



# Preliminary Estimates Show Promising Progress on Buffer Law

April 2017 Snapshot



At a March 16 press conference at the State Capitol, Governor Mark Dayton announced that the majority of Minnesota's counties are already 60–100 percent compliant with the state's bipartisan water quality buffer initiative. The preliminary analysis from the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) came as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced the state's water quality buffer protection map is now complete.

In his 2017 budget proposal, Governor Dayton has proposed a slate of additional financial assistance to help farmers and landowners across Minnesota fully participate in the water quality buffer initiative. The Governor's Tax Bill includes \$6.7 million in financial assistance for farmers for installing water quality buffers, alleviating the cost of buffer installation by providing eligible landowners \$40 per acre each year for each tillable acre converted to a water quality buffer strip. It also includes \$10 million in ongoing aid to support local government administration and enforcement of buffer requirements. This will ensure trusted experts in the community work with landowners to achieve compliance with this important law. These financial resources would supplement existing financial resources already available to Minnesota farmers and landowners for water quality conservation efforts on their land.

Dayton, joined at the press conference by Cottonwood Soil and Water Conservation District's (SWCD) Becky Alexander, praised the work of soil and water conservation districts in implementing the law. BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke also spoke at the press conference.

"SWCDs around the state have been working closely with landowners to help them understand the law and get practices on the ground and the results of that work are very encouraging," said BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke. "Our local government partners have the relationships with landowners and the knowledge of the landscape to get the job done."



*Top: Governor Dayton talks about the progress made in implementing the buffer law.*

*Bottom: Cottonwood SWCD's Becky Alexander talks about the role of SWCDs.*

The press conference also touched on alternative practices available for land where buffers might not be the best option to achieve the law's results. Common examples of alternative practices are available on BWSR's website: [www.bwsr.state.mn.us/buffers](http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/buffers). The story of a Mower County landowner who has successfully implemented buffers was shared.

For the last three decades, the Gebhardt family has implemented conservation field practices on a 150-acre parcel of their farm operations. Jim Gebhardt worked with the Mower SWCD to determine whether these practices benefit water quality more than what would be provided by a 50-foot buffer required under the water quality buffer law. The district confirmed that the combination of practices meets – and goes beyond – the water quality benefits required to satisfy the buffer law.

“We were losing tons of soil every year on that land before we put in the basins and grass waterways,” said Jim Gebhardt. “It’s great to have those projects recognized for their water-quality benefits, but alternative practices to buffers won’t work for everyone. You need to have the right slope of ground to make it work.”

While there is still work to be done, the preliminary estimates are encouraging. BWSR will continue to work with local governments as implementation continues. Stay tuned.