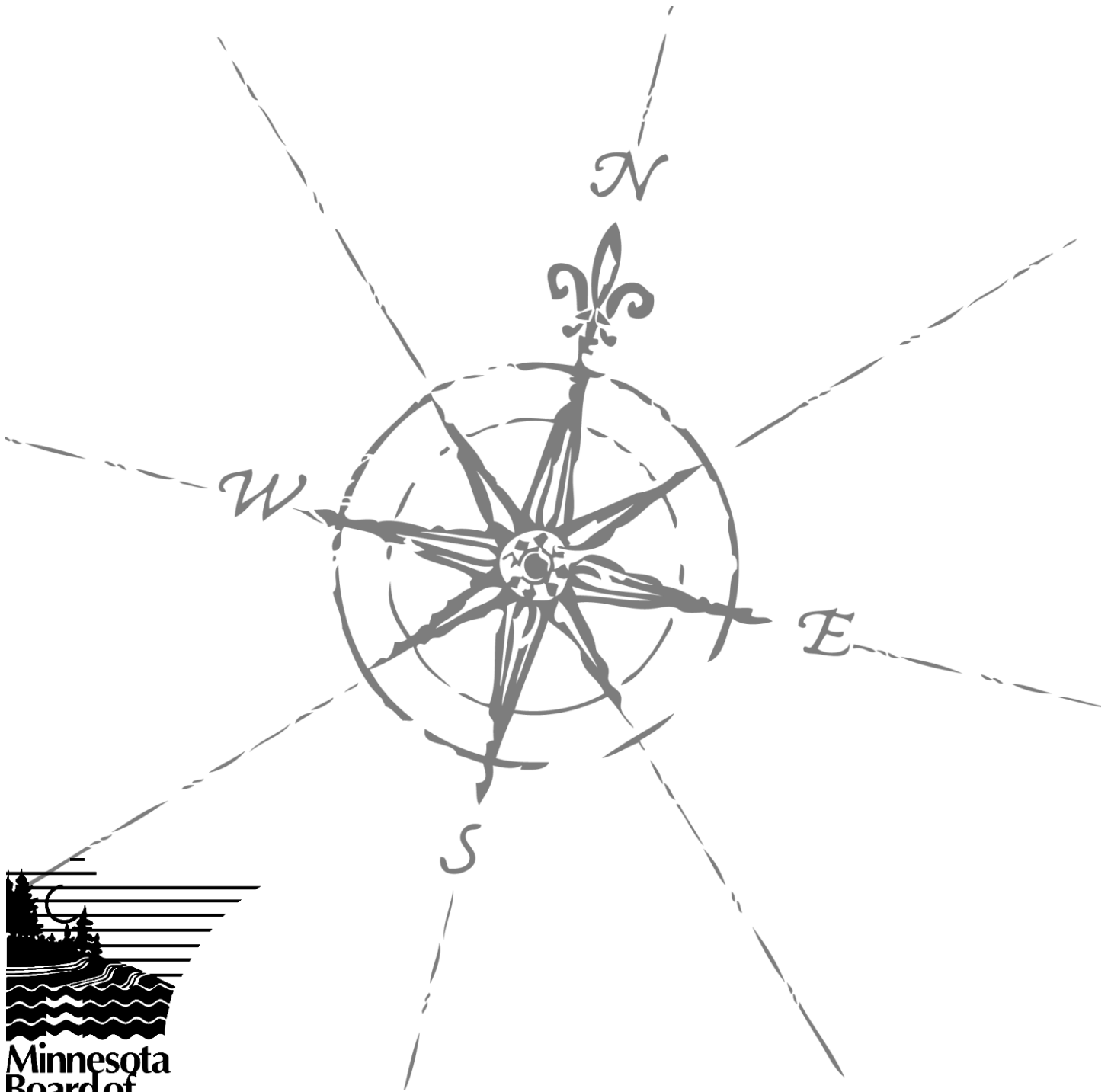


Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP)



2011 Report to the Minnesota Legislature

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Printing cost for the production of this report was \$143.

About this Report

This report has been prepared for the Minnesota State Legislature by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B.102, subdivision 3. This statute requires BWSR to provide designated legislative committees with “an analysis of local water management entity performance” each year. This report covers the activities of the Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) during the 2010 calendar year. This is the fourth annual report prepared by BWSR for this program.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

PRAP BACKGROUND 2

PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF PRAP 4

PERFORMANCE REVIEW RESULTS 5

ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS 7

REPORTING 8

PROGRAM CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION 10

APPENDICES 11

- A. PRAP Authorizing Legislation (Minn. Statutes Chapter 103B.102}**
- B. PRAP Advisory Team Members**
- C. Level I: 2010 Long-range Plans Status**
- D. Level I: Status of Annual Reports for 2009**
- E. Level I: Status of Audits and Financial Reports for 2009**
- F. Level II: Summaries of 2010 Performance Review Reports**
- G. 2010 LGU Performance Awards and Recognition**

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Executive Summary

PRAP: Year 3

The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has implemented its Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) for three years. While all of the legislatively mandated elements are in place and functioning, because of funding limitations BWSR has been able to conduct detailed performance reviews for only 16 percent of the original goal of 49 local government entities per year. These local government entities are Minnesota's soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), watershed districts (WDs), watershed management organizations (WMOs) and counties that comprise the local system that BWSR relies on to deliver its conservation programs on the landscape.

2010 PRAP Activity Summary

Level I Performance Review

- BWSR maintained and expanded the PRAP web accessible database of all 244 local government units (LGUs) in the local delivery system.
- SWCD long-range plans are current.
- County local water plans are current, but some metro counties' optional groundwater plans are due for updates.
- A number of overdue WD and WMO plan updates were completed.
- Several local drainage authorities failed to comply with ditch buffer reporting requirements.

Level II Performance Reviews

- The PRAP program coordinator, with field staff assistance, conducted detailed reviews of 8 LGUs' plan implementation performance and operational effectiveness.
- Some performance standards were modified based on their usefulness as indicators.

- BWSR convened a select panel of hydrologists for advice on the best streamflow parameters for tracking watershed management effectiveness.

Level III Review and Assistance

- BWSR staff provided guidance and assistance to one LGU regarding internal management issues.

Other Assistance

- During Level II reviews LGUs identified training needs that were referred to BWSR's training program coordinator for follow-up.

Reporting

- PRAP webpage and LGU searchable database were maintained and expanded.

PRAP Program Accountability

BWSR met most of its own performance standards for PRAP in 2010. BWSR remains committed to being accountable for how well PRAP is administered.

The LGU Delivery System: How is it Working?

Three years of detailed PRAP performance review, although limited in scope, has detected certain trends that may apply system-wide and indicate the challenges BWSR faces in its oversight role to help those entities be the best they can be.

- Many LGUs are preoccupied with current funding instability.
- Plan objectives related to groundwater are challenging to accomplish and measure.

Objectives for 2011

BWSR will maintain current levels of LGU review and explore methods for self-motivation of LGU performance enhancement.

PRAP Background

Local Delivery of Conservation Services

PRAP focuses on the local governmental units (LGUs) that deliver BWSR's water and land conservation programs, and in particular, how well those LGUs are implementing their long-range plans. The LGUs include soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), watershed districts (WDs), water management organizations (WMOs), and the water management function of counties—a total of 244 distinct organizations. PRAP, authorized by the state legislature in 2007 (see Appendix A), is coordinated by one BWSR central office staff member. He receives assistance from BWSR's 13 Board Conservationists, who routinely work with LGUs across the state.

With limited program funding BWSR was able to track a few performance indicators for all LGUs statewide, but only 8 of the needed 49 in-depth reviews could be conducted.

Multi-level Process

PRAP has three operational components:

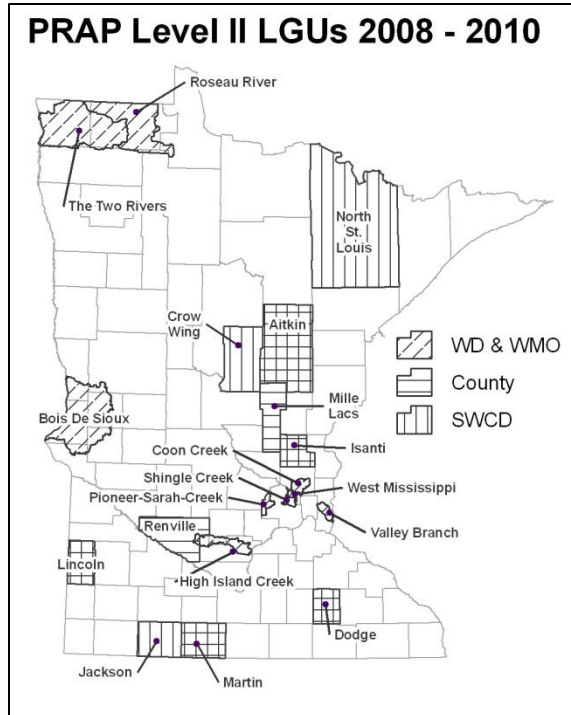
- **performance review**
- **assistance**
- **reporting**

The **performance review** component is applied at four levels.

Level I is a tabulation of required LGU reports and documents with website posting of results. Level I can be achieved with current program funding and does not require additional effort by LGUs.

Level II is a routine, interactive review originally envisioned to cover up to 49 LGUs per year to evaluate operational effectiveness and plan implementation

progress. Program funding so far has allowed an average of 8 Level II reviews per year.



BWSR's Level I and II performance standards for each type of LGU can be viewed at www.bwsr.state.mn.us/prap/index.html.

Level III is an in-depth assessment of an LGU's performance problems and issues initiated by BWSR or the LGU and usually involving targeted assistance to address specific performance needs. BWSR has conducted Level III review and assistance for two LGUs and regularly monitors all LGUs for additional opportunities.

Level IV is for those LGUs that have significant performance deficiencies, requiring extensive assessment, monitoring and possible penalties as authorized by statute. So far there have not been any Level IV cases.

Assistance varies with the needs of the LGU. Level I assistance is largely routine training for LGUs. BWSR presents this type of training through the annual BWSR Academy. At Levels II-IV assistance is targeted to the specific needs of the LGUs and can be provided by BWSR staff or consultants, depending on availability and the skills needed. A small portion of the PRAP budget is available to LGUs to both incentivize and support specialized assistance recommended by the program.

Reporting makes information about LGU performance accessible to the LGU's stakeholders and constituents. It allows for scrutiny by citizens and local officials. In 2009 BWSR added an LGU search capability to its PRAP webpage, allowing website visitors to view some of the performance data for all of the LGUs served by the program. Other features of the PRAP webpage are summary reports from each Level II performance review, and the performance standards specific to each type of LGU.

Accountability: From Measuring Effort to Tracking Results

Administration of government programs demands and deserves a high degree of accountability. PRAP was developed, in part, to deliver on that demand by providing systematic government entity performance review and then reporting publically accessible results. The challenge in reporting results is to move from measuring effort (how much money was spent on buffers?) to detecting effects of those efforts on targeted resources (have buffers improved downstream habitat and water quality?). The challenge of detecting the effects of one LGU's programs on natural resources is the abundance of factors and the tendency for some to override the effects of others.

At the program's start in 2007 the BWSR board adopted principles (see box) that still guide the implementation of this oversight function. Those principles are reflected in the program's goal of balancing performance information and targeted advice to motivate LGUs to act in their own best interests.

Guiding Principles

PRAP operates on the following principles adopted by the BWSR Board in 2007:

- **Pre-emptive**
- **Systematic**
- **Constructive**
- **Includes consequences**
- **Transparent**
- **Retains local ownership and autonomy**
- **Maintains proportionate expectations**
- **Preserves the state/local partnership**
- **Results in "more better" on-the-ground conservation**

Performance Review of PRAP

BWSR's Accountability

BWSR continues to hold itself accountable for the accomplishments of the PRAP program. In consideration of that commitment, this section matches program

objectives from last year's PRAP legislative report with corresponding program activities during 2010.

BWSR's Performance Review ACTIVITIES	
What We Proposed	What We Did
Add metro county groundwater plans to the Level I review.	Appendix C now includes the status of metro county groundwater plans.
Verify adherence to Level II Performance Standards.	BWSR requested evidence of adherence from Level II LGUs.
Send LGUs periodic check-the-website e-mails to ensure accurate reports and information.	BWSR responded to LGU updates and corrected Level I information.
Conduct 7-8 Level II routine performance reviews.	BWSR conducted 8 Level II performance reviews.

BWSR's ASSISTANCE TO LGUs	
What We Proposed	What We Did
Continue Level III assistance.	BWSR assisted the Winona SWCD with a survey of partners' perceptions of district performance.
Monitor the performance of LGUs experiencing change.	BWSR managers periodically monitored LGUs experiencing change in staffing and board membership, finances, organization, etc.
Incorporate BWSR training needs assessment and plan into Assistance component.	BWSR Training Coordinator attended a Level II Part 3 meeting; BWSR Training Team is addressing LGU-identified training needs.

BWSR's PRAP REPORTING	
What We Proposed	What We Did
Track and report Level I performance of all LGUs.	BWSR website reports compliance with Level I performance standards for SWCDs, WDs, counties, and WMOs.
Expand Level I performance information on the BWSR website.	BWSR added county groundwater plan status to the PRAP website searchable database.
Track both late and missing reports in Level I.	Appendices D and E now include late submittals.

PRAP Advisory Team

The purpose of the Advisory Team is to advise BWSR on program implementation and help BWSR maintain a balance between the need for accountability and the need to minimize the program's administrative burden on LGUs. The

Team did not meet in 2010; however, BWSR provided the members with an annual program update. BWSR will continue to inform and make use of the Advisory Team as program needs warrant. Advisory team members are listed in Appendix B.

Performance Review Results

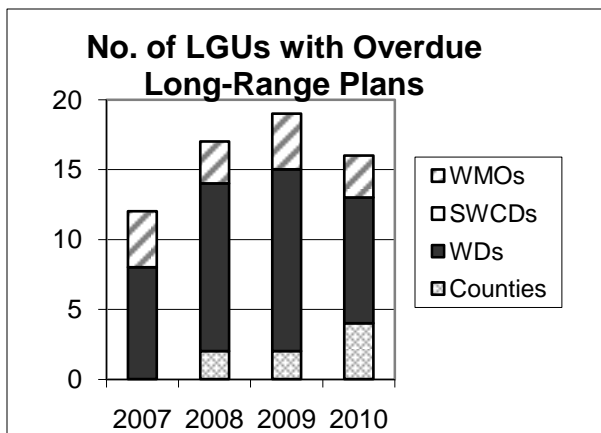
2010 Objectives

The 2010 objectives for the PRAP performance review component were to expand the Level I compliance tracking for all LGUs, to conduct the same number of routine Level II reviews as in 2009, and to monitor the activities of LGUs undergoing significant change for opportunities to initiate Level III review or assistance.

Level I Results

Level I performance review consisted of monitoring and tabulating the plan revisions due and the routine annual activity and financial reports that LGUs are required to submit to BWSR throughout the year. In April BWSR notified LGUs about the Level I review requirements, posted those requirements on the website, and then followed up with non-compliant LGUs at year's end. Level I results are listed in Appendices C, D and E and the BWSR website.

An area of improvement is the reduction in the number of overdue WD and WMO plan



revisions, meaning more plans are up-to-date and addressing current resource issues. With PRAP's emphasis on evaluating plan implementation, having a current plan is essential. The increase in overdue county

plan revisions is a result of adding metro county groundwater plans to the Level I database. Four of these voluntary plans are currently overdue for updating. BWSR field staff continue to work with LGUs on plan updates.

The Level I information now indicates which LGUs submitted late reports in addition to listing those whose reports were not submitted at all. LGU reports are an important means of providing citizens with timely information about LGU plans and performance.

On a statewide basis, the 2010 Level I performance review shows the SWCDs and county local water management offices doing a good job of meeting basic program accountability requirements. Statewide SWCD productivity—the percent of cost-share grant dollars spent on conservation practices and one of the indicators of effectiveness—remains very good at 79 percent. BWSR considers values of 80 percent and above to indicate “high” productivity. WDs in greater Minnesota continue to have difficulty complying with the annual activity report requirement. Local drainage authorities slipped in complying with the ditch buffer strip reporting requirement. Seven counties and two WDs did not submit reports in 2010 compared with two and zero, respectively, in 2009.

Level II Results

BWSR conducted eight Level II reviews in 2010: combined reviews in **Aitkin**, **Isanti** and **Martin** of joint SWCD-county water management, and individual reviews of the **Roseau River** and **High Island Creek** watershed

districts. See Appendix F for the summary reports.

The Level II review process considers the LGU's progress in implementing their plan's goals and objectives (Part 1), compliance with BWSR's checklist of performance standards (Part 2), and LGU board members' discussion of factors affecting plan implementation (part 3) to present a picture of overall performance. For the combined reviews, the board and staff from both LGUs met in a joint session for discussion about common issues. The BWSR PRAP coordinator and a Board Conservationist for each LGU serve as the primary reviewers.

In an effort to find good indicators of water management effectiveness, BWSR convened a select panel of experts to assess the usefulness of various hydrologic measures for showing the results of watershed projects and practices. So far, this discussion has led to modification of one PRAP performance standard and may generate a research project on this topic.

Other findings from the 2010 Level II reviews are included in the overall Program Conclusions section on page 10.

Level III Results

BWSR conducted a limited Level III assessment for the Winona SWCD using the BWSR District Assessment survey tool. Results from this poll of the district's partners and BWSR's subsequent recommendation led the SWCD to engage the services of a labor relations advisor. BWSR used PRAP program funds to cost share with the district in paying for those services. The district board made a personnel change in December.

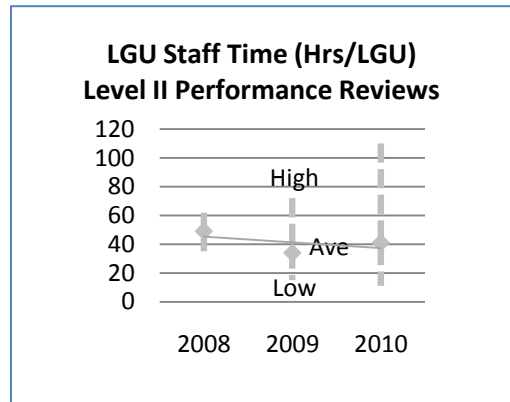
BWSR managers continue to regularly monitor the performance of LGUs experiencing change and consider the need for Level III review.

Level IV Results

No Level IV actions were needed in 2010.

PRAP Program Costs

BWSR continues to track program costs in terms of the time required for both LGUs and BWSR staff to complete Level II reviews. In response to LGU concerns about staff time needed to gather and prepare performance data, BWSR took steps in 2009 to reduce the LGU workload. The average time spent



by LGUs for the 2010 Level II reviews ticked upward, due primarily to one LGU's spending nearly twice as much staff time as the next highest. BWSR annually tracks the time required to accomplish the various program elements looking for ways to improve program efficiency.

BWSR staff spent approximately 200 hours providing Level III review and assistance services to one LGU in 2010. Level III activities typically consume many staff hours because of the complex issues and extensive consultation required for this level of engagement with LGUs.

Assistance to Local Governments

Focus on Assistance

The term “assistance” is in the PRAP program title because assisting LGUs is a logical next step after performance review and a key objective of the program. Prior to PRAP, BWSR field staff regularly provided LGUs with assistance to support and enhance their operational effectiveness. PRAP has increased BWSR’s capability to assist LGUs.

As mentioned above, BWSR provided Level III review and assistance to the Winona SWCD in 2010. Using PRAP assistance funds, the district hired a consultant to assist the board with BWSR-recommended activities.

A common request of LGUs is for more training. BWSR held its third annual training academy for LGU staff in October. BWSR’s Training Program Coordinator has completed a systematic assessment of LGU training needs and formed a staff training team to begin addressing those needs to increase the technical and administrative capacity of local organizations.

Several LGUs used the PRAP performance standards for a self-assessment of their operations, even though they were not selected for a Level II review.

Assessing the Needs

With only limited staff resources to provide assistance to LGUs, BWSR must target those efforts. In addition to BWSR’s 2010 training needs assessment, PRAP provided an opportunity for LGUs to identify the types of assistance that would be most helpful. During the open

discussion activity of the Level II performance reviews, LGU board members were asked for the types of assistance they would like to receive. The eight 2010 LGUs requested assistance with:

- obtaining stability in funding,
- informing political officials about their needs,
- grant writing,
- technical training for board and committee members,
- developing partnerships for programs and projects,
- learning how to collaborate with other local government entities, and
- improving the responsiveness of state and federal regulatory agencies.

Future of Assistance

BWSR staff assistance to LGUs will be closely coordinated with the needs assessment and programs developed by the BWSR Training Program Coordinator. PRAP will serve as one of the pathways for BWSR’s delivery of targeted training and assistance as the comprehensive training plan is implemented. As funds allow, LGUs will be able to apply for small matching grants from PRAP to help with some assistance needs.

Reporting

Purpose of Reporting

The purposes of reporting about LGU performance are:

- to provide a perspective on the progress in meeting statewide soil and water conservation goals through the efforts of local government-based activities and programs,
- to give stakeholders access to information about the effectiveness of their local water management entities, and
- to provide both information and incentives 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.

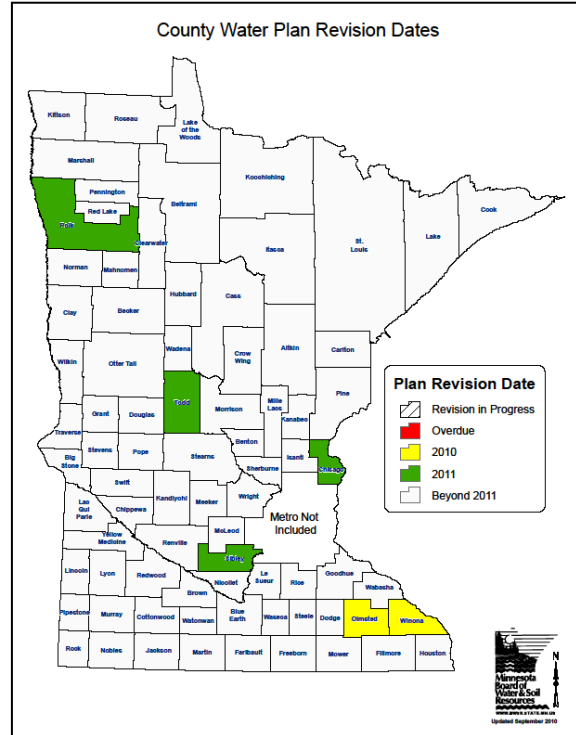
LGU-Generated

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 Level I.

BWSR Website

Since 2009 the BWSR website includes a searchable database for users to view basic Level I performance information that BWSR has collected for each LGU. The website also includes regularly updated

maps of long-range plan status by LGU type.



Users can find general program information, summaries of Level II and III performance review reports, and copies of annual legislative reports.

Level II Performance Review Reports

BWSR prepares a report containing findings, conclusions, and recommendations for each LGU that is the subject of a Level II performance review. Each LGU receives a draft of the report for their own review, and they are invited to comment on or correct the report content. BWSR then prepares both a final report that is sent to the LGU and a one-page summary that is included in this legislative report (see Appendix F) and on the PRAP webpage.

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 local delivery system for land and water conservation services and programs. This document is the fourth such report that BWSR has prepared.

Rewards and Recognition

BWSR seeks to ensure that PRAP pays as much attention to exemplary performance as it does to performance improvement. In the routine Level II performance review reports there is a list of commendations which an LGUs receives for compliance with the high performance (stretch goal)

standards on the Part 2 checklist. All 2010 Level II LGUs received commendations, which are the starred items listed in the report summaries in Appendix F. PRAP also provides an opportunity to highlight those LGUs that are recognized by their peers or other organizations for their outstanding performance or contribution to Minnesota's resource management and protection, as well as service to their local clientele. (See Appendix G.) The BWSR website also features some of these award recipients.



The Stearns Soil and Water Conservation District was honored as the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' 2010 SWCD of the Year. District Supervisor Chuck Uphoff (center) received the award from MASWCD President Steve Sunderland (center right) while surrounded by Stearns SWCD supervisors and staff.

Program Conclusions and Future Direction

Conclusions

After three years of PRAP implementation, including Level II reviews of 24 LGUs throughout the state, several recurring themes have emerged.

- LGUs are initially apprehensive about their Level II performance review but, for the most part, value the recommendations they receive and try to implement them.
- Many high-performing LGUs are preoccupied with the instability of the current funding environment.
- LGUs have the most difficulty accomplishing plan objectives related to groundwater quantity and quality.
- LGU board members overwhelmingly value their staff and see them as a key to their success.
- LGUs that have learned how to collaborate effectively with partners generally show more success in plan implementation.
- Many LGUs could benefit from a strategic approach to short-range (annual) planning that focuses limited resources on areas of greatest need.
- Some LGUs take advantage of “good marks” from their Level II review by informing stakeholders of their strengths.

PRAP in 2011

During 2011 BWSR will add some program elements, modify some, and continue others.

NEW PRAP Elements

- In collaboration with the BWSR Training Team provide LGUs with guidance for basic board and staff skill sets.

MODIFIED PRAP Elements

- Develop performance thresholds for selected Level II performance standards.

CONTINUED PRAP Elements

- Conduct 7-8 Level II routine performance reviews.
- Continue monitoring of LGUs experiencing change for assistance opportunities.
- Track and report Level I performance of all LGUs.

Challenges Long-Term

Performance measurement is a young and evolving field for entities delivering local government conservation services.

Improvements will require successfully addressing several issues.

- How to find the best indicators and the appropriate scale for measuring the performance of the conservation services delivery system.
- Measure real changes in resource *quality*, not just *effort* in program delivery.
- Help LGUs to jointly develop resource improvement goals and targets for areas of overlapping jurisdiction.

Appendices

A. PRAP Authorizing Legislation (Minn. Statutes Chapter 103B.102)

B. PRAP Advisory Team Members

C. Level I: 2010 Long-range Plan Status

D. Level I: Status of Annual Reports for 2009

E. Level I: Status of Audits and Financial Reports for 2009

F. Level II: Summaries of 2010 LGU Performance Review Reports

G. 2010 LGU Performance Awards and Recognition

Appendix A

PRAP AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION

103B.102, Minnesota Statutes 2007

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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, but not less than once every five 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 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

Appendix B

PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ADVISORY TEAM MEMBERS

NAME	ORGANIZATION	REPRESENTING
Kevin Bigalke	Nine-Mile Creek WD	Metro WD
Ray Bohn	MN Assoc. of Watershed Districts	WD association
Brian Dwight	BWSR	BWSR-No. Region
Vacant		Greater MN WD
Annalee Garletz	Assoc. of Minnesota Counties	County government
Barbara Haake	Rice Creek WD	WD association
Todd Olson	Assoc. of Metropolitan Municipalities	Water management organizations
Kathryn Kelly	Renville SWCD	SWCD supervisors
Tim Koehler	USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service	Federal partner
Kevin Ostermann	MACDE / Nicollet SWCD	MACDE
Sheila Vanney	MN Assoc. of Soil & Water Cons. Districts	SWCD association
Steve Woods	BWSR-St. Paul	BWSR management

Appendix C

Level I: 2010 Long-Range Plan Status

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Local Water Plan Adoption Resolution Expired

All resolutions are current.

District Comprehensive Plan Expired

All comprehensive plans are current.

Counties

Local Water Plan Revision Overdue

All plans are current.

Metro County Groundwater Plan Revision Overdue

Carver

Ramsey

Dakota

Scott

(Anoka and Hennepin Counties have chosen not to participate in this optional program.)

Watershed Districts

Management Plan Revision Overdue: No Action

Belle Creek

Management Plan Revision Overdue: Plan Revision in Progress

Bear Valley

Lower Minnesota River

Coon Creek

Middle Snake Tamarac Rivers

Crooked Creek

Sand Hill River

Cormorant Lakes

Stockton-Rollingstone-Minnesota City

Watershed Management Organizations

Management Plan Revision Overdue: Plan Revision in Progress

Lower Rum River

Mississippi

Six Cities (Plan revision on-hold pending reorganization.)

Appendix D

Level I: Status of Annual Reports for 2009 as of December 31, 2010

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

eLINK Reports of Grant Expenditures

All districts comply.

Website Content: Compliance with 10 Content Elements

Anoka (late)

Counties

Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Report: Not Submitted

Faribault

St. Louis

Murray

Steele

Pope

Waseca

Ramsey

eLINK Reports of Grant Expenditures

All reports submitted.

Watershed Districts

Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Report Not Submitted

Joe River

Wild Rice

Annual Activity Reports Not Submitted

Bear Valley

Pelican River

Belle Creek

Thirty Lakes

Buffalo-Red River

Upper Minnesota River

Crooked Creek

Wild Rice

Joe River

Annual Activity Reports Submitted Late: 13 (see PRAP webpage for detail)

Metro Watershed Management Organizations

Annual Activity Reports Not Submitted

Six Cities

Annual Activity Reports Submitted Late

Grass Lake

Mississippi

Appendix E

Level I: Status of Audits and Financial Reports for 2009 as of December 31, 2010

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Annual Financial Reports (all 90 Districts): Submitted Late

Aitkin

Wabasha

Annual Audits (45 required)

All required audits submitted on-time.

Watershed Districts

Annual Audits Not Completed:

Bear Valley

Belle Creek

Crooked Creek

Joe River

Stockton-Rollingstone-Minnesota City

Thirty Lakes

Upper Minnesota River

Annual Audits Submitted Late:

Carnelian-Marine

Valley Branch

Metro Watershed Management Organizations

Annual Audits Not Submitted:

Carver

Sunrise River

Annual Audits Submitted Late:

Mississippi

Six Cities

Upper Rum

Appendix F

LEVEL II FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

PRAP

Performance Review and Assistance Program

2010 Level II Review: Aitkin County Local Water Management (*Aitkin County*)

Why BWSR did this review

BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance review of the **Aitkin County** local water management program in concert with the review of the Aitkin SWCD. Both entities use the same long-range plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the county's program. The water plan task force, county board and staff are responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

Aitkin County Local Water Management Summary of Performance Review Results

What BWSR Found

Aitkin County is making good progress implementing the provisions of the local water plan for which they are responsible. The county's water plan task force provides a forum to discuss citizen concerns, program priorities, and actively supports the education of Aitkin County's citizens regarding the protection of water resources.

The county program staff benefit from a strong working relationship with the Aitkin SWCD, to which they have delegated the water planner responsibilities and the oversight of the water plan task force.

Action Items

There are no action items (immediate steps needed to correct operational deficiencies).

Commendations

The Aitkin County water plan task force and staff are commended for meeting these high performance standards.

- ★ Public drainage records modernized
- ★ Non-state \$ leveraged with all state funds
- ★ Comparison of planned with actual program expenditures
- ★ Water quality trends tracked for priority water bodies
- ★ Obtain stakeholder input: within last 5 yrs
- ★ Partnerships: liaison with SWCDs/WDs and cooperative projects/tasks done
- ★ County local water plan on county website
- ★ Water management ordinances on county website

BWSR has suggested additional tracking of public education and outreach efforts.

Appendix F

LEVEL II FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

PRAP

Performance Review and Assistance Program

2010 Level II Review:

Aitkin Soil and Water Conservation District

(Aitkin County)

Why BWSR did this review

BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance review of the **Aitkin SWCD** in concert with the review of the Aitkin County local water management program. Both entities use the same long-range plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the district. The board of supervisors is responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

Aitkin Soil and Water Conservation District Summary of Performance Review Results

What BWSR Found

The Aitkin SWCD is a high performing organization. In the late 1980s the district undertook the writing of the county's first water plan. Since then the district has taken on other challenges, including more recently, the Big Sandy Lake TMDL plan and the forest stewardship program. The district also plays important roles in implementing the county's shoreland management program and the Wetland Conservation Act.

The SWCD enjoys a strong working relationship with the county board and staff. The SWCD supervisors and staff also work well with the state DNR, MPCA and many others. Another factor in the district's success has been stability and leadership in the district manager position. This has led to low turnover of other district staff that produces the benefit of good staff knowledge of the county's resources and residents.

The supervisors and manager anticipated the current funding challenges and have proactively pursued new program and funding opportunities. Aitkin SWCD has maintained a strong presence to advance the joint Aitkin-Cass-Crow Wing county funding applications that have been successful in obtaining the funding needed to advance conservation policy. Aitkin was a key player in the Wild Rice Lakes project, which was recently recommended for funding by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

The district is commended for these high performance practices:

- ★ Operational guidelines exist and current
- ★ Certified wetland delineator: on staff or retainer
- ★ Outcome trends monitored and reported for key resources
- ★ Non-state \$ leveraged with all state funds
- ★ Website contains additional content beyond minimum required
- ★ Obtain stakeholder input: within last 5 yrs
- ★ Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks done
- ★ Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff.

BWSR recommended the district modify their annual plan and report formats, and address their low operating reserve.

Appendix F

LEVEL II FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

PRAP

**Performance Review and Assistance Program
2010 Level II Review:
High Island Creek
Watershed District**
*(Renville, McLeod, Sibley
Counties)*

Why BWSR did this review
BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance review of the **High Island Creek Watershed District** because they are near the midpoint in implementing their 10-year watershed management plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the watershed district. The board of managers is responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

High Island Creek Watershed District Summary of Performance Review Results

What BWSR Found

In their 2004 management plan, the managers made a conscious decision to shift the focus of the district from almost exclusively land drainage to begin addressing broader water resource conservation issues. The managers acknowledged that such a shift in emphasis was substantial. Although keeping the drainage system working effectively remains their top priority, over the past ten years the managers have taken steps towards addressing water conservation and water quality concerns.

The start of the High Island Creek Watershed Clean Water Partnership (CWP) Project provided timely support for the watershed district's shift in focus. Clearly, the watershed district managers have benefitted from and appreciate their working relationship with the CWP Project coordinator, and this fact is evidence of the value that a full-time district administrator would provide to the overall operation of the watershed. An administrator would also be able to develop improved working relationships between the district and state and federal regulatory agencies.

Other observations about the basic functioning of the organization are that board meetings would benefit from increased structure and that the district does not submit timely activity reports nor take advantage of other reporting mechanisms, such as websites, to most effectively inform and engage the residents of the watershed.

The district has two action items that need immediate attention: submittal of the 2009 annual report and establishment of a watershed district advisory committee.

The High Island Creek Watershed District is commended for compliance with the following high performance standards:

- ★ Water quality trends tracked for priority water bodies
- ★ Coordination with Cty Board and City/Twp officials
- ★ Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks done

BWSR recommends that the district managers enter into a Performance Improvement Agreement to address statutory requirements, employ an administrator, tighten up meeting procedures, develop a district website, provide additional administrative training, and seek cooperative funding sources.

Appendix F

LEVEL II FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

PRAP

Performance Review and Assistance Program

2010 Level II Review: Isanti County Local Water Management (*Isanti County*)

Why BWSR did this review

BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance review of the **Isanti County** local water management program in concert with the review of the Isanti SWCD. Both entities use the same long-range plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the county's local water management program. The county is responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

Isanti County Local Water Management Summary of Performance Review Results

What BWSR Found

The Isanti County local water planning and management program has made some significant strides since BWSR approved the county's plan in 2006. They hired a county-based, half-time water planner who reinvigorated the water plan task force and made outreach efforts to surrounding counties. Particular areas of focus have been the Rum River and the North Branch of the Sunrise River. These improvements are significant.

However, recent budget cuts to the County Planning and Zoning Department resulted in the loss of the half-time water planner and the splitting of those duties among the remaining department staff. While the water plan implementation will still be administered, these changes are likely to result in a reduction of the growth of the local water management efforts. Hopefully, once the budget shortfalls within the county have been addressed, restoration of the water planner would be a high priority.

The Isanti local water management efforts should continue and there should be an increased focus on the Clean Water Fund grants to implement the water plan action items.

The Isanti County water management task force has one action item to be addressed in the short-term: provide a public information piece updating recent activities and efforts.

The county is commended for meeting the following high performance standards:

- ★ Partnerships: liaison with SWCDs/WDs and cooperative projects/tasks done
- ★ Track outcomes for public education objectives
- ★ County local water plan on county website
- ★ Water management ordinances on county website

BWSR recommended that the county follow-up on the action item and maintain the excellent work of the water management task force.

Appendix F

LEVEL II FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

PRAP

Performance Review and Assistance Program

2010 Level II Review:

Isanti SWCD (*Isanti County*)

Why BWSR did this review

BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance review of the **Isanti SWCD** in concert with the review of the Isanti County local water management program. Both entities use the same long-range plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions, and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the district. The board of supervisors is responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District Summary of Performance Review Results

What BWSR Found

The Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District appears to run its organization on a 15 year-old model that does not reflect the changing reality of the local environment. With the district's strong focus on agricultural practices, the opportunities that can be found in the rapidly urbanizing areas are being missed. These urban residents are not a natural clientele for this SWCD and poor outreach to this new population may place the district in an increasingly marginalized position.

The district staff and board members are beginning to make greater efforts to tie into the county government and the water plan task force. These efforts should be continued and the bonds between the organizations strengthened.

Overall, the staff and board have valuable experience in the conservation of the county's natural resources. However, the district appears to lack a clear focus overall. Strengthening the district's operational administration should be a priority and will put the district in a stronger position to tackle the challenges likely to face the county over the next few years.

The district has action items to work on in two areas: developing policies for data practices requests and for managing personnel matters.

The district is commended for:

- ★ Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks done with neighboring districts, counties, watershed districts, non-governmental organizations
- ★ Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff

BWSR recommends that the district address its two action items within the next six months, maintain and strengthen its involvement in the Isanti County local water plan task force, designate/hire a staff person with lead district management responsibilities, and expand the scope of district responsibilities in the upcoming county local water plan update.

Appendix F

LEVEL II FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

PRAP

Performance Review and Assistance Program

2010 Level II Review: Martin County (*Martin County*)

Why BWSR did this review

BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance review of the **Martin County** local water management program in concert with the review of the Martin SWCD. Both entities use the same long-range plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the program. The water plan committee and county staff are responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

Martin County Local Water Management Summary of Performance Review Results

What BWSR Found

The county is making good progress in addressing its water management responsibilities as described in the county local water plan. At the midpoint of the plan implementation cycle the county has addressed the objectives within its areas of main responsibility.

One example of proactive water resource management is the drainage system redetermination of benefits providing a fairer user-pays approach that allows improved maintenance of the agricultural water management systems in the county. This effort is resulting in reduced erosion and sedimentation. Another example is the imminent health threat abatement septic system grant to “fix” 17 systems that was recently awarded to the county.

In the area of feedlots in particular, and to a lesser extent shoreland and subsurface sewage treatment systems, there is room for improvement in the communication and coordination of these county responsibilities with other local water management activities in the county. This could be easily achieved by having county program staff regularly attend quarterly water plan committee meetings to provide status reports of funding levels, expenditures, activities and any program results or outcomes.

Martin County local water management is commended for:

- ★ Public drainage records: meet modernization guidelines
- ★ Annual plan priorities based on water quality trend data for key water resources
- ★ Non-state \$ leveraged with all state funds
- ★ Comparison of planned with actual program expenditures
- ★ Data collected to track outcomes for each priority concern
- ★ Water quality trends tracked for priority water bodies
- ★ Obtain stakeholder input: within last 5 yrs
- ★ Partnerships: liaison with SWCD for cooperative projects
- ★ Report to water plan advisory committee on plan progress
- ★ County local water plan on county website
- ★ Water management ordinances on county website

BWSR recommends that the county ensure regular reporting of program status at water plan committee meetings.

Appendix F

LEVEL II FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

PRAP

Performance Review and Assistance Program

2010 Level II Review: Martin SWCD (*Martin County*)

Why BWSR did this review

BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance review of the **Martin SWCD** in concert with the review of the Martin County local water management program. Both entities use the same long-range plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the district. The board of supervisors is responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

Martin Soil and Water Conservation District Summary of Performance Review Results

What BWSR Found

Martin SWCD does a good job overall in accomplishing the goals and objectives of its long-range plan and maintaining high standards of operational efficiency and effectiveness. The district board and staff are engaged and working to keep up with changes resulting from economic limitations and conservation priorities. The district has benefitted from a good relationship with the county board and, likewise, the county has benefitted from having a strong partner in the SWCD. Having a multi-staff organization has resulted in work on conventional SWCD programs as well as making progress with the relatively new “Native Buffer” and “Cooperative Weed Management” programs. The SWCD has embraced the new Clean Water Fund opportunities by applying for grants for improving water quality in Fairmont City lakes and tributaries and has expanded into working with urban BMPs as well as the more traditional agricultural BMPs.

Martin SWCD can improve in the area of Technical Approval Authority and technology. Staff should be given the opportunity to improve skills in the areas of grant writing, grant reporting, BMP design/construction and project signoff.

The Martin SWCD is commended for meeting these high performance standards.

- ★ Operational guidelines
- ★ Board training: orientation and cont. ed. plan
- ★ Staff training: orientation and cont. ed. plan
- ★ Annual plan priorities based on natural resource quality trends
- ★ Comparison of planned with actual program expenditures
- ★ Non-state \$ leveraged with all state funds
- ★ Certified wetland delineator: on staff
- ★ Outcome trends monitored & reported for key resources
- ★ Website contains additional content beyond required
- ★ Obtain stakeholder input: within last 5 yrs
- ★ Annual report communicates progress on plan goals
- ★ Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks done with others
- ★ Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff

BWSR recommends that the board review staff training and technical approval authority needs and update skills as needed.

Appendix F

LEVEL II FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

PRAP

Performance Review and Assistance Program

2010 Level II Review: Roseau River Watershed District *(Roseau, Marshall, Lake of the Woods, Beltrami & Kittson Counties)*

Why BWSR did this review

BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance review of the **Roseau River Watershed District** because they are near the midpoint in implementing their 10-year watershed management plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the district. The board of managers is responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

Roseau River Watershed District Summary of Performance Review Results

What BWSR Found

In their watershed management plan the district managers have set the dual goals for their district of flood damage reduction (FDR) and natural resource enhancement (NRE). The plan sets an ambitious agenda for project implementation, and the fact that they have constructed three major FDR projects in the past five years and aggressively pursued two others is evidence of a high level of commitment to that agenda.

This progress is evidence of an improvement in board purpose and intent and staff attentiveness to the complexities of the project development process. Past unfamiliarity with how to work within the project development system resulted in some lost opportunities.

Although the district has worked to establish better relationships and to collaborate with other local governments that have water management responsibilities in the Roseau River watershed, there is still room for improvement. The district is well-positioned to provide the needed coordination but must be more persistent in pursuing it.

There are five action items the managers and staff need to address in the short term:

- Rules: date of last revision or review
- Data practices policy
- Website: increase content
- Functioning advisory committee
- Communication piece: sent within last 12 months

The Roseau River Watershed District is commended for meeting these high performance standards:

- ★ Administrator on staff
- ★ Obtain stakeholder input: within last 5 yrs
- ★ Coordination with County Board and City/Twp officials
- ★ Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with others

BWSR recommends that the district address the five action items, intentionally pursue collaboration with partners, consider staff development, and address operating guidelines and policies.

Appendix G

2010 Local Government Performance Awards and Recognition

Association of Minnesota Counties and Board of Water and Soil Resources
County Conservation Awards

Stearns County

Board of Water and Soil Resources Outstanding SWCD Employee

Kathy Smith, Martin SWCD

Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
SWCD of the Year

Stearns SWCD

Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Outstanding Supervisor Award

Robert Borchert, Rice SWCD

MN Assoc. of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and MN Dept. of Transportation
Living Snow Fence Achievement Award

Lincoln SWCD

DNR Appreciation Award

Carver SWCD

Board of Water and Soil Resources Outstanding WD Employee

Justin Hanson, Turtle Creek WD

Department of Natural Resources Watershed District of the Year

Red Lake WD

Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts Program of the Year

Rain Barrel Art, **Nine Mile Creek WD**

Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts Project of the Year

Fish Barrier/Invasive Species Project, **Riley-Purgatory Bluff Creek WD**