



BWSR 2008 Review and 2009 Preview

Sound management of our water resources is critical to a healthy and thriving Minnesota – and that view is shared by a large and growing number of communities and citizens. Because 78% of the state's land is held in private ownership, BWSR's focus on private lands is critical to attaining the state's goals for clean water and healthy landscapes. Managed wisely our watersheds, our working lands, and our groundwater resources will continue to be foundational components of the state's current and future environmental and economic quality of life.

The key to the agency's success is the engagement and oversight provided by the 17-member board that consists of:

- ❑ 12 members representing local perspectives -- 3 citizens and 9 local government entities (county commissioners, soil and water conservation district supervisors, and watershed district managers)
- ❑ 4 commissioners of state agencies (DNR, Dept. of Agriculture, Dept. of Health, and Pollution Control Agency)
- ❑ 1 representative of the University of Minnesota Extension Service

The board's balanced mix of perspectives and experiences make it an ideal public forum to develop practical and credible conservation policies and programs. This governing structure is a means for citizens and local governments to take direct ownership of conservation issues.

Looking back at 2008

BWSR has implemented a number of significant changes in the past year that have improved our efficiency and effectiveness.

1. Legislation gave BWSR greater **oversight and assistance responsibilities** for the local government units that deliver the state's clean water and conservation programs. The comprehensive program, called the *Performance Review and Assistance Program*, features different levels of implementation, from an annual review of minimum expectations for local governments to an extensive evaluation of organizational performance. That type of evaluation is conducted on an as-needed basis, and it includes extensive assistance and possible sanctions.
2. Changes to the **Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)**, the state's wetland protection program, are underway to assure the state's policy of no-net-loss of wetlands goal is met, and that administrative efficiencies between local operations and federal programs are maximized. Administrative Penalty Order authority and procedures were also established.
3. Enhancement and expansion of the **Wetland Banking** system, which has both public and private sector elements, has led to a cooperative agreement with MnDOT to coordinate services for all of the state and local public transportation project wetland mitigation needs. Minnesota's program is a national model of a successful environmental trading program that achieves better environmental and economic outcomes. We also are nearing an agreement with the US Army Corps of Engineers to allow full use the state system for federal regulatory purposes.
4. The **Clean Water Legacy Act** provided new funding for monitoring, protecting and improving the state's waters, expanded funding to local units of government, and evolved the watershed-based approach for reducing nonpoint source pollution. BWSR provided leadership in inter-agency efforts such as the Clean Water Council and the Stormwater Steering Committee. By channeling dollars to the local conservation delivery system, the \$9.8M in grants to local units of government in 2007-08 was matched by \$8.15M in local funding.
5. BWSR received \$25 million in bonding for the **Reinvest-in-Minnesota (RIM Reserve)** program to improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, reduce phosphorus and nitrogen loading, and improve wildlife and native plant habitat by restoring wetlands and adjacent uplands on private land. About 10,000 acres of wetland and surrounding habitat were enrolled in 2008 and will be restored in cooperation with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). A major federal partnership established with Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) means that each state \$1 has leveraged \$1.4 in federal funds. A similar opportunity is expected to be available in 2009.
6. Following a severe **Flood Event in SE Minnesota in August 2007**, BWSR -- in partnership with NRCS and the local SWCDs and other conservation partners -- continues to lead the conservation recovery

efforts in the 7-County Presidential Disaster Declaration DR-1717 area by providing state funds and technical assistance. BWSR allocated an initial \$4M toward projects and accepted an additional transfer of \$1.85 million from the state Dept. of Employment and Economic Development. Additional funds for technical services were provided by the Legislature and Gov. Tim Pawlenty in June. Because many conservation projects require a licensed engineer to design and supervise construction, BWSR has hired a temporary engineering team to get the federal, state and local project funding into projects as soon as possible.

7. Per a legislative charge, BWSR accomplished the successful start-up of the **Star Lakes** Board which is focused on growing citizen ownership and commitment to clean water efforts.
8. Several **administrative and program management** initiatives; including;
 - Enhancements and upgrades to a fully internet-based system to track conservation and pollutant reduction results reported in our *eLINK* system which also supports several MPCA and DNR programs.
 - Reorganization of *Conservation Engineering Assistance* services to accomplish managerial efficiencies and establish a greater focus for the technical services provided to leverage Clean Water and Federal Farm Bill project funding.
 - Development of a *grants compliance tool* based on the recommendations in the legislative auditor's fiscal report.

Looking forward to 2009

BWSR core values and principles will guide decision-making based on a new strategic plan adopted in January 2008. BWSR's mission:

Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.

The partnership means providing technical expertise, oversight and accountability measures, and collaboration between agencies, local units of government and private organizations and individuals.

Based on the feedback from 7 regional listening sessions held around the state in December, the passage of the **Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment** on November 4 has provided the opportunity to:

1. Enhance the local delivery system and grow the public-private partnerships necessary to accomplish our conservation and clean water mission,
2. Revamp the delivery of our conservation programs to maximize their impact toward the restoration and protection of land and water resources, and
3. Make conservation and clean water needs and accomplishments well known and understood by citizens.

The health of water bodies and natural habitats is highly correlated with land-use and practices upstream. Maximizing conservation impacts requires a high level of ownership at the local level with technical support and oversight at the state-level. This is important for three reasons:

- Land use planning and decision-making are largely the role of local governments.
- Conservation projects are implemented by informing and engaging private landowners and citizens at the community center, at the front door, or at the kitchen table. That role is best accomplished by those who are most connected to those citizens and landowners – and that role again falls to our local governments.
- New and emerging technologies - such as GIS modeling programs that identify conservation practices for targeted water quality and habitat improvements and training on such technologies or practices - are most effectively coordinated at the state level.

With a focus on the privately owned working lands of the state, BWSR is ready, willing and able in 2009 and beyond to make major contributions to protect and improve - in partnership with our local governments - the water and land resources of Minnesota.