



WATER & SOIL CONSERVATION 2007

The Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources works collaboratively with local government units, federal agencies, and landowners to implement conservation projects on private, working lands. Managed wisely, these working lands – Minnesota’s farms, forests and urban areas – can contribute to the state’s environmental goals of cleaner air and water, abundant fish and wildlife habitat, and preservation of open spaces.

BWSR is the state’s administrative agency for 91 soil and water conservation districts, 46 watershed districts, 27 metropolitan watersheds and 80 county water management organizations. The agency also coordinates state programs and policies with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Services Agency, and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers through various formal agreements.

Using state resources to leverage federal and local funds has enabled BWSR to implement projects that have resulted in less sediment and nutrients entering our lakes, rivers, and streams; more fish and wildlife habitat; the drastic slowing of wetland losses, and reduced soil erosion. These outcomes are being achieved despite the intensification of agriculture, greater demands for forest products, and rapid urbanization in many parts of the state.

By channeling financial, technical and administrative assistance to the local level, BWSR ensures that state conservation policy is implemented with local priorities in mind.



Since 78 percent of the state’s land is in private ownership, BWSR’s private working-lands programs are critical for improving water quality and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat. (Photo: NRCS)

Board membership: A forum for citizens, local and state government perspectives

The 17-member board meets 10 times per year, and members include:

- 3 citizens
- 3 County Commissioners
- 3 Soil and Water Conservation District supervisors
- 3 Watershed organization managers
- 4 state agency commissioners: Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Department of Natural Resources and Pollution Control Agency
- University of Minnesota Extension Service



Board members are appointed to four-year terms by the Governor, and there must be at least one member from each of the eight areas in the state (pictured). The diverse board structure ensures that a broad range of interests provides input on all of the board’s decisions on complex water and soil management policies.

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BWSR staff collaborate with local and federal partners

BWSR has eight field offices, located in Bemidji, Brainerd, Duluth, Fergus Falls, Marshall, New Ulm, Rochester and St. Paul. Field office staff have expertise in the unique natural resource concerns in their region, making them a valuable resource for staff in local government units. Agency responsibilities are delivered with or implemented by local government partners, so that local priorities are met for water and soil conservation on private lands. BWSR also coordinates state programs and policies with the MN Department of Transportation, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Services Agency, and the U. S. Army Corp of Engineers through various formal agreements.

Programs achieve cleaner air and water, create habitat, and leverage other funds

Clean Water Legacy. The 2006 legislature enacted the Clean Water Legacy Act (CWLA) to accelerate identification of impaired waters, total maximum daily load (TMDL) studies, and cleanup activities. BWSR is the lead agency for implementing non-point pollution reduction programs as part of the state's overall effort to address its impaired waters. Funding addresses project grants, technical assistance program reporting, and evaluation services.

Wetland Protection. The Wetland Conservation Act charges Minnesota to achieve no net loss in the quantity, quality, and biological diversity of Minnesota's existing wetlands. More than 350 local government units administer the Wetland Conservation Act. BWSR provides a range of assistance to those partners — through technical evaluation panels, financial assistance with grants, dispute resolution, and coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The end results are decisions about wetland protection made with local input, sound science, and due process.

Wetland Banking. BWSR works directly with individual landowners to restore wetlands through the Wetland Banking Program. WCA requires wetlands to be replaced when they are lost through safety-related repair and rehabilitation of existing public roads. Wetland banking gives landowners the option of buying wetland credits that are available from previously restored or created wetlands. BWSR restores hundreds of acres of wetlands each year on behalf of MnDOT and local government units to establish wetland banking credits. These restoration efforts have restored diverse wetlands with native vegetation on large parcels of land.

State Cost-Share. BWSR provides cost-share grants to SWCDs to help landowners offset the costs of installing conservation practices that protect water quality and control erosion. Landowners are required to match a percentage of the total project cost, using their own funds in combination with other state, federal, or local sources. Local SWCD boards set local priorities for projects in conjunction with the state's overall priorities set through BWSR.

Conservation partners:

Soil and Water Conservation Districts. SWCDs work directly with private landowners, connecting them with the financial and technical resources they need to establish conservation practices on their land. BWSR also works in partnership with SWCDs to implement federally funded conservation provisions of the Farm Bill.

Watershed Districts and Watershed Management Organizations. Watershed districts, organized on hydrologic boundaries, provide a framework to address water management issues that transcend political boundaries. Their projects and activities include flood-control structures, public drainage systems, lake level controls, septic system improvements, and construction of storm water treatment ponds and sediment basins. Watershed management organizations are found in the metropolitan area, and they deal with surface water, whereas watershed districts deal with both surface water and groundwater.

Counties. Minnesota's counties play a crucial role in developing and implementing local water plans. As a general-purpose unit of government, counties, with their planning and land-use authorities, are uniquely positioned to link many land-use decisions with local goals for surface and groundwater protection and management.

Joint Powers Boards. BWSR works with a number of joint powers boards that address regional water and soil resource management concerns.

Federal Government. BWSR works with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency on implementing the conservation provisions of the federal Farm Bill. Efforts to optimize Farm Bill programs bring federal money into Minnesota for private lands conservation. BWSR partners with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency on wetland regulations. These agencies continue to examine ways to achieve regulatory simplification and still achieve mutual goals of no net loss of wetlands. BWSR also restores wetlands in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Conservation Easements (Restoring Wetlands and Prairies). Reinvest in Minnesota Reserve continues to be a strong force in Minnesota's soil and water conservation efforts. RIM increases public and private investment in private lands to improve water quality and enhance habitat and flood storage. These private-land conservation activities are administered in partnership with SWCDs and focus on restoring wetlands and enrolling highly erodible, riparian, and sensitive groundwater lands. The RIM Reserve program leverages federal government dollars through the USDA. By combining RIM Reserve with the federal Conservation Reserve Program and Wetland Reserve Program, more than 180,000 acres of environmentally sensitive cropland have been retired and replaced with native prairie or restored wetlands.

State Soils Office. BWSR collaborates with the University of Minnesota and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service on three main areas. The first is to increase the usefulness of current soils data. Work involved in this area helps ensure that current data is digitally correct and technically reliable. Other areas involve updating aging soil surveys in the state and technical support and training to local governments.

Engineering and Technical Services. Design and engineering services are provided for wetland projects restored through RIM Reserve and the Minnesota Wetland Banking Program. BWSR Engineering and Technical Services staff also assist local units of government in permit decisions related to WCA and develops standards for soil conservation engineering practices.

BWSR engineering staff give expert input into federal and state agricultural and non-point source pollution policy discussions toward developing rules and regulations.

The 2005 Minnesota Legislature directed BWSR to conduct an assessment of the use, maintenance and benefits of required grass strips along public drainage ditches, in consultation with stakeholders. That effort produced the **Public Drainage Ditch Buffer Study**, published February 2006. BWSR now facilitates a Drainage Work Group as an outgrowth of that study.

Local Water Management. In the late 1970s, the Legislature decided that local governments, working with the state, should play a principal role in achieving the state's surface water and groundwater management objectives. The Legislature adopted water planning authorities, including the Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act (authorized in 1982), Comprehensive Local Water Planning (1985), and Metropolitan County Groundwater Planning (1987). BWSR was given oversight responsibilities to ensure that local water plans are prepared and coordinated with existing local, and state efforts and that plans are implemented effectively. All parts of Minnesota have state-approved and locally adopted plans in place.

These local plans focus on priority concerns, defined goals and objectives, and measurable outcomes. To assist counties in carrying out priority projects and programs in their plans, BWSR provides financial assistance to them through the Natural Resources Block Grant. Additional funding is available to counties, watershed districts, and watershed management organizations in the form of challenge grants, provided through the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources.

Farm Bill Assistance. The 2002 Farm Bill authorized unprecedented levels of funding for conservation programs on agricultural working lands nationwide. BWSR has played a key role in efforts to identify state-funded initiatives that leverage additional farm bill funding, and target state and federal resources to projects that improve water quality. BWSR continues to work with local and federal partners to market and implement federal conservation programs.



Design and construction of this wetland in Big Stone County was done by BWSR Engineering and Technical Services.

2004-2005 Natural Resources Block Grants

- 508 Education projects
- 94 Resource inventory projects
- 222 Monitoring projects
- 305 Regulations and ordinances
- 678 Feedlot initiatives

Statutory Responsibilities

- State soil conservation agency (M.S. 103B.101)
- Direct private land soil and water conservation programs through the action of SWCDs, counties, cities, townships, Watershed Districts, and Water Management Organizations (M.S. 103C, 103D)
- Link water resource planning with comprehensive land use planning (M.S. 103B)
- Provide resolution of water policy conflicts and issues (M.S. 103A.211, 103A.305, 103A.315, 103A.311)
- Implement the comprehensive local water management acts (M.S. 103B.201, 103B.255, 103B.301)
- Provide the forum for local issues, priorities and opportunities to be incorporated into state public policy (M.S. 103B.101)
- Administer the Wetland Conservation Act (M.S. 103G)
- Coordinate state and federal resources to realize local priorities

eLINK makes it possible to evaluate costs and benefits, track outcomes, and display data

Local government units that receive funding through BWSR programs submit data that measures outcomes through a relational database called "eLINK." That data includes project location, cost, funding source(s), and pollutant reduction, which can then be displayed graphically through GIS (samples pictured right).

Implementation programs are tracked through eLINK so that stakeholders can evaluate costs and benefits of conservation programs, track where the money is being spent, how much additional money is leveraged, and what is being accomplished as a result of conservation efforts on Minnesota's privately owned lands.

Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources

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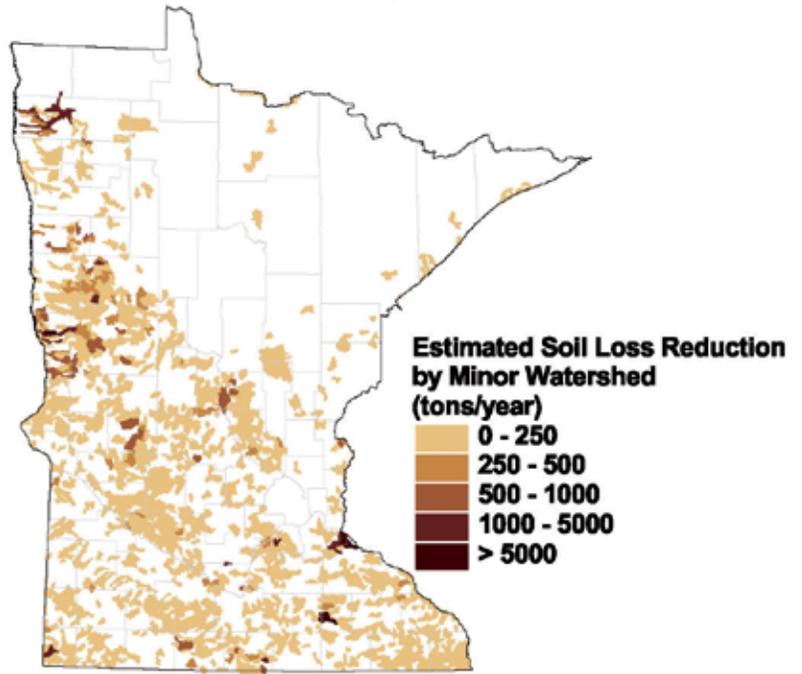
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Land and Water Treatment Practices Initiated 2004-2005 - Reported via eLINK

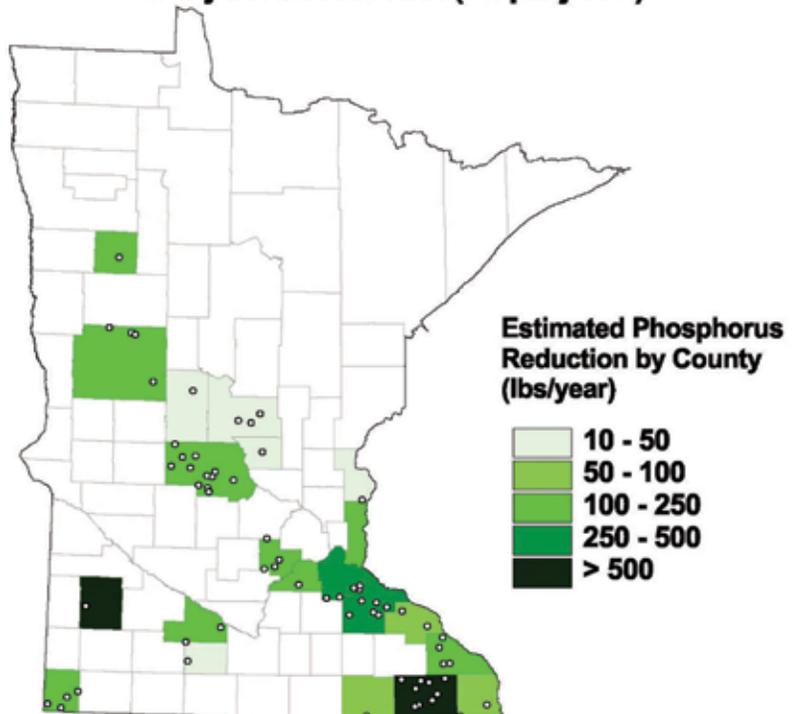


3,218 projects

- Soil Loss Reduction 136,000 tons/year
- Sediment Reduction 101,000 tons/year
- Phosphorus Reduction 199,000 lbs/year

Total Cost \$16 M: Land Occupier \$3.9 M, Local Government \$1.1 M, State Grant \$6 M, Federal Grant \$3.1 M, Federal Loan \$663,000

Feedlot Water Quality Management Grant Projects 2004-2005 (71 projects)



71 projects: 6,160 pounds / year phosphorous reduction