

2021 BWSR Legislative Wrap-up

Legislative action this year positions the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to make meaningful progress on conservation initiatives in the 2022-23 biennium. Work funded during this biennium will focus on improving soil health, enhancing water quality and storage, and mitigating the effects of climate change.

The 2021 regular session ended in May without the Legislature approving BWSR’s budget. A state government shutdown was averted during a June special session after the Legislature passed, and Gov. Tim Walz signed, budget and policy bills into law. Overall, legislative work in 2021 concluded with positive steps forward for conservation in Minnesota.



Photo Credit: Minnesota Historical Society

General Fund

The Legislature appropriated BWSR’s General Fund budget for fiscal years 2022-23. It funds several grant programs (see table for details),

plus dollars for agency operations, easement stewardship, and Wetland Conservation Act implementation. All existing General Fund grant appropriations remains the same as

fiscal years 2020-21.

FY22-23 General Fund Grants/Programs	2021 Appropriation
County natural resources block grants	\$6,846,000
Septic system replacement grants	\$1,400,000
SWCD conservation delivery grants	\$6,232,000
SWCD cost-share grants	\$2,400,000
WCA implementation/oversight	\$1,522,000
Feedlots cost-share (RCPP match)	\$520,000
Cooperative weed management grants	\$200,000
Drainage technical assistance	\$332,000
Lower Minnesota watershed district dredge spoil sites (pass-through)	\$480,000
SW MN Area II floodplain (pass-through)	\$280,000
Soil health via ag cover crops	\$1,350,000
Water storage and treatment	\$2,000,000
Red River Basin Commission (pass-through)	\$200,000

New General Fund appropriations this year include \$1.4 million for septic system improvement grants, \$2 million for water storage and treatment and \$1.35 million for soil health and cover crop grants. Both the water storage and soil health appropriations are intended to further Gov. Walz’s goal to make climate change mitigation a priority on natural and working landscapes.

Clean Water Fund

BWSR received \$141 million from the Clean Water Fund in fiscal years 2022-23, with roughly 90% of those dollars passed on to local governments for conservation implementation (see table for details).

The success of Clean Water Fund efforts is driven by a highly integrated and collaborative system for water resource management and

comprehensive planning that supports local implementation. Clean Water Funds made available to all state agencies this year totaled about \$256 million.

Outdoor Heritage Fund

BWSR received funding for nine projects recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council via the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

These projects include:

- \$1,251,000 for wild rice protection
- \$3,051,000 for RIM Reserve (wetlands)
- \$4,170,000 for RIM Reserve (buffers)
- \$4,354,000 for RIM Reserve (grasslands)
- \$1,609,000 for Pine and Leech watersheds targeted RIM easements

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

BWSR’s pollinator programs received additional funding from the Environment and Natural Resources

Trust Fund (ENRTF) for the coming biennium. After taking no action in 2020 on Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) recommendations, the Legislature appropriated funds for LCCMR-recommended projects from both the 2020 and the 2021 funding cycles.

BWSR received two appropriations totaling \$1.9 million to continue the Lawns to Legumes pilot program. This program offers grants, workshops, coaching and planting resources for installing pollinator-friendly native plantings in residential lawns. This new funding will allow more Minnesota residents to receive assistance for creating pollinator habitat in their yards.

BWSR also received \$750,000 from ENRTF for a pollinator and beneficial insect strategic habitat program, which strives to address dramatic declines of beneficial insects by strategically enhancing approximately 1,000 acres of native habitat on existing conservation

or natural lands.

Policy changes affecting BWSR

Several policy provisions related to BWSR’s work were signed into law.

The Water Quality and Storage Program is a new initiative that provides financial assistance to local governments to control water volume and flow rates in an effort to mitigate climate change impacts. Funded practices may include retention structures and basins, acquisition of flowage rights, soil and substrate infiltration, and the creation, restoration or enhancement of wetlands, channels and floodplains. The policy language that creates this new program requires BWSR to give priority to projects in the Minnesota River Basin and Lower Mississippi River Basin.

Other policy provisions include a one-year deadline extension for Wetland Conservation Act 404 assumption, and an increase in the daily compensation cap for SWCD board supervisors from \$75 to \$125.

Clean Water Fund Programs	Previous (FY 20-21)	New (FY 22-23)
Water management transition (One Watershed, One Plan)	\$4,000,000	\$5,808,000
Watershed-based implementation funding	\$26,966,000	\$43,564,000
Accelerated implementation grants	\$8,000,000	\$9,682,000
Projects and practices grants	\$32,000,000	\$22,266,000
Conservation drainage management	\$1,700,000	\$1,700,000
MN CREP	\$17,250,000	\$5,600,000
Critical shoreland easements	\$3,000,000	\$2,468,000
Wellhead easements	\$4,000,000	\$5,000,000
Wetland restoration easements	\$0	\$5,660,000
Measures, results, and accountability	\$2,000,000	\$2,500,000
Riparian protection and soil loss assistance	\$5,000,000	\$3,872,000
Tillage and erosion transects	\$850,000	\$724,000
Technical evaluation	\$168,000	\$84,000
Riparian buffer easements	\$9,500,000	\$0
Working lands floodplain easements	\$0	\$3,872,000
Enhancing adoption of cover crops	\$0	\$4,000,000
Watershed partners Legacy grants program	\$0	\$1,000,000
SWCD capacity funding	\$24,000,000	\$24,000,000
Total	\$138,434,000	\$141,800,000