

**BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES  
520 LAFAYETTE ROAD NORTH  
ST. PAUL, MN 55155  
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2025**

**AGENDA**

**9:00 AM CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

**MINUTES OF AUGUST 28, 2025 BOARD MEETING**

**PUBLIC ACCESS FORUM** (10-minute agenda time, two-minute limit/person)

**INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF**

- Song Vang, Office and Administrative Specialist Sr.
- Brandon Ellickson, Civil Engineering Technician

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

*A conflict of interest, whether actual, potential, or perceived, occurs when someone in a position of trust has competing professional or personal interests, and these competing interests make it difficult to fulfill professional duties impartially. At this time, members are requested to declare conflicts of interest they may have regarding today's business. Any member who declares an actual conflict of interest must not vote on that agenda item. All actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest will be announced to the board by members or staff before any vote.*

**REPORTS**

- Chair & Administrative Advisory Committee – Todd Holman
- Executive Director – John Jaschke
- Audit & Oversight Committee – Joe Collins
- Dispute Resolution and Compliance Report – Travis Germundson/Rich Sve
- Grants Program & Policy Committee – Mark Zabel
- RIM Reserve Committee – Jayne Hager Dee
- Water Management & Strategic Planning Committee – Joe Collins
- Wetland Conservation Committee – Jill Crafton
- Buffers, Soils & Drainage Committee – LeRoy Ose
- Drainage Work Group – Neil Peterson/Tom Gile

**AGENCY REPORTS**

- Minnesota Department of Agriculture – Thom Petersen
- Minnesota Department of Health – Steve Robertson
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Sarah Strommen
- Minnesota Extension – Joel Larson
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency – Katrina Kessler

## **ADVISORY COMMENTS**

- Association of Minnesota Counties – Brian Martinson
- Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees – Mike Schultz
- Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts – LeAnn Buck
- Minnesota Association of Townships – Eunice Biel
- Minnesota Watersheds – Jan Voit
- Natural Resources Conservation Service – Troy Daniell

## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***RIM Reserve Committee***

1. Conservation Easement Alteration Policy Revision – Karli Swenson – ***DECISION ITEM***

### ***Grants Program and Policy Committee***

1. FY26 and 27 Multipurpose Drainage water Management (MDM) Grants – Tom Gile – ***DECISION ITEM***
2. FY26 Buffer implementation Grants – Tom Gile – ***DECISION ITEM***
3. Lower Minnesota River Management Grant – Marcey Westrick – ***DECISION ITEM***
4. Keep it Clean Pilot Grant Program – Ara Gallow – ***DECISION ITEM***

## **UPCOMING MEETINGS**

- BWSR Board meeting is scheduled for October 22, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. in St. Paul and by MS Teams.

## **ADJOURN**

**BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES  
39375 COUNTY HIGHWAY 24  
GRAND EAGLE 3 CONFERENCE ROOM  
MORTON, MN 56270  
THURSDAY, AUGUST 28, 2025**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Eunice Biel, Jayne Hager Dee, Jill Crafton, Joe Collins, LeRoy Ose, Lori Cox, Mark Zabel, Mike Runk, Rich Sve, Ron Staples, Ted Winter, Todd Holman, Tom Schulz, Sarah Strommen, DNR; Joel Larson, University of Minnesota Extension; Glenn Skuta, MPCA; Steve Robertson, MDH; Brad Jordahl Redlin, MDA

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Neil Peterson

**STAFF PRESENT:**

John Jaschke, Rachel Mueller, Ed Lenz, Denise Lauerman, Mark Hiles, Julie Westerlund, Marcey Westrick, James Adkinson, Adam Beilke, Craig Engwall, Annie Gunness

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Jan Voit, Minnesota Watersheds; LeAnn Buck, MASWCD; Sarah Boser

**Chair Todd Holman called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**\*\***  
**25-36**     **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** - Moved by Jill Crafton, seconded by Joe Collins, to adopt the agenda as presented. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**\*\***  
**25-37**     **MINUTES OF JUNE 25, 2025 BOARD MEETING** – Moved by Ron Staples, seconded by Eunice Biel, to approve the minutes of June 25, 2025, as circulated. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**PUBLIC ACCESS FORUM**

No members of the public provided comments to the board.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

**Chair Holman read the statement:**

*“A conflict of interest, whether actual, potential, or perceived, occurs when someone in a position of trust has competing professional or personal interests, and these competing interests make it difficult to fulfill professional duties impartially. At this time, members are requested to declare conflicts of interest they may have regarding today’s business. Any member who declares an actual conflict of interest must not vote on that agenda item. All actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest will be announced to the board by members or staff before any vote.”*

**REPORTS**

**Chair & Administrative Advisory Committee** – Chair Todd Holman reported the BWSR Board Tour went well. Stated the Environmental Quality Board passed the Annual Groundwater Report that BWSR staff had a part in. Met with John Jaschke and Jake Rossow and looked at the Control Systems Assessment Worksheets. Thanked staff who were involved in the grant streamlining work. Stated a NRCS supported staff, a Resilience Specialist, worked with Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape team and conducted a project to develop a climate resilience parcel scoring tool. They will be presenting the tool at the Land Trust Alliance Conference in Ohio next week.

**Executive Director’s Report** - John Jaschke reported the BWSR Board Tour took place yesterday with Renville and Redwood County Soil and Water Conservation Districts and thanked them and BWSR staff for their work. Also appreciated the Lower Sioux Community hosting our event. Stated annual meetings will be taking place with discussions of resolutions and policies. Dave Weirens will be attending the AMC Policy Meeting for BWSR and John will be attending a Government to Government meeting with the Tribal Nations.

**Audit and Oversight Committee** – Joe Collins reported they have not met.

**Dispute Resolution and Compliance Report** – Rich Sve reported the committee has not met. Rich stated he will not be seeking another term on the BWSR Board after his term expires.

Todd Holman thanked Rich Sve for his service.

**Grants Program & Policy Committee** – Mark Zabel reported there are multiple items on the agenda for today.

**RIM Reserve Committee** – Jayne Hager Dee reported they have not met.



**Water Management & Strategic Planning Committee** – Joe Collins reported they have not met. Stated he attended the Tribal State Relations Training and found it very informative.

**Wetland Conservation Committee** – Jill Crafton reported they have not met.

**Buffers, Soils & Drainage Committee** – LeRoy Ose reported they have not met.

**Drainage Work Group (DWG)** – Ron Staples reported they received a Wetland Conservation Act rule making update from Les Lemm. They also received an update from the DNR on the Public Waters Inventory. Discussed recent federal changes that impact the wetlands section of the public drainage manual. Discussed housing the Technical Summit Communities Report on outlet adequacy on the BWSR website, separate from the Drainage Manual. No meeting scheduled in September.

Mark Zabel asked if any comments were being accepted on the report of outlet adequacy. Ron stated it is available to the public, but they are not taking comments.

Lori Cox asked if there is any movement on the portal. Ron does not know the status. John Jaschke stated it's on the list but does not have a majority of people wanting to do something with it at this time. John will have Tom Gile prepare a future summary to share with the Board on the portal.

## **AGENCY REPORTS**

**Minnesota Department of Agriculture** – Brad Jordahl Redlin reported the Soil Health Financial Assistant Program applications close on Friday for their Soil Health Equipment Grants.

**Minnesota Department of Health** – Steve Robertson reported uncertainty about federal funding continues. Stated the Department of Health sponsored a meeting of source water protection for managers from the other Region 5 states. Steve shared the link to the [Minnesota Drinking Water Action Plan](#).

Lori Cox asked if they're partnering with agencies through different funding for water protection. Steve stated they are partnering with other agencies.

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources** – Sarah Strommen provided an update on the Public Waters Inventory. The application process for the Urban and Forestry Grants is open until October 28th. The Governor announced the 2026 fishing opener will be held in Stillwater on the St. Croix River.

Mike Runk thanked the Commissioner Strommen for her mention of the fishing opener. He is a member of the Convention Visitor Bureau in Stillwater, and they have been working diligently to get the invitation.

Jill Crafton asked if there is any information on the Mississippi River and the federal uncertainties. Commissioner Strommen stated she doesn't have anything specific, they are continuing to work with federal and state partners.

**Minnesota Extension** – Joel Larson reported he was happy to see the irrigation workshop article in Snapshots that they partnered in. Stated they are having a related workshop for Irrigators and Agriculture Professionals on November 18th and 19th in Sherburn County. The Minnesota Water Resources Conference being held October 14th through 15th in St. Paul. The Midwest Climate Resilience Conference is being held in Milwaukee October 20th through 22nd.

**Minnesota Pollution Control Agency** – Glenn Skuta thanked everyone involved in the tour. Reported they are generating a draft impaired waters list for next year. The Nutrient Reduction Strategy is on public notice until September 10th. Stated updated State and Federal Feedlot Permits for large agriculture facilities are being issued.

Jill Crafton asked about PFAS monitoring and if there is a report available. Glenn stated he will get back to Jill.

#### **ADVISORY COMMENTS**

**Association of Minnesota Counties** – No report was provided.

**Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees** – No report was provided.

**Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts** – LeAnn Buck reported they are midway into their resolution process and thanked those that have been part of those conversations. Their MASWCD Leadership Institute in partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension Service had their graduation. Stated they are looking to schedule eight area meetings in the months of September and November. LeAnn provided an update on preliminary legislative items. Stated they are 16 years into the Clean Water Fund and have nine years to go.

**Minnesota Association of Townships** – Eunice Biel reported there were district meetings in August. Minnesota paid leaves take effect January 2026, there is no exception for elected officials and Townships must create a paid leave account. Townships may now apply for loans and grants for wastewater and stormwater projects. September 4th there will be a Clerk and Treasure Training for small cities and township to learn about paid leave. There is a Legislative and Research Committee meeting in Mankato on September 12th.

**Minnesota Watersheds** – Jan Voit reported they had their summer tour in Roseau. They had their resolutions meeting on Monday. Their annual conference is December 3rd through the 5th at Grandview Lodge in Nisswa. They will be having a joint tour in August 2026 with BWSR, the Red River Water Management Board, and the Red River Retention Authority.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service** – No report was provided.

Chair Holman called a recess at 10:15 a.m. and called the meeting back to order at 10:25 a.m.

#### **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Grants Program and Policy Committee**

**FY26-27 Technical Service Area Grants** – Adam Beilke presented FY26-27 Technical Service Area Grants. Nonpoint Engineering Assistance (NPEA) - (General Fund). The Non-Point Engineering Assistance (NPEA) Grants are allocated annually to the NPEA (TSA) Joint Powers Boards for the purpose of providing technical assistance to landowners to apply conservation practices.

TSA Enhanced Technical Assistance - (Clean Water Fund). Enhanced Technical Services grants are used to invest in regional capacity across the state to efficiently accelerate projects and practices that improve or protect water resources. These grant funds are available only to Technical Service Areas.

Lori Cox asked if there is a cap per grant. Adam stated the amounts shown are the individual grants that go to each TSA. Lori asked if he could provide an example of the equipment. Adam stated it could be for survey equipment or vehicles for staff to access the sites.

Mark Zabel stated each of the TSAs is a joint organization of the SWCDs, they enhance and provide additional capacity in their technical service.

\*\*  
25-38 Moved by Ted Winter, seconded by Tom Schulz, to approve the FY26-27 Technical Service Area Grants. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**Natural Resources Block Grants** – Adam Beilke presented Natural Resources Block Grants (NRBG).

The NRBG is a composite of base grants available to local government units that help them implement programs designed to protect and improve water resources. The purpose of this agenda item is to authorize the Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027 NRBG programs. Appropriation language allows BWSR to authorize both years of the biennium.

\*\*  
25-39 Moved by Joe Collins, seconded by Jill Crafton, to approve the Natural Resources Block Grants. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**FY26-27 Soil and Water Conservation District Conservation Delivery and Conservation Contracts Grants** – Adam Beilke presented FY26-27 Soil and Water Conservation District Conservation Delivery and Conservation Contracts Grants.

Conservation Delivery Grants - Conservation Delivery Grants provide each Soil and Water Conservation District with funds for the general administration and operation of the district. These administrative and operational costs include paying for the costs of employing staff, office space, transportation, postage and utilities, and supervisors' compensation and expenses.

Conservation Contracts Grant Program - The purpose of this program is to provide grants to SWCDs so they can help local landowners or land occupiers offset the costs of installing conservation practices that protect and improve water quality by controlling soil erosion and reducing sedimentation.

Ted Winter asked if the funding source comes from the general fund. Adam stated they are general funds.

\*\*  
25-40 Moved by Eunice Biel, seconded by Jayne Hager Dee, to approve the FY26-27 Soil and Water Conservation District Conservation Delivery and Conservation Contracts Grants. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**Area II Floodplain Management Grants** – Adam Beilke presented Area II Floodplain Management Grants.

Area II, formed in 1978 as a non-profit joint powers entity, works to alleviate the recurrent flood problems in southwestern Minnesota. Member counties include:

- |                 |           |                   |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------------|
| • Brown         | • Lincoln | • Pipestone       |
| • Cottonwood    | • Lyon    | • Redwood         |
| • Lac qui Parle | • Murray  | • Yellow Medicine |

BWSR oversees the administrative services funding related to the efforts of Area II and requires BWSR approval before funds can be appropriated. The funding provided to the Area II Board in FY26 and FY27 via specific legislation is in the amount of \$140,000 each year.

\*\*  
25-41 Moved by Ted Winter, seconded by Mark Zabel, to approve the Area II Floodplain Management Grants. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**FY26-27 Watershed Based Implementation Funding** – Julie Westerlund presented FY26-27 Watershed Based Implementation Funding.

The legislature appropriated \$88.1M for FY26-27 Watershed Based Implementation Funding. Staff have prepared program requirements and calculated allocation amounts according to the previously established funding formula. The BWSR Grants Program and Policy Committee reviewed the program requirements and draft board order on August 18, 2025 and made a recommendation that the full board approve the attached board order.

Glenn Skuta asked if Julie could speak on how past allocations were spent. Julie provided an overview of past allocations.

Ted Winter asked what the funding is. Julie stated its Clean Water Funding.

John stated there is a Board-adopted formula that determines the grant amount available to each 1W1P area.

**\*\***  
**25-42** Moved by LeRoy Ose, seconded by Jill Crafton, to approve the FY26-27 Watershed Based Implementation Funding. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**BWSR Grants Streamlining** – James Adkinson presented BWSR Grants Streamlining.

BWSR grant staff have worked to streamline grant programs in efforts to improve efficiency and clarity for grantees. This 18-month initiative was completed in June 2025 and aims to reduce discrepancies in program requirements, define requirements more clearly, and improve the overall communication of grant program information. An overview was provided to the board.

Mark Zabel appreciated clearly showing the line of what's required and what's guidance.

John Jaschke stated we're trying to be as consistent as we can and thanked the team for the work they put into it.

#### **UPCOMING MEETINGS**

- RIM Reserve Committee is scheduled for September 5, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. in St. Paul and by MS Teams.
- Next BWSR Meeting is scheduled for 9:00 AM, September 24, 2025, in St. Paul and by MS Teams.

Chair Holman adjourned the meeting at 11:12 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Holman  
Chair



# In the field: IDEC cohort samples conservation careers



**O**n a humid August morning with a heat index reaching the mid-90s, six college students outfitted with work boots, hand nets and collection jars made an exciting discovery on a private conservation easement in Hennepin County.

A bumblebee with a distinctive brown section on its back droned among tall grasses and native forbs. The students quickly identified it as a rusty patched bumblebee, the federally endangered species that was named Minnesota's state bee in 2019.

The rare sighting was made during an Aug. 6 field day organized by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and hosted by Hennepin County for the state's Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers (IDEC) program.

Hennepin County staff took the

**Top:** IDEC fellows used hand nets and jars to collect insects while learning about habitat diversity at an Aug. 6 field day hosted by Hennepin County. Fellows toured four conservation easements totaling 89 acres.

**Photo Credit:** BWSR

**Inset:** IDEC fellow Lauren Beck, who is studying data science at Winona State University, held a collection jar containing a rusty patched bumblebee, the federally endangered species that was named Minnesota's state bee in 2019.

**Photo Credit:** DNR

students on a tour of four conservation easements totaling 89 acres. The easements permanently protect privately owned land for conservation purposes via Hennepin County's Habitat Conservation Program, a collaboration with the Minnesota Land Trust funded by the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Hennepin County aims to protect 6,000 acres by 2040 and plant 1 million trees by 2030. Hennepin County staff monitors easements on a rotating basis



to determine which wildlife species are present and to analyze habitat-related trends.

By the end of the day, the group had made another exhilarating find: they observed a blue-spotted salamander on the ground near an ephemeral wetland. According to Hennepin County wildlife biologist Nicole Witzel, who assisted students with species identification, habitat loss and decreasing water quality are contributing to a decline in blue-spotted salamander populations.

"These students were extremely respectful of the resources that we



shared with them,” said Kristine Maurer, Hennepin County natural resources specialist. “I was really impressed with the level of intentionality and curiosity they brought. They really took advantage of the space and time they had with these professionals who could someday be their colleagues.”

IDEC is a strategic partnership among BWSR, the DNR, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa. Funded by the state’s [Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund \(ENRTF\)](#), the program is designed for under-represented undergraduate students attending accredited colleges or universities in Minnesota, and involves a multi-year experience in three different components: fellowship, mentorship and internship.

IDEC fellows are organized into cohorts; however, during their second and third summer internships, they typically work independently, supported by program staff as needed. Each cohort spends its first summer completing a rotational internship at participating agencies to gain exposure to the mission, operations and key initiatives of each. In their second and third summers, fellows select a specialized internship at one of the three state agencies, based on their career interests and the availability of agency funding.

“This initiative is designed to cultivate the next generation of environmental and natural resources professionals and advocates,” said May Yang-Lee, career pathways program coordinator for the DNR, who oversees IDEC. “By the time they graduate, fellows have gained extensive



**Top:** IDEC fellows examined a blue-spotted salamander during an Aug. 6 field day in Hennepin County. **Bottom:** Dakota SWCD Manager Ashley Gallagher discussed drinking water supply management areas during an Aug. 4 field day that included several stops to hear about district projects. Fellows learned about water-quality monitoring at Vermillion Falls, visited a perennial crop field, and stopped by an agricultural weather station just south of Hastings.

**Photo Credits:** BWSR



professional experiences, built strong networks and developed the skills necessary to succeed in the environmental field.”

The Hennepin County easements field day was part of a weeklong series of activities in early August that BWSR staff organized for the IDEC cohort. The week featured a mix of field

days and job shadowing. In addition to the Hennepin County easements visit, field days included a morning spent touring Capitol Region Watershed District projects, and a trip to a Lawns to Legumes community garden project in St. Paul’s Frogtown neighborhood.

The cohort also visited [Gibbs Farm](#) in Ramsey County

and took a guided tour focused on the traditional and cultural lifeways of the Dakota of Heyáta Othúnwe (The Village at the Side) at Bdé Makhá Ska as a precursor to a presentation about Tribal-state relations by BWSR Tribal Liaison Melissa King.



**IDEC is supported by the Outdoor Heritage Fund, which is part of Minnesota's Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.**

On Aug. 4, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff took the fellows on a tour of several district projects, starting with a morning stop at Vermillion Falls in Hastings to learn the basics of using water monitoring equipment. The group then stopped at a nearby field to view perennial Kernza and alfalfa crops and take soil samples. Perennial cover crops can help improve soil health and filter water, which is important for protecting drinking water.

Dakota County SWCD Manager Ashley Gallagher said she and her staff



**The Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers (IDEC) Program is funded by a one-time \$1.28 million appropriation from the state's Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. Funding is available through 2028.**



organized the day to showcase different types of field work and the related equipment used to perform it.

“We focused on field work to give students a chance to see if they like it,” Gallagher said. “I hope they saw the depth of what the conservation field can offer. If you like field work, you can do that — but if you don’t, there’s still a place for you in the environment and conservation world.”

The day finished with a stop at an agricultural weather station south of Hastings, which the Dakota County SWCD established with funding from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The station collects data about rainfall and evapotranspiration to help inform farmers’ decisions about when and how to irrigate. Watershed-Based Implementation Funding from BWSR supports staff time and irrigation scheduling tools.

Gallagher said she would be interested in working again with IDEC cohorts.

“The energy students bring is always fun,” Gallagher said. “Problem-solving is more successful when you involve people of various backgrounds and ideas. You get better solutions that way.”

BWSR Organizational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator Mandy Duong, who helped plan the week of activities, said BWSR emphasized field days that paired IDEC fellows with local government partners, since they are the professionals who implement conservation initiatives on the ground.

“Our goal was to provide a



**Top:** IDEC fellows visited Gibbs Farm in Ramsey County, where they took a guided tour focused on the traditional and cultural lifeways of the Dakota of *Ĥeyáta Othúnwe* (the Village at the Side) at *Bdé Makhá Ska* as a precursor to a presentation about Tribal-state relations by BWSR Tribal Liaison Melissa King. **Photo Credit:** DNR

diversity of experiences and perspectives from LGU (local government unit) partners so that students can get a more holistic understanding of what BWSR is, what we do and the different partners that make our work possible,” Duong said.

BWSR Legislative Coordinator Mike Nelson, who assisted with planning and attended several field days, agreed.

“BWSR works through partnerships, so we recognize the value of the partners and the work they do at all levels of government. Many BWSR employees have also worked at the local level,” Nelson said. “We thought, ‘Let’s really highlight the partnerships, because that’s how things happen in our world.’”

The decision to focus on conservation at the local level resonated with fellows.

“The most helpful aspect of this week’s presentations and activities was introducing us to their partners and possible career opportunities,” said Jessica Haase, an IDEC fellow studying fisheries, wildlife and conservation biology at the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus. “I feel like BWSR was not so set on convincing us to work for them, but rather they were very excited to introduce us to some of their partners that do interesting work. This week gave me a lot more ideas for places I may want to work at someday.”

The IDEC program is funded through fiscal year 2028, and discussions regarding its future are ongoing. Regardless of whether the program concludes or continues, Yang-Lee said each state agency is committed to applying the lessons learned to enhance future career

pathways and internship opportunities to support the development of Minnesota’s next-generation workforce and advancing representation across the state. A total of \$1.28 million in ENRTF appropriations has supported activities across six cohorts; the final cohort of 16 IDEC Fellows is currently underway.

Duong said she hoped the work would continue.

“We want a state workforce that represents the people who live and work here,” Duong said. “Having a diverse workforce adds creativity, a wider range of ideas, and new ways of thinking that can lead to better problem-solving and innovation.”

BWSR staff members write and produce *Snapshots*, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.



# NRCS, host of partners back \$17M for irrigation upgrades



Minnesota NRCS  
website: [www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov)

**From left:** Ron Sakry, left, farms near Deer Creek with his son Kenny, right, seen here after a July 2023 soil health field day on their farm. The Sakrys are among those who installed precision irrigation upgrades with Regional Conservation Partnership Program support from NRCS.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture research scientist Jeppe Kjaersgaard manages the RCPP award.

Daryl Zeise of Otter Tail County wanted to increase yields on the 75-acre field where he updated his irrigation system with RCPP support.

**Photo Credits:** Ann Wessel, BWSR

## Fine-tuned systems increase productivity, protect groundwater; second RCPP award extends eligibility from 20 to 25 counties

Shortly after Ron Sakry installed a variable-rate fertigation system on the irrigator that sweeps across a 160-acre field, the neighbors called. Something was wrong. The sprinklers shut off when the irrigator reached the sloughs.

Turns out they were working as intended.

As the irrigator crosses the field, water and fertilizer delivery rates adjust — by zone or by individual sprinkler head — based on four mapped soil types and three seasonal precipitation scenarios programmed into the system. Dry hilltops receive the full rate; potholes nothing.

“Our biggest concern was that we didn’t want to be putting all this extra nitrogen out over the open-water areas that we have. We have approximately 15 acres of low ground that (the irrigator crosses),” Sakry said. “Before, we were putting nitrogen through the irrigator — plus the water — so we were just wasting both the water and nitrogen on that portion.”

Sakry, who farms in Otter Tail County, was one of 45 producers who installed precision irrigation upgrades with Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) support from the



“If we can conserve and improve our practices today in order for the next generation to take over the farm, that’s our end goal.”

— Jake Wildman, Irrigators Association of Minnesota president

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The five-year RCPP was so popular that funds were committed within the first year.

NRCS awarded the \$3.5 million RCPP to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) in 2022. Partners’ \$5.4 million match made \$8.9 million available for upgrades, technical assistance and staff training.

Now, NRCS and its partners are making an additional \$17.3 million available for producers to install precision irrigation upgrades that will benefit both the environment and their bottom line.

**FUNDING & PARTNERS:** A total of \$17.3 million is available. NRCS’ \$11,160,000 RCPP award is funded by the Farm Bill. Partners’ \$6,110,450 matching-fund and in-kind contributions include nearly \$1.9 million from 26 SWCDs, \$1.5 million from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, nearly \$1.4 million from Central Lakes College, \$578,000 from irrigator organizations and industry (among them, the Irrigators Association of Minnesota, the Minnesota Area II Potato Growers Research and Promotion Council, and the Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council), \$500,000 from BWSR, nearly \$199,000 from the University of Minnesota, \$75,000 from the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and \$25,000 from the Minnesota Department of Health.



“It’s really to protect the groundwater from nitrate (pollution) and help our irrigators be more efficient,” said MDA research scientist Jeppe Kjaersgaard, who manages that \$11.2 million RCPP award.

The \$6.1 million match comes from partners — including 26 soil and water conservation districts, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Central Lakes College, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), industry organizations and businesses.

Agreements are expected to be in place and details are expected to be released in October.

The new RCPP runs through Dec. 31, 2029. It expands eligibility from 20 to 25 central Minnesota counties.

“We know that some of the areas in Minnesota where the groundwater is more vulnerable to nitrate contamination from crop production (are) where we have sandy soils or caustic soils. Many of those (areas) are in the central part of Minnesota, and that is where we also have most of the irrigation,” Kjaersgaard said.

About 675,000 acres of cropland is irrigated in Minnesota, according to 2023 USDA census data.

“There is an unmet need out there of producers that want to adopt these new technologies because they know it’s going to be good for their bottom line — and also good for the environment. They want to make a profit, but they also want to be stewards and make sure (it does not have a) negative impact on the environment, if at all possible,” said Darren Newville, who manages the East Otter Tail and Wadena

## Initial RCPP award details, upgrades

**The initial \$8.9 million — the \$3.5 million RCPP and \$5.4 million in matching funds — provided 45 producers with financial and technical support. That RCPP, which launched in 2022 and runs through Oct. 15, 2027, supported contracts for 39 irrigation water management plans, 26 variable-rate irrigation systems, 33 soil moisture sensor systems, 47 practices related to pump upgrades or pumping plant automation, 12**

**sprinkler upgrade systems, five fertigation retrofits and one irrigation pipeline installation. It also supported eight cover crop agreements (for 13 cumulative years), five residue and tillage management plans (nine cumulative years) — and three irrigation workshops that trained more than 100 SWCD and NRCS technical staff in irrigation technology, practice certification and irrigation water management.**

soil and water conservation districts (SWCD).

Perham-based NRCS District Conservationist Troy Baumgart said irrigation efficiencies address resource concerns such as plant productivity and health, and water and energy conservation.

The sensors and monitors are meant to feed the plants the right amount of water and fertilizer at the right time. When the holding capacity of the soil and root systems is exceeded, those nutrients flow into the aquifers.

The first RCPP included projects ranging from \$100,000 variable-rate systems to \$6,000 for soil moisture sensors. Landowners’ share was about 25%.

“We know the technology is good, we know it works. But it’s expensive to get into, so if we can have a little help and a little support with the funding, it makes our decision a lot easier,” said Jake Wildman, president of the 550-member Irrigators Association of Minnesota, which supports science-based irrigation management research and is among the RCPP partners.

“We’re delivering water more accurately and more efficiently,” Wildman said. “When we can agronomically, environmentally and economically improve — those three things right there

are exactly what will benefit the producer.”

The RCPPs reflect what producers said they wanted during a series of meetings organized by the Freshwater Society and supported by a \$58,000 Clean Water Fund grant BWSR awarded to the East Otter Tail SWCD.

Daryl Zeise of Otter Tail County wanted to increase yields on the 75-acre field where he updated his irrigation system with RCPP support.

“That variable-rate irrigation, it’s unbelievable. I had some low spots that probably didn’t yield 20% (compared with the rest of the field). It’s not 100%, but it’s pretty close now,” Zeise said this summer. “The low spots in the field, they just didn’t produce. And now when we can just skip (applying) the water on them, they’re drying up.”

Zeise still drives out to check the field, where a renter is growing corn this year. Twice a day, he checks the irrigation company app for rainfall totals, the rate of water depletion and sunlight intensity. The agronomist who set up the system ensures the monitor accurately reflects the field readings.

“The first year I don’t think anybody believed anything, but as you learn how to use it, it is very good,” Zeise said of the moisture sensors. “We just

kind of needed to trust (it).”

Wildman said some producers prefer a system they can fix themselves. Precision irrigation elements such as variable-rate nozzles, which contain individual sensors that continuously communicate with the pivot as the irrigator crosses the field, can be hard to troubleshoot.

“It’s amazing how well it works ... and when it does work,” Wildman said. “There’s just a lot of things that we can’t see that’s going on. And one little wire or loose hardware misplaced somewhere could throw everything off, and it’s very hard to diagnose.”

The RCPP not only made it possible for producers to work with their own agronomist or irrigation company but also offered three [workshops](#) to train NRCS and SWCD staff who work with farmers.

“It is true that we certainly want irrigators to continue to be profitable, to farm in an economically sustainable way, but also an environmentally sustainable way. I think that’s a goal everyone has, and I think this RCPP really helps bring everyone together,” Kjaersgaard said. “The partnerships and trust have been there for a long time, but this RCPP has helped move that forward.”

MDA is working with the University of Minnesota and Central Lakes College on field research and computer modeling to determine the economic and environmental outcomes, including what impact the practices have on reducing nitrate losses to groundwater.

---

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.

# BWSR Board tour highlights habitat work, water storage



By late August, plants flourished on a Renville County RIM easement where Native Resource Preservation conducted a late-spring prescribed burn to prepare for interseeding. The Renville County SWCD secured a \$95,000 HELP grant to fund enhancements, including tree removal and the planting of diverse dry and wet prairie seed mixes. Tour attendees visited the site, one of three sites improved through the project, to see the results. **Photo Credits:** Ashley Rezachek, BWSR



Clean Water Funds supported some conservation projects featured during the annual tour, including improvements to the County Ditch 59 drainage system and a wetland restoration in Redwood County.

**M**innesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Board members, staff and partners visited water storage, habitat restoration and water-quality improvement projects in Redwood and Renville counties during the agency's annual board tour.

The late summer tour highlighted projects and initiatives designed to reduce downstream flows and limit sediment- and nutrient-loading. These projects were made possible through strong partnerships among local, state and federal partners plus private companies.

BWSR hosts the annual tour to showcase partners' efforts



Each August, BWSR Board members, BWSR staff and partners tour conservation sites with ties to the agency's work to see project outcomes and accomplishments. Each year features a different region of the state.

to address the various types of natural resource concerns that impact all Minnesotans.

"The BWSR tour provides a glimpse of the challenges

and complexities local partnerships face in implementing lasting conservation efforts to address resource concerns," said Luke Olson, BWSR board



conservationist and tour organizer. “The insight promotes informed flexibility and efficiency of programs to assist with these efforts.”

Joey O’Brien, president of the Lower Sioux Indian Community Council, welcomed the group and noted that this was the first time the annual BWSR Board Tour included a stop in a Tribal community.

Deb Dirlam, director of the Lower Sioux Indian Community’s Office of the Environment, opened the Aug. 27 tour with a presentation about the community’s ongoing stewardship efforts — including wild rice and wetland restorations, medicinal plant gardens, agricultural practices and a hemp program centered on sustainable building materials.

The first featured project on the bus tour was a grade stabilization structure renovation in Renville County completed in November 2018 and fully funded with approximately \$76,600 in state Disaster Recovery Assistance Program (DRAP) dollars.

The project stemmed from a 2014 Presidential Disaster Declaration following severe storms across southwestern Minnesota. In Renville County, an altered grade stabilization structure with a corroded metal pipe had failed, creating a deep ravine and increasing flooding risks for the city of Morton downstream.

The Renville County SWCD worked with a new landowner to reconstruct the site.



*Three BWSR Clean Water Fund grants totaling \$1.85 million serve as the primary funding source for water quality and storage work within the County Ditch 59 drainage system. Funding includes a 2023 Multipurpose Drainage Management grant (\$116,897), a 2024 projects and practices competitive grant (\$773,133), and a 2025 Multipurpose Drainage Management grant (\$956,613). Construction work was underway during the Aug. 27 tour.*



“The new owner was very interested in it, because they had small children, and so they were really concerned about this big, huge hole and this big ravine that was created,” said Holly Hatlewick, Renville County SWCD administrator.

The SWCD partnered with Technical Service Area (TSA) staff, private engineers and Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects. Area II

Minnesota River Basin Projects handled design and engineering. The new structure controls flow, reduces erosion and manages runoff. Plants stabilize the site and restore habitat.

“It turned out to be a fantastic project,” said Hatlewick. “We’re saving 152 tons of sediment, that sediment is being held back annually with that pond system, and now we just have this great

structure.”

The project also reduces phosphorus by an estimated 175 pounds annually.

The next Renville County stop featured a restoration project funded by BWSR’s Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program (HELP), which aimed to restore diverse native habitats to benefit pollinators, birds and other wildlife.

The Renville County SWCD secured a \$95,000 HELP grant to apply toward three Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easements and a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) site.

The stop featured one landowner’s property where restoration work was underway. The site includes three adjacent sites: two RIM easements totaling 99.2 acres and a 60-acre CRP contract.

Restoration efforts over the past year included tree removal, prescribed burning, targeted herbicide application and reseeding with native prairie species. A mix of 41 wet prairie and 51 dry prairie species was planted across the easements. To protect wildlife habitat, the work is being done in phases.

A Native Resource Preservation crew completed the work with guidance from SWCD staff. In addition to the grant-funded work, the landowner completed additional improvements to the CRP enrollment, completing prescribed burns with approval from the USDA’s Farm Service

Agency (FSA).

The next stop highlighted a collaboration between the Renville County SWCD and the Renville County Drainage Authority to improve water quality and storage within the [County Ditch \(CD\) 59 drainage system](#). The project manages runoff from a 700-acre watershed.

CD 59 flows into Beaver Creek, a priority watershed in the Hawk Creek-Middle Minnesota comprehensive watershed management plan. Beaver Creek carries water to the Minnesota River from 21 county and judicial ditches affecting nearly 97,600 acres. Beaver Creek is impaired for dissolved oxygen, fish and macroinvertebrate populations, turbidity and fecal coliform.

The project involved constructing 13 water and sediment control basins, three water storage ponds and a restored wetland. These features are designed to reduce nutrient runoff, curb sediment-loading, alleviate flooding and enhance long-term watershed health.

The bus stopped at the site of the constructed wetland restoration, where work was underway. Designs call for a permanent pool of 18 to 24 inches of water that will temporarily rise during storm events. Water will be stored for up to 100 hours before being gradually released downstream. Berms and in-field basins will help to slow water flow and capture sediment.

Together, the projects provide 460 acre-feet of



**Above:** Tour attendees explored a wetland complex in Redwood County, where nearly 200 acres of wetlands and habitat have been restored.

**Photo Credit:** Denise Lauerman, BWSR **Below:** The tour included a stop at a grade stabilization structure completed in 2011, which created an 8-acre ponding area for water storage. **Photo Credit:** Ashley Rezachek, BWSR



water storage, and keep an estimated 4,635 pounds of nitrogen, 538 pounds of phosphorus and 49 tons of sediment out of the waterways annually.

Three BWSR Clean Water Fund grants totaling \$1.85 million served as the primary funding source.

Additional support from NRCS allowed the installation of saturated buffers to further treat low-flow tile drainage.

Tour attendees visited a wetland complex in Redwood County, an area

historically challenged by poor drainage. Four Redwood County landowners cooperated to restore nearly 200 acres of wetland and associated habitat through the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP). This voluntary program combines federal and state resources to permanently protect environmentally sensitive lands while keeping them in private ownership.

"We had to have all of the landowners work together for this," said Brian Pfarr,

Redwood SWCD resource specialist, who helped coordinate the project.

The project included building berms with stable outlets, removing and rerouting drainage tile and installing culverts along a Paxton Township road to help alleviate flooding. Because a designated public watercourse — a trout stream — added significant permitting complexity, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) assisted with project hydrology.

Participating landowners enrolled in both the FSA-administered CRP for 14 to 15 years and the BWSR-administered RIM program, which establishes perpetual conservation easements.

The project, which tapped \$446,730 in Outdoor Heritage Funds, approximately \$322,200 in Clean Water Funds from BWSR and \$7,500 in capital investment funds — bonding dollars associated with the easement — demonstrates collaboration among local, state and federal partners to improve water quality, wildlife habitat and long-term land stewardship.

"The project is an example of everyone coming to the table," Pfarr said. "If one of these people had backed out, it would be a problem."

The next stop on the tour showcased a 14-year-old grade stabilization structure in Sherman Township, which is holding strong after replacing a failing 33-year-old grade stabilization structure. Installed in 2011, the structure has withstood





Hempcrete blocks (**center**) are made by mixing hemp (**left**), a lime-based binder and water. **Photo Credits:** Ashley Rezachek, BWSR **Right:** Danny Desjarlais, hempcrete construction project manager, stands in front of a prefabricated hempcrete wall panel at the Lower Sioux Indian Community's hemp manufacturing facility. **Photo Credit:** Denise Lauerman, BWSR

time and the region's corrosive soils, which had caused the original corrugated metal pipe to deteriorate and collapse.

The updated design uses long-lasting concrete instead of metal, providing a more durable, permanent solution. A key feature of the project is an 8-acre ponding area, which helps manage stormwater runoff, control erosion and improve water quality.

"It was a godsend when I saw what had happened to it," said landowner John Hogan, reflecting on the completed project. A self-described conservation advocate, Hogan said that he's seen a range of wildlife return to the site, including ducks, swans and geese.

Project partners included the Redwood SWCD, Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area, NRCS, BWSR, DNR and Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects. Funding for included approximately \$12,800 in 2011 Upper Minnesota River Basin Initiative funding and a \$1,450 landowner contribution, and additional support from BWSR for project monitoring.

The tour concluded at the Lower Sioux Indian Community's 20,000-square-foot hemp manufacturing facility. The facility produces eco-friendly building materials such as prefabricated hemp panels, bulk hemp fibers and hempcrete blocks.

Hempcrete is made from a mix of hemp, lime-based binder and water. Used to insulate exterior housing walls, the material is pest-, water- and fire-resistant.

Hempcrete plays a key role in the community's "[Seed to Sovereignty](#)"

initiative, a housing program that blends traditional knowledge with modern sustainable building methods. Made from locally grown and processed industrial hemp, this durable, carbon-negative material supports efforts to address the housing crisis.

"We aren't inventing anything new here, this is ancient technology," said Danny Desjarlais, hempcrete construction project manager.

He emphasized that hempcrete is a nontoxic alternative to plastics

and hazardous materials commonly used in home construction.

The program also includes hands-on training, project consultation and community workshops aimed at empowering others to replicate the model. From retrofitting existing homes to constructing new ones, the initiative promotes healthy living environments, energy efficiency and a local economy centered on hemp.

Throughout the tour, participants engaged with local staff and landowners, gaining insight into the cooperation and innovation behind long-term solutions. Olson said hearing local challenges firsthand showed how state grant funding helps drive lasting change.

"It was very beneficial for me to gain an understanding of the complexity of projects, the cooperation and patience it takes to pursue these endeavors," Olson said. "The solutions proposed to address water and land resource needs are impressive."

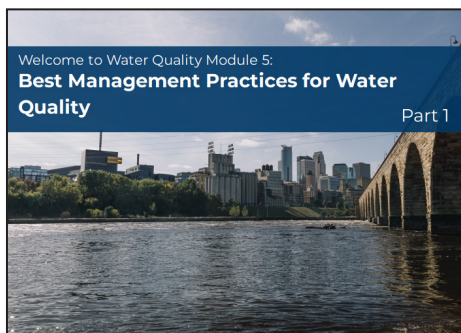


Joey Goodthunder, a Lower Sioux Indian Community farmer who grows corn, soybeans, and hemp, stands near a hemp processing machine during a tour of the community's hemp manufacturing facility. He spoke about the community's agricultural work and conservation efforts.

**Photo Credit:** Denise Lauerman, BWSR

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.

# Core competency trainings offer flexible learning options for conservation pros



BWSR's Minnesota Core Competency Conservation Training program aims to help conservation professionals develop consistent, baseline competencies in three primary areas (from left): water quality, soils and conservation planning. **Graphic Credits:** BWSR

A series of online trainings that familiarize conservation professionals with real-world scenarios has trained 1,000-plus individuals since it launched five years ago.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) Minnesota Core Competency Conservation Training (MNC3) program is a series of online trainings that aims to help conservation professionals develop consistent, baseline competencies in three primary areas: water quality, soils and conservation planning. Trainings on additional topics such as continuous living cover, habitat management and soil erosion are also available. Thirty-four modules are currently available within eight training topics; each takes approximately one hour to complete.

Staff from soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), BWSR and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are all encouraged to

complete the modules.

"The MNC3 site provides a wide range of self-paced technical training opportunities developed with Minnesota-specific content for local conservationists," said Kelly Voigt, BWSR northern regional training conservationist, who oversees the trainings. "By providing standardized, accessible training, we're helping strengthen conservation efforts across Minnesota by ensuring every team member is equipped to make a meaningful difference."

Voigt said the MNC3 team continues to develop new training modules in partnership with subject-matter experts. Some modules come together quickly, while others require more extensive research and involve developing complex interactive elements.

"Our goal is to create interactive, real-world scenarios that mirror the decisions and problem-solving

situations employees face in the field," Voigt said.

BWSR's Technical Training and Certification Program (TTCP) delivers the training. TTCP is a collaborative effort among BWSR, NRCS, the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) and the Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE). Its mission is to develop and maintain a highly trained, technically skilled workforce of natural resource professionals capable of meeting Minnesota's conservation delivery needs.

BWSR TTCP Coordinator Jon Sellnow, who helped develop MNC3, said making free, online training available has improved how employees learn and succeed in their roles. For example, new hires can quickly gain the foundational knowledge needed to perform their jobs and understand Minnesota's voluntary conservation framework.

"Our goal is to make high-quality conservation training accessible anytime, anywhere — so employees can build the skills they need on their own schedule and apply them confidently in the field," Sellnow said. "With MNC3, staff are able to create an account and start training on their first day on the job."

Voigt said because all modules are recorded, the program doesn't rely on trainers' availability.

"In recent years, there have been fewer trainers available statewide," Voigt said. "This has made the MNC3 trainings more important than ever to ensure consistent, up-to-date knowledge reaches conservation professionals, no matter where they are."

To take the training modules, create a free account on the [MNC3 website](#).

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.





# Wadena SWCD Board Supervisor, Tom Schulz, Looks Back at the Last 50 Years

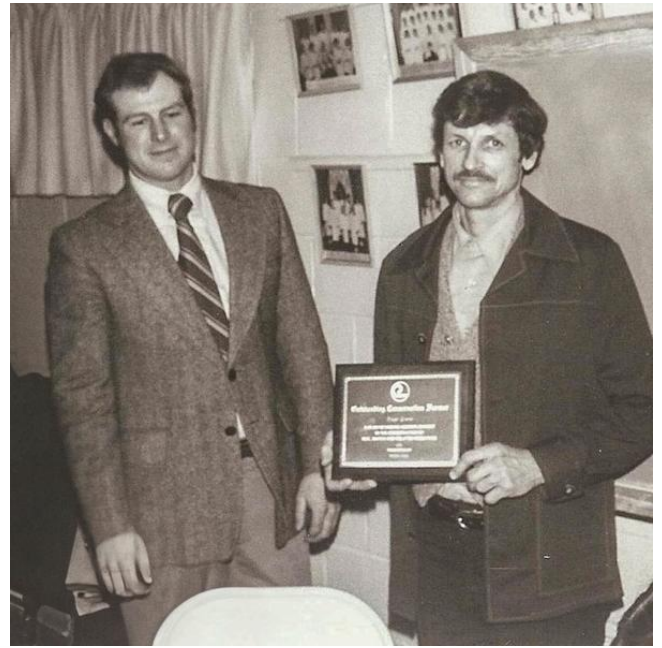
September 12, 2025 by [Alyson Levig](#)

## Cultivating a Career

Agriculture and conservation have always been the backbone of Wadena County native Tom Schulz's professional and personal career. The culprit, or his family farm (now Evergreen Lane Farm), was founded as a dairy facility back in 1888 that

grew the agricultural taproot, fueling the conservation-lined roots that slowly branched out.

Prior to 1975, Schulz's main goal was becoming an agriculture teacher focusing on economics rather than picking rock, milking cows, and stacking haybales on the homestead. However, the Vietnam War, as well as his father's passing, put Schulz's education on hold and his agricultural upbringing back into the spotlight.



What was considered a setback at the time actually cultivated Schulz's career within conservation because of the farm's implementation of contour farming along the drumlins of their property. The practice, along with Schulz winning the FFA award for placing first in the soil judging contest, caught the attention of the Soil Conservation Service (now known as the Natural Resources Conservation Service or NRCS), and the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) board, when they approached Schulz 50 years ago to become one of the board supervisors for the Wadena SWCD.

## **Conserving Wadena County**

Schulz was officially sworn in on January 20, 1975, and has strived to continuously accomplish the same primary goal: applying conservation to the land.

"Resources obviously decrease vastly when they're in use, so making sure we use our available resources regeneratively has always been a goal of mine," Schulz explained. "I think we've accomplished it and a lot of others too, but implementation of a practice generally stops after the payment is received, which is something we still see today and still is something to overcome."

Since joining the SWCD board, Schulz quickly found himself balancing the family farm, continuing his education, his participation on multiple other local, county, and state



boards, and his family—a juggling act that continues even today—but one Schulz enjoys immensely.

“I’ve always had the desire to lead,” Schulz said. “And when people are willing to learn, it makes serving in that regard much more fun and harder to give up.”

It also helps when your ideas come into fruition, especially when they benefit conservation. One of Schulz’s early suggestions as a board supervisor was to honor a local conservationist every year with photos and rhetoric to showcase what they’ve done on their land as an act of encouragement toward others to do likewise as they’re able.

“The concept was a huge hit at our annual meeting in 1980, with lots of local and state representation present,” Schulz said with a smile. “The next year, a similar outreach effort to recognize conservation at the local level was presented at the state’s annual convention! And they’ve done it every year since then.”

Though being a part of a board can help grow exciting aspects in both conservation and agriculture, it can also cultivate challenges, which Schulz has dealt with his fair share of throughout his time as a board supervisor. However, he also related that serving with men decades older than him was instructive, as they were not afraid of challenges. If public funds were limited, they would approach the respective individuals to get projects done, the first being the irrigation feasibility, which was completed with the aid of the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

“Those board members I had worked with were truly part of ‘The Greatest Generation,’” Schulz explained. “And in retrospect, we often stand on the shoulders of those who go before us, and those older board members bring wisdom and institutional knowledge that can be so valuable.”

Another challenge was finding extra funding to hire a district manager and supplemental employees to instigate a better organization that could finish soil surveys for the county. An enormous task that enabled the district to expand to new things, which they did. Beginning in 1977, the district conducted the Pinelands Sands Water Survey to cover the rest of the county.

For years afterward, work continued normally for the district until the 2011 Minnesota government shutdown, leading to a 20-day closure of most government services beginning on July 1, 2011. This created a crisis for the Wadena SWCD district as invoices for the work being performed were not paid by the state, which led to staff layoffs.

“With all egos aside, we first tried to initiate a merge with Wadena County, but the employees didn’t like the concept, and there were some concerns that pocketbooks would not be separate, which is an aspect the board didn’t like either,” Tom explained. “So, I went to the East Otter Tail SWCD next, and we were able to create the joined relationship we exhibit today—a move that I’ve never regretted.”

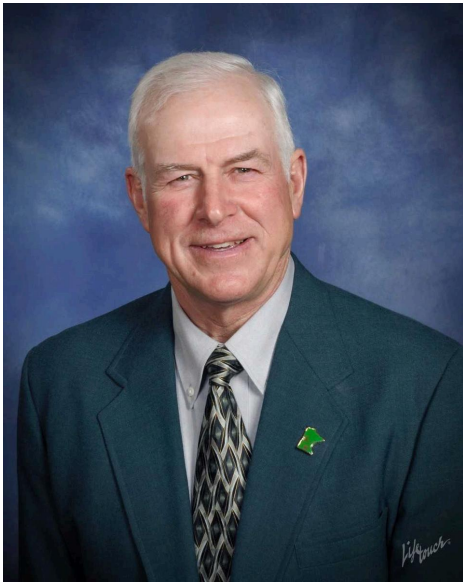
The second, larger challenge Schulz has seen over the years has been the lack of resources to complete goals on both the state and federal side of the conservation world. In both offices, Schulz has witnessed local producers being sent home without funding—an issue that, thankfully, has had a turning point in recent years.

Though one of Schulz’s passions that has yet to receive additional resource funding is forestry.

“One third of Minnesota is forested, but there are no economic benefits for landowners implementing forestry practices until the first thinning. So, I would love to see a federal program allow a cash flow of some sort for those twenty-plus years while those trees are establishing and growing,” Schulz explained. “Currently, the only additional route available is planting a faster-growing tree such as Hybrid Poplar that can be harvested in about half the time, which I’m trying out. My first rotation harvest was successful, and I’m hoping to achieve my second rotation harvest, though in this instance, we’ve hedged our plan by planting white pines on every third row that will be harvested decades from now.”

Overall, it’s a change Schulz would like to see happen and is continuously leading other forest managers and voicing his thoughts in other board groups hoping a modification will be made soon.

## **The Next Step Forward**



Looking back over the past 50 years, Schulz has witnessed many positive and negative changes throughout agriculture and conservation within Wadena County; however, his view on being involved with the Wadena SWCD hasn't.

“As a landowner, you're receiving expert-level technical assistance on any project when you walk through the door of any SWCD,” Schulz said. “Plus, the personal interaction along with an interest in wanting what is best for your land is the kind of ‘boots on the ground’ aid that is provided to everyone who works with us.”

As a board supervisor, Schulz mentioned how one is able to personally see what conservation can and will do to enable the environment to be more sustainable for all individuals and future generations.

However, those future generations will witness the Wadena SWCD board of supervisors without Tom Schulz present once his term is up in 2028, as he has decided not to run again. However, Schulz will still be present on the multiple other boards he is currently a part of—all dedicated to some aspect of agriculture or conservation—continuously advocating for each in hopes to bring upon necessary amendments to make both more balanced for years to come.

Posted in: [News](#)

# Wadena Soil & Water Conservation District

4 Alfred St NE  
Wadena, MN 56482

218-632-4201

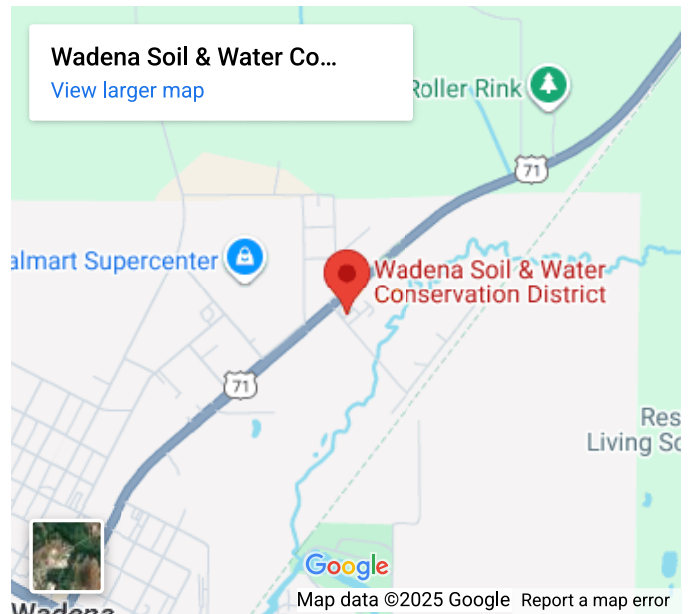
[anne.oldakowski@wadena.mnswcd.org](mailto:anne.oldakowski@wadena.mnswcd.org)

## Connect

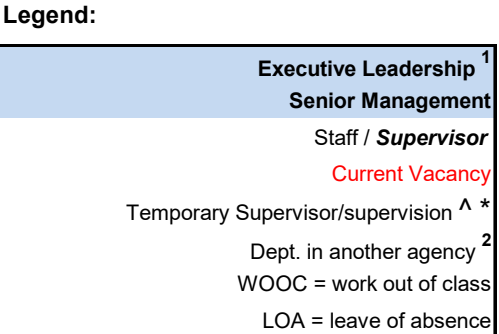


[Site Map](#)

[Privacy & Terms](#)



2025 Photos & Text Copyright - © Wadena Soil & Water Conservation District  
3plains.com - [Website Design](#)



# BWSR Board Member Conflict of Interest in Grant Review – Disclosure Form

**Meeting:**

**Date:**

I certify that I have read and understand the descriptions of conflict of interest provided, reviewed my participation for conflict of interest, and disclosed any perceived, potential, or actual conflicts. As a BWSR Board member, appointed according to Minnesota Statute Section 103B.101, I am responsible for evaluating my participation or abstention from the review process as indicated below. If I have indicated an actual conflict, I will abstain from the discussion and decision for that agenda item.

*Please complete the form below for all agenda items. If you indicate that you do not have a conflict for an agenda item, you do not need to fill out additional information regarding that agenda item.*

Agenda Item	No conflict (mark here and stop for this row)	Grant applicant(s) associated with conflict (required if conflict identified)	Conflict Type (required if conflict identified)	Will you participate? (required if conflict identified)	Description of conflict (optional)
				Yes / No	
				Yes / No	
				Yes / No	
				Yes / No	

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<input type="checkbox"/> IN-STATE <input type="checkbox"/> OUT-OF-STATE		<input type="checkbox"/> SHORT TERM ADVANCE <input type="checkbox"/> RECURRING ADVANCE		SEMA4 EMPLOYEE EXPENSE REPORT						<input type="checkbox"/> Check if advance was issued for these expenses <input type="checkbox"/> FINAL EXPENSE(S) FOR THIS TRIP?					
Employee Name		Home Address (Include City and State)			Permanent Work Station (Include City and State)			Agency		1-Way Commute Miles		Job Title			
Employee ID		Rcd #	Trip Start Date		Trip End Date		Reason for Travel/Advance (30 Char. Max) [example: XYZ Conference, Dallas, TX]					Barg. Unit		Expense Group ID (Agency Use)	

Chart String(s)	Accounting Date	Fund	Fin DeptID	AppropID	SW Cost	Sub Acct	Agncy Cost 1	Agncy Cost 2	PC BU	Project	Activity	Srcce Type	Category	Sub-Cat	Distrib %	
	A															
	B															

A. Description:

Date	Daily Description	Itinerary		Trip Miles	Total Trip & Local Miles	Mileage Rate
		Time	Location			
		Depart				
		Arrive				
		Depart				
		Arrive				
		Depart				
		Arrive				
		Depart				
		Arrive				
		Depart				
		Arrive				
		Depart				
		Arrive				
		Depart				
		Arrive				
		Depart				
		Arrive				
VEHICLE CONTROL #					Total Miles 0	

B. Description:

Meals ✓			Total Meals (overnight stay)	Total Meals (no overnight stay) taxable	Lodging	Personal Telephone	Parking	Total
B	L	D						
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						0.00
			Total MWI/MWO 0.00	Total MEI/MEO 0.00	Total LGI/LGO 0.00	Total PHI/PHO 0.00	Total PKI/PKO 0.00	Subtotal (A) 0.00

MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT CALCULATION

Enter the rates, miles, and total amounts for the mileage listed above. Get the IRS rate from your agency business expense contact.	Rate	Total Miles	Total Mileage Amt.
1. Enter rate, miles, and amount being claimed at <b>equal to the IRS rate</b> .			0.00
2. Enter rate, miles, and amount being claimed at <b>less than the IRS rate</b> .			0.00
3. Enter rate, miles, and amount being claimed at <b>greater than the IRS rate</b> .			0.00
4. Add the total mileage amounts from lines 1 through 3.			0.00
5. Enter IRS mileage rate in place at the time of travel.			
6. Subtract line 5 from line 3.	0.000		
7. Enter total miles from line 3.		0	
8. Multiply line 6 by line 7. This is <b>taxable</b> mileage.			0.00 <small>(Copy to Box C)</small>
9. Subtract line 8 from line 4. If line 8 is zero, enter mileage amount from line 4. This is <b>non-taxable</b> mileage.			0.00 <small>(Copy to Box D)</small>

OTHER EXPENSES – See reverse for list of Earn Codes.

Date	Earn Code	Comments	Total
Subtotal Other Expenses: (B)			0.00
Total taxable mileage greater than IRS rate to be reimbursed: (C)			0.00 <small>MIT or MOT</small>
Total nontaxable mileage less than or equal to IRS rate to be reimbursed: (D)			0.00 <small>MLI or MLO</small>
<b>Grand Total (A + B + C + D)</b>			0.00

If using private vehicle for out-of-state travel: What is the lowest airfare to the destination? \_\_\_\_\_ Total Expenses for this trip must not exceed this amount.

I declare, under penalty of perjury, that this claim is just, correct and that no part of it has been paid or reimbursed by the state of Minnesota or by another party except with respect to any advance amount paid for this trip. I AUTHORIZE PAYROLL DEDUCTION OF ANY SUCH ADVANCE. I have not accepted personal travel benefits.

Employee Signature _____ Date _____ Work Phone: _____	Less Advance issued for this trip: _____ Total amount to be reimbursed to the employee: 0.00 Amount of Advance to be returned by the employee by deduction from paycheck: 0.00
---	--

Approved: Based on knowledge of necessity for travel and expense and on compliance with all provisions of applicable travel regulations.  
  
 Supervisor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Appointing Authority Designee (Needed for Recurring Advance and Special Expenses)  
  
 Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## EMPLOYEE EXPENSE REPORT (Instructions)

### DO NOT PAY RELOCATION EXPENSES ON THIS FORM.

See form FI-00568 Relocation Expense Report. Relocation expenses must be sent to Minnesota Management & Budget, Statewide Payroll Services, for payment.

### USE OF FORM: Use the form for the following purposes:

1. To reimburse employees for authorized travel expenses.
2. To request and pay all travel advances.
3. To request reimbursement for small cash purchases paid for by employees.

**COMPLETION OF THE FORM: Employee:** Complete, in ink, all parts of this form. If claiming reimbursement, enter actual amounts you paid, not to exceed the limits set in your bargaining agreement or compensation plan. If you do not know these limits, contact your agency's business expense contact. Employees must submit an expense report within 60 days of incurring any expense(s) or the reimbursement comes taxable.

All of the data you provide on this form is public information, except for your home address. You are not legally required to provide your home address, but the state of Minnesota cannot process certain mileage payments without it.

**Supervisor:** Approve the correctness and necessity of this request in compliance with existing bargaining agreements or compensation plans and all other applicable rules and policies. Forward to the agency business expense contact person, who will then process the payments. Note: The expense report form must include original signatures.

**Final Expense For This Trip?:** Check this box if there will be no further expenses submitted for this trip. By doing this, any outstanding advance balance associated with this trip will be deducted from the next paycheck that is issued.

**1-Way Commute Miles:** Enter the number of miles from your home to your permanent workstation.

**Expense Group ID:** Entered by accounting or payroll office at the time of entering expenses. The Expense Group ID is a unique number that is system-assigned. It will be used to reference any advance payment or expense reimbursement associated with this trip.

**Earn Code:** Select an Earn Code from the list that describes the expenses for which you are requesting reimbursement. Be sure to select the code that correctly reflects whether the trip is in state or out-of-state. **Note:** Some expense reimbursements may be taxable.

**Travel Advances, Short-Term and Recurring:** An employee can only have one outstanding advance at a time. An advance must be settled before another advance can be issued.

**Travel Advance Settlement:** When the total expenses submitted are less than the advance amount or if the trip is cancelled, the employee will owe money to the state. Except for rare situations, personal checks will not be accepted for settlement of advances; a deduction will be taken from the employee's paycheck.

**FMS ChartStrings:** Funding source(s) for advance or expense(s)

**Mileage:** Use the **Mileage Reimbursement Calculation** table to figure your mileage reimbursement. Mileage may be authorized for reimbursement to the employee at one of three rates (referred to as the equal to, less than, or greater than rate). The rates are specified in the applicable bargaining agreement/compensation plan. Note: If the mileage rate you are using is above the IRS rate at the time of travel (this is not common), part of the mileage reimbursement will be taxed.

**Vehicle Control #:** If your agency assigns vehicle control numbers follow your agency's internal policy and procedure. Contact your agency's business expense contact for more information on the vehicle control number procedure.

**Personal Travel Benefits:** State employees and other officials cannot accept personal benefits resulting from travel on state business as their own. These benefits include frequent flyer miles/points and other benefits (i.e. discounts issued by lodging facilities.) Employees must certify that they have not accepted personal travel benefits when they apply for travel reimbursement.

**Receipts:** Attach itemized receipts for all expenses except meals, taxi services, baggage handling, and parking meters, to this reimbursement claim. The Agency Designee may, at its option, require attachment of meal receipts as well. Credit card receipts, bank drafts, or cancelled checks are not allowable receipts.

**Copies and Distribution:** Submit the original document for payment and retain a copy for your employee records.

	Earn Code			Earn Code	
Description	In State	Out of State	Description	In State	Out of State
Advance	ADI	ADO	Membership	MEM	
Airfare	ARI	ARO	Mileage > IRS Rate	MIT*	MOT*
Baggage Handling	BGI	BGO	Mileage < or = IRS Rate	MLI	MLO
Car Rental	CRI	CRO	Network Services	NWK	
Clothing Allowance	CLA		Other Expenses	OEI	OEO
Clothing-Non Contract	CLN		Parking	PKI	PKO
Communications - Other	COM		Photocopies	CPI	CPO
Conference/Registration Fee	CFI	CFO	Postal, Mail & Shipping Svcs.(outbound)	PMS	
Department Head Expense	DHE		Storage of State Property	STO	
Fax	FXI	FXO	Supplies/Materials/Parts	SMP	
Freight & Delivery (inbound)	FDS		Telephone, Business Use	BPI	BPO
Hosting	HST		Telephone, Personal Use	PHI	PHO
Laundry	LDI	LDO	Training/Tuition Fee	TRG	
Lodging	LGI	LGO	Taxi/Airport Shuttle	TXI	TXO
Meals With Lodging	MWI	MWO	Vest Reimbursement	VST	
Meals Without Lodging	MEI*	MEO*	Note: * = taxable, taxed at supplemental rates		