



April 6, 2017

Dear Minnesota landowners and conservation partners:

With seven months to go until the initial November 1, 2017 deadline, Minnesota has already made significant progress in implementing the 2015 buffer law. In fact, 64 of the state's 87 counties are 60 – 100 percent in compliance with the buffer law and 200,000 acres have already been enrolled in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. Buffers along waterways reduce phosphorous, nitrogen, and sediment from entering Minnesota's lakes and streams, improving and protecting water quality statewide. This early progress is only possible thanks to your work, partnership, and input. With your input, more than 4,100 comments were made on the DNR's buffer maps, and more than 2,700 changes made as a result. There is still work to be done, but we are confident that the preliminary steps completed and underway are on track.

Minnesota's buffer law, passed with bipartisan support in 2015, is not a one size fits all plan. While buffers of perennial vegetation may fit most locations, an alternative practice may be better suit some lands or landowners. That is why the law includes the flexibility of using alternative practices, in place of buffers, that will still provide equivalent water quality benefits.

This Alternative Practices Guidance focuses on some common situations where alternative practices may make sense. In addition, it includes the Agriculture Water Quality Certification Program, which supports landowners by undertaking a comprehensive review of their entire operation to minimize water quality impacts. It is important to note that alternative practices are not limited to those included in this document. Other combinations of practices, outlined in the Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guide, can be implemented by landowners in partnership with soil water and conservation districts (SWCDs). Additionally, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources will continue to consider alternative practices with broad applicability to provide further options for landowners and SWCDs.

This guidance was developed with input from landowners, local governments, and stakeholder groups familiar with on-the-ground clean water practices that have been successfully applied in various altered and natural landscapes. We are grateful for the involvement of landowners from around the state who provided feedback directly or indirectly regarding alternative practices implementation, as well as Goodhue SWCD, McLeod SWCD, Faribault SWCD, Marshall SWCD, Big Stone SWCD, Chisago SWCD, Wright SWCD, Root River SWCD, Traverse SWCD, Carver SWCD, Douglas SWCD, Stearns SWCD, West Polk SWCD, Nobles SWCD, Pope SWCD, Fillmore SWCD, Pennington SWCD, Watonwan SWCD, agency experts from the Departments of Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Health; Pollution Control Agency and Board of Water and Soil Resources; USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service Minnesota office, Minnesota Farmers Union, Freshwater Society, Minnesota Ag Water Resources Center, The Nature Conservancy, Minnesota Corn Growers Association, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, and Friends of the Mississippi River. We also want to thank all the other SWCDs around the state who have been an integral part of implementing the initial elements of the buffer law.

Additional resources regarding Minnesota's buffer law and alternative practices are available online at www.bwsr.state.mn.us/buffers.

Thank you for your partnership in improving and protecting Minnesota's clean water.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Jaschke", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

John Jaschke
Executive Director
Board of Water and Soil Resources

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Frederickson", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dave Frederickson
Commissioner
Department of Agriculture

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Landwehr", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Tom Landwehr
Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources