

**BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES
520 LAFAYETTE ROAD NORTH
ST. PAUL, MN 55155
WEDNESDAY, MAY 25, 2022**

AGENDA

9:00 AM CALL MEETING TO ORDER

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

MINUTES OF APRIL 27, 2022 BOARD MEETING

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

INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF

- Mike Nelson, Legislative Coordinator
- Justin Hanson, Assistant Director of Regional Operations
- Patty Sweep, HR Director
- John Shea, Board Conservationist
- Melissa King, Water Programs Coordinator
- Christa Branham-MacLennan, eLINK Data Specialist

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 staff before any vote.

REPORTS

- Chair & Administrative Advisory Committee – Gerald Van Amburg
- Executive Director – John Jaschke
- Audit & Oversight Committee – Joe Collins
- Dispute Resolution and Compliance Report – Travis Germundson/Rich Sve
- Grants Program & Policy Committee – Todd Holman
- RIM Reserve Committee – Jayne Hager Dee
- Water Management & Strategic Planning Committee – Joe Collins
- Wetland Conservation Committee – Jill Crafton
- Buffers, Soils & Drainage Committee – Mark Zabel
- 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 – Nicole Bernd
- Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts – LeAnn Buck
- Minnesota Association of Townships – Eunice Biel
- Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts – Emily Javens
- Natural Resources Conservation Service – Troy Daniell

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Central Region Committee

1. Rum River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – Joe Collins and Jason Weinerman – ***DECISION ITEM***

Grants Program and Policy Committee

1. FY23 MN Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Outreach and Implementation Program Continuation Grants – Dusty Van Thuyne – ***DECISION ITEM***

NEW BUSINESS

1. Red River Watershed Management Board – Rob Sip – ***DECISION ITEM***

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- Grants Program and Policy Committee is scheduled for Monday, June 13, 2022 at 9:00 a.m., location TBD.
- BWSR Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 22, 2022, at 9:00 a.m. in the Lower Level Conference Rooms at 520 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul and by WebEx.

ADJOURN

**BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES
520 LAFAYETTE ROAD NORTH
LOWER LEVEL BOARD ROOM
ST. PAUL, MN 55155
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2022**

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joe Collins, Jill Crafton, Jayne Hager Dee, Kurt Beckstrom, Neil Peterson, Rich Sve, Gerald Van Amburg, Ted Winter, LeRoy Ose, Kelly Kirkpatrick, Eunice Biel, Todd Holman, Ronald Staples, Mark Zabel, Glenn Skuta, MPCA; Joel Larson, University of Minnesota Extension; Jeff Berg, MDA; Steve Robertson, MDH; Sarah Strommen, DNR

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

John Jaschke, Rachel Mueller, Tom Gile, Travis Germundson, Ryan Hughes, Les Lemm, Ed Lenz, Suzanne Rhees, Marcey Westrick, David Copeland, Dan Shaw, Dave Weirens, Ken Powell, Mike Nelson, David Demmer

OTHERS PRESENT:

Brian Martinson, AMC; Emily Javens, MAWD; LeAnn Buck, MASWCD; Troy Daniell, NRCS; Brenda Lageson, Andy Henschel, Courtney Phillips, Christopher Lowe, Jan Voit, Jamie Beyer

Chair Gerald VanAmburg called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

22-17 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** - Moved by Ted Winter, seconded by Eunice Biel, to adopt the agenda as amended. *Motion passed on a roll call vote.*

22-18 **MINUTES OF MARCH 23, 2022 BOARD MEETING**
The March 23, 2022, board meeting minutes were approved as amended by a voice vote.

PUBLIC ACCESS FORUM

No members of the public provided comments to the board.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF

Tom Gile introduced Paul Erdmann, Ecological Science Conservationist; Marcey Westrick introduced Darren Mayers, Board Conservationist; and Dennis Rodacker introduced Solimar Garcia Barger, Wetland Mitigation Program Assistant.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

Chair Van Amburg 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 staff before any vote.”

REPORTS

Chair & Administrative Advisory Committee – Chair Gerald Van Amburg introduced new SWCD Board Member Kurt Beckstrom. Stated two other board members were reappointed, Rich Sve and LeRoy Ose. There is one appointment (metro area City) that remains to be filled.

Executive Director’s Report - John Jaschke reported an updated Committee Roster was sent out. He reviewed the Day of Packet that included the Minnesota Wetland Professional Certification Program Plan Revision that will be discussed later in the agenda and the Snapshot articles. Stated the legislative process is underway and have until May 23 when the session ends. John thanked board members who responded to the future meetings survey. Stated we will go to in-person meetings starting in May with an alternative virtual option if needed through WebEx. Committee meetings will have the same options.

This year’s Board Tour is in conjunction with the August meeting and will be in the East Grand Forks area going to various locations in the Red River Valley area. It will be a joint tour with the Red River Water Management Board, Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, the Red River Basin Commission and the Northwest Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

New staff coming onboard continues. Mike Nelson is our new legislative coordinator and will be introduced at a future meeting. Interviews for the HR Director position were completed and expect to have someone onboard soon. Assistant Director for Regional Operations Justin Hanson will start in May

and Melissa King is our new Water Program Coordinator. A position has been posted for the Assistant Director of the Strategy and Operations Division. Stated the agency is also working on a telework policy.

Jill Crafton asked what the implications for being in person are for committee meetings. John stated meetings will be based on the committee chair in consultation with lead staff on what is preferred and what the agenda is.

Chair Van Amburg asked if there is anything new on the DEI Report. John stated Jenny Gieseke is leading and will be organizing an external session with a consultant to interview BWSR's outside partners.

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

Dispute Resolution and Compliance Report – Rich Sve reported they have not met. Travis Germundson reported there are presently seven appeals pending. All the appeals involve the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). There have been no new appeals filed since the last Board Meeting.

File-22-2 (2-16-22) The appeal was placed in abeyance and the Restoration Order stayed for submittal of additional documentation in support of the appeal and for Kanabec County to make a final decision on the after-the-fact exemption applications that are associated with the project.

File 22-1(1-7-2022) Hearing to occur sometime in August in St. Paul. Recommendation proposed to be submitted to the BWSR Board.

Travis stated BWSR has been appointed new board attorney Chris Evens. The Buffer program has two buffer specialist to be filled. Stated staff have been working with MN.IT to replace an internal Microsoft Access database to ensure future functionality. Will have vendor in place soon and have a functional database by the end of the year.

Jill Crafton asked if they'd be able to get a presentation down the road on the functionality. Travis stated they could give an overview of the enhancements and the functionality of it in the future.

Glenn Skuta asked if the 93 parcels listed in the Buffer Compliance Section are a cumulative total since the inception of the buffer law. Travis stated they are a rolling total.

Grants Program & Policy Committee – Todd Holman reported they met on March 28 and April 11 with action items on the agenda for today. Next meeting is May 23rd.

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

Water Management & Strategic Planning Committee – Joe Collins reported they have not met.

Wetland Conservation Committee – Jill Crafton reported they met on April 21 with an item on the agenda today.

Buffers, Soils & Drainage Committee – Mark Zabel reported they have not met.

Drainage Work Group (DWG) – Neil Peterson stated they have not met. Tom Gile reported there was a drainage bill introduced this session in the House. It has been laid over and included in the proposed House omnibus bill. It establishes a drainage registry portal for drainage procedures and non-petitioned repairs. Improvements and new drainage systems would be required to be noticed in the portal. The

portal would be established and maintained by BWSR. Tom stated this is not from a Drainage Work Group (DWG) recommendation. The DWG will be meeting in June or July dependent on legislative work.

Joe Collins asked if this bill has passed or where it's at. Tom stated it was passed out of a House Committee and is in a House bill but not the Senate at this time. Joe asked if they recognize there has been a lot of comments about this bill in terms of not being vetted by different organizations. Tom stated there were people from the Drainage Work Group that commented and reached out to their state elected officials. Ron Staples stated they also sent letters.

AGENCY REPORTS

Minnesota Department of Agriculture – Jeff Berg reported the agriculture bill passed off the House floor but not in the Senate yet. Stated there are 60 sites with confirmed cases of Avian Influenza. The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification program has over 1,200 producers and is approaching 850,000 acres.

Minnesota Department of Health – Steve Robertson reported they will be notifying their intent to update the Wetland Protection Rule through the State Register.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Sarah Strommen reported they are following the drought relief bill that passed the Senate and the House. It's a standalone bill that provides drought relief to farmers in the Senate bill and drought relief to farmers and forest landowners for loss of trees in the House. Stated they are looking to reconcile those. The House bill for Environmental and Natural Resources has passed off the Senate floor and will be at the House tomorrow.

Sarah stated the Governor has called on the National Guard to assist with flooding. Stated they are thinking of the future of funding conservation and outdoor recreation work. They are on schedule to have some recommendations later this year. The walleye opener is May 15th and they are expecting half million Minnesotans to participate.

Chair Van Amburg stated he read an article about setting aside 30% of the earth's area for conservation, biological diversity, and climate change. Chair Van Amburg asked if they were having any discussions in their department about this. Sarah stated she read the article and noted there were interviews by conservationists and the common sense was they aren't sure the 30x30 is the right framework for Minnesota. Stated that we have a lot of action plans and it's the framework Minnesotans built. Jill Crafton thanked Gerry for raising this issue.

Minnesota Extension – Joel Larson reported they are hiring an extension educator to work on climate resilience primarily in agriculture and other rural communities. The position is funded in partnership with the Minnesota Corn Growers. In the last month they were able to secure a second extension educator position to work on climate resiliency in forest communities. Hoping to have both onboard within the next couple of months.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency – Glenn Skuta reported Wayne Cords the South Watershed Section Manager has taken an internal promotion to the Assistant Director of Operations Division and stated his vacancy will be filled. Glenn stated the Clean Water Council had their first in-person meeting this week and will hold meetings in a hybrid format. One of the subcommittees will continue meeting virtual and the other subcommittee will be a hybrid meeting. Starting this week MPCA staff will start coming back into the office.

ADVISORY COMMENTS

Association of Minnesota Counties – Brian Martinson reported they are focused on legislative work. Stated AMC has concerns with the drainage registry information portal proposal. The funding necessary for 404 Assumption is included in the Senate. Stated they support the effort in the Environment and Natural Resources bill. AMC continues to advocate for local road wetland replacement funding. They are seeking \$20 million in a combination of cash and bonding, stated this mirrors the request from the governor. They are also seeking ongoing base funding for this program of approximately \$6 million annually to BWSR to operate the program. Brian stated there are a couple newer issues, the House has advanced a Legacy Funding bill. This year they included spending from the Clean Water Fund. Brian stated the Clean Water Council has not met and reviewed any of the projects or made recommendations so AMC has some concerns about the process. Stated there is an Environment Natural Resources Trust Fund (LCCMR bill) moving forward that has many good provisions. Brian noted in the Senate version there is money for septic system grants directed towards BWSR with the same control or restriction language on use that were in last year's budget bill.

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

Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts – LeAnn Buck stated it's an honor to have Kurt Beckstrom along with Jayne Hager Dee and Mark Zabel on the board. LeAnn stated one of their priorities this legislative session is the SWCD Aid Package that the association is seeking capacity funding so as not to be reliant on the Clean Water Fund. LeAnn thanked Brian Martinson and Matt Hilgart with AMC, the Commissioner's on the board, and other agencies for their ongoing support of their SWCD districts. LeAnn stated they are working to secure the last \$9 million for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

Thanked Sarah and her DNR staff for meeting with them on private lands stewardship and forest management. Thanked Joel and stated the Minnesota Office of Soil Health staff did a wonderful job of putting together the soil health event.

Stated the association has been diligent with their advocacy at a national level and have conducted meetings talking about appropriations for our USDA partners in the Natural Resource Conservation Service. LeAnn thanked Eunice Biel for being a strong advocate in helping to leverage federal funds for climate and USDA major initiatives.

LeAnn stated One Watershed One Plan is going from planning to implementation.

Neil Peterson stated the SWCDs do great work. They are currently working on their third One Watershed One Plan and without the SWCD staff a lot of these plans would be at a standstill and thanked them for their contributions.

Minnesota Association of Townships – Eunice Biel thanked LeAnn for her support. Stated Minnesota Association of Townships will be having a town law review and a legal short course in May that is being held in person. Will also have videos on ARPA funds and how to report expenditures.

Eunice gave a legislative update and stated there is an update on the legislation annexation policy in SF 1927. Stated there is an increase in ongoing township road funding by \$20 million in Transportation.

Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts – Emily Javens thanked BWSR staff Pete Waller, Brett Arne, Matt Fischer, and Henry Van Offelen for providing training to new managers. It was well received by members and they will be providing another training later in May.

Emily stated they've had conversations with Executive Director Jaschke on future partnering and are undergoing a strategic plan update. Thanked Tom Gile for his work with the drainage registry portal and AMC for writing a joint letter with MAWD. Glad to hear LeRoy was reappointed to the board and is looking forward to Kurt Beckstrom being on the board. Stated the watershed district levy bill is still in committee.

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Troy Daniell thanked BWSR for their partnership and in writing Snapshots and success stories. Hope they can continue this collaboration and storytelling.

Stated they are writing contracts for EQIP, CSP, and various RCPP projects. Looking forward to getting out in the field with the nice weather. Troy stated they had a couple RFPs this year. They will fund one tribal related RFP with White Earth Nation to help with food sovereignty and conservation. They will be ranking and awarding other grants to partners in the near future.

Stated their budget received their final allocation and they will continue with an aggressive hiring schedule. Troy stated the infrastructure funding that came out last year had a piece for watershed operations that can help with initial planning and implementation. Stated he will keep making contacts with people and hope some proposals will come forward this summer.

Chair Van Amburg recessed the meeting at 10:57 a.m. and called the meeting back to order at 11:05 a.m.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Southern Region Committee

Shell Rock River & Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – Ted Winter and David Copeland presented Shell Rock River & Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.

Shell Rock River & Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) – The Shell Rock River & Winnebago River Watershed Partnership (Partnership) was selected by BWSR for a One Watershed, One Plan Planning Grant in August of 2018. The Partnership established a Memorandum of Agreement on July 5, 2018, for the purposes of watershed planning. Planning was initiated on April 23, 2019, via notification to designated Plan review authorities. The Partnership has followed One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures; and the Policy Committee, Technical Advisory Group, and Steering Team members have attended regularly scheduled meetings and kept open communication throughout Plan development. The Partnership submitted the draft Shell Rock River & Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) to BWSR on November 1, 2021, for 60-day comment period. A public hearing was held January 20, 2022, and the Policy Committee submitted the Plan for approval February 17, 2022. The Southern Regional Committee (Committee) met on March 30, 2022, to review the planning process, the content of the Plan, State agency comments on the Plan, and to make a recommendation for approval. The Committee recommends approval by the full Board.

Jill Crafton stated she was impressed with the detail and thanked them for their work.

Joe Collins stated he was impressed with learning how soil cover crops can be used for water storage.

Mark Zabel asked if there was a local adoption following board approval. Dave stated they have 120 days to adopt the plan and the 10 year clock starts from the date of the BWSR Board approval.

Glenn Skuta noted the anticipated funding expected slightly exceeds the amount of funding needed for the plan. Dave stated that goes to the success that Shell Rock River Watershed District had in securing funding from other sources, including Lessard-Sams Funds.

Kelly Kirkpatrick stated she is excited about this program.

**
22-19 Moved by Kelly Kirkpatrick, seconded by Jill Crafton, to approve the Shell Rock River & Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

Grants Program and Policy Committee

Approval of Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot Grants – Dan Shaw presented Approval of Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot Grants.

The Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot (HELP) program is funded through the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) and is focused on restoring and enhancing diverse native habitat on conservation lands and natural areas strategically located across Minnesota in efforts to address declining pollinators and other beneficial insects. On December 16, 2021, through Board Order #21-56, the Board authorized staff to complete and open the Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot RFP for a total of \$ 674,500. The application period was open until February 23, 2022. 11 applications requesting \$400,760 were received. The grants were reviewed by an interagency review team on March 24, 2022 to finalize grant ranking. The Grants Program and Policy Committee, at their March 28, 2022 meeting, reviewed the proposed grant awards and recommended approval to the Board.

Steve Robertson asked what the aggregate acreage was covered by the 11 applications being considered for today. Dan stated the projects range in size significantly. Some are a couple hundred acres that are easements or CRP land. Some are much smaller projects that are more focused on really high diversity locations, some are part of nature centers or arboretums.

**
22-20 Moved by Rich Sve, seconded by Jill Crafton, to approve the Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot Grants. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

Cooperative Weed Management Area Grants – Dan Shaw presented Cooperative Weed Management Area Grants.

Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMA) are partnerships of federal, state and local government agencies along with tribes, individual landowners and various other interested groups that manage noxious weeds or invasive plants in a defined area. On December 16, 2021, through Board Order #21-57, the Board authorized staff to complete and open the Cooperative Weed Management Area Program Request for Proposal for a total of \$200,000 to eligible Soil and Water Conservation District's for newly developing and existing CWMA/CISMA partnerships in Minnesota.

The application period was open from January 3, 2022 to February 23, 2022. 21 applications requesting \$335,000 were received and applications were ranked by the CWMA Interagency Advisory Team. 13 applications are recommended to the Board for funding.

Gerry asked how many were new. Dan stated Brown SWCD, Goodhue SWCD, and Pennington SWCD are new.

**
22-21 Moved by Jayne Hager Dee, seconded by Neil Peterson, to approve the Cooperative Weed Management Area Grants. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

Approval of Fiscal Year 2023 Clean Water Fund SWCD Local Capacity Grants – Marcey Westrick presented Approval of Fiscal Year 2023 Clean Water Fund SWCD Local Capacity Grants.

In the 2021 Legislative Session, the legislature continued support for SWCDs through the Clean Water Fund at \$12M each year of the biennium. Per the appropriation language, each soil and water conservation district shall receive an increase in its base funding of \$100,000 per year. Money remaining after the base increase is available for grants to soil and water conservation districts as determined by the board based on county allocations to soil and water conservation districts and the amount of private land and public waters. The Grants Program and Policy Committee, at their April 11, 2022 meeting, reviewed the proposed grant allocations and recommended approval to the Board.

Ron Staples asked if each additional SWCD is getting a base amount of \$100,000 per year. Marcey stated that it's an increase based on the original appropriation, that each would receive \$100,000 and an additional base amount plus a portion based on the county contribution and a water and land portion.

**
22-22 Moved by Joe Collins, seconded by Jill Crafton, for Approval of Fiscal Year 2023 Clean Water Fund SWCD Local Capacity Grants. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

Approval of Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Dredge Management Grants – Marcey Westrick presented Approval of Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Dredge Management Grants.

In the 2021 Legislative Session, the legislature appropriated funding in the amount of \$240,000 each fiscal year to the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District for the cost of operating and maintaining sites for dredge spoil to sustain the state, national, and international commercial and recreational navigation on the lower Minnesota River. The Grants Program and Policy Committee, at their April 11, 2022 meeting, reviewed the proposed grant allocations and recommended approval to the Board.

**
22-23 Moved by Jill Crafton, seconded by Joe Collins, to approve the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Dredge Management Grants. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

Wetland Conservation Committee

Minnesota Wetland Professional Certification Program Plan Revision – Les Lemm and Ken Powell presented Minnesota Wetland Professional Certification Program Plan Revision.

The Minnesota Wetlands Professionals Certification Program (MWPCP) plan was approved by the Board during the program transition from the University of Minnesota to BWSR in 2019. The program plan states the following for the continuing education requirements of certified individuals: "No more than four 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." This limit of four online training hours was based in part on the difficulty of tracking and documenting participation in online classes. Since the time of plan approval we can now effectively track and document participation in online classes. Secondly, the COVID-related pandemic has resulted in a major shift to online training formats such that they are

readily available and more effective than in the past. Therefore, Wetland Section staff recommends increasing the amount of online training that certified individuals can count towards the continuing education requirement from four credit hours to six. This modest adjustment would result in certified individuals only needing to attend two days of in-person classes (average of six credit hours per day for typical classes) every three years. The remainder of their continuing education credits could be obtained through online courses/training. This would align well with our two-day in-person regional training classes that we offer annually. In addition to the above-described change, specific details on the transition of the program from the University, including specific staffing estimates, have been deleted as they are outdated and no longer relevant.

Jill Crafton would like to see regulation training added in the board order, item number 4.

Number 4 will be updated to read "Since 2020 regulatory training has been added and online training has expanded and become more effective for the continue education of program participants."

Joel Larson thanked staff for their work and thinks this has been a fantastic transition.

Van Amburg wanted to thank BWSR staff for creating a great program.

**
22-24 Moved by Jill Crafton, seconded by Kelly Kirkpatrick, to approve the Minnesota Wetland Professional Certification Program Plan Revision. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- Central Region Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 5, 2022, at 3:00 p.m. in the Lower Level West Conference Room at 520 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul and by Microsoft Teams.
- Grants Program and Policy Committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 23, 2022, at 9:00 a.m. in the Lower Level West Conference Room at 520 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul and by Microsoft Teams.
- BWSR Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 25, 2022, at 9:00 a.m. in the Lower Level Conference Rooms at 520 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul and by WebEx.

Chair VanAmburg adjourned the meeting at 12:13 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Gerald Van Amburg
Chair

BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM

AGENDA ITEM TITLE: FY23 MN Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Outreach and Implementation Program Continuation Grants

Meeting Date: May 25, 2022

Agenda Category: Committee Recommendation New Business Old Business

Item Type: Decision Discussion Information Non-Public Data

Keywords for Electronic Searchability: Clean Water Fund, Buffers, CREP

Section/Region: Conservation Easements

Contact: Dusty Van Thuyne

Prepared by: Dusty Van Thuyne

Reviewed by: Grants Program & Policy Committee(s)

Presented by: Dusty Van Thuyne

Time requested: 10 minutes

Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation

Attachments: Resolution Order Map Other Supporting Information

Fiscal/Policy Impact

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> General Fund Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amended Policy Requested | <input type="checkbox"/> Capital Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Policy Requested | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clean Water Fund Budget |

ACTION REQUESTED

Approval of the Board Order: FY23 MN Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Outreach and Implementation Program Continuation Grants Board Order, that would authorize the use of funds from Laws of Minnesota 2015, 1st Special Session, Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 7(o), Laws of Minnesota 2017, 1st Special Session, Chapter 91, Article 2, Section 7(n), Laws of Minnesota 2017, Regular Session, Chapter 91, Article 2, Sect. 7(o), and Laws of Minnesota 2019, 1st Special Session, Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 7(n) to be available for grants to LGUs to provide technical assistance to landowners for conservation practices related to CREP.

LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

SUMMARY *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

Laws of Minnesota 2015, 1st Special Session, Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 7(o), appropriated Clean Water Funds to the Board for the FY 2016 SWCD Local Capacity Services (Board Resolution #15-74).

Laws of Minnesota 2017, 1st Special Session, Chapter 91, Article 2, Section 7(n), appropriated Clean Water Funds to the Board for the FY 2019 SWCD Local Capacity Services (Board Order #18-32).

Laws of Minnesota 2019, 1st Special Session, Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 7(n), appropriated Clean Water Funds to the Board for the FY 2020 SWCD Local Capacity Services (Board Order #19-43).

Laws of Minnesota 2017, Regular Session, Chapter 91, Article 2, Sect. 7(o), appropriated Clean Water Funds to the Board for the FY 2018 Buffer Cost Share Grant (Board Order #17-55).

The Laws of Minnesota 2015, 2017, and 2019, authorize the Board to “shift grant or cost-share funds in this section and may adjust the technical and administrative assistance portion of the funds to leverage federal or other nonstate funds or to address oversight responsibilities or high-priority needs identified in local water management plans.”

The purpose of this agenda item is to reallocate SWCD Capacity and Buffer Cost Share funds through FY23 MN CREP Outreach and Implementation Program Continuation grants. Senior Management Team reviewed the recommendation on May 10, 2022, and recommended approval to the Grants Program and Policy Committee (GP&P). The GP&P reviewed the recommendation at their May 23, 2022, meeting and recommended approval of the order to the board.



BOARD ORDER

FY23 MN Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Outreach and Implementation Program Continuation Grants

PURPOSE

Authorize MN CREP Outreach and Implementation Program grants to Soil and Water Conservation Districts

RECITALS / FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Laws of Minnesota 2015, 1st Special Session, Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 7(o), appropriated Clean Water Funds to the Board for the FY 2016 SWCD Local Capacity Services (Board Resolution #15-74).
2. The Laws of Minnesota 2017, 1st Special Session, Chapter 91, Article 2, Section 7(n), appropriated Clean Water Funds to the Board for the FY 2019 SWCD Local Capacity Services (Board Order #18-32).
3. The Laws of Minnesota 2019, 1st Special Session, Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 7(n), appropriated Clean Water Funds to the Board for the FY 2020 SWCD Local Capacity Services (Board Order #19-43).
4. The Laws of Minnesota 2017, Regular Session, Chapter 91, Article 2, Section 7(o), appropriated Clean Water Funds to the Board for the FY 2018 Buffer Cost Share Grant (Board Order #17-55).
5. At the August 2021 Board meeting, the Board authorized staff to develop an open solicitation of SWCDs for the use of returned Buffer Cost Share funding to implement riparian buffers or alternative practices on public waters or public ditches consistent with Minnesota Statutes, section 103F.48 (Board Order #21-27).
6. There is a current cumulative balance of at least \$1,587,648 in the FY 2016, 2019, and 2020 SWCD Local Capacity Services Grants and FY 2018 Buffer Cost Share Grant encumbrances, including returned and unused funds from all distributions listed above.
7. The Laws of Minnesota 2015, 2017, and 2019 authorize the Board to “shift grant or cost-share funds in this section and may adjust the technical and administrative assistance portion of the funds to leverage federal or other nonstate funds or to address oversight responsibilities or high-priority needs identified in local water management plans.”
8. The Laws of Minnesota 2017 appropriations listed above are available until June 30, 2022, for distribution purposes and available to spend by grantees until June 30, 2023.
9. The Grants Program and Policy Committee, at their May 23, 2022, meeting, reviewed the proposed Board Order and recommended approval to the Board.

ORDER

The Board hereby:

1. Authorizes staff to accomplish the reallocation of funds described above to eligible SWCDs for purposes of CREP and related outreach and implementation for FY23 in proportion to the amounts that were provided for this purpose in FY22 and make any minor and technical adjustments to the corresponding policy as needed in order to utilize FY23 funding sources prior to finalization of grant agreements.

2. Authorizes SWCD staff to sign the grant agreement for execution in lieu of SWCD board approval, with SWCD board ratification at a later date.
3. Authorizes staff to award FY 2023 MN CREP Outreach and Implementation Program Continuation grant agreements consistent with this Board Order.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, this May 25, 2022.

MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES

Gerald Van Amburg, Chair
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: _____

2022 Legislative Session Update

May 24, 2022

The 2022 Legislature adjourned around midnight on Sunday, meaning they have concluded legislative work for the biennium unless the Governor calls them back for a special session. Many large bills that were part of a comprehensive package agreed to a week or so ago were not passed within the final moments of session leaving questions on what, if anything, might still happen.

When looking at the results from this year, a reminder that in even-numbered years the Legislature traditionally focuses on policy, supplemental funding, and bonding since agency budgets were passed in last year's biennial budget.

BWSR related items - Passed in regular session:

Omnibus Legacy - Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) *HF3438*

Bill passed and signed by the Governor. Background: While the original House bill contained supplemental funding for Clean Water Fund, the Senate's bill only funded OHF provisions. The final version of the bill contains OHF projects with limited policy language changes for the Clean Water Council recommendation reports.

BWSR-related projects in the final bill include:

- RIM Grassland Reserve, Phase IV
- RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water, Phase X
- RIM Wetlands, Phase IX
- Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape ACUB Program, Phase X – BWSR is partnering with Morrison County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Wild-Rice Shoreland Protection, Phase VIII
- Integrating Habitat and Clean Water (identified through One Watershed, One Plan)
- Mississippi Headwaters Corridor Project Phase VII (through DNR) – BWSR is partnering with Mississippi Headwaters Board

Total project appropriations for BWSR: \$21,589,000

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund *HF3765*

Bill passed and sent to the Governor for signature. Background: With no formal recommendation from the LCCMR, there were different versions of projects moving forward in the House and Senate bills. An agreement was reached in Conference Committee that excluded land acquisition projects and included some projects that did not go through the LCCMR process. Direct appropriations to BWSR included:

- Watershed and Forest Restoration: What a Match! (\$3,318,000)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) State Incentives (\$750,000)
- Strategic Framework to Guide Local Water Storage Implementation (\$200,000)

Drought Relief, Agriculture, and Broadband *HF3420*

Bill passed and sent to the Governor for signature. Background: Agriculture and Broadband components were added during the Conference Committee. The final bill included an appropriation (\$500,000) and policy language for a Department of Agriculture Soil Health Financial Assistance Pilot Program. As part of this pilot, the bill requires the Dept. of Ag to develop a healthy soil management plan in consultation with other agencies and organizations including BWSR. Eligible applicants for the grants of equipment and materials include farmland owners or lessees, Tribal nations, and local governments including SWCDs.

Labor Agreements *HF3346*

Bill passed and signed by the Governor. The House and Senate ratified several labor agreements for state government employees.

BWSR related items NOT passed during regular session:

This year, many bills focused on the anticipated \$9 billion surplus including Taxes, Public Safety, Health and Human Services, Transportation, Environment, and more. These moved slowly through the Conference Committee process and ran out of time before votes in both House and Senate could happen. As a result, these will not take effect unless approved in a special session.

Environment Omnibus *HF4492 and SF4062*

Conference Committee Report passed by committee - not yet voted on in House or Senate.

Background: The House and Senate each passed different versions of this bill. In Conference Committee, a final version was agreed upon late Sunday but not in time for a vote in the Senate or House. BWSR provisions found in the final conference committee report include general fund appropriations for a Tribal Liaison position and for the Local Road Wetland Replacement Program (\$1.58 million in FY23/\$765,000 in future years).

Tax Omnibus *HF3669*

Individual Articles approved, but not a comprehensive Conference Committee Report.

Background: The House and Senate passed different versions of the Omnibus Tax Bill with the House providing SWCD funding and the Senate providing tax buffer credit. In Conference Committee, there was agreement to provide a new \$6 million per year from the General Fund via a Dept of Revenue aid payment to SWCDs starting in 2023.

Next Steps

Many bills including the Environment Omnibus, Tax Omnibus, and Bonding bill were not finalized during regular session. We are monitoring if there will be a special session. If not, the Legislature is next scheduled to meet in January 2023.

For more Information:

[Mike Nelson](#), BWSR Legislative Coordinator, 651-564-5250.

Lincoln County collaboration



“ It's important that we keep our topsoil in place so it's there for future generations to farm.

— Randy Janiszkeski, landowner



EQIP assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Clean Water Funds from a One Watershed, One Plan grant plus EPA dollars from the MPCA support a project with a big impact on the Yellow Medicine River's water quality



PORTER — A conservation-minded landowner found a permanent fix for the perennial erosion that robbed his Lincoln County field of topsoil when local, state and federal partners collaborated on a project too extensive for any one of them to take on alone.

Randy Janiszkeski's 120-acre Alta Vista Township field drained a 150-acre watershed in the hills above the North Branch Yellow Medicine River. After

every hard rain, he'd repair the gullies and then keep farming the land until the next hard rain.

"The water just continually gets stronger and faster as it goes across the farm. It started washing out the ground and leaving ditches that we couldn't actually cross with farm equipment," Janiszkeski said. "It was ending up down in the creeks where it ends up down the rivers."

From left: Southwest Prairie TSA engineer Russell Hoogendoorn, landowner Randy Janiszkeski, NRCS resource conservationist Randy Sheik and Lincoln SWCD Manager Dale Sterzinger gathered where water and sediment control basins and a waterway outlet to the North Branch Yellow Medicine River. **Photo Credits:** Ann Wessel, BWSR

Now, a series of six water and sediment control basins in the upland area slows and temporarily stores runoff from 40 acres. A 3,000-foot-long waterway with a diversion at the top treats the remaining 110 acres.

“If I didn’t have the cost-share funds, it wouldn’t have been affordable. We wouldn’t have done it,” Janiszkeski said.

Federal dollars — Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) assistance from the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and an Environmental Protection Agency grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency — reimbursed 75% of the \$86,000 cost. Clean Water Funds from a Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) One Watershed, One Plan grant covered 15%. Janiszkeski paid the balance.

Construction finished in fall 2020. Last year’s drought didn’t bring any hard rains to test the site. Janiszkeski said the reprieve allowed the berm-stabilizing grasses to become more established.

Lincoln Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Manager Dale Sterzinger said this project alone achieves 10% of the 10-year sediment reduction goal for the North Branch Yellow Medicine River. The Yellow Medicine River One Watershed, One Plan identified the north branch subwatershed, and Alta Vista Township in particular, as priority sites where conservation practices would make the greatest water quality improvements.

“Keeping all of that sediment out of the river will clean those waters up and help



The Yellow Medicine River flowed through Lincoln County on March 31, 2021. A Yellow Medicine River One Watershed, One Plan priority site, the Janiszkeski project drew from Clean Water Funds BWSR allocated for 1W1P project implementation. EQIP assistance from NRCS, and EPA funding are also in play.

reduce any nutrient-loading that could be occurring,” said Randy Sheik, the Lincoln County-based NRCS resource conservationist who worked with Janiszkeski to identify resource concerns and apply for EQIP assistance.

Nutrient reductions here help to address the “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico. The Yellow Medicine River flows to the Gulf by way of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers.

Sterzinger enlisted Rock County SWCD-based Southwest Prairie Technical Service Area (TSA) engineer Russell Hoogendoorn to design the project.

A neighbor’s cooperation allowed Hoogendoorn to design a stable tile outlet that crossed the neighbor’s pasture and carried water directly to the creek. The alternative would have added about a mile — and more expense — to the route.

“I think it’s going to be a huge benefit to the soil, and also to the water system because we’re not going to be running all this dirty runoff ... into the creek,” Janiszkeski said. “If we’re outletting water, at least it’s clean water going into the creeks.”

Estimates show the six basins and the waterway will keep 22 pounds of phosphorus and just over 19 tons of sediment out of the river, and prevent 38.5 tons of soil erosion each year. One pound of phosphorus can produce up to 500 pounds of algae.

“The phosphorus reduction, sediment and soil (erosion) reductions are huge on this project because of the large watershed flowing through this area and all the erosion that was taking place right above the Yellow Medicine River where this water outlets,” Sterzinger said.

The water and sediment control basins, which are designed to retain water for up to 48 hours, moved the Yellow Medicine River watershed closer to meeting its One Watershed, One Plan goal of creating 1,000 acre-feet of upland water storage.

Slowing the water, which Janiszkeski said flowed like rivers across the field after a hard rain, will reduce downstream flood damage to cropland, existing waterways and a township road.

“It will also reduce the velocity of water entering the Yellow Medicine River,” Sterzinger said. “By reducing the velocity of water, we are hoping for less streambank erosion. With less erosion, water quality and nutrient retention will be improved immensely.”

Within this prioritized and targeted area of the North Branch Yellow Medicine River watershed, about 75 potential structural practices were identified.

Sterzinger said farmers throughout Lincoln County are eager to curb field erosion.

“We have a very steep landscape, so erosion takes place very easily,” Sterzinger said. “We have a good, heavy loam soil in parts of our county, but with our landscape — the way the water moves and the wind blows — the soil definitely moves.”

The SWCD has a list of landowners interested in pursuing conservation projects.

“The downfall is we don’t have enough funding to get to everybody. That’s why we try to pool all those resources together,” Sterzinger said.

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Optimizing cover crops



Goodhue County farmer experiments with seed mixes, spacing and row width to extract the most from soil health benefits, forage and fertilizer



GOODHUE — What began as a cost-saving experiment in no-till for Goodhue County farmer Ed McNamara led to 25 years of fine-tuning practices to improve soil health, boost forage quality, maximize nutrients and improve water quality.

“We’ve got the agronomic side figured out. Now we’ve got to get the individual producers’ management styles to change,” McNamara said. “If you only use your field five months of the year, the other seven months of the year it could be growing one, maybe two crops. Isn’t that a more efficient use of the highest-priced asset that you have?”

McNamara has experimented on his own, with assistance from the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and as part of research projects.

He’s no-tilled soybeans into corn stubble every year since that first cost-saving

experiment in 1997. The oats-and-peas cover crop he seeded as a prevent-plant measure in 2013 fed the cattle that November and expanded the slate of soil health practices he’s made permanent on his 350-acre corn-and-soybean farm.

Early on, NRCS assistance allowed him to experiment with cover crops through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and with nitrogen application rates through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

In a three-year research project that finished in fall 2021, McNamara inter-seeded cover crops between 30- 60- and 90-inch corn rows. A University of Minnesota agronomist and a Clean River Partners conservation program manager worked with him and three other farmers to determine how row width affected corn yield and cover crop biomass — and if it could be profitable.

Top: Turnips (left) and crimson clover (right) and are part of the cover crop mix growing amid corn stubble. Ed McNamara pulls up a turnip from the harvested corn field where it was part of a cover crop mix. “If we can eliminate runoff, then we can eliminate the movement of phosphorus attached to the soil particles that would infiltrate surface waters. We’ve been able to clean the water up by having cover crops trap sediment,” he said. **Bottom:** Cover crops grow between rows of harvested corn in mid-October in McNamara’s Goodhue County field. “When we’ve had a heavy rain event, the cover crops that would be greening up in the spring act as a dehumidifier for the soil. That helps get the soil in better shape when it comes time to plant,” he said. **Photo Credits:** Ann Wessel, BWSR



On his own, in 2021 McNamara planted twin-row corn 7.5 inches apart in east-west rows. The spacing made it possible to harvest with a 30-inch corn head. Staggering plants within the double rows exposed the cover crop to more sunlight.

This spring, he planned to alternate 10-foot-wide strips of four, 30-inch twin rows of corn with 10-foot-wide strips of cover crops. After each cover crop harvest, he planned to apply a different type of manure — beef, turkey and hog — and then plant corn on that strip the following year. The aim: maximize the cover crops' feed value, determine how much phosphorus intensively managed cover crops will take up, and potentially eliminate the need for commercial fertilizer next year.

McNamara's Belle Creek Township farm lies within three watersheds that drain to the Mississippi River: Hay Creek, a trout stream; and the Zumbro and Cannon rivers. The water table is high, the soil is a silty clay loam.

"That makes things interesting, but it also presents the opportunities for adopting tillage practices and cover crops to lessen the impact for the water below us," McNamara said.

A Goodhue County Soil & Water Conservation District Board supervisor for the past 24 years, McNamara is also a certified crop adviser.

While harvesting corn in mid-October, McNamara discussed what's worked for him, what hasn't, and how he's adjusted. The following excerpts are edited for length.

How do cover crops and no-till benefit you?

No-tilling soybeans into



McNamara combines corn on Oct. 17, 2021, in Belle Creek Township.

VIDEO: [Discussing soil health](#)

standing corn stalks has reduced our fuel requirements, our machinery requirements, and it's reduced soil erosion. We've maintained or increased our yields, and it's saved us time — and of course saving time on a farm means that you're saving money.

How do cover crops benefit the soil?

The benefits that we're seeing from the soil is water infiltration. We've been able to increase our microbial activity on the soil. We've seen an increase in earthworm activity, which helps the nutrients on the top of the soil to be pulled down deeper. We've also been able to make the soil somewhat more resilient with weather extremes. We've been able to get on the fields in the spring quicker. When we've had a heavy rain, the cover crops that would be greening up in the spring act as a dehumidifier. That helps get the soil in better shape when it comes time to plant.

How does water quality benefit?

One (way) is infiltration rather than runoff. If we can eliminate runoff, then we can eliminate the movement

of phosphorus attached to the soil particles that would infiltrate surface waters. We've been able to clean the water up by having cover crops trap sediment. I really feel that we're gaining the benefit of having (something) similar to a starter fertilizer effect. The root systems on the cover crops seem to remove the potassium and phosphorus that's attached to the clay particles and make that available for the next year's corn and soybean crop.

What advice do you have for someone who's considering cover crops?

I always say one cover crop mix is better than none. Two is better than one. So just move up the ladder as you gain the comfort zone of the management that's required to make cover crops work, because (you can't) just throw it out there and walk away from it. You must ratchet up your management because Mother Nature is still in control.

What do you need to manage more intensively with cover crops in corn?

If you're trying to (plant) into a standing, green cover crop in the spring, you need to have

some extra nitrogen available for that corn, otherwise the cover crop's roots tie up that excess nitrogen and it doesn't release it until late July or August.

What about cover crops in soybeans?

The cover crop makes those herbicide programs work a whole lot better because we're trying to control much smaller weeds. If you want to plant (the soybeans into the cover crop), you have to use a little bit more viable water, get good spray coverage. Most of the time when you get the biological system going within that soil, that (cover crop) residue will break down by harvest time.

How have you fine-tuned the cover crop seed mix for corn?

We started out at 18 pounds (an acre) of annual rye grass, we're up to 21 pounds now. We were at 2 pounds of red clover and crimson clover; we're up to 6 pounds. We were putting on a pound of purple-topped turnip and a pound of radish. The brassicas were taking over the stand. So we backed those down to a half a pound each. It looks pretty good now.

What effect have soil health practices had on yield?

Soybean yields have been trending higher — from 54-55 bushels an acre to 62-65 bushels an acre. Corn yields increased from about 175 bushels an acre to about 190 bushels an acre. I think having that fertility that is normally tied up on the clay particles getting shaken loose with the cereal crops ... basically shake that PNK (phosphorus, nitrogen and potassium) off of that clay particle. Once it makes that available in the soil solution, the crop can take it up.



Study considered corn cover crops' profitability

Ed McNamara was one of four farmers in Goodhue and Rice counties who participated in a three-year research project to determine if planting cover crops in corn could be profitable.

Specifically, the Clean River Partners and University of Minnesota study examined how corn row spacing affects not only yield but also the growth and profitability of forage cover crops. A Minnesota Department of Agriculture sustainable agriculture project grant supported the study, which ended in 2021. Clean River Partners published the final results on its [website](#) this spring.

“What we were really looking at was if we plant corn in wider rows ... can we grow more cover crops, and if we grow more cover

Above: For the previous two years, the field McNamara harvested on Oct. 17, 2021, had been enrolled in a wide-row corn study. McNamara has found that corn yields have generally increased as a result of the soil health practices he's put in place on his Goodhue County farm.

crops, then how does that impact the grain yield,” said Alan Kraus, conservation program manager at Northfield-based Clean River Partners.



Kraus

“It ultimately is a profitability study. If you grow more cover crop, you have that cover crop available to feed your cattle by grazing or machine harvesting. So the value of the cover crop can offset the loss of the grain yield, if there is a loss,” Kraus said.

Plots included 30-inch rows

without cover crops, 30-inch rows with cover crops, and 60-inch rows with cover crops. Results were based on three years of data from 45 test plots. One farm did not participate the third year.

Corn grown in 60-inch rows with an inter-seeded cover crop produced a 17% dip in grain yield compared with corn grown in 30-inch rows without a cover crop.

Grain yields across all plots averaged 194 bushels per acre for 30-inch rows without a cover crop. Yields averaged only slightly less — 191 bushels per acre — for 30-inch rows with a cover crop. Yields averaged 160 bushels per acre for 60-inch

rows with a cover crop.

A lab tested the quality and quantity of cover crops' dried biomass. Researchers considered market prices for forage to determine its value.

The break-even point: Consistently producing 1,000 pounds an acre of dried cover crop biomass that was harvested together with the corn stover and fed to cattle would offset a 13% an acre reduction in corn yield.

The study did not add the value of water quality or soil health benefits.

If funding were to become available, Kraus said future studies might experiment with different hybrids or plant density to boost grain yield, and with different cover crop seed mixes to boost biomass.



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PRAP grant boosts efficiency



For the 16 SWCDs within the Red River Valley Conservation Service Area, hiring a third party to assess workloads and review its structure equipped the TSA to better handle an anticipated increase in requests for service as One Watershed, One Plan implementation gets underway

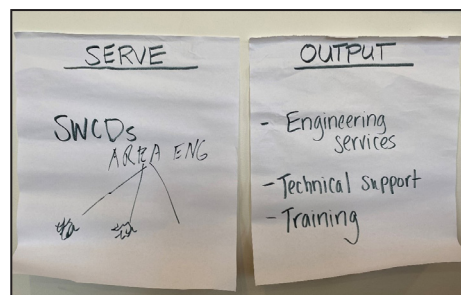
DETROIT LAKES — Burgeoning with 16 member soil and water conservation districts united by a reorganization more than 10 years ago, the Red River Valley Conservation Service Area (CSA) was poised for change when One Watershed, One Plan discussions led to a Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) grant-backed effort to make technical services available faster and more efficiently.

The results of the consultant-led organizational restructuring are slated to be finalized this month. The work started in September.

The [Red River Valley CSA](#), also known as Technical Service Area (TSA) 1, is based in Detroit Lakes, where, as the TSA host, Becker SWCD District Manager Bryan Malone handles TSA finances. Malone said previous failed reorganization attempts, declining

PROJECT COSTS:

The first phase of the TSA 1 project cost \$51,384 — \$20,000 from the PRAP grant plus a \$31,384 local contribution. The second phase cost \$24,079 — \$9,850 from the PRAP grant plus a \$14,229 local contribution.



Top: TSA 1 Board members met March 8 in Mahanomen to discuss Phase 2 of a PRAP grant-backed reorganization. **Photo Credit:** Pete Waller, BWSR **Above:** Pages from a flip chart show discussion topics during the initial meeting with a consultant. **Photo Credit:** Moriya Rufer, HEI

board attendance, and a clear sense of urgency made the decision to apply for a PRAP grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) easier.

After the TSA reorganized in 2009 to serve 16 SWCDs within the Red River Valley — stretching from Traverse County north to the Canadian border

Details

TSAs: Technical Service Areas throughout the state provide technical assistance to and through member SWCDs, in cooperation with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, BWSR and other local, state and federal government units.

PRAP: The [PRAP Program](#) monitors and assesses performance of local water management entities statewide. Completed on a 10-year rotation, organizational assessments review performance standards and progress toward water/watershed plan goals; review the wetland program; and survey staff, board members and partners.

— travel time affected attendance and made it difficult to get a quorum at meetings. Members attempted reorganization in 2015 and 2016. Then, in 2020 the issue came back in full force. Workload discussions arose as partner organizations participated in One Watershed, One Plan.

“We could see increased workloads. Managers started talking more about staffing and engineering, and technical staff to handle implementation,” Malone said.

As the workload conversation progressed, the topic of organizational structure always seemed to creep in. Just as board members believed they were close to a reorganization, the details derailed the attempt.

Malone said BWSR Board Conservationist Matt Fischer suggested the PRAP grant.

“I give him credit for being persistent. He mentioned it and we all said we could do it ourselves. He stayed for support and kept mentioning it; it ended up coming around in the end,” Malone said.

Fischer said: “It has to be locally led, otherwise it won’t be successful. The decisions are being made by the TSA supervisors, informed through their staff. It wouldn’t be successful if they didn’t own the decisions made (about) how they want to go forward.”

At first, board members could not arrive at a consensus about applying for a PRAP grant.



Because Becker County is the host county for the Red River Valley Conservation Service Area, also known as Technical Service Area 1, Becker Soil & Water Conservation District Manager Bryan Malone handles TSA finances. Photo Credit: Ann Wessel, BWSR

“When we first got the proposal, it showed the timeline taking four months. We had a goal and timeline, and there was concern it was taking longer than we wanted. Some felt it could be done internally,” Malone said.

Others were concerned about the cost. Fischer and Malone said the fact that all meetings cost money, whether or not a consultant or facilitator was present, changed many opinions. Hiring a facilitator was meant to reduce the number of meetings about reorganization, and to make timely decisions about how to move forward.

The PRAP grant itself unfolded in two phases. The initial phase, which began in September 2021, involved hiring a third party to complete a workload analysis. That work was finalized in February 2022. The process began with a series of well-attended workshops. Fischer said board members remained

involved and engaged throughout the process.

“The general consensus (was), it’s not working, and we need to do something to get it on track,” Fischer said.

Discussion of the board’s mission and vision statements were a starting point for individuals to understand the TSA, how it began, and what flexibility existed to make improvements. The questions “What are you here for?” and “What are you trying to accomplish?” brought about thoughtful conversation.

Members then received a survey that evaluated current use of the TSA, existing and desirable wait times for receiving technical services, potential bottlenecks for implementation, and existing workflow. Existing comprehensive watershed management plan implementation activities and potential future technical needs were also reviewed.

PRAP Grants

Since 2021, BWSR has awarded more than \$125,000 in grants to organizations to improve their operating performance. Activities typically include facilitation, mediation or consulting for items related to strategic planning, organizational development, reorganization/merging, assessing capacity, or benchmark analysis.

In 2022 alone, BWSR has funded \$38,675.00 in PRAP grants.

The survey results indicated that a system was in place to request training, and that both training and trainers were available. However, only six of the 16 SWCDs have staff with engineering Job Approval Authority (JAA). Members discussed working through individual offices that have the appropriate JAA, and completing on-the-job-training for those who need to finalize it. This change will speed delivery of engineering and design services. Estimated staffing needs were projected based on anticipated workload output.

The resulting product was presented to the TSA 1 Board on Feb. 2.

The TSA 1 Board then initiated the grant’s second phase, which evaluated governance and structures capable of meeting current and future workloads. Workshops began in May. A final product is slated to be complete in time for the board to make adjustments before the start of its new fiscal year in July.

Neighborhood connections aid gardeners



Metro Blooms Landscape Designer Jennifer Moeller talks with residents of the Brook Gardens apartments in Brooklyn Park during a community celebration for their Lawns to Legumes Demonstration Neighborhood in October 2020.
Photo Credit: Metro Blooms

BWSR's senior ecologist and vegetation specialist offers ways for neighbors to collaborate when creating pollinator habitat

Minnesota pollinators face a daunting array of challenges. Habitat loss, pesticides, pathogens, pollutants and the effects of climate change are all factors that affect declining native pollinator populations. At times, addressing these challenges can seem overwhelming. The pandemic has also drawn time and attention away from these topics, requiring us to regain momentum to protect these species.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

(BWSR) strives to address major conservation challenges in Minnesota — and in recent years, we've found innovative ways to make progress by partnering with gardeners, pollinator and wildlife enthusiasts, and environmental nonprofits.

BWSR's Lawns to Legumes program is building a movement to protect at-risk pollinators and the integrity of our landscapes. Residents across the state are working to establish habitat in their yards and communities. In

doing so, they're recognizing that their efforts can make a difference for at-risk species. While gardening may initially seem like an individual pursuit, it presents opportunities to connect with neighbors and build community.

Lawns to Legumes' success can be attributed to the hard work of individual residents. However, we've observed that residents who are new to gardening or who may not have the financial resources available



Lawns to Legumes is funded by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). ENRTF dollars are generated by the Minnesota State Lottery for the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation and enhancement of the state's air, water, land, fish, wildlife and other natural resources.

to invest significantly in landscaping are often hesitant to get started, even if they have been awarded cost-share funding. This is where neighbors can play an important role in supporting each other.

“Our gardening practices influence our neighbors,” said Rebecca Rice, director of Blue Thumb — Planting for Clean Water, a Lawns to Legumes partner. “We have a direct impact on the environment they live in, so if we’re planting for pollinators and clean water, our neighbors might begin to notice and enjoy the butterflies around our blooming natives. They might enjoy it so much that they want some in their yard, too — and gardeners are always happy to share.”

Here are five ways that neighbors can assist neighbors to increase benefits for pollinators and other at-risk wildlife species:

Share tools, materials and information: Sharing knowledge, tools, extra plants, seeds or other materials can be a big help to neighbors who are getting started with native plantings. If you do share plants, tools, or materials with friends and neighbors, be sure to take precautions to [prevent the spread](#) of invasive jumping worms (*Amyntas* spp.). Sharing information such as resources found on BWSR’s [Lawns to Legumes webpage](#) can also help neighbors get started.

Erect yard signs, host project tours: Having pollinator yard signs is one way to communicate your project’s intent and can lead to discussions with neighbors about how to get started. Garden parties and project tours also can build community support

for pollinators while allowing people to enjoy the beauty of established pollinator gardens.

Map your project: [Map and provide information about your projects](#) on Blue Thumb’s website. We want to know about your efforts and those of your neighbors — having this data helps state government agencies and others understand where pollinator corridors are developing, and where additional habitat is needed. A robust map of projects also can help support future funding requests for the Lawns to Legumes program.

Get involved with local organizations: Many local organizations work to educate and collaborate on the establishment of habitat for wildlife. [Wild Ones](#) is a great example of an organization that promotes native landscaping and has several chapters in Minnesota. Many of these local chapters are hosting tours this spring and summer. Contact your local soil and water conservation district for information about [native plant nurseries](#) and other ecological gardening resources near you.

Share projects and updates on social media: Social media is a powerful tool that can help stress the importance of protecting declining pollinator populations. It’s a great way to show pictures of established projects. Follow BWSR’s social media accounts for gardening resources, project photos and program updates on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). BWSR also recommends following its Lawns to Legumes partner organization, Blue Thumb — Planting for Clean Water, on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



Top: Minneapolis residents participating in the Lawns to Legumes’ Longfellow Demonstration Neighborhood met up for a plant pickup event in July 2020. **Photo Credit:** Longfellow Community Council

Bottom: A Lawns to Legumes sign is staked in a pollinator planting at the Brook Gardens apartments in Brooklyn Park. **Photo Credit:** Metro Blooms



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dan Shaw is BWSR’s senior ecologist and vegetation specialist. Shaw started working in the field of ecology about 25 years ago. Before joining BWSR, he gained experience with restoration companies, native plant nurseries, consulting firms and nonprofit organizations. Over the past 15 years at BWSR, he’s coordinated conservation programs focusing on native vegetation establishment, invasive species management, pollinator habitat, habitat-friendly solar, water management and resiliency to climate change. Shaw has taught ecology courses at the University of Minnesota for the past 20 years. He also has written and illustrated several ecology-focused publications.

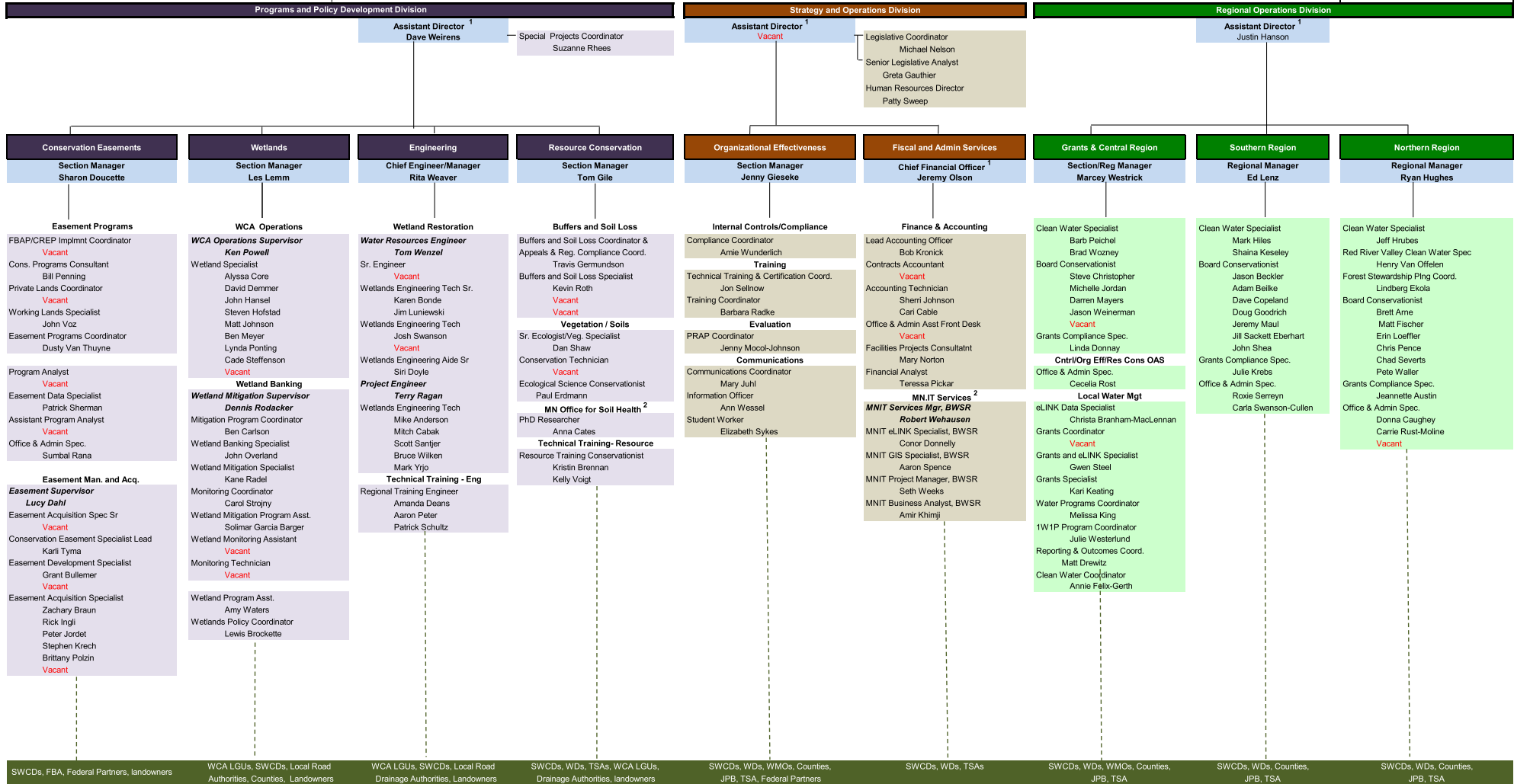


Shaw

BWSR BOARD

Legend:

Executive Leadership¹
Senior Management
 Staff / **Supervisor**
 Current Vacancy
 Temporary Supervisor/Supervision^A *
 Dept. in another agency²
 WOOC = work out of class
 LOA = leave of absence



<input type="checkbox"/> IN-STATE	<input type="checkbox"/> SHORT TERM ADVANCE	SEMA4 EMPLOYEE EXPENSE REPORT	<input type="checkbox"/> Check if advance was issued for these expenses
<input type="checkbox"/> OUT-OF-STATE	<input type="checkbox"/> RECURRING ADVANCE		<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
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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)
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Chart String(s)	A	Accounting Date	Fund	Fin DeptID	AppropID	SW Cost	Sub Acct	Agncy Cost 1	Agncy Cost 2	PC BU	Project	Activity	Srce Type	Category	Sub-Cat	Distrib %
		B														

A. Description:	B. Description:
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Date	Daily Description	Itinerary			Trip Miles	Total Trip & Local Miles	Mileage Rate	Meals ✓			Total Meals (overnight stay)	Total Meals (no overnight stay) taxable	Lodging	Personal Telephone	Parking	Total				
		Time	Location					B	L	D										
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VEHICLE CONTROL #					Total Miles	0	Total MWI/MWO			0.00	Total MEI/MEO	0.00	Total LGI/LGO	0.00	Total PHI/PHO	0.00	Total PKI/PKC	0.00	Subtotal (A)	0.00

Figure mileage reimbursement below

MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT CALCULATION	OTHER EXPENSES – See reverse for list of Earn Codes.
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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.	Date	Earn Code	Comments	Total
1. Enter rate, miles, and amount being claimed at equal to the IRS rate.			0.00				
2. Enter rate, miles, and amount being claimed at less than the IRS rate.			0.00				
3. Enter rate, miles, and amount being claimed at greater than the IRS rate.			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				Subtotal Other Expenses:	(B) 0.00
8. Multiply line 6 by line 7. This is taxable mileage.			0.00 <small>(Copy to Box C)</small>			Total taxable mileage greater than IRS rate to be reimbursed:	(C) 0.00 <small>MIT or MOT</small>
9. Subtract line 8 from line 4. If line 8 is zero, enter mileage amount from line 4. This is non-taxable mileage.			0.00 <small>(Copy to Box D)</small>			Total nontaxable mileage less than or equal to IRS rate to be reimbursed:	(D) 0.00 <small>MLI or MLO</small>
Grand Total (A + B + C + D)							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: _____	Amount of Advance to be returned by the employee by deduction from paycheck: 0.00
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Approved: Based on knowledge of necessity for travel and expense and on compliance with all provisions of applicable travel regulations. _____ Appointing Authority Designee (Needed for Recurring Advance and Special Expenses)

Supervisor Signature _____	Date _____	Work Phone: _____	Signature _____ Date _____
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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.

Description	Earn Code		Description	Earn Code	
	In State	Out of State		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		