STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2029

Isanti
Soil and Water
Conservation District

Isanti Soil & Water Conservation District

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DEVELOPMENT OF PLAN OVERVIEW

Through the use of an outside consultant, we gathered information and insight to evaluate the current Isanti County Soil and Water Conservation District (hereafter referred to as the “District”), determined our objectives, the required resources needed to accomplish them, and how the District needs to operate to ascertain them.

Impact requires a strategic approach, efficient processes and powerful partnerships.

The District’s Strategy

We will use our time, personnel, and resources in the most effective manner to fulfill the mission of the District. To maximize our impact, we will reconcile priority programs that are urgent and important to meet the goals and needs of the Lower St. Croix and Rum River Watershed plans. We will increase funding by exploring alternative sources and through successful outreach in both Watershed priority areas and promotion of the District.

The Purpose

Creating a solid foundation that outlines the District’s direction will increase its efficiency, affirm priority programs, lower stress and pressure on personnel, help achieve deliverables, and provide greater stability.

Putting Together the Strategic Plan

- Interviews - Everyone in the organization was interviewed. A standardized list of questions was used to gather insight into the organization and its individual components.
- Evaluation of Current Operations - Existing operations were assessed, and the Lower St. Croix and Rum River Comprehensive Watershed plans were examined to determine key programs and priorities.
- Strategic Planning Retreat - Staff created SWOT Analysis' and Venn Diagrams, performed individual assessments, had open discussions on areas of growth, and tested their knowledge on priority programs and watershed plans. The input of staff from this retreat was instrumental in development of this strategic plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Identified Objectives

- **Staff cannot take on more work.**
- **Key priorities for watersheds are not being met.**
- **There is a lack of consistency to fund staff positions.**

Each goal will be improved upon while keeping the mission of the Isanti County Soil and Water Conservation District at the forefront of every decision. The proposed goals are symbiotic - each one will help in the success of the others.

Goal 1 Enhancing our Capacity

- Consider additional staffing needs based on funding and needs of the District.
- Refine current staff positions to give them better definition and clarity.
- Determine which services can be contracted or shared to alleviate workload on current staff.
- Consider offering staff members to take the Clifton Strength Finder test.

Goal 2: Target Beneficial & Consistent Funding

- District Manager/Administrative Assistant to prepare analysis of funding sources, uses, and suitability to fulfill SWCD's mission.
- Board and District Manager use analysis to eliminate or outsource programs that don't meet criteria and target additional funding sources.

Goal 3: Align the District with the Rum River & Lower St. Croix Watershed Priority Areas

- Use Eisenhower Matrix to identify priority programs and eliminate what is not necessary.
- A “Slow Release” approach will significantly focus new efforts on an individual resource concern each year so not to inundate staff and maximize the district’s impact.
- Use potential measurable outputs in outreach campaigns and progress reports.
- Targeting undertreated areas rather than random voluntary actions by landowners.
- Emphasis on on-site and in-person consistent communication to promote conservation practice adoption.
- Use GIS analysis to determine specific audiences in target areas.

Goal 4: Increase Awareness of the Isanti SWCD

- Rather than creating more work, create more awareness - Who is the Isanti SWCD?
- Evaluate effectiveness of outreach campaigns.
- Consider developing/obtaining a brand guide to stay consistent.
- Drive outreach and marketing efforts based on funding sources and greatest needs.
- Set budget and use a variety of marketing tools and media outlets to reach target audiences.

The following information was gathered during the Strategic Planning Retreat Facilitated on March 18th, 2024.

What are the core values of the SWCD?

What makes a great work environment?

Est. 1963

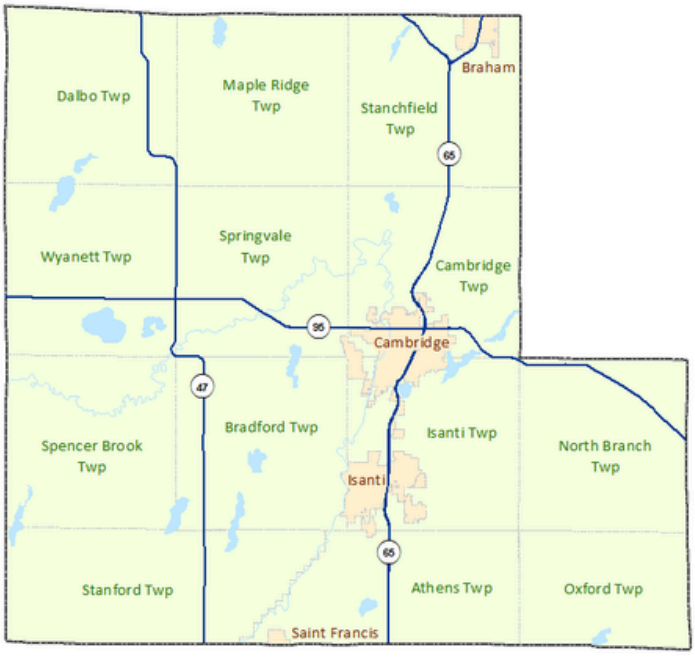
THE DISTRICT

OUR MISSION STATEMENT IS TO TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE, TO INSPIRE ACTION, AND TO BRING INNOVATIVE RESOURCES TO THE TABLE SO THAT PEOPLE CAN BECOME LEADERS IN KEEPING LAND AND WATER HEALTHY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

THE DISTRICT'S MISSION STATEMENT UNIFIES THE EFFORTS OF OUR STAFF TO REACH LONG-TERM GOALS BY ALIGNING OUR BEHAVIORS, ENVISIONING THE FUTURE, BUILDING COMMUNITY, DEVELOPING PURPOSE, AND ENCOURAGING INGENUITY.

EXISITING SERVICES

- Lake monitoring and stream assessment
- Buffer Compliance
- Tree Sale Program
- Riverbank Erosion
- Lakeshore Restoration Design using Native Vegetation
- Rain Garden & Other Rain Run-off Control Practices
- Site Visits, Project Review, & Technical Information on Wetland Issues
- No Till Drill Rental
- Technical Assistance for Residential & Rural Best Management Practices
- Financial Assistance for Residential & Rural Best Management Practices
- Assistance with Abandoned Well Sealing
- Conservation Education & Outreach



SWOT ANALYSIS

By analyzing strengths and weaknesses, the SWCD can allocate resources effectively by investing in areas where they excel and address weaknesses and identified needs. A valuable tool for assessing an organization's internal and external factors.

STRENGTHS

- Passionate staff
- Relationships with LGUs, LWGs, & Community
- Strong partnership with NRCS
- Management
- Interpersonal communication
- Tree Sale Program

WEAKNESSES

- Young staff/lack of experience
- Limited work space
- Limited staff
- Workload
- Forestry
- Engineering

OPPORTUNITIES

- Education
- Outreach & Awareness
- Partnering with cities for Urban BMPs
- NRCS partnership
- Exploring other partnership opportunities
- Groundwater
- Land protection including conservation easements

THREATS

- Workload
- Staffing
- Unpredictable weather
- Intense recreation
- Inconsistent funding

The presented information was gathered during the Strategic Planning Retreat Facilitated on March 18th, 2024.

2024-2029

PRIORITY GOALS

GOAL 1: ENHANCE OUR CAPACITY

We will increase our ability to serve our District and fulfill the goals of our Watershed plans by creating the appropriate positions, hiring qualified staff, developing work plans, creating new working environments, contracting the necessary services, and expanding and further developing our partnerships.

GOAL 2: TARGET BENEFICAL & CONSISTENT FUNDING

We will address natural resource issues most greatly affecting the District and our Watersheds by exploring additional funding opportunities that will consistently fund positions, not just projects.

GOAL 3: ALIGN THE DISTRICT WITH THE RUM RIVER & LOWER ST. CROIX WATERSHED PRIORITY AREAS

We will position ourselves and our resources to meet the needs and address resource concerns of each plan's priority areas, affirm priority programs, and measure our success through key performance indicators within each plan.

GOAL 4: INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE ISANTI SWCD

We will promote awareness of the District and market and encourage conservation programs and practices with a marketing and outreach campaign that effectively engages residents, businesses, and local officials. In addition, we will use education to seek voluntary actions and behavioral changes that independently furthers the mission of the District, alleviates pressure on staff, and meets the priorities of our Watersheds.

ANALYSIS OF KEY METRICS

THE FOLLOWING PAGES EXPLAINS HOW THE DISTRICT INTENDS TO USE OUR TIME, ENERGY, EFFORT, AND MONEY TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS.

To drive our goals, resource concerns that demand priority need their areas of impact and targeted demographics identified, analyzed, and understood.

PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERNS → **AREA OF IMPACT** → **TARGETED DEMOGRAPHICS**

PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERNS*

*Across both Watershed plans

SURFACE WATER

- Quantity
- Quality
- Restoration
- protection

GROUNDWATER

- Drinking water
- Groundwater quality
- Knowledge & data

NATURAL RESOURCES

- Fragmentation of habitat
- Invasive species
- Protection & restoration

AREAS OF IMPACT*

*Refer to the Isanti County Local Water Management Plan Draft while still active for further analysis of priority areas linked to resource concerns.

AGRICULTURAL LANDS

DEVELOPED/DEVELOPING LANDS

FORESTED LANDS

SHORELINE & LAKES

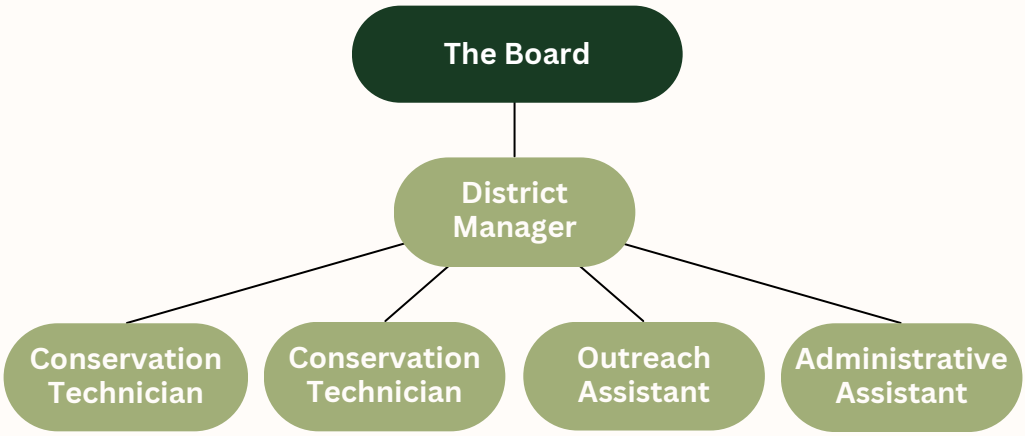
TARGETING "CRITICALLY UNDERTREATED AREAS"

- Effective but not always easy - Takes more money and effort than random, voluntary implementation since landowners must be identified, located, approached, and sold on implementation.
- Target BMPs on watershed areas that contribute the most to water quality impairment—instead of relying on voluntary implementation randomly scattered throughout the watershed.
- A cost-effective strategy: Continue targeting during the early phase of implementation efforts when returns (pollutant-yield reductions per dollar invested in implementation) are still high, and once implementation returns are lower, transition to random (first come, first served).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ISANTI SWCD

THE BOARD	LEADERSHIP	PERFROMANCE STAFF
Offers governance	Reports to board, inspires and guides staff of performance	Aligned with goals of plan and drives it's success

EXISTING ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

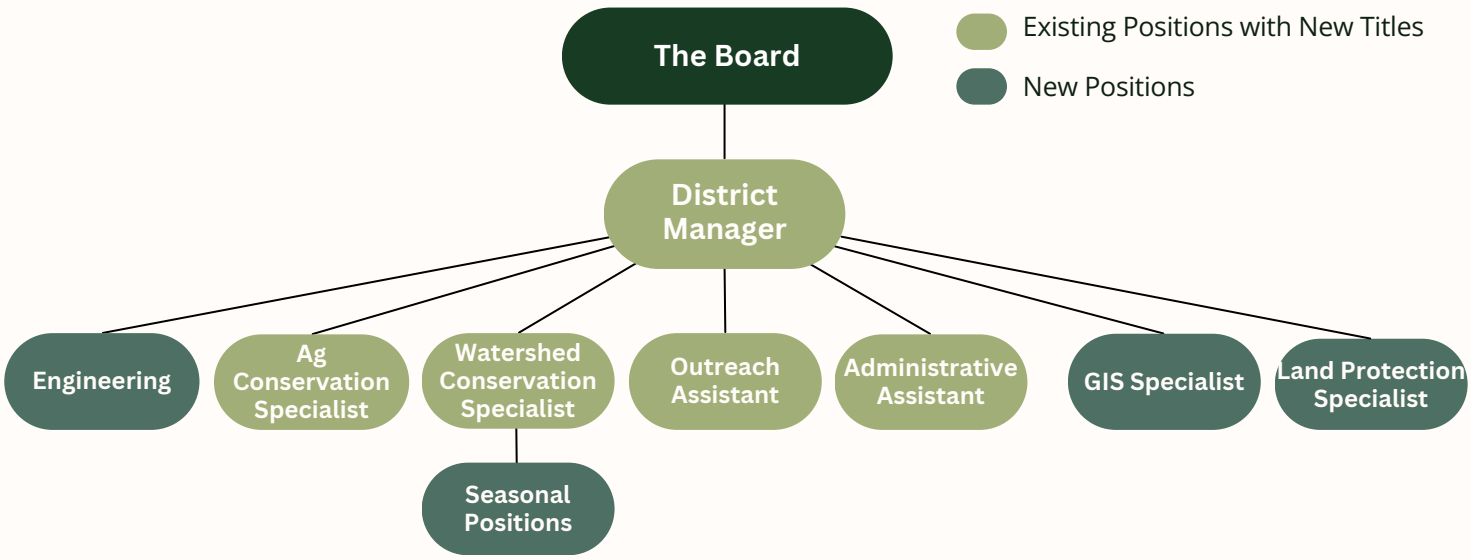


PROPOSED NEW TITLES FOR EXISTING POSITIONS

The newly titled positions give staff definition to their roles, responsibilities, and areas of focus.

Conservation Technician	→	Ag Conservation Specialist
Conservation Technician	→	Watershed Conservation Specialist
Outreach Assistant	→	Program & Outreach Coordinator

NEW & PROPOSED POSITION TITLES TO ADD TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



BREAKDOWN OF POSITIONS

THE FOLLOWING BREAK DOWN OF POSITIONS INCLUDING THOSE WITH NEW TITLES WILL AID IN THE DISTRICT MOVING WITH FLUIDITY AND EFFICIENCY.

DISTRICT MANAGER

This position is responsible for representation of the District. They report directly to the Board and supervises and leads their team.

Primary Responsibilities

- Interpret and implement statutes, regulations, policies, and laws relevant to the District.
- Comprehensive Watershed Plan Coordination.
- Manages and coordinates daily SWCD activities to implement annual and long range plans, staffing needs, and budgets for the SWCD.
- Supervises and directs SWCD personnel, schedules weekly staff meetings, annual performance reviews, and updates personnel policies.
- Assures that a monthly written financial report is prepared for the Supervisors review and approval and monitors the financial position of the District throughout the year.
- Maintains adequate records and prepares needed reports and fiscal planning.
- Identifies sources and recommends actions to the Board to secure operating funds for the SWCD.
- Writes grant applications and seeks other funding proposals as opportunities.
- Assesses the need for conservation work and the priority areas within the District and recommends actions and programs to meet the needs, working with various government agencies and conservation groups.
- Maintains a cooperative relationship with all natural resource agencies and partnerships and coordinates requests for SWCD assistance.
- Administers all local, state and federal programs assigned to the SWCD and keeps updated on all federal, state and local laws and new technology and BMPs that affect the SWCD.
- Assists in supervising technical duties for the implementation of programs and projects.
- Prepares annual plan of work and the proposed budget for SWCD board to review.
- Initiates and directs all public relations for the SWCD.

AG CONSERVATION SPECIALIST

This position will work to demonstrate practices that work for their particular area and will connect agronomic advice with federal, state and local programming and funding.

Primary Responsibilities

- The main responsibility of this position will be working one-on-one with agricultural landowners in developing and implementing comprehensive natural resource management plans and installing best management practices (BMPs) to conserve natural resources.
- Prioritizes data from completed resource inventories and assessments to promote and implement BMPs that improve soil health and prevents groundwater pollution.
- Incorporates economic data into assessments and management plans to determine most cost-effective practices and impacts on production.
- Develops comprehensive natural resource management plans with agricultural landowners.
- Relays information on federal, state and local cost share and incentive programs to landowners.
- Helps develop and implement outreach in close collaboration with Outreach & Program coordinator to ensure seamless implementation of technical assistance and cost share delivery.
- Promotes precision agriculture, GIS tools, and technology in developing innovative solutions associated with natural resources management, including nutrient management.
- Performs technical work according to the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide.
- Works with units of government and private industry for planning purposes in land use and conservation of natural resources.
- Seeks out and apply for any grants that could be utilized by the SWCD for conservation projects.
- Leads no-till drill rental and soil health technical assistance.

WATERSHED CONSERVATION SPECIALIST

This position coordinates local watershed management activities and promotes urban/stormwater BMPs & coordination within the District, acting act as a liaison between federal, state, and local programs and officials along with landowners and developers.

Primary Responsibilities

- Maintain or enhance watershed-based ecosystems to maintain water quality and promote appropriate BMPs & watershed management measures relating to all land uses and water quality impairments.
- Prepare GIS maps.
- Identify wetland restoration opportunities and work with landowners (including institutions and public entities) to create or restore wetlands (including improvement of functions and values), develop wetland banks, and WCA.
- Perform alum treatment, carp management, or other methods identified in feasibility studies to reduce internal loading.
- Work with LGUs to manage shoreline "view corridors" and to adopt innovative shoreland standards to protect buffers, native ecosystems, and habitat corridors.
- Perform analysis and monitoring/modeling guidance.
- Helps develop and implement outreach in close collaboration with Outreach & Program coordinator to ensure seamless implementation of technical assistance, BMPs, Minimal Impact Design Standards, and cost share delivery.
- Assist the Outreach & Program Coordinator with outreach and education to lake associations and lake groups or shoreline owners to promote shoreline restoration projects.
- Grant application development and sourcing/leveraging funding sources to improve water quality.
- Provide cost share for and actively promote installing, implementing, or retrofitting best management practices and green infrastructure on developed or developing lands.
- Provide cost share and technical assistance to homeowners for shoreline restoration, rain gardens, and habitat improvements.
- Work with landowners and local governments to update ordinances, and promote and coordinate land acquisition, conservation easements, land protection, and wetland buffer zoning when land is developing.
- Develop and implement a plan for management and maintenance of ditch system including a system and protocol for establishing BMPs within easement right of ways of existing public ditches.
- Provide cost share and technical assistance to homeowners and landowners.

PROGRAM & OUTREACH COORDINATOR

This position informs the public of the services the SWCD provides, coordinates projects and events, assists with public relations, and promote outreach and engagement which supports:

- Raising awareness and behavioral change.
- Technical assistance and project development.

Primary Responsibilities

- Research outreach strategies and marketing skills and distill data and analytics down to digestible communication.
- Provide focused educational outreach on priority areas (for example, proper ice salt distribution and fertilizer use).
- Outreach and support citizen led groups that do input gathering and decision-making around resource goals.
- Prioritize engaging particular populations that will be relied upon as partners and those who will be impacted by decisions of the District.
- Encourage and help landowners solve their own local natural resource issues and helping them implement their own solutions to their property issues/problems.
- Develop creative, engaging programming and materials that can be distributed to all local staff involved with engagement, working with them to refine materials based on stakeholder input and local needs.
- Create a catalog of stories sharing personal narratives about projects implemented across the District and Watersheds.
- Write and distribute periodic communications sharing success stories, resources, and other information for both the general public and tailored to specific audiences.
- Promote, organize, and host informational workshops, seminars, and other activities for the public to encourage behavioral change that accomplishes the District's mission and goals.
- Work to build relationships with partnerships and support them in enhancing engagement within their own areas or who are interested in partnering to design and implement strategies that can address the District's priorities.
- Work with key stakeholders to reach others in their networks and identify practices they are interested in that can lead to water and natural resources improvement.
- Monitor the effectiveness of outreach campaigns.
- Assist with administrative duties.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

This position is responsible for assisting the District Manager in all aspects of the District's business by performing skilled clerical, bookkeeping, payroll, and customer service functions. In addition, they perform correspondence, reports, local funding administration, state grants processing, and interacts with the public by providing general information relating to the SWCD's activities and services.

Primary Responsibilities

- Keeps District Manager informed of any correspondence received regarding District programs or activities.
- General office and clerical duties such as typing, data entry, scanning, and filing office correspondence; preparing office mailings; ordering office supplies; maintaining office equipment; and processing invoices, expense forms, claim forms and vouchers.
- Assists with tree sale and equipment rentals.
- Maintains monthly calendar of activities and assists in responding to inquiries for information and services from the public.
- Maintains all District paper and electronic records according to retention schedules, procedures, and standards set by the District, State and Federal policies.
- Coordinates board/committee member schedules; makes meeting registrations as needed.
- Prepares/publishes public notices; prepares information for Board or committee action; sends out mailings as requested in advance of meetings; attends meetings as necessary, and prepares minutes related to various boards and committees.
- Maintains all ledgers, accounts receivables/payables, and financial records of the District.
- Prepares Annual Budget with District Manager and Board and interprets and projects the financial standing of the District for the Manager and Board.
- Performs accounting, payroll, and fiscal year-end financial statements for the District.

BREAKDOWN OF ADDITIONAL PROPOSED POSITIONS/SHARED SERVICES

Until these positions can be regularly filled, the current staff must consider how to balance the most important priorities from their current job with the most important add-on activities from the unfilled positions. Leadership reassures it is okay to put aside some nonessential activities from their current role so that the most critical items get done.

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS) SPECIALIST

*PART-TIME, SHARED SERVICES, OR CONTRACTED

- Capture, track, manage and update information through GIS tools.
- GIS graphics and mapping to support District wide efforts.
- Create and manipulate geospatial data to a high degree of integrity, for reporting, spatial analysis, and presentation purposes.
- Utilize multiple databases and GIS software to perform complex spatial analysis for Stormwater.
- Develop, update, manage, and maintain geodatabases, workflows, reports, statistical information, and maps.
- Organize, create, manipulate, enter, and retrieve GIS data for reporting, analysis, and presentation purposes.
- Field data collection of various stormwater assets.
- Interpret survey drawings, site development plans, subdivision plans, and plats of above and underground.
- infrastructure plans.
- Assists other employees with technical support to train and assist system users in new and existing GIS applications.
- Assist Program & Outreach Coordinator with target audience/areas, contacts, and mailings.

ENGINEERING

*FULL-TIME, SHARED SERVICES, OR CONTRACTED

- Supervises geomorphic data collection, organization, and management; assist with data analysis and the compilation of results, conclusions, and recommendations.
- Performs flood routing, storm water runoff, and hydraulic and hydrologic analyses for the Watersheds.
- Prepares design calculations, quantity estimates, and probable cost estimates for proposed projects.
- Prepares or directs the preparation of complex project designs, proposals, specifications, estimates and contract proposals for water quality related projects.
- Approves designs for soil and water quality restoration projects on public and other private lands.
- Supervises construction of conservation projects and attends project meetings.
- Cooperates with involved local, regional, state and federal government agencies on projects and permits.
- Edits technical sections of SWCD plans, reports, etc.

LAND PROTECTION SPECIALIST

*FULL-TIME, SHARED SERVICES, OR CONTRACTED

- Performs technical work according to the NRCS FOTG.
- Develops conservation plans in accordance with the NRCS.
- Coordinate or assist with negotiations, grant applications, and project management for conservation easements and acquisitions, habitat work, CRP, etc.
- Promote and provide technical assistance to develop and implement Landscape. Stewardship Plans and Private Forest Management Plans/ Woodland Stewardship Plans.
- Promote Private Forest Management and BMPS.
- Seek out and apply for any grants that could be utilized by the SWCD for forestry projects.
- Assist with habitat work and conservation planning.
- Work with private landowners to evaluate the natural resources on rural and urban sites.
- Provides information and necessary follow-up on all incentive programs and other conservation opportunities to landowners/operators.
- Work to build relationships with stakeholders in the District to promote and help with implementation of forestry actions.
- Provide cost share to landowners for land restoration or easement establishment or local matching funds for acquisition grant programs.

ADDITIONAL SEASONAL POSITIONS

*PART-TIME, SHARED SERVICES, OR CONTRACTED

- Additional water monitoring assistance.
- Additional assistance with project maintenance.
- Additional assistance with Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

CONTRACTED & SHARED SERVICES

Contracting and sharing services with other agencies helps the District add capacity without hiring new staff.

This alleviates the workload on staff and extends their scope of direct communication with landowners and program enrollment services.

Potential Services to Share or Contract out:

- Conservation Planning & Design.
- GIS Specialist
- Engineering.
- Land Protection Specialist.
- Monitoring & Management.
- AIS

WORK ENVIRONMENT

It’s important to take the time to include the whole team when determining the best small office layout or work scheduling solutions. Further action is needed to determine the individual preferences of employees and who may benefit from a more hybridized schedule.

- Shared/contracted services will divert office space overflow.
- Flexible/multi-purpose office furniture - Shared desks and tables can be configured in a number of space-saving ways. Desks and tables on wheels can be easily rearranged, contributing to a more collaborative work environment.
- Expand vertically - Walls are not effectively utilized in office spaces. Vertical shelving or wall organizing units would help to expand the space.
- Further transition of full-time/part-time employees to hybrid work schedules – encouraging employees to spend a day each week working from home frees up tight office space and gives them more flexibility and freedom. It will create the illusion of a larger office with fewer bodies, but with the same amount of work being done.
- A consistent schedule for remote/hybrid/part-time employees - The consistency will help in planning and will prevent overlapping and overflow.

WAYS TO PREVENT BURNOUT

The risk of losing essential staff due to burnout and overwork can often lead to further downstream consequences. Even employees with an excellent work ethic may falter in situations where they feel overburdened. The District is intent on providing a healthy work environment.

Plan for Increased Workloads

- Due to seasonal demands, project/program deadlines or a staff member leaving or going on an extended leave.
- Leadership will monitor upcoming workload increase and let staff know of its temporary nature.
- Hire seasonal/temporary staff members or outsource work to help the District get through busier periods without putting undue stress on current staff.

Eliminate Unnecessary Tasks

- While the District has evolved, some of our processes may have not.
- By evaluating our processes, we can discover new, improved ways to complete tasks in ways that don't create burnout in employees.

Regular Check-ins

- Helps spot issues before they have detrimental effects.
- Leadership will have regular meetings with employees to see if they are able to keep up with workload or need additional support.
- Nonverbal hints that a staff member is falling behind include, last-minute work completion, errors in the work they complete or changes in behavior, such as a normally friendly employee withdrawing from coworkers or becoming irritable.

Perform Job Analysis of Staff Members

- Helps determine if staff members workloads are reasonable and if they align with job their description.
- Update and define job descriptions and expectations before onboarding a new employee for the position.
- Understand staff members favorite and least favorite part of their job duties.
- Offer staff members the opportunity to take the Clifton Strength Finder test to identify how their strengths and weaknesses help or interfere with their job duties.

Discourage Excessive Work

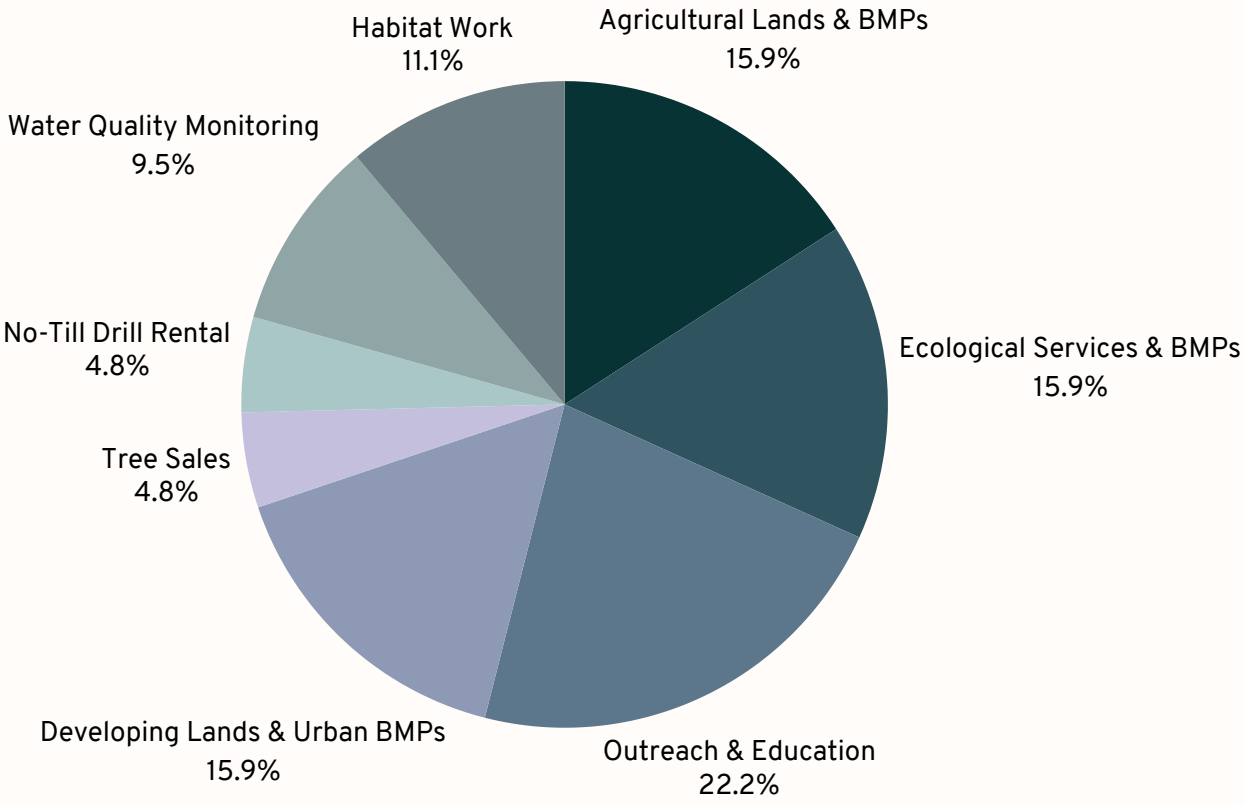
- Reduce the risk of burnout by discouraging excess work hours.
- Delegate externally and reset expectations with stakeholders.
- Evaluate how deadlines are discussed or how people are pushed to increase productivity.
- Praising those who overwork sends the message that staff must push themselves to exhaustion.

Perform Exit Interviews

- Helps to identify issues, if any, that led to the departure.
- Recognize any patterns that may arise from previous exit interviews.

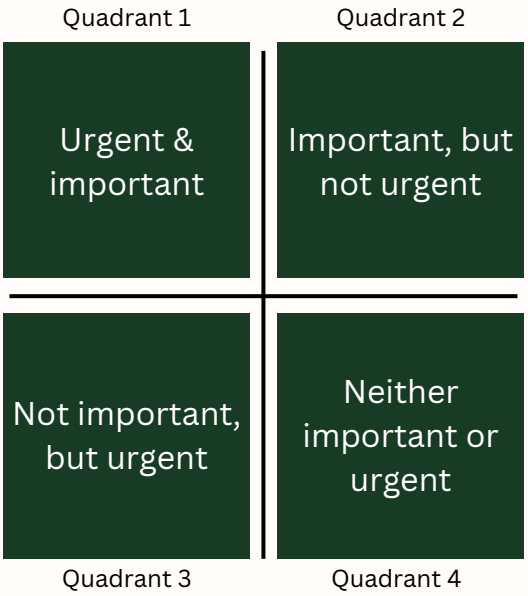
TIME MANAGEMENT

To maintain optimal effectiveness, the district will continually review our annual goals and focus our time spent on projects and services with the highest value, make cuts from the lower priorities so you can focus on the top ones. Staff and Board Member input is included on what they believe is realistic.



Insight gathered from the Strategic Planning Retreat & goals of both Watershed plans.

THE EISENHOWER MATRIX



"Do, decide, delegate, and don't do."
In addition to being a useful tool for time management and organization of staff's to-do items, the Eisenhower Matrix will also determine priority programs that will help meet the District's goals.

- Do the tasks in quadrant 1.
- Decide on when to deal with the tasks in quadrant 2.
- Delegate/contract out the tasks in quadrant 3.
- Delete the items in quadrant 4.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITES

THE GOAL IS TO FUND POSITIONS, NOT JUST PROJECTS. THE FUNDING NEEDS TO LAST LONG ENOUGH TO GET MEASURABLE RESULTS.

In order to achieve this goal, the District is seeking out consistent avenues of funding to support additional staff members.

The District can allocate more funding from a variety of sources by using outreach to show what we give back to the community and its natural resources. In addition, consistent funding will enable the District to develop long-term plans and execute them with fluidity and confidence.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Federal Funding & State Funding *Reference the Rum River Comprehensive Watershed Plan for a breakdown of Federal & State funding sources.
Watershed bases Implementation Funds
County allocation

Non-Profits

- Edge Dairy
- Minnesota Milk
- Ducks Unlimited
- Trout Unlimited
- Pheasants Forever
- Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
- National Fish & Wildlife foundation
- Rough Grouse Society
- The Nature Conservancy
- Woodcock Association
- Audubon
- Minnesota Land Trust

Private Companies may fund education, civic engagement, environmentally safe development, and projects and practices to offset carbon emissions.

- Private agriculture industries,
- Private developers,
- Corporations invested in carbon offsets.

Local foundations may fund education, civic engagement, and other local priority efforts. Seek out sponsorships or memberships with a one-time donation or monthly contribution. Dedicate a plaque, project, or tree planted to them. Promote them through website, social media, or at events.

- Lake Associations
- Lake Improvement Districts
- Local fishing and hunting groups
- Sportsman’s clubs
- Environmental clubs
- Schools
- Businesses
- Private landowners

OUTREACH, EDUCATION, & DELIVERY METHODS

EDUCATION & OUTREACH IS FUNDAMENTAL TO MEETING THE GOALS OF EACH WATERSHED PLAN.

By performing outreach and education that targets goals of the Watershed plans, the District will dually be promoting its own awareness.

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Increased education and awareness of watershed issues, a greater sense of community support, and expanded technical resources will translate to more active resource stewardship.

IMPROVING STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS → **LEADS TO PUBLIC ACTIVATION** → **LEADS TO BEHAVIOR CHANGE**

OUTREACH PRINCIPLES

Differentiate - Research and identify key metrics, partnerships, and demographics in target areas in order to:

- Reach our goals efficiently.
- Understand how to incentivize priority landowners.
- Empower landowners and follow up with them to ensure practices are being successfully integrated.
- Gather meaningful feedback - must be aware of changes to needs and challenges and adjust our response.

Communicate – Create and deliver relevant, timely content and messaging based on the District's priorities and the specific audience.

- Clearly articulate who, how, and where.
- Demystify information, build buy-in, support stakeholder implementation.
- Clearly articulate actionable items and incentives.
- Use multiple avenues of communication.
- Identify potential new offerings.
- Temporarily or permanently remove offerings and services no longer a priority.
- Encourage proactive measures for landowners and farms to mitigate the outcomes of unpredictable weather.
- A "Get to Know your SWCD" campaign.

Nurture - plan, coordinate, and host/sponsor activities, events, and communications to foster and secure:

- New opportunities and outlets to reach landowners.
- Meaningful networking and industry involvement.
- Community involvement and behavior changes.
- Potential pursuit of new partnerships and funding.

*TARGETED DEMOGRAPHICS

Different demographics have different conversation styles and preferences of how they receive their news and information. Using an incorrect approach for a specific demographic will affect their response or inclination to take action.

Urban

- Unaware of their impact on resource issues, but more likely to take independent action when educated.
- Responsive to emotional displays of information and storytelling.
- Information shared can be backed by quantitative research and case studies.
- Multimedia engagement.
- Involved in community and more likely to attend in person meetings.
- Money is NOT typically their main driver to take action.

Shoreline Owners

- Shoreline classifications should be considered when deciding on the approach to communicate.
    - General development lakes
    - Recreational lakes
    - Natural environment lakes
- Engage lake associations/LIDS to share information and to source potential funding.

Recreational Land

- A sense of precedented environmental stewardship.
- Money is NOT typically their main driver to take action.
- Target for Easements and CRP.
- Engage hunting/fishing groups to share information and to source potential funding.

Private Industry/Contractors

- Incentivize environmentally safe development and incorporation of conservation into new development.
- Public opinion is important to them- Promote developers to the community who incorporate and practice conservation principles.
- Engage and educate septic and well contractors of resource concerns and financial resources available to their clients.

Underserved Landowners

Women-

- A sense of precedented environmental stewardship and conservation ethics.
- Money is NOT typically their main driver to take action. Responsive to emotional displays of information and storytelling.
- Help them feel empowered - demystify information with special attention to not belittle their knowledge or capabilities.
- In-person communication and outlets for women-to-women connection will promote action.
- Highlight successful women landowners and farmers - “If she can do it, I can do it.”

New Farmers-

- Insecure land tenure critically inhibits multi-year business planning.
- Offer farm business planning workshops with conservation incorporated from the beginning.
- Seeking financial support and overall encouragement.

Absentee Landowners-

- Reaching out to non-operating landowners could help accelerate the use of conservation practices on leased land.

Farmers

- The types of farms should be considered when deciding on the approach to communicate.
  - Grass-fed beef producers
  - Feedlots
  - Irrigators
  - Corn/soy producers
  - Organic producers
  - Hobby
- Money is the most important factor for decision-making in agriculture.
- Need to be aware of and believe there is a problem for them to take action.
- In-person and on-site is the most productive avenue of communication.
- Consistent communication and follow-ups lead to positive experiences which will be likely shared with their peers.
- Their time is highly valuable - not likely to attend meetings without perceived value.
- Over incentivize and reward them to try something new.
- Reward farmers or groups of farmers who refer others to participate in programs.

Barriers for Farmers

- Misunderstandings due to a lack of expectation-setting around the yield impacts of conservation practices.
- Lack of cash or credit for producers share of cost and limited cash flow while waiting for government reimbursement.
- Socio-cultural factors that prize productivity over resilience.
- Organizational barriers may include conflicting messages from different source and confusion over the roles and responsibilities among the various agencies.

Process of Adoption for Farmers

1. Awareness of the problem or relevant opportunity
2. Interest in more information-data collection of positive perceptions of a practice.
3. Evaluation—how the technology can be applied to the producer's operation,
4. Trial—testing the applicability at a specific site, their own cautious trial- without a small evaluation, chances are greatly diminished for adoption.
5. Adoption—full use of the technology or disadoption- when not sufficiently encouraging or goals are not advanced. This could lead to abandonment or a scaling down of the practice.
6. Adaptation—producer customizes the practice or technique to fit his or her needs. with continuous process of review and modification.

Where Farmers get their Information

*As they progress through each stage listed above.

- In Stages 1 and 2 (Awareness and Interest), producers turn to mass media, government agencies, friends and neighbors, dealers and salespeople (in that order).
- In Stages 3 through 5 (Evaluation, Trial and Adoption), farmers rely on friends, neighbors and family, government agencies, mass media, dealers and salespeople.
- And in Stage 6 (Adaptation), farmers use their own personal experience. In addition, producers are increasingly turning to the Internet and certified crop consultants as sources of information.

***Sources for Targeted Demographics:** AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST & Center for Agriculture in the Environment. (2013). The adoption of conservation practices in agriculture. https://s30428.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/AdoptionofConservationPracticesinAg_FINAL.pdf

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STEPS OF SUCCESSFUL OUTREACH

Define goals/topic.

Identify target audience.

Develop a clear message/action.

Utilize multiple channels of communication with options for a 'call to action.'

Actively engage with responders immediately.

Follow-up with relevant and timely content that the audience wants to learn more about.

OUTREACH EXAMPLE TOPIC

TOPIC:
CONTAMINATION OF DRINKING WATER

TARGET AUDEINCE → Private well owners

MESSAGE → Become aware of water contaminants of local concern and their causes.
Spark interest: Is your septic system affecting your drinking water?

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS → Social media posts, postcard mailings, newspaper ads, flyers

ACTION ENGAGEMENT → Give them resources to become septic system compliant, free water testing kits, what financial help is available?

TOPIC:
CONTAMINATION OF DRINKING WATER

TARGET AUDEINCE → Contractors

MESSAGE → Groundwater contamination affects your clients.
Spark Interest: Generate more business by informing your clients of the low interest loans available to them.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS → Email campaigns, postcard mailings

ACTION ENGAGEMENT → Offer an educational breakfast, what financial assistance is available to their clients?

*Reference the Rum River Comprehensive Watershed Plan for a breakdown of outreach strategies.

MANAGING OUR VISIBILITY

- Collect quality project photos and success stories.
- Be consistent (look/brand).
- Use the power of repetition to instill ‘top of mind awareness’ - The more people see or hear something, the more they remember it.
- Frequency will directly correlate with the effectiveness of cultivating awareness.

PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATION

Educational programs, presentations, webinars, workshops, and field days regarding services, offerings, how-tos, and resource awareness are of value to:

- Our target audience.
- Current and potential employees.
- The community.
- Current and potential avenues of funding.
- Of value to our natural resource concerns.

And

- Gives learners flexibility.
- Adapted to the educated – taught at a level that applies.
- Utilizes relatable experiences.
- Provides opportunities for application.
- Engages positive emotions.
- The content is compelling and based on specific objectives.
- Provides further resources or opportunities for what the audience wants to learn more about.
- Has multi-day options, are hands-on, practical, and teachers have deep experience with the presented topics.

Types of measurable outputs to use in promoting outreach success and progress reports

1. # of teachers and classrooms engaged.
2. # of workshops and seminars given.
3. # of participants/projects/partners identified.
4. # of stakeholder group meetings.
5. # of farmers using BMPs.
6. # of feet of shoreline restored.
7. # of testing clinics.
8. # of operations certified.
9. # of Woodland Stewardship plans.
10. # of Landscape Stewardship plans.
11. # of assessments.
12. # of acres under fertilizer management plans.
13. # of acres under nutrient management plans.
14. # of unused wells closed.

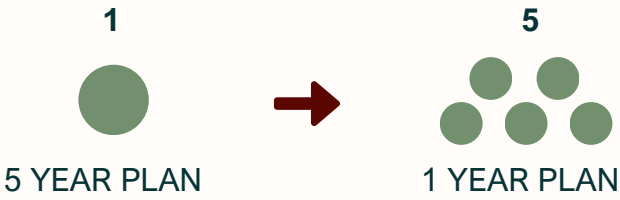
What staff is involved?

Everyone! Each staff member will assist the Program & Outreach Coordinator organize events, gather information, support technical assistance, and promote project development regarding their area of interest.

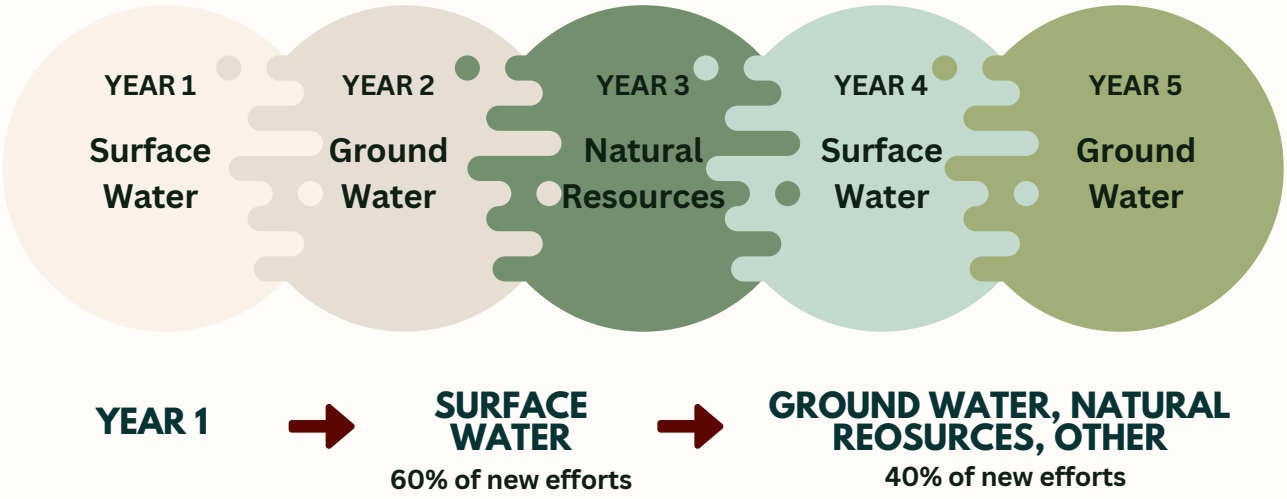
A "SLOW RELEASE" APPROACH TO OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Each year will significantly focus NEW efforts on an individual resource concern (60/40) so not to inundate staff and maximize the District's impact.

- The goal of this concept is to breakdown the immense agendas of each watershed plan into bite-size, realistic and actionable means of implementation.



- Outreach strategies in targeted areas will be narrowed down to saturate the targeted demographics.
- Measurable goals for the designated resource concern will be determined at the beginning of each year.
- The resource concern of focus for each year is determined by priority and the District's assessment of capabilities.



Key variables that need to be determined each year to execute "slow approach" outreach campaigns

HIGH PRIORITY MEASURABLE GOALS → HIGH PRIORITY PRACTICES

PRIMARY TARGET AREAS → PRIMARY AUDIENCE

EXAMPLE TIMELINE & ACTIONS

THE DISTRICT UTILIZES SEVERAL TOOLS TO GUIDE THEM INTO THE FUTURE INCLUDING LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM TIMELINES, CALENDARS, AND PROGRESS REPORTS.

JANUARY
- Target additional funding.
- Drive outreach & education efforts & update outreach calendar.
- Evaluate office space and staff work schedules

APRIL
- Quarterly progress report.
- Update social media calendar.

JULY
- Quarterly progress report.
- Update social media calendar.

OCTOBER
- Develop annual work plan & assessment of capabilities.
- Evaluate programs & upcoming year's budget.
- Create a job posting for additional positions.

NOVEMBER
- Quarterly progress report.
- Update social media calendar.
- Develop seasonal position descriptions.
- Engage schools to add conservation curricullum.

JANUARY
- Target additional funding.
- Drive outreach & education efforts & update outreach calender.

QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT

- Time management breakdown/percentages.
- Measurable outputs.
- Budget to actual.
- Outreach performance.

OUTREACH CALENDER

Frequency per year PER CAMPAIGN

- Local media – quarterly.
- Social media - weekly.
- Mailings- 2-3 times a year.
- Workshops- twice a year.
- Events- once a year per event.
- Meetings- visit each group once a year.
- School outreach- once a year.

LANDOWNER FOLLOW-UP CALENDER

- Staff members create individual spreadsheets with landowners worked with to track interactions, personable information, and times for follow-ups.
- This can lead to a positive experience for landowners and they are more likely to refer and encourage others to implement similar practices.

SOCIAL MEDIA CALENDER

- Based off yearly approach and outreach calendar.
- Develop a quarterly/biannually timeline to post about upcoming events, deadlines, campaigns, resource concerns, etc.
- Use national holidays or environmental days of recognition to fill in slow spots.

FURTHER CAPABILITIES & CONCLUSION

MANAGEMENT OF PLAN

Align and Execute

- Identify critical gaps and constraints we need to overcome to ensure success.

Inspire Action

- Empower key leaders and project managers to drive action toward goals.

Commit to Implementation Framework

- Develop reasonable and achievable pace around implementation to institutionalize progress.

ASSESSMENT OF CAPABILITIES

*To be analyzed at the beginning of each new year

- Leadership – Does leadership have everything they need to set direction, align resources, inspire team?
- Skills and Systems – Are skills, abilities, and systems in place to support initiative?
- Structure- Does our organizational structure help or hurt efforts?
- Financial capacity – Can we support the level of financial investment required to realize success?

ELEVATING OUR DISTRICT

We anticipate increased education and awareness, a greater sense of community support, and expanded technical resources will translate to more active resource stewardship.

Initiatives to promote behavior change are often most effective with direct contact and communication which has been proven to be the most effective way for getting landowners to establish conservation practices. By lightening the burden on staff, they will have more time for direct, on-site communication, and follow-ups with landowners in targeted resource areas.

The District's approach and ways of engagement can evolve over time as new understandings emerge. This plan will guide us to achieve our goals, meet those of the Rum River and Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed plans, and promote a conscientious culture of environmental stewardship.

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