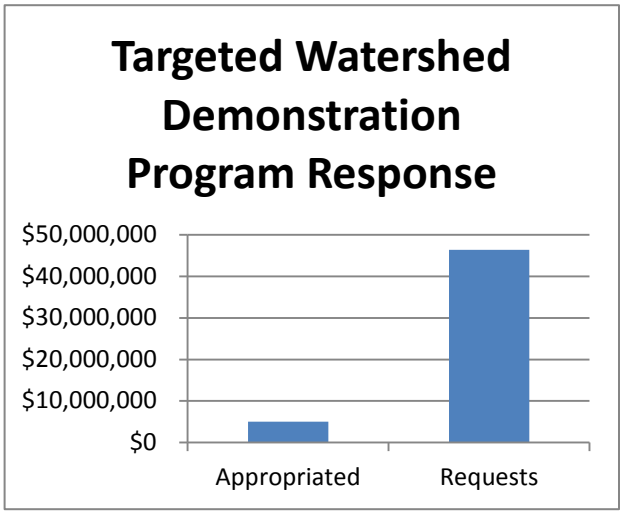
The Targeted Watershed Demonstration Program Launches

May 2014 Snapshots

In 2013, the Minnesota Legislature created a new appropriation to BWSR to *award grants to local government units organized for the management of water in a watershed or subwatershed that have multiyear plans that will result in a significant reduction in water pollution in a selected subwatershed. Priority in making grants must be given to the three to six best designed plans each year.* That appropriation evolved into the Targeted Watershed Demonstration Program. This new Clean Water Fund program is piloting a more holistic and multi-faceted approach toward the State's ongoing work to reduce water pollution. Focusing on the watershed scale, the goal of the program is to demonstrate that concentrated implementation actions can have a positive impact on water quality.

Across the state, nonpoint water pollution remains one of the most widespread environmental problems. Improvements have been made in water quality at the project scale but landscape-scale environmental benefits in lakes and rivers are less commonly documented. Focusing more conservation efforts in a concentrated manner has the potential to make significant strides while achieving measurable results. It may also result in greater environmental improvements per dollar spent.

Interest in the program vastly exceeded available funding. Twenty-five submittals were received for the FY2014 cycle, requesting a total of $46.4 million in funds for what ultimately was $5.7 million in awards. In March of 2014, the Cedar River Watershed District, Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District, and Rice Creek Watershed District were named the inaugural participants in the Targeted Watershed Demonstration Program.



Working at this scale to improve water quality involves having a thorough understanding of the pollution sources and pathways within the watershed. It also involves prioritizing subwatersheds and specifically targeting areas from which the majority of pollutants are delivered and are thus in need of the greatest conservation. All three demonstration projects clearly articulated their knowledge of the watersheds they are working in and all have a solid action plan based on this information.

Pilot Project Overviews:

Dobbins Creek, Cedar River Watershed District (WD), $1.5 million award.
An important resource in southern Minnesota, the creek is impaired, the cloudiness of the water affecting plant and animal life. This project will install conservation practices in a systematic way to reduce sediment and nutrients, efforts which are estimated to contribute 15% of the pollutant reduction necessary to achieve Dobbins Creek's water quality goal.

Long Lake, Rice Creek Watershed District, $3 million award.
Work within this metro-area watershed will target Long Lake, a key destination in the most visited regional park in Ramsey County. Long Lake is an important regional resource, enjoyed by nearly half a million people annually. It's on the State's list of Impaired Waters due to excess nutrients, and the work on this project is estimated to achieve more than 40% of the pollutant reductions necessary to meet the Long Lake water quality goals.

Serpent Lake Subwatershed, Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), $1.2 million award.
North-central Minnesota's Serpent Lake, a regionally significant body of water in Crow Wing County, is at a critical turning point as water clarity continues to decline. If polluted runoff problems are not addressed, the resulting costs of water quality impacts will increase greatly, negatively affecting the quality of life and economic vitality of the region. The SWCD estimates that the conservation practices implemented through this program will prevent 139 pounds of phosphorus from entering the lake. That represents the majority of the phosphorus pollutant reductions necessary to meet the lake's water quality goal and reverse the declining water quality trend.

The Cedar River Watershed District, Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District, and Rice Creek Watershed District will have a four year time frame to complete their proposed project. BWSR will be working with each applicant to track their progress over the duration of the funding cycle and will deliver an interim report to the Minnesota Legislature in 2016 on the outcomes achieved to date.