

**Clean Water Council
Budget and Outcomes Committee (BOC) Meeting Agenda
Friday, August 14, 2026, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

Hybrid – Webex and Online

2026 BOC Members: Steve Besser, Dick Brainerd, Steve Christensen (BOC Chair), Warren Formo, Brad Gausman (BOC Vice-Chair), Holly Hatlewick, Annie Knight, Fran Miron

9:00 Regular Business

- Introductions
- Approve agenda and June meeting minutes
- Chair and Staff update

9:20 Public Comment

Any member of the public wishing to address the Council regarding something not on the agenda is invited to do so as a part of this agenda item.

9:35 (DISCUSSION ITEM) Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) evaluation report for the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP)

On July 10, the OLA released its evaluation report for the MAWQCP. The report highlights several opportunities to strengthen the program. One recommendation in particular relates to how outcomes are monitored. We will discuss this recommendation with program staff, while also briefly touching on a couple other recommendations from the report.

10:20 Break

10:30 (DISCUSSION ITEM) Clean Water Council staffing vision

Council members have expressed interest in a discussion regarding a long-term staffing vision for the Clean Water Council. This agenda item will briefly give us a chance to begin this discussion.

10:45 (DISCUSSION ITEM) Watershed-based Implementation Fund

Clear support for enhancing our ability to report out on outcomes from the Watershed-based Implementation Funding program (the largest Clean Water Fund-supported program) has been offered through the public engagement process. This agenda item will provide an opportunity to briefly discuss how reporting is currently standardized, dig into the challenges with aggregating that data, and surface some options for enhancements.

11:00 (DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEM) Draft preliminary recommendations for FY28-29

Based on conversations over the last six months and the direction given by the Council, the Interagency Coordinating Team has developed a draft budget for proposed programs that largely aligns with Council guidance. This meeting will provide an opportunity for the Council to discuss or recommend changes to the proposed budget, including setting dollar amounts for non-agency programs. Outcomes from today will be reviewed by the full Council later this month.

12:30 Adjourn



Summary

July 2026

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has not ensured that producers meet all program standards before receiving Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) certification. Though MDA reports a number of program outcomes, MAWQCP's effect on water quality is not clear.

Report Summary

Program Certification

Statutes establish numerous requirements MDA must follow while administering MAWQCP.

- While MDA's current administration of MAWQCP does not align with all provisions in statute, some statutory requirements may be unnecessary. (p. 23)
- Statutory requirements to protect the privacy of certified producers may inhibit MDA's ability to effectively administer the program. (p. 24)

Recommendations ► The Legislature should update MAWQCP's authorizing statutes. MDA should clarify expectations for communication with regulatory agencies and require MAWQCP staff and certifiers to communicate with these agencies when necessary to administer the program. (pp. 26, 27)

Program Standards

MDA's certification process allows producers to receive MAWQCP certification with "contingencies." These producers agree to implement or maintain certain practices to meet the program's standards.

- MDA certifies producers that have not met the program's standards. Some producers certified with contingencies did not meet program standards years after certification, yet they still received the benefits of certification. (pp. 29, 31)

Recommendation ► MDA should discontinue the use of contingencies in MAWQCP certification agreements. (p. 34)

Background

The Legislature established MAWQCP in 2013 to certify agricultural producers whose practices protect water quality. MDA administers MAWQCP in partnership with program certifiers at Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the state.

MAWQCP is a voluntary program. To get certified, producers apply, and program certifiers review producers' operations and conduct in-person field verifications. Certifiers enter the producers' information into the MAWQCP assessment tool to determine whether they meet the program's standards. If producers meet the program's standards, MDA certifies the producers for 10 years. In addition to the initial assessment, MAWQCP staff conduct reviews mid-way through producers' certification periods to ensure compliance with program standards.

Since MAWQCP was established, MDA has certified over 1,600 producers and over 1.1 million acres of farmland.

- While the program conducts more mid-certification reviews than statutes require, the comprehensiveness of these reviews varies. MDA allows producers to remain certified even if their mid-certification reviews reveal that they do not comply with program standards. (pp. 36, 39)

Recommendations ► MDA should focus its mid-certification reviews on producers at the highest risk of being out of compliance with program standards and ensure producers follow program requirements. The Legislature should revise the requirement to conduct random producer audits. (p. 40)

Program Purpose and Impact

MDA reports on several program measures, including the number of certified producers, number of conservation practices implemented by certified producers, and estimated pollutant reduction.

- MAWQCP's statutory purpose is unclear. Because MAWQCP's purpose is not well defined, identifying appropriate outcome measures is challenging. (pp. 45, 46)

Recommendation ► The Legislature should clarify MAWQCP's purpose and identify intended outcomes. (p. 47)

- MAWQCP's effect on water quality is not clear. Pollution reduction estimates capture projected impacts of conservation practices, rather than the actual impact, and MDA's data on reduction estimates have significant limitations. MDA does not collect data that would allow the agency to measure MAWQCP's actual impact on water quality; however, measuring MAWQCP's impact on Minnesota's lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater may not be feasible. (pp. 48, 51, 52)

Recommendations ► MDA should address limitations in the agency's data on conservation practices and pollutant reduction estimates, and consider ways to incorporate water quality monitoring for a selection of certified producers. (p. 54)

- Producers who responded to our survey reported that MAWQCP offers many benefits to them and few drawbacks. (p. 55)

Summary of Agency Response

In a letter dated July 8, 2026, Commissioner Thom Petersen said that MDA agrees “with many of the recommendations outlined by the report” but has “several points of clarification that we feel are important to include.” Notably, he said MDA agrees with the recommendations that the Legislature update several aspects of MAWQCP's authorizing statutes and that MDA (1) clarify expectations regarding communication with other regulatory agencies and (2) strengthen its policies for MAWQCP.

On the other hand, the commissioner said that MDA does not support discontinuing all contingencies, since they are “a critical part of each certification agreement.” However, he said MDA has and “will continue to make strides to limit the use of contingencies.” Regarding the recommendation to address limitations in the agency's data on program outcomes and consider ways to incorporate water quality monitoring, the commissioner said the agency “reports outcomes using the same methodologies applied by other state agencies, which incorporate monitoring frameworks that account for the many variables influencing ground and surface water.” Overall, the commissioner said “We acknowledge there are ways to improve this program and are incredibly proud of MAWQCP and all it has done to further our state's commitment to enhancing water quality and conservation.”

From: [Frisch, Brianna \(MPCA\)](#)
To: [Frisch, Brianna \(MPCA\)](#)
Subject: Fw: Re: BOC meeting Friday
Date: Thursday, August 13, 2026 4:00:32 PM

From: RRHF LLC
Sent: Thursday, August 13, 2026 2:32 PM
To: Petersen, Thom (MDA)
Cc: Kader, Jen (She/Her/Hers) (MPCA); Barten, John; Richard Biske; rep.steven.jacob@house.mn.gov; sen.john.hoffman@senate.mn; Kristi Pursell; sen.nathan.wesenberg@mnsenate.gov
Subject: Fw: Re: BOC meeting Friday

Commissioner Petersen, I appreciate your response. I've requested for years more public discussion regarding this program. What I keep seeing in language and text is met with generalities, not specifics. More specifically, no actual measurements/actual results of water quality while I served on the citizen's advisory committee for 6 yrs, or since. Unfortunately, you failed to address the majority of my inquiries.

I was also present at the Legislative Audit Commission's review of this program last week [08-04-2026 Legislative Audit Commission](#). The Auditors provided their review and subsequent recommendations. One portion of their presentation showed 90+% of producer certifications from 2019 listed one or more contingencies still outstanding (years later) and in 2025 over 80% were still outstanding. 'Contingencies' mean you changed/implemented nothing. How is that 'important'? Your explanation of 1 instance appears unfounded. One can infer no evidence for preceding years or in between yielding different results. Primary to protecting or improving water quality, I do not practice: synthetic nitrogen or phosphorus applications, perennial tillage, drain tile, pesticide-coated seed treatments (prophylactic usage), nor any pesticide-class ag chem over top or on food grown here. So, one would not find that here over the last 12 yrs. However, all practices just mentioned are deemed 'certified' for water quality for 10 yrs. How, when they show up on your and MPCAs impairment lists and pollution monitoring reports?

This leaves one to wonder, as hopefully this Council has, what is 'certified'? Any MAWQCP employee, any CWC member should be able to state with clarity how each method or practice improves, protects, or alleviates agricultural water pollution / degradation per the statutory definition. Example: how does a 500 acre producer with neonicotinoid-treated corn seed physically keep *all* seed coating dust from becoming displaced from the planter, drifting off target onto field-edges, dispersing through soils, running off onto surface waters, seeping into tile lines, ditches, tributaries, or groundwater? One can't answer because there is no mechanism to do so *except* discontinue use. You do not mention how to alleviate instances of pollution on your public facing website other than 'BMPs'. No mention that if

implementing practice or method x, you would instantly protect water quality in MN. Yet, you deem risks to water quality are removed on entire operations with this program using conservation practices implemented or not.

[Neonicotinoid Insecticides | Minnesota Department of Agriculture](#)
[Agricultural Chemical Monitoring and Assessment | Minnesota Department of Agriculture](#)

The agency behind agricultural conservation practices is federal-level NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and locally Director Troy Daniell of MN-NRCS. I originally attached Troy and staff stating no guarantees, risks removed, or warranties of any kind for any conservation practices achieving water quality outcomes *unless* you measure as science expects. Isn't scientific data 'certifying'? If for a decade, how could one pre-empt anything created in the future today?

My hope is the Clean Water Council takes a logical pause regarding this or any program making claims of water quality while providing no vehicles, tests, measurements, implemented improvements so Minnesota taxpayers have full transparency. If not, what is the future of the Clean Water Council + Clean Water Fund?

I look forward to Friday's Budget and Outcomes Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

On Wed, Jul 22, 2026 at 6:45 M Petersen, Thom (MDA)
<thom.petersen@state.mn.us> wrote:

Lori, I sorry for delay in responding a little busy with a few things, I received your email and I welcome and encourage the discussion. In particular, the MDA recognizes the needed and important missing component of review of the audit in a public forum, where recommendations can be properly and openly explored.

I also wanted to briefly address your comments as provided in your email.

-Producers 'certified' have not met program standards, unimplemented practices/methods recommended. Risks to water quality are not removed.

As you know, the MAWQCP is the only comprehensive program that exists in the nation where all quantified reductions in fertilizer, pesticide, tillage, and more are all required to be maintained. Risks are being removed in every case, and the example cited by OLA of an "unmet standard" was the specific case of a producer who had implemented 8 of 8 new water and sediment control basins and 32 of 33 new grassed waterways (with the final waterway scheduled). This is an ongoing victory for conservation of pretty incredible proportions, rather than a failure. Further, it is entirely unreasonable to believe that kicking that farm out of the program while it was implementing practices would result in

more conservation occurring, when instead it means losing the practices and all the daily management improvements that occurred every crop cycle on every field (rented or owned) on the farm.

-It's not clear what effect if any this program has on water quality outcomes

MDA reporting adheres to and strictly uses the metric criteria for the state of Minnesota as established in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy and by MPCA (regulatory authority agency). Relative to water quality outcomes, there is no distinction between what the MAWQCP can and does report and what every other conservation program or clean water fund project in the state can and does report.

-Contingencies are deemed 'important' per Commissioner Petersen

As you can understand from your own certification, you are contractually bound to perform all commitments made on all production within your 16 acre operation for the 10-year certification period, all of which your certification is contingent upon. Should you ever seek regulatory certainty, you are then required to verify you meet every commitment made on your perennial grass, perennial berries, perennial orchard, and annual vegetable management and practices. Any unmet contingencies disqualify you for regulator certainty, and you receive no MAWQCP benefit. So contingencies are an important vehicle in the program to ensure participants perform responsibly, as well as an opportunity to implement practices that may have contributing factors affecting implementation timing (point in annual crop rotation, weather, completed design and contractor services, etc.).

-Statutes are not up to date, suggestions provided to strengthen program purpose

The "Program Purpose" language in statute 17.9891 does need updating to reflect MAWQP's established purpose of implementing practice and management changes to improve water quality.

-Anonymizing data makes it difficult to track

MDA has GIS mapping and tracking of every new practice implemented through the MAWQCP.

-No on the ground, in-field, edge-of-field measurements taken at any level (specific parcel up to watershed)

There are and have been MAWQCP-certified farms with monitoring sites, including Discovery Farms and FarmAmerica. MDA is happy to introduce more monitoring projects thru the MAWQCP, joining the efforts of MDA, UofM, research stations, USDA, land grants everywhere, etc. in operating legitimate monitoring projects to scientific standards. The MAWQCP could contribute to the state, national, and international community's ever expanding monitoring data in at least two ways:

1) Produce even more additional data on the specific practices implemented (cover crops, no till, IPM, etc.) to contribute to the ever expanding data sets from monitoring that exist for building ever improving models the state and nation uses to set goals and measure progress as in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy etc.

2) Take advantage of the MAWQCP's unique instances of stacked practices and comprehensive management that only MAWQCP requires farmers to do (the combinations on certified farms are essentially limitless—simultaneously no till, with nitrogen reduction, air-applied cover crops, and on and on in thousands of combinations on different certified farms).

-Group suggestions for improvements to this program were received by MDA May 2023, reviewed Sept 2023, but never implemented. MDH requested well testing for certified farms, but was rejected from program inclusion.

All certified farms receive regular, updated notice of well-testing services, a service that is also maintained on our webpage.

-The only 'progress' shown from this program are statistics: # of acres, # of farms, # of practices with pollution source reduction *estimates* (we don't know % implemented vs implied). "MDA does not collect data that would allow the agency to measure impact on actual water quality... "

The only reported outcomes the MAWQCP has ever provided are for practices 100% implemented as a result of participation in the MAWQCP. Any pre-existing and of course any non-existing (not implemented) practices are never reported on (and can't be if they don't yet exist). MDA reporting adheres to and strictly uses the metric criteria for the state of Minnesota as established in the by MPCA (regulatory authority agency), the Nutrient Reduction Strategy, or otherwise stipulated through statewide planning and goal setting.

Finally, I appreciate your interest in continuing your MAWQCP certification. As noted in the communication you received in January along with all farms with certification terms ending in 2027, we welcome your reapplying as your current certification expires in November, though you will be required to meet current certification requirements which have been expanded since your previous certification.

Thom Petersen, Commissioner

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Thom.Petersen@state.mn.us

651-201-6219 (O)

612-749-5179 (W)

From: RRHF LLC <rootsreturn@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, July 17, 2026 1:38 PM

To: Kader, Jen (She/Her/Hers) (MPCA) <Jen.Kader@state.mn.us>; Barten, John <bbarten79@gmail.com>; Richard Biske <rbiske@tnc.org>

Cc: Petersen, Thom (MDA) <thom.petersen@state.mn.us>; rep.steven.jacob@house.mn.gov; sen.john.hoffman@senate.mn; Kristi Pursell <rep.kristi.pursell@house.mn.gov>; sen.nathan.wesenberg@mnsenate.gov

Subject: Fwd: BOC meeting Friday

Greetings CWC Administrator and Chairs (cc Commissioner + House & Senate members):

I'm forwarding a prior discussion with Paul re MAWQCP still relevant today. At the time there was a troubling lack of comprehension for how this program operated to improve water quality, and its incongruence with CWF statute [114D.50 Subd 4](#). After reading the [Legislative Auditor's \(LA\) report](#) last week, it appears accountability remains an issue not only with this program, but could also be questionable with other programs awarded Clean Water Funds (not audited since 2017).

The report confirmed several concerns brought to MDA and CWC. Items below are of particular concern, as they might appear for any funded program. I would like to understand CWC's reactions and the seriousness this poses as an example. I'm also curious how CWC is interpreting Commissioner Petersen's determination to certify acres never enrolled. One can't model estimates (or outcomes) unimplemented. Rep. Jacobs' own [district e-newsletter calls this fraud](#) but he failed to acknowledge responsibility of MDA (administrator + fund recipient). One of the program's claims is risks of harm to water quality are removed, although claims go uncorroborated. Continued use of 'contingencies' (practice or method *will be* implemented in the future) was suggested by LA to be removed altogether: claim of x conservation practice = y outcome. If unimplemented, how 'certified'? How widespread? Would the general public agree to this?

Models are just that until data confirms/denies. MPCA has memorialized this comment routinely across venues for years. MPCA every 2 yrs sends quantified impaired waters data to EPA and US Congress.

-Producers 'certified' have not met program standards, unimplemented practices/methods recommended. Risks to water quality are not removed.

-Its not clear what effect if any this program has on water quality outcomes

-Contingencies are deemed 'important' per Commissioner Petersen

-Statues are not up to date, suggestions provided to strengthen program purpose

-Anonymizing data makes it difficult to track

-No on the ground, in-field, edge-of-field measurements taken at any level (specific parcel up to watershed)

-Group suggestions for improvements to this program were received by MDA May 2023, reviewed Sept 2023, but never implemented. MDH requested well testing for certified farms, but was rejected from program inclusion.

-The only 'progress' shown from this program are statistics: # of acres, # of farms, # of practices with pollution source reduction *estimates* (we don't know % implemented vs implied). "MDA does not collect data that would allow the agency to measure impact on actual water quality... "

CWCs scoring rubric is still misaligned with statute (attached). The statute is clear, but rubric feels short of determining actual improvements. This program fits into a void where no actual water quality data will be generated utilizing current structure. Acres, farms, volume stats do not equal outcomes. ~\$40M total authorized to date.

Attached also is my discussion with MN-NRCS where they determined = no conservation practice or method itself stands as a measurable determination of water quality. Instead, they confirm you need verifiable measurements at some scale, at some point, to determine improvements of any natural resource. MAWQCP program relies on approved NRCS methods and practices, so remains the circular unresolved argument. Know that pesticide use, synthetic fertilizer use, perennial tillage, drain tile, unpermitted manure and storage all constitute 'certified' acres for 10 yrs under this program. They are pollutants and pollutant sources per MPCA, MDH, MDA.

As an aside, I received a link to the online MAWQCP 10 yr renewal form months ago. At the end it stated I would hear from staff soon. I've never received follow-up, no one has yet visited my farm. At early midpoint I was scheduled to meet an MDA staffer no longer employed at the agency. We met in my farm's processing room. She had me answer 3 questions with no review of my field acres, crops,

equipment, or practices. Last time I saw anyone was 6 yrs ago.

Please advise if or how you determine Legacy funding awarded to this program is justified. I participated with others in the 6/15/26 CWC public feedback session - thank you all (Jen) for that coordination and engagement. It was clear from those involved that more scrutiny of ~\$2B spent to date is worthwhile.

Please feel free to reach out for further discussion or clarification. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lori

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Gardner, Paul (MPCA) <Paul.Gardner@state.mn.us>

Date: Thu, Oct 12, 2023 at 11:22 AM

Subject: RE: BOC meeting Friday

To: rootsreturn@gmail.com <rootsreturn@gmail.com>

Hi, Lori. I would not agree that there are no measures. MAWQCP has a GIS database that maps each practice on each farm, and each practice has a related pollutant reduction, which is based on modeling. This is the same approach used in the state's Watershed Pollutant Load Calculator. In fact, the program may actually be using that Calculator, although I'll have to check. But it is private data due to the state's data privacy statutes. That statute permits MDA to release aggregate data. It would be interesting to ask MDA how one can verify their methodology. They've showed me the GIS layers showing the mapping of practices but they were very particular to keep me from seeing the particular geographic location due to the privacy statutes. If that would help build some trust with the program, maybe that is worth pursuing.

From: RRHF LLC <rootsreturn@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, October 5, 2023 7:15 PM

To: Gardner, Paul (MPCA) <Paul.Gardner@state.mn.us>

Subject: Re: BOC meeting Friday

Thank you Paul.

I wholeheartedly agree CWC does not exist for in-the-weeds details for any dept, division. But strategically, CWC is in place to justify CWF used for any project/program and for its production actual, measured results and accountability. In this and any case = clean water. Budget & Outcomes Committee looked like it may have been able to provide proper scrutiny through a strategic lens. If providing a recipient CWF budget, one in turn provides clean water outcomes. I cannot fathom what CWC wants is using CWF with no results / ROI. Are all programs, agencies the same? I know CWC has not received what you ask; how much is enough? Has MDA ever revealed? This program doesn't use measures, or projections, and refuses to.

Can anyone state clean water metrics from this tool match metrics from all other available agency modeling and results? Will CWC fund in perpetuity before any actual contribution to clean water for MN is achieved, in some measured capacity? A decade later? The fact MDA doesn't want to look at any data (even their own) is a miss for CWF usage. Per Brad/MDA, results and accountability are not what the program or tool was employed to do. Then how qualified for funding? Assessing risk and not checking for compliance do not equal improved water quality outcomes. This will not provide clean water outcomes for Minnesotans.

The variables you speak of are hardwired in the tool and largely based off NRCS and COMET tools, using priority scoring schemes. MDA is not interested in continuous improvement, hence a no and 'we'll consider these as the program matures' for anything suggested as effectual. Words and actions of course differ.

For CWC's interpretation of this program, I struggle to find how it matches statutes. I'm attaching the recap and inquiry provided for the three members if not passed on to you. My request was to appear to discuss CWC and CWF usage for this, at the high level, to find how the Council sees accountable, measured results of this program. By not receiving an answer, maybe that's all we need to know. As a BWSR member I've received comments citizens see a missing seat on the Council for the general public, appearing like a more non-transparent public agency. I don't think taxpayers voted for that (I didn't live in MN when it was on the ballot):

Good morning CWC members,

At the conclusion of the Aug 4th virtual Budget & Outcomes Committee meeting (thank you again), Steven you requested we return after meeting with MDA. We had that meeting, and to no surprise almost no recommendations for improvements or measures were potentially adopted, or slated for adoption. My request to follow up on a spreadsheet with Brad for yes/no/why on each was also turned down. He only agreed to look closer at the advisory board structure (currently no bylaws, guidelines, rules, etc) with no detail as to what or when. Also considered was enrolling farmers could receive a free well test. The rejections include looking at how this program ties into inter-agency goals or strategies for clean water efforts, and utilizing the very data MDA collects, monitors, publishes on ag water quality, which will continue not to be shared with the advisory board aptly named MN Ag Water Quality. Nomenclature implies a measured, not a hoped for, result. If renamed to 'MDA Conservation Acres' or 'MDA Conservation Methods' utilizing other funding available (many federal programs, BWSR/SWCD, MDA soil health), it would ensure fiscal responsibility how they want, not require farms to alleviate contributions to poor water quality. Rich, you also asked previously if Policy needs to be implemented for some programs to ensure measurable outcomes. We would support that effort.

Without reviewing any of their own data, targeting where / how to best obtain clean water from ag lands, what actual measures does this MDA program have to receive CWF dollars? The program has no published goals other than a moving target # of acres per year by a sitting Governor. No objectives, target areas, strategies, timelines, budgets, or data followed to obtain clean water. Seemingly unlimited as to how long and how many millions in CWF dollars will be used to not obtain clean water goals. Current data show after a decade of this program and \$43M (\$7M more for this biennium) one cannot attribute this program to any watershed or waterbody improvements. MDA agrees and data from all agencies show the same.

MDA stated this program employs a risk assessment tool, not a results tool. Does that match CWF appropriations without goals, a timeline, accountability or evaluation measurements? [Sec. 114D.50 MN Statutes](#)

Subd. 4. Expenditures; accountability.

(a) ... must meet or exceed the constitutional requirements to protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams and to protect groundwater and drinking water from degradation receiving funding from the clean water fund **shall include measurable outcomes, as defined in section 3.303, subdivision 10 , and a plan for measuring and evaluating the results** ...

(b) Money from the clean water fund shall be expended to balance the benefits across all regions and residents of the state.

(c) A state agency or other recipient of a direct appropriation from the clean water fund must compile and submit all information for proposed and funded projects or programs, **including the proposed measurable outcomes and all other items required** ...

(d) Grants funded by the clean water fund must be implemented according to section [16B.98](#), and must account for all expenditures. Proposals must **specify a process for any regranting envisioned**. Priority for grant proposals must be given to proposals involving grants that

will be competitively awarded.

(e) **Money from the clean water fund may only be spent on projects that benefit Minnesota waters.**

[Groundwater quality | Minnesota Pollution Control Agency \(state.mn.us\)](#), and [River and stream water quality | Minnesota Pollution Control Agency \(state.mn.us\)](#), and [Lake water quality | Minnesota Pollution Control Agency \(state.mn.us\)](#)

[Little action so far on plan to enlist farmers to clean up polluted groundwater in Minnesota \(startribune.com\)](#), and [Agriculture pollutes underground drinking water in Minnesota. Well owners pay the price. - Minnesota Reformer](#)

[Edge-of-Field Water Quality Monitoring | Minnesota Department of Agriculture \(state.mn.us\)](#), and [Groundwater Pesticide Water Quality Monitoring | Minnesota Department of Agriculture \(state.mn.us\)](#), and [Surface Water Pesticide Water Quality Monitoring | Minnesota Department of Agriculture \(state.mn.us\)](#)

With respect to (b) and (e) above, funds are only benefiting those specified farmers, not MN waters or residents. With no measures or data, have CWF been appropriated correctly? Utilizing CWF for this program seems counter to statute, and appears perpetual. Taxpayers and communities across MN deserve ROI. Can the Council answer how long until this current program returns the implied ROI? No one can answer. This program has not protected or restored groundwater and drinking water from degradation.

During the last 5 yrs serving on the MAWQCP advisory board, not once have we viewed MDAs (or any other agency) ag pollution data or reports on water quality. Nor to my knowledge during its entire 10 yr existence. Here is their 9/20 update (one of many published updates per year) we didn't talk about in our 9/19 advisory board meeting: [PFMD Update | Minnesota Department of Agriculture \(state.mn.us\)](#). Neonics in waterways would have been a relevant topic of discussion, like any other division topics listed. When I mention outcomes in meetings, it's never met with a deeper dive into how the program should be steered towards clean water goals. We perennially talk about how more producers can get on board voluntarily. Every meeting. MDAs authority goes beyond asking for voluntary signup for clean water.

As a new board member of BWSR, it continues to be disheartening when agencies charged with prevention, mitigation, and removal of pollution don't respect our natural resources or follow statutory charge.

I would like to request to briefly speak at a full Council meeting as you previously suggested John and Steve, from a farmer/land access provider, clean water advocate, consumer perspective. The 2 reps on CWC do not represent all ag voices

in MN and are not diverse. We don't see a citizen's rep seat on the Council, similar to citizen reps on BWSR (one = myself). Brad let me know he already expressed his interpretation of our meeting's outcomes. In our democratic system of public agency transparency to include all perspectives, I would limit my time to 10-15min total respecting the Council's time and topic needs. I am happy to reach out to Paul.

Thank you all again for your efforts to help Minnesotans and our environment.

Best regards,

Lori

On Thu, Oct 5, 2023 at 4:30 PM Gardner, Paul (MPCA)
<Paul.Gardner@state.mn.us>wrote:

Hi, Lori. The Council is interested in strategic-level discussions rather than tactical-level things. So they haven't shown an appetite for debating specific measurement strategies. The list of suggestions you sent us is at a level of detail that they would feel unqualified to discuss. They are interested in the big picture, e.g., how much is enough monitoring for landowners and agencies to target implementation dollars? Are certified farms better for water quality than convention farms and by how much? We also rely a lot on modeling for all sorts of projects, not just MAWQCP, since monitoring each location takes money away from implementation on stuff that we know works. If that modeling is off, then we have a bigger problem since we use the same approach with the other 98% of the Clean Water Fund.

On the governance issue like composition of the advisory committee, that would not be in the wheelhouse of the Council.

I've chatted with Brad and he said the department is very open to continuous improvement. He also was open to the private well testing idea (as is the Council). My suggestion might be to isolate a couple of your initial points for re-consideration and do it in a way that aligns with MDA vocabulary a bit. I went through the assessment tool myself yesterday and would be interested to hear from MDA about how they determine the variables they use in scoring farms. That would be an interesting way to pose questions about doing something differently.

Paul

From: RRHF LLC <rootsreturn@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 5, 2023 1:53 PM
To: Gardner, Paul (MPCA) <Paul.Gardner@state.mn.us>
Subject: Re: BOC meeting Friday

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Hi Paul,

I just returned from BWSR strategic meeting. I did not plan on attending as I have a visitor at the farm tomorrow beginning at 9 (land/farm access opportunity).

I sent John, Steven, and Rich a short recap, requesting 15 mins or less in total to appear at a full Council mtg after our speaking with MDA, and stated I was happy to coordinate with you.

I believe from an improvement to program, holding CWF recipients accountable point of view, the full Council would benefit from a short discussion about the rejections of those recommended improvements *not only* from its program director, but from an AWQCP advisory board member, BWSR board member supporting natural resources, and recipient of certification + AWQ endorsements. Brad stated to me he does not wish to return to CWC to discuss clean water improvements or outcomes.

Please let me know your thoughts.

Thank you.

On Thu, Oct 5, 2023 at 12:49 PM Gardner, Paul (MPCA)
<Paul.Gardner@state.mn.us>wrote:

Hi, Lori. Are you going to attend our BOC meeting online tomorrow?

[Clean Water Council - Budget and outcomes committee | Minnesota Pollution Control Agency \(state.mn.us\)](#)

The chair suggested you might want to participate in the public comment part after the BOC members have had a chance to discuss some things.

Paul Gardner

Administrator, Clean Water Council

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Paul.Gardner@state.mn.us

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/clean-water-council>

<https://www.legacy.mn.gov/clean-water-fund>

Pronouns: He/Him/His

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--

Lori D. Cox, Owner

Roots Return Heritage Farm, LLC

Consulting, Mentoring, Advocating New/Emerging Farmers

MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) (former BOD Citizen Rep)

CURE MN (BOD)

Climate Land Leaders

MEP Water and Pollinator Cluster

2017 Carver Cty SWCD Outstanding Conservationist

NACD Soil Health Champion Network Farm

UMN CFANS Mentor Program

UMN CFANS Borealis Night of Excellence 2024 - Outstanding Friend Award

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Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program

Brad Jordahl Redlin | Agricultural Conservation Services Manager

Council Partnership

Partnership with Clean Water Council is central to statewide water-quality outcomes

MDA appreciates ongoing collaboration on clean-water projects

Today's focus: clarifications raised in the OLA report



The MDA agreed with nearly all OLA findings

Two areas require clarification:

Contingencies

Monitoring & Modeling



Baseline Program Standards

MAWQCP conducts whole-farm assessment:

Physical characteristics – slope, erodibility, soil type, vegetation

Nutrient Management – fertilizer type, rate, source, timing, placement

Tillage/Residue Management – STIR factor category standard

Pest Management – Integrated Pest Management category standard

Tile Drainage System – drainage water management

Irrigation Management – irrigation water management

Whole-field practices – conservation practice management

Resource Concerns – other necessary conservation practices

Certification Number _____



STATE OF MINNESOTA
AGRICULTURAL WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION AGREEMENT

This agreement is between _____ ("Producer") and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture ("MDA"), which is authorized to sign on behalf of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Board of Water and Soil Resources pursuant to Minnesota Governor's Executive Order 19-12.

This contract is governed by Minnesota Statutes Sections 17.9891-17.993 which outline procedures for implementing the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. All parties agree that the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program is in the public interest as it enhances the water quality of Minnesota's rivers, lakes, streams, wetlands and groundwater, as well as promotes and accelerates environmental stewardship by Minnesota's farmers.

A. TERMS OF AGREEMENT:
Agreement start date is _____ and expires on _____

B. PRODUCER'S DUTIES:
Producer, upon completing a formal water quality assessment of all land in Producer's agricultural operation, achieving a passing score using the certification instrument, and having the assessment approved by a MDA-accredited certifying agent, agrees to the following:

1. Maintain compliance with all water quality rules and regulations in place at the time of certification, and if Producer is adjudicated to be in violation of said laws and regulations anytime during the certification period of this agreement, Producer has the affirmative duty to notify MDA within 30 days. Further, if Producer knows, or has reason to know, of a violation of said laws and regulations anytime during the certification period of this agreement, even though it has not been adjudicated, Producer has the affirmative duty to report the violation to MDA within 30 days.

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Agreement

Contracts ensure practices are implemented and maintained

Contract Framework

Benefits are contingent on participant performance

Contracts universally used in federal registrations and certifications (EPA, FDA, USDA, NCRS)

Contracts ensure regulatory certainty available only to farms meeting its commitments

In agriculture, further contingent challenges exist relative to weather, crop rotation, field conditions



Contingencies

OLA referenced “unmet” contingencies

- Regulatory certainty unavailable to farms with outstanding contingencies
- Financial benefit consists of reimbursement payments:
 - Limited to \$5,000/yr, for approved practices treating identified resource concern
 - Paid only upon completion of implementation at maximum of 75% of verified cost



OLA-cited example

Grower completed 8 of 8 WASCOBs, 32 of 33 grass waterways (with final scheduled)

- Implementation of conservation practices is MAWQCP's purpose
- Above example not a failure, but a profound conservation achievement in progress



Contingencies

Program designed to ensure water-quality practices are implemented, effective, comprehensive, and maintained

Participation and benefits are and need to be contingent on fulfilling and maintaining contracted obligations

4,377 new practices **implemented**

168,655 tons of soil retained in fields each year

61,481 tons of sediment prevented from entering waterways annually

77,988 pounds of phosphorus prevented from entering waterways annually

1,259,535 pounds of nitrogen prevented from entering waterways annually





Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program

Margaret Wagner | Fertilizer Section Manager

MAWQCP Monitoring Approach

MDA supports incorporating a formal monitoring component into MAWQCP

Baseline monitoring has occurred on more than a dozen certified farms

Any expanded effort must be designed to produce reliable, decision-ready data

Investments must answer specific questions and justify cost



What Field-Level Monitoring Can and Cannot Do

Tile and edge-of-field data provide the best estimates of nutrient loss

Results are highly sensitive to short-term weather and site variability

Requires ≥ 7 years of data to detect meaningful trends

Extreme weather often dominates annual results



What We Have Learn About Evaluating Practices

Detecting Differences Between Practices

Paired watershed design is necessary to compare practices or cropping systems

Finding viable paired sites is the biggest challenge

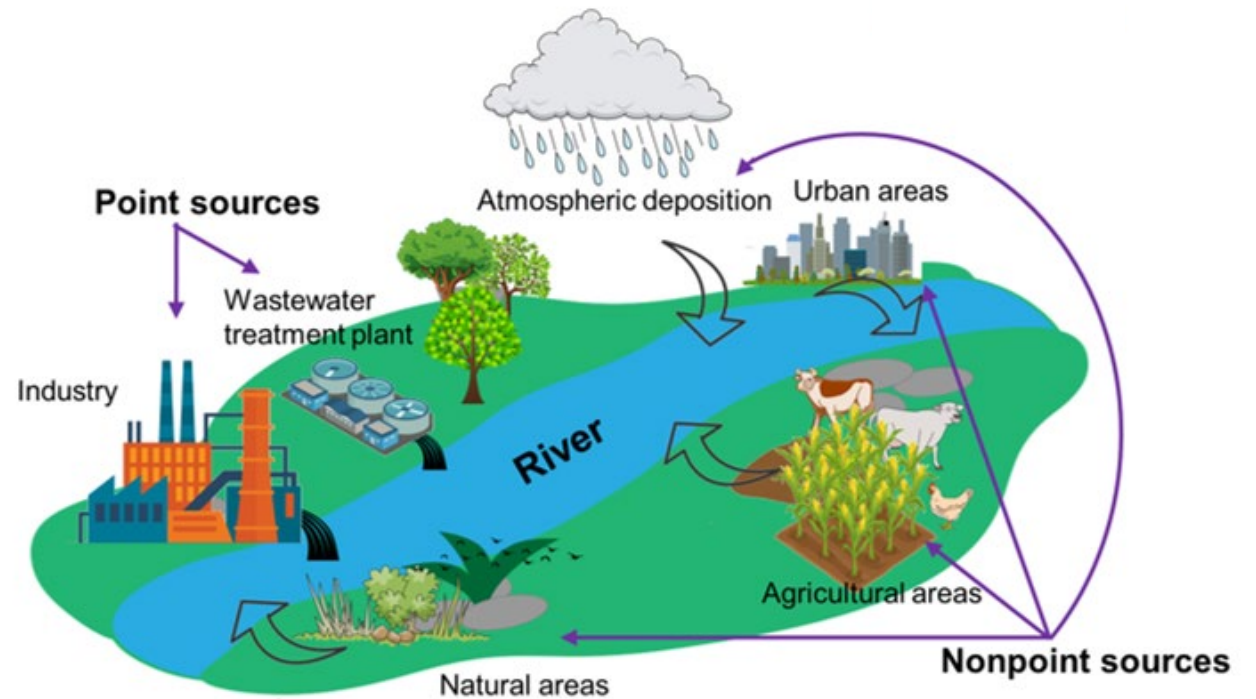
Many fields cannot be isolated for accurate monitoring



Modeling Complements Monitoring

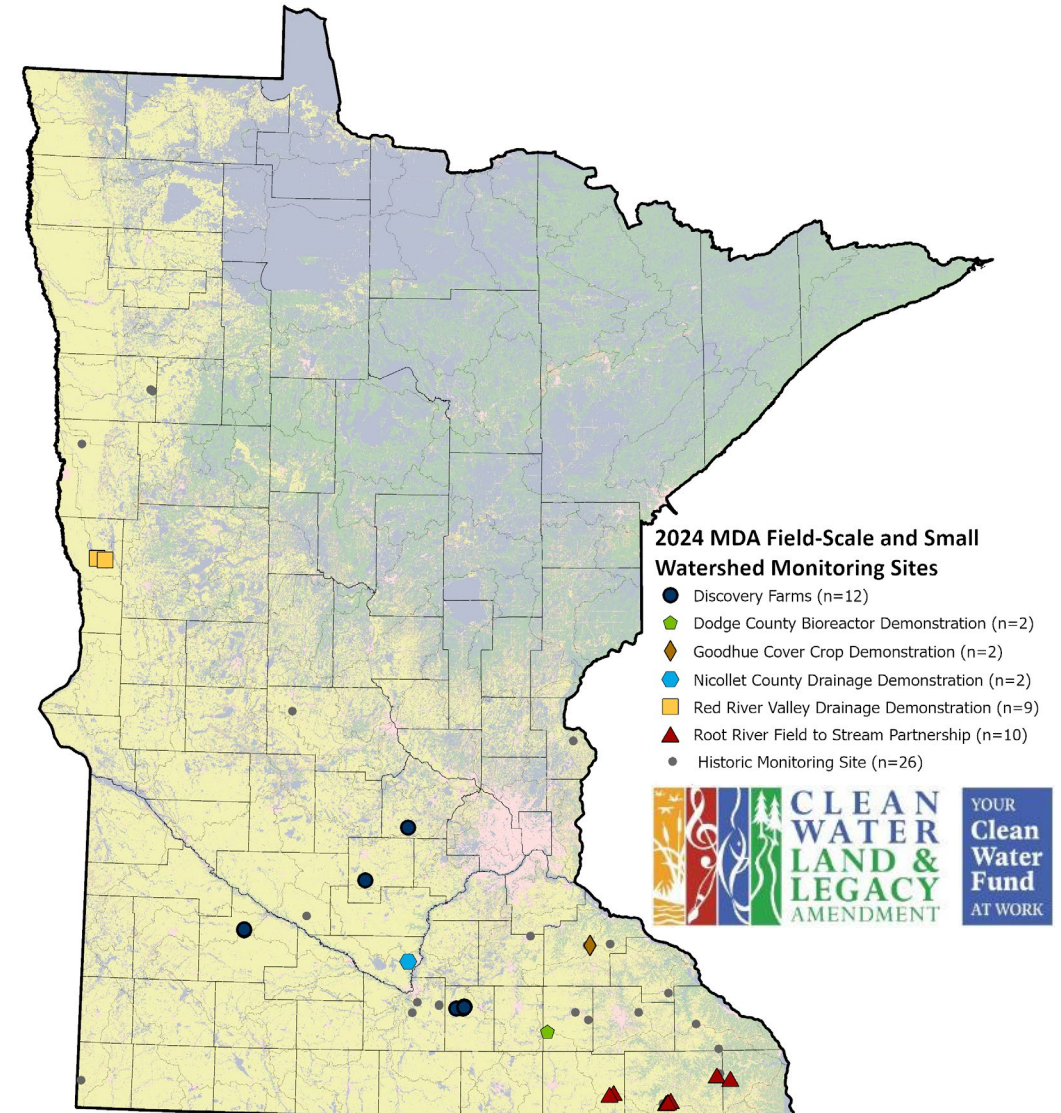
Why Minnesota Uses Both Tools

- Monitoring cannot be done everywhere
- Well-calibrated models simulate thousands of scenarios instantly
- Modeling is used across all Minnesota conservation program



Minnesota's Monitoring Leadership

- MDA has supported dozens of edge-of-field sites over the past decade
- Includes Discovery Farms, Root River Field to Stream, and other demonstrations
- In 2025, more than 35 monitoring stations operated statewide



What Monitoring Measures

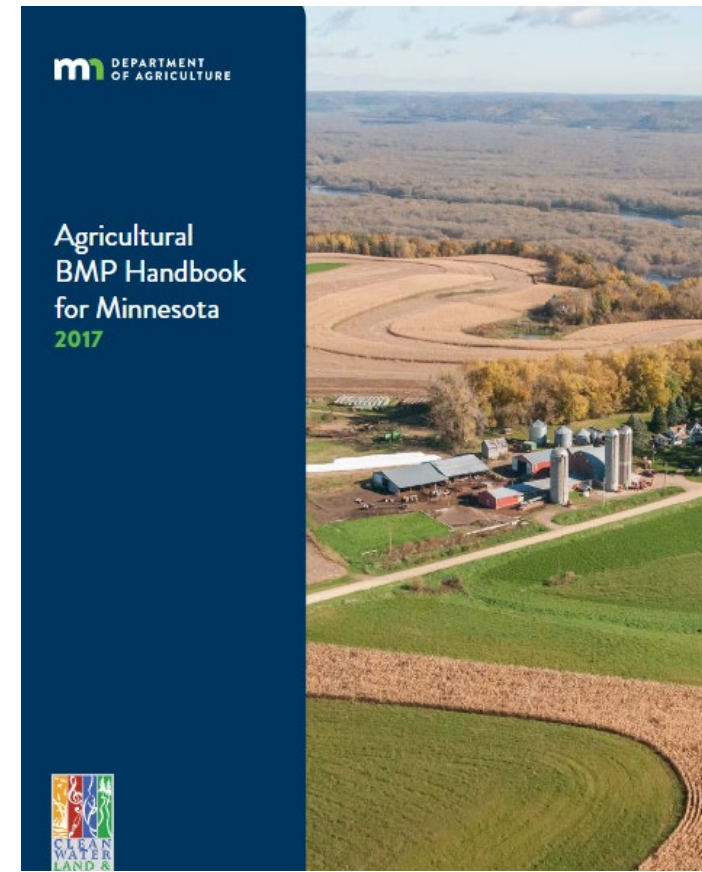
Observed, Site-Specific Data

- Sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus movement
- Surface runoff and subsurface tile drainage
- Automated sampling captures runoff whenever it occurs
- Most nutrient losses occur during 1–2 major surface runoff events each year



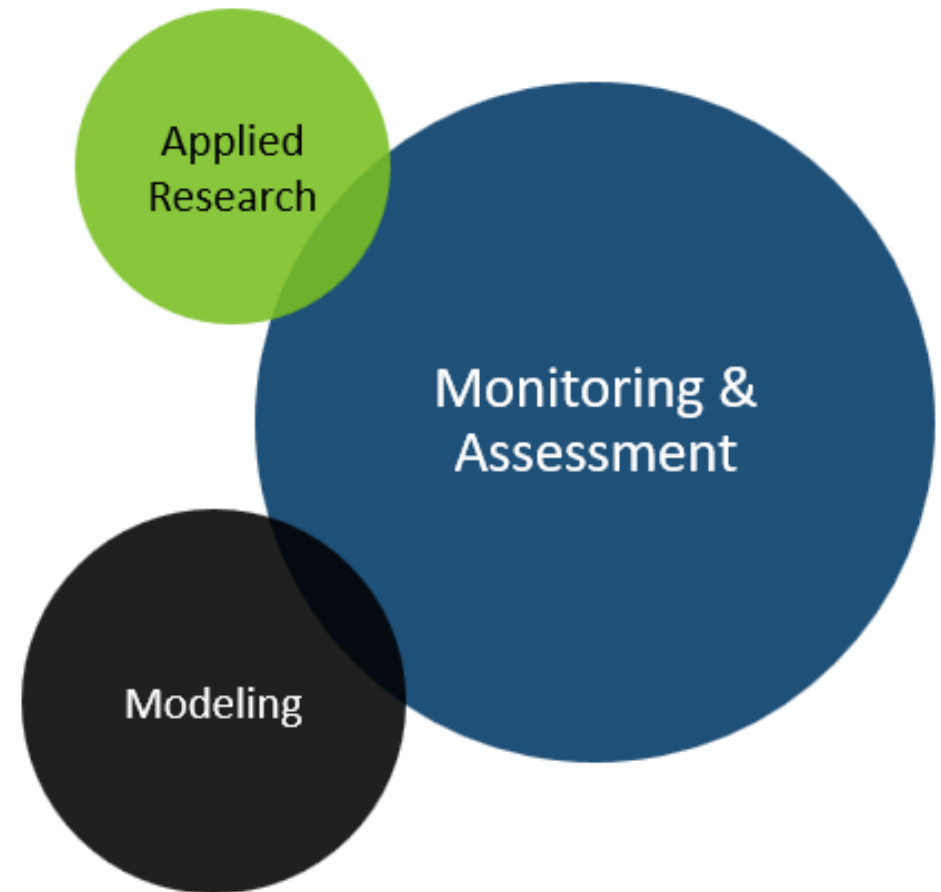
Applied Research Investments

- Cover crop effectiveness
- Irrigation scheduling and nitrate leaching
- Agricultural BMP Handbook (effectiveness of 30 BMPs)



How Monitoring + Research Feed Modeling

- MN and national research calibrate and refine water-quality models
- Models predict outcomes from conservation practices implemented through MAWQCP
- State and federal agencies use the same or similar models to estimate water quality impacts



How Minnesota Uses This Data

Turning Monitoring Into Action

- Monitoring and research data informs MN-specific computer models
- Monitoring, assessment and applied research directly inform implementation
- Implementation gets practices on the ground



Limits of Field-Level Monitoring

- Monitoring is not feasible on most certified farms
 - Over 1,900 certified farms = thousands of fields
- Paired watershed sites are rare and difficult to establish

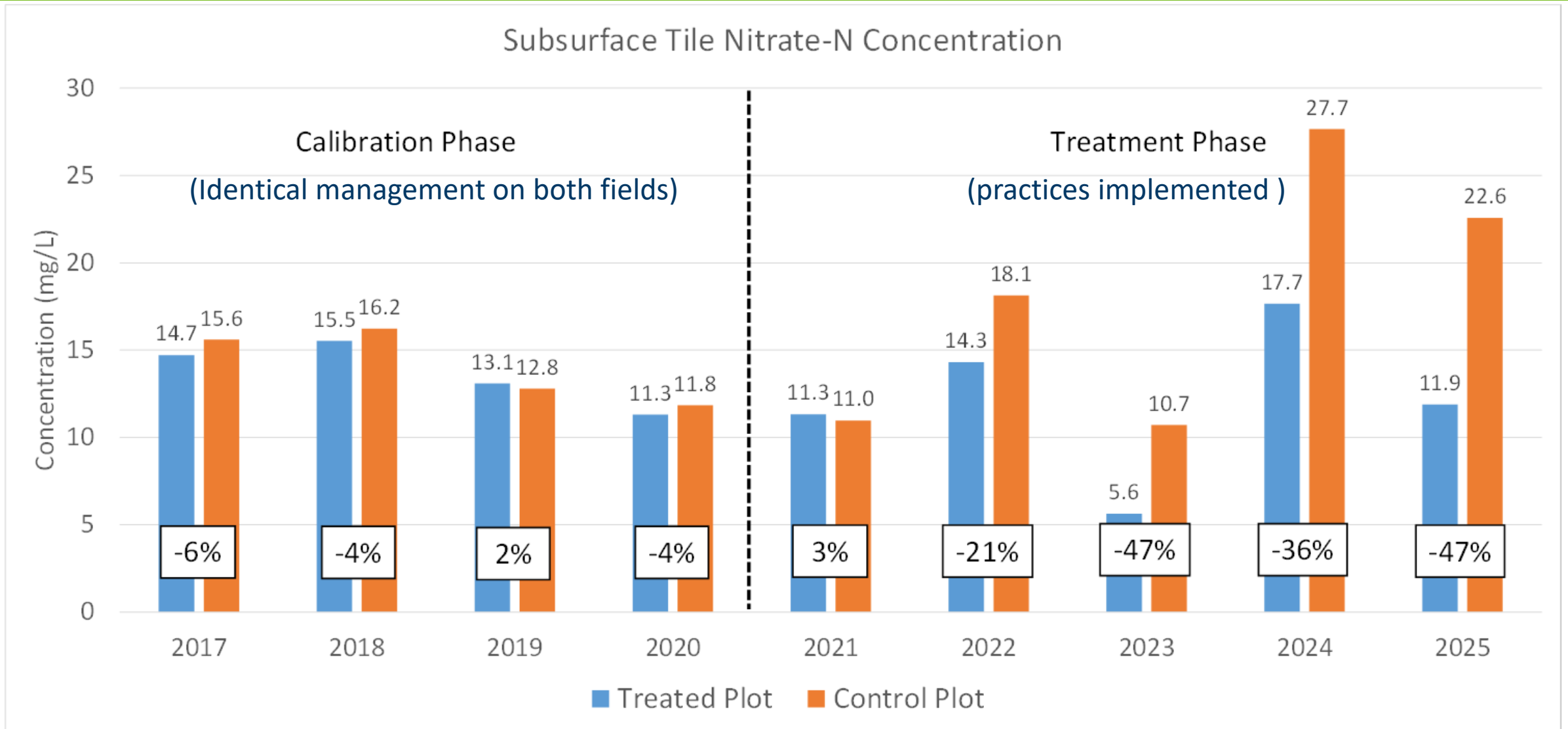


Recommended Approach

- Use paired watershed design with a control field and a treatment field
- Control field maintains existing practices
- Treatment field implements MAWQCP-required practices
- Grab samples or private well samples are not suitable for effectiveness monitoring



Example of Paired Watershed Data



Monitoring Costs

Budget Proposal – surface runoff, subsurface drainage tile, and groundwater monitoring demonstration site

Year	Site Establishment	Operating Cost -Nutrients and Sediment Only	Total
1	\$215,000	\$153,355	\$368,355
2		\$153,355	\$153,355
3		\$153,355	\$153,355
4		\$153,355	\$153,355
5		\$153,355	\$153,355
6		\$153,355	\$153,355
7		\$153,355	\$153,355
8		\$153,355	\$153,355
9		\$153,355	\$153,355
10		\$153,355	\$153,355
Total	\$290,000	\$1,533,550	\$1,823,550

- Proposal is scalable and cost is presented for single site over 10 years
- MDA proposes adding 5-10 sites statewide

Demonstration Site





Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program

Thom Petersen | Commissioner of Agriculture

Program Improvements

Integration

Early tools replaced with integrated digital systems

Mid-certification review tiers

Certification standards updated

Updated BMPs incorporated

RAPT: unified mapping, assessment, planning, tracking



Audit-Period Enhancements

Rigor

All active certifiers audited

Consolidated technical and policy guidance

Combined tracking of contingencies in RAPT

Structural-practice contingencies policy

Mid-certification reviews prioritized for highest-risk producers

Nutrient-reduction accounting aligned with statewide strategies



OLA Recommendations & Next Steps

Enhancements already underway

- Strengthened certifier guidance
- Classification for contingencies
- Improved tracking through RAPT



Continued collaboration with CWC to support statewide water-quality goals

53% of Minnesota's land is in agricultural production

Conservation choices ripple across more than half the landscape

Farmland conservation programs must deliver maximum impact



Asked to describe MAWQCP's impact:

57%: improved soil health

56%: improved water quality

52%: reduced erosion



Producer: MAWQCP is “vitally essential” for understanding and improving water-quality impacts

Shared Commitment

Together, we ensure MAWQCP delivers the greatest benefits to Minnesota's water and the communities that rely on it

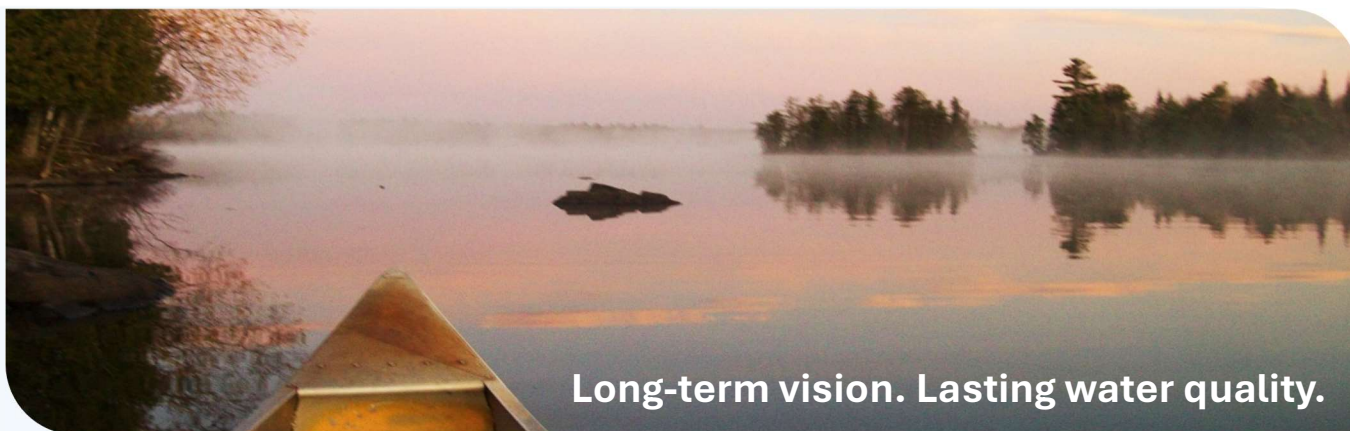
MAWQCP delivers conservation where it matters most

MDA remains committed to strengthening the program

Partnership with the Clean Water Council is essential



Questions?



Long-term vision. Lasting water quality.

After years of strategic investments in watershed protection and restoration through the Clean Water Fund, local communities are beginning to see measurable improvements in the quality of Minnesota's lakes, rivers, and drinking water. *However, these results did not happen overnight.*

Watershed-scale improvement requires sustained investment, science-based strategies, and strong collaboration among local governments, producers, landowners, state and federal agencies, and Tribal government partners. WBIF funding helps make that work possible by supporting projects that **leverage additional dollars, focus resources** where they have the **greatest impact**, and build **long-term resilience** for Minnesota communities.

The Local Government Water Roundtable collectively represents hundreds of local officials and resource professionals from across Minnesota, and supports the continued, long-term funding of BWSR's Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) for continued success.

Working together to protect groundwater in Thief River Falls



ABOVE: Representatives from three local governments that worked together to protect drinking water in Thief River Falls.

Behind every clean water success story is a long-term commitment to protecting Minnesota's water resources through science-based, locally driven solutions. One example is the source water protection work in Thief River Falls. Through participation in One Watershed, One Plan, the City, Pennington Soil & Water Conservation District, Red Lake Watershed District, and Pennington County partnered to support major investments in water quality projects, with assistance from WBIF and BWSR competitive drinking water grants.

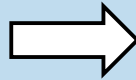


"We want to protect water quality in the Red Lake River because it's a drinking water source... especially as part of the Red Lake River One Watershed, One Plan. That is one of our priority areas to implement projects to improve water quality."

- Corey Hanson, water quality coordinator at Red Lake Watershed District



PROJECTS



RESULTS

1,700
structural
practices

28,299
Acres of
non-structural
practices

12,008
acres of forest
management &
stewardship

190
Wells
sealed

32,478
lbs/year
phosphorus

105,373
lbs/year
nitrogen

44,418
tons/year
sediment

65
vulnerable
DWSMAs
benefited

Coordinated

*Locally-led
collaboration*

Streamlined

*Simplified
administrative
process*

Predictable

*Reliable support
for local water
management*

Accountable

*Prioritized,
targeted, and
measurable*

The Local Government Water Roundtable strongly supports long-term funding for WBIF. Continued investment is essential to maintaining Minnesota's science-based, comprehensive approach to water protection while building on the progress already underway. Communities across the state are seeing real results through improved drinking water protection, stronger watershed management, and conservation efforts that leverage local, state, federal, and private landowner resources.

As water quality challenges continue to grow, stable WBIF funding remains an urgent priority. Local governments rely on these resources to implement practical, locally driven solutions that deliver measurable outcomes and long-term benefits for Minnesota's water resources and communities.



MEMORANDUM

Date: 08/14/2026
To: Jen Kader, Administrator, Clean Water Council
From: Maggie Karschnia, Clean Water Coordinator, BWSR
 Justin Hanson, Assistant Director of Regional Operations, BWSR

RE: Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) Outcomes Reporting

Purpose

The Watershed-based Implementation Fund (WBIF) is the largest Clean Water Fund-supported program and represents a significant investment in locally led water quality improvement. At the One Watershed, One Plan listening sessions, there has been clear support by local partnerships for strengthening our ability to consistently report on the outcomes of WBIF investments. At the request of the Clean Water Council's (CWC) Budget and Outcomes Committee (BOC), a WBIF outcomes reporting item has been put on the August agenda. This agenda item provides an opportunity to discuss a proposed approach to improve outcomes reporting at the watershed, regional, and statewide levels. This approach is summarized below.

Proposed Outcomes Reporting Plan

A two-year work plan is proposed to strengthen data consistency, improve the connection between implementation activities and water quality outcomes, and provide more accessible information to decision-makers and the public.

Timeline	Milestone	Description	Resources & Capacity	
			Use Existing	May Need Additional
YEAR 1	eLINK Updates	Convene a workgroup to discuss and advance standardized reporting of best management practices (BMPs) and identify opportunities to update and improve eLINK reporting.	X	
YEAR 1 to YEAR 2	Explore Output & Outcome Connections	Review existing eLINK data and explore ways to improve connections to water quality outcomes in partnership with MPCA and the interagency Outcomes Workgroup.	X	
YEAR 1	Draft Interactive Watersheds Map	Coordinate with watershed partnerships to outline a design and mock up an interactive map showing 1W1P boundaries and priority areas along with WBIF and other Clean Water Fund projects across watersheds, connecting implementation outputs to outcomes if possible in coordination with MPCA.		X

Timeline	Milestone	Description	Resources & Capacity	
			Use Existing	May Need Additional
YEAR 1 to YEAR 2	Draft Outcomes Reporting Plan	Coordinate across state agencies to develop a plan with key deliverables and timelines for improved reporting of outcomes at the local, regional, and state levels for both WBIF and other CWF programs.		X
YEAR 1	CWC BOC Presentation	Present updates and the proposed statewide outcomes reporting plan to the Clean Water Council BOC for review and approval.	X	
YEAR 2	Launch Interactive Watersheds Map	Finish development of and launch the interactive watershed-based project and outcomes map		X
YEAR 2	Implement Outcomes Reporting Plan	Begin implementation of the statewide outcomes reporting plan.		X
END OF YEAR 2	CWC BOC Presentation	Present initial results, consolidated findings, lessons learned, and recommended next steps to the BOC for review and then to the Clean Water Council.	X	

Action Requested

The CWC BOC has requested a proposed two-year work plan and outcomes reporting approach for the WBIF. The proposed approach will provide a clear timeline and milestones for improving the consistency, accessibility, and usefulness of information about WBIF investments and their contribution to water quality outcomes.

Some activities will require additional scoping before BWSR can determine whether they can be completed with existing resources and capacity or will require additional funding. The BOC could consider the following options.

OPTION 1: Proceed Within Existing Resources

CWC BOC action: Direct BWSR to proceed with activities that can be completed using existing resources, staff capacity and agency partnerships, while scoping the activities below to determine their feasibility, anticipated costs, and potential resource needs to be requested in the next biennium (FY30-31).

- Outcomes Reporting Plan & Implementation
- Interactive Watersheds Map

OPTION 2: Direct Staff to Return with a Costed Proposal in October Before Proceeding

CWC BOC action: Direct staff to proceed with activities that can be completed using existing resources, staff capacity and agency partnerships AND develop rough cost estimates for those activities that need additional resources and capacity, and return to the CWC at its September meeting with an estimated budget to be included in the proposed FY28-29 budget.

Note: This option provides the Council with the greatest opportunity to evaluate the investment before committing resources, but may not align the with FY28-29 CWF budgeting timeline.

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there are green agricultural fields with distinct rows of crops. A small river or stream flows through the middle ground. In the background, a small town with several buildings and a parking lot is visible, situated near a larger body of water under a blue sky with light clouds.

WATERSHED-BASED IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

FROM REPORTING TO A STATEWIDE STORY

OUTCOMES REPORTING PROGRESS AND PATH FORWARD

August 14, 2026

WHY WE'RE HERE

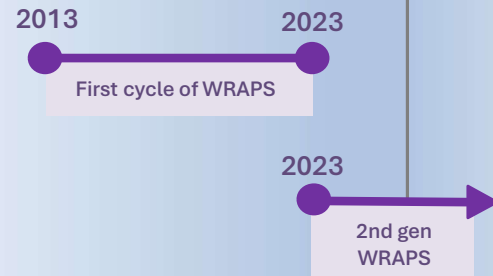
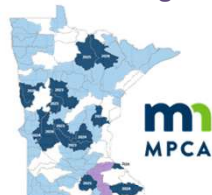
GOING FROM **OUTPUTS REPORTING TO**
A STATEWIDE OUTCOMES NARRATIVE



IWM Intensive Watershed Monitoring



WRAPS Watershed Restoration & Protection Strategies



WBIF Watershed Based Implementation Funding

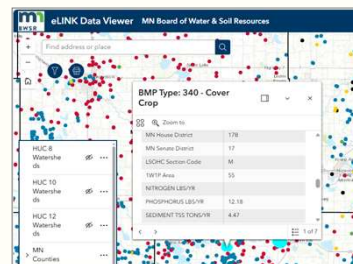


WE ARE
HERE

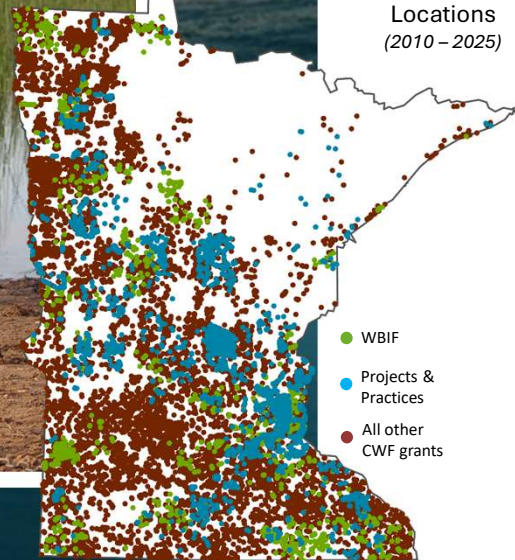
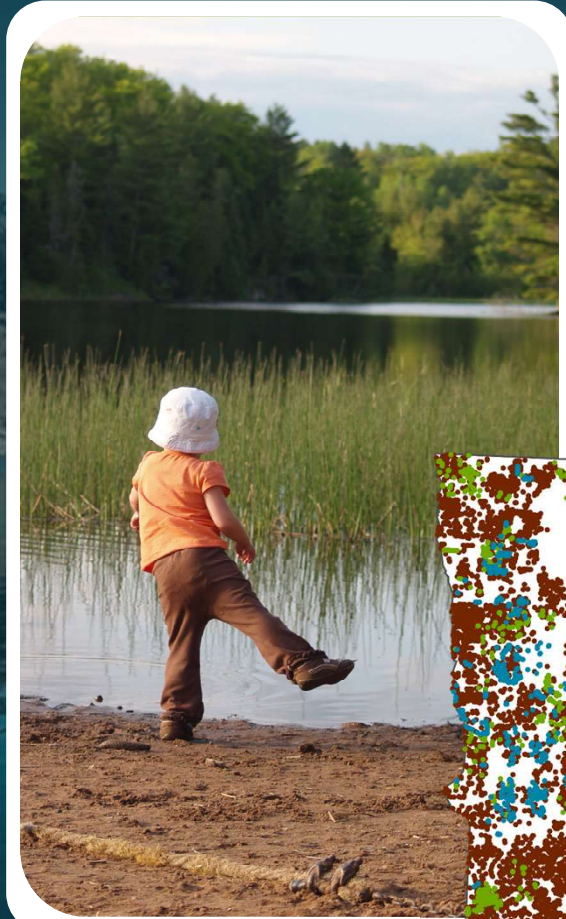


WHERE WE ARE TODAY

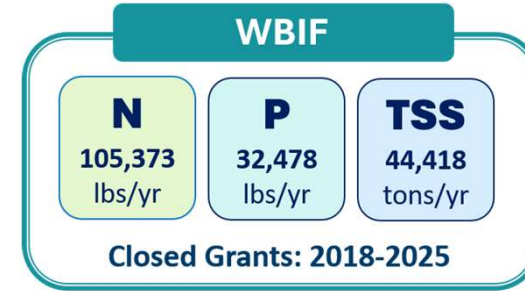
The program has made significant progress in shaping a cohesive statewide narrative and sharing the considerable strides we've made.



WHERE WE ARE TODAY



BWSR CWF Project
Locations
(2010 – 2025)



FY2018-2025 WBIF Outputs

Watershed	Plan Approval Year	Nitrogen Reduction (lbs/yr)	Phosphorus Reduction (lbs/yr)	Sediment Reduction (tons/yr)
Yellow Medicine River	2016	8,259	1,393	802
North Fork Crow River	2018	0	3,531	3,309
Cedar River	2019	7,299	883	600
Watonwan River	2020	13,411	796	1,110
Mississippi River Headw	2021	378	1,424	887
Middle-Snake-Tamarac	2022	1,031	872	955



WHO WE'RE

LEARNING
FROM

Local Partners: Watershed districts, cities, counties, SWCDs, and Tribal governments providing on-the-ground insight and place-based knowledge.

Organizations: Non-profit partners, local government associations, and key interest groups.

Agencies: Federal and state agencies contributing data, expertise, and policy alignment across program areas.

& WORKING
WITH



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

THE AGGREGATION CHALLENGE

WHEN DATA COMES TOGETHER — WHAT GETS LOST?

Integrating diverse data sources across local programs creates complexity. Nuance, local priorities and community-specific stories risk being flattened into a single statewide metric.

- 1. Watershed Goals and Priorities**
- 2. Output Tools**
- 3. Multiple Funding Efforts**



How do we aggregate without losing what matters most?

THE AGGREGATION CHALLENGE

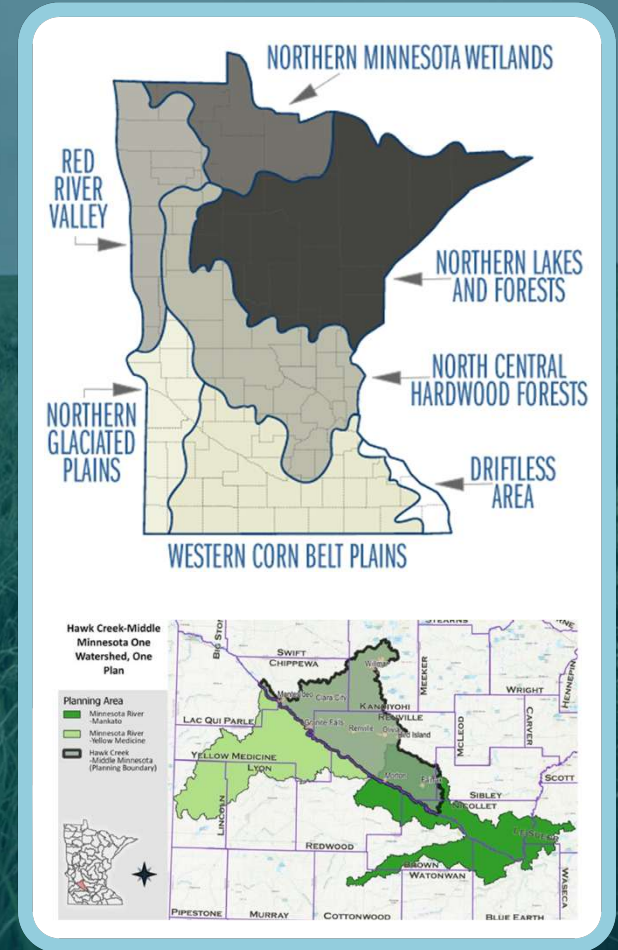
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2. Output Tools

3. Multiple Funding Efforts



AGRICULTURAL

- RUSLE2
- HSPF SAM
- PTMAApp
- BEET



STORMWATER

- WinSLAMM
- MIDS
- P8



FORESTRY

- FERN
- PLET

How do we aggregate without losing what matters most?

THE AGGREGATION CHALLENGE

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1. Watershed Goals and Priorities

2. Output Tools

3. Multiple Funding Efforts

[U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service \(USDA-NRCS\)](#)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetlands Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE)
Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easement (EWPP-FPE)
Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program (EWRP)
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

[Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources \(BWSR\)](#)

Easement programs:

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)
Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)
Army Compatible Use Buffer program (ACUB)
Riparian buffer conservation easements

Grant programs:

Disaster Recovery Assistance Program
Clean Water Fund Grants
State Conservation Cost-Share
Native Buffer Grant Program
Natural Resources Block Grant (NRBG)

Other programs as reported in the eLINK tracking system

[Minnesota Department of Agriculture \(MDA\)](#)

Agriculture Best Management Practices Loan Program (AgBMP)
Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP)

[Minnesota Pollution Control Agency \(MPCA\)](#)

Federal Clean Water Act Section 319 Program (Section 319)
Clean Water Partnership Program (CWP)



...AND MANY MORE!

OUTCOMES BY SCALE

WATERSHED LEVEL

Local data, goals & priorities
Ground-level stories

STATEWIDE LEVEL

Statewide synthesis
Unified narrative on trends

REGIONAL LEVEL

Larger regional aggregation
Strides to reduce pollutants



Connections to:

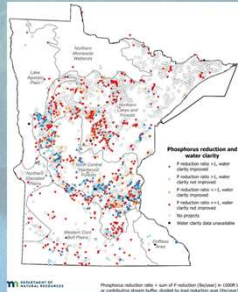
- **Fishable,**
- **Swimmable, and**
- **Drinkable waters**

WHAT'S EMERGING

Outcomes Reporting Concepts

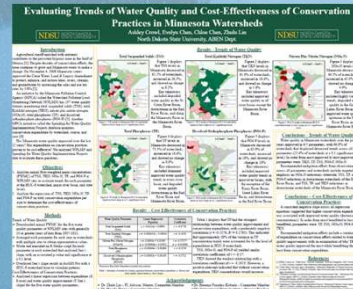
1

Near-lake
BMP data



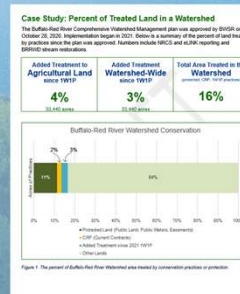
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NDSU Study



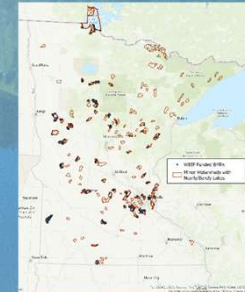
3

% Treated
Acres



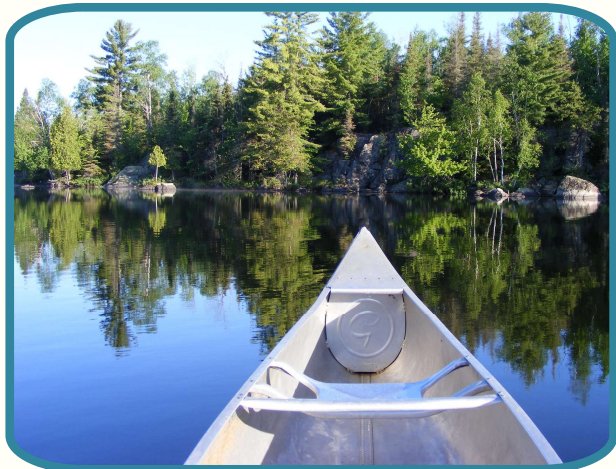
4

Nearly/Barely
Investments



TWO-YEAR APPROACH

PROPOSED PLAN +
COUNCIL ACTION



YEAR ONE (2027)

- eLink updates
- Explore Output & Outcome Connections
- **Draft Interactive Watersheds Map***
- **Outcomes Reporting Plan***
- **CWC BOC Presentation**

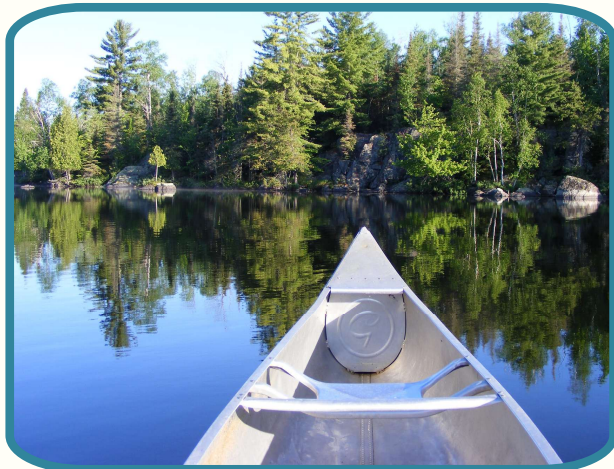
Year TWO (2028)

- **Launch Interactive Watersheds Map***
- **Begin Implementing Outcomes Reporting Plan***
- **CWC BOC Presentation**

*May require additional resources & capacity.

TWO-YEAR APPROACH

PROPOSED PLAN +
COUNCIL ACTION



OPTION 1

Direct BWSR to proceed with activities that can be completed using existing resources, staff capacity and agency partnerships, while scoping the activities below to determine their feasibility, anticipated costs, and potential resource needs to be proposed in FY30-31.

OPTION 2

Direct staff to:

1) proceed with activities that can be completed using existing resources, staff capacity and agency partnerships

AND

2) develop rough cost estimates for those activities that need additional resources and capacity, and return to the CWC at its September meeting with an estimated budget to be included in the proposed FY28-29 budget.

THANK YOU

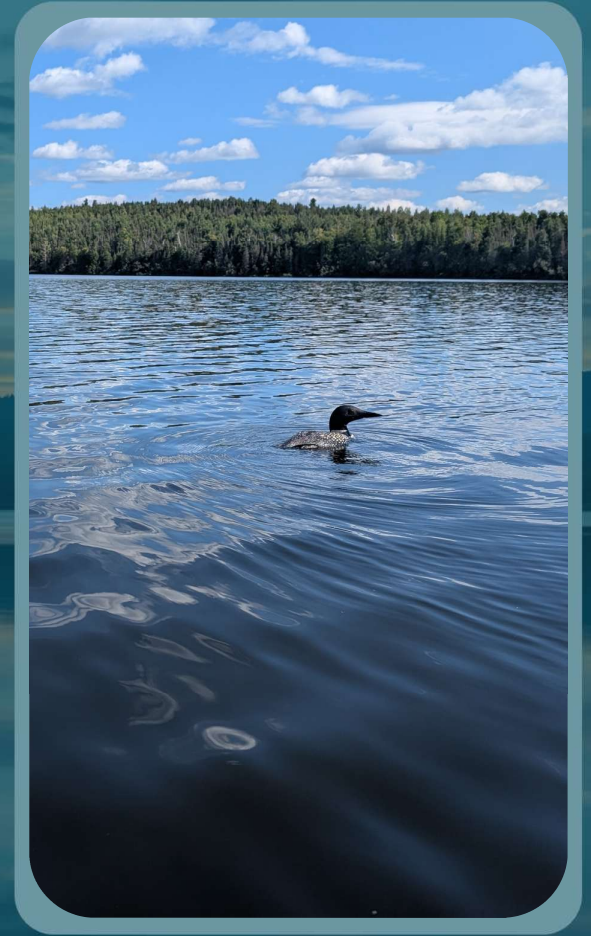
QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

Thank you for your support in shaping this statewide story. Your input is essential to moving this program forward together.

For questions or follow-up, please reach out to:

Julie Westerlund, 1W1P Coordinator
julie.westerlund@state.mn.us

Maggie Karschnia, Clean Water Coordinator
maggie.karschnia@state.mn.us



Mission

Protect and restore Minnesota’s waters for generations to come.

Goals and objectives



Drinking water is safe for everyone, everywhere in Minnesota

- Protect public water supplies
- Ensure private well users have safe water



Groundwater is clean and available

- Improve and protect groundwater quality
- Ensure sustainable long-term trends in aquifer levels
- Avoid adverse impacts to surface water features due to groundwater use



Surface waters are swimmable and fishable

- Prevent and reduce pollution of surface waters
- Maintain and improve the health of aquatic ecosystems
- Protect and restore hydrologic systems



Minnesotans value water and take actions to sustain and protect it

- Build capacity of local communities to protect and sustain water resources
- Encourage systems and approaches that support, protect, and improve water
- Provide education and outreach to inform Minnesotans’ water choices
- Encourage citizen and community engagement on water issues



Reflects bias for implementation & Outcomes



Aligns with MN Water Mgmt Framework – grounded in data & science



Fosters Watershed Approach – supporting local empowerment



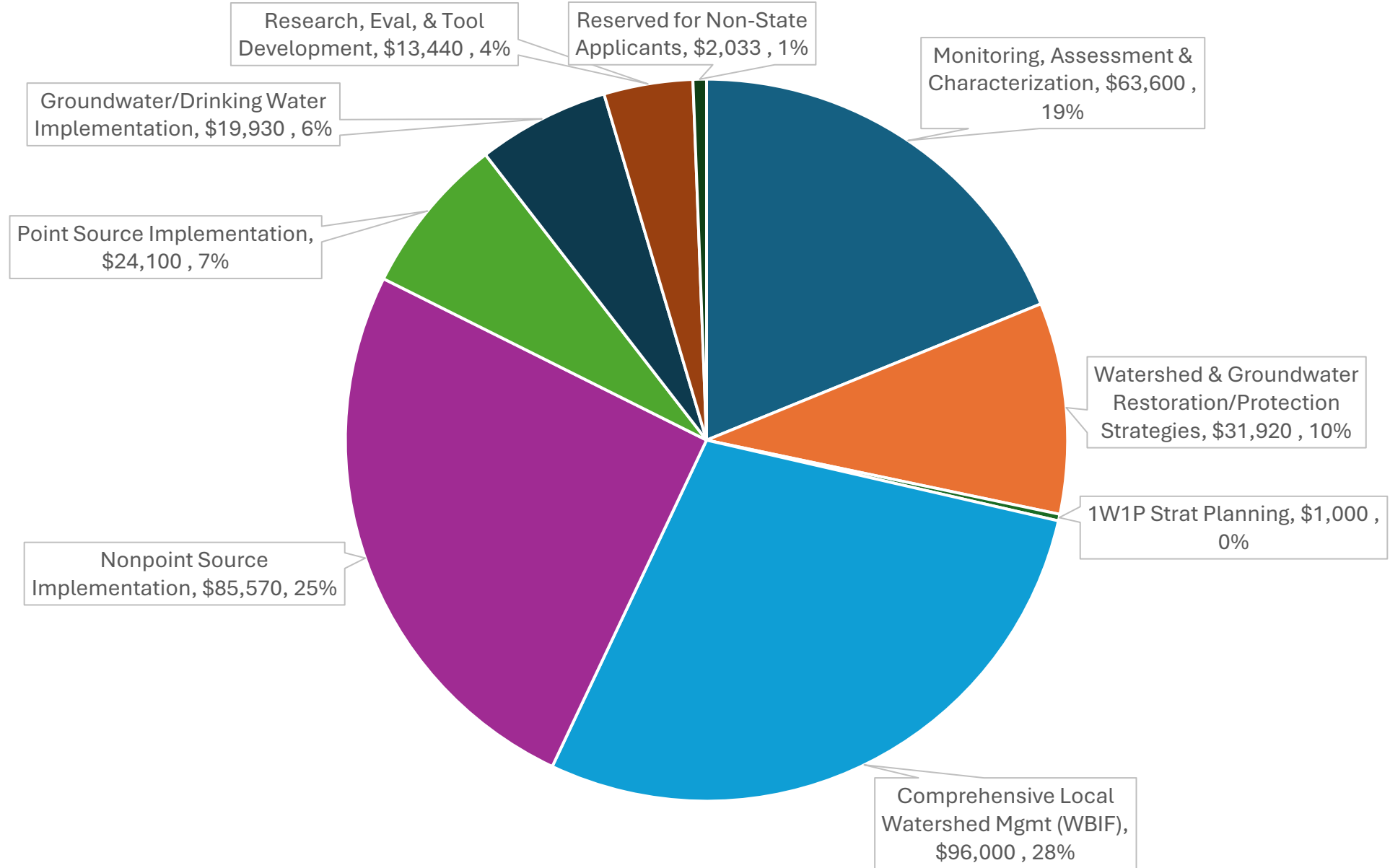
Increases Drinking Water protection



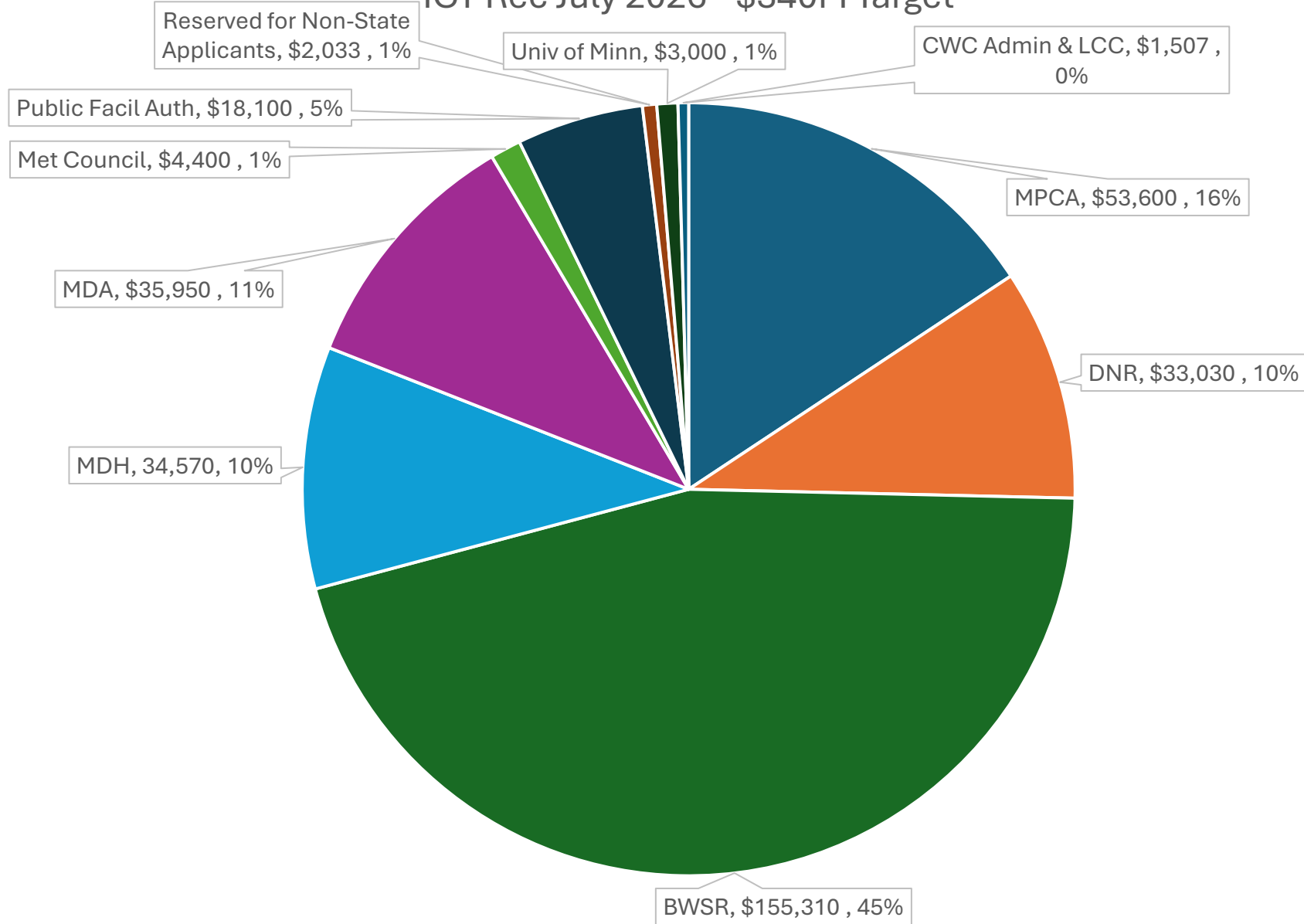
Supports innovation

Natural shoreline protection program, Merged BWSR/Olmstead County cover crop program, Manure BMP specialist

ICT Rec July 2026 - \$340M Target



ICT Rec July 2026 - \$340M Target



Larger CWF Funded Programs

(i.e., \$10M+ or 10+ FTE)

<u>Program</u>	<u>Agency</u>	<u>Past Appropriations</u>	<u>ITC Rec July 2026</u>	<u>FTEs</u>	<u>Strat Plan Pillar</u>
Surface & Drinking Water Prot & Restoration	BWSR	\$6M-\$17M	\$7.5M	15	Surface Water, Drinking Water
Accelerated Implementation	BWSR	\$8.7M-\$11M	\$9M	9.5	Surface Water
Enhancing Cover Crops	BWSR	\$9M-\$12M	\$12.5M	1	Surface Water, Ground Water, Drinking Water
Wetland Restoration Easements	BWSR	\$5M-\$10M	\$8M	1	Surface Water
Working Lands Floodplains Easements	BWSR	\$2M - \$13M	\$2.3M	1	Surface Water
Ag BMP Loan	MDA	\$4M - \$13M	\$4.5M	1	Surface Water, Ground Water
WBIF	BWSR	\$88M	\$96M	9	Surface, Ground, Drinking, People
Nitrate in GW	MDA	\$6M	\$7.2M	12	Drinking Water
Watershed Restoration & Prot Strat (WRAPS)	MPCA	\$14.5M	\$15M	33	Surface, People
Watershed Restoration & Prot Strat (WRAPS)	DNR	\$4.75M	\$5.3M	13	Surface
Source Water Protection (DWSMAs)	MDH	\$7.5M	\$8.12M	16	Drinking
Point Source Impl. Grants	PFA	\$16M	\$18M	0	Surface, Drinking
Aquifer Monitoring for Water Supply Planning	DNR	\$4.7M	\$5.3M	15	Drinking Water, Ground Water
Lake Biological Monitor & Assessment (fka IBI)	DNR	\$3M	\$3.3M	16	Surface
Stream Flow Monitoring	DNR	\$5.6M	\$5.85M	15	Surface
Drinking Water CEC	MDH	\$11.8M	\$11.85M	24	Drinking
River & Lake Monitoring & Assessment	MPCA	\$18.9M	\$20.9M	42	Surface
Private Well Initiative	MDH	\$6M	\$10M	3.8	Drinking

BOC homework responses

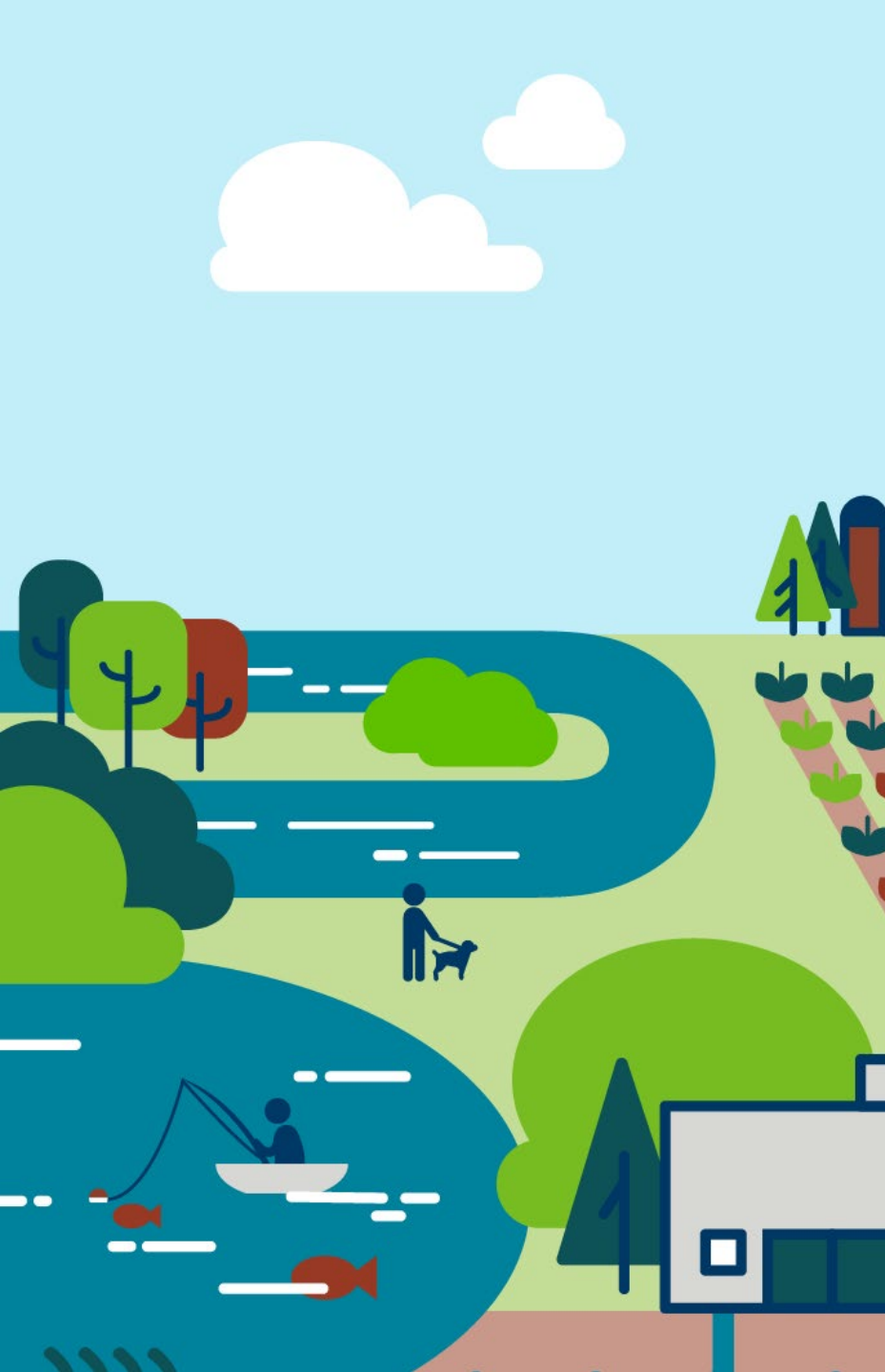
August 14, 2026





General reactions

- Good proposal with strong alignment with previous conversations, guidance
- Balances investment choices across the Water Management Framework
- Largely aligns with CWC Strategic Plan
- Appreciate agencies not using full amount in their proposal, while considering scalability and what is needed to make progress on water quality
- Special thank you to Glenn Skuta for “green text” version



Questions at this time

1. BWSR WBIF
2. BWSR Clean Water Legacy Partners
3. BWSR Riparian Protection Program
4. New programs
 1. MDA Manure Water Quality Specialist
 2. DNR Shoreline Protection and Restoration
5. Voyageurs National Park
6. General
 1. “Pillar 4” of the CWC Strategic Plan
 2. Are large investments in large programs delivering water quality benefits?
 3. FTEs: how many new FTEs are being added by the funding increases?

Recommended adjustments

Agency	Program	ICT Rec July 2026	Potential + or -	Revised Rec
BWSR	Legacy Partners	\$2M	+\$1.75-2M	\$2M-4M
BWSR	Critical Shoreland Easements	\$2M	+\$1.75-2M	\$2M-3.75-4M
UMN	Stormwater BMP Perf & Eval Tech Transfer	\$2M	+\$0.5M	\$2M-2.5M
MPCA	River & Lake Monitoring & Assessment	\$20.9M	-\$1-1.4M	\$19.5-20.9M
MDH	Private Well Initiative	\$10M	-\$1-2M	\$8-10M
MDA	Nitrate in Groundwater	\$7.2M	-\$0.5M	\$6.7-7.2M
BWSR	Conservation Drainage	\$3M	-\$0.5-0.6M	\$2.4-3M
BWSR	Riparian Protection & Soil Loss Assistance	\$3.5M	-\$0.5M	\$3-3.5M

Non-agency programs: \$2.033M?

Proposal	Prior Appropriations	Requested	Proposed Funding
Voyageurs National Park	\$1.5M	\$8M (\$3M match from St. Louis County)	\$0-2M (\$1.5M 8/14)
Red River Basin River of Dreams*	\$300k-\$326k	\$350k	\$325k-350k, ?? (\$350k 8/14)
River Watch in the Minnesota Valley*	\$0	\$150k	\$100k-150k, ?? (\$75k 8/14)
River Watch – Cannon River Valley*	\$0	\$150k	\$0-100k, ?? (\$0 8/14)
<i>*Perhaps fund these through River & Lakes Monitoring & Assessment</i>			





Date: July 27, 2026

To: John Barten, Clean Water Council Chair
Steve Christensen, Budget and Outcomes Committee Chair, Clean Water Council
Jen Kader, Clean Water Council Administrator

From: Dana Vanderbosch, Assistant Commissioner, MPCA
Katie Smith, Assistant Commissioner, DNR
Andrea Fish, Assistant Director, BSWR
Myra Kunas, Assistant Commissioner, MDH
Raj Mann, Assistant Division Director, MDA
Sam Paske, Assistant General Manager, Metropolitan Council
Chad Kolstad, Interim Executive Director, Public Facilities Authority
Joel Larson, Associate Director of the Water Resources Center, University of Minnesota

RE: Interagency Recommendations for FY2028-2029 Clean Water Fund Budget

The Clean Water Fund Interagency Coordinating Team (ICT) appreciates the opportunity to provide to the Clean Water Council (CWC) these FY28-29 Clean Water Fund (CWF) budget recommendations for consideration. We strived to create a budget that supports all elements of Minnesota's water management framework. These recommendations reflect:

- a strong commitment to foundational work that supports Minnesota's water management system, and ensures a base of solid science and data on which to effectively target implementation funds and gage progress;
- the input of partners and the CWC priorities; and
- a sustained commitment to funding implementation, incorporating innovations alongside time-tested strategies that increase results.

In recognition that there are applicants for Clean Water Funding from non-state entities, the ICT did not allot the entire amount that Minnesota Management and Budget projects to be available for appropriation in FY28-29. This leaves capacity for the CWC to recommend funding to non-state applicants or supplement state programs, as desired.

The ICT also recognizes that cancellations back to the CWF from previous biennial appropriations are likely and this may mean there is more to allot for FY28-29 after the November 2026 and February 2027 budget forecasts are released. This would allow us to jointly identify additional opportunities for increased investment before the 2027 legislative session.

Budget Recommendations by Agency

Collectively, the budget recommendations are grounded in the watershed approach to protect and restore the state's abundant and diverse water resources. As you know, the watershed approach is a systematic, data-driven, iterative process that allows state agencies and local partners to coordinate to maximize CWF investments. It requires and supports local and state partnerships and includes consideration of water quality, quantity, surface water, groundwater, drinking water, habitat, and recreation. The following paragraphs summarize the proposed FY28-29 recommendations for activities led by each of the ICT member agencies.

I. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

River and Lake Monitoring

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$18,900,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$20,900,000

The Surface Water Monitoring program conducts water chemistry and biological monitoring on lakes, rivers, and streams to determine if waterbodies are impaired or meet standards, detects long-term trends over time at the basin, watershed and subwatershed scales, and identifies areas for protection and restoration. The primary output from the surface water monitoring activities is a large body of high-quality data, which is used in other steps within the Watershed Framework. A primary feature of the surface water monitoring activities is partnership between MPCA and local units of government, educational institutions, and Tribal nations who accomplish the work together. This recommendation ensures work will remain steady, and that two FTE can be hired to manage the large volume of data that is being generated from the new continuous nitrate monitoring network that the Legislature funded two years ago.

Groundwater Trend Monitoring

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$2,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,300,000

Rationale: Groundwater monitoring data are foundational to understanding the condition of Minnesota's groundwater quality. A long-standing Memorandum of Understanding divides groundwater monitoring responsibilities between the Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. These data are critical for the development of Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategies (GRAPS), and the development and implementation of One Watershed One Plans (1W1P). As more WRAPS, GRAPS and 1W1P are implemented, monitoring remains critical as the means to determine if clean water goals are being met. This program's budget has not been increased in many years. The recommendation ensures work can remain steady, and that high-priority PFAS sampling can be routinely conducted so we can detect contamination as quickly as possible.

Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS)

FY26/27 Appropriation: \$14,500,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$15,000,000

Rationale: WRAPS reports, including Total Maximum Daily Load studies (TMDLs) for impaired waters, are updated with local partners to confirm strategies for impaired waters and unimpaired waters by setting reduction and protection goals, milestones and measures to guide targeted state and local government planning and implementation efforts. Funding also supports updating watershed models as new monitoring data become available. Some of this program's funding moves to local partners who participate in WRAPS updates and supports the We Are Water public engagement traveling exhibit. This recommendation ensures that work remains steady.

Chloride Reduction Program

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,300,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$2,600,000

Rationale: This program provides critical support to communities by providing chloride reduction from road salt and water softening training, and grants to communities so they can implement their chloride management plans. This recommendation recognizes the CWC's desire to see more training and more grants available for on-the-ground chloride reduction work, and it also meets the needs MPCA is hearing from partners. The MPCA is open to discussing additional work once the CWC finalizes its chloride reduction policy.

Subsurface Treatment System Grants (septic systems)

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$6,881,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$6,900,000

Rationale: This program provides critical funding to local units of government to operate their respective SSTS programs and also provides funding to homeowners with low income to replace or repair non-complying septic systems. Both county SSTS programs and grants for SSTS replacement protect groundwater and connected surface water. This recommendation ensures we can maintain the grant levels from the past biennium.

Wastewater and Stormwater TMDL implementation

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$3,200,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,400,000

Rationale: With the completion of hundreds of TMDLs over the past decade and a half, the work to translate wasteload allocations into permit requirements has expanded enormously. Funding for these programs provides technical assistance tools to local units of government and supports staff to accelerate work in the stormwater and wastewater permitting programs that protect lakes and streams. The FY28/29 recommendation will ensure the work effort remains steady.

Clean Water Council Administration

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$922,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,500,000

Rationale: This recommendation reflects the change in CWC administration scope to conduct more stakeholder engagement and communication, as well as hire an additional staff person to assist the Council Administrator.

II. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Stream Flow Monitoring

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$5,650,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$5,850,000

Rationale: Stream flow monitoring is foundational to assessing water quality, the development of TMDLs, WRAPS, and developing and implementing 1W1Ps. As more WRAPS and 1W1Ps are implemented, monitoring remains critical to measure progress. The recommendation will maintain the current gage network, replace aging equipment and continue to ensure data are readily available to inform decision making and assess progress toward clean water goals.

Lake Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) Assessment

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$3,050,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,300,000

Rationale: Lake IBI assessments are foundational to assessing water quality, the development of TMDLs, WRAPS, developing and implementing 1W1P. Lake IBI assessments started later than stream IBIs conducted by the MPCA and there are still many lakes that need to be completed. This recommendation maintains most of the DNR's core capacity to assess lakes for fish and associated stressor identification.

Fish Contamination Assessment

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,100,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,100,000

Rationale: The DNR traditionally collected fish for mercury and PCB contamination assessment from 70 lake and stream sites using Game and Fish Funds. The Clean Water Fund has been supporting the laboratory costs for an additional 80 lake and stream sites per year. The recommendation maintains the core capacity for the statewide assessment of PFAS compounds in fish tissue.

Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$4,750,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$5,300,000

Rationale: The DNR employs experts in hydrology and geomorphology to support comprehensive assessments and strategy development as part of WRAPS. DNR staff complete targeted surveys and analysis and watershed reports that inform WRAPS and ultimately implementation projects. DNR staff make this information available in the Watershed Health Assessment Framework (WHAF) and other reports. The proposed amount will maintain DNR's capacity to provide this core expertise as part of the interagency watershed approach.

Aquifer Monitoring for Water Supply Planning

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$4,700,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$5,300,000

Rationale: The DNR is developing a robust groundwater level monitoring network that informs our understanding of groundwater level trends; the source of drinking water for 75% of Minnesotans. DNR applies this data in groundwater models, technical analysis, and water supply planning. The proposed amount will add up to 25 new monitoring wells, help maintain the current network of about 1,254 wells, and sustain the DNR's capacity to manage and apply the data.

Nonpoint Source Restoration and Protection**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$4,350,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$4,930,000**

Rationale: As the number of completed WRAPS and 1W1P increases, there is an increasing need for DNR experts to provide site-specific technical support for planning and implementing projects. DNR is actively involved in about 80 implementation projects each year, providing design expertise on dam removals, stream restoration and other stabilization projects. DNR staff often help during implementation and construction oversight, filling in critical gaps in local expertise. The proposed amount will maintain this core expertise and continue supporting local government partners.

Tool Development and Evaluation**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,400,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,500,000**

Rationale: The DNR maintains and provides access to LiDAR-derived elevation data that is widely used for targeting and designing implementation projects and for watershed modeling. DNR also assesses relationships among disturbance patterns, BMP applications, and water quality in forested watersheds. The proposed amount will maintain effort on LiDAR related support, maintain effort in forest BMP monitoring. Over the past biennium the DNR has eliminated effort on fine-scale watershed models to evaluate the effects of drainage, soil health and other BMPs.

County Geologic Atlases**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$200,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$200,000**

Rationale: The CWF has enhanced data collection and analysis of the county geologic atlases by providing supplemental chemistry and geology data. The core funding of the atlas program continues to be the LCCMR and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, along with state general fund resources. The proposed amount restores capacity to supplement the atlas data collection efforts that have previously resulted in significant efforts to target nitrate reduction in southeastern Minnesota.

Mussel Restoration Program**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$700,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$750,000**

Rationale: Of the 50 native freshwater mussel species in Minnesota, 61% are low in number, declining and their persistence is in jeopardy. Mussels are efficient natural filterers of water, including removal of sediment, nutrients and bacteria and they provide habitat for other aquatic species. The DNR has developed the expertise to grow and restore mussel populations and upgraded facilities to support an expansion and more rapid restoration of mussels throughout Minnesota. The amount requested will provide support to significantly maintain higher propagation, rearing and restoration efforts.

Culvert Replacement Incentive Program**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$2,900,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,000,000**

Rationale: Minnesota's public roads intersect the state's natural perennial flowing watercourses at approximately 65,000 locations. Many of the culvert structures at these locations are failing and require replacement. A culvert replacement and incentive program would provide financial and technical assistance for counties and other local governments to modernize culvert systems to address climate resiliency, restore fish communities, and reduce sediment loads (two major sources of impairment). This proposal will accelerate the adoption of alternative culvert designs that improve biological connectivity, channel stability, reduce flood stage and lower long-term maintenance costs. This proposal will fund approximately 12 projects with a 25% cost share. Funds would need to be available until spent to allow for sufficient local planning and implementation.

Natural Shoreline Protection Program (New)**FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,800,000**

Rationale: Nearly 50% of Minnesota's natural shorelines have vanished due to suburban-style development and lawn manicuring. This conversion allows up to nine times more pollutants into lakes and degrading critical fish and wildlife habitats. Protecting and restoring native plant buffers is essential to filter runoff and anchor soil.

This program will enhance funding for the Lake Steward program, sponsored by Minnesota Lakes and Rivers, and provide funding for permanent lakeshore conservation easements to protect priority lakes by restoring natural shorelines and reducing pollutant loading.

III. Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)

One Watershed, One Plan

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,000,000

Rationale: As more comprehensive watershed management plans mature, increased funding is needed to keep plans current through plan evaluations and updates that reflect new data, implementation experience, and emerging priorities. Maintaining current plans ensures implementation funding continues to be targeted to the highest-priority projects, strengthens local and Tribal partnerships, and preserves the effectiveness of Minnesota's watershed-based approach.

Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF)

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$88,100,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$96,000,000

Rationale: While moving at a slower rate than the implementation trajectory calls for, continued growth in WBIF is necessary to keep pace with rising projects costs and to meet the demand by partnerships to help fund the goals set out in their plans. Stable funding provides local governments and Tribal partners the certainty needed to invest in staff, leverage additional resources, and deliver measurable water quality improvements for priority resources identified in watershed plans.

Accelerated Implementation

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$8,700,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$9,000,000

Rationale: As we continue to hear a demand from local and Tribal government partners for more training and tools, this recommendation helps to maintain program capacity. Funding is needed to expand technical assistance through Technical Service Areas, technical training & certifications, and implementation support that directly increases the pace and quality of conservation project delivery. These investments leverage federal matching funds while building the local capacity required to move priority projects from planning to implementation.

Conservation Drainage (*Multipurpose Drainage Management*)

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$2,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,000,000

Rationale: Demand for multipurpose drainage projects continues to exceed available funding. Increased investment will allow more high-impact drainage system improvements to incorporate conservation practices during infrequent system upgrades, producing long-term water quality benefits while expanding implementation of new conservation solutions identified by the Drainage Work Group.

Measures, Results, and Accountability

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$2,500,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$2,780,000

Rationale: Continued investment ensures accountability for CWF expenditures by measuring, evaluating, and communicating program outcomes. Maintaining robust performance reporting and grant oversight improves program effectiveness, supports legislative accountability, and demonstrates the return on public investment.

Riparian Protection and Soil Loss Assistance (*Buffer Law Implementation*)

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$4,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,500,000

Rationale: Stable funding is necessary to maintain statewide buffer compliance through continued monitoring, technical assistance, and local implementation support. Sustained investment protects previous gains in compliance and prevents increased enforcement costs by helping landowners remain in compliance. The FY28/29 recommendation reflects the Council's direction to decrease funding support, without compromising the integrity of the previous investments.

Surface and Drinking Water Protection & Restoration (*Projects and Practices*)**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$6,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$7,500,000**

Rationale: Demand for project funding consistently exceeds available resources, with requests typically totaling twice the available funding. Conservation project costs have increased by 6%-15% statewide, year over year in the previous 2 years. The increase reflects a recovery from the cuts from the shortfall last biennium, and an increased investment to fund more high-priority, shovel-ready projects. An increase in funding will also allow local governments to capitalize on time-sensitive opportunities, including the protection of drinking water resources while avoiding higher future project costs.

Watershed Partners Legacy Partners**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$2,000,000**

Rationale: The proposal doubles the previous appropriation for the program. Based on the priority of the CWC, increased funding is needed to address demand from Tribal Nations and nonprofit conservation organizations and to expand participation through a more flexible funding approach for Tribes. Additional investment will build implementation capacity and allow more high-quality projects aligned with local watershed priorities to move forward.

Enhancing Cover Crops for Adoption (*Joint Soil Health Program*)**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$9,486,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$12,500,000**

Rationale: Increased funding supports expansion of technical assistance and implementation needed to meet growing demand for soil health practices, including restoring funding to the FY24-25 level of \$12M, and adding a new, southeast Minnesota performance-based pilot program, all while leveraging available federal matching funds and aligned LCCMR funding (Olmsted County) to maximize conservation outcomes.

Tillage and Erosion Transects**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$850,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$850,000**

Rationale: Maintaining funding ensures continued collection of consistent, scientifically valid statewide data used to target conservation investments, improve watershed models, and evaluate conservation outcomes. Reliable, long-term data is essential for informed water quality planning and decision-making.

Technical Evaluation**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$200,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$220,000**

Rationale: Continued funding supports independent evaluation of restoration projects, improving accountability and ensuring future investments are informed by demonstrated project performance. Evaluation findings strengthen conservation effectiveness and provide legislators and partners with credible information on program outcomes. The increase reflects two biennia of inflation, as the appropriation has remained the same during that time period.

Wetland Restoration Easements**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$5,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$8,000,000**

Rationale: Increased funding is needed to capitalize on high-priority restoration opportunities before they are permanently lost. Wetland restoration provides multiple public benefits from a single investment, and this program remains one of Minnesota's most effective tools for achieving large-scale water quality improvements while leveraging federal conservation funding. This is BWSR's top priority easement program and work may be done in cooperation with the USDA or other agencies to leverage federal funding.

Targeted Wellhead/Drinking Water Protection Easements**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$5,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$2,000,000**

Rationale: Continued investment is needed to protect additional high-priority drinking water supply areas. Rising land values and increasing development pressure make proactive land protection more cost-effective

than delaying conservation investments or constructing costly drinking water treatment systems that many small water suppliers struggle to fund and maintain.

Working Lands Floodplain Easements

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$2,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$2,300,000

Rationale: Increased funding responds to growing demand for working lands easements that improve water quality while maintaining productive agricultural use and will keep the program at a sustainable level. This program sets aside sensitive land in riverine and riparian corridors to address water quality concerns, and climate adaptation and mitigation goals, and creates opportunities to leverage additional conservation funding and achieve multiple watershed benefits through a single investment.

Critical Shorelands Easements

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$2,000,000

Rationale: Increased funding is needed to capitalize on time-sensitive land protection opportunities before development permanently alters high-quality shorelands. Strong demand from local partners, increasing development pressure, and aging landownership make consistent investment critical to protecting Minnesota's highest-quality waters. FY26-27 appropriation amount was suggested by BWSR as a budget solution for the biennium because of the additional funding this program received in FY24. This request is in line with historic appropriations for this easement program.

Great Lakes Restoration

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,060,000

Rationale: Continued funding enables soil and water conservation districts in the Lake Superior Basin to leverage significant federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative investments. State funding provides the local capacity and matching resources necessary to maximize federal dollars and accelerate implementation of priority watershed projects.

Conservation Corp of Minnesota and Iowa

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,500,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,600,000

Rationale: Continued investment maintains critical on-the-ground implementation capacity that many local governments and Tribal Nations rely on to complete conservation projects. The program also develops Minnesota's conservation workforce while accelerating delivery of CWF investments.

IV. Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)

Future of Drinking Water

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$500,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$500,000

Rationale: Current federal and state regulations no longer provide adequate protection for customers of public water systems and users of private wells. This initiative supports MDH's implementation of the **Minnesota Drinking Water Action Plan** to protect Minnesotans against new threats that endanger our vision of safe and sufficient drinking water for everyone, everywhere in Minnesota. In addition, this initiative will focus on implementation of select activities named in the Action Plan that will prepare both public and private well supplies to adapt to an uncertain future.

Source Water Protection

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$7,690,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$8,120,000

Rationale: Protecting our sources of drinking water (groundwater, rivers, and lakes) is the most equitable and cost-effective approach to safeguarding our drinking water now and for future generations. This support facilitates planning and implementation specific to local needs for protecting drinking water sources and includes small grants for public water systems to implement actions identified in their Source Water Protection Plans. Additionally, program assets are being directed toward 1) enhancing the characterization of source water quality conditions using rigorous screening, monitoring, and analysis and 2) fulfilling MDH and CWC strategic

objectives of securing long-term protection for the most vulnerable lands in drinking water system management areas statewide and protection plans for community systems that use surface waters as their source of drinking water.

Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategies

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$3,500,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,500,000

Rationale: GRAPS is an interagency effort to coordinate the delivery of state agency groundwater and drinking water data, information, and implementation strategies for use at the local level. The aim is to facilitate local efforts to benefit groundwater resource restoration and protection. Key efforts include the following:

1) migrating data and information to online tools, 2) completing a GRAPS report for every comprehensive watershed planning (1W1P) by end of FY28 so that local partners have groundwater information resources for implementation planning, and 3) building local capacity through education, outreach, and financial assistance.

Private Well Initiative

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$6,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$10,000,000

Rationale: Unlike people who get their drinking water from public water system, people who get their drinking water from a private well (private well users) are largely on their own for ensuring that water from their well is safe for their household. As part of our commitment for equity, we are increasing education, technical support, and financial assistance for private well users so they can be confident in the safety and quality of their drinking water. This initiative continues to make progress towards the Council's vision of offering free private well testing to 10% of private well users each year. By the end of FY29, the initiative is on track to have free private well testing available for 50% of Minnesota's private well users and on track to meet the 2034 goal of offering free private well testing to all private well households.

Contaminants of Emerging Concern

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$11,850,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$11,850,000

Rationale: Maintain program capacity for evaluating contaminants of emerging concern (CEC). The health-based evaluation of known and new contaminants in drinking water is the starting point for assessing the threat to public health and potential public health burden. The values developed in this initiative are widely used by sister agencies. Technical assistance is given by the CEC program to citizens, companies, and other state agencies on interpreting and evaluating what CEC concentrations in water mean for human health. This initiative also develops analytical methods for laboratories to improve detection of emerging contaminants and ensures that accredited laboratories performing analytical water testing are accountable to standards that support defensible and accurate data.

Recreational Water Quality Online Portal

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$600,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$600,000

Rationale: While many people assume all beaches are monitored, beach testing is conducted at the discretion of the entity responsible for the beach (often a local public health agency). This initiative maintains the statewide recreational water testing portal that allows Minnesotans to go to one online location to access information on any recreational water testing conducted or beach closures currently in place. Additionally, the portal allows users to be made aware of any alerts currently in place at the beach of interest, such as the appearance of harmful algal blooms or major pollution events.

V. Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)

Monitoring for Pesticides in Surface Water and Groundwater

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$740,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$800,000

Rationale: Pesticide monitoring is critical to assess water quality compared to environmental standards (assessing impaired waters); evaluate the risk to drinking water from both surface and groundwater sources; and evaluate the need for and effectiveness of restrictions on product use or voluntary best management practices. Clean Water funding has allowed the MDA to increase the number of detectable pesticides, increase

the sensitivity of detection of certain pesticides, and increase the overall number of samples that can be analyzed on an annual basis. The expansion has allowed the MDA to test additional public water supply wells, lakes, rivers/streams, wetlands including water samples collected on Tribal land.

Pesticide Testing of Private Wells

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,100,000

Rationale: The primary goal of testing wells for pesticides is to provide information to homeowners and the public about the presence of pesticides in private drinking water wells and in groundwater. Funding is for free pesticide testing of private wells in areas where groundwater may be at risk for elevated pesticide concentrations. Earlier phases of the project analyzed up to 133 pesticide compounds in private wells across agricultural areas with vulnerable groundwater. Those results identified the herbicides cyanazine and atrazine—and their degradates—represented the greatest pesticide-related risk to private well users. Building on these findings, upcoming sampling will prioritize these compounds, along with nitrate and select insecticides and fungicides in vulnerable aquifers, to ensure continued monitoring of contaminants most likely to affect groundwater quality.

AgBMP Loan Program

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$4,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$4,500,000

Rationale: AgBMP loans can be used for the implementation of any practice that reduces or mitigates the effects of water pollution. The purpose is to encourage agricultural best management practices and other practices that prevent or reduce runoff from feedlots, farm fields and for other pollution problems identified by the county in local water plans. Funding can also be used to replace or treat contaminated wells. The program is administered by local governments and local loaning institutions and has extremely low administration costs. AgBMP loans are frequently used to leverage additional funding. Loans are repaid into the corpus of the account and will be available for future clean water projects regardless of the renewal of the CWF. The demand for Ag BMP loans greatly exceeds available funding.

Minnesota Agriculture Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP)

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$7,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$7,470,000

Rationale: The proposed budget serves to meet expanding demand and associate needs for program delivery including implementation grants, growing number of participating farms to audit, and overall labor demands to serve increasing participation. This funding provides for MAWQCP to meet seven goals in the CWC's 2024 Strategic Plan. Greater than 50% of funding is pass-through for soil and water conservation districts and supports implementation. The funding is required as match to leverage and maintain a \$10,000,000 federal EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG).

Technical Assistance

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$3,200,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,980,000

Rationale: Technical assistance is a primary vehicle to work with the agricultural community to promote best management practices. This funding is used to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation practices, demonstrate practices that protect water and enhance outreach and education of recommended agricultural practices to the agricultural community and local government partners. Technical assistance activities fill an important need for field demonstrations and validation of practices to protect water quality.

Irrigation Water Quality Program

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$310,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$330,000

Rationale: Funding supports an irrigation water quality specialist through a contract with the University of Minnesota Extension to address water quantity and water quality issues in Minnesota's irrigated regions. The specialist conducts applied research, develops technical guidance and publications, provides education and outreach on irrigation and nitrogen best management practices (BMPs), and contributes to the development of irrigation scheduling tools for Minnesota irrigators.

Nitrate in Groundwater**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$6,200,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$7,200,000**

Rationale: The MDA leads nitrate monitoring and reduction activities across Minnesota, with emphasis on areas with vulnerable groundwater. This work is done in partnership with the agricultural community and local governments. Funding supports activities that identify sources of nitrate contamination and evaluate and implement practices at the local level to reduce nitrate in groundwater. In addition to promoting, demonstrating, and encouraging adoption of nitrogen fertilizer BMPs, the program engages in strategic efforts to increase vegetative cover in vulnerable areas; works with farmers and crop advisors in local advisory teams; conducts computer modeling to evaluate practices; monitors groundwater, provides technical support and supports on-farm demonstration projects.

Research Inventory Database (MnWRL)**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$100,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$80,000**

Rationale: The MnWRL is a user-friendly, searchable inventory of water research relevant to Minnesota. It provides “one-stop” access to all types of water research, including both peer-reviewed articles and white papers and reports. MnWRL provides access to water related information, enabling water managers, researchers, engaged citizens and others to easily find, share, and coordinate research to support their efforts to protect, conserve, manage and restore water in Minnesota.

Forever Green Initiative (FGI)**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$5,000,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$6,660,000**

Rationale: The FGI develops Minnesota-specific winter annual and perennial crops that provide continuous living cover to protect and restore surface and groundwater quality. Through integrated research, farmer adoption support, and market-building efforts, the program accelerates adoption of cropping systems that reduce nutrient loss, enhance soil health, and support farm profitability. CWF advances research, implementation, and partnerships that expand these crops across Minnesota’s agricultural landscape.

Conservation Equipment Assistance**FY26-27 Appropriation: \$3,500,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,500,000**

Rationale: Conservation Equipment Assistance supports the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Soil Health Financial Assistance Program (SHFAP), which provides grants to producers, producer groups, and local governments to purchase or retrofit equipment that implements soil-health practices. A primary obstacle to expanding soil health is access to the specialized equipment necessary for successful adoption of soil health practices. By expanding access to equipment for cover cropping, reduced tillage, managed grazing, and similar practices, the program improves soil structure, increases infiltration, and limits disturbance to directly protect water quality by reducing erosion and curbing sediment and nutrient runoff. The appropriation is required as match to leverage and maintain a federal EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) award.

Manure BMP and Water Quality Specialist (NEW)**FY28-29 Recommendation: \$330,000**

Rationale: Funding will support a manure land application and water quality specialist to develop and promote BMPs and update guidance, with a focus on regions at elevated environmental risk, including Southeast and Central Minnesota. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the MDA indicate that nutrients from manure are frequently under credited when farmers calculate the total amount of nitrogen applied to the crop, resulting in overapplication of commercial fertilizer. Improving manure crediting accuracy—and ensuring manure is applied at the right time, in the right place, in the right amount, and from the right source—will reduce nitrate leaching from manured fields to groundwater and decrease manure related runoff to surface water.

VI. Metropolitan Council

Water Demand Reduction Grant Program

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,400,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,400,000

Rationale: The program is a Metropolitan Council and local community cost share program that provides 100% pass-through water efficiency grants to metro municipalities. This popular, over-subscribed program provided critical support to address the drought of 2021. The proposed budget was set to continue to meet growing needs by communities implementing water demand reduction measures to use groundwater more wisely, particularly in areas with drinking water contamination or water availability issues. The funds protect drinking water supplies and support the reliability and resiliency of water suppliers to serve homes, businesses, and growth.

Metropolitan Area Water Sustainability Support

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$2,750,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$3,000,000

Rationale: This program helps municipalities and industries in the Twin Cities metro area as they plan and implement projects that address emerging drinking water supply threats and overall water sustainability, provide cost-effective regional solutions, leverage inter-jurisdictional coordination, support local implementation of wellhead protection plans, and prevent degradation of groundwater and surface water resources. Activities in this program provide metro communities with:

- III. Potential solutions to better connect land use impacts on water supply and overall water sustainability
- IV. Ways to balance regional water use through utilization of surface water, storm water, wastewater and groundwater
- V. Analysis of infrastructure requirements needed to maintain and strengthen the reliability of water systems
- VI. Development of planning level cost estimates, including capital cost and operation cost
- VII. Funding mechanisms and equitable cost-sharing structure for regionally beneficial water supply development projects
- VIII. Information and tools to use to address climate change impacts on overall water supply systems and overall water sustainability
- IX. Ways to reduce impacts on our groundwater system including funds to communities for stormwater reuse

Through established workgroups, the Met Council will collaborate with local units of government, state agencies and other stakeholders to collaboratively address local and regional water sustainability issues.

VII. Public Facilities Authority (PFA)

Point Source Implementation Grant (PSIG) Program

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$16,440,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$18,000,000

Rationale: The PSIG program provides essential assistance to cities to upgrade water treatment facilities needed to meet required wasteload reductions to address impaired waters and protect threatened waterbodies. Program funding has been supplemented in the past with bonding appropriations; however, annual applications consistently exceed available funds. Currently the PSIG funding list has over \$160 million of projects outside that funding range and construction costs only continue to grow.

Small Community Wastewater Treatment Program

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$100,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$100,000

Rationale: The Small Community Wastewater Treatment Program provides grants and loans to assist small unsewered communities with technical assistance and construction funding to replace non-complying septic systems with community subsurface sewage treatment systems (SSTS). These funds allow small communities to evaluate and implement lower cost decentralized treatment alternatives to address their wastewater needs.

VIII. University of Minnesota

Stormwater BMP Performance Evaluation & Technology Transfer

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$1,600,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$2,000,000

Rationale: Provides research and technology transfer to address priority water resource needs for Minnesota communities. Research is completed through a competitive grant program to develop new stormwater practices and policies as well as improving the effectiveness of existing practices. Technology transfer is a crucial aspect of the program and translates emerging research results to Minnesota stormwater professionals and practitioners through training, outreach, and Extension.

Geologic Atlas with Dept. of Natural Resources

FY26-27 Appropriation: \$800,000 FY28-29 Recommendation: \$1,000,000

Rationale: Develops county Geologic Atlases, which include maps and databases essential for improved management of ground and surface water. This is foundational data that supports management of drinking water, domestic and industrial supply, irrigation, and aquatic habitat. The distribution of geologic materials defines aquifer boundaries and the connection of aquifers to the land surface and to surface water resources to enable a comprehensive water management effort.

	Agency	Program Activity	Enacted budget FY2026-27 (000s)	ICT recs FY2028-29 (000s)
		Monitoring, Assessment, and Characterization		
	MPCA	River and Lake Monitoring & Assessment: The Surface Water Monitoring program conducts water chemistry and biological monitoring on lakes, rivers, and streams to determine if waterbodies are impaired or meet standards, detects long-term trends over time at the basin, watershed and subwatershed scales, and identifies areas for protection and restoration. The primary output from the surface water monitoring activities is a large body of high-quality data, which is used in other steps within the Watershed Framework. A primary feature of the surface water monitoring activities is partnership between MPCA and local units of government, educational institutions, and Tribal nations who accomplish the work together. This recommendation ensures work will remain steady, and that two FTE can be hired to manage the large volume of data that is being generated from the new continuous nitrate monitoring network that the Legislature funded two years ago.	\$18,900	\$20,900
	MPCA	Groundwater assessment: Groundwater monitoring data are foundational to understanding the condition of Minnesota’s groundwater quality. A long-standing Memorandum of Understanding divides groundwater monitoring responsibilities between the Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. These data are critical for the development of Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategies (GRAPS), and the development and implementation of One Watershed One Plans (1W1P). As more WRAPS, GRAPS and 1W1P are implemented, monitoring remains critical as the means to determine if clean water goals are being met. This program’s budget has not been increased in many years. The recommendation ensures work can remain steady, and that high-priority PFAS sampling can be routinely conducted so we can detect contamination as quickly as possible.	\$2,000	\$3,300
	DNR	Aquifer Monitoring for Water Supply Planning: The DNR is developing a robust groundwater level monitoring network that informs our understanding of groundwater level trends; the source of drinking water for 75% of Minnesotans. DNR applies these data in groundwater models, technical analysis, and water supply planning. The proposed amount will add up to 25 new monitoring wells, help maintain the current network of about 1,254 wells, and sustain the DNR’s capacity to manage and apply the data.	\$4,700	\$5,300
	DNR	Fish Contamination Assessment: The DNR traditionally collected fish for mercury and PCB contamination assessment from 70 lake and stream sites using Game and Fish Funds. The Clean Water Fund has been supporting the laboratory costs for an additional 80 lake and stream sites per year. The recommendation maintains the core capacity for the statewide assessment of PFAS compounds in fish tissue.	\$1,100	\$1,100
	DNR	Lake IBI assessment: Lake IBI assessments are foundational to assessing water quality, the development of TMDLs, WRAPS, developing and implementing 1W1P. Lake IBI assessments started later than stream IBIs conducted by the MPCA and there are still many lakes that need to be completed. This recommendation maintains most of the DNR’s core capacity to assess lakes for fish and associated stressor identification.	\$3,050	\$3,300
	DNR	Stream flow monitoring: Stream flow monitoring is foundational to assessing water quality, the development of TMDLs, WRAPS, and developing and implementing 1W1Ps. As more WRAPS and 1W1Ps are implemented, monitoring remains critical to measure progress. The recommendation will maintain the current gage network, replace aging equipment and continue to ensure data are readily available to inform decision making and assess progress toward clean water goals.	\$5,650	\$5,850
	MDA	Monitoring for Pesticides in Surface Water and Groundwater: Pesticide monitoring is critical to assess water quality compared to environmental standards (assessing impaired waters); evaluate the risk to drinking water from both surface and groundwater sources; and, evaluate the need for and effectiveness of restrictions on product use or voluntary best management practices. Clean Water funding has allowed the MDA to increase the number of detectable pesticides, increase the sensitivity of detection of certain pesticides, and increase the overall number of samples that can be analyzed on an annual basis. The expansion has allowed the MDA to test additional public water supply wells, lakes, rivers/streams, wetlands including water samples collected on Tribal land.	\$740	\$800
	MDA	Pesticide Testing of Private Wells: The primary goal of testing wells for pesticides is to provide information to homeowners and the public about the presence of pesticides in private drinking water wells and in groundwater. Funding is for free pesticide testing of private wells in areas where groundwater may be at risk for elevated pesticide concentrations. Earlier phases of the project analyzed up to 133 pesticide compounds in private wells across agricultural areas with vulnerable groundwater. Those results identified the herbicides cyanazine and atrazine—and their degradates— represented the greatest pesticide-related risk to private well users. Building on these findings, upcoming sampling will prioritize these compounds, along with nitrate and select insecticides and fungicides in vulnerable aquifers, to ensure continued monitoring of contaminants most likely to affect groundwater quality.	\$1,000	\$1,100
	MDH	Drinking Water Contaminants of Emerging Concern Program: Maintain program capacity for evaluating contaminants of emerging concern (CEC). The health-based evaluation of known and new contaminants in drinking water is the starting point for assessing the threat to public health and potential public health burden. The values developed in this initiative are widely used by sister agencies. Technical assistance is given by the CEC program to citizens, companies, and other state agencies on interpreting and evaluating what CEC concentrations in water mean for human health. This initiative also develops analytical methods for laboratories to improve detection of emerging contaminants and ensures that accredited laboratories performing analytical water testing are accountable to standards that support defensible and accurate data.	\$11,850	\$11,850

	Agency	Program Activity	Enacted budget FY2026-27 (000s)	ICT recs FY2028-29 (000s)
12	MDH	Private Well Initiative: Unlike people who get their drinking water from public water system, people who get their drinking water from a private well (private well users) are largely on their own for ensuring that water from their well is safe for their household. As part of our commitment for equity, we are increasing education, technical support, and financial assistance for private well users so they can be confident in the safety and quality of their drinking water. This initiative continues to make progress towards the Council’s vision of offering free private well testing to 10% of private well users each year. By the end of FY29, the initiative is on track to have free private well testing available for 50% of Minnesota’s private well users and on track to meet the 2034 goal of offering free private well testing to all private well households.	\$6,000	\$10,000
13		Monitoring, Assessment, and Characterization total	\$54,990	\$63,500
14		Watershed & Groundwater Restoration/Protection Strategies		
15	MPCA	Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies: WRAPS reports, including Total Maximum Daily Load studies (TMDLs) for impaired waters, are updated with local partners to confirm strategies for impaired waters and unimpaired waters by setting reduction and protection goals, milestones and measures to guide targeted state and local government planning and implementation efforts. Funding also supports updating watershed models as new monitoring data become available. Some of this program’s funding moves to local partners who participate in WRAPS updates and supports the We Are Water public engagement traveling exhibit. This recommendation ensures that work remains steady.	\$14,500	\$15,000
16	DNR	Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies: The DNR employs experts in hydrology and geomorphology to support comprehensive assessments and strategy development as part of WRAPS. DNR staff complete targeted surveys and analysis and watershed reports that inform WRAPS and ultimately implementation projects. DNR staff make this information available in the Watershed Health Assessment Framework (WHAF) and other reports. The proposed amount will maintain DNR’s capacity to provide this core expertise as part of the interagency watershed approach.	\$4,750	\$5,300
17	MDH	Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategies: GRAPS is an interagency effort to coordinate the delivery of state agency groundwater and drinking water data, information, and implementation strategies for use at the local level. The aim is to facilitate local efforts to benefit groundwater resource restoration and protection. Key efforts include the following: 1) migrating data and information to online tools, 2) completing a GRAPS report for every comprehensive watershed planning (1W1P) by end of FY28 so that local partners have groundwater information resources for implementation planning, and 3) building local capacity through education, outreach, and financial assistance.	\$3,500	\$3,500
18	MDH	Source Water Protection: Protecting our sources of drinking water (groundwater, rivers, and lakes) is the most equitable and cost-effective approach to safeguarding our drinking water now and for future generations. This support facilitates planning and implementation specific to local needs for protecting drinking water sources and includes small grants for public water systems to implement actions identified in their Source Water Protection Plans. Additionally, program assets are being directed toward 1) enhancing the characterization of source water quality conditions using rigorous screening, monitoring, and analysis and 2) fulfilling MDH and CWC strategic objectives of securing long-term protection for the most vulnerable lands in drinking water system management areas statewide and protection plans for community systems that use surface waters as their source of drinking water.	\$7,690	\$8,120
19		Watershed & Groundwater Restoration/Protection Strategies total	\$30,440	\$31,920
20		Comprehensive Local Watershed Management		
21	BWSR	Water Management Transition (One Watershed One Plan): As more comprehensive watershed management plans mature, increased funding is needed to keep plans current through plan evaluations and updates that reflect new data, implementation experience, and emerging priorities. Maintaining current plans ensures implementation funding continues to be targeted to the highest-priority projects, strengthens local and Tribal partnerships, and preserves the effectiveness of Minnesota’s watershed-based approach.	\$1,000	\$1,000
22		Comprehensive Local Watershed Management total	\$1,000	\$1,000
23		Nonpoint source implementation		
24	BWSR	Implementation Funding for Watersheds with Approved Comprehensive Watershed Plans (Watershed-based Implementation Funding): While moving at a slower rate than the implementation trajectory calls for, continued growth in WBIF is necessary to keep pace with rising projects costs and to meet the demand by partnerships to help fund the goals set out in their plans. Stable funding provides local governments and Tribal partners the certainty needed to invest in staff, leverage additional resources, and deliver measurable water quality improvements for priority resources identified in watershed plans.	\$88,100	\$96,000
25	BWSR	Accelerated Implementation: As we continue to hear a demand from local and Tribal government partners for more training and tools, this recommendation helps to maintain program capacity. Funding is needed to expand technical assistance through Technical Service Areas, technical training & certifications, and implementation support that directly increases the pace and quality of conservation project delivery. These investments leverage federal matching funds while building the local capacity required to move priority projects from planning to implementation.	\$8,700	\$9,000
26	BWSR	Conservation Drainage Management and Assistance: Demand for multipurpose drainage projects continues to exceed available funding. Increased investment will allow more high-impact drainage system improvements to incorporate conservation practices during infrequent system upgrades, producing long-term water quality benefits while expanding implementation of new conservation solutions identified by the Drainage Work Group.	\$2,000	\$3,000

	Agency	Program Activity	Enacted budget FY2026-27 (000s)	ICT recs FY2028-29 (000s)
27	BWSR	Critical Shoreland Protection-Permanent Conservation Easements: Increased funding is needed to capitalize on time-sensitive land protection opportunities before development permanently alters high-quality shorelands. Strong demand from local partners, increasing development pressure, and aging landownership make consistent investment critical to protecting Minnesota's highest-quality waters. FY26-27 appropriation amount was suggested by BWSR as a budget solution for the biennium because of the additional funding this program received in FY24. This request is in line with historic appropriations for this easement program.	\$1,000	\$2,000
28	BWSR	Wetland restoration easements: Increased funding is needed to capitalize on high-priority restoration opportunities before they are permanently lost. Wetland restoration provides multiple public benefits from a single investment, and this program remains one of Minnesota's most effective tools for achieving large-scale water quality improvements while leveraging federal conservation funding. This is BWSR's top priority easement program and work may be done in cooperation with the USDA or other agencies to leverage federal funding.	\$5,000	\$8,000
29	BWSR	Measures, Results and Accountability: Continued investment ensures accountability for CWF expenditures by measuring, evaluating, and communicating program outcomes. Maintaining robust performance reporting and grant oversight improves program effectiveness, supports legislative accountability, and demonstrates the return on public investment.	\$2,500	\$2,780
30	BWSR	Riparian Protection and Soil Loss Assistance (Buffer Law Implementation): Stable funding is necessary to maintain statewide buffer compliance through continued monitoring, technical assistance, and local implementation support. Sustained investment protects previous gains in compliance and prevents increased enforcement costs by helping landowners remain in compliance. The FY28/29 recommendation reflects the Council's direction to decrease funding support, without compromising the integrity of the previous investments.	\$4,000	\$3,500
31	BWSR	Working Land and Floodplain Easements: Increased funding responds to growing demand for working lands easements that improve water quality while maintaining productive agricultural use and will keep the program at a sustainable level. This program sets aside sensitive land in riverine and riparian corridors to address water quality concerns, and climate adaptation and mitigation goals, and also creates opportunities to leverage additional conservation funding and achieve multiple watershed benefits through a single investment.	\$2,000	\$2,300
32	BWSR	Surface and Drinking Water Protection/Restoration Grants: Demand for project funding consistently exceeds available resources, with requests typically totaling twice the available funding. Conservation project costs have increased by 6%-15% statewide, year over year in the previous 2 years. The increase reflects a recovery from the cuts from the shortfall last biennium, and an increased investment to fund more high-priority, shovel-ready projects. An increase in funding will also allow local governments to capitalize on time-sensitive opportunities, including the protection of drinking water resources while avoiding higher future project costs.	\$6,000	\$7,500
33	BWSR	Watershed Partners Legacy (WPL) Grants: The proposal doubles the previous appropriation for the program. Based on the priority of the CWC, increased funding is needed to address demand from Tribal Nations and nonprofit conservation organizations and to expand participation through a more flexible funding approach for Tribes. Additional investment will build implementation capacity and allow more high-quality projects aligned with local watershed priorities to move forward.	\$1,000	\$2,000
34	BWSR	Enhancing Landowner Adoption of Soil Health Practices for Drinking Water & Groundwater Protection: Increased funding supports expansion of technical assistance and implementation needed to meet growing demand for soil health practices, including restoring funding to the FY24-25 level of \$12M, and adding a new, southeast Minnesota performance-based pilot program, all while leveraging available federal matching funds and aligned LCCMR funding (Olmsted County) to maximize conservation outcomes.	\$9,486	\$12,500
35	BWSR	Lake Superior leveraging of GLRI/federal funds: Continued funding enables soil and water conservation districts in the Lake Superior Basin to leverage significant federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative investments. State funding provides the local capacity and matching resources necessary to maximize federal dollars and accelerate implementation of priority watershed projects.	\$1,000	\$1,060
36	BWSR	MN & IA Conservation Corps. Continued investment maintains critical on-the-ground implementation capacity that many local governments and Tribal Nations rely on to complete conservation projects. The program also develops Minnesota's conservation workforce while accelerating delivery of CWF investments.	\$1,500	\$1,600
37	DNR	Nonpoint source restoration and protection activities: As the number of completed WRAPS and 1W1P increase, there is an increasing need for DNR experts to provide site-specific technical support for planning and implementing projects. DNR is actively involved in about 80 implementation projects each year, providing design expertise on dam removals, stream restoration and other stabilization projects. DNR staff often help during implementation and construction oversight, filling in critical gaps in local expertise. The proposed amount will maintain this core expertise and continue supporting local government partners.	\$4,350	\$4,930
38	DNR	Mussel Restoration: Of the 50 native freshwater mussel species in Minnesota, 61% are low in number, declining and their persistence is in jeopardy. Mussels are efficient natural filterers of water, including removal of sediment, nutrients and bacteria and they provide habitat for other aquatic species. The DNR has developed the expertise to grow and restore mussel populations and upgraded facilities to support an expansion and more rapid restoration of mussels throughout Minnesota. The amount requested will provide support to significantly maintain higher propagation, rearing and restoration efforts.	\$700	\$750

	Agency	Program Activity	Enacted budget FY2026-27 (000s)	ICT recs FY2028-29 (000s)
39	DNR	Culvert replacement Incentive Program: Minnesota’s public roads intersect the state’s natural perennial flowing watercourses at approximately 65,000 locations. Many of the culvert structures at these locations are failing and require replacement. A culvert replacement and incentive program would provide financial and technical assistance for counties and other local governments to modernize culvert systems to address climate resiliency, restore fish communities, and reduce sediment loads (two major sources of impairment). This proposal will accelerate the adoption of alternative culvert designs that improve biological connectivity, channel stability, reduce flood stage and lower long-term maintenance costs. This proposal will fund approximately 12 projects with a 25% cost share. Funds would need to be available until spent to allow for sufficient local planning and implementation.	\$2,900	\$3,000
40	DNR	(NEW) Natural Shorelines: Nearly 50% of Minnesota’s natural shorelines have vanished due to suburban-style development and lawn manicuring. This conversion allows up to nine times more pollutants into lakes and degrading critical fish and wildlife habitats. Protecting and restoring native plant buffers is essential to filter runoff and anchor soil. This program will enhance funding for the Lake Steward program, sponsored by Minnesota Lakes and Rivers, and provide funding for permanent lakeshore conservation easements to protect priority lakes by restoring natural shorelines and reducing pollutant loading.	\$0	\$1,800
41	MC	Water demand reduction/efficiency grant program: The program is a Metropolitan Council and local community cost share program that provides 100% pass-through water efficiency grants to metro municipalities. This popular, over-subscribed program provided critical support to address the drought of 2021. The proposed budget was set to continue to meet growing needs by communities implementing water demand reduction measures to use groundwater more wisely, particularly in areas with drinking water contamination or water availability issues. The funds protect drinking water supplies and support the reliability and resiliency of water suppliers to serve homes, businesses, and growth.	\$1,400	\$1,400
42	MDA	AgBMP Loan Program: AgBMP loans can be used for the implementation of any practice that reduces or mitigates the effects of water pollution. The purpose is to encourage agricultural best management practices and other practices that prevent or reduce runoff from feedlots, farm fields and for other pollution problems identified by the county in local water plans. Funding can also be used to replace or treat contaminated wells. The program is administered by local governments and local loaning institutions and has extremely low administration costs. AgBMP loans are frequently used to leverage additional funding. Loans are repaid into the corpus of the account and will be available for future clean water projects regardless of the renewal of the CWF. The demand for Ag BMP loans greatly exceeds available funding.	\$4,000	\$4,500
43	MDA	MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program: The proposed budget serves to meet expanding demand and associate needs for program delivery including implementation grants, growing number of participating farms to audit, and overall labor demands to serve increasing participation. This funding provides for MAWQCP to meet seven goals in the CWC’s 2024 Strategic Plan. Greater than 50% of funding is pass through for soil and water conservation districts and supports implementation. The funding is required as match to leverage and maintain a \$10,000,000 federal EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG).	\$7,000	\$7,470
44	MDA	Technical Assistance: Technical assistance is a primary vehicle to work with the agricultural community to promote best management practices. This funding is used to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation practices, demonstrate practices that protect water and enhance outreach and education of recommended agricultural practices to the agricultural community and local government partners. Technical assistance activities fill an important need for field demonstrations and validation of practices to protect water quality.	\$3,200	\$3,980
45	MDA	Conservation Equipment Assistance: Conservation Equipment Assistance supports the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Soil Health Financial Assistance Program (SHFAP), which provides grants to producers, producer groups, and local governments to purchase or retrofit equipment that implements soil-health practices. A primary obstacle to expanding soil health is access to the specialized equipment necessary for successful adoption of soil health practices. By expanding access to equipment for cover cropping, reduced tillage, managed grazing, and similar practices, the program improves soil structure, increases infiltration, and limits disturbance to directly protect water quality by reducing erosion and curbing sediment and nutrient runoff. The appropriation is required as match to leverage and maintain a federal EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) award.	\$3,500	\$3,500
46	MDA	Ag Weather Station Network	\$2,300	\$0
47		Nonpoint source implementation total	\$161,636	\$182,570
48		Point source implementation		
49	MPCA	Chloride reduction efforts: This program provides critical support to communities by providing chloride reduction from road salt and water softening training, and grants to communities so they can implement their chloride management plans. This recommendation recognizes the CWC’s desire to see more training and more grants available for on-the-ground chloride reduction work, and it also meets the needs MPCA is hearing from partners. The MPCA is open to discussing additional work once the CWC finalizes its chloride reduction policy.	\$1,300	\$2,600
50	MPCA	Wastewater/stormwater TMDL implementation: With the completion of hundreds of TMDLs over the past decade and a half, the work to translate wasteload allocations into permit requirements has expanded enormously. Funding for these programs provides technical assistance tools to local units of government and supports staff to accelerate work in the stormwater and wastewater permitting programs that protect lakes and streams. The FY28/29 recommendation will ensure the work effort remains steady.	\$3,200	\$3,400

	Agency	Program Activity	Enacted budget FY2026-27 (000s)	ICT recs FY2028-29 (000s)
51	PFA	Point Source Implementation Grant (PSIG) Program: The PSIG program provides essential assistance to cities to upgrade water treatment facilities needed to meet required wasteload reductions to address impaired waters and protect threatened waterbodies. Program funding has been supplemented in the past with bonding appropriations; however, annual applications consistently exceed available funds. Currently the PSIG funding list has over \$160 million of projects outside that funding range and construction costs only continue to grow.	\$16,440	\$18,000
52	PFA	Small Community Wastewater Treatment Program: The Small Community Wastewater Treatment Program provides grants and loans to assist small unsewered communities with technical assistance and construction funding to replace non-complying septic systems with community subsurface sewage treatment systems (SSTS). These funds allow small communities to evaluate and implement lower cost decentralized treatment alternatives to address their wastewater needs.	\$100	\$100
53		Point source implementation total	\$21,040	\$24,100
54		Groundwater/Drinking Water Implementation		
55	BWSR	Targeted Wellhead/Drinking Water Protection: Continued investment is needed to protect additional high-priority drinking water supply areas. Rising land values and increasing development pressure make proactive land protection more cost-effective than delaying conservation investments or constructing costly drinking water treatment systems that many small water suppliers struggle to fund and maintain.	\$5,000	\$2,000
56	MC	Metropolitan Area Water Sustainability Support: This program helps municipalities and industries in the Twin Cities metro area as they plan and implement projects that address emerging drinking water supply threats and overall water sustainability, provide cost-effective regional solutions, leverage inter-jurisdictional coordination, support local implementation of wellhead protection plans, and prevent degradation of groundwater and surface water resources.	\$2,750	\$3,000
57	MDA	Nitrate in Groundwater: The MDA leads nitrate monitoring and reduction activities across Minnesota, with emphasis on areas with vulnerable groundwater. This work is done in partnership with the agricultural community and local governments. Funding supports activities that identify sources of nitrate contamination and evaluate and implement practices at the local level to reduce nitrate in groundwater. In addition to promoting, demonstrating, and encouraging adoption of nitrogen fertilizer BMPs, the program engages in strategic efforts to increase vegetative cover in vulnerable areas; works with farmers and crop advisors in local advisory teams; conducts computer modeling to evaluate practices; monitors groundwater, provides technical support and supports on-farm demonstration projects.	\$6,200	\$7,200
58	MDA	Irrigation Water Quality Protection: Funding supports an irrigation water quality specialist through a contract with the University of Minnesota Extension to address water quantity and water quality issues in Minnesota’s irrigated regions. The specialist conducts applied research, develops technical guidance and publications, provides education and outreach on irrigation and nitrogen best management practices (BMPs), and contributes to the development of irrigation scheduling tools for Minnesota irrigators.	\$310	\$330
59	MDH	Future of Drinking Water: Current federal and state regulations no longer provide adequate protection for customers of public water systems and users of private wells. This initiative supports MDH’s implementation of the Minnesota Drinking Water Action Plan to protect Minnesotans against new threats that endanger our vision of safe and sufficient drinking water for everyone, everywhere in Minnesota. In addition, this initiative will focus on implementation of select activities named in the Action Plan that will prepare both public and private well supplies to adapt to an uncertain future.	\$500	\$500
60	MPCA	Enhanced County inspections/SSTS corrective actions: This program provides critical funding to local units of government to operate their respective SSTS programs and also provides funding to homeowners with low income to replace or repair non-complying septic systems. Both county SSTS programs and grants for SSTS replacement protect groundwater and connected surface water. This recommendation ensures we can maintain the grant levels from the past biennium.	\$6,881	\$6,900
61	MPCA (funds passed thru)	National Park Water Quality Protection Program	\$1,500	\$0
62		Groundwater/Drinking Water Implementation total	\$23,141	\$19,930
63		Local Implementation total (NPS, PS, GW/DW)	\$205,817	\$226,600
64		Research, Evaluation and Tool Development		
65	BWSR	Tillage and Erosion Survey: Maintaining funding ensures continued collection of consistent, scientifically valid statewide data used to target conservation investments, improve watershed models, and evaluate conservation outcomes. Reliable long-term data are essential for informed water quality planning and decision-making.	\$850	\$850
66	BWSR	Technical Evaluation: Continued funding supports independent evaluation of restoration projects, improving accountability and ensuring future investments are informed by demonstrated project performance. Evaluation findings strengthen conservation effectiveness and provide legislators and partners with credible information on program outcomes. The increase reflects two biennia of inflation, as the appropriation has remained the same during that time period.	\$200	\$220
67	DNR	Tool development and evaluation: The DNR maintains and provides access to LiDAR-derived elevation data that is widely used for targeting and designing implementation projects and for watershed modeling. DNR also assesses relationships among disturbance patterns, BMP applications, and water quality in forested watersheds. The proposed amount will maintain effort on LiDAR related support, maintain effort in forest BMP monitoring. Over the past biennium the DNR has eliminated effort on fine-scale watershed models to evaluate the effects of drainage, soil health and other BMPs.	\$1,400	\$1,500

	Agency	Program Activity	Enacted budget FY2026-27 (000s)	ICT recs FY2028-29 (000s)
68	DNR	County geologic atlases: The CWF has enhanced data collection and analysis of the county geologic atlases by providing supplemental chemistry and geology data. The core funding of the atlas program continues to be the LCCMR and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, along with state general fund resources. The proposed amount restores capacity to supplement the atlas data collection efforts that have previously resulted in significant efforts to target nitrate reduction in southeastern Minnesota.	\$200	\$200
69	MDA	Research Inventory Database: The MnWRL is a user-friendly, searchable inventory of water research relevant to Minnesota. It provides “one-stop” access to all types of water research, including both peer-reviewed articles and white papers and reports. MnWRL provides access to water related information, enabling water managers, researchers, engaged citizens and others to easily find, share, and coordinate research to support their efforts to protect, conserve, manage and restore water in Minnesota.	\$100	\$80
70	MDA	Forever Green Agricultural Initiative (U of MN): The FGI develops Minnesota-specific winter annual and perennial crops that provide continuous living cover to protect and restore surface and groundwater quality. Through integrated research, farmer adoption support, and market-building efforts, the program accelerates adoption of cropping systems that reduce nutrient loss, enhance soil health, and support farm profitability. CWF support advances research, implementation, and partnerships that expand these crops across Minnesota’s agricultural landscape.	\$5,000	\$6,660
71	MDH	Recreational Water Quality Online Portal: While many people assume all beaches are monitored, beach testing is conducted at the discretion of the entity responsible for the beach (often a local public health agency). This initiative maintains the statewide recreational water testing portal that allows Minnesotans to go to one online location to access information on any recreational water testing conducted or beach closures currently in place. Additionally, the portal allows users to be made aware of any alerts currently in place at the beach of interest, such as the appearance of harmful algal blooms or major pollution events.	\$600	\$600
72	U of MN	Stormwater BMP Performance Evaluation & Technology Transfer: Provides research and technology transfer to address priority water resource needs for Minnesota communities. Research is completed through a competitive grant program to develop new stormwater practices and policies as well as improving the effectiveness of existing practices. Technology transfer is a crucial aspect of the program and translates emerging research results to Minnesota stormwater professionals and practitioners through training, outreach, and Extension.	\$1,600	\$2,000
73	U of MN	Geologic Atlas with Dept. of Natural Resources: Develops county Geologic Atlases, which include maps and databases essential for improved management of ground and surface water. This is foundational data that supports management of drinking water, domestic and industrial supply, irrigation, and aquatic habitat. The distribution of geologic materials defines aquifer boundaries and the connection of aquifers to the land surface and to surface water resources to enable a comprehensive water management effort.	\$800	\$1,000
74	MDA	(NEW) Manure BMP and Water Quality Specialist: Funding will support a manure land application and water quality specialist to develop and promote BMPs and update guidance, with a focus on regions at elevated environmental risk, including Southeast and Central Minnesota. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the MDA indicate that nutrients from manure are frequently under credited when farmers calculate the total amount of nitrogen applied to the crop, resulting in overapplication of commercial fertilizer. Improving manure crediting accuracy—and ensuring manure is applied at the right time, in the right place, in the right amount, and from the right source—will reduce nitrate leaching from manured fields to groundwater and decrease manure related runoff to surface water.	\$0	\$330
75		Research, Evaluation and Tool Development total	\$10,750	\$13,440
76	MPCA	Clean Water Council budget	\$922	\$1,500
77	LCC	Legislative Coordinating Commission	\$7	\$7
78		Administration total	\$929	\$1,507
79		Budget total	\$303,926	\$337,967

Program priorities for ICT and proposers

July 20, 2026

The Budget and Outcomes Committee and Full Council have developed the following list of priorities for programs seeking increases. A full reflection of Council priorities which includes “Hold Steady” and “Decrease” programs can be seen in the excel spreadsheet and PDF that has also been sent with this document.

Green text shows the change in funding for the programs from the current FY26-27 appropriation to the current ICT recommendations, and the % change that represents (past reductions to programs are not shown here). These figures show strong alignment between the CWC priorities below and the ICT recommendations.

Tier 1

- Direction to proposers: Emphasize increases here first, but do not wipe out total available for increase.

Program name	Council Priority	Rationale
Forever Green – increasing from \$5M to \$6.66M, a 33% increase	High	High public support Fits first five considerations from survey Potential source of ag systems change and innovation Appreciation for leverage Great communication and outreach from program High rubric score mean average
WBIF – increasing from \$88.1M to \$96M, a 9% increase	High	High Public support High rubric score mean average Strong alignment with strategic plan Enables local and tribal governments to pursue measurable outcomes Community-driven plans Honor the past investments of developing the plans Science-driven Strong relationship to top considerations Implementation--the outcome of the water management framework Focus on that program over time with developed plans--need funding Tremendous amount of collaboration cultivated by this program
Clean Water Council Admin – increasing from \$.922M to \$1.5M, a 63% increase	High	Got highest rubric score Council has taken on a more proactive approach--need increase capacity to maintain this Public engagement increase in staff roles 2034 horizon

Merged BWSR/Olmsted Soil Health increasing existing program from \$9.486M to \$12.5M, a 32% increase, and adds new pilot component	High	Financial leverage of historic soil health funds Innovation of soil health funds Implementation on the ground
Critical Shoreland Easements increasing from \$1M to \$2M, a 100% increase	High	Permanent impact of CWF dollars Shorelands are disappearing--proactively protect what we have Protection cheaper than restoration Protect Upper Miss--crown jewel and Drinking water source for about 25% of Minnesotans Nature-based solutions Fish and wildlife benefits Science-based High alignment with priority considerations High impact for lower investment
Working Land and Floodplain Easements increasing from \$2M to \$2.3M, a 15% increase	High	Long-term impact past 2034 Produces direct, tangible impact for groundwater, wildlife Storage to reduce flooding, slow runoff Build climate resilience High impact for lower investment
Wetland Easements increasing from \$5M to \$8M, a 60% increase	High	Long-term impact past 2034 Produces direct, tangible impact for groundwater, wildlife Storage to reduce flooding, slow runoff Build climate resilience High impact for lower investment
Source Water Protection increasing from \$7.69M to \$8.12M, a 5.6% increase	High	Preserve what we can now before contaminated Drinking water protection specifically Important to local public water systems Strong public support
Conservation Drainage/Multi-purpose Drainage Management increasing from \$2M to \$3M, a 50% increase	High	Critical to soil health, lake and stream health--drainage impacts a lot more than just the field it is draining from Comprehensive engineering approach that addresses drainage elements to make fixes where appropriate Maintain drainage with conservation, adding opportunities for infiltration and storage Leverages additional funds Addresses upstream inputs to downstream impairments Complementary with other programs, including easement programs

		Direct and measurable reductions High level of collaboration
Legacy Partners increasing from \$1M to \$2M, a 100% increase	High	Directly supports implementation in an innovative way Direct support for tribal partners across the state Support in public comments Top ten of rubric mean average Supports established water management plans Support non-competitive tribal grants through an increase
Chloride Reduction increasing from \$1.3M to \$2.6M, a 100% increase	High	Chloride is an increasing challenge for surface water and groundwater across the state Science-based Want to see it grow further than Smart Salting training Strong public support
Native Mussels increasing from \$.7M to \$.75M, a 7% increase	High	Ecosystem services, support for fish and wildlife Restoring native species to rivers Nature-based solutions Innovation and science-based approach Improve fishable and swimmable
River Watch (both programs) not agency programs	High	Community and youth engagement aspect, connection with the schools Social change, build water literacy Increase funding to diverse audiences
Stormwater Research Program increasing from \$1.6M to \$2M, a 25% increase	High	Stormwater world's forever green program--research to find the solutions that will work Strong public support and awareness of need Impacts other programs--what is learned here makes other programs stronger Water reuse connection
Private Well Initiative increasing from \$6M to \$10M, a 67% increase	High	High rubric score Over 1 million Minnesotans get their drinking water from private wells, supports drinking water for Minnesotans Specific measure named in the CWC strategic plan
Groundwater Assessment increasing from \$2M to \$3.3M, a 65% increase	High	Groundwater quality assessment, increase for PFAS focus

Tier 2

- Direction to proposers: Still work to ensure meaningful increase but as second priority

Program name	Council Priority	Rationale
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Drinking Water Easements decreasing from \$5M to \$2M, a 60% decrease	High	Protection cheaper than restoration Science-based Nature-based solutions Long-term impact Add climate resilience Drinking water as a strong reason for public support of the Legacy amendment
AgBMP Loans increasing from \$4M to \$4.5M, a 12.5% increase	High	Good use of funding--loans that are paid back and reutilized Helps move adoption and innovation Strong public support
Natural Shorelines (NEW) as a new program, increasing from \$0 to \$1.8M	High/Med	Engagement of stakeholders in implementation, community involvement and stewardship Social program that can help change attitudes Disappearing shorelines Habitat Easement benefits listed above Minnesota Land Trust engagement, adds another option for landowners to engagement in voluntary permanent protection
Nitrate in Groundwater increasing from \$6.2M to \$7.2M, a 16% increase	High	Nitrate as a threat to drinking water across the state Challenge for nitrate is greater than the investment received so far Support changes in practices
Accelerated Implementation increasing from \$8.7M to \$9M, a 3.4% increase	High	Technically- and science-driven High level of innovation Targeted using local input, 1W1P
MAWQCP increasing from \$7M to \$7.47M, a 6.7% increase	High	Technical, whole farm planning and assessment Existing program that needs continued support Increasing buy-in and momentum, voluntary Tie-ins with other programs we are providing funding to
Point Source Implementation Grants increasing from \$16.44M to \$18M, a 9.5% increase	High	Support municipalities This work continues to be needed
Surface Water and Drinking Water Protection Restoration increasing from	High	Strong level of local engagement by multiple partners Drinking water as a strategic plan priority

\$6M to \$7.5M, a 25% increase		
River and Lake Monitoring increasing from \$18.9M to \$20.9M, a 10.6% increase	High	Without it, we don't know if we have a problem Need it to see outcomes of our efforts Data is valuable to evaluate how we are doing and what is needed
Technical Assistance increasing from \$3.2M to \$3.98M, a 24% increase	High	Research on feasibility and effectiveness of solutions we are trying to implement
Manure and Water Quality Specialist (NEW) as a new program, increasing from \$0 to \$.33M	High	Changes in feedlot rules and regulations are creating an opportunity to work with farmers and address nitrate, particularly in vulnerable parts of the state Economic impact for the state Cover (alfalfa, etc.) to help provide other benefits to the state Ag Irrigation Water Quality Specialist program as a model--has been effective Enhance end results of MAWQCP Support for ag sector during tough economic times
County Geologic Atlas Part A increasing from \$.8M to \$1M, a 20% increase	High	Foundational for Part B Counties rely on these for Groundwater and Drinking Water

Tier 3

- Direction to proposers: Continue to increase as funds are available

Program Name	Council Priority
Enhanced SSTS Program Support increasing from \$6.881M to \$6.9M, a 1.7% increase	High
Voyageurs National Park Clean Water Project not agency programs	High



August 13, 2026

Jen Kader
Clean Water Council Administrator
520 Lafayette Road North
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Clean Water Council Recommendations

Dear Ms. Kader,

The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Clean Water Council (CWC) project recommendations from the Clean Water Fund (CWF). MCGA advocates for nearly 6,500 corn farmer-members and works closely with the Minnesota Corn Research and Promotion Council and all of Minnesota's 24,000 corn farmers to implement best management practices for water quality and soil health.

We would first like to address the recent Office of the Legislative Auditor Report regarding the MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. While farmers should have some flexibility in implementing practices based on weather and time of year they enter the program, we would agree that tighter contingency timelines could be considered that still gives farmers flexibility to implement the practices on a timeline that works best for their farm. A large portion of the report asserts that the use of modeling in determining water quality outcomes is not a reliable metric to measure actual outcomes. By this standard, any CWF funded program that relies on modeling outcome determinations should be audited, and we would encourage the CWC to request audits of all programs that report outcomes using these same scientific tools.

Additionally, while we recognize the CWC's funding reduction over the years, we would encourage the CWC to consider the outcomes of the continued funding for Buffer Implementation. Between the CWF and the statutory required Riparian Protection Aid through the Department of Revenue, local government units have received over \$100 million since the passage of the buffer law for implementation and enforcement despite near-universal compliance within two years of the law going into effect. What was the return on investment for this massive expenditure of the last 10 years? In our September 2024 letter to the CWC regarding this issue, we stated that to our knowledge, virtually all of Minnesota's farmers came into compliance with the buffer law without financial help from the state, such as cost-share, and we requested examples of where this money was used to help farmers implement buffers since the law was passed in 2015. To date, we have not received any information regarding this request. We encourage the CWC to request deeper evaluation of the over \$100 million that has been spent "implementing" buffers.

MCGA wants to thank the CWC for its continued direction of increasing recommendations for on-the-ground projects. As the CWC considers funding recommendations for the FY 28-29 biennium, MCGA would support prioritization, and in some cases expansion, of the following projects because of the focus on implementation and are consistent with the CWC strategic plan priorities.

Conservation Equipment Assistance (MDA) - We greatly appreciate the CWC's support for this program since its inception as a pilot in 2022. Since then, farmer interest in soil health practice implementation has been proven by the tremendous popularity of this program. Last year, MDA received over \$8.6 million in funding requests vs the \$4.75 million total grant funding available which included general fund, CWF funds and funding from the EPA, made available in the Inflation Reduction Act. We expect a similar response from Minnesota farmers during the next funding round.

MCGA would like to comment on questions that have been raised regarding the use of equipment by farmers to do "custom work" whereby they use their own equipment and are hired by fellow farmers - often neighbors -to do conservation tillage or cover crop applications on cropland that otherwise would not have been done because that farmer does not have the equipment to do so. Renting or trading labor for use of equipment is a common practice among farmers, not just for conservation tillage systems or other conservation practices but also done for other farming practices such as planting or harvesting. The ability of an individual farmer to do custom work for other farmers is an opportunity to keep farmers on the farm rather than having to look for off-farm work.

As the CWC considers its recommendations, MCGA would strongly encourage the Council to evaluate current funding for various programs that are designed to incentivize farmers to adopt soil health practices like strip-till, no-till, precision agriculture, nutrient management and cover crops where appropriate. The best way to expand adoption of these practices is by farmers owning their own equipment and working with other farmers to do custom work. The upfront cost of retrofitting or buying new equipment is often the biggest barrier to farmers as they look at ways to implement different tillage or cover cropping systems on their farms as well as the broader suite of practices that can enhance soil health and improve water quality. We would encourage the council to evaluate programs based off response to the programs by the people who are doing the on-the-ground work to implement practices-Minnesota's farmers. Prior to this program, the options available to farmers who were interested in trying a new practice and offsetting some of the risk, was either through a cost-share program and/or renting equipment through their local SWCD. These programs may have had farmer interest, but they were not designed for large-scale adoption. A challenge with scaling-up the SWCD equipment rental model is the equipment may not be available to rent from their SWCD, due to high demand at a time of year when time is of the essence. Given the strong response to this program and the joint goal of expanding adoption of on the ground practices, we would strongly encourage the CWC to look at expanding the funding for this program.

AgBMP Loan Program (MDA) - Expanding the AgBMP Loan Program complements the Conservation Equipment Assistance Program as well as multiple other programs that will allow Minnesota farmers to take advantage of low interest loans to implement soil health practices and other conservation measures to benefit clean water. MCGA has several members who have taken advantage of the AgBMP Loan Program to make conservation improvements to their own operations and have appreciated the financing option offered through low interest loans.

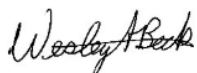
Technical Assistance (MDA) – We appreciate the CWC’s long-term support for on-farm demonstrations like Discovery Farms that increase education and promotion of best management practices on the farm. MDA technical assistance funds help to support on-farm demonstrations in agricultural production areas to evaluate various conservation practices, implement edge-of-field monitoring and build peer-to-peer learning among farmer, local governments, and private service providers.

MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MDA) – Enrollment in the program continues to increase and it has been an effective program to leverage federal conservation program funding resources for implementation. We think there are opportunities to further utilize the program as a conduit to implement soil health and water quality practices on farms by utilizing CWF dollars to help farmers implement practices as a part of the program.

Expanding the Ag Weather Station Network (MDA)- Continued expansion of these weather stations will give farmers the local information they need to make the best possible agronomic decisions regarding planting dates, crop protection timing, and more. This detailed local information will create opportunities to reduce chemical applications. Information on when weather conditions are favorable for effective crop protectant application means less unusable applications which have a benefit for water quality in Minnesota.

Conservation Drainage Management and Assistance (BWSR)-These grants are directed toward drainage authorities to target critical areas to reduce erosion and sedimentation, reduce peak flows and flooding, and improve water quality, while protecting drainage system efficiency and reducing drainage system maintenance.

Thank you for considering our input on the Clean Water Fund project recommendations and funding.
Sincerely,



President

Minnesota Corn Growers Association