

OLMSTED SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



2021 OPERATIONAL PLAN



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Olmsted Soil and Water Conservation District is to promote sustainable resource utilization and protection of natural resources in the County. The District assists agricultural producers, communities, watershed planners and landowners in developing and implementing conservation and resource management systems and practices. The District also serves as a source for conservation programs, funding, technical assistance and environmental education for county residents.

Introduction

The purpose of the Olmsted Soil and Water Conservation District's Operational Plan is to provide guidance and direction to District staff and supervisors for the goals and mission set forth by Olmsted Soil and Water Conservation District. The Operation Plan is the "working plan" for the District and is utilized in conjunction with the County's comprehensive water plan for determining important program applications, staffing, and financial requirements for District Operation.

Operational Objective: **WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

The District is participating in the State of Minnesota's One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) watershed planning and implementation efforts. This process focuses on watershed planning and moves away from the traditional county based water planning. The Olmsted County Comprehensive Water Management Plan continues to inform our local goals and objectives in the 1W1P processes in the Root, Zumbro and Mississippi River–Winona-La Crescent (WinLaC) watersheds. The County's Land Use Plan also has water quality elements that help to inform the 1W1P processes as they develop. The ultimate goal is to have a watershed based implementation plan that is prioritized, targeted and measurable and will guide effective, efficient project implementation.

The District will participate in the planning efforts, provide technical assistance, deliver programming and participate in the development of an implementation plan for these major watersheds.

Actions:

- Zumbro Watershed—Participate in the Watershed Alliance for the Greater Zumbro (WAGZ) 1W1P planning effort currently underway. Upon plan approval, implement prioritized and targeted best management practices to achieve measurable results.
- WinLaC Watershed—Assist the watershed planning group in developing an organizational structure, identifying goals and creating actions that further the “One Watershed, One Plan” effort that includes the Whitewater watershed. The development of this plan gets underway in 2021.
- Root River Watershed-Implement the approved 1W1P with watershed partners utilizing watershed based implementation funding (WBIF), to implement prioritized and targeted best management practices to achieve measurable results. The implementation process is in its second two-year funding phase.
- Serve in a technical capacity for the Olmsted County Environmental Management Team, the Physical Development Committee and the Olmsted County Environmental Commission.
- Provide technical assistance and funding to producers and landowners throughout the County to implement programs and projects that meet our goals to reduce soil erosion, decrease sedimentation and improve water quality.
- Promote the Agricultural Best Management Practices Loan Program to address failing septic systems, well sealing, conservation tillage, best management practice implementation, feedlot abatement and ag-waste system improvement projects.
- Implement buffers on all Public Waters streams in Olmsted County through education, outreach and compliance review efforts in support of the State of Minnesota's 2015 Buffer Initiative.
- Serve as a cooperative technical partner with Olmsted County, City of Rochester and Olmsted's Urbanized Townships on storm-water management and implementing the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit.

Operational Objective: **NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION**

A mission of Olmsted County is to promote sustainable resource utilization and protection of natural resources.

The District will provide assistance to landowners and producers to reduce soil erosion on croplands, riparian floodplains, and other sensitive areas while protecting long term sustainability, improving productivity and enhancing habitat.

Actions:

- Provide landowners with technical assistance to control erosion by promoting upland best management practice implementation utilizing state and federal cost share programming.
- Promote soil health principles and regenerative agriculture by encouraging the adoption of cover crops, conservation tillage practices, the use of alternative, diversified crops and nutrient management options on cropland.
- Promote the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), targeting riparian, floodplain and wellhead protection areas. Administer existing Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Program contracts for easement compliance & sensitive lands protection and habitat management and enhancement activities.
- Promote new State and Federal programs that enhance wildlife habitat and protect and restore sensitive landscape features.
- Utilize GIS to identify parcel non-compliance with the 2015 Buffer Initiative, requiring 50 feet of perennial vegetation on public waters streams. Assist landowners with meeting compliance obligations. Maintain BuffCAT database for BWSR.
- Serve as a cooperative technical agency to City, County and Townships to conduct plat, grading plan and development reviews for proposed projects with emphasis on controlling runoff, reducing erosion and protecting streams and wetlands.
- Implement elements of the County Soil Loss ordinance. Investigate erosion complaints. Assist landowners in finding solutions to solve erosion issues. Review the ordinance for potential revisions in 2021.
- Promote the District annual tree sale. Assist landowners with woodland practice implementation inquiries.
- Promote the new District native plant and seed sale. Assist landowners with implementing small water treatment and habitat improvement projects.

Operational Objective: **WETLAND PROTECTION**

Olmsted County is responsible for the local administration of the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) of 1991.

Pursuant to the Joint Powers Agreement between Olmsted County and Olmsted Soil and Water Conservation District, the District as delegated by the County, will act as the local government unit (LGU) for areas designated as rural on the County Land Use Plan.

The District will carry out responsibilities of the LGU for implementation of the Wetland Conservation Act of 1991.

Actions:

- Provide assistance to the County, municipalities, landowners and consultants on interpretation and implementation of the WCA 8420 rules and regulations.
- Work collaboratively on WCA issues utilizing Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) members expertise including MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Olmsted County Planning Dept and Olmsted SWCD staff. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and local County, Township and City government will be included as necessary.
- Review producer 1026 requests and NRCS certified wetland determination evaluations on agricultural lands to ensure compliance with State wetland rules.
- Provide wetland related technical assistance to landowners and consultants regarding rule application and interpretation, project evaluation and permitting, development proposals and wetland banking opportunities.
- Provide technical assistance to landowners to resolve unintentional wetland impacts, DNR issued RPN's or cease and desist orders. Development restoration plans where required. Guide the replacement plan process under WCA regulation as needed.
- Utilize the latest technology to enhance the delivery of wetland technical services.
- Assist landowners interested in developing wildlife habitat through wetland enhancement, restoration or creation.

Operational Objective: **DEVELOP NEW PROGRAMS AND MAINTAIN EXISTING PROGRAMS**

Olmsted SWCD will continue to maintain existing programs, which have proven effective; and develop new progressive conservation and education programs in the areas of environmental stewardship and natural resource management.

Actions:

- Continue our Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) partnership to conduct stream and river water quality monitoring. The Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network (WPLMN) is a partnership between MPCA and Olmsted SWCD to conduct event-based sampling on 4 priority locations in the Zumbro River watershed.
- Administer the “Safe Drinking Water for Private Wells Users” grant for our 6-County, SE karst region to provide a targeted outreach and education campaign, additional nitrate and water quality monitoring, and financial assistance for water treatment and well repair.
- Monitor the long-term groundwater monitoring network on the 30-year anniversary to assess water quality in the vicinity of the decorah edge in 6 townships in the western and central part of Olmsted County.
- Provide an Olmsted County Plat Book for sale based on the latest County GIS data every 3-5 years (current is 2018).
- Continue the Annual Tree and Shrub Sale and promote planting of native tree and shrub species in Olmsted County.
- Promote the new Native Plant and seed sale. Provide program information and technical assistance for the preservation, restoration and management of native prairie communities and enhancement of pollinator species habitat .
- Promote perennial vegetation on highly erodible land, groundwater protection zones, riparian zones, and wetland protection areas.
- Maintain the precipitation monitoring network utilizing volunteers in the County. Report data to State Climatology Office.
- Integrate new technology and equipment into conservation activities of the District to enhance programs, improve efficiencies and expand technical capabilities.
- Promote Federal conservation programs available to cooperators—CRP, EQIP, CSP, etc.
- Promote Forestry programs and stewardship by referring landowners to DNR Foresters for forestry related technical assistance.
- Select a landowner to recognize as Olmsted County’s Outstanding Conservationist. Landowners demonstrating good land stewardship through implementation of conservation and water quality improvement projects will be recognized at the annual Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District’s (MASWCD) state convention each December.

Operational Objective: **EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

Olmsted SWCD will provide conservation based outreach and educational programming. In addition, all Staff and Supervisors will continue their professional education and training in conservation as it relates to their position and duties.

Outreach Actions:

- Promote Soil Health principles engaging agricultural producers through field days and workshops, individual consultations, and research data dissemination through the Olmsted County Soil Health Farm demonstration site.
- Assist with coordinating the SE MN Annual Envirothon event providing an outdoor educational competition style experience to students grades 6-12. To be hosted at rotating SE MN locations in cooperation with SE MN SWCDs.
- Promote environmental, conservation and agricultural learning opportunities to schools within Olmsted County.
- Engage the public in conservation topics utilizing hands-on tools including the Olmsted County Land Use Model, Groundwater Model, the new Enviroscope Watershed Model, as well as MPCA's updated Karst Trunks and Stream Table for use as environmental education engagement tools.
- Promote education and outreach opportunities through Facebook, the SWCD and County websites and other available social media.
- Coordinate activities at the Olmsted County Fair utilizing the Conservation Building to promote conservation topics and activities. Create educational displays, host events and speakers and utilize staff, supervisors and volunteers to engage the public during the Fair in July.
- Promote Olmsted SWCD activities by providing an annual presentation to the Olmsted County Board of Commissioners. Promote conservation by selecting projects and practices to highlight on the County Road tour. Attend the Physical Development Committee bi-monthly meetings and the Olmsted County Township Officer's quarterly meeting.
- Promote and expand education and outreach opportunities to urban constituents in partnership with the City of Rochester. Topics including stormwater management, yard by yard treatment practices, pollinator plantings, rain barrel use, rain garden installations, and considerations for development on decorah edge.
- Promote public education through news articles, newsletters, webpage development, social media posting and event promotion.

Staff Training:

- Attend training to develop staff and supervisors understanding of conservation programs, practices and policies.
- Encourage employees to seek training utilizing their Individual Development Plans (IDP) to develop their job skills and abilities by providing compensation for technical training and continued education. Leverage federal, state and county training programs.

Operational Objective: Priority programs

HIGH PRIORITY EROSION:

The District will work with cooperators to reduce agricultural erosion and run-off. When applications exceed available funding, priority for state cost share projects are based on professional staff assessment and direct evidence of ephemeral and/or gully erosion rather than “T” and soil class. Further priority is given to applicants following approved conservation plans and/or demonstrating the willingness to apply conservation practices that reduce runoff, erosion and improve water quality. Technical assistance is available to landowners interested in reducing erosion and improving water quality. Financial assistance is available to landowners to offset the cost for practice implementation. Geographically, priority is given to watersheds identified in the Olmsted County Water Management Plan or through approved One Watershed, One Plan Implementation plans.

HIGH PRIORITY WATER QUALITY:

The District will work with cooperators to implement projects that improve water quality. The District identifies the following as priority areas for water quality improvement implementation: Zumbro River, So Br Cascade Creek, Bear Creek, the No Br Root River-Mill Creek, Whitewater River and the sub-watersheds identified in the County Water Management Plan above the flood control structures. The District will promote management of riparian areas with perennially vegetated buffers. The District has and will continue to solicit and support applications for State Cost Share projects, Reinvest in Minnesota, CRP, CREP and EQIP projects in these areas. The District continues to provide technical assistance to feedlot operators aiding in the understanding of MPCA feedlot compliance requirements. Priority for funding is given to applicants with existing nutrient management plans or who have plans in preparation. High priority impaired waters identified through the MPCA’s TMDL and WRAPS processes or prioritized in approved One Watershed, One Plan Implementation plans will be targeted for conservation best management practice implementation projects when possible.

SOIL HEALTH INITIATIVE:

The District will promote soil health principles and regenerative agricultural practices to cooperators through research and field days at the Olmsted County Soil Health Farm. The district board established a cover crop program in 2017 to provide cost sharing incentives to producers who have not utilized cover crops in their management systems. Cost sharing is available to establish up to 30 acres of cover crops each year during a 3 year contract period. This program has been successful and continues in 2021.

Operational Objectives: **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

The Root River One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) was awarded \$1.4 million from Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to implement projects addressing water quality within then Root River watershed. Funds from this grant are being used to implement best management practices throughout the watershed.

Olmsted SWCD in partnership with Whitewater Joint Powers Board and Winona SWCD will focus on nitrogen load reduction through BMPs that minimize nitrate loss through leaching, optimize row crop yield, and maximize rate of return for participating farmers with operations in the critical source areas of the Middle and South Fork subwatersheds. The 319 program offers producers within designated watersheds, cost share to establish cover crops on up to 30 acres. Olmsted SWCD staff will continue to provide technical assistance to producers under this grant in 2021.

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program—(MAWQCP) sponsored by the MN Department of Agriculture. The purpose of the program is to accelerate the voluntary adoption of agricultural practices that improve water quality and maintain a productive agricultural economy. Producers who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified in the program and in turn be assured that their operation meets the state's water quality requirements for a period of 10 years. The program has been very successful in Olmsted County, Southeast Minnesota and is available statewide.

The 2015 Buffer Initiative legislation enacted during special session in June 2015 enhances the protection of Minnesota waters by building on existing requirements to buffer public waters. The legislation provides funding for SWCD's to provide technical assistance to affected landowners to implement buffers. Olmsted County is currently 100% compliant but the District is currently conducting its required three year compliance reviews. Utilizing current GIS data, staff will review all affected parcels for buffer compliance across Olmsted County, ensuring the long term program goals are achieved.

Olmsted County Water Resources has merged into the Soil and Water Conservation District with the addition of the Water Resources Coordinator to the District team This adds additional projects and programs that are important to the restoration and protection of our waters, landscape and citizens in Olmsted County and expands our expertise and outreach within the important area of groundwater research and protection and water planning activity.

The SWCD is working in partnership with the City of Rochester, Olmsted Co, Dodge Co and Dodge SWCD to seek a 319 Focused Small Watershed grant through EPA. This will focus on water quality in the So Br of Cascade Creek subwatershed. The group is in the process of gathering information to support the development of a 9 element watershed plan to implement project, provide educational outreach to citizens and monitor water quality in the watershed. The goal will be removal of the waterbody from the threatened and impaired waters list in MN.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE: SPECIAL PROJECTS

Olmsted SWCD will continue to collaborate with Olmsted County Planning, Survey and GIS departments to support a new LiDar flight and seek funding to update this important landscape database in Olmsted County, the southeast MN region and statewide.

Olmsted SWCD and USDA NRCS have entered into a cooperative working agreement to provide landowners, producers, Federal and State land management agencies, other individuals, groups and units of government with leadership in resource conservation. This work continues in 2021.

Olmsted SWCD will continue to pursue partnerships and grant opportunities that benefit Olmsted County residents by addressing water quality concerns, soil erosion reduction, groundwater protection and habitat enhancement.

Olmsted SWCD will continue to seek partnerships and funding to expand conservation delivery opportunities in Olmsted County, the southeast MN region and statewide.

**Olmsted Soil & Water Conservation District
2021 Budget**

REVENUE

Intergovernmental Revenue Federal

66460 - Sec 319 Clean Water Grant \$ -

Intergovernmental Revenue State

State Conservation Delivery Grant \$ 23,754

Capacity Funds \$ 60,000

State Cost Share Grant \$ 69,500

Other State Revenues \$ 30,800

MAWQCP Reimbursements \$ 113,662

Intergovernmental Revenue County

County Appropriations \$ 400,765

Other Appropriations \$ 4,500

Planning (WCA Grant) \$ 12,000

Charges For Services

Plat Books \$ 1,200

Trees \$ 17,500

Miscellaneous Revenue

Wetland Fees \$ 2,500

Stormwater Assistance \$ 15,000

Miscellaneous Services \$ 3,950

Investment Earnings

Interest \$ 5,000

Reserve Usage

Reserve Usage \$ 78,563

TOTAL REVENUES

\$ 838,694

		Olmsted Soil & Water Conservation District			
		2021 Budget			
EXPENDITURES					
Capital Outlay			\$	13,440	
District Operating Other Services					
		Staff Development	\$	2,200	
		Telephone & Communications	\$	3,500	
		Postage	\$	300	
		Publishing & Advertising	\$	100	
		Membership Dues	\$	7,200	
		Professional Services - Audit Fees	\$	2,800	
		Equipment Repair & Maintenance	\$	300	
		Public Works Finance System/Service	\$	48,591	
		Public Works Admin Staff Services	\$	11,640	
		Olmsted County HR Support	\$	7,186	
		Olmsted County IT	\$	34,588	
		Miscellaneous	\$	450	
		Mileage	\$	1,000	
		Gas	\$	1,500	
		Rent - Building	\$	25,398	
		Vehicle Maintenance	\$	3,000	
		Insurance	\$	9,784	
District Operating Personnel Services					
		Salaries and Benefits	\$	458,755	
		Elected Officials	\$	10,000	
District Operating Supplies					
		Office Supplies	\$	600	
		Field Supplies	\$	500	
District Project Expense					
		Education	\$	1,500	
		Trees	\$	10,000	
		Plat Books	\$	1,000	
		Miscellaneous	\$	200	
Intergovernmental Payments State					
		State Cost Share (Unit 3541)	\$	69,500	
		MNWQCP Staff Expenses (Unit 3542)	\$	113,662	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES			\$	838,694	
PROFIT/(LOSS)			\$	-	