

BWSR WATER QUALITY AND STORAGE PROGRAM REPRESENTS  
IMPORTANT SHIFT IN CONSERVATION PRACTICES AND PRIORITIES

Last year, the legislature authorized the establishment of the Water Quality and Storage program now found in [Minn. Stat. § 103F.05](#), with a one-time funding allocation of \$2 million. The Board of Water and Soil Resources has developed the program guidelines and the [first round of grant applications has been advertised, with project proposals due April 4<sup>th</sup>](#).

**HF3813 provides an additional \$10 million in bonding to fund water storage projects.**

**PURPOSE** Water storage slows runoff to rivers and reduces overall water volume by allowing water to soak in.

**NO RANDOM ACTS OF CONSERVATION** Practices must show the amount of flow reduction they will achieve.

**TWO FOCUS AREAS** Priority is given to projects in watersheds with flat, agricultural uplands that drain to the steep lower river reaches. More water than ever before is being conveyed by our rivers. Water storage in headwater areas benefits land owners upstream losing river frontage and everyone downstream. Focusing on these 2 watersheds and headwaters locations for projects uses state funding most effectively.

1) **MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED** Eighty acres a year are lost to channel widening, bluff collapse and ravine growth. Flashy flows widen and deepen rivers, damaging infrastructure like State Highways 169, 19 and 14 and bridges. Downstream, eroded sediment clouds the water, impairs river habitat, clogs navigation channels, and buries or compromises infrastructure like levees, trails and roads (and even towns). Communities, individuals and agribusiness leaders supported the passage of the water storage initiative. That is also where state dollars can most significantly improve water quality through water storage. The Le Sueur and Greater Blue Earth watersheds have received the most study.

2) **TRIBUTARIES TO THE MISSISSIPPI IN SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA** The Root and Zumbro are well-studied and the Cannon has well known sediment and phosphorus problems.

**WHEN** April 1 to July 1 is when flows are most erosive. Water storage is especially important since Minnesota is receiving larger, individual rain events and for each rain event, a greater portion of it runs off because less water is held in plant roots and leaves (because we grow annuals which are very small then), and less water soaks in (due to decreased soil health, wetland loss, tiling, and impermeable surfaces).

Water storage projects are different from flood control structures which target the very highest flows. Those kinds of projects don't address the more frequent, channel-forming flows that are targeted with this program.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** Carre E. Jennings, Research & Policy Director [cjennings@freshwater.org](mailto:cjennings@freshwater.org)