

PRAP**Performance Review and Assistance Program
2010 Level II Review:
Aitkin Soil and Water Conservation District** (*Aitkin County*)**Why BWSR did this review**

BWSR conducts Level II performance reviews to help local government water management entities to be the best they can be in plan implementation and overall operational effectiveness. In 2010 BWSR is conducting Level II performance reviews of eight different local water management entities.

BWSR has conducted a routine Level II performance reviews of the **Aitkin SWCD** in concert with the review of the Aitkin County local water management program. Both entities use the same long-range plan.

This document includes findings, conclusions and recommendations to enhance the overall operation and effectiveness of the district. The board of supervisors is responsible for taking any actions they decide are necessary in response to the recommendations in this report.

**Aitkin Soil and Water Conservation District
Summary of Performance Review Results****What BWSR Found**

The Aitkin SWCD is a high performing organization. In the late 1980s the district undertook the writing of the county's first water plan. Since then the district has taken on other challenges, including more recently, the Big Sandy Lake TMDL plan and the forest stewardship program. The district also plays important roles in implementing the county's shoreland management program and the Wetland Conservation Act.

The SWCD enjoys a strong working relationship with the county board and staff. The SWCD supervisors and staff also work well with the state DNR, MPCA and many others. Another factor in the district's success has been stability and leadership in the district manager position. This has led to low turnover of other district staff that produces the benefit of good staff knowledge of the county's resources and residents.

The supervisors and manager anticipated the current funding challenges and have proactively pursued new program and funding opportunities. Aitkin SWCD has maintained a strong presence to advance the joint Aitkin-Cass-Crow Wing county funding applications that have been successful in obtaining the funding needed to advance conservation policy. Aitkin was a key player in the Wild Rice Lakes project, which was recently recommended for funding by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

The district is commended for these high performance practices:

- ★ Operational guidelines exist and current
- ★ Certified wetland delineator: on staff or retainer
- ★ Outcome trends monitored and reported for key resources
- ★ Non-state \$ leveraged with all state funds
- ★ Website contains additional content beyond minimum required
- ★ Obtain stakeholder input: within last 5 yrs
- ★ Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks done
- ★ Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff.

BWSR has recommended the district modify their annual plan and report formats, and address their low operating reserve.