



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

2025 Annual Report  
and  
2026 Annual Plan of Work

*Adopted February 10, 2026*

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

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## 2025 Annual Report and 2026 Annual Plan of Work

**Introduction:** The Chisago Soil and Water Conservation District’s Annual Report and Annual Plan of Work serve as crucial planning tools utilized by the SWCD Board and staff to prioritize tasks and track accomplishments towards 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 is governed by a board of five supervisors, each possessing a range of expertise and elected to staggered four-year terms. Board members represent five distinct nominating districts within the county and are elected by the county-at-large. Each Supervisor participates in 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 serves as a guide for the development of the SWCD’s Annual Plan of Work.



**Staff: (front row) Ben Harker, Craig Mell, Jacob Furst, John Brezinka, (back row) Barbara Heitkamp, Ellen Badger Hanson, Mary Jo Youngbauer, Jacque Olson, Debra Hermel, Susan Humble, Casey Thiel.**

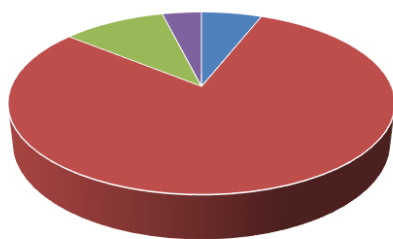
The Chisago SWCD office is co-located with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the University of Minnesota Extension Service, and the Chisago County Master Gardener Program. Over the years, we have developed a robust working relationship with the NRCS. Together, we utilize local, 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

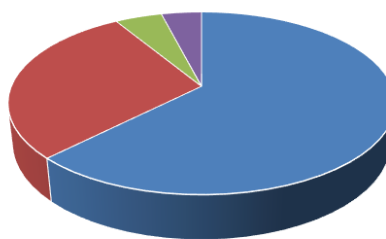
The Chisago SWCD is funded through various sources. A majority of the funding we receive for landowner projects are State Clean Water Fund grant dollars allocated by the legislature and passed through the State Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). General operating funds are obtained from BWSR, Chisago County, grants, fees for services, and partnership agreements with the federal government or other local/area conservation organizations. Our 2026 budget is \$2,992,600.

**2026 Revenues**



■ Federal Funds 6% ■ State Funds 80%  
■ Local Funds 10% ■ District Programs 4%

**2026 Expenses**



■ Grants (Landowners/Partners) 62% ■ Tech. Asst/BMP Installation 29%  
■ Monitoring and Assessments 5% ■ Education and Marketing 4%

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## 2025

### Annual Report Summary

The past year has been marked by significant accomplishments and collaborative efforts in our ongoing mission to manage and protect water resources within Chisago County. Our focus has been on implementing comprehensive management plans, monitoring water quality, and engaging with the community through education and outreach. Below, we highlight key projects and initiatives that exemplify our commitment to environmental stewardship and effective resource management.

**Monitoring, Planning, and Assessments:** The Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) prioritizes resource concerns through comprehensive 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 the Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, serving as the fiscal agent and grant administrator.
- Completed a surface water monitoring report based on data collected by county staff on 27 lakes during the summer of 2024.
- Collaborated with MPCA to finalize 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.
- 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 in Chisago County.



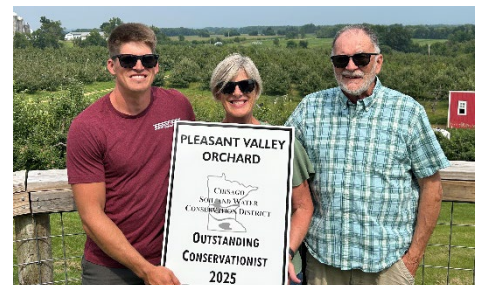
**Outreach and Events:** The SWCD provides education and outreach activities through various settings to promote responsible land stewardship and raise public awareness of our programs and services.

- **Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership/East Metro Water Resource Education Program**



Farmer Soil Health Bus

- **Field Days/Workshops:** These included the *Soil Health for Row Crop Farmers Bus Tour* (47 attendees), the *Well Water Testing Clinic* (101 samples collected), and the *Parking Lot and Sidewalks Smart Salt Workshop* (50 attendees). Additionally, we presented the State of the Waters in Chisago County at the Chisago Lakes and North Branch public libraries.
- **Workshop on the Water:** This event brought together locally elected officials and concerned citizens to learn about practices and policies that help protect and restore water resources in the Lower St. Croix watershed (120 attendees).
- **Adopt-A-Drain Program:** We currently have 60 volunteers who have adopted 113 storm drains in Chisago County.
- **Outstanding Conservationist:** Pleasant Valley Orchard was named our 2025 Outstanding Conservationist.



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## 2025

- **Rain Barrel/Compost Bin Sale:** Partnering with the Chisago County Environmental Services Department, we sponsored a rain barrel and compost bin sale program for residents, distributing 56 rain barrels and 48 compost bins in May.
- **Children's Water Festival:** Co-hosted with Chisago County, this event saw 640 fifth grade students attend in September at Wild Mountain.
- **2025 Spring Garden Expo:** In collaboration with the Chisago County Master Gardeners, this event attracted 170 attendees.
- **Chisago SWCD 75th Anniversary:** We celebrated our 75th anniversary with a bus tour showcasing the work completed by landowners in Chisago County and an open house at our new office, welcoming past employees, board members, outstanding conservationists, and current partners.



**Conservation Technical Assistance and Best Management Practices:** In close partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Chisago SWCD provided technical assistance to landowners to address erosion and sediment control issues on both rural and urban landscapes.



- Implemented over 100 conservation practices across Chisago County using various local, state, and federal programs. Projects included enhanced street sweeping, rain gardens, shoreland plantings, cover crops, no-till and strip-till farming, water and sediment control basins, pasture and hayland plantings, critical area planting, conservation crop rotation, and native grass plantings.
- Tree/Shrub Program: 540 customers purchased 36,500 trees and shrubs.
- MN State Buffer Law: Achieved compliance on 100% of all Public Waters and Public Ditches in Chisago County.
- Urban BMP Maintenance Program: Employed a seasonal worker to maintain numerous urban BMPs through a partnership with the Chisago Lakes Lake Improvement District.



### Project Funding

- In 2025, the Chisago Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), in collaboration with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), successfully utilized approximately \$700,000 in local, state, and federal funds to implement a wide array of erosion and sediment control best management practices across Chisago County.
- Grant Success: In 2025, we proudly secured two Clean Water Fund grants, four BWSR Soil Health Implementation grants, a MPCA 319 Nine Key Element grant, and a Federal Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) grant. Additionally, we assisted producers in obtaining Federal Farm Bill funds. These financial awards, totaling a combined \$1.8 million, will enable us to continue our vital project implementations throughout Chisago County.



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## 2026 Annual Plan of Work

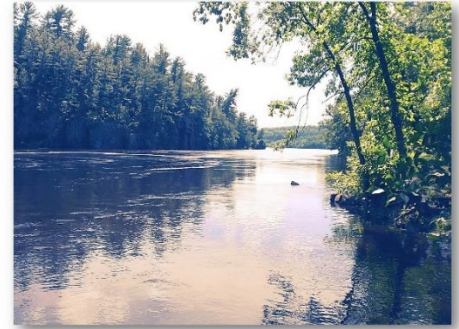
### Annual Plan of Work Summary

The SWCD's annual plan of work outlines key initiatives and partnerships aimed at promoting conservation and environmental sustainability within Chisago County. This document provides a detailed plan, focusing on monitoring and assessments, outreach and events, conservation technical assistance, and highlighting partnerships.

### Monitoring and Assessments

- Conduct water quality studies to prioritize 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. Serve as the Fiscal Agent and Grant Administrator for Watershed Based Implementation Fund grants and the Clean Water Fund Soil Health Grant.
- Complete a subwatershed assessment of the Goose Creek watershed and use existing assessments to identify pollutant hot spots, allowing staff to prioritize outreach and implementation efforts.
- Collaborate with the MPCA through a 319 Small Watersheds focus grant to implement a Nine Key Element plan for the Chisago Lakes Chain of Lakes watershed.
- Monitor groundwater levels in 16 wells across Chisago County as part of the DNR groundwater monitoring program.
- Partner with the USDA NRCS to utilize the Mississippi Rivers Basin Initiative plan for targeted outreach and implementation efforts in the Direct Drainage to the St. Croix River watershed.
- Develop analyses and updated phosphorus balances for TMDL studies for Chisago County lakes identified as regionally significant for pollutant reduction in the Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Management Plan.
- Create a phosphorus sourcing and management plan for a tributary to East Rush Lake.
- Compile a surface water monitoring report based on water quality data collected by county staff on area lakes during the summer of 2025.
- Collaborate with local cities to develop and implement a targeted enhanced street sweeping plan to reduce pollutant loading to the St. Croix River.

Lower St. Croix River  
Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan



### Outreach and Events

- Provide conservation outreach and organize events for producers, landowners, schools, government units, lake associations, and public service groups.
- Collaborate with the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership to promote conservation programs through workshops that focus on small- and large-scale agriculture and wildlife habitat enhancement.
- Work 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 2026 Master Gardener Expo.
- Collaborate with the Chisago County Environmental Services Department to sponsor a rain barrel and compost bin sale program for Chisago County residents in May.

#### Project Funds

- Chisago Lakes Chain of Lakes Watershed
- St. Croix River Direct Drainage Watershed
- Rush/Goose Creek Watersheds
- Lower St. Croix Watershed Based Implementation Funds
- Soil Health Implementation
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Chisago Lakes Lake Improvement District

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## 2026 Annual Plan of Work

- Regularly update the SWCD's web page ([www.chisagoswcd.org](http://www.chisagoswcd.org)) to keep residents informed of current programs and upcoming activities.
- Utilize informational meetings, workshops, demonstration sites, newsletter articles, social media, and press releases to publicize SWCD programs.

## Conservation Technical Assistance and Best Management Practices

- Provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and local government units to implement conservation projects aimed at achieving cleaner water and productive land.
- Utilize local, state, and federal grant dollars to implement best management practices throughout Chisago County, including:

- 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.



- Assist the USDA NRCS in developing conservation plans and implementing projects utilizing USDA programs such as EQIP, CSP, and CRP.
  - Serve as the lead technical agency in implementing the state buffer program in Chisago County and provide technical assistance on public ditch rules and regulations related to the Chisago County Public Ditch System.
- Provide technical assistance to local government units in protecting wetland resources through the implementation of the Wetland Conservation Act, and through the restoration of drained and/or degraded wetlands.
  - Hold the annual spring tree and shrub sale to supply 40,000 conservation-grade trees and shrubs to the residents and landowners of Chisago County.



## Partners

The SWCD has established strong partnerships with a variety of organizations, enhancing our capacity to deliver technical assistance, educational activities, and financial incentives for water quality protection. Some of our key partners include:

- 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
- Local/Area: 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)