

# Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

## SWCD GENERAL FUND SUPPORT: SF1712 Ruud / HF1624 Fischer

*Providing an ongoing state general fund investment in SWCDs*

### About Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs):

Minnesota SWCDs are special-purpose units of government established under state law to carry out conservation programs at the local level. The districts work with landowners to provide technical expertise and financial assistance to landowners to maintain and improve the quality, quantity, distribution and sustainability of natural resources including surface water, groundwater, soil, and ecological resources. Each SWCD has a five-member, locally elected Board of Supervisors to set policies, provide local input, and ensure oversight and accountability for the district.

### WHAT IS NEEDED – ONGOING STATE GENERAL FUND INVESTMENT IN SWCDs

Soil and Water Conservation Districts' current estimated funding needs total \$28 million per year, statewide. Funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts is a shared state and local obligation. **SWCDs need an ongoing general fund investment of \$14 million per year.**

**Background.** SWCD Capacity Funding in the amount of \$11 million per year has been a Clean Water Fund appropriation over the past two biennia (FY16-17, FY18-19).

That funding has enabled SWCDs across the state to hire more than 110 full time equivalent positions to work one on one with landowners to design and install conservation practices in prioritized and targeted areas to help achieve measurable water quality results.



**Source.** Clean Water Funds were never seen as a long term funding source for meeting this need. Every two years, the slate is wiped clean for clean water fund appropriations and new recommendations for how the funds should be spent are developed by the Clean Water Council. Similar to other locally elected units of government who get state aid, SWCDs need a committed, ongoing investment from the state through the general fund. Without this funding, we will unfortunately be seeing SWCD staff layoffs, and a decreased capacity or ability of SWCDs to help make accomplishments toward our clean water goals.

**Amount.** When it started, \$11 million was half of an estimated \$22 million annual need. Current funding needs total \$28 million per year, and half of that would be \$14 million. That funding needs a permanent home in the state's general fund appropriations through the Board of Water and Soil Resources.



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SWCD employees, guided by their elected boards, work tirelessly with cooperating agricultural producers, forest landowners, and urban residents. Local SWCDs work directly with landowners to implement the state's soil and water conservation policies.

**OBSTACLES TO CLEAN WATER AND HEALTHY SOIL**

**The current funding structure for soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) falls short of providing necessary resources to meet our statutory obligations. The dual problems of inadequacy and unreliability lead to inconsistent levels of effort and responsiveness to citizen expectations.**

Current SWCD operational funding generally consists of county contributions, state contributions (small general fund appropriation, and Clean Water Fund appropriations which are not expected to continue), and a variety of local or federal agreements and partnerships.



A 2018 analysis by the Board of Water and Soil Resources calculated a **current shortfall of just under \$28 million per year across all SWCDs in the state**. This translates to inadequate funding to deliver the services essential for SWCDs.

Many SWCDs face volatility in their day-to-day operations due to varied funding at the county level. This is coupled by insufficient state resources, many of which are competitive in nature and directed at projects and practices rather than the people it takes to make those projects happen.

**Total estimated need= \$45,320,000 / year**  
**State funding = \$3,720,500 \***  
**County funding = \$13,811,543**  
**Shortfall = \$27,780,000 per year**

*\* State funding excludes \$11,000,000 of Clean Water Funds that went to SWCDs each year of the last two biennia; that funding is not ongoing; MASWCD is seeking \$14 million per year in General Funds, half of our current estimated need, to go SWCDs through the Board of Water and Soil Resources.*

