

*Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil  
resources by working in partnership with  
local organizations and private landowners.*



# 2007 Strategic Plan

*Executive Summary*  
*BWSR 2007 Strategic Planning*

*CREDITS*

*Plan Development*

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# *Executive Summary*

## *BWSR 2007 Strategic Planning*

### **Overview**

BWSR's strategic planning effort resulted in a modified statement of mission & beliefs, an identification of the key issues & strategies to address each, and a set of approaches to spur effective implementation. Each of these is summarized here.

### **BWSR Mission**

*Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.*

### **Beliefs**

- *Real-World Effectiveness*
- *Local Planning and Implementation*
- *Resource Leadership*
- *Wise Use*
- *Partnerships to Deliver Programs*
- *Cooperative Approach*
- *Innovation*

### **Strategic Issues and Strategies**

1. *What do we do to create the effective local delivery system and partnerships to accomplish our mission?*
  - *Defining Reality:*
    - *Require an assessment of each LGU at least once every five years.*
    - *Create a formal recognition for LGU success stories.*
    - *Market the LGU "scorecard" broadly.*
  - *Incentives for Change:*
    - *Funding allocations reward LGU positive changes/competency.*
    - *Define expectations clearly and implement consequences for non-improvement.*
    - *Successful LGU Organizational Challenge Program awards grants to selected candidates that propose to create changes that move the LGU forward.*
  - *Support for Change:*
    - *Develop a web site that provides examples and ideas of organizational best practices.*
    - *Establish peer mentor program.*
    - *Establish and utilize the Performance Review and Assistance Program.*

2. *How do we redevelop and deliver our conservation programs so we maximize their impact on the land and water resource?*
- Review of Administrative Processes:
    - Undertake an initiative to streamline external reporting/administrative procedures.
  - Program Integration:
    - Review all programs to focus resources on top priority issues as identified in water plans and the impaired waters list.
    - Target available funding to top priority issues *and* LGUs that have a track record or clear potential to deliver results.
  - Monitoring/Assessment/Feedback Protocol:
    - Create a monitoring and assessment protocol that measures the extent to which resources:
      1. Are targeted to top priorities;
      2. Achieve real outcomes; and
      3. Leverage outside resources
3. *How do we make our accomplishments and the state's resource conservation needs well known among those having significant influence over our mission?*
- Documentation of Resource Outcomes and Resource Needs:
    - Require appropriate LGU documentation of outcomes as part of the monitoring of each program activity.
    - Create knowledge about LGU activities and effectiveness by sharing activity and effectiveness assessments.
    - Develop publications and websites to highlight premier projects
    - Develop a state "Water and Soil Resources Report Card" that offers compelling documentation of need.
  - LGU/County Relationship Building:
    - Participate in at least one AMC District meeting and a statewide event yearly.
    - Develop a system whereby other LGUs meet at least twice a year with Counties to provide an overview of activities.
    - Enhance eLINK operations so LGUs can easily access and customize data.
    - Meet regularly with AMC Natural Resource and Environment Committee.
  - Other Partnership Building:
    - Hold semi-annual "sounding board" meetings with key stakeholders.
    - Develop monthly "resource leadership quick-takes" that can be e-mailed out to a broad list of customers and partners.
    - Develop both Executive and Legislative strategies to inform and influence the state's natural resource conservation agenda.

## **Next Steps**

1. Determine the outcomes that are desired and the appropriate measures for the success of each.
2. Assign a staff person or team responsible for:
  - Develop action steps, timelines, and securing resources, and
  - Measuring progress and results.

## **Purpose**

*Purpose: 1. The object toward which one strives or for which something exists; goal; aim. 2. A result or effect that is intended or desired; intention. 3. Determination; resolution.*

Purpose must be at the heart of a strategic planning effort as it needs to give direction to every part of the organization and define the work that must be done. Purpose is who we are and what makes us distinctive. It is what we as an organization exist to achieve and what we're willing to do, and not willing to do, to achieve it.

A strategic plan cannot be an end unto itself. It needs to be able to guide the development of the organization – its identity and purpose – over time. The strategic plan is a framework which provides context to use when creating, re-creating and revising the key components supporting the organization's purpose.

The purpose of this strategic plan then is to guide the organization as its own purpose evolves.

*A strategic plan cannot be an end unto itself. It needs to be able to guide the development of the organization – its identity and purpose – over time.*

*The revised mission statement reads as follows:*

*Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.*

*The beliefs statement was revised to acknowledge the importance of effectiveness, leadership and innovation to the success of BWSR and the accomplishment of its mission.*

## **Mission and Beliefs**

BWSR's Public Relations, Outreach and Strategic Planning Committee led the effort to revisit the agency mission statement and core beliefs. The previous mission statement read as follows: "*The mission of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is to assist local governments to manage and conserve their irreplaceable water and soil resources.*" After input from constituents much discussion the committee recommended the changes shown below to place the emphasis on water and soil conservation. Working in partnership with local organizations is still critical, but is seen as an important means to accomplish the goal, not the goal in and of itself.

The beliefs statement was revised to acknowledge the importance of effectiveness, leadership and innovation to the success of BWSR and the accomplishment of its mission. These values are not an add-on to the culture of the organization – they rather articulate the existing culture and behavior of BWSR.

### ***BWSR Mission***

*Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.*

### ***What We Believe In:***

- **Real-World Effectiveness.** Our mission is focused on water resources and soil conservation. The success of BWSR should be measured by our effectiveness at enhancing both.
- **Local Planning and Implementation.** Working at the local level is the approach best positioned to produce lasting success.

*BWSR reaffirms its commitment to deliver its programs through partnerships at the local level.*

- **Resource Leadership.** Effective resource protection requires a strong vision of the resource future we desire and the willingness to challenge organizations to participate. BWSR can be the leader that does it.
- **Wise Use.** Resource protection can effectively take place within a framework that acknowledges the motivations for resource use by landowners.
- **Partnerships to Deliver Programs.** Minnesota is a diverse state. Resource protection cannot be accomplished by any one organization or group. Partnerships are not just preferred; they are the only way to be effective.
- **Cooperative Approach.** Aligning the voluntary and regulatory elements of federal, state and local conservation efforts is necessary to assure citizens are well-served by all levels of government.
- **Innovation.** As water and soil resource challenges evolve, so must our ways of doing business.

## Strategic Issues

***BWSR can only accomplish its mission if it has an effective delivery system. This makes LGU capacity a key issue.***

***Can BWSR's programs be made even more effective? That is the focus of the second strategic issue.***

***Issue #1:*** *What do we do to create the effective local delivery system and partnerships to accomplish our mission?*

***Discussion:*** BWSR's principal delivery system is a statewide set of local government units (LGUs) that are focused on protecting and enhancing the state's water and soil resources. The primary LGUs include Counties, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Watershed Districts (WD), and Metropolitan Watershed Management Organizations (WMO). BWSR can only accomplish its mission if it has an effective delivery system.

***Issue #2:*** *How do we redevelop and deliver our conservation programs so we maximize their impact on the land and water resource?*

***Discussion:*** As indicated previously, BWSR's principal delivery system is a statewide set of LGUs that are focused on protecting and enhancing the state's water and soil resources. At present, BWSR spends about 75% of its General Fund budget on external program activities (LGU grants, technical and administrative support, Cost-share, etc.), with the remaining 25% devoted to BWSR program, technical and administrative activities.

Some of this funding is distributed on a need basis using formulas that account for population, land area, tax capacity and quantity of activity. However, BWSR has flexibility in how it distributes a large and growing portion of the funding.



***Being effective is necessary, but not sufficient; our legislative, agency, and local partners need to know about that effectiveness. Hence, the third strategic issue.***

***Issue #3: How do we make our accomplishments and the state's resource conservation needs well known among those having significant influence over our mission?***

***Discussion:*** Competition for state and other resources is increasing, while available funding is not keeping pace with demand. BWSR and the partner LGUs are not just in competition for other resource dollars, but also for general fund resources that are used for a broad range of state needs.

At the same time, it is a challenge to effectively communicate the "BWSR story" to those that have influence over the organization.

*The quality of the local delivery system is key to BWSR's ability to accomplish its mission. At present, the quality of that system is uneven...*

## **Issue Assessment: Strategies**

For each of the three strategic issues there is a brief assessment of that issue (based on Board discussions, the online survey results, and the focus group comments), an identification of “leverage points” (particular strategies and areas that can be used to bring about change), a discussion of the preferred strategic approach, and a listing of specific strategies.

**Issue #1:** *What do we do to create the effective local delivery system and partnerships to accomplish our mission?*

*Assessment.* The effectiveness of the local delivery system is key to BWSR's ability to accomplish its mission. At present the quality of that system is uneven; a number of LGUs are excellent while some do not have sufficient capacity.

There appear to be a number of factors at work in those LGUs that have limited capacity;

- *There is sometimes a lack of local political commitment to BWSR's mission (i.e., resourceconservation).* In some parts of the state, resource conservation is perceived, fairly or not, to be in conflict with economic strategy to bring about prosperity. This view can be particularly prevalent in areas where natural resource utilization accounts for a significant share of the area's economic activity.
- *The partnership between the County and other LGUs can be made stronger.* One of the principal challenges for SWCDs and WDs is that Counties perceive them to be outside their control and, therefore, outside their responsibility. As one Focus Group participant said about the County/BWSR relationship: “We will be successful when we finally talk about each other in terms of “we” instead of “they.”
- *The lead staff in the LGU is not necessarily an outstanding leader.* Lead staff are critical, but a combination of forces results

***The approach to improving LGU's should support and preserve those LGUs that are capable of doing a good or excellent job, while challenging other LGUs to enhance their operations.***

in the lead staff not having the capacity that is needed. The chronic under-funding of SWCDs, which do not have taxing authority, is one contributing factor.

- *Resources for the LGU are sometimes in short supply.* While resources are not sufficient to create a quality organization, they are necessary. Few SWCDs and counties have been able to develop a business model that provides an adequate revenue stream for outstanding success.

#### *Possible Leverage Points*

- *Lead LGU staff.* We know that the lead staff is critical to the success of an organization, and BWSR can potentially influence that selection. There are in excess of 800 board members directing the actions of our primary partners. It is beyond our ability to reach all so our emphasis is in interfacing with the lead staff that is critical to the success of an organization.
- *Partnership between LGUs, and between Counties and other LGUs.* Building a positive LGU/County relationship can pay enormous dividends, both in terms of influence as well as money.
- *Accountability/performance mechanisms at BWSR's disposal.* Measurement brings accountability to organizations. BWSR has a responsibility, and an opportunity, to use this tool to improve performance.
- *Existing sources of revenue.* WDs, Counties and Cities all have statutory authority to raise revenue by a variety of means. LGUs without sufficient revenue streams should look to partnerships with others who utilize these powers.

*Strategy Development.* The approach to improving LGUs should support and preserve those LGUs that are capable of doing a good or excellent job, while challenging other LGUs to enhance their operations. This approach will encourage local development of strategies best suited to each unique circumstance. BWSR will act as a catalyst for these efforts by

***Strategies are divided into three categories: Defining Reality, Incentives for Change, and Support for Change.***

instituting enhanced and expanded performance review and assistance mechanisms. By improving the operations of a number of LGUs, it is anticipated that system effectiveness will reach a threshold that provides momentum for change for the remaining LGUs.

Strategies are divided into three categories: Defining Reality, Incentives for Change, and Support for Change.

#### Defining Reality

- ***Require a performance assessment of each LGU at least once every five years.*** Measurement is critical as a starting point for change.
- ***Create a formal celebration for LGU success stories.*** There are several tools to encourage change. Letting people know who is doing what, and celebrating the successes, is one such tool
- ***Market the LGU “scorecard” broadly.*** Measurement becomes powerful only after the results are known broadly.

#### Incentives for Change

- ***Funding allocations reward LGU positive changes/competency.*** This strategy is about aligning strategy and resources. If rewards are not targeted to the measured success, then the measurements are meaningless.
- ***Define expectations clearly and implement consequences for non-improvement.*** This is the stick part of a carrot and stick approach. LGUs must learn from peers and from the state. BWSR will work with LGU and professional associations to make peer-to-peer mentoring more robust.
- ***Create a Successful LGU Organizational Challenge Program which awards grants to selected candidates that propose to create changes that move the LGU forward.*** This program is focused on those LGUs that are committed to change, but need an increase in resources to accomplish it.

*LGUs are more likely to listen to peers than a state agency.*

It should be designed with recognition that different strategies are needed in different places. Access to cooperative funds or future appropriations would be supported by additional recognition as well.

#### Support for Change

- ***Development of a web site that provides examples and ideas of organizational best practices.*** Some LGUs will need ideas to create change. This is a low-cost way to provide those ideas.
- ***Establish peer mentor program.*** LGUs can benefit from the experiences of peers as well as from state, federal, and private sector partners.
- ***Utilize the Performance Review and Assistance Program.*** We can identify opportunities to provide training and facilitate LGU self-assessment and improvement.

***It appears some of these [older] programs could be given a tune-up, and some could benefit from additional performance monitoring.***

***Adding more paperwork does not save the environment.  
~Survey Respondent***

**Issue #2:** *How do we redevelop and deliver our conservation programs so we maximize their impact on the land and water resource?*

*Assessment.* Some BWSR programs are relatively new (Clean Water Legacy), while others have evolved for decades (Comprehensive Local Water Management, Cost-share). It appears some of these programs could be given a tune-up, and some could benefit from additional performance monitoring. In addition, integration of programs could be improved. Following are some of the factors that affect the performance of BWSR programs

- *The amount of administrative time required by different programs can be a burden.* Although there is disagreement on how much of this burden can be eliminated, it is generally agreed that, at a minimum, technology can be used to streamline the administrative/reporting burden. As one survey respondent put it, “Adding more paperwork does not save the environment.”
- *Strategy alignment across programs is not perfect.* As an example, cost-share funding can be made available for projects that are not priorities in the local water plan.
- *WCA takes a disproportionate amount of staff time.* It is generally agreed that WCA takes a large amount of BWSR staff time and that is due, to legislative appropriation and policy decisions. However, the old saying, “the urgent takes precedence over the important” seems to apply here. Greater investment in local program management via training and regulatory coordination should be constantly evaluated.
- *The funding strategies of all programs are not focused solely on resource impact.* Some of BWSR funding is targeted to capacity building, some is allocated based on resource criteria, and some is allocated based on a measure of equity. Success at achieving program goals and outcomes should be the common denominator for all.

*The following strategies use a three prong approach to maximize the impact and effectiveness of BWSR programs: minimizing and streamlining administrative work, closely aligning program strategies, and measuring and rewarding performance.*

#### *Possible Leverage Points*

- *The method by which BWSR delivers programs (need-based vs. competitive).* BWSR has the power to allocate resources to projects that make the most impact.
- *The method by which BWSR monitors performance.* BWSR can do more to measure its and its partners successes.
- *The guidelines that determine eligible and priority activities for each program.* Focusing resources on priority issues is one method to effect change.
- *BWSR staff work planning.* Time invested in setting strategies and priorities will result in increased efficiencies and effectiveness for the agency and its partners.

*Strategy Development.* The following strategies use a three-prong approach to maximize the impact and effectiveness of BWSR programs: minimizing and streamlining administrative work, closely aligning program strategies, and measuring and rewarding performance. Although LGU capacity and quality and program effectiveness are closely linked, the following strategies focus on program effectiveness.

#### Review of Administrative Processes

- **Undertake initiative to examine whether current measures are optimal and streamline external reporting/administrative mechanisms.** The less time spent on administrative matters, the more time available for resource protection and enhancement efforts. eLINK has good partner data, but partners must be satisfied with the collection mechanism itself.

*Make districts earn what they get, don't just split it up. Competition makes us all better.*  
~Survey Respondent

*Measurement has a major role in driving change. Measured success builds the story and supports the right strategy. Measured failure even has value as it demands change and improved approaches.*

#### Program Integration

- **Review programs to better focus resources on top priority issues as identified in water plans and the impaired waters list.** Strategy alignment maximizes use of available resources.
- **Target available funding to top priority issues and LGUs that have a track record of delivering results.** Impact on the resource comes not only from the targeting of priority problems; it comes from working with organizations that get things done. BWSR has done this already with cost-share, CREP/WREP, the Department of Defense, and the Working Lands Initiative among others. The case for performance-based funding was best made by one survey respondent, "Make districts earn what they get, don't just split it up. Competition makes us all better."

#### Monitoring/Assessment/Feedback Protocol

- **Create a monitoring and assessment protocol that measures the extent to which resources:**
  - **Are targeted to top priorities;**
  - **Achieve real outcomes; and**
  - **Leverage outside resources.**Measurement has a major role in driving change. Measured success builds the story and supports the right strategy. Measured failure even has value as it demands change and improved approaches.



**Assessment overview:**

- ***The Legislative and Executive Branches are key to the accomplishment of BWSR's mission;***
- ***Effective and documented stewardship of water and soil resources must be shown; and***
- ***Communication is best accomplished locally and personally***

***Nothing makes a bigger impact than actually seeing things on the ground.***

***~Survey Respondent***

**Issue #3:** *How do we make our accomplishments and the state's water and soil resource conservation needs well known among those having significant influence over our mission?*

*Assessment.* This issue has three separate pieces: identifying those that have significant influence over BWSR's mission, determining what the story is that can motivate them, and figuring out how best to tell the story.

- *Those that have significant influence over the mission.* The Executive and Legislative branches set policy and priorities and provide funding; and thus most significantly establish BWSR's priorities. LGUs and key stakeholder groups – both resource users and those interested in resource conservation -- also have significant influence in the process. Each brings an agenda to the Legislature, and each influences public policy.
- *The story that motivates them.* Major trends at the state level suggest a move away from an equalized approach to a more performance-based approach. Real outcomes, close local partnerships, and a reputation of BWSR as a unique state agency would go a long way to gaining support. The story cannot be separated from the reality, which is closely linked to the performance of LGUs, the effectiveness of BWSR programs and the documentation of that effectiveness. One survey respondent put it this way, "Nothing makes a bigger impact than actually seeing things on the ground."
- *How the story is told.* The most effective method is one that is local and personal and includes examples of real successes. This would include a targeted message with examples, shared through individual or small group meetings.

*Possible Leverage Points*

- *Performance and its measurement.*  
Telling a story about effectiveness

***There are three pieces to a successful strategy to tell BWSR's story: defining those who have influence over the mission, understanding and having the story that will motivate them, and determining the most effective method to tell the story.***

requires the actual measurement and documentation.

- *Strong and deep partnerships with LGUs.* It is one thing to tell your own story; it is quite another, and even more powerful, to have others tell it. Others will only tell the story if they feel like they are a part of it.
- *Strong relationships with those that have a resource conservation mission that complements the BWSR mission.* External groups have influence in the process and are potential allies.

*Strategy Development. The two-step approach includes the effective documentation and then delivery of the message. Message delivery can best be accomplished through enhanced partnerships and face to face conversations with individuals and small groups.*

#### Documentation of Resource Outcomes and Resource Needs

- *Require appropriate LGU documentation of outcomes as part of the monitoring of each program activity.* Again, telling a successful story requires documentation.
- *Create knowledge about LGU activities and effectiveness by sharing activity and effectiveness assessments.* The Legislature is more likely to support future success than reward need alone.
- *Develop publications and websites to highlight premier projects and their outcomes.* Technology is a powerful and cost-effective tool to help deliver the message.
- *Develop a state "Water and Soil Resource Report Card" that offers compelling documentation of need.* While trumpeting success is important, the Legislature also needs to know that there is still much to be done.

***Relationship-building is key to gaining understanding and support for BWSR's mission. Here is what one person said about the County/BWSR relationship:***

***“We will be successful when we finally talk about each other in terms of ‘we’ instead of ‘they’.”***

#### LGU/County Relationship Building

- ***Participation in at least one AMC District meeting and statewide event each year.*** Smaller group presentations are more effective than large conferences.
- ***Promote a system whereby SWCDs and Watershed Districts meet semi-annually with Counties to provide an overview of activities.*** Counties are key partners, but are not all well-informed of BWSR activities.
- ***Enhance eLINK operations so LGUs can easily access and customize data.*** eLINK is a tool that has great promise, but one that has not yet fulfilled that promise.
- ***Meet regularly with AMC's Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee.*** This committee sets AMC's legislative priorities.

#### Other Partnership Building

- ***Hold semi-annual “sounding board” meetings with key stakeholders*** There are a number of organizations in the state that share BWSR's mission and that have influence with the Legislature.
- ***Develop regular “resource leadership quick-takes” that can be e-mailed out to broad list of customers and partners.*** Technology can be used to cost-effectively build both understanding and support.
- ***Develop both Executive and Legislative strategies to concisely inform and influence the state's natural resource conservation agenda.*** Both branches have a critical role in helping BWSR advance its mission. Our stakeholders think we do an acceptable job of this, but few think we excel at it.

***Who is responsible for completion? What specific actions will be taken? What is the best way of measuring a successful outcome? Who will be responsible for the measurement of progress? To the extent that BWSR has answers for each of these, the probability of success increases.***

## **Next Steps**

This strategic planning effort will only be meaningful if BWSR finds a way to “walk the talk,” and thereby deliver meaningful results. To do this, an effective bridge must be created between the ideas contained here and action.

To bring this level of accountability to the implementation process requires another level of detail. The old management adage, “*What gets measured gets done*” applies here. For each strategy the following questions need to be answered: Who is responsible for its completion? What specific actions will be taken? What resources are needed? When will this strategy be completed? What is the best way of measuring a successful outcome? Who will be responsible for the measurement of progress? To the extent that BWSR has answers for each of these, the probability of success increases.

Following are more formalized recommendations for the next steps:

- *Determine the outcomes that are desired and the appropriate measures for the success of each.* Desired outcomes have to do with effectiveness of LGUs, the change in water quality and soil conservation, and the awareness and support for BWSR. Each can be measured (although some are harder than others). The measures act as a rudder for the entire process. If positive change is evidenced, then the strategies are appropriate. If it isn't, BWSR should know about it and that acknowledgement should drive a change in strategy
- *Assign a staff person or team responsible for implementation.* If this is everyone's responsibility, it is no one's responsibility. Accountability and responsibility need to have a face attached to it.
- *Charge the staff with developing action steps, timelines, and securing resources.* Each strategy needs more detail. Specific actions need to be identified, resource needs need to be considered, and timelines need

***Accountability for implementing this plan involves three separate, but related, approaches: measuring action, assigning responsibility and adding detail to the strategy***

development. Measurement requires measurability – this detail will provide that.

- *Charge some person or group with measuring progress and results.* Responsibility to oversee the evaluation is critical.
- *Assure that citizen perspectives are considered.* Program evaluation and alignment shall include assessment of technical, procedural, and administrative components from a citizen perspective.



## Appendix

### Strategic Plan Development and Adoption

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) undertook a survey of stakeholders near the end of 2006. The purpose of the effort was to provide a foundation for the Board's strategic planning process that spanned most of 2007. The Public Relations, Outreach and Strategic Planning Committee of the Board was the primary body charged with leading the Strategic Plan revisions process.

#### Board Roster (as of January 2008)

Randy Kramer, Chair, Citizen  
Dana Allen, Citizen  
Paul Brutlag, Citizen  
Quentin Fairbanks, County Commissioner  
Brian Kletscher, County Commissioner  
Brian Napstad, County Commissioner  
Bob Burandt, SWCD  
Paul Langseth, SWCD  
Louise Smallidge, SWCD  
Ken Robinson, Watershed District  
Gene Tiedemann, Watershed District  
LuAnn Tolliver, Watershed District  
Joe Martin, Department of Agriculture  
John Linc Stine, Department of Health  
Larry Kramka, Department of Natural Resources  
Jim Anderson, Minnesota Extension Service  
Paul Eger, Pollution Control Agency

The Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board at its January 23, 2008 Meeting.