

## Clean Water Fund program aims to expand partnerships



Pilot program offers new opportunities to tribal governments, NGOs to protect and restore water quality



Minnesota nonprofit organizations and tribal partners will soon be able to apply for new grants through a Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) pilot program.

The Clean Water Legacy Partners Grant Pilot Program aims to protect, enhance and restore water quality throughout the state. It is slated to begin accepting applications later this year. The Legislature appropriated \$1 million from the Clean Water Fund for the program in 2021. Available funding will be evenly split between nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and tribal governments.

“This allocation was specifically designated to expand partnerships for clean water,” BWSR Clean Water Specialist Shaina Keseley said.

“ These two groups are part of the conservation universe. They do work similar to what our traditional LGUs do. ”

— Annie Felix-Gerth, BWSR Clean Water Coordinator

BWSR typically provides grants to local government units (LGUs) — such as soil and water conservation districts and watershed districts — to address priorities identified in local water plans, which are required to receive many of BWSR’s grants. The Clean Water Legacy Partners Grant Pilot Program will provide more opportunities for NGOs and tribal governments to

*Grants will leverage the Clean Water Fund to support projects that protect or restore water quality, similar to the Blue Lake project seen here from a public access in Isanti County.*

**Photo Credit:**  
Barbara Peichel,  
BWSR

receive similar Clean Water Funds.

The Clean Water Council, a 28-member group that advises the governor on how to allocate the Clean Water Fund, has been looking to create a program like this for several years, Keseley added.

“We just haven’t worked with a lot of entities outside of local governments, so now we are looking to expand and to be more inclusive,” BWSR Clean Water Coordinator Annie Felix-Gerth said. “These two groups are part of the conservation universe. They do work similar to what our traditional LGUs

do.”

Clean Water Legacy Partners Grant Pilot Program funds can be used for activities including urban stormwater practices, forestry practices, agricultural conservation practices, shoreline stabilization projects, well sealing and public engagement events. More details on eligible activities will be made available when the grant application period begins.

Grant requests must be between \$25,001 and \$250,000. A non-state match of at least 10% — in cash or in-kind services or materials — is required. Landowners,

land occupiers, private organizations, local governments or other sources can provide the match.

The number of application rounds will depend upon the number of applications and eligible projects. Application rounds will be open for about 90 days until all funds are allocated.

“It’s a process,” Keseley said. “If we need more than one request for proposal round to ensure the grant dollars are going out the door for good projects, we will open other rounds.”

BWSR staff will review all

applications for eligibility, and then applications will be further reviewed and ranked by a team of BWSR staff and external partners. From there, the team will make funding recommendations to BWSR’s Board.

“I think there’s just a lot of excitement around this grant funding and we’re going to use this pilot as a stepping stone to hopefully move this program forward,” Felix-Gerth said.

BWSR’s Board approved the Clean Water Legacy Partners Grant Pilot Program request for proposals at its October meeting.