

BWSR tailors technical training to fit certification needs



Willie Peters of Scott Soil & Water Conservation District worked with the Area 4 Technical Training Team during a grassed waterway training last September in Scott County. Participants included SWCD and Natural Resources Conservation Service staff. **Photo Credit:** Andy Porupsky, Scott SWCD

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is tailoring its Technical Training and Certification Program (TTCP) to fit the needs of conservation workers throughout the state, based on data



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focusing on real, documented training needs to achieve and maintain technical skills and credentials.

The process allows BWSR and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to deliver relevant, region-specific training to Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) and NRCS staff.

The Tech Training IDP includes a framework for SWCD and NRCS field offices to collaborate and prioritize resource concerns, conservation practices

and credentialing needs within an entire county or work area. Staff can identify gaps in technical skills, and prioritize individuals' training based on the partnership capability.

"We're getting real data about what SWCD and NRCS employees' goals are for credentialing, and what training they need to get there," said Megan Lennon, BWSR technical training and certification coordinator. "What are the specific training needs that we need to meet in order to have the skill sets to put conservation practices on the ground?"

The resulting training will focus on critical needs and eliminate wish-list items. Pinpointing training needs starts with identifying priority resource concerns — such as soil erosion or water quality degradation — and then focusing on the conservation practices used to address them. Job Approval Authority (JAA), the ability to sign off on a completed conservation practice, is the most common form of credentialing.

The effort supports the training partnership among BWSR, the NRCS and SWCDs. Financial support comes from the Clean Water Fund and a

NRCS contribution.

Basic technical skills training designed for new employees might focus on surveying, hydrology, construction inspection, plant identification and soil health. Advanced training might include electronic surveying, integrated pest management or advanced soil mechanics.

"We're trying to tailor the trainings that we deliver to specific needs. We know those are going to change demographically, and we know they're going to change over time," Lennon said. "The benefit of the Individual Development Plan is it will be able to capture training needs over space and time."

BWSR recently expanded the cadre of technical trainers in the Minnesota Conservation Partnership by hiring two regional training engineers and two regional training conservationists. With NRCS backgrounds, all four are well-versed in that agency's technical specifications and the JAA credential system.

Training offerings will be posted on the TTCP home page's Technical Training Calendar.