

# Selling conservation, flood control



*Cedar River Watershed District Project Manager Cody Fox speaks during a Sept. 23 Climate Week event hosted jointly by BWSR and the Mower SWCD, while BWSR Chief Engineer Rita Weaver looks on.*  
**Photo Credit:** Mary Juhl, BWSR

## 2021 Outstanding Watershed District Employee Cody Fox of the Cedar River Watershed District took on water storage projects, a tough sell that required both technical expertise and communication skills

Cedar River Watershed District (CRWD) Project Manager Cody Fox knew it would be a tough sell.

In an area of the state prone to flooding, he had to convince landowners to store water on their land after heavy rains – knowing they had spent years diverting water using tile drainage.

CRWD Administrator Justin Hanson said Fox has been instrumental in implementing 14 CRWD capital improvement projects, including multiple water storage infrastructure

projects along Dobbins Creek, a Cedar River tributary especially prone to streambank erosion and sediment-loading.

“Landowners would identify barriers, and Cody would knock them down,” Hanson said.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) named Fox the 2021 Outstanding Watershed District Employee on Dec. 2 during the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts’ (MAWD) annual conference.

“If you were going to build a conservation technician in a lab, Cody’s what an ideal technician would look like,” Hanson said.

“He’s an excellent listener who communicates well, and he understands the ag business side of things, but he’s also skilled in the technical



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— Justin Hanson, Cedar River Watershed District administrator

aspects of the job.”

Fox joined the CRWD in 2010 as a district technician. He serves a dual role as project manager for the CRWD and the Mower Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). Mower SWCD’s staff members are contracted to provide technical services to the CRWD.

Fox was promoted to project manager in 2016. That year, the CRWD began implementing a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that leverages \$3.2 million from the Hormel Foundation, Clean Water Fund grants, bonding money and a Section 319 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The plan aims to reduce flow by 8% at the confluence of the Cedar River and Dobbins Creek.

“The bottom line is that we have high flow events that ravage streambanks and create safety issues,” Fox said. “If we can slow the water down, capture sediment and reduce the speed at which it settles out, you get benefits not



*Cedar River Watershed District Project Manager Cody Fox visits a project site in September 2017 just outside Austin. The gully was among 25 priority fixes identified in the CRWD’s \$8.4 million capital improvement plan. Photo Credit: Ann Wessel, BWSR*

just at the outlet but miles downstream. We realized this was something big that made sense to pursue.”

In addition to his CIP work, Fox inspects ditches for Mower County, handles engineering design for the

CRWD, and recently began working to implement the Cedar River Comprehensive Watershed Plan via BWSR’s One Watershed, One Plan program.

“Cody has a unique skill set that combines high-

end technical skills with outstanding people skills and a superb work ethic,” said BWSR Board Conservationist Dave Copeland, who works frequently with Fox. “He specializes in connecting with landowners and understanding how their personal and business goals fit with conservation opportunities.”

Outside of his day job, Fox is a volunteer firefighter for the city of Albert Lea. He spends his free time with his wife and two young children, hunting, and watching the Minnesota Twins.

Each year, BWSR celebrates the excellent work accomplished by local government staff to advance conservation efforts across the state. In addition to recognizing Fox, BWSR presented the Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee award to Rock SWCD Assistant Director Doug Bos during the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) annual convention on Dec. 13.