

Producers' work with Martin SWCD targets Fairmont city water supply



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BWSR awarded Martin County an \$882,000 Clean Water Fund grant in 2022 for a [nutrient treatment train](#) to reduce pollutant-loading to Amber Lake, which flows from Hall Lake to Budd Lake. Contractors built an 8-acre nutrient treatment wetland and an 8,000-linear-foot two-stage ditch. Tile installation is set for this season. Estimated annual reductions: 12,827 pounds of nitrate, 463 pounds of total phosphorus, 29 tons of sediment.

FAIRMONT — The Martin Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is poised to work with producers on the second phase of Clean Water Fund-backed work affecting Fairmont's drinking water.

The city of about 10,250 draws its municipal water supply from Budd Lake, part of the nutrient-impaired Fairmont Chain of Lakes. In May 2016 nitrate levels exceeded 10 parts per million (ppm), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) standard for safe drinking water. The [Minnesota Department of Health](#) (MDH) links nitrates to health concerns.

Fairmont solved the 2016 issue by drawing from a backup well. But water quality improvement work continues. Clean Water Fund grants the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) awarded to the Martin SWCD in 2019 and 2025 are part of that effort. Those grants focus on two subwatersheds draining to Budd Lake: Dutch Creek and Hall Lake.

With 100% of costs covered by \$92,150 in Clean Water Funds and \$43,060 in EPA grant dollars via the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), producers installed five grassed waterways, three water and sediment control basins and two saturated buffers.

Together, those projects will keep an

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— Kate Rosenberg,
Martin County producer

estimated 1,002 pounds of nitrogen, 52 pounds of phosphorus, 123 tons of sediment and 248 tons of soil out of the chain of lakes annually. One pound of phosphorus can feed up to 500 pounds of algae.

“Having this really targeted area allows you to focus your energy and efforts on specific, critical areas, and having this grant gave us the staff time to do that,” said Martin SWCD Manager Ashley Brenke. “We normally don't do saturated buffers, so that was one practice we were able to install that we probably wouldn't have otherwise.”

The Dutch Creek subwatershed is the largest of the two that drain to Budd Lake. Land-use is primarily agricultural.

“Farmers are the first defense in land stewardship. If we don't take care of it, then it doesn't happen,” said Kate Rosenberg.

Center: Martin SWCD outreach coordinator Jesse Walters and Kate Rosenberg took a look at the soybean crop in July 2022 on land she farms in Rolling Green Township. Rosenberg worked with the Martin SWCD to install a series of water and sediment control basins in a field bordering Dutch Creek (**right**). The Clean Water Fund grant-supported project is part of the SWCD's nitrate-reduction work targeting watersheds that feed into Budd Lake, **left**, a source of city drinking water.
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Ann Wessel, BWSR

Rosenberg, who farms about 1,000 acres with her husband, worked with the SWCD to install a series of three water and sediment control basins in a Rolling Green Township field bordering Dutch Creek, also known as County Ditch 2.

That field contains a draw that stretches back a half mile, draining about 55 acres. Existing grassed waterways couldn't handle the runoff. The water and sediment control basins curb erosion and nutrient-loading by allowing the sediment to settle out.

"There is a clear benefit that the outlet tile at the ditch itself is repaired (and) the dike is higher so that we don't have (more) soil loss at that point," Rosenberg said.

The structure held up to heavy rains in June 2024.

"People driving by, observing projects and seeing that they are functioning properly and have a positive impact — those are all positive interactions that lead to more projects," said Martin SWCD outreach coordinator Jesse Walters.

With a \$260,000 Clean Water Fund grant awarded in 2025, the Martin SWCD will offer incentives for practices including up to 55 acres of new enrollments in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and 700 acres of split-rate nitrogen application; and cost-share for seven high-



The city of Fairmont supplies about 3,900 residential users with drinking water.

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priority structural practices identified in Fairmont's Surface Water Intake Protection Plan.

That list reflects some of the things landowners were interested in that weren't covered under the 2019 grant.

Before approaching producers, SWCD staff run computer modeling to see what projects might work where. Producers are primarily interested in the cost and how projects would fit with their farming practices and equipment. The 2025 grant and leveraged funding — including continuing EPA funds targeting the



VIDEO: in “[Fairmont Drinking Water Treatment](#),” Water and Wastewater Superintendent Brady Powers explains how the city treats its drinking water, which is drawn from the Fairmont Chain of Lakes.

Dutch Creek and Hall Lake subwatersheds, made available through the EPA's Small Watersheds Focus program — may cover up to 100% of the cost.

Walters meets with

producers in the field. If the computer model doesn't fit their operation, they might discuss other options.

"We've also seen increases in other programs that aren't funded by this grant, like Jesse's done a great job working on some CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) projects," Brenke said. "So we've seen an increase in those projects in this small watershed compared to other parts of the county just because we're doing that targeted landowner outreach."

Practices supported by the 2019 Clean Water Fund grant are treating 550 acres within the 26,000-acre Fairmont Drinking Water Supply Management Area.

"I think there's a lot of people that care a lot about the water quality in the Fairmont Chain of Lakes, and I think it takes all of those people and more to make improvements within the Fairmont Chain of Lakes," Walters said. "It can take efforts beyond what we can do to see noticeable improvements."

Project partners include the city of Fairmont, Martin County, the Martin County Drainage Authority, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the MDH, the MPCA and BWSR.

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.