



## For Immediate Release

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### **Stearns County receives 2010 County Conservation Award from Association of Minnesota Counties and Board of Water and Soil Resources**

St. Paul – The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) presented the 2010 County Conservation Award to Stearns County to recognize the county's creation of a Natural Resources Conservation Overlay District. The award was presented at the AMC annual convention and trade show.

"This is an innovative way for a county to use its zoning tools to focus natural resource protection to a high-priority area," said John Jaschke, BWSR Executive Director.

In March of 2008, the Stearns County Board of Commissioners adopted major changes to the County's Comprehensive Plan, which was a very public process involving cities, townships, lake associations, agricultural producer groups and many county residents. Large parts of Avon and Colledgeville townships and St. John's University property located in St. Joseph and St. Wendel townships have been the focus of ongoing conservation and education efforts led by St. John's Arboretum through an organization dubbed "The Avon Hills Initiative." The Avon Hills includes the largest concentration of steep slopes, wooded areas, erodible soils, wetland complexes and high-quality native plant communities in the county. The initiative's protection efforts in that area provided an ideal opportunity for the county to create the Natural Resources Conservation Overlay District as one of its own zoning tools in a 2010 update of the county's zoning ordinance, which was a very transparent, public process involving many citizens and stakeholder groups.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is the state's administrative agency for soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts, metropolitan watershed management organizations, and county water managers. The BWSR mission: Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.

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