



MASWCD

PRESIDENT

CHARLES RAU
Rice, MN
(320) 493-9503
chuck.rau@maswcd.org

VICE PRESIDENT & SW AREA 5 DIRECTOR

CLARK LINGBEEK
Comfrey, MN
(507) 920-9884
clark.lingbeek@maswcd.org

SECRETARY/TREASURER & SC AREA 6 DIRECTOR

MARK SCHNOBRICH
Hutchinson, MN
(320) 587-3760
mark.schnobrich@maswcd.org

NW AREA 1 DIRECTOR

RANDY SCHELLACK
Glyndon, MN
(701) 238-8121
randy.schellack@maswcd.org

WC AREA 2 DIRECTOR

TOM GREGORY
Kimball, MN
320-398-7312
tom.gregory@maswcd.org

NE AREA 3 DIRECTOR

KURT BECKSTROM
Milaca, MN
(612) 390-2459
kurt.beckstrom@maswcd.org

METRO AREA 4 DIRECTOR

LAURA ZANMILLER
West St. Paul, MN
(651) 270-2856
laura.zanmiller@maswcd.org

SE AREA 7 DIRECTOR

RANDY SMITH
Adams, MN
(507) 438-4570
randy.smith@maswcd.org

NC AREA 8 DIRECTOR

KEN LAPORTE
Pillager, MN
(218) 746-3927
ken.laporte@maswcd.org

IMMEDIATE PAST

PRESIDENT
PAUL KRABBENHOFT
Moorhead, MN
(701) 799-0369
paul.krabbenhof@maswcd.org

STAFF

Executive Director
LEANN BUCK

Assistant Director
SHEILA VANNEY

Office Manager
STEFANIE MARTINEZ

Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

255 Kellogg Boulevard East, Suite 101, St. Paul, MN 55101 | 651-690-9028 | www.maswcd.org

March 21, 2022

Rep. Dave Lislegard
Chair, House Property Tax Division

Re: DE amendment for HF 1377 (Lislegard), Property Tax Division Report

Chair Lislegard and Division Members,

On behalf of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), I'd like to express our gratitude for the Soil and Water Conservation District Aid provisions included in the delete-everything amendment for HF 1377 (Lislegard). SWCD Aid would establish a desperately needed standing, statutory appropriation of general funds from the Department of Revenue to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) statewide, similar to state aids for other elected units of local government.

Unfortunately, the level of funding put forward is inadequate for addressing our chronically unmet funding needs. The \$22 million per year we are seeking is not a bloated funding request. It's a result of a funding assessment we conducted in summer of 2022 in cooperation with the Board of Water and Soil Resources. House File 735, carried by Rep. Liz Reyer, with significant bipartisan support, includes that \$22 million funding level. And while that funding level still leaves us with significant unmet funding needs, it represents a significant portion of the state's share of helping more adequately fund SWCDs.

SWCDs are the technical experts and "boots on the ground." Our staff and elected board members have the trust of their community members and are able to help landowners work through conservation programs from start to finish. However, in the absence of adequate funding, instead of hiring additional staff to accelerate our conservation work, SWCDs are unable to even retain the ones they have. Our SWCDs have turned into revolving doors, hiring and training staff only to see them move on to higher paying jobs elsewhere.

Minnesota SWCDs will be working hard to leverage federal funding from the Inflation Reduction Act and climate smart agriculture initiatives. At \$22 million per year, our SWCDs will have a chance to hire and retain the conservation professionals needed to compete for federal project dollars over the next five years, and work with interested private landowners on getting those projects implemented in our communities.

MASWCD represents the state's 88 soil and water conservation districts, including their 440 elected supervisors and their more than 460 employees. Soil and Water Conservation Districts are political subdivisions of the State established under Minnesota Statute Chapter 103C. Each SWCD is governed by a board of elected supervisors. SWCD law is implemented across 100% of the state.

As water quality and soil health issues are prioritized in Minnesota, SWCDs' roles have expanded and include helping landowners navigate programs and policies that are increasing in complexity. To face these challenges and increase our pace of progress toward cleaner water and healthier soils, SWCDs need not only more *predictable* state funding, but also more *adequate* state funding. At \$22 million per year, SWCD Aid will help us get closer to meeting those funding needs. A few examples of how SWCD Aid would benefit districts across the state include:



Benton SWCD would be able to hire an additional technician, which would allow the district to provide service on a timelier basis to feedlot owners and to producers interested in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program.



Carver SWCD would expand upon two new programs: their Pollinator Cost-Share program and their Soil Health/Cover Crop program. SWCD aid would also enable the district to retain the qualified staff needed for providing these public services in a rapidly growing county.



Clay SWCD would be able to enhance staffing to meet landowner interest in soil health practices such as cover crops and purchase equipment for assisting with establishment of pollinator habitat.



Crow Wing SWCD would be able to devote staff time and resources to projects like re-routing an ATV trail to mitigate soil erosion into a nearby lake, which they currently do not have the capacity to address in a timely fashion.



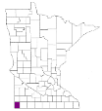
Dakota SWCD would be able to hire a technician for more landowner outreach and project implementation. Recent survey results have shown that SWCD staff are well respected and trusted, and that landowners prefer one-on-one discussions about conservation opportunities specific to their land rather than attending workshops and events.



Lake SWCD would be able to increase staff capacity to address critical water quality and soil erosion issues along Lake Superior and its tributaries, collaborating with neighboring SWCDs and other agencies on work as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.



Olmsted SWCD would be able to enhance staffing, expand technical services, and increase programming to the public to help meet the growing needs of their constituents in both urban and rural settings.



Rock SWCD would be able to train and retain qualified staff who have earned the trust of the agricultural producers in the county, providing these local cooperators with the technical services need to get needed conservation practices implemented on their farm fields.

These are just a few examples of how SWCDs across the state would use this funding to boost their capacity in getting conservation projects implemented. They showcase the important work that could be accomplished, but where we're currently falling short.

Thank you for including SWCD Aid in your proposed division report and for your support of this important funding mechanism for Minnesota's statewide conservation delivery system. We urge you to reconsider the funding level and to support \$22 million per year for this effort.

Sincerely,

Chuck Rau

President, Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts