

Regional wetland trainings offer hands-on learning



Left: A group approaches a wetland boundary during a wetland delineation training exercise in June 2018 in Arden Hills.

Below: A trainer describes a soil profile to a group of participants during a wetland delineation training exercise in June 2018 in Arden Hills.

Photo Credits:
BWSR staff



A new wetland training program developed by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) offers a localized approach to conservation professionals who administer the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA).

Initiated last year, the regional wetland training program establishes a core curriculum covering fundamental day-to-day responsibilities for efficiently implementing the WCA.

Passed by the state Legislature in 1991, the WCA was established to protect Minnesota's wetlands by ensuring no net loss of the state's natural wetlands. For example, if a project proposes to drain or fill a wetland, attempts must be made to avoid impacting the wetland. If impacting the wetland cannot be avoided, the WCA stipulates that the





The state Legislature passed the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) in 1991 to protect wetlands in Minnesota such as this prairie wetland in Kittson County. Through mitigation, the WCA strives to achieve no net loss of the state's natural wetlands. Attempts must be made to avoid or mitigate project impacts on wetlands.

impact must be minimized. If the impact is large enough or the project doesn't qualify for an exemption, the wetland must be replaced with one of equal public value.

Beyond the core curriculum, the program offers trainings tailored to specific regions' unique topographic and water features. Trainees can earn Wetland Delineator Certification Program continuing education credits.

At least one training is offered annually in both the northern and southern regions of Minnesota. Training sites will rotate each year to make them more accessible to participants throughout the state.

"While the content of these trainings is centered on the WCA core curriculum, the regional approach also provides an opportunity to address local topics such as common scenarios and rule or policy updates that may affect WCA implementation in a particular area," said BWSR wetland specialist David Demmer.

The first two regional trainings took place last year in Thief River Falls and Mankato. The training in Thief River Falls focused on ditch maintenance,

agricultural wetland banks and WCA enforcement procedures. It closed with a wetland boundary review field exercise. The Mankato training focused on common exemptions in southern Minnesota, provided an overview of the wetland bank establishment process, and offered information on the permitting process for solar farms. The two trainings drew a total of nearly 100 participants.

"The Mankato training filled to capacity, which reaffirmed the demand for this type of applicable training," Demmer said.

Trainings in 2019 will offer an expanded, two-day format. Demmer said that allows trainers to follow classroom learning with hands-on training. The first day focuses on WCA administration, and the second day is filled with exercises in the field.

The first training in 2019 — focusing on the southern region of the state — was scheduled for May 21-22 at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge in Zimmerman. The first day's agenda was to focus on ditch maintenance and drainage law and include presentations from local partners on well monitoring in the Anoka Sand Plain, and the role of local

governments in administering the WCA. The second day of the training was to provide a deeper dive into wetland science with a soil texturing exercise, completing delineation data sheets and reviewing wetland boundaries.

This year's northern region training is scheduled for Sept. 30 through Oct. 1 at the Cloquet Forestry Center in Carlton County. The first day will cover the Wetland Bank Review process, common yet difficult wetland determinations, and WCA file management for local governments. Planned field day topics include determining the growing season, delineating atypical areas, common hydric soil indicators in northern Minnesota, a wetland boundary field exercise, and mapping plant communities.

"Given the amount of interest and level of participation, BWSR wetlands staff feel optimistic that in collaboration with all its partners, the wetland regional training program will meet the growing demand for relevant and accessible wetland-gear training," Demmer said. "This will help ensure effective administration of the Wetland Conservation Act across the state of Minnesota."