

Clean Water funds help conserve natural resources across Minnesota

Since 2016, the **Clean Water Fund** has provided capacity grants to soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) to implement conservation practices throughout the state. Administered through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), capacity grants are an investment in the skilled technicians and conservation experts who make this work possible. We are asking legislators to **support the use of Clean Water funds for SWCD capacity at the amount of \$22 million for this biennium.**

Our impact

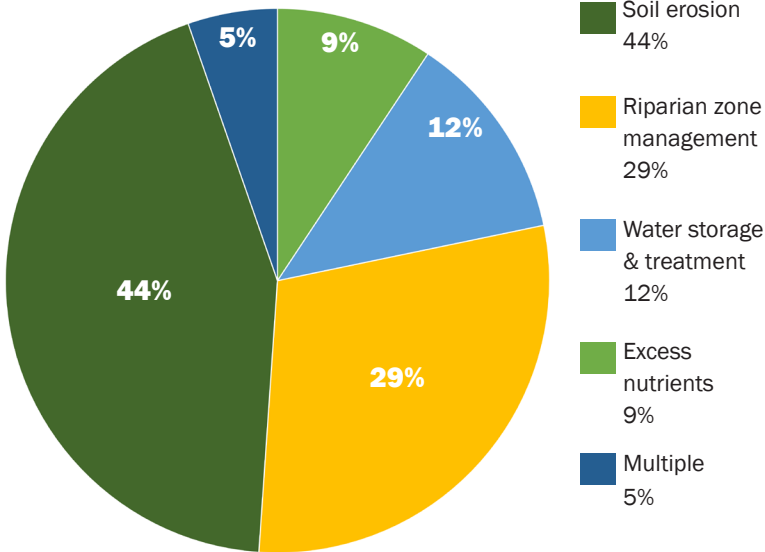
For the 2018-19 biennium, the Legislature appropriated \$22 million from the Clean Water Fund to support SWCD capacity. Collectively, this funding has helped SWCDs build the core technical services needed to help address locally identified soil and water resources issues.

In 2018-19, capacity grants were used to address specific natural resource concerns and priorities including:

- Excess nutrients
- Water storage and treatment
- Riparian zone management
- Soil erosion
- And much more!

In addition to this funding, SWCDs successfully leverage resources from a variety of local, state, national and private sources to complete projects across the state as prioritized by their local communities.

2018-19 SWCD capacity grants by resource concerns addressed



Source: Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources



Our approach

The **Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts** (MASWCD) provides a collaborative, centralized voice for Minnesota’s 88 SWCDs. SWCDs are local units of government comprised of elected, nonpartisan supervisors who are passionate about conserving Minnesota’s remarkable natural resources.

SWCDs provide value to our state’s conservation through technology, funding and educational services for private landowners. They are a primary source of conservation information, support and program management for landowners and other local units of government.

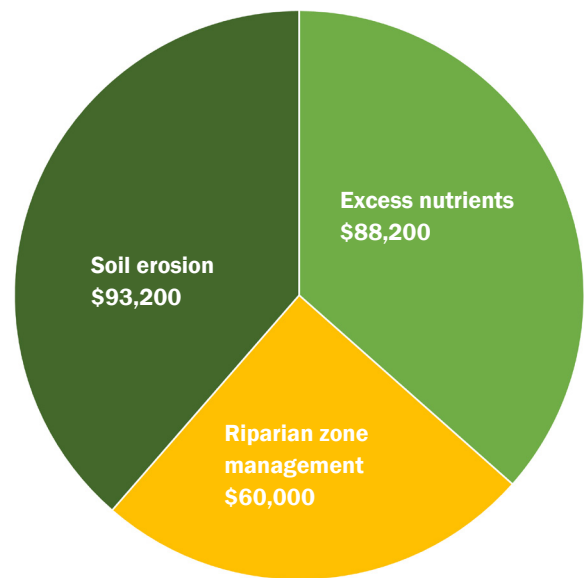
SWCDs are the technical experts and **“boots on the ground”** who understand their specific communities’ needs and help landowners navigate conservation programs from start to finish.

Spotlight: Area 1

Otter Tail County has a mix of land uses and ecosystems, giving the **East Otter Tail SWCD** many chances to expand and diversify the projects we do. District capacity funding has given us the ability to promote our work through additional education and outreach efforts.

District capacity funding has also allowed the East Otter Tail SWCD to hire, train and maintain additional qualified staff to focus specifically on excess nutrient best management practices, shoreline restorations and soil erosion BMPs. These staff members have created trusted relationships with local landowners and farmers and are viewed as a valuable resource in our community. We have pooled our funds with the Becker and WOT SWCDs to employ a shared licensed engineer, giving us the technical capacity to handle complex projects.

With a combination of district capacity funds and matching funds from Otter



Source: East Otter Tail SWCD

Tail County, we were able to provide cost-share or incentive payments along with technical assistance for an additional four abandoned well sealings, seven native shoreline restoration projects, two grade stabilization projects, two field windbreaks, seeding a buffer on public waters and the installation of 160 acres of cover crops by two area producers.

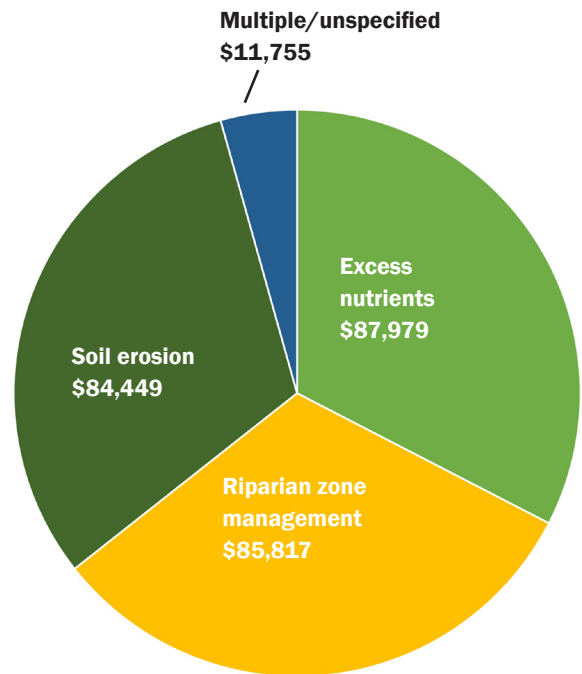


Spotlight: Area 2

Todd SWCD concentrates work efforts under the local capacity funding pool in riparian areas with soil erosion and excess nutrient concerns. The FY 2018-2019 district capacity funds assisted Todd SWCD in acquiring the higher-level engineering expertise needed to implement streambank stabilization projects on the Long Prairie River, agricultural waste storage facilities and shoreline erosion installations near Lake Osakis, and several waste storage impoundments along the Little Partridge River in Todd County.

These funds enabled the SWCD to participate in collaborative partnerships with the Veteran's Administration, Sourcewell, Motley Cemetery, the MPCA, West Central Technical Service Area and several landowners to accomplish water quality project objectives and priorities across the county. The project results include calculated reductions of 714 lbs. of biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) per year, 3.5×10^{-14} colony forming units (cfu) of E. coli, 180 tons of sediment (TSS), 56 pounds of nitrogen and 1755 lbs. of phosphorous every year that were previously contributing to surface waters.

Not only were technical contributions made on the part of Todd SWCD staff in the design of critical area plantings, riparian buffer plantings, runoff diversions and other practices, Todd



Source: Todd SWCD

SWCD was able to obtain the proper equipment to do so more efficiently. For the past six years, technical staff was struggling with older, outdated survey equipment, often calling for repair. Through capacity funding, Todd SWCD was able to acquire a new Trimble unit to aid in more accurate detailing of designs for targeted buffer, feedlot, and erosion practices. Funds were also used to support conservation efforts centered on buffer compliance.

The SWCD, along with the county, is proud to document that Todd County landowners with acreage in the overall riparian land mass are now 99% compliant with state buffer rules.



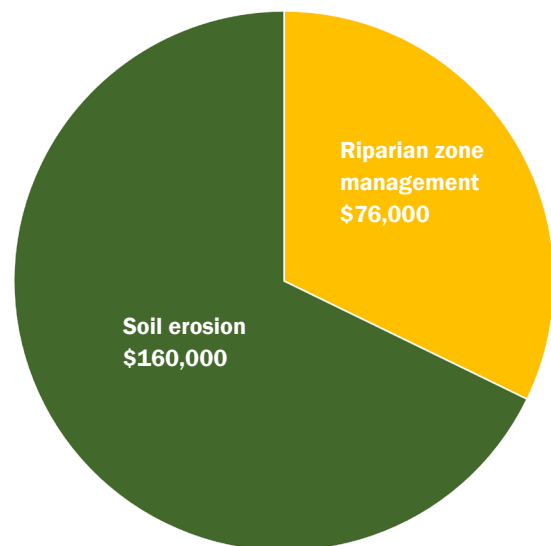
Spotlight: Area 3

Since the first capacity grant in 2016, the **Carlton SWCD** established a new technical position aimed at increasing staff capacity to use available project funding to implement conservation practices with landowners in Carlton County. Additionally, the SWCD has used capacity grant funds to pursue new conservation initiatives including working on urban storm water planning and project implementation, watershed management, and equipment rental to agriculture producers for implementation of soil health and grazing management practices. Approximately 71% of the capacity grant funding has been expended on staff capacity from 2016 -2020.

Through focusing on this “boots on the ground” approach, the SWCD has maximized the capacity grant to leverage an annual average of \$406,712 in SWCD operational funding and \$450,089 in landowner project funding from 2018-2020. By investing about \$65,000 of the annual capacity grant total in new initiatives and staff funding to better implement current programs, the SWCD has leveraged over \$856,000 annually in local, state, federal and private funds for conservation efforts in Carlton County.



Forest riparian buffer along a trout stream



Source: Carlton SWCD



Spotlight: Area 4

Residents and landowners in Dakota County have a stronger organization, extra education and outreach opportunities, and more technical assistance available to support their conservation efforts. Capacity funding supports several programs and activities by the **Dakota SWCD**. It is used to enhance our education and outreach efforts through virtual workshops, social media and web improvements. The increase in outreach opportunities directly correlates to more connections with landowners and more installed conservation practices.

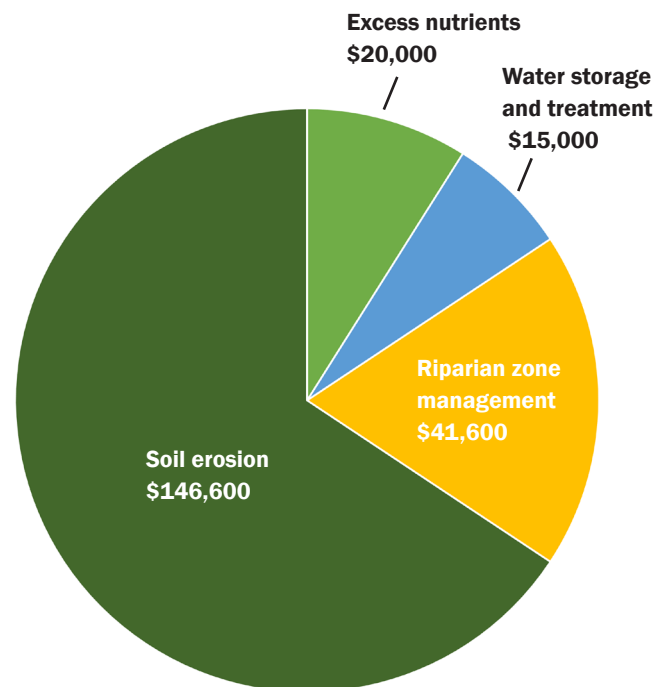
Capacity funding also provides a mechanism to increase staff skillsets so staff can meet federal and state requirements. In addition, capacity funding is used to conduct required compliance inspections of completed projects after the original grant agreement has expired.



Dakota SWCD staff planning a rain garden

These funds provide more opportunity to develop partnerships for coordinated activities among both public and private organizations with common goals.

Capacity funds have allowed the Dakota SWCD to hire one additional staff which has resulted in a 20% increase in the total number of projects installed annually.



Source: Dakota SWCD

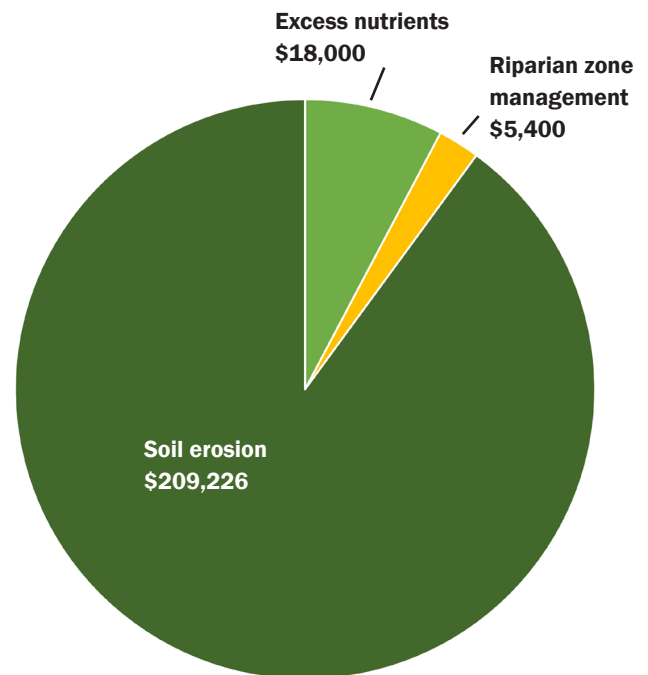


Spotlight: Area 5

The **Rock SWCD** invested in staff, training, equipment and software to increase the district's capacity and capability in placing conservation practices on the ground. The lessons learned from the flood events of 2014 clearly demonstrated a need for additional conservation practices to better control soil erosion and reduce impairments to water resources. The cultural and conservation-oriented practices of the past, in keeping productive soil in place and on the landscape, have shown to be insufficient when faced with the intense rainfall events the county has experienced in most years since 2014. The new, additional structural practices serve a key role in helping to control soil erosion on the landscape, while complementing the cultural practices such as no-till, strip till and ridge till. The demand for survey, design and placement of structural practices continues to be significant.



District staff have gained experience in the areas of cover crops and soil health, while at the same time being able to promote such efforts. The local capacity funds have proven to be an essential resource in order to provide the services sought out by the landowners and agricultural producers of Rock County.



Source: Rock SWCD





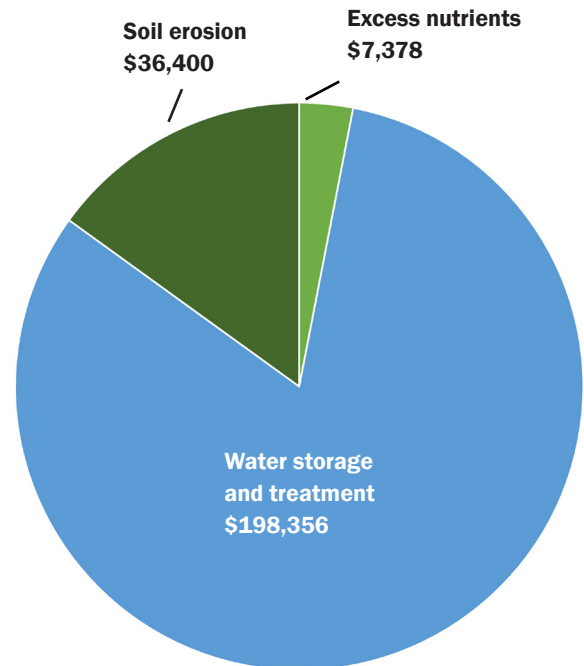
Site in need of a grade stabilization structure and a grassed waterway prior to construction



Completed grassed waterway project

Spotlight: Area 6

Le Sueur County has benefited greatly from receiving capacity funds. In FY 2018-2019, the funds have been put to good use accelerating SWCD programs and retaining technical staff. Roughly half of the funds have been used to put projects on the ground in Le Sueur County, including grade stabilization and cover crops. Approximately 666 acres of cover crops were installed under three-year contracts. Approximately 36% of the funds have been utilized on the District Technician position which oversees the district's cost share and cover crop programs. The capacity funds have bolstered our relationships with landowners by accelerating what SWCDs can offer through our technical expertise and programs.



Source: Le Sueur SWCD

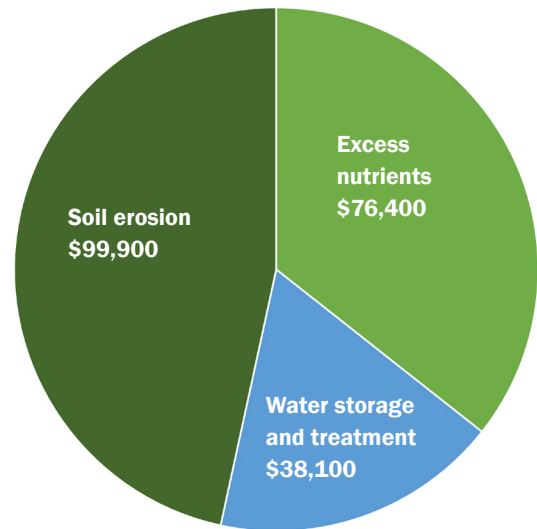


Spotlight: Area 7

Root River SWCD has become a well-rounded organization because of the advent of local capacity funding. During the last biennium, district staff were able to log 204 hours of continued education. Through the added training, Root River staff is able to provide landowners with the most up-to-date information to address their resource concerns.

Through increased project funding, the district has been able to increase both its technical and financial offerings to landowners. The FY 2018-2019 allocation provided a means to deliver technical and financial assistance to land operators interested in implementing cover crops. Through this allocation, the district was able to work with 18 producers who planted 475+ acres of cover crops over a three-year period. Interestingly, those producers and others implemented many more acres of cover crops following their cash crop harvest as a means to decrease soil erosion while improving soil health.

Over time it is our hope that these short term improvements (over three to four years) will also provide increased production through better nutrient cycling in the case of crop production and increased stocking rates in the case of prescribed grazing practices.



Source: Root River SWCD

The cover crop program continues to show increased interest and Root River SWCD is becoming a leader in soil health activities.

The district takes great pride in providing landowners a multitude and diverse array of programs that address everything from invasive species control and management to structural practices to soil health, prescribed grazing and tree programs. Many of the offerings are new to Root River SWCD since the advent of capacity funding and will continue to be provided to landowners as long as funding is available in the future.

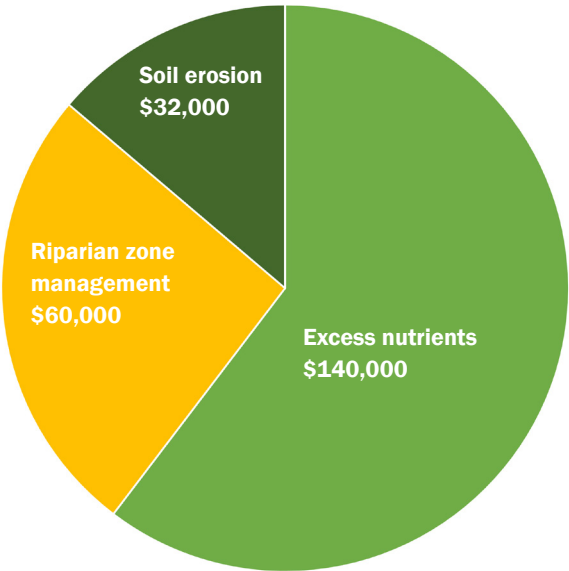


Spotlight: Area 8

Wadena County offers a mix of agricultural and recreational land, and we have to reach out to many different groups to promote conservation. The 2018-2019 district capacity funding allowed us to better promote ourselves and our programs to our county residents, as well as keep trained and dedicated staff to implement our programs.

The funding has also allowed the **Wadena SWCD** to devote more staff time to focus specifically on excess nutrient best management practices and riparian zone BMPs. Staff has been able to create relationships with local landowners and farmers and have provided useful technical assistance. With district capacity funding, the SWCD was able to provide cost share and technical assistance to three local producers to install over 118 acres of cover crops.

These acres wouldn't be possible without the extra funding, and the cover crops kept 62 tons/year of soil out of surface waters and 576.5 pounds/year of nitrates out of the groundwater. This funding supports a large part of the work that we do to protect our natural resources and has allowed us to be an effective and trusted resource for our county residents.



Source: Wadena SWCD



Outreach event showing a streambank stabilization

