

April 27, 2022

# Minnesota Wetland Professional Certification Program Plan

## Project Description:

The Minnesota Wetland Professional Certification Program (MWPCP) certifies wetland practitioners in Minnesota. The program was authorized by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) on September 25, 2019 and implemented on January 1, 2020.

This program plan addresses program purpose, scope, certification requirements, testing, continuing education requirements, training, program fees, and budget. Other state and federal agencies, local governments and colleges/universities with relevant wetland expertise will be asked for assistance with trainings depending on the subject matter.

## Purpose:

The purpose of the MWPCP is to increase and maintain the level of knowledge and expertise for those conducting and/or reviewing professional work associated with wetland regulatory compliance in Minnesota. This includes identifying and delineating wetlands as well as reviewing and/or assisting applicants/landowners in complying with wetland regulations in Minnesota.

The MWPCP provides the following:

1. Increased uniformity for implementing WCA through standardized training, experience and educational requirements for wetland professionals;
2. Increased consistency of the regulatory process by standardizing wetland regulatory expectations and products;
3. Greater protection for landowners and other consumers by providing a base level of required knowledge and ongoing training for certified wetland professionals conducting and reviewing wetland regulatory work on private and public lands; and
4. An incentive for wetland professionals to maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills.

The program is strictly voluntary. There is no requirement for individuals conducting professional wetland work in Minnesota to be certified by this or any other program. However, it is the goal of this program for certification to be a recognized as a "standard" for individuals working in a professional capacity related to wetland regulatory compliance in Minnesota.

## **Scope:**

The MWPCP provides certification for wetland professionals conducting and/or reviewing work related to compliance with wetland regulations in Minnesota. Certification indicates an individual has a fundamental understanding of the basic technical tools, rules, policies and guidance associated with wetland regulatory compliance in Minnesota. This includes the following subject areas:

- Wetland identification and delineation;
- Wetland restoration;
- State and Federal wetland regulations (rules, policies, procedures);
- Wetland functional assessment; and
- Wetland monitoring.

The program emphasizes the practical components of these subject areas as they apply to wetland regulatory implementation. The program does not test for, nor does it certify the competency of a wetland professional. It certifies that a wetland professional has successfully completed foundational training developed specifically for those working in the wetland regulatory field in Minnesota and that they have the basic background knowledge and training to become competent at conducting work associated with wetland regulatory compliance.

## **Certification Requirements:**

There are both In-training and professional certifications.

### **In-Training Certification Requirements**

Individuals that are certified as In-training have demonstrated a basic understanding of the subject areas identified in the program scope, but have minimal professional experience. In-training certification requirements are as follows:

- Must pass an In-training exam covering wetland delineation, wetland science and the application of wetland regulations in Minnesota; and
- Within the three years prior to passing the exam, must have completed at least 18 hours of wetland regulatory and/or technical coursework related to one or more of the five subject areas listed under Program Scope. All training hours must be obtained through in-person completion of an approved course or courses.

## Professional Certification Requirements

- Must pass a Professional certification exam covering wetland delineation, wetland science and the application of wetland regulations in Minnesota;
- Within the three years prior to passing the exam, must have completed at least 18 hours of wetland regulatory or technical coursework related to one or more of the five subject areas listed under Program Scope. All training hours must be obtained through in-person completion of an approved course or courses. This requirement is not applicable if an individual is In-training certified at the time they pass the Professional exam; and
- Within the twelve years prior to passing the exam, must have the equivalent of at least three years of full-time professional employment where wetland regulation, delineation, management and/or restoration are among the primary duties/tasks of the position(s) held. The requirement is two years if the individual holds an advanced degree (Masters or PhD) in natural resources including wetland ecology, wildlife biology, hydrology, water resources, soil science, botany, plant ecology, ecology, fisheries, zoology, aquatic biology or closely related field.

There is no distinction between public and private sector wetland professionals with respect to the necessary training and knowledge for certification.

### Certification Testing:

Professional and In-training certification tests will generally be offered following a multi-day introductory wetland course or courses offered annually plus occasional testing opportunities associated with regional training events. Tests will be prepared and reviewed by selected BWSR wetland staff with additional peer review by staff from other cooperating agency partners. Tests will generally involve multiple choice questions covering a core curriculum established by the program. A study guide will be prepared and made available for those preparing to take either exam.

### Continuing Education:

Individuals that are certified as In-training or Professional must maintain their knowledge and expertise through attendance of periodic training/educational events related to wetlands. Certified individuals must attend at least 18 hours (credit hours) of training/educational events every three years to maintain their certification.

Qualifying training/educational events must be primarily focused on one or more the following subject areas: wetland delineation/identification, wetland restoration, state/federal wetland regulations, wetland functional assessment and wetland monitoring. These events can include training courses, webinars, online training, structured field trips, professional conferences and seminars. Individuals requesting qualifying credit hours for these events must be a registered participant or instructor.

Credit hours are equivalent to the number of hours (to the nearest hour) associated with a particular course or event minus scheduled breaks. No more than six of the 18 required credit hours in a three-year period can be obtained from online training/events where the participant does not attend in person.

Training events sponsored by the MWPCP will be assigned credit hours for continuing education. For non-MWPCP sponsored training/events participants are required to submit detailed agendas justifying qualifying credit hour claims.

Certified individuals will be provided with annual reports on the credit hours they have obtained to date within their three-year renewal period.

Certified individuals failing to meet the continuing education requirements will be de-certified and required to pass the certification exam and meet all other certification requirements to become certified again. BWSR staff may make temporary adjustments to continuing education requirements if available training opportunities are significantly limited during the certification period.

BWSR will maintain a list of certified individuals and update it annually.

### **Training:**

The MWPCP will sponsor annual training classes throughout the state as part of BWSR's wetland training plan as updated and amended. Generally, training will include a combination of classroom and field-based classes depending on the subject matter. In addition to regional training venues, at least one basic wetland regulatory and delineation training class will be offered annually. Training courses will generally be open to the public, although specific classes may occasionally be limited to local government unit staff or other groups/sectors. Online training modules have been and will continue to be developed and made available on the BWSR website for self-directed learning and as preparation, background and supplemental information for those attending more advanced classes.

### **Fees and Budget:**

The program will charge fees for classes, testing and certification. These fees will be used to offset costs associated with program administration, management and training. At least biennially, costs associated with the program will be tabulated, fees will be evaluated and adjusted as necessary, and a training schedule with budget will be developed. A major program goal is to provide training and testing at an affordable cost for local government unit staff, consultants and other wetland professionals. Annual fee schedules will be developed and approved through the existing decision-making process of BWSR's Senior Management Team. Fees may be waived or reduced for course attendees from other agencies and entities in proportion to any training assistance they provide for the program.