

BWSR unique among state agencies with grant volume and availability



The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) provides more than 1,000 grants per year to its local government partners, supporting a wide range of conservation activities.

In contrast to contracts, which stipulate very specific goods or services to be provided by the contractor, grant programs include a certain level of flexibility for the grantee to use the funds to best meet local needs.

BWSR is unique among state agencies in both the volume of grants the agency distributes, and the ability to make these funds available through advance and reimbursement payments.

Over the past ten years, BWSR has issued grants for more than 50 unique program allocations, including noncompetitive grants issued annually to counties and SWCDs, one-time legislatively-appropriated grants, funds to aid in disaster recovery, and competitively awarded Clean Water Fund grants.

The Natural Resources Block grant (NRBG), which is issued to counties, provides funds for administration and implementation of statutorily-mandated conservation programs ranging from the Wetland Conservation Act to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Subsurface Sewage Treatment System programs. Grantees can “flex” the funding across select programs, allowing grantees to shift available funding to the NRBG program where local need is highest.

A number of noncompetitive funds are made available to Soil and Water Conservation Districts as well, ranging from the State Cost-Share program, which provides cost-share assistance for local landowners to implement voluntary conservation

projects, to the SWCD Local Capacity Services program, which helps build the capacity of local districts to address specific resource needs.

In 2008, Minnesota voters approved the Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment, dedicating a portion of sales and use tax to the state’s natural and cultural legacy. A number of BWSR grant programs have been made possible through the Clean Water Fund and Outdoor Heritage Fund components of this amendment.

BWSR tracks the outcomes of grant programs through eLINK, BWSR’s grant management and conservation tracking tool. This allows statewide conservation practice data to be captured in a consistent format and analyzed to determine where practices have been installed and what the estimated pollution reduction impacts have been. This reporting data assists BWSR and its local partners in sharing the stories of conservation achievements throughout Minnesota.

Wayne Zellmer, BWSR’s Grants Coordinator, says, “Our agency makes every effort to streamline its grant programs, policies, and reporting so that local governments can focus on working with local landowners to get great conservation projects on the ground.”



A sample project from a Clean Water Fund Grant awarded to Carlton SWCD.

Using stacked logs and precisely placed boulders, engineers remeandered a 500-foot-long segment of an unnamed Deer Creek tributary to slow the velocity of water and cut the amount of sediment entering Lake Superior via the Nemadji River.