



Planting the Seeds: Establishing a state buffers program

August 2016 Snapshots

In June of 2015, Governor Dayton signed into law a new buffer initiative aimed at enhancing protection of Minnesota's waters. The law was further clarified in 2016, and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is currently in the middle of a deliberate and transparent process to develop program policies and supporting guidance for its statewide implementation.

The law designates an estimated 110,000 acres of land for water quality buffer strips statewide on which new perennial vegetation buffers of up to 50 feet along rivers, streams, and ditches will be established to help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment. It also provides flexibility and financial support for landowners to install and maintain buffers, and boost compliance with buffer laws across Minnesota.

In March, BWSR staff began gathering insight from stakeholders and the public on program development. Comments received during this process were posted on the BWSR website, and were used to help inform program development. BWSR has also been working closely with our local government partners throughout the process, as they are tasked with implementing the law.

Seven draft policies were posted on the website in late June so that stakeholders and the public would have another opportunity to review pieces of the program's development and provide comments about the process. These policies will lay the foundation for the development and delivery of a host of supporting guidance which local partners and the public can use to make progress towards compliance with the law.



Buffer and Soil Loss Program Coordinator Tom Gile talks buffer implementation with local government staff in Detroit Lakes earlier this summer.

Feedback will be incorporated and it's anticipated that the BWSR Board will adopt a series of policy documents at its August meeting which will ultimately guide the remainder of program development and guidance. The process is moving swiftly in an effort to get the information completed and in the hands of those who are implementing the law as soon as possible.

With the release of the DNR Buffer Map in early July, Soil and Water Conservation Districts are meeting with landowners around the state to help them understand what their responsibilities are in terms of implementation. BWSR continues to develop tools and guidance for our partners to help facilitate this process.

“In my travels around the state participating in workshops and Q&A sessions with our local government partners, it’s clear that everyone is working as hard as they can to make sure the implementation process works for landowners as smoothly as possible,” Buffer and Soil Loss Program Coordinator Tom Gile said. “People are ready to get started.”

BWSR’s ultimate goal is a well-established program that makes a difference for Minnesota’s water quality. Many landowners are not waiting for the compliance deadlines – November 1, 2017 for public waters and November 1, 2018 for public drainage ditches – to begin implementing buffers on their land. Contact your local SWCD for more information about how the buffer law applies to you and your property. For more information on the new buffer law, please visit: www.bwsr.state.mn.us/buffers/. The DNR map and more information about their process can be found at <http://dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index.html>.