

# 2024

## Annual Plan

# Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District

Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) is organized under provisions of Minnesota Statue Chapter 103C and is governed by a board of five elected supervisors.



### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



**Dave Ausen**  
Treasurer  
District 1

**Chris Dahl**  
Chairman  
District 2

**Vickie Heers**  
Supervisor  
District 3

**Curt Helland**  
Secretary  
District 4

**Don Kropp**  
Vice-Chairman  
District 5

### SWCD STAFF



**Brenda Lageson**  
District Manager

**Chad Billat**  
Private Lands Biologist

**Lindsey Zeitler**  
Resource Conservationist

**Mark Trnka**  
Conservation Technician

**Senja Viktora**  
District Technician

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## **Our Mission Statement:**

To serve the residents of Freeborn County by creating an awareness of soil and water resource concerns, by offering practical alternatives to manage those concerns, and by providing technical assistance (as local resources allow) to apply and maintain best management practices (BMPs) that impact water quality while sustaining soil productivity and land user profits.

# Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District 2024 Annual Plan

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this Annual Plan is to identify a course of action for 2024 that will help guide supervisor policy decisions and resulting staff initiatives. Freeborn County SWCD has adopted the Freeborn County “Local Water Management Plan” as our Long-Range Comprehensive Plan. We will address those areas of concern in the water plan that apply to our roles and responsibilities as directed by State Statues 103c. We will briefly discuss several objectives and supporting action items (with identified work efforts to accomplish the listed objective) that we plan to concentrate on.

A Staff Model will show how time may be allocated in 2024 utilizing present staff.

High priority erosion areas will be identified and needed conservation Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be discussed.

A summary of specific practices applied in 2023 will illustrate which practices are in demand and give us an indication of potential workload for 2024. This will determine estimated revenues and expenditures.

As we are moving away from a single county water plan and planning on a watershed scale to several One Watershed, One Plans (Cedar/Wapsipinicon, Shell Rock/Winnebago, LeSueur, Blue Earth, and Cannon watersheds) our objectives will reflect that moving forward.

## II. Objectives & Action Items

### Objective # 1

Address soil erosion and soil erosion concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by planning and implementing a variety of conservation practices. Practices will include Water and Sediment Control Basins, Terraces, Grassed Waterways, and Grade Stabilizing Structures, etc., and vegetative seeding will help protect the structural integrity of these practices.

#### Action Items:

1. Work with landowners/operators with high priority erosion problems to identify their needs, discuss conservation practices alternative and then provide design and construction supervision assistance to install 10 structural practices on 10 tracts.

### **Object #1 continued.....**

2. Use all available information and education methods to promote conservation practice installation. Inform them of cost sharing opportunities that may exist and technical assistance available from our local SWCD/NRCS office.
3. Spot check and monitor existing cost shared practices during the contract lifespan to ensure continued function and effectiveness in erosion control and water quality protection.
4. Communicate with State and Federal legislators, County Commissioners, and local agency officials to keep them aware of our programs, services, and funding needs.
5. Attend and participate in MASWCD Legislative Day at the Capitol.
6. Keep County Commissioners informed of our programs, services and financial needs through our Annual Plan, Annual Report, and Web Site.
7. Participate in the Freeborn Area Soil Health Team to promote the use of soil health practices on working lands.
8. Assist landowners to effectively plant native grasses, native wildflowers, pasture mixes, and no-till soybeans by having a no-till drill available for use.

### **Objective # 2**

Address surface water concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by working cooperatively with the Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA) and local landowners.

#### **Action Items:**

1. Provide information to the Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA) staff for future Clean Water Fund Implementation Grants and other grant applications.
2. Use local news media and our SWCD newsletter, etc. to inform and educate landowners about current and future expected assistance opportunities.
3. Utilize GBERBA grants to encourage and cost share high priority BMPs

### **Objective # 3**

Address drainage concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas; reduce sediment delivery to water bodies; increase surface water storage capacity and enhance wildlife habitat by enrolling 200 acres in long-term easements for wetland restoration and riparian buffers.

#### **Action Items:**

1. Work with state, federal, non-governmental, and other local partners to promote and implement ReInvest in Minnesota (RIM) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
2. Encourage landowners to enroll in easements in high-ranking priority areas for wetland restorations.
3. Encourage landowners to enroll in easements in high priority areas for buffers identified in the "Other Waters" list completed in 2017.
4. Work with NRCS in monitoring existing easements for compliance and effectiveness.
5. Include the above-mentioned program opportunities in all ongoing information and educational programs.

#### **Objective # 4**

Address drainage concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by assisting with the implementation of the state’s goal to achieve a no net loss in the quantity, quality, and biological diversity of existing wetlands.

##### **Action Items:**

1. Continue to partner with Freeborn County Environmental Services, the City of Albert Lea, and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources to implement the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) Rules, Chapter 8420 of State Statutes by continued representation on the local Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) for WCA.
2. Assist local landowners by keeping them informed of the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act Rules and direct them to NRCS for USDA – “Swampbuster” rules that may apply.
3. Include wetland concerns in our educational and informational programs.

#### **Objective # 5**

Address soil erosion and soil quality concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by maintaining our existing Tree Program.

##### **Action Items:**

1. Continue to provide a source for landowners/operators to access quality tree and shrub planting stock for conservation purposes at reasonable costs.
2. Continue to offer Windbreak and Shelterbelt design assistance to those requesting it.
3. Continue to provide planting equipment for rent at reasonable rates.
4. Use local newsletter and media to inform residence of tree program and services available.

#### **Objective # 6**

Address surface water concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by maintaining an effective informational and educational program.

##### **Action Items**

1. Publish an annual newsletter highlighting programs, services, and current events.
2. Use our SWCD website and Facebook page to keep the public informed and provide access to our services.
3. Continue to provide timely educational initiatives for presentation in our County Fair Booth.
4. Write periodic newspaper articles on events, new programs, and services.
5. Use the local news media or newsletter to purchase advertising as needed for local projects.

#### **Objective # 7**

Address surface water concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by working cooperatively with the LeSueur River Watershed Project, Winnebago Watershed Project, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Freeborn County Environmental Services, and involved local landowners to implement BMPs in Priority Management Zones (PMZ).

##### **Action Items:**

1. Review information for Shell Rock River Watershed, LeSueur River Watershed, Winnebago Watershed, and Cedar River Watershed.
2. Contact Landowners and operations in watersheds to discuss BMP options.
3. Inform landowners of existing conservation programs and identify sites for future grant applications.

### **Objective # 8**

Address surface water concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by implementing the Minnesota Buffer Law as directed in Minnesota Statute 103F.48.

#### **Action Items:**

1. Inform landowners, producers, and partners of law requirements and provide conservation technical and financial assistance.
2. Assist landowners in implementation.
3. Assist with validation of compliance when requested by landowners.

### **Objective # 9**

Address surface water concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by assisting landowners in applying and becoming certified in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP).

#### **Action Items:**

1. Inform landowners and partners about the program through the SWCD newsletter, website, and at informational meetings.
2. Assist landowners through the application and certification process.
3. Assist landowners with the implementation of new BMPs to achieve certification and inform them about technical and financial assistance opportunities.

### **Objective # 10**

Address soil erosion and soil quality concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by implementing the soil loss ordinance as directed by Minnesota Statute 103F.400.

#### **Action Items:**

1. Inform landowners, producers, partners, and citizen of the ordinance.
2. Field complaints and work with BWSR as identified in the Statute.
3. Assist landowners to become compliant and inform them of technical and financial assistance opportunities.

### **Objective # 11**

Address surface water concerns as identified in priority areas of One Watershed, One Plan planning areas by participating in the Cedar River and Wapsipinicon Watersheds, Shell Rock River and Winnebago Watersheds, and LeSueur River Watershed planning areas.

#### **Action Items:**

1. Have Supervisors represent Freeborn County SWCD on Policy Boards.
2. Have staff represent Freeborn SWCD on Steering/Implementation, and Advisory Boards.
3. Communicate priorities and needs of Freeborn SWCD so that they can be included in the Cedar River and Wapsipinicon Watersheds, Shell Rock River and Winnebago Watersheds, LeSueur River Watershed planning areas.



### III. High Priority Erosion Problems:

High priority erosion problems” includes areas where erosion from wind and water is occurring equal to or in excess of 2 x “T” tons per acre per year, areas that exhibit active gully erosion, is identified as high priority in the comprehensive local water plan or is identified in the conservation district’s comprehensive plan. Soil loss tolerance (T) is the maximum amount of soil loss in tons per acre per year that can be tolerated and still permit a high level of crop productivity to be sustained economically and indefinitely.

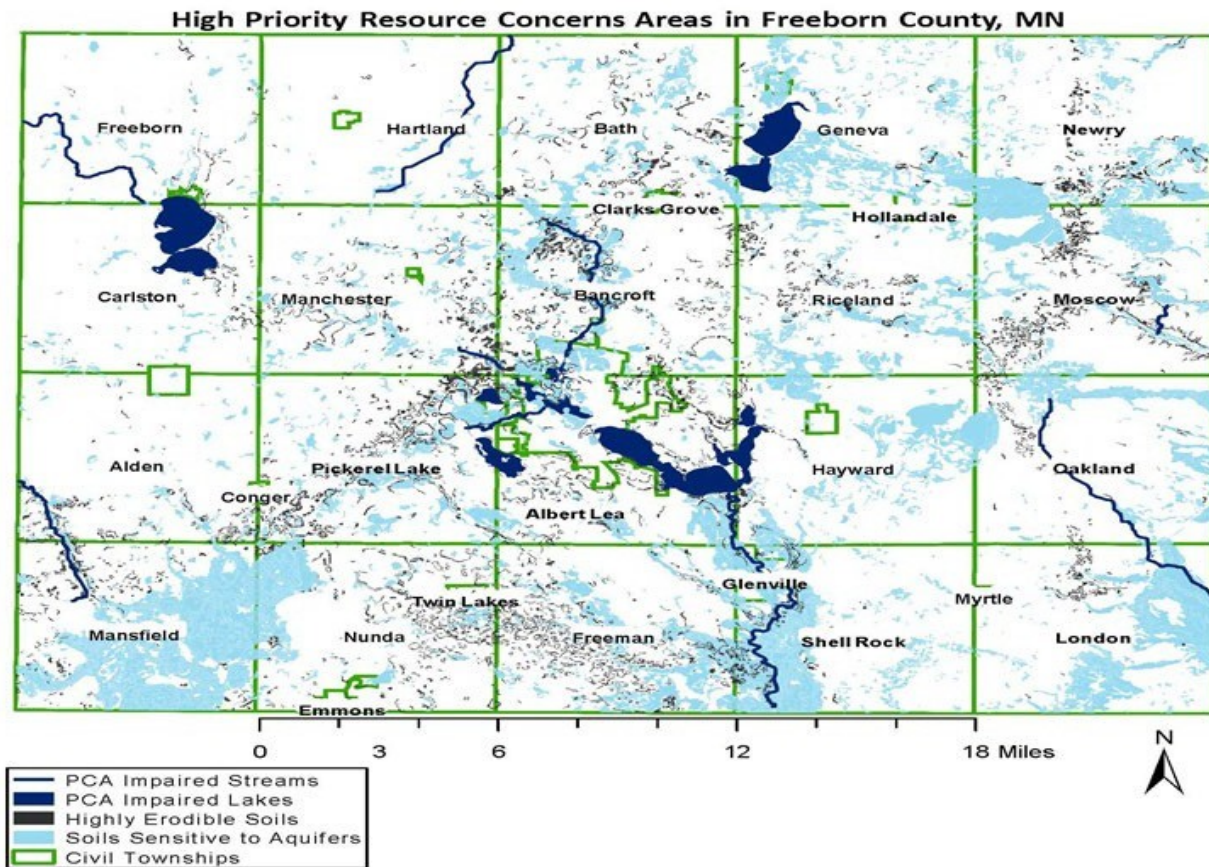
### IV. High Priority Water Quality Problems:

“High priority water quality problems” means areas where sediment, nutrients, chemicals, or other pollutants discharge to Department of Natural Resources designated protected waters or to any high priority water as identified in a comprehensive local water plan or the conservation district’s comprehensive plan, or discharge to a sinkhole or groundwater. The delivery rate of pollutants to the water sources is in amounts that will impair the quality or usefulness of the water resource.

### V. High Priority Recourse Concerns:

Areas needing conservation practices installed: As shown in the map below

- Practices needed to control high priority erosion problems: waterways, terraces, water and sediment control basins, conservation tillage systems, cover crops, grade stabilization structures, and windbreaks.



The MN Pollution Control Agency has determined through Total Maximum Daily Load (TDML) studies that the streams and lakes shown above are impaired for aquatic life and aquatic recreation.

The soils map unit is considered highly erodible (HEL) if the potential erodibility exceeds 8 times the Soil Loss Tolerance (T). T is the maximum amount of soil erosion that can occur on a soil type without decreasing long-term productivity. Most HEL soils have steep slopes.

Soils sensitive to aquifers are generally sandy or silt soils where water infiltration rates can be high and the potential exists for groundwater pollution. These soils are generally more vulnerable to wind and water erosion as well.

## VI. High Priority Feedlots

Freeborn County considers every site over 10 animal units a feedlot, the State of Minnesota considers feedlots as 50 animal units or more unless in shoreland, then the threshold is 10. The following numbers reflect all livestock sites in Freeborn County over 10 animal units: 331 total feedlots.

## VII. State Cost-Share Allocation & Implementation Policies

- Freeborn County SWCD’s policy is to reserve all its available contract money for high priority erosion and/or water quality problems. Primarily gully control in Highly Erodible Land (HEL) or near sensitive surface water bodies (see map on page 5). However, because soil inclusion can make it possible to find small highly erodible areas in non-HEL soil types, the evidence of gullies is used to determine eligibility.
- The maximum cost share is 75% of project cost for standard cost share. Occasionally, state, and federal cost share is ‘piggybacked’ on large scale projects. This may provide the incentive needed to encourage landowners to install a high priority project. When cost share requests exceed funds available the district board will prioritize according to location to sensitive resources and cost effectiveness etc.
- Our State Cost Share standard allocation for Fiscal Year 2023 was \$16,482. After deducting the allowable 20% for Technical and Administrative Expenses, the balance available for projects is \$13,185. Applicants are paid based on invoices and receipts for the contractor after the project is satisfactorily completed. A Non-Structural Land Management Plan was adopted for 2020 that allows a flat rate to be paid on buffers, cover crops, and no-till.

## 2023 Calendar Year Summary

State Cost Share Program*	Dollar Amount
*Contracts finalized, and payments made including Watershed Based Implementation Funds (WBIF)	
Non-Structural Contracts Cover Crops, Prairie Strips, Well Sealings	\$84,252
Structural Contracts Grassed Waterway	\$50
<b>Total for 2023</b>	<b>\$84,302</b>
Federal Environmental Incentive Program (EQIP) Dollars	Dollar Amount
Practice Types: Cover Crops, Residue Management: No-Till/Strip-Till/Mulch Till, Brush Management, Energy Efficient Lighting Systems, Seasonal High Tunnels for Crops, Combustion System Improvement	\$180,538
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Dollars	Dollar Amount
Practice Types: Cover Crops, Nutrient Management, Integrated Pest Management, Conservation Crop Rotation, Reduced Tillage Enhancements	\$852,309



## VIII. Freeborn County SWCD Staff Model-2024

**Goal:** High functioning staff contributing to significant impacts for conservation in the Freeborn County SWCD District.

**Objective(s):** Plan for and distribute work wisely across staff to fulfill legal requirements, comply with agreements with other agencies/ organizations (especially with funding obligations) and attain conservation goals/objectives set by the Freeborn County SWCD Board.

Manager	Private Lands Biologist	Resource Conservationist	District Technician	Conservation Technician
Adm./Personnel Mgmt. – 37%	Easement Lead – CREP/ RIM/CRP – 50%	Structural BMP Lead – 48% Grassed Waterways, Grade Stabilization Structures, other eFOTG structural practices. Included State Cost Share and NRCS funded programs.	AgCertainty (MAWQCP) Lead – 50%	Structural BMP – 40% Grassed Waterways, Grade Stabilization Structures, other eFOTG structural practices. Included State Cost Share and NRCS funded programs.
Fiscal Mgmt./ Bookkeeping – 30%	WCA – 8%	Non-Structural/Soil Health Lead – 18%	Structural BMP Assist – 25% Grassed Waterways, Grade Stabilization Structures, other eFOTG structural practices Included State Cost Share and NRCS funded programs.	Non-Structural/Soil Health – 10%
Local Water Management – 18% 1W1P Cedar, Shellbago, LeSueur	Structural BMP Assist – 21% Grassed Waterways, Grade Stabilization Structures, other eFOTG structural practices Included State Cost Share and NRCS funded programs.	Buffer Law Implementation/ Excessive Soil Loss Law – 15%	Outreach, education – 10%	Buffer Law Implementation/ Excessive Soil Loss Law – 10%
Overall Prog. Mgmt. – 10%	Local Water Management – 12% 1W1P Cedar, Shellbago, LeSueur	Local Water Management – 10% Blue Earth, 1W1P Cedar/ Wapsipinicon, Shell Rock Advisory, LeSueur	Assist on other programs – 5%	Assist on other programs – 30%
	Tasks as assigned – 2%	Tasks as assigned – 2%	Tasks as assigned – 3%	Tasks as assigned – 3%
Training, Project Development, General Adm. – 5% or more	Training, Project Development, General Adm. – 7% or more	Training, Project Development General Adm. – 7% or more	Training, Project Development General Adm. – 7% or more	Training, Project Development General Adm. – 7% or more
<b>100% FTE</b>	<b>100% FTE</b>	<b>100% FTE</b>	<b>100% FTE</b>	<b>100% FTE</b>

## IX. Freeborn County SWCD 2024 Budget

### Revenues

County	\$188,000
State	\$232,752
<b>Total Intergovernmental</b>	<b>\$420,752</b>
<b>Charges for Services</b>	<b>\$ 63,680</b>

### Miscellaneous Revenue

Interest	\$3,000
Misc. Other	\$100
<b>Total Misc. Revenue</b>	<b>\$3,100</b>
<b>Reserves</b>	<b>\$81,670</b>

**Total Revenue \$566,202**

### Expenses

#### District Operations

Personal Services	\$458,156
Other Services/Charges	\$48,436
Supplies	\$1,000
Capital Outlay	\$2,000

**Total District Operations \$509,592**

### Project Expenditures

District	\$26,850
State	\$32,760
<b>Total Project Expenditures</b>	<b>\$59,610</b>

**Total Expenditures \$569,202**