

TSA 8 expands knowledge and skills for SWCD technical staff

The nine Soil and Water Conservation Districts within Technical Service Area 8 (TSA 8) cover a large and vitally important region in Northern Minnesota.

This area is home to the birthplace of a handful of watersheds and also houses the headwaters and over 400 miles of the Mississippi. Additionally, 44% of Minnesota’s inland lakes, and a large network of healthy forests and wetlands are also found here.

“Our work is important because the intersection of forests and waters holds the key to water quality. A lot of our area is in a 'Protection' framework, which means that most of our resources are in good condition. But, this also means they are in need of protection” says BWSR Minor Watershed/Private Forest Management Coordinator, Dan Steward.

For this reason, recent local planning and prioritization efforts have primarily focused on identifying which high quality areas are at the greatest risk for degradation.

In the past, all TSAs have provided engineering services to their member Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). However, under the leadership of Melissa Barrick, North Central District Manager, TSA 8 recognized the need for an expanded role beyond their traditional functions.

Responding to this need, through Shared Services and recent Enhanced Shared Technical Services grants, TSA 8 has been adding tools and resources, as well as educational opportunities for its districts that can be accessed as needed.

The first addition came in 2016 when Geographic Information System (GIS) Specialist, Mitch Brinks, began assisting member districts in their water planning efforts, including creating maps for their "One watershed, One plan". Since then, he has worked alongside each district to identify risk areas with the development of prioritization maps.

Through his detailed GIS mapping data, districts are able to pinpoint and create a hierarchy of priority concerns.

In 2017, TSA 8 held a series of educational training sessions for SWCD technical staff members. The 3-part series allowed districts to get hands-on experience with project management, proper best management practice (BMP) installation, basic survey/engineering skills, GIS mapping, and GPS data collection.

The goal of these educational sessions was to expand knowledge and skills among districts by sharing information and expertise.



Technical Service Area 8

TSA 8 then added another resource for its districts in 2017 by recruiting design/communication specialist, Dain Erickson, to help members best tell the story of the SWCDs efforts.

Through print, web, and other media, he develops and

shares complex information in ways that will resonate with the general public.

Thanks to the BWSR grant funds, the addition of these contractors, along with the educational training sessions, TSA 8 has taken on a more proactive role in supporting the work of each of its local SWCDs and in protecting their unique and outstanding resources.