



2015 BWSR Legislative Summary

July 2015 Snapshots

While the Minnesota Legislature officially adjourned on May 18, 2015, incomplete and vetoed bills required a special session to complete work. The Special Session addressed these items. Governor Dayton signed the Special Session bills into law on June 13, 2015. BWSR session highlights include:

General Fund

Current bill language contains continuation of general funding at current levels, a 1.8% increase to administrative operations to help cover inflation-based administrative costs, one-time support to help with known retirements and their associated costs, and an increase to Wetland Conservation Act operations.

Clean Water Fund

The Omnibus Legacy Bill appropriates to BWSR \$113.163M from the Clean Water Fund (CWF) for the biennium. BWSR's Clean Water Fund work will be targeted to critical source areas using the best available scientific assessments, including MPCA's Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS). Additional CWF policies include increased compliance and eligibility requirements, modifications to the Clean Water Council membership, and the Soil Health and One Watershed, One Plan policies.

Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund (ENRTF)

BWSR has three programs that will receive funding from the ENRTF (2015 Session Law, Regular Session, Chapter 76) as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) – Farm Bill Assistance, Cover Crops and Soil Health Initiative, and Watershed Scale Conservation on North Central Lakes.

Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF)

BWSR has three programs that will receive funding from the OHF also in the Omnibus Legacy bill, as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. These are Minnesota Buffers for Wildlife and Water Quality, Wild Rice Shoreland Protection, and the Camp Ripley Partnership. Additional policies for OHF include: a requirement to provide GIS files to the Council for certain lands acquired in fee, increased compliance and eligibility requirements, making progress towards greater disability access to programs and publications, and encouragement to promote monarch butterfly habitat.

Governor's Buffer Initiative

Governor Dayton's buffer initiative resulted in new laws that require perennial vegetation strips of at least 30 feet in width and averaging 50 feet along public waters, and a minimum of 16.5 feet or alternative practices on public drainage systems. Soil and Water Conservation Districts are charged with local implementation and assistance. The law also provides local and state authority for \$500 Administrative Penalty Orders for compliance with the requirements as well as modifies the state Soil Erosion statutes for statewide applicability. Funding for this initiative can be found in the Clean Water Fund portion of the Legacy Bill.

Disaster Recovery

In addition to the almost \$2.5 million passed in January for flood relief, \$15.3 million in flood relief was passed during the Special Session for easements and installation of conservation practices in flood-damaged areas.

Policy Initiatives

BWSR staff pursued three primary policy initiatives during this session and all advanced successfully. Those initiatives were:

- One Watershed, One Plan and Soil Health
- Wetland Conservation Act changes
- Conservation Stewardship Investment Account

As with every year, there were discussions and actions on a variety of other budget and policy issues. For more detailed information about the highlights listed above, as well as other policy and funding provisions and topics of discussion that affected BWSR, please see the full legislative summary at http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/news/announcements/BWSR_Legislative_Summary_June_2015.pdf.