performance standards for SWCDs and Scott County is commended for meeting 15 of 15 high performance standards.**

### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Joint Recommendation: Continue to refine prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria for goals and objectives in water management throughout Scott County

Recommendation 2 – Joint Recommendation: Communicate individual organizational roles and responsibilities clearly with partners

Recommendation 3 – SWCD Recommendation: Conduct a workload analysis to aid in project planning for future anticipated watershed-based implementation funding

Recommendation 4 – County Recommendation: Develop or enhance varied communication and outreach strategies to connect with partners

Recommendation 5 – WCA Recommendation: Attend regional and statewide WCA trainings

Recommendation 6 – WCA Recommendation: Coordinate with BWSR wetland specialist in assessing violations

### Action Items:

Scott County and the Scott SWCD had no action items to address at the time of this report.

## Traverse County and Traverse Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Traverse Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Traverse County should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, plan efforts, and building partnerships. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing their local water management plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the region have created the necessity to forge new working relationships among partners to improve local water management in Traverse County. The opportunity for participation in the development of One Watershed, One Plans provides collaboration opportunities for Traverse SWCD, County, and partners to reorient water

planning efforts to focus on specific problems and priorities for the local waterbodies.

### Resource Outcomes:

The current Traverse County local water management plan does not contain specifically identified measurable resource outcomes and was a recommendation made by BWSR for this report.

### Commendations:

**The Traverse Soil and Water Conservation District is commended for meeting 16 of 22 high performance standards for SWCDs and Traverse County is commended for meeting 8 of 12 high performance standards.**

### Recommendations:

Joint Recommendation 1: Continue to refine Prioritized, Targeted, and Measurable criteria for Goals and Objectives in water management throughout Traverse County.

SWCD Recommendation 2: Establish a policy to manage the reserve fund balance carried by the Traverse SWCD

SWCD Recommendation 3: Conduct a wage scale analysis to aid in staff retention

WCA Recommendation 4: Attend Regional WCA trainings

WCA Recommendation 5: Implement Regularly Scheduled TEP meetings

### Action Items:

Traverse County and Traverse SWCD had no action items to address at the time of this report.

## Upper Minnesota River Watershed District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

The Upper Minnesota River Watershed District should be commended for their work in implementing core programs, rules, planning efforts, and building partnerships. The board and staff are viewed very favorably by their partners and have made significant progress toward implementing their revised watershed management plan.

Ongoing water management challenges in the area have created the necessity to forge stronger working relationships among partners to improve local water management within the watershed, and the switch to comprehensive watershed management plans throughout the state means new opportunities

for increased prioritization of projects and available funding.

The Upper Minnesota River WD is commended for meeting all of the basic performance standards including having data practices policies, updated rules within the last 6 months, maintaining an advisory committee, and completing required annual reports. They are also commended for meeting all the high performance standards, a testament to the quality of work and high achievement they are recognized for by their partners.

### Resource Outcomes:

The current Upper Minnesota River WD plan does contain some measurable resource outcomes, most specifically related to Big Stone Lake. Other action items did not address clearly stated measurable resource outcomes which was a recommendation made by BWSR staff in this report.

### Commendations:

**The Upper Minnesota River WD is commended for achieving all 16 high performance standards.**

### Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Continue to refine Prioritized, Targeted, and Measurable criteria for Goals and Objectives for developing and implementing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

Recommendation 2 – Improve communication and coordination with local government and agency partners

Recommendation 3 – Review current workload and assess the benefit of a staffing analysis

### Action Items:

The Upper Minnesota River WD had no action items to address at the time of this report.

## Appendix H

### Performance Standards Checklists used in Level II Reviews

#### COUNTY LOCAL WATER MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

LGU Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Area	Performance Standard		Level of Review	Rating	
	■	Basic practice or statutory requirement	I Annual Compliance	Yes, No, or Value	
	★	High Performance standard (see instructions for explanation of standards)	II BWSR Staff Review & Assessment (1/10 yrs.)		
Administration				YES	NO
	■	eLINK Grant Report(s): submitted on time	I		
	■	County has resolution assuming WCA responsibilities and delegation resolutions (if needed).	II		
	■	County has knowledgeable and trained staff to manage WCA program or secured a qualified delegate.	II		
	■	Drainage authority buffer strip report submitted on time	I		
Planning	★	Public drainage records: meet modernization guidelines	II		
	■	Local water mgmt. plan: current	I		
	★	Metro counties: groundwater plan up-to-date	I		
	★	Prioritized, Targeted & Measurable criteria are used for Goals, Objectives and Actions in local water management plan	II		
	★	Water quality trend data used for short- and long-range plan priorities	II		
Execution	■	WCA decisions and determinations are made in conformance with WCA requirements.	II		
	■	WCA TEP reviews and recommendations are appropriately coordinated.	II		
	★	Certified wetland delineator on staff or retainer	II		
	★	WCA Communication and Coordination	II		
	★	Water quality data collected to track outcomes for each priority concern	II		

	★	Water quality trends tracked for priority water bodies and/or groundwater	II		
Communication & Coordination	■	BWSR grant report(s) posted on county website	I		
	★	Communication piece sent within last 12 months: indicate target audience below	II		
	Communication Target Audience:				
	★	Obtain stakeholder input: within last 12 months	II		
	★	Partnerships: liaison with SWCDs/WDs and cooperative projects/tasks done ( <i>in addition to 1W1P</i> )	II		
	★	Annual report to water plan advisory committee on plan progress	II		
	★	Track progress for I & E objectives in Plan	II		
	★	Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives	II		
	★	County local water plan on county website	II		
	★	Water management ordinances on county website	II		

## SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

LGU Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Area	Performance Standard		Level of Review	Rating	
	■ Basic practice or Statutory requirement ★ High Performance standard (see instructions for explanation of standards)		I Annual II Compliance BWSR Staff Review & Assessment (1/10 yrs.)	Yes, No, or Value	
				YES	NO
Administration	■	Financial statement: annual, on-time and complete	I		
	■	Financial audit: completed as required by statute (see guidance) or as per BWSR correspondence	I		
	■	eLINK Grant Report(s) submitted on-time	I		
	■	Data practices policy: exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 yrs.	II		
	■	Personnel policy: exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 yrs.	II		
	■	Technical professional appointed and serving on WCA TEP	II		
	■	SWCD has an adopting resolution assuming WCA responsibilities and appropriate decision delegation resolutions as warranted (if WCA LGU)	II		
	★	Job approval authorities: reviewed and reported annually	II		
	★	Operational guidelines and policies exist and are current	II		
	★	Board training: orientation & cont. ed. plan and record for each board member	II		
	★	Staff training: orientation and cont. ed. plan/record for each staff	II		
Planning	■	Comprehensive Plan: updated within 5 yrs. or current resolution adopting unexpired county LWM plan	I		
	★	Prioritized, Targeted and Measurable criteria are used for Goals and Objectives in the local water management plan as appropriate.	II		
	★	Annual Plan of Work: based on comp plan, strategic plan priorities	II		
	★	SWCD is currently actively involved in at least one 1W1P	II		
	★	SWCD has received a competitive CWF grant in past 2 years	II		
	★	Strategic Plan or Self-Assessment completed within last 5 years	II		
Execution	■	Are state grant funds spent in high priority problem areas	II		
	■	Total expenditures per year (over past 10 yrs.)	II	see below	
	■	Months of operating funds in reserve	II		
	■	Replacement and restoration orders are prepared in conformance with WCA rules and requirements.	II		

	■	WCA TEP member knowledgeable/trained in WCA technical aspects	II		
	■	WCA TEP member contributes to reviews, findings & recommendations	II		
	■	WCA decisions and determinations are made in conformance with all WCA requirements (if WCA LGU)	II		
	■	WCA TEP reviews/recommendations appropriately coordinated (if LGU)	II		
	★	Certified wetland delineator: on staff or retainer	II		
	★	WCA Coordination and Communication	II		
	★	Water quality data collected to track outcomes for each pr. concern	II		
	★	Water quality trends tracked for priority water bodies	II		
Communication & Coordination	■	Website contains all required content elements	I		
	★	Website contains additional content beyond minimum required	II		
	★	Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives	II		
	★	Communication piece sent within last 12 months, indicate target	II		
	Communication Target Audience:				
	★	Outcome trends monitored and reported for key resources	II		
	★	Track progress on I & E objectives in Plan	II		
	★	Obtain stakeholder input: within last 12 months	II		
	★	Annual report communicates progress on water plan goals	II		
	★	Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, watershed districts, NGOs or private businesses	II		
	★	Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff	II		

2009      2010      2011      2012      2013      2014      2015      2016      2017      2018

## METRO WATERSHED DISTRICT and WMO PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

LGU Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Area	Performance Standard		Level of Review	Rating	
	★	High Performance standard	I Annual Compliance	Yes, No, or Value	
	■	Basic practice or statutory requirement (see instructions for explanation of standards)	II BWSR Staff Review & Assessment (1/10 yrs.)	YES	NO
Administration	■	Activity report: annual, on-time	I		
	■	Financial report & audit completed on time	I		
	■	Drainage authority buffer strip report submitted on time	I		
	■	eLINK Grant Report(s): submitted on time	I		
	■	Rules: date of last revision or review	II	mo./yr.	
	■	Personnel policy: exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 years	II		
	■	Data practices policy: exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 years	II		
	■	Manager appointments: current and reported	II		
	■	Consultant RFP: within 2 yrs. for professional services	II		
	■	WD/WMO has resolution assuming WCA responsibilities and appropriate delegation resolutions as warranted (N/A if not LGU)	II		
	■	WD/WMO has knowledgeable & trained staff that manages WCA program or has secured qualified delegate. (N/A if not LGU)	II		
	★	Administrator on staff	II		
	★	Board training: orientation and continuing education plan, record for each board member	II		
	★	Staff training: orientation and continuing education plan and record for each staff	II		
	★	Operational guidelines for fiscal procedures and conflicts of interest exist and current	II		
	★	Public drainage records: meet modernization guidelines	II		
Planning	■	Watershed management plan: up-to-date	I		
	■	City/twp. local water plans not yet approved	II		
	■	Capital Improvement Program: reviewed every 2 years	II		

	★	Strategic plan or self-assessment completed in last 5 years	II		
	★	Strategic plan identifies short-term priorities	II		
Execution	■	Engineer Reports: submitted for DNR & BWSR review	II		
	■	WCA decisions and determinations are made in conformance with all WCA requirements. (if delegated WCA LGU)	II		
	■	WCA TEP reviews & recommendations appropriately coordinated. (if delegated WCA LGU)	II		
	★	Certified wetland delineator on staff or retainer	II		
	■	Total expenditures per year (past 10 yrs.)	II	see below	
	★	Water quality trends tracked for key water bodies	II		
	★	Watershed hydrologic trends monitored / reported	II		
Communication & Coordination	■	Website: contains information as required by MR 8410.0150 Subpart 3a, i.e. as board meeting, contact information, water plan, etc.	II		
	■	Functioning advisory committee(s): recommendations on projects, reports, 2-way communication with Board	II		
	■	Communication piece: sent within last 12 months	II		
		<b>Communication Target Audience:</b>			
	★	Track progress for Information and Education objectives in Plan	II		
	★	Coordination with County Board, SWCD Board, City/Township officials	II		
	★	Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring organizations, such as counties, SWCDs, WDs, Non-Government Organizations	II		

## GREATER MN WATERSHED DISTRICT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

LGU Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Area	Performance Standard		Level of Review		Rating	
	★ High Performance standard	■ Basic practice or Statutory requirement (see instructions for explanation of standards)	I Annual Compliance	II BWSR Staff Review & Assessment (1/10 yrs.)	Yes, No, or Value	
					YES	NO
Administration	■	Annual report: submitted on time		I		
	■	Financial audit: completed on time		I		
	■	Drainage authority buffer strip report submitted on time		I		
	■	eLINK Grant Report(s): submitted on time		I		
	■	Rules: date of last revision or review		II	Mo./yr.	
	■	Personnel policy: exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 years		II		
	■	Data practices policy: exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 years		II		
	■	Manager appointments: current and reported		II		
	■	<b>WD has resolution assuming WCA responsibilities &amp; appropriate delegation resolutions as warranted. (N/A if not LGU)</b>		II		
	■	<b>WD has knowledgeable &amp; trained staff that manages WCA program or has secured a qualified delegate. (N/A if not WCA LGU)</b>		II		
	★	Administrator on staff		II		
	★	Board training: orientation and continuing education plan and record for board members		II		
	★	Staff training: orientation and continuing education plan/record for each staff		II		
	★	Operational guidelines exist and current		II		
	★	Public drainage records: meet modernization guidelines		II		
Planning	■	Watershed management plan: up-to-date		I		
	★	<b>Prioritized, Targeted, Measurable criteria used in WD Plan</b>		II		
	★	Strategic plan identifies short-term activities & budgets based on state and local watershed priorities		II		

	★	Member of County Water Plan Advisory Committee(s)	II							
Execution	■	Engineer Reports: submitted for DNR & BWSR review	II							
	■	WCA decisions and determinations made in conformance with all WCA requirements. (N/A if not LGU)	II							
	■	WCA TEP reviews/recommendations coordinated (N/A if not LGU)	II							
	★	Certified wetland delineator on staff or retainer	II							
	■	Total expenditures per year for past 10 years	II	attach						
	★	Water quality trends tracked for key water bodies	II							
	★	Watershed hydrologic trends monitored / reported	II							
Communication & Coordination	■	Functioning advisory committee: recommendations on projects, reports, maintains 2-way communication with Board	II							
	■	Communication piece sent within last 12 months	II							
	■	Website: contains annual report, financial statement, board members, contact info, grant report(s), watershed management plan, meeting notices, agendas & minutes, updated after each board meeting	II							
	★	Obtain stakeholder input: within last 12 months	II							
	★	Coordination with watershed-based initiatives	II							
	★	Track progress for I & E objectives in Plan	II							
	★	Coordination with County Board, SWCD Board, City/Township officials	II							
	★	Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, soil and water districts, non-governmental organizations	II							
2009		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018

TOTAL= \$

# Appendix I

## 2021 Local Government Performance Awards and Recognition\*

(Awarding agency listed in parentheses.)

### **Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Employee**

(Board of Water and Soil Resources)

**Doug Bos, Assistant Director, Rock Soil and Water Conservation District**

### **Soil and Water Conservation District of the Year**

(Minnesota Association of Soil and Water conservation Districts)

**Mower Soil and Water Conservation District**

### **Outstanding Administrator of the Year**

(Minnesota Association of Watershed District Administrators)

**Jamie Beyer – Administrator, Bois de Sioux River Watershed District**

### **Outstanding Watershed District Employee**

(Board of Water and Soil Resources)

**Cody Fox – Project Manager, Cedar River Watershed District**

### **Program of the Year Award**

(Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts)

**Comfort Lake Forest Lake Watershed District – Citizen-Assisted Tributary Monitoring Program**

### **WD Project of the Year**

(Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts)

**Sand Hill River Watershed District – Sand Hill River Ecosystem Enhancements**

### **County Conservation Awards**

(Association of Minnesota Counties and Board of Water and Soil Resources)

**Crow Wing County Highway Department Community Partnership**

**Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership**

***Anoka, Chisago, Isanti, Pine, and Washington Counties***