



Conservation progress reporting made easier

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Dating back as early as 1986, the Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR) has required reports from local units of government that indicate progress made in protecting the state's resources. Throughout the years, the method to complete this reporting has changed, first from paper reports (1986-1996), to floppy disk submission (1997-2002) and finally to the online eLINK database (2003-2012).

Based on feedback and assistance from local government partners, BWSR is now leading development of a new web-based system to track statewide conservation projects and activities, meant to improve efficiency, support partnerships, increase transparency for general public access and to provide for technology upgrades.

Melissa Lewis, BWSR project team lead, is working with contractor TetraTech to design the new database. According to Lewis, the new database will be much more user-friendly and allow for greater access to data by partners and members of the public.

"We want the new database to be easy to use and to provide the data that we know is in demand – data that shows results from implementation of conservation practices on the ground," Lewis said. "We are working hard to listen to our stakeholders and other users of the current eLINK system to ensure we make the appropriate upgrades."

With funding provided by the Clean Water Fund (from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment), the new system will integrate and streamline current grant processes such as applications, work plans, and reports; reducing data entry and bringing efficiencies to state and local governments. Improved speed and system response will provide data and results back more quickly to local government.

The new system will also provide public access to summarized grant and project information, and take advantage of the feature provided by the Legislative Coordinating Commission (LCC) Minnesota Legacy website which allows upload of data about legacy-funded projects.

Finally, the new system will include technology upgrades for speed and data entry, be accessible from multiple browsers, use the latest mapping technology, and will incorporate features such as password resets and messaging; all while ensuring the latest appropriate security protocols are followed.

Lewis said the goal of the new system follows the spirit of reporting requirements of the past – to tell the story of conservation successes across Minnesota.

The new eLINK is expected to debut in April 2013.

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The current eLINK system is an online database, accessible on BWR's website.