

BWSR celebrates outstanding 2017 conservation work

December 19, 2017

St. Paul, Minn.

As the year draws to a close, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) recognized the excellent work done locally in Minnesota communities to advance conservation.

John Jaschke, BWSR Executive Director, explains, “Our local government partners are the key conservation resource for their community. They answer questions, provide resources, and are the trusted experts on specific conservation issues and concerns. This year we are pleased to announce awards for two exceptional employees of local government, and a county conservation award.”

2017 Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee

Peter Mead, District Administrator for Becker Soil and Water Conservation District, was honored at the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts annual meeting on December 5, 2017. Peter has helped the district achieve success leading up to and during 2017, such as leading a number of projects, including the Becker County Drainage Ditch Inventory and Inspection Project, the South Branch Wild Rice Sediment Reduction Project, and the Buffalo Red Shallow Lakes and Mainstem Improvement Strategy. Peter’s initiative has also resulted in improved technology to increase effectiveness of their work, including a lake prioritization tool and modernized mapping and permitting tools.

2017 Outstanding Watershed District Employee

Phil Belfiori, District Administrator Rice Creek Watershed District, was honored at the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts annual meeting on December 1, 2017. He uses collaboration and partnerships to focus on implementation of on-the-ground projects to improve water quality and reduce flooding in a complex watershed that has urban, suburban, and rural water concerns. With the support of the District’s Board of Managers he has implemented pro-active repair and maintenance of the public drainage system and oversees one of the state’s busiest wetland conservation act local government units.

In 2017 Phil used his extensive background in watershed and water resource management to develop a strategic plan Rice Creek Watershed District, increase staff capacity and retention, while increasing the number of projects the District is working on now and in the future. Phil positioned the Rice Creek Watershed District as a leader in Minnesota through innovative approaches to issues such as stormwater reuse, carp management, and wetland banks.

2017 Association of Minnesota Counties-BWSR County Conservation Award

The 2017 County Conservation Award was given to Rock County. Following heavy flooding in June 2014, the Rock County Land Management Office (LMO) surveyed damages to infrastructure as well as erosion control projects and other conservation practices designed to protect waters of the county. Nearly 600 flooded areas and constructed conservation practices were evaluated. The estimated cost to fully repair and remediate these projects totaled \$4.2 million. The county outlined the need for funding and received \$1.5 million to cost-share projects with landowners that would repair damages or implement new more durable conservation measures on the land for water quality benefits. To date they have accomplished nearly 150 engineered waterways, water and sediment control basins, and stream bank and shore land protection projects.

Rock County was able to leverage \$1.5 million in state funds and doubled the impact through local appropriations, private cost-share match, and the use of federal funds.

The project also led to flood retention methods on a smaller scale through projects designed to retain flood water and store it on the land. The County LMO partnered with private engineers, the regional Technical Service Area (TSA) engineers, and SWCD staff to accomplish the large work load involved with designing and installing these conservation projects.

###

BWSR is the state soil and water conservation agency, and it administers programs that prevent sediment and nutrients from entering our lakes, rivers, and streams; enhance fish and wildlife habitat; and protect wetlands. The 20-member board consists of representatives of local and state government agencies and citizens. BWSR's mission is to improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.