

# BWSR recognizes Olmsted SWCD's Langer for teamwork, shared expertise

Olmsted Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) colleagues describe Skip Langer as a leader whose expertise is frequently sought across southeastern Minnesota, including in habitat restoration projects and comprehensive watershed management planning.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) named Langer, the Olmsted SWCD district manager, as the [2023 Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee](#) on Dec. 12 during the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) annual convention in Bloomington.

"It was a real honor to be recognized and it was extremely fun to have my whole team there," Langer said. "I have to give them all the kudos for the work that they do. Nobody does this conservation work alone."

In their nomination, SWCD supervisors noted that Langer's technical knowledge and in-depth understanding of water-quality and conservation issues strengthened the quality of the SWCD's work.

"Skip has a particularly



*Olmsted SWCD District Manager Skip Langer, left, accepted the 2023 Outstanding SWCD Employee Award from BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke during the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts annual convention on Dec. 12 in Bloomington. Photo Credit: Mary Juhl, BWSR*

positive personality, I'd say, and he's always looking to see how we can help somebody with an issue that they're having in terms of running their farm," said Olmsted SWCD District 3 Supervisor Cheryl Winters who, with fellow SWCD supervisors, nominated Langer for the award.

Langer joined the district as a conservation

technician in April 1999. He was promoted to district manager in 2015, and now oversees seven full-time employees plus seasonal and regional staff.

"His staff really respect (him) and enjoy working for him and I think that is an important part of a job," Winters said.

The nomination noted Langer's commitment

to high-priority Olmsted County initiatives such as soil health initiatives and groundwater protection. He also manages strategic planning and budgeting for the department. Its annual operating budget of nearly \$1.5 million includes grants from state agencies.

Langer was instrumental in developing a program launched in 2022 to address groundwater

protection and soil health. Supervisors credited him with helping to secure \$5 million in Olmsted County funding to support producers who implement best management practices such as cover crops, alternative crops and increased haying and grazing. The cost-share program focuses on reducing nitrate leaching, increasing nitrogen retention and curbing soil erosion.

“He’s also very good at leveraging grant funds and finding uses for any kind of extra funds,” Winters said.

SWCD supervisors acknowledged Langer’s contribution to the Root River One Watershed, One Plan comprehensive watershed management planning process. The Root River One Watershed, One Plan was approved on Dec. 14, 2016. One of the first approved [One Watershed, One Plans](#), and it laid the groundwork to improve water quality across the state. Langer also was a member of the planning work group for the Greater Zumbro Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, which was approved by BWSR on Oct. 27, 2021.

Throughout the years, Winters said Langer has demonstrated dedication to his work and has built strong working relationships with Olmsted County commissioners,



*Skip Langer addressed the audience during his acceptance speech at the MASWCD annual convention. Photo Credit: Patrick Clancy*

SWCD partners, state legislators, and state and federal partners such as BWSR and the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service.

“He’s taken time out of his personal schedule to meet with state representatives and explain what the programs are about or what we’re trying to do or why we would like their support on a certain bill,” Winters said. “He’s made some good relationships there.”

The [South Branch Cascade Creek restoration and development project](#), illustrates Langer’s leadership and experience dealing with complex, multi-government projects. It provided microhabitats for spawning fish, invertebrates and shorebirds on the site of a former 40-acre golf course. Langer built relationships with key landowners and secured

easements higher in the watershed, where off-channel basins were constructed to improve water quality and flood control. The \$1.5 million restoration project has virtually eliminated the erosion problem that was contributing 550 tons of sediment per year into Cascade Creek.

When asked which project he was most proud of, Langer identified the Cascade Creek restoration project.

“That was fun learning new techniques for stream rehabilitation. We had some opportunities to do some upland storage projects that had been planned for a long time and really kind of aligned with the project,” Langer said. “The county was involved, the city was involved. It was just a great collaborative project and in the end, it turned out fantastically. It’s a great example of what can

be done on a larger scale for some of these stream restoration projects.”

Prior to Olmsted SWCD, Langer worked in natural resources for the city of Mankato’s Parks and Forestry Department, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources’ Division of Wildlife, and crew leader and project manager for the precursor to Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa.

Over his decades-long career in the soil and water resources field, Langer has witnessed shift to a watershed-based approach.

“It’s been great, working collaboratively with our partners in southeast Minnesota,” Langer said. “They’re really focused on getting a lot done and my team here in Olmsted County is as good as it gets. To be honest, I couldn’t be more proud of them and the work that they do and that we do together.”

*Each year, BWSR celebrates the excellent work accomplished by local government staff to advance conservation efforts across the state. The 2023 Outstanding Watershed District Employee award was presented to Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Director of Projects Michael Hayman on Nov. 30 during Minnesota Watersheds’ annual conference in Alexandria.*