

# BWSR lauds Capitol Region's Fossum for data-driven, people-focused work



Capitol Region Watershed District (CRWD) Administrator Mark Doneux cited high-profile water quality improvement projects at Como Lake and Highland Bridge when he nominated Monitoring and Research Division Manager Bob Fossum for the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) 2022 Outstanding Watershed District Employee award.



“ I’m lucky enough to be able to work at a job and an organization that directly improves the environment. Directly improves water resources. And, on an even larger scale, it directly improves the quality of life for people. ”

— Capitol Region Watershed District Monitoring and Research Division Manager Bob Fossum

BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke presented Fossum with the award on Dec. 2 during the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts’ (MAWD) annual conference in Alexandria.

Asked to reflect on the achievements he was most proud of, Fossum highlighted partnerships.

“Being one of the first two or three staff members at Capitol Region Watershed District and seeing all of the great work we were able to accomplish with our partners over the

years and seeing where we’ve come to today is probably one of the most rewarding parts of my work. I’ve been lucky to be able to work on a lot of very interesting and some groundbreaking work,” Fossum said. “That only happens when you’ve got an incredibly supportive board.”

Doneux said keeping partners, elected officials and the public informed about work such as the [Como Lake treatments](#), which curbed curly-leaf pondweed with herbicide and reduced in-lake phosphorus with alum, is among the

challenges of such a highly visible project.

“In Como Lake we had this curly-leaf pondweed infestation. Talking through what it was, how prolific it was, and really the practical realities of how we need to manage and treat that — he starts with the facts, the science, and is able to communicate the importance and need — and ultimately the benefit to the resource. His ability to do that really exceeds his years in technical training,” Doneux said.

Fossum joined the CRWD

## Nomination Details

CRWD Administrator Mark Doneux cited two projects when he nominated Monitoring and Research Division Manager Bob Fossum for the award.

**COMO LAKE:** In Como Lake, annual phosphorus concentrations decreased by 62% compared with the historical average as the result of a 2020 alum treatment. Herbicide treatments in 2020 and 2021 brought 79% and 97% reductions in the number of buds that spur invasive curly-leaf pondweed growth. Fossum oversaw those treatments, and developed the management plan that guides the lake’s water quality improvements.

**HIDDEN FALLS CREEK:** At Highland Bridge, where the Ford plant once stood, Fossum was instrumental in the planning, design, financing and construction that re-established Hidden Falls Creek, which was routed underground more than 100 years ago when the area was developed. Now, from a central water feature, Hidden Falls Creek carries filtered stormwater under Mississippi River Boulevard to Hidden Falls and the Mississippi River. A 90-foot tunnel connects the park with the Highland Bridge redevelopment.

**Left:** CRWD Monitoring and Research Division Manager Bob Fossum was instrumental in re-establishing Hidden Falls Creek at Highland Bridge. **Center:** CRWD Administrator Mark Doneux and Fossum visited the site. **Photo Credits:** Capitol Region Watershed District **Right:** Fossum oversaw a Como Lake alum treatment. **Photo Credit:** Sky Candy Studios

in 2004. He led monitoring and research, and became director of that division when it was formed. He manages six staff members who track water quality and quantify pollutants at 85 monitoring stations throughout the 40-square-mile district. He is also among the CRWD's capital improvement project managers.

"I'm lucky enough to be able to work at a job and an organization that directly improves the environment. Directly improves water resources. And, on an even larger scale, it directly improves the quality of life for people. Not too many people get to say that. I get to go to a job where the results of my work make the world better. Quite literally. Literally make water better. Make the environment better, and make quality of life better for people," Fossum said.

The CRWD borders the Mississippi River and includes downtown St. Paul. Its work involves many Ramsey County and city departments, plus other municipalities and jurisdictions such as the Minnesota Department of Transportation, universities and colleges.

"(Capitol) Region's fully developed. About a quarter million people live within our boundaries. So it's as much about the people — and the politics, which come with it — but it's as much about the people as it is about the science," Fossum said. "Explaining to people the 'What are we doing?' the 'Why are we doing it?' and 'How will this make their quality of life better?' — in some ways it's even more important than the science."

Doneux cited the re-establishment of Hidden Falls Creek, part of the [Highland](#)



Fossum was named 2022 Outstanding Watershed District Employee on Dec. 2 during the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts' annual conference at the Arrowwood Conference Center in Alexandria. BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke presented the award. **Photo Credit:** Ann Wessel, BWSR

[Bridge redevelopment](#) at the site of St. Paul's former Ford plant, as an example of a project that has improved both water quality and quality of life. Fossum's involvement spanned about 10 years, navigating the politics and involving the Highland District Council, St. Paul elected officials and city departments.

"We didn't want to see just a bunch of underground pipes to treat stormwater. We had this rare opportunity to better manage water but also doing it in a way that brings water back to the surface that people can see and enjoy. Having that as a sales pitch was a pretty strong and compelling argument to make it an amenity and not just a utility," Doneux said. "It's cheaper and more effective to treat water in a centralized system. .... We did a study that Bob led to show cost-benefit of a central water feature. While it cost more to build, it was cheaper in the long term to maintain."

St. Paul Parks and Recreation Manager of Design and Construction Alice Messer has worked with Fossum on projects that involve parkland.

"He always thinks about parkland and how important it is for residents, and we're always trying to think of ways to have innovative stormwater complemented with parkland. It's never easy, but I think both of those projects are examples where it just appears seamless. You go to Určí Makhá in the former Ford site or you go to Como Lake and you can see these BMPs (best management practices) integrated — but they are integrated into the landscape. They feel like part of the park. People are learning about water quality."

At the former Ford site, Messer said visitors can touch the water, which is carried over Hidden Falls to a creek channel bound for the Mississippi River. Doneux said the water feature draws joggers, walkers and people who take their kids to the site.

"It's a development amenity, it's a neighborhood amenity — it's a city amenity now," Doneux said.

"What's the best way to manage water on this 135-acre redevelopment site? You start with that as your foundation. It helps your

cause when you've got the facts behind you," Doneux said.

University studies across the U.S. draw from the BMP monitoring data the CRWD produces. Among its early innovations: The district adopted a volume control standard and rules in 2006. Most recently, the CRWD automated real-time data collection.

"The other big thing I try to do in my career is always, always, always be available to discuss and answer questions of people that have concerns — even if they're perhaps a little worked up about it, or even a little mad about it. We owe it to the public, as a public agency, to be able to sit and discuss our projects," Fossum said.

Fossum said one of the planned CRWD projects he's most excited about is stormwater treatment at McMurray Fields in St. Paul's Como Regional Park, which is expected to occur over the next few years. And he's looking forward to CRWD's developing approach to climate change and climate resiliency work — how water resources are starting to respond to it, and what that means from a water management perspective.

"This could be like a lifetime achievement award for Bob. It could be Employee of the Decade," Doneux said.

*Each year, BWSR celebrates the excellent work by local government staff to advance conservation efforts. BWSR presented the Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Employee award to Becker SWCD Administrator Bryan Malone Dec. 13 at the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' annual convention.*