

Becker SWCD administrator's leadership earns annual BWSR award

Becker Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Administrator Bryan Malone credits his upbringing on a small dairy farm in rural Minnesota for pulling him into the conservation field.

“I wasn’t able to take over the farm, but this career was my way to still be involved with agriculture and to make a difference in landowners’ profitability and also help out the land,” he said.

His peers recognized that work on Dec. 13 when BWSR honored Malone with the 2022 Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee award. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) presented the annual award to Malone during the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' (MASWCD) [annual convention](#) in Bloomington.

Malone works with a staff of 12 and manages \$6 million in BWSR grants as the Becker SWCD administrator. He has been involved in multiple One Watershed, One Plan efforts, working across county lines with



Bryan Malone, Becker SWCD district administrator, received the 2022 Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee award from BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke on Dec. 13, during the MASWCD annual convention in Bloomington. **Photo Credit:** Ashley Rezachek, BWSR

partners to identify and pursue common water quality goals. Since he joined the Becker SWCD two years ago, Malone has successfully applied for several Clean Water Fund competitive grants. Colleagues describe him as an excellent communicator, mediator and leader, and as someone who has managed to elevate an already high-performing SWCD through his skills as a collaborator and experienced project

manager.

“Bryan leads and enables the Becker SWCD to not only talk the talk, but they also walk the walk regarding putting conservation on the ground,” said BWSR Board Conservationist Pete Waller, one of three BWSR staff members who nominated Malone for the award.

On top of his duties as Becker SWCD administrator, Malone is

the host district manager for the [Red River Valley Conservation Service Area \(RRVCSA\)](#). Malone helped revitalize the 16-county RRVCSA by securing Performance Review and Assistance (PRAP) funding from BWSR [to pursue structural improvements to the organization](#). These improvements included increasing the number of staff members from three to six and bringing RRVCSA employees into the Becker SWCD staffing structure. Those who

nominated him said that under Malone's leadership, participation grew and collaboration increased, resulting in more efficient and effective conservation delivery across the Red River Valley.

"The organization had been struggling for years and needed the right person to grab the reins and get it back on track. Bryan was that person through his ability to listen to multiple viewpoints, mediate compromise from this large group, and effectively communicate the options with the board so they could make a decision. Bryan's role in that process was critical and I'm positive the RRVCSA would not be where it's at today without him," said BWSR Board Conservationist Matt Fischer. Fischer also nominated Malone for the annual award.

Malone got his associate degree in pre-forestry at the University of Minnesota – Crookston, and then earned his bachelor's degree in forest resources with an emphasis in soils from the University of Minnesota – St. Paul. His first job after college was at Carver SWCD, where he stayed for two years working on feedlot fixes, runoff projects and other district priorities. Then he worked as a technician at Red River Valley Conservation Service Area for 2 ½ years. In 1998, he moved to Pennington



Above: From left: Ed Musielewicz of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Becker SWCD Administrator Bryan Malone and Becker SWCD Soil & Water Resource Technician Ed Clem visited one of the sediment reduction/erosion control projects centered on the South Branch Wild Rice River in October 2021 in Becker County. **Photo Credit:** Ann Wessel, BWSR

Below: Bryan Malone addressed the audience during his acceptance speech at the MASWCD annual convention. **Photo Credit:** Ashley Rezachek, BWSR



SWCD where he spent the next 23 years as the district manager before moving to Becker SWCD in 2020.

Asked what it meant to receive the award, Malone said:

"Well, it's pretty humbling because the list of people that have received the award before is something. There are some outstanding district managers and employees that are building some really good stuff in the state."

Malone credited teamwork for successes at the Becker SWCD and for recent advances with the RRVCSA.

"The work that we've done with the (RRVCSA) this year has been quite the team effort. There's a lot of us in the TSA (Technical Service Area) area. It took a lot of us to figure out where we're going to go and what we wanted to do," Malone said during his acceptance speech.

Each year, BWSR celebrates the excellent work accomplished by local government staff to advance conservation efforts across the state. In addition to recognizing Malone, BWSR presented the Outstanding Watershed District Employee award to Capitol Region Watershed District Monitoring and Research Division Manager Bob Fossum during the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts' annual conference on Dec. 2.