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# 2013 Performance Review and Assistance Program

Report to the Minnesota Legislature

February 2014

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**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 2007, BWSR's Performance Review and Assistance Program has been methodically assessing the performance of the units of government that constitute Minnesota's local delivery system for conservation of water and related land resources. The goal is to help these local government partners to be the best they can be in their management of these critical resources.

#### **PRAP focuses on four aspects of Local Governmental Unit (LGU) performance in the delivery of conservation services:**

- Administration—financial reporting and accountability
- Planning—keeping plans current and focused
- Execution—implementing planned objectives and tracking progress
- Communication and Coordination—working with partners and stakeholders.

BWSR's PRAP uses Levels I-IV of review to assess performance and report results, ranging from a statewide focus in Level I to an individual LGU focus in Levels II, III and IV.

#### **2013 Program Accomplishments**

- Increased the number of Level II reviews to 18 from an average of 8 (2008-2011). By March 2014 BWSR will have conducted 63 Level II performance reviews since 2008.
- Completed a pilot performance review of the LGUs operating in the Sauk River watershed to assess collaboration and plan implementation on a watershed basis. Started a second watershed-based review of the LGUs in the Zumbro River watershed.
- Awarded three PRAP Assistance Grants to LGUs to improve organizational effectiveness.

#### **2013 Level I Plan and Reporting Performance of 241 LGUs**

The tracking of plan status shows that nearly all LGUs keep their plans up-to-date. The low Level I compliance rates are largely because LGUs are not meeting report deadlines. If not for this tardiness in submitting reports, the overall Level I compliance rate would be 92%.

##### **Long-range Plan Status: number of overdue plans remains low.**

- Soil & Water Conservation Districts: all plans or resolutions are current.
- Counties: three metro county groundwater plan revisions are overdue.
- Watershed Districts: three plan revisions are overdue; all are in progress.
- Watershed Management Organizations: all plans are current.

##### **LGUs in Full Compliance with Level I Performance Standards: 68%.**

- Soil & Water Conservation Districts: 82% compliance (74/90).
- County Water Management: 62% compliance (54/87).
- Watershed Management Organizations: 61% compliance (11/18).
- Watershed Districts: 57% compliance (26/46).

#### **New PRAP Objectives for 2014**

- Meet the new target for Level II performance reviews of 24 per year.
- Include new One Watershed-One Plan accountability measures in PRAP performance standards.
- Highlight resource outcomes in the plan implementation section of Level II reports.
- Determine the implementation of PRAP recommendations from 2008-2013 Level II reviews.
- Work with other BWSR programs to improve on-time reporting by LGUs.

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# What is the Performance Review & Assistance Program?

## Supporting 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 they are implementing their long-range plans. The LGUs reviewed are soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), watershed districts (WDs), watershed management organizations (WMOs), and the water management function of counties—a total of 241 distinct organizations. PRAP, authorized in 2007 (see Appendix A), is coordinated by one BWSR central office staff member, with assistance from BWSR's 15 Board Conservationists and 3 regional managers, who routinely work with these LGUs across the state.

## Guiding Principles

PRAP operates on the following principles first adopted by the BWSR Board in 2007 and then amended in 2013.

- 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 the program's goal of providing reliable, practical information in a way that encourages LGUs to act to improve their delivery of conservation services. Of particular 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 the different types of LGUs.

## Multi-level Process

PRAP has three operational components:

- performance review
- assistance
- reporting.

The **performance review** component is applied at four levels (see pages 4-7).

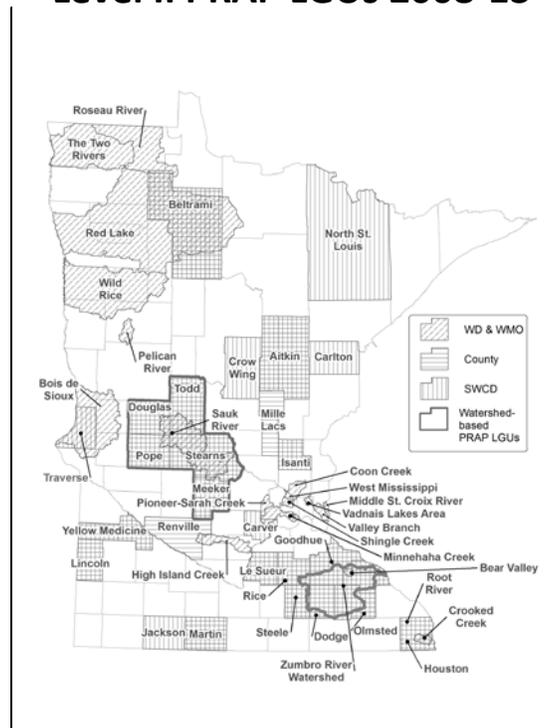
**Level I** is an annual tabulation of required plans and reports for all 241 LGUs with website posting of the results. Level I is conducted entirely by BWSR staff and does not require additional effort by LGUs.

**Level II** is a routine, interactive review to cover all LGUs at least once during each plan cycle to evaluate operational effectiveness and progress on plan implementation. The 2013 legislature amended the statute to reduce the review frequency from once every five to once every ten years. 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](http://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. Since 2008 BWSR has conducted Level III review and assistance for three LGUs at their request. BWSR regularly monitors all LGUs for additional opportunities.

**Level IV** is for those LGUs that have 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. So far there have not been any Level IV cases.

## Level II PRAP LGUs 2008-13



**Assistance** (page 8) varies with the needs of the LGU. BWSR provides practical and financial assistance to help LGUs make organizational improvements or address performance issues. Since 2012 BWSR has issued PRAP Assistance Grants to LGUs for specialized assistance, usually in the form of consultant services, identified by LGUs themselves or recommended by BWSR in a performance review. BWSR staff provide assistance in the form of training for LGUs at the annual BWSR Academy and at the LGU associations' own board member training sessions. BWSR staff routinely spend many hours consulting with LGUs to address specific needs or challenges. See page 8 for specific assistance activities in 2013.

**Reporting** (pages 9-10) makes information about LGU performance accessible to the LGUs' stakeholders and constituents. Reporting venues include the PRAP page on BWSR's website, this annual report, and the LGUs' own websites and annual activity reports. Several

LGUs have requested BWSR staff to report their performance review results to the local county board.

### **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 local government performance review and then reporting publically accessible results. The challenge in reporting results is to move from measuring effort (e.g., how much money was spent on buffers?) to detecting effects of those efforts on targeted resources (e.g., have buffers improved downstream habitat and water quality?). PRAP addresses LGUs' operational functions that contribute to successful resource outcomes, but those outcomes ultimately depend on the combination of several BWSR and LGU programs working in concert.

## Report on PRAP Performance

### 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 the 2013 PRAP legislative report with corresponding program activities during 2013.

<b>BWSR's PERFORMANCE REVIEW ACTIVITIES</b>	
<b>What We Proposed</b>	<b>What We Did</b>
Track Level I performance of all LGUs.	BWSR tracked the required plan and report status of 241 LGUs.
Incorporate a survey of LGU board and staff during the Level II review process to identify performance issues.	2013 Level II performance reviews included an on-line, anonymous survey of LGU board/staff and their partners.
Reduce the number of Level II performance reviews to continue watershed-based PRAP implementation and change the schedule to begin this review later in the calendar year.	Rather than reducing Level II reviews BWSR maintained the number at 7 and included 11 watershed-based performance reviews, which started in October instead of July.

<b>BWSR's ASSISTANCE to LGUs</b>	
<b>What We Proposed</b>	<b>What We Did</b>
Continue to promote PRAP Assistance Grants.	The November 2013 <i>BWSR Spotlights</i> publication featured PRAP Assistance Grants and the Root River SWCD's experience using their grant.
Continue monitoring of LGUs experiencing change for assistance opportunities.	BWSR managers monitored LGUs experiencing change in staffing and board membership, finances, organization, etc.
Notify PRAP LGUs of BWSR Academy training classes that address their expressed needs.	Notified 2013 Level II LGUs of BWSR Academy training sessions that addressed training-related assistance they requested.
Evaluate and assist LGU implementation of PRAP-recommended changes.	Assisted two LGUs with follow-up to actions recommended in their previous Level II reviews.

<b>BWSR's PRAP REPORTING</b>	
<b>What We Proposed</b>	<b>What We Did</b>
Report Level I performance of all LGUs.	BWSR website includes a searchable database of Level I performance standards for SWCDs, WDs, counties, and WMOs. Appendices B, C and D summarize the Level I results for 2013.
Redesign the PRAP webpage.	Webpage redesign will await a general redesign of the entire BWSR website.

## 2013 LGU Performance Review Results

### 2013 Objectives and Statute Changes

BWSR's 2013 objectives for the PRAP performance review component built on changes made in 2012 and were further modified by a 2013 legislative amendment to the PRAP authorizing statute. (See Appendix A.) That change requires less frequent Level II performance reviews for each LGU, from once in 5 years to once in 10, which corresponds well to the 10-year plan cycle of most LGUs. With past program capacity, BWSR was unable to meet the original statutory requirement for 45 LGU reviews per year. BWSR is phasing in a schedule to meet the new requirement, with 18 Level II reviews started in 2013 and 24 to be started in 2014. In addition, BWSR continued the Level I compliance tracking for all LGUs, conducted a Level III review of one LGU, and monitored the activities of LGUs undergoing significant change for opportunities to provide assistance.

### Level I Results

The Level I performance review monitors and tabulates the LGUs' long-range plan updates and their reporting of annual activity, ditch buffer strip, grants, and finances. General compliance with Level I performance standards is listed in the box below. Detailed results are listed in

#### LGUs Meeting All 2013 Level I Performance Standards

**All LGUs 68%**

SWCDs 82% (74/90)

Counties 62% (54/87)

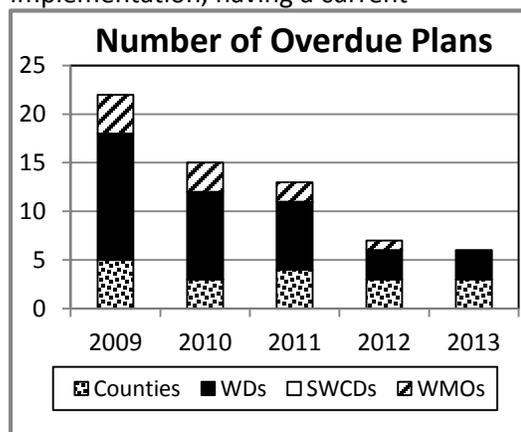
WMOs 61% (11/18)

WDs 57% (26/46)

Appendices B (long-range plans), C (eLink and annual activity reports), and D (annual financial reports) and are searchable through the BWSR website ([bwsr.state.mn.us/PRAP/index.html](http://bwsr.state.mn.us/PRAP/index.html)).

The following sections explain the performance results for each of the program areas tracked by the Level I review.

**Long-range plans.** The improvement in the number of overdue long-range plan revisions has stabilized. With PRAP's emphasis on evaluating plan implementation, having a current



plan is essential. The 3 metro county groundwater plans continue to await revision. At this time, having an out-of-date groundwater plan is not a liability to these counties' grant eligibility. Because the plans are optional and the issues are difficult to address at the county scale, these counties are apparently willing to delay plan updates pending further state guidance. For the three overdue WD plan revisions, the lack of a current management plan makes those districts ineligible for Clean Water Fund grants. All three districts are actively working on plan revisions.

**Annual activity reports.** The Level I review tracks both missing and late reports. LGU reports are an important means of providing citizens and BWSR with timely information about LGU activities and plans.

WDs in greater Minnesota continue to have difficulty complying with the annual activity

report requirement. There are currently no penalties associated with late or missing WD reports. For the 96 counties and WDs that serve as local drainage authorities 67% met the February 1 due date for their annual buffer strip reports, with 33% arriving late. Eleven counties and 14 SWCDs submitted late eLINK grant status reports. This tardiness in reporting accounts for most of the overall 68% Level I performance rating, which would be 92% if lateness were excluded as a performance criterion.

**Annual financial reports and audits.** Level I tracking of financial information includes both whether the report or audit was completed and whether it was submitted on time. All SWCDs submit annual financial reports to BWSR. In 2013 all SWCDs submitted these reports on time. Most LGUs are required to prepare annual audits of their financial records. Level I tracking showed that 89% of LGUs met this performance standard in 2013.

## Level II Results

The Level II performance review process examines an LGU's progress in implementing their plan's goals and objectives and their compliance with BWSR's operational performance standards. It also includes surveys of board members/staff and LGU partners to assess internal and external effectiveness and working relationships. BWSR uses two approaches in conducting Level II reviews.

### Standard Level II Performance Reviews

BWSR conducted standard Level II reviews of seven LGUs in 2013: **Yellow Medicine County** and **SWCD**, **Beltrami County** and **SWCD**, the **Minnehaha Creek** WD, the **Red Lake** WD, and the **Vadnais Lakes Area** WMO. For both the Yellow Medicine and Beltrami LGUs, BWSR conducted a joint review of the county and SWCD because both entities share the same local water plan. The WDs and the WMO received individual reviews and reports. Appendix E contains summaries of the

performance reports. Full reports are available from BWSR by request.

The reviews showed mixed results regarding the effectiveness of plan implementation, the primary issue that Level II PRAP assesses. The WDs and WMO are implementing their plans effectively. All three reported strong rates of accomplishment for their planned action items. The partner survey for each entity reinforced this assessment with 80-100 percent of the organizations' partners rating their quality of work as "good" or "strong."

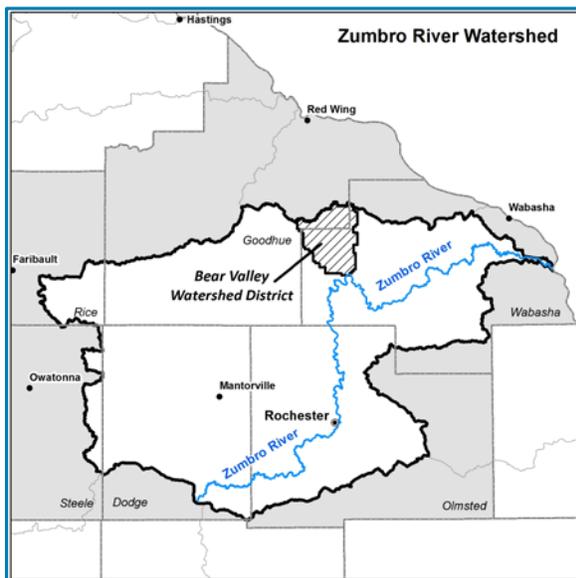
The Yellow Medicine County and SWCD have made good progress on most of their planned actions, except for those related to water runoff management. BWSR recommended better coordination with the WDs that have jurisdiction in the county and a focus on objectives by subwatershed in the next iteration of the county local water management plan to address this need.

The Beltrami LGUs' plan accomplishments were among the lowest seen so far in PRAP reviews, with a significant number of SWCD-type program activities (45%) having been dropped or put on hold. The plan was written in 2005. The review revealed that one factor affecting progress was the 2010 merger of the SWCD staff into the county's Environmental Services department, which reduced staff levels and the LGUs' capacity to address many of the objectives in the pre-merger plan. In the PRAP report, BWSR recommended that the LGU take steps to increase staff capacity and that the next version of the local water plan, due in 2015, be written in consideration of the LGU's projected future capacity.

### Watershed-based Level II Performance Reviews

In 2012 BWSR conducted a pilot project of a joint performance review process of the local water management entities with all or part of their jurisdiction in the same watershed. These are the county environmental services departments, the soil and water conservation districts, and the watershed districts that are routinely reviewed in PRAP. That pilot project, which focused on the Sauk River watershed in central Minnesota, had two purposes: 1) to test a methodology for assessing LGU collaboration in planning and program delivery on a watershed basis, and 2) to examine barriers to cross-jurisdictional collaboration and suggest remedies to remove barriers.

The pilot project showed that this watershed-based PRAP was a useful approach to accomplishing a Level II performance review. The process and methodology were adjusted, and then in 2013 BWSR applied them to the 13 LGUs in the Zumbro River watershed. These include the counties and SWCDs in **Steele, Rice, Dodge, Goodhue, Olmsted** and **Wabasha** counties and the **Bear Valley** WD. (See map.) In response to feedback from the 2012 pilot project participants, the review process was started later in the year to accommodate LGU program schedules. Consequently, the review was still underway when this report was



published.

This process, and in particular the associated performance standards, will be used for developing an evaluation method of LGU performance for BWSR's *One Watershed-One Plan* approach to comprehensive local water planning during the coming years. Based on limited experience with this type of joint review, the LGUs involved discover opportunities for additional collaboration and also use the joint meetings as a means to raise issues regarding coordination with their neighbors. Because this approach provides for efficient use of BWSR staff time (i.e., reducing it by half per LGU compared with the standard Level II process), BWSR will continue to conduct watershed-based Level II performance reviews.

Appendix F contains a summary of the 2012 Sauk River watershed joint report and the individual LGU report summaries from that review. Report summaries of the Zumbro River watershed review will be published on the BWSR website as they become available beginning in March.

### Level III Results

BWSR staff conducted a Level III review of the Sibley SWCD at the request of the district's board of supervisors. The review focused on overall performance in delivery of conservation programs, with particular emphasis on the conservation easement program. BWSR used staff interviews, a survey of supervisors and partners, review of district reports, and the board's completion of the MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's District Leadership Tool, which tracks compliance with a set of best organizational management practices.

The review revealed significant underperformance issues regarding delivery of conservation programs. BWSR

recommended several steps for the supervisors to implement, including a more rigorous tracking of work plan implementation by staff, and strategic planning by the supervisors to redefine and then communicate the district’s mission and values. The supervisors responded to the report by agreeing to develop their annual work plan based on the action items in the new county water plan and to consult with neighboring districts regarding easement program implementation and assistance with staff replacements. BWSR staff are continuing to work with the district to explore other organizational arrangements to improve district performance. The review report summary is in Appendix G.

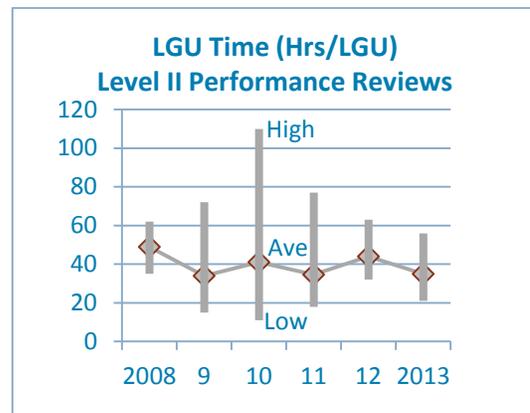
BWSR regional managers regularly monitor the performance of LGUs experiencing change in order to assess the need for Level III reviews. Also, LGUs can request these detailed performance assessments to determine the need for organizational improvements. So far the three Level III reviews conducted have all been requested by LGU boards.

**Level IV Results**

No Level IV actions were conducted in 2013. In part, the Levels I-III reviews are designed to avoid letting an LGU’s performance degrade to the point where a Level IV process is needed.

**PRAP Performance Review Time**

BWSR tracks the time spent by LGUs in a performance review as a substitute for actual program costs. Factors affecting an LGU’s time include the number of action items in their long-range plan, the number of staff persons who help with data collection, and the ready availability of performance data. In 2013 LGUs spent an average of 34 hours on their Level II review, much less than the 5-year average of 40 hours.



BWSR staff spent an average of 28 hours per LGU conducting Level II reviews in 2013, compared with 47 hours in 2012 and 2011. The watershed-based PRAP process resulted in a substantial reduction in the amount of BWSR field staff time spent per LGU reviewed.

# Assistance Services to Local Governments

## Types of Assistance

Part of helping LGUs to be the best they can be involves targeted assistance to address organizational development issues. PRAP has systematically expanded BWSR's capability to assist LGUs. In addition to PRAP, BWSR field staff provided LGUs, such as the Waseca SWCD, with many hours of assistance to support and enhance their operational effectiveness. The PRAP Coordinator provided assistance as described in the box below.

### **2013 PRAP Assistance to LGUs**

- *North St. Louis SWCD: BWSR conducted a survey of district partners to identify working relationships, quality of district performance, and partnership opportunities. BWSR staff presented survey findings and recommendations to the district supervisors and staff. In addition, a review of district finances is now underway using PRAP Assistance funds.*
- *Sauk River WD: BWSR regional and central office staff are assisting the board of managers to address manager and staff resignations and to develop better coordination of WD and county regulatory programs.*
- *Dodge SWCD: BWSR staff informed the district supervisors about options to address staff transitions that would be eligible for PRAP Assistance Grants.*

## PRAP Assistance Grants

In 2013 the BWSR Board reauthorized the delegated authority to the Executive Director to award grants or contracts for the purpose of assisting LGUs in making organizational improvements. Grants, which are 50-50 cost-shared with the LGU, were issued to the Chippewa SWCD, the Buffalo Red River WD,

and the Sauk River WD. The total amount awarded was \$8,000, compared to \$6300 awarded in 2012, the first year of this program. BWSR publicized the program in a November *BWSR Snapshots* article that described how the Root River SWCD, a 2012 Assistance Grant recipient, used their grant to reorganize after a key staff member's retirement. Another grant recipient significantly improved their financial management resulting in elimination of chronic financial reporting problems and the extra BWSR staff time needed to correct financial mistakes.

LGUs that undergo a formal BWSR performance review are automatically eligible for PRAP Assistance Grants to help with the implementation of organizational improvements recommended by BWSR in their Level II final report. The BWSR Executive Director regularly informs Board members of assistance grant status.

## Assessing and Meeting LGU Needs

During the Level II review process LGUs are asked to identify the types of assistance they think would improve their performance. In 2013 LGUs requested assistance with:

- flexibility in planning to meet program funding opportunities,
- focusing on subwatersheds in plans,
- developing strategic, short-term goals,
- county records modernization,
- better "big picture" communication,
- stabilizing funding,
- increasing staffing,
- board member training, and
- building partnerships.

The BWSR Training Coordinator matched these assistance requests with classes offered at the BWSR Training Academy and BWSR informed the LGU staff of those opportunities.

# 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 the Level I review process.

### BWSR Website

The BWSR website contains a webpage devoted to PRAP information. The site gives users access to a searchable database of basic Level I performance information that BWSR has collected for each LGU. The number of user visits to that database has fluctuated significantly since 2010, the year the database came on-line. With BWSR's recent

### No. of Website Hits to PRAP Level I Performance Database

(by calendar year)

**2010-** 1437

**2011-** 695

**2012-** 213

**2013-** 784

[www.bwsr.state.mn.us/PRAP/reporting/index.php](http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/PRAP/reporting/index.php)

modification of the eLINK system to include organizational compliance tracking, BWSR will be changing the format for website access to that information. 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 that is the subject of a Level II performance review. The LGU lead staff and board or task force members receive a draft of the report to which they are invited to submit comments or corrections. 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 Appendices E, F and G) and added to the PRAP webpage. Occasionally, LGUs will request BWSR to present performance review reports to the local county board. The Minnehaha Creek WD managers have asked BWSR staff to present the results of their 2013 performance review to both the Hennepin and Carver county boards.

### 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. This document is the seventh such report.

### Rewards and Recognition

The PRAP Guiding Principles require that the program also recognize 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 H.)

In addition, for those LGUs that undergo a Level II performance review, their report lists a "commendation" for compliance with each benchmark performance standard that demonstrates practices over and above basic requirements. All 2013 Level II LGUs received such commendations.



The President of the Association of Minnesota Counties, Beltrami County Commissioner Joe Vene (l.), and BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke (r.) present the *2013 AMC - BWSR County Conservation Award* to **Washington County** officials Jane Harper (Program Manager), Molly O'Rourke (County Administrator) and Kevin Corbid (Deputy Administrator) for the county's **Land and Water Legacy Program**.

# Program Conclusions and Future Direction

## Conclusions

- **Too many LGUs are missing deadlines for basic activity and financial reporting.** Level I reporting alone does not provide sufficient incentive to improve LGUs' timely reporting. Without financial incentives (e.g., grant ineligibility) this trend is likely to continue.
- **Level II analysis reveals that most LGUs are making good progress on the action items in their long-range plans.** In future planning, LGUs need to build in measureable outcomes that tie planned actions to resource improvements.
- **The PRAP LGU performance measures provide a starting point for developing accountability criteria for BWSR's grant programs and the One Watershed-One Plan initiative.** As BWSR develops criteria for both performance and resource outcomes, the PRAP process will incorporate those as indicators of LGU performance.
- **PRAP Assistance Grants incent LGUs to address operational improvements.** LGUs are open to improvements in their operational effectiveness, particularly when changes in personnel occur. The PRAP Assistance Grants provide an incentive for LGUs to adjust staffing and strategic direction between major plan updates.
- **The 40 hours that LGUs spend completing the Level II review process is reasonable, especially considering that this is now a once-in-10-year requirement.** BWSR will continue to test different methodologies to reduce this time requirement.

## Future Direction: PRAP in 2014

During 2014 BWSR will add some program elements, modify some, and continue others.

### NEW PRAP Elements

- Meet amended authorizing legislation target by conducting 24 Level II reviews in 2014.
- Highlight resource outcomes in the plan implementation section of Level II reports.
- Work with other BWSR program staff to improve the on-time reporting by LGUs.

### MODIFIED PRAP Elements

- Expand evaluation of LGU implementation of PRAP recommendations to evaluate program effectiveness.
- Modify watershed-based PRAP performance standards to incorporate accountability measures developed for the One Watershed-One Plan initiative.

### CONTINUED PRAP Elements

- Publicize the availability of PRAP Assistance Grants.
- Continue monitoring LGUs experiencing change for assistance opportunities.
- Monitor and report Level I performance of all 241 LGUs.
- Notify PRAP LGUs of BWSR Academy training classes that address their expressed needs.

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## 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

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level I: 2013 LGU Long-Range Plan Status</b> as of December 31, 2013</p>
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### **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 Revisions**

All local water management plans are current.

7 counties have received plan extensions from BWSR.

#### **Metro County Groundwater Plan Revision Overdue**

Carver

Ramsey

Scott

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

### **Watershed Districts**

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

Buffalo Creek

Crooked Creek

Thirty Lakes

#### **Metro Joint Powers Agreement Watershed Management Organizations** **Management Plan Revision Overdue**

All plans are current.

## Appendix C

### Level I: Status of Annual Reports for 2012 as of December 31, 2013

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

##### **eLINK Reports of Conservation Delivery and Cost Share Grants**

All reports submitted.

##### **Reports submitted late**

14 SWCDs submitted late reports.

**Website Content: Website reporting verification deferred due to eLINK upgrade.**

#### **Counties**

##### **Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Report**

All reports submitted. 25 counties (33%) submitted late reports.

##### **eLINK Reports of NRBG Grant Expenditures**

All reports submitted.

##### **Reports submitted late**

10 counties submitted late reports.

#### **Watershed Districts**

##### **Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Report: Reports submitted late**

All reports submitted. 7 watershed districts (33 %) submitted late reports.

##### **Annual Activity Reports Not Submitted**

Belle Creek	Cormorant Lakes	Sand Hill River
Buffalo-Red River	Joe River	Warroad
Coon Creek	Lower Minnesota River	

##### **Annual Activity Reports Submitted Late**

3 watershed districts submitted late reports.

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

##### **Annual Activity Reports**

All reports submitted.

##### **Annual Activity Reports Submitted Late**

2 JPA-WMOs submitted late reports.

## Appendix D

### Level I: Status of Financial Reports and Audits for 2012 as of December 31, 2013

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

##### **Annual Financial Reports (all 90 Districts)**

All reports submitted.

##### **Annual Audits (48 required)**

##### **Audits Not Received**

Aitkin

##### **Audits Submitted Late**

1 SWCD submitted a late audit report.

#### **Watershed Districts**

##### **Annual Audits Not Completed:**

Bear Valley

Cormorant Lakes

Rice Creek

Buffalo Creek

High Island Creek

Sand Hill River

Coon Creek

Joe River

Warroad

##### **Annual Audits Submitted Late:**

3 watershed districts submitted late audit reports.

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

##### **Annual Audits Not Submitted:**

Lower Rum River

Mississippi River

##### **Annual Audits Submitted Late:**

5 JPA-WMOs submitted late audit reports.

<p>PRAP Level II Report Summary</p>	<p>Yellow Medicine County Local Water Management Yellow Medicine Soil and Water Conservation District Joint Review</p>	
<p><b>What is a PRAP Performance Review?</b></p> <p>The Board of Water and Soil Resources supports Minnesota’s counties, watershed districts and soil and water conservation districts that deliver water and related land resource management projects and programs. In 2007 the Board set up the Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) to systematically review the performance of these local units of government to ensure their effective operation. Each year BWSR staff conduct routine reviews of several of these local conservation delivery entities. This document reports the results of one of those reviews.</p>	<p><b>Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Yellow Medicine county water planning and local water management function and the Yellow Medicine SWCD have fostered a strong working relationship that serves both agencies well.</li> <li>■ For the most part, their partners believe both entities are doing good work and are good to work with.</li> <li>■ Both entities have completed or made progress on nearly 75 percent of their planned action items. If there is any area that may need attention, however, it would be drainage and runoff volume management. This assessment revealed relatively less accomplishments for those objectives. A recommendation is offered for addressing this issue area in conjunction with the next comprehensive local water plan update.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Key recommendation</b> is that with the upcoming revision of the comprehensive local water plan, there will be an opportunity for Yellow Medicine County, which shares jurisdiction with watershed management organizations, to reorient its local water plan to the individual needs and priorities of the county’s watersheds.</li> <li>■ <b>Action Items</b> are identified for each entity</li> <li>■ Both entities received numerous <b>commendations</b> for meeting BWSR’s benchmark performance standards, which signify excellence in overall operational performance:                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County meets <b>8 of 12</b> county benchmark standards</li> <li>SWCD meets <b>11 of 15</b> SWCD benchmark standards.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<p>PRAP Level II Report Summary</p>	<p>Beltrami County Soil and Water Conservation District and County Environmental Services Department Joint Review</p>	
<p><b>What is a PRAP Performance Review?</b></p> <p>The Board of Water and Soil Resources supports Minnesota’s counties, watershed districts and soil and water conservation districts that deliver water and related land resource management projects and programs. In 2007 the Board set up the Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) to systematically review the performance of these local units of government to ensure their effective operation. Each year BWSR staff conduct routine reviews of several of these local conservation delivery entities. This document reports the results of one of those reviews.</p>	<p><b>Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ By some measures used in this assessment, the new cooperative agreement between the county and SWCD is resulting in effective conservation work in Beltrami County. However, other measures show low progress in addressing the work items related to three of the county’s priority water management concerns.</li> <li>■ BWSR agrees that one reasons is the reduction in staff capacity to do the work required. While the loss of FTEs is a factor, there is also the need to better prioritize and manage the work of the existing staff.</li> <li>■ The county water plan committee, which has not met for several years, needs to be reconvened to address the revision of the local water management plan as well as provide support for and accountability for on-going plan implementation.</li> <li>■ The SWCD, as host district for the Area 8 Technical Service Area staff needs to convene the joint powers board to address new funds availability issues.</li> <li>■ BWSR recommends that the ESD and SWCD modify their current annual work planning and reporting process to both tie work actually done to work planned as well as to document work that cannot be done because of inadequate staff capacity.</li> <li>■ Both entities are commended for meeting several of BWSR’s benchmark performance standards for high performing local water management agencies.</li> <li>■ Finally, both entities need to address three action items related to BWSR’s performance standards for county water management and SWCDs.</li> </ul>	

PRAP Level II Report Summary	Vadnais Lakes Area Watershed Management Organization
<p><b>What is a PRAP Performance Review?</b></p> <p>The Board of Water and Soil Resources supports Minnesota’s counties, watershed districts and soil and water conservation districts that deliver water and related land resource management projects and programs. In 2007 the Board set up the Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) to systematically review the performance of these local units of government to ensure their effective operation. Each year BWSR staff conduct routine reviews of several of these local conservation delivery entities. This document reports the results of one of those reviews.</p>	<p><b>Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The VLAWMO has set ambitious goals for local water management in a challenging urban environment that involves many players. Now more than halfway through their current planning cycle the organization is making good progress in implementing their projects and programs.</li> <li>■ They have demonstrated the ability to effectively collaborate with other local water management entities to get the work done.</li> <li>■ Partner organizations gave high marks to the VLAWMO’s efforts to work with them and to deliver high quality products and services. If anything, there is potential for VLAWMO to accomplish more by collaborating more.</li> <li>■ <b>Key Recommendation: Use short-term strategic planning to explore project and program expansion.</b> Consider how to strategically use partnerships to accomplish even more.</li> </ul> <p>The VLAWMO has two <b>action items</b>, basic performance standards practices, to address. They received numerous <b>commendations</b> for meeting eight of BWSR’s high performance benchmark standards.</p> 

PRAP Level II Report Summary	Red Lake Watershed District
<p><b>What is a PRAP Performance Review?</b></p> <p>The Board of Water and Soil Resources supports Minnesota’s counties, watershed districts and soil and water conservation districts that deliver water and related land resource management projects and programs. In 2007 the Board set up a program (PRAP) to systematically review the performance of these local units of government to ensure their effective operation. Each year BWSR staff conduct routine reviews of several of these local conservation delivery entities. This document reports the results of one of those reviews.</p>	<p><b>Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Red Lake Watershed District has three key elements that make for a very effective local water management organization: an active, engaged board of managers, highly professional staff and an effective administrator.</li> <li>■ The managers, while primarily concerned with water quantity management, nevertheless build habitat restoration elements into their projects</li> <li>■ Staff members efficiently and effectively assist the soil and water conservation districts providing both project development and technical services. These partnerships are exemplary in local water management and conservation work.</li> <li>■ The district administrator’s extensive experience in local watershed district work serves the organization well.</li> <li>■ As a result, the district has made excellent progress in pursuing and completing planned action items and displays good operational efficiency.</li> <li>■ Partner organizations, gave high marks to the RLWD as an organization that is both a pleasure to work with and that does good work.</li> </ul> <p>The Red Lake Watershed District received commendations for meeting 11 of BWSR’s 14 benchmark performance standards, and complies with all of the basic standards.</p> 

PRAP Level II Report Summary	Minnehaha Creek Watershed District
<p><b>What is a PRAP Performance Review?</b></p> <p>The Board of Water and Soil Resources supports Minnesota’s counties, watershed districts and soil and water conservation districts that deliver water and related land resource management projects and programs. In 2007 the Board set up the Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) to systematically review the performance of these local units of government to ensure their effective operation. Each year BWSR staff conduct routine reviews of several of these local water management entities. This document reports the results of one of those reviews.</p>	<p><b>Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations</b></p> <p>The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) is a highly functioning, high achieving, and proactive organization. Operating in a complex urban environment with high-profile water resources, they have set a high bar for themselves in their planning, programming, and project development. As this performance assessment reveals, they have an impressive record of accomplishments and have demonstrated the value of partnerships and collaboration. Their breadth of programming can serve as a model for other metro-area water management LGUs.</p>  <p>Operating as an umbrella organization covering all or parts of 29 municipalities and townships brings a particular set of challenges. Through concerted efforts, the MCWD has improved relationships with their partner LGUs over the years. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in relationships with some of the cities in the district.</p> <p>The district has seized opportunities to expand their operations. Because of their size, the district has the ability to quickly adapt to emerging issues, such as aquatic invasive species. They also show creativity and innovation.</p> <p>The district owes some of its success to a large staff of specialists in resource management, communications and support. However, the majority have only recently joined the organization. The staff retreats of recent years were good means to achieve and maintain staff cohesion that are essential for effective functioning. A few of the survey responses suggest that the need for such attention to staff integration is on-going. Potential benefits to the district include ensuring the MCWD culture is understood and shared, and reinforcing the recent gains made in external stakeholder relations.</p> <p>Two recommendations are offered to address district—city relationships and on-going staff development.</p> <p><b>Performance Standards</b></p> <p>The MCWD meets 12 of 14 <b>benchmark</b> performance standards, which indicates exemplary organizational competence. There are two <b>basic practices</b> standards for the district to address in the coming months.</p>

**PRAP Pilot Project  
Performance Review and  
Assistance Program  
Watershed-based PRAP  
Sauk River Watershed** *(Pope,  
Douglas, Todd, Meeker and  
Stearns Counties & SWCDs;  
Sauk River Watershed  
District)*

**Why BWSR did this review**

Starting in 2008 BWSR has conducted individual Level II performance reviews of 35 different LGUs. This pilot project is designed to test a methodology that will assess the extent to which LGUs that operate within the same watershed have a watershed focus and work together to address resource needs on a watershed basis. This is the first such pilot project.

BWSR selected the LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed because this is a well-defined major watershed covered by a watershed district. The LGUs are all recognized as strong performers in delivering their projects and programs. None of them have previously been the subject of a Level II performance review.

This document includes findings and recommendations to promote collaborative local water management among the LGUs in the Sauk River watershed.

**Sauk River Watershed – All LGUs  
Summary of Performance Review Results**



**What BWSR Found**

This review revealed many instances where local government units (LGUs) within the same jurisdictional boundary, a county and SWCD, exhibit strong working relationships and good collaboration. Because of these cases the review suggests a more positive picture of

collaboration than occurs across county boundaries. With the exception of the Sauk River Watershed District, county boundaries and the political implications of those boundaries are significant barriers to collaboration. In general, collaboration among LGUs on a watershed basis could be stronger. The majority of LGU board and staff members who responded to the PRAP survey indicated that more collaboration would be good for their organization and for the watershed’s resources. They suggested ideas for making such improvements.

This review identified three specific issues for LGU action: identifying strengths (feedlot management), communication and coordination, and lack of trust/competition for funds. Practical action steps are recommended to address each of these issues and an implementation schedule is proposed.

In addition, the report includes suggestions for a BWSR role in assisting LGUs in the implementation of the recommended actions. BWSR has assistance grants to support implementation.

The next steps in this process include meetings with each contributing LGU board to present recommendations specific to that LGU to improve their potential for collaboration with each other.

**PRAP Pilot Project  
Performance Review and  
Assistance Program  
Watershed-based PRAP  
Sauk River Watershed**

*(Pope, Douglas, Todd, Meeker  
and Stearns Counties &  
SWCDs; Sauk River Watershed  
District)*

**Why BWSR did this review**

Since 2008 BWSR has conducted individual Level II performance reviews of 35 different LGUs. This pilot project is designed to test a new methodology that will assess the extent to which LGUs that operate within the same watershed have a watershed focus and work together to address resource needs on a watershed basis. This is the first such pilot project.

BWSR selected the LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed because this is a well-defined major watershed covered by a watershed district. The LGUs are all recognized as strong performers in delivering their projects and programs. None of them have previously been the subject of a Level II performance review.

**Sauk River Watershed District  
Summary of Performance Review Results  
Watershed-based PRAP**



**What BWSR Found**

The Sauk River WD has an ambitious and comprehensive management plan which has guided their aggressive pursuit of improved water quality and better resource outcomes. They have a balanced approach to watershed

management that relies on both incentive programs and regulatory controls. They have provided opportunities for and sought partnerships with other LGUs operating within their area of jurisdiction. An example of collaboration is their water quality monitoring program on which several of the other LGUs now rely for data.

This review identified two specific issues for the managers and staff to address with respect to their working relationships with the other local governmental units in the watershed. The first is the perceived program overlap with Stearns County and the Stearns SWCD. The second is the need for a periodic review of the district’s coordination role among the other LGUs operating within the watershed. In both cases BWSR offers recommendations with specific process and methodology suggestions for how the district can address these issues. Some process elements used to address these issues would also be eligible for BWSR PRAP Assistance Grants.

With respect to the collaboration among all 10 LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed, this review found that, while there are some areas of success, there is also potential for improvement. Four issues and recommendations are addressed jointly to all the LGUs to work on that potential. For the Sauk River WD, because of their key position in the watershed addressing the two recommendations directed at them specifically would also accomplish some of these joint recommendations.

**PRAP Pilot Project Performance Review and Assistance Program Watershed-based PRAP Sauk River Watershed**

*(Pope, Douglas, Todd, Meeker and Stearns Counties & SWCDs; Sauk River Watershed District)*

**Why BWSR did this review**

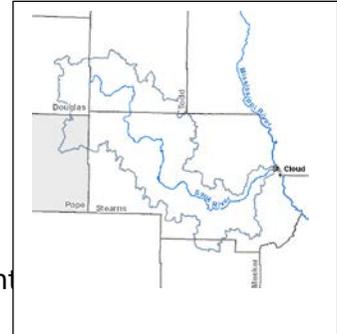
Since 2008 BWSR has conducted individual Level II performance reviews of 35 different LGUs. This pilot project is designed to test a new methodology that will assess the extent to which LGUs that operate within the same watershed have a watershed focus and work together to address resource needs on a watershed basis. This is the first such pilot project.

BWSR selected the LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed because this is a well-defined major watershed covered by a watershed district. The LGUs are all recognized as strong performers in delivering their projects and programs. None of them have previously been the subject of a Level II performance review.

**Pope County & Pope Soil and Water Conservation District Summary of Performance Review Results Watershed-based PRAP**

**What BWSR Found**

The Pope County portion of the Sauk River Watershed covers only 7 percent of the county in the northeast corner. This is a headwater area to two Sauk River tributaries. Two Pope County LGUs, the county Land and Resource Management Department (LRM) and the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), provide local resource management services throughout the county using the same comprehensive local water management plan. Both LGUs have partnered with the Sauk River Watershed District on a few programs. The Pope LGUs have not found opportunities to collaborate on program delivery with neighboring counties that share portions of the Sauk River watershed.



Regarding organizational development, the Pope SWCD has taken some positive steps toward enhanced organizational effectiveness in the past few years. Since July, however, both LGUs have faced a significant organizational challenge. The loss of key staff people in the county Land and Resource Management Department has resulted in a systematic reexamination of services by the county and, potentially, a greater role for the SWCD in program areas previously conducted by county staff.

Regarding organizational development, the Pope SWCD has taken some positive steps toward enhanced organizational effectiveness in the past few years. Since July, however, both LGUs have faced a significant organizational challenge. The loss of key staff people in the county Land and Resource Management Department has resulted in a systematic reexamination of services by the county and, potentially, a greater role for the SWCD in program areas previously conducted by county staff.

This review identified two specific issues and associated recommendations for action by these LGUs. The first deals with the need to complete the on-going planning of organizational and service delivery realignment. The second addresses the local water management plan revision that is currently underway and the need to expand the role of the local water plan task force.

With respect to the collaboration among all 10 LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed, this review found that, while there are some areas of success, there is also potential for improvement. Four issues and recommendations are presented to address that potential. However in the case of Pope County LGUs, any discussion of collaboration with the other contributing LGUs in the Sauk River watershed should be postponed until the reorganization process is completed.

**PRAP Pilot Project  
Performance Review and  
Assistance Program  
Watershed-based PRAP  
Sauk River Watershed**

*(Pope, Douglas, Todd, Meeker  
and Stearns Counties &  
SWCDs; Sauk River Watershed  
District)*

**Why BWSR did this review**

Since 2008 BWSR has conducted individual Level II performance reviews of 35 different LGUs. This pilot project is designed to test a new methodology that will assess the extent to which LGUs that operate within the same watershed have a watershed focus and work together to address resource needs on a watershed basis. This is the first such pilot project.

BWSR selected the LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed because this is a well-defined major watershed covered by a watershed district. The LGUs are all recognized as strong performers in delivering their projects and programs. None of them have previously been the subject of a Level II performance review.

**Douglas County & Douglas Soil and Water  
Conservation District  
Summary of Performance Review Results  
Watershed-based PRAP**

**What BWSR Found**

Only 8.9 percent of the Sauk River watershed is in Douglas County. That 90 square-mile area, located in the southeastern portion of the county, covers only 14 percent of the county. It is a headwaters area which includes streams that are tributary to Lake



Osakis, including a portion of the lake itself, the source of the Sauk River. Two Douglas County LGUs, the county Land and Resource Management Department (LRM) and the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), provide local resource management services throughout the county using the same comprehensive local water management plan. Both LGUs have worked well with each other on local conservation program delivery. They are making good progress in implementation of the local water management plan action items. There has been some partnering with the Sauk River Watershed District as well.

This review identified two specific issues and associated recommendations for action by these LGUs to enhance collaboration on a watershed basis. The first deals with the need to follow through with the Crooked Lake restoration project. The second encourages the LGUs to consider expanding the role of the local water plan committee with additional meetings per year.

With respect to the collaboration among all 10 LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed, this review found that, while there are some areas of success, there is also potential for improvement. Four issues and recommendations are presented to address that potential. For the Douglas LRM and SWCD, following the recommendations in this report will enhance collaboration with contributing LGUs and will facilitate implementation of planned objectives.

**PRAP Pilot Project Performance Review and Assistance Program Watershed-based PRAP Sauk River Watershed**

*(Pope, Douglas, Todd, Meeker and Stearns Counties & SWCDs; Sauk River Watershed District)*

**Why BWSR did this review**

Since 2008 BWSR has conducted individual Level II performance reviews of 35 different LGUs. This pilot project is designed to test a new methodology that will assess the extent to which LGUs that operate within the same watershed have a watershed focus and work together to address resource needs on a watershed basis. This is the first such pilot project.

BWSR selected the LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed because this is a well-defined major watershed covered by a watershed district. The LGUs are all recognized as strong performers in delivering their projects and programs. None of them have previously been the subject of a Level II performance review.

**Meeker County & Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District Summary of Performance Review Results Watershed-based PRAP**

**What BWSR Found**

With only a small portion of the county (15 square miles) within the Sauk River watershed, it may be easy to overlook the role of Meeker County LGUs in the management of the watershed’s resources. However, while the contributions of Meeker County to resource conditions in the watershed may be relatively small, one tenet of watershed management is that all areas will have some type of an effect downstream and the resource managers must ensure their area’s contribution is a positive one. The county maintains its involvement in Sauk River watershed management by its representation on the Sauk River Watershed District board with a county-appointed manager and by having a watershed context for the county’s comprehensive local water plan.



The Meeker Comprehensive Local Water Plan is the most conducive to providing a watershed context for county and SWCD administered programs when compared to the other four counties’ plans. This is shown in both the identification of priority concerns by watershed and the inclusion of a watershed applicability label for each of the plan’s action items. Even though the plan shows little distinction of action items by watershed, for this PRAP analysis the staff were able to select 14 of 43 action items as applying specifically or generally to the Sauk River watershed portion of the county. This suggests that there could be a more deliberate allocation of action items by watershed in the next plan update. A recommendation is offered to that end.

The county may benefit in some aspects of plan implementation by expanding the role of the water plan committee. In general, a well-informed and active water plan committee can serve as an arm of local government in helping to educate residents about local water management issues and can also be a conduit of public opinion that provides program staff with useful feedback. BWSR recommends that the county consider expanding the committee’s role.

**PRAP Pilot Project  
Performance Review and  
Assistance Program  
Watershed-based PRAP  
Sauk River Watershed**

*(Pope, Douglas, Todd, Meeker  
and Stearns Counties &  
SWCDs; Sauk River Watershed  
District)*

**Why BWSR did this review**

Since 2008 BWSR has conducted individual Level II performance reviews of 35 different LGUs. This pilot project is designed to test a new methodology that will assess the extent to which LGUs that operate within the same watershed have a watershed focus and work together to address resource needs on a watershed basis. This is the first such pilot project.

BWSR selected the LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed because this is a well-defined major watershed covered by a watershed district. The LGUs are all recognized as strong performers in delivering their projects and programs. None of them have previously been the subject of a Level II performance review.

**Todd County Soil, Water, Conservation and  
Development  
Summary of Performance Review Results  
Watershed-based PRAP**

**What BWSR Found**

Approximately 22 percent of the Sauk River watershed is in Todd County. That 215 square-mile area covers about one-fifth of the county in the south-western corner. It includes several of the large recreational lakes in the

watershed and the upper reach of the Sauk River mainstem. The recent merger and coordination of the county planning and zoning and soil and water conservation district functions has the potential to balance regulatory and incentive approaches to produce effective water and land conservation. Technical staff from the SWCD bring long-term experience of working with landowners and conservation programs. The county staff have an effective working relationship with the Sauk River Watershed District.



While staff longevity has been a strength of the district in the past, the turnover of some district staff in recent years, combined with the potential for additional turnover in the near future and the recent merger, requires on-going assessment of strategic direction, especially for the soil and water conservation district functions.

Todd County is making reasonably good progress on implementing the action items in the county local water management plan. A strength of the plan is the identification of a lead role for the local water plan task force for several of the action items. However, the current practice of having the task force meet only once per year, except when plan updates or revisions are due, does not serve this active role.

With respect to the collaboration among all 10 LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed, this review found that, while there are some areas of success, there is also potential for improvement. Three recommendations are offered to address these issues. For the Todd County soil, water, and conservation functions, BWSR recommends a strategic assessment of mission and vision and development of a work plan for the local water plan task force to enhance their contribution to plan implementation.

**PRAP Pilot Project Performance Review and Assistance Program Watershed-based PRAP Sauk River Watershed**

*(Pope, Douglas, Todd, Meeker and Stearns Counties & SWCDs; Sauk River Watershed District)*

**Why BWSR did this review**

Since 2008 BWSR has conducted individual Level II performance reviews of 35 different LGUs. This pilot project is designed to test a new methodology that will assess the extent to which LGUs that operate within the same watershed have a watershed focus and work together to address resource needs on a watershed basis. This is the first such pilot project.

BWSR selected the LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed because this is a well-defined major watershed covered by a watershed district. The LGUs are all recognized as strong performers in delivering their projects and programs. None of them have previously been the subject of a Level II performance review.

**Stearns Soil & Water Conservation District Summary of Performance Review Results Watershed-based PRAP**

**What BWSR Found**

The Stearns SWCD serves as an effective provider of conservation programs and practices through well-managed technical and financial assistance. They have made good progress in implementing all their assigned action items in the county's

local water management plan. They continue to maintain a productive working relationship with and receive the support of the Stearns County board.

There is a need, however, to address the SWCD's working relationship and program delivery with the Sauk River Watershed District. Some areas of program overlap with the watershed district are not well coordinated and need to be addressed. The SWCD role in this issue may be partially addressed by undertaking a strategic reassessment of the organization's purpose and focus for program delivery in the Sauk River watershed portion of the county.

BWSR recommends, first, an internal process of strategic reassessment of program options and then engagement with the Sauk River Watershed District through one or more facilitated discussions to improve collaboration and communication. If requested, BWSR can assist with process design and financial support.



**PRAP Pilot Project Performance Review and Assistance Program Watershed-based PRAP Sauk River Watershed**

*(Pope, Douglas, Todd, Meeker and Stearns Counties & SWCDs; Sauk River Watershed District)*

**Why BWSR did this review**

Since 2008 BWSR has conducted individual Level II performance reviews of 35 different LGUs. This pilot project is designed to test a new methodology that will assess the extent to which LGUs that operate within the same watershed have a watershed focus and work together to address resource needs on a watershed basis. This is the first such pilot project.

BWSR selected the LGUs working in the Sauk River watershed because this is a well-defined major watershed covered by a watershed district. The LGUs are all recognized as strong performers in delivering their projects and programs. None of them have previously been the subject of a Level II performance review.

**Stearns County Environmental Services Summary of Performance Review Results Watershed-based PRAP**

**What BWSR Found**

The Stearns County Environmental Services Department (ESD) has provided effective leadership in the implementation of an ambitious local water management plan. They have completed an impressive number of action items dealing with regulatory controls and water management programs to address specific resource management priorities. They continue to make good progress on the remainder of their planned actions for which they have lead agency responsibility. The ESD has maintained productive working relationships in delivering local water and related land resource conservation programs and projects with both the Stearns SWCD and with the Sauk River Watershed District.



From BWSR’s perspective the Stearns ESD has apparently experienced a loss of support from the county board. While the commissioners have shown active interest in local water management, their actions to dissolve the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC) indicate a changing vision for local water management in the county. The county ESD staff had provided effective leadership for the WRAC and many of the county LGUs and other civic groups had relied heavily on that group for efficient communication and coordination of local water management efforts.

BWSR recommends that, after the local water plan revision is complete, the county board undertake a strategic look at the future mission, vision, priorities and structure for effective local water management in the county. This effort should include an examination of the effectiveness of the current use of the Planning Commission for local water management coordination. Financial help for this effort may be available through BWSR’s PRAP Assistance Grant program.

**PRAP**

Performance Review and Assistance Program  
**2013 Level III Review:**  
**Sibley SWCD** (*Sibley County*)

**Why BWSR did this review**

BWSR conducts Level III performance reviews to help local government water management entities address specific operational needs. In this case the chair on behalf of the Sibley SWCD Board of Supervisors approached BWSR program staff with a request for assistance.

BWSR staff prepared a draft work plan for a Level III review which was presented to and approved by the Board of Supervisors.

This document includes findings and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the district. The Board of Supervisors is responsible for taking any actions they deem necessary in response to the findings and recommendations in this

**Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District  
 Summary of Performance Review Results**

**What BWSR Found**

The Sibley SWCD needs to address its underperformance in the delivery of conservation services. The findings from this performance review suggest some possible reasons for that underperformance. The supervisors must set upon a course of action to address it. Fortunately, there are some good tools already available to the district and some current district practices to build upon.

**Recommendations**

1. Use the new Comprehensive Local Water Plan to write the Annual Work Plan.
2. Monitor staff program and project delivery.
3. Figure out what the Sibley SWCD *really* cares about.
4. Use the products of Recommendation 3 to tell others who you are and what you want to accomplish.

## Appendix H

### 2013 Local Government Performance Awards and Recognition

(Awarding agency listed in parentheses.)

#### Outstanding WD Employee

(Board of Water and Soil Resources)

**Cliff Aichinger, Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District**

#### Watershed District of the Year

(Department of Natural Resources)

**Minnehaha Creek Watershed District**

#### Program of the Year

(Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts)

**Capitol Region WD, Neighborhood Stabilization Program**

#### Project of the Year

(Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts)

**Heron Lake WD, Grassroots Effort to Bring Back Fulda Lakes**

#### County Conservation Award

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

**Washington County Land and Water Legacy Program**

#### Outstanding SWCD Employee

(Board of Water and Soil Resources)

**Jerad Bach, Blue Earth SWCD**

#### Outstanding Supervisor Award

(Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts)

**Steve Sunderland, Chippewa SWCD**

#### SWCD of the Year

(Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts)

**Yellow Medicine SWCD**

#### Appreciation Award

(Department of Natural Resources)

**East Otter Tail SWCD**