

# 2024 Legislature passes funding for habitat, easements, water-quality improvements



**BWSR received \$11.4 million from the Clean Water Fund and \$19.4 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund this year. The Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment supports both funds.**

Actions taken during the 2024 legislative session will help the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) further its mission to work with partners to improve and protect Minnesota’s land and water resources. Legislation passed this year prioritizes funding for pollinator habitat, conservation easements and water-quality improvements.

The 2024 Legislature adjourned in late May, concluding its work for the biennium. In even-numbered years, the Legislature typically focuses on policy changes, supplemental budgeting and distributing capital investment funds for infrastructure projects (also referred to as “bonding bills”). State agency budgets are typically passed during the biennial budgeting process that occurs during odd-numbered years. While no bonding bill was passed this session,

several major bills that were passed will impact BWSR’s work.

## **Passed: Omnibus Environmental Policy Bill**

The Omnibus Environmental Policy Bill contains several provisions that affect BWSR and its partners. Changes were made to the Wetland Conservation Act to help fill regulatory gaps for federally unregulated waters following a Supreme Court of the United States’ case (*Sackett v. EPA*), which diminished federal protections. Wetland banking provisions were also clarified to align local and federal expectations.

Other provisions included:

- Clarifying jurisdictional authority for implementing riparian buffer protection
- Recognizing the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual in

*The Minnesota Legislature in even-numbered years typically focuses on policy changes, supplemental budgeting and distributing capital investment funds to support infrastructure projects. In odd-numbered years, lawmakers focus on passing a biennial budget. Photo Credit: Minnesota Historical Society*

- state statute
- Modernizing language in state statute pertaining to soil and water conservation districts and watershed districts
- Making administrative adjustments to the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program
- Repealing an outdated beaver damage control grant program last funded in 2006

## Passed: Environment and Natural Resources Supplemental Budget Bill

This year's Environment and Natural Resources Supplemental Budget Bill created a state pollinator account to support BWSR's pollinator habitat programming. A portion of state lottery funds will be deposited into the pollinator account and appropriated annually.

The bill included three one-time appropriations for BWSR totaling \$1.95 million:

- Funding for the Lawns to Legumes program, plus policy changes that establish data privacy expectations for program participants
- Funding for manure management activities to enhance groundwater protection and reduce greenhouse gases associated with agriculture, prioritizing areas of the state with high nitrate levels in groundwater, or that have geology that makes groundwater vulnerable to contamination, such as the karst region of southeastern Minnesota
- Pass-through funding for the

Red River Basin Commission to facilitate development of a feasibility assessment of adaptive phosphorous management with partners in the region

## Passed: Omnibus Legacy Bill

Legacy bills are those funded by Minnesota's Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment passed in 2008 by Minnesota voters. The amendment supports several state funding sources: the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), the Clean Water Fund (CWF) and the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

This year's Omnibus Legacy Bill includes eight OHF appropriations for BWSR totaling \$19.4 million:

- Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) Program
- Riparian habitat protection in the Kettle River and Snake River watersheds
- Wild rice shoreland protection
- RIM Wetlands Easement Program
- Pine and Leech Watershed Targeted RIM easement permanent land protection
- Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project
- Red River Basin Riparian Habitat Program
- Lower Wild Rice River corridor habitat restoration

The Omnibus Legacy Bill also included five CWF appropriations for BWSR totaling \$11.4 million:

- Working Lands Floodplain Program

- Critical shoreland protection for permanent easements
- Legacy Partners Grant Program, including targeted watershed district rain garden grants
- Match for local partners within the Lake Superior basin seeking available federal funding
- Long-term groundwater protection through easements, grants, or contracts that prioritize vulnerable drinking water concerns

## Passed: Omnibus Tax Bill

The final Omnibus Tax Bill makes clarifications regarding the sale of tax-forfeited lands, including rights affected by forfeiture. The forfeiture of the property extinguishes all liens, claims, and encumbrances other than specified items such as conservation easements. This bill also establishes a Minnesota Advisory Council on Infrastructure (MACI) for proper management coordination and future investment of Minnesota's infrastructure. BWSR is among the agencies included as a non-voting member of the MACI.

## Not passed: Bonding Bill

A bonding bill was not passed during the 2024 legislative session. While BWSR provisions for the RIM Easement Program and the Local Government Road Wetland Replacement Program were included in early versions of a bonding bill, an agreement was not reached to meet the three-fifths majority required for final passage.