



When Natural Disasters Strike

September 2014 Snapshots

Natural disasters happen, and here in Minnesota where heavy rainfalls in early summer caused flooding throughout the state, we are all too aware of the devastation that can be left in their wake. Over the last 15 years, Minnesota had 12 emergency events rise to the level of federal disaster declaration. These events require a tremendous amount of coordination on the part of federal, state, and local agencies. They demand immediate staff time and priority – often resulting in recovery inefficiencies and stressing both the human and financial resources of local and state governments. Unfortunately, disasters are virtually impossible to predict, so government response must be both effective and nimble.

In order to meet both those requirements, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) created a standard operating procedure to provide structure for both our staff and local government partners in disaster response to optimize efficiencies, responsiveness, and the impact of legislative appropriations. The Disaster Recovery Assistance Program (DRAP) is that structure. Its purpose is to provide designated emergency appropriations to our local government partners for conservation projects in the disaster area that protect our soil and water resources. In the event of a disaster, program policy and guidance provides our staff and our local government partners with the information needed to navigate the disaster response procedures not just of BWSR, but other state and federal agencies.



This program provides designated appropriated funds to our local government partners for erosion and sediment control, water quality and watershed protection projects and RIM easements in disaster areas. It provides clear expectations for how funds received from BWSR can be used for disaster response.



Authorized by state statute and activated by resolution of our board or by authority delegated to our Executive Director, the program addresses critical conservation problems resulting from a natural disaster. In previous disasters, we would authorize specific policies and operating procedures after each disaster occurs. Because we can immediately activate the disaster program in the event of a natural disaster or extreme environmental impact, we save critical response time both for our staff and our local government partners. The program's step-by-step guidance and standardized reporting for all phases of disaster response – from the time the event occurs through recovery – will make response efforts more efficient and effective for everyone involved.

Minnesota City, 2007. After waters receded, BWSR stepped in with emergency funding for damage sustained during the flooding.

While the new program hasn't been activated yet, it stands at the ready. In disaster response, every minute matters. Increasing efficiencies means that staff can spend less time mired in process and more time helping recovery. That's good news for everyone.