



**CHISAGO SWCD**  
CHISAGO SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2024 Annual Report  
and  
2025 Annual Plan of Work

*Adopted February 3, 2025*

***“Bringing Conservation to Chisago County”***

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## 2024 Annual Report and 2025 Annual Plan of Work

**Introduction:** The Chisago Soil and Water Conservation District’s Annual Report and Annual Plan of Work serve as a planning tool used by the SWCD Board and staff to prioritize the workload and track accomplishments to achieving the long-term goals of the Chisago SWCD.



**Chisago SWCD Board of Supervisors: Justin Wilson, David Tollberg, Lance Petersen, Rick Cedergren, and Matt Hardy .**

The Chisago SWCD has a board of five supervisors with a variety of expertise elected to staggered four-year terms. Board members represent nominating districts that encompasses five distinct areas of the county and are elected by the county-at-large. Each Supervisor serves on internal and external committees to oversee the SWCD’s operations and partnerships.

On November 10, 2020, the Chisago SWCD Board of Supervisors adopted the Lower St. Croix River Comprehensive Water Management Plan as the SWCD’s Comprehensive Plan. This plan helps guide the development of the SWCD’s Annual Plan of Work.



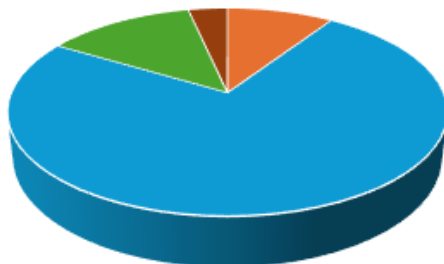
**Staff: (front row) Craig Mell, Ellen Badger Hanson, Barbara Heitkamp, Jacquelynn Olson, (back row) Megan Lindberg, Debra Hermel, Casey Thiel, Susan Humble, Mary Jo Youngbauer, Jacob Furst**

The Chisago SWCD office is co-located with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the University of Minnesota Extension Service, and the Chisago County Master Gardener Program. Over the years we have developed a very strong working relationship with the NRCS. Together we utilize local, state, and federal funding sources to implement conservation and water quality projects that protect and enhance the natural resources of Chisago County.

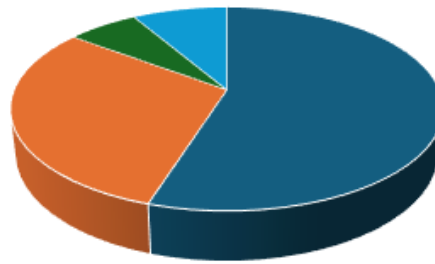
The Mission of the Chisago SWCD is: **“Bringing Conservation to Chisago County”**

**Budget:** The Chisago SWCD is funded through a variety of sources. A majority of the funding we receive for landowner projects are State Clean Water Fund grant dollars allocated by the legislature and passed-through the State Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). General operating funds are obtained from BWSR, Chisago County, grants, fees for service and partnership agreements with the federal government or other local/area conservation organizations. Our 2025 budget is \$2,363,500.

2025 Revenues



2025 Expenses



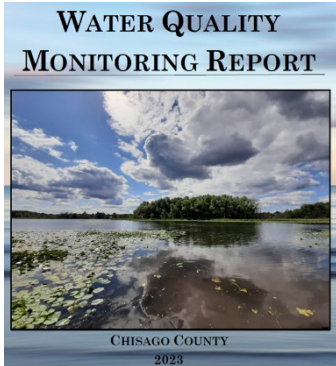
- Federal Funds 4.2%
- State Funds 76.1%
- Grants (Landowners/Partners) 69%
- Tech. Asst/BMP Installation 23%
- Local Funds 15.4%
- District Programs 4.3%
- Monitoring and Assessments 5%
- Education and Marketing 3%

**“Bringing Conservation to Chisago County”**

## 2024 Annual Report

**Monitoring, Planning and Assessments:** The Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) prioritizes resource concerns through surface water monitoring, management plans, watershed restoration and protection strategies, natural resource inventories, and subwatershed assessments.

- Partnered with 14 local government units in the Lower St. Croix River watershed to implement, along with serving as the fiscal agent and grant administrator, the Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.
- Completed a surface water monitoring report of the water quality monitoring data collected by county staff on 27 lakes throughout the summer of 2023.



- Partnered with MPCA to draft the 319 Small Watersheds Nine Key Element plan for the Chisago Lakes Chain of Lakes watershed.
- Conducted groundwater level monitoring of 16 wells in Chisago County as part of the DNR groundwater monitoring program.
- Assisted Chisago County with the implementation of their Cooperative Weed Management Area plan, including assisting with treatment efforts of wild parsnip and submitting grant proposals for continued implementation of the CWMA plan.
- Completed a Long-Range Strategic Planning Session to better define our goals and mission of our organization.
- Utilized subwatershed assessments for the City of North Branch, the Goose and Rush Creek watersheds, the Chisago Lakes Chain of Lakes watershed, the Direct Drainage to the St. Croix River watershed, and the Sunrise River watershed to prioritize staff planning efforts.
- Completed a USDA NRCS Mississippi Rivers Basin Initiative plan for the Direct Drainage to the St. Croix River and the Goose Creek watersheds in Chisago County.

**Outreach and Events:** The SWCD, through a variety of settings, provides education and outreach activities to promote good land stewardship and provide public awareness of our programs and services.

- **Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership/East Metro Water Resource Education Program**
  - **Field days/workshops** included *Well Water Testing Clinic* (103 samples collected), *Smart Salt Training for Local Public Works staff* (40 attendees), *Ag Field Day* Host by Kevin Rochel (40 attendees), and a *Shoreline Contractors Training* (25 attendees).
  - **Local Leaders Workshops:** This year we did a three-part series, including a “Workshop on the Water” (6/24), a “Conservation Innovation Tour” (8/7), and a “Protecting Water and Quality of Life in Rural Areas” (9/30). All three events brought together locally elected officials and concerned citizens to learn about different practices and policies that can help communities protect and restore our water resources in the Lower St. Croix watershed.
  - **Adopt – A – Drain program:** Volunteers have adopted 108 storm drains in Chisago County.



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## 2024 Annual Report

- **“We Are Water MN”** – Assisted the Chisago County Water Plan with hosting the “We Are Water MN” exhibit in Chisago County from June 20 – August 4.
- **Events** – Hosted a booth at the Regenerative Ag Conference and the Rush City Earth Day Expo.
- **Rain Barrel/Compost Bin Sale:** Partnered with the Chisago County Environmental Services Department to sponsor a rain barrel and compost bin sale program for Chisago County residents. All total 72 rain barrels and 64 compost bins were distributed to local residents in May thanks to this partnership.
- **Children’s Water Festival:** Co-hosted with Chisago County, all total 650 fifth grade students attended this year’s event in September at Wild Mountain.
- **Outstanding Conservationist:** Kevin Rochel was named our 2024 Outstanding Conservationist.
- **2024 Spring Garden Expo:** Partnered with the Chisago County Master Gardeners to host this event, 160 people attended.



### Conservation Technical Assistance and Best Management Practices:

The Chisago SWCD in close partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provided technical assistance to landowners to correct erosion and sediment control issues on rural and urban landscapes.



- All total 67 conservation practices were implemented throughout Chisago County utilizing a variety of local, state, and federal programs. Projects included enhanced street sweeping, rain gardens, shoreland plantings, cover crops, no-till farming, water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization structures, grassed and lined waterways, field windbreaks, prescribed grazing, critical area planting, underground outlets, clean water diversions, and native grass plantings.
- Tree/shrub program: 730 customers purchased 40,000 trees and shrubs.
- MN State Buffer Law: obtained compliance on 100% of all Public Waters and Public Ditches in Chisago County.
- Urban BMP Maintenance Program: hired a seasonal employee to maintain numerous urban BMPs thanks in part to a partnership with the Chisago Lakes Lake Improvement District.

**Project Dollars:** In 2024, the Chisago SWCD in partnership with the USDA NRCS utilized approximately \$700,000 in local, state, and federal funds to implement numerous erosion and sediment control best management practices throughout Chisago County. In 2024, we were awarded a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, a Clean Water Fund grant, a BWSR Soil Health Staffing grant, and two Federal MRBI grants totaling \$1.3M to continue implementing projects in Chisago County.

**Staff Leadership:** Jacquelynn Olson, MASWCD Leadership Institute Graduate; Mary Jo Youngbauer, State Noxious Weed Advisory Committee; and Sue Humble, MASWCD State Awards Committee.



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## 2025 Annual Plan of Work

**Outreach and Events:** Provide conservation outreach and events to producers, landowners, schools, units of government, lake associations, and public service groups.

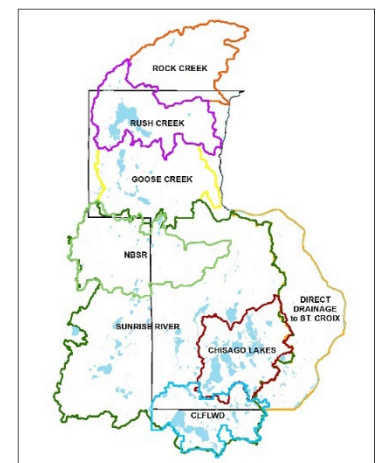
- Partner with the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership to promote conservation programs through a series of workshops focusing on small- and large-scale agriculture and wildlife habitat enhancement.
- Partner with the Chisago County Water Plan to host the annual Chisago County 5th grade Children's Water Festival for approximately 700 students in September.
- Partner with the Chisago County Master Gardeners to host the 2025 Master Gardener Expo.



- Partner with the Chisago County Environmental Services Department to sponsor a rain barrel and compost bin sale program for Chisago County residents in May.
- Provide continued updates to the SWCD's web page ([www.chisagoswcd.org](http://www.chisagoswcd.org)) to keep residents informed of current programs and upcoming activities.
- Use informational meetings, workshops, demonstration sites, newsletter articles, social media, and press releases to publicize SWCD programs.

**Monitoring/Assessments:** Complete water quality related studies which will lead to the prioritization of projects for future technical and financial support by the SWCD.

- Partner with 14 local government units in the Lower St. Croix River watershed to implement the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Lower St. Croix River watershed. Serve as the Fiscal Agent and Grant Administrator for both the Watershed Based Implementation Fund grants and the Clean Water Fund Soil Health Grant.
- Complete a subwatershed assessment of the Goose Creek watershed and utilize several existing subwatershed assessments to identify the pollutant hot spots to allow staff to prioritize and target our outreach and implementation efforts in the watershed.
- Partner with the MPCA through a 319 Small Watersheds focus grant to develop a Nine Key Element plan for the Chisago Lakes Chain of Lakes watershed.
- Conduct groundwater level monitoring of 16 wells in Chisago County as part of the DNR groundwater monitoring program.
- Partner with the USDA NRCS to utilize the Mississippi Rivers Basin Initiative plan for the Direct Drainage to the St. Croix River watershed and the Goose Creek watershed to target our outreach and implementation efforts in these watersheds.
- Develop a regionally significant lakes internal loading analyses and updated phosphorus balances for TMDL studies for the Chisago County lakes listed as regionally significant for pollutant reduction in the Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Management Plan.
- Complete a phosphorus sourcing and management plan for a tributary to East Rush Lake.
- Develop a surface water monitoring report of the water quality monitoring data collected by county staff on area lakes throughout the summer of 2024.
- Partner with local cities to develop and implement a targeted enhanced street sweeping plan to reduce pollutant loading to the St. Croix River.



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## 2025 Annual Plan of Work

**Conservation Technical Assistance and Best Management Practices:** Provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and local units of government to implement conservation projects resulting in cleaner water and productive land.

- Best Management Practices
  - Utilize local, state, and federal grant dollars to implement best management practices throughout Chisago County. Designated local, state, and federal funds include:
    - Rush and Goose Creek watersheds: Rush Lake Improvement Association, State Clean Water Fund, Federal Mississippi Rivers Basin Initiative funding.
    - Chisago Lakes Chain of Lakes: Chisago Lakes Lake Improvement District, State Clean Water Fund.
    - Direct Drainage to the St. Croix River: State Clean Water Fund, Federal Mississippi Rivers Basin Initiative funding.
    - County Wide: Lower St. Croix Watershed Based Implementation Funds, State Soil Health Practices Grants, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and USDA NRCS Federal Program Funds.
  - Provide assistance to the NRCS in the development of conservation plans and the implementation of conservation projects utilizing funding from USDA programs such as EQIP, CSP, and CRP.
- Minnesota State Buffer Law
  - Serve as the lead technical agency in the implementation of the state buffer program in Chisago County and provide technical assistance to the Chisago County on public ditch rules and regulations related to the Chisago County Public Ditch System.



- Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act
  - Provide technical assistance to Local Government Units in the protection of wetland resources through the implementation of the wetland conservation act and through the restoration of drained and/or degraded wetlands.
- District Annual Tree/Shrub Sale
  - Hold annual spring tree and shrub sale geared towards supplying 40,000 conservation grade trees and shrubs to the residents/landowners of Chisago County.

**Partners:** The SWCD has established and relies on strong partnerships with a variety of organizations. These partnerships further our ability to deliver technical assistance, provide educational activities, and generate financial incentives for water quality protection. The following is a list of some of our main partners:

- **Federal** – Natural Resources Conservation Services, Farm Service Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service
- **State** – Board of Water and Soil Resources, MN Department of Agriculture, MN Department of Natural Resources, University of Minnesota Extension, MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- **Area/Local** –Metro Association of Conservation Districts, Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership, Chisago County, Chisago Lakes Lake Improvement District, Rush Lake Improvement Association, Chisago County Master Gardeners, and numerous local cooperators.



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**651-674-2333**  
[www.chisagoswcd.org](http://www.chisagoswcd.org)