

# Local governments tap PRAP grants to assess, streamline staffing needs

Local government units (LGUs) throughout Minnesota are improving staffing and workload efficiencies with support from Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) grants from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).

BWSR established PRAP in 2012 to help LGUs systematically review their organizations' performance to find ways to improve processes and boost efficiency. The grants fund organizational improvement activities such as assessing staff workloads, updating personnel policies, and working in conjunction with consultants to complete strategic plans and assessments. BWSR has awarded approximately \$450,000 in PRAP grants since the program began.

Three recent PRAP recipients that focused on staff and workload assessments shared their experiences.

## Southwest Prairie Technical Service Area (TSA 5)

The Southwest Prairie Technical Service Area (TSA 5) received a \$20,000 PRAP grant from BWSR last year to help analyze staff workloads. TSA 5 provided a \$15,600 match, primarily in the form of staff time. Grant work began in April 2024 and concluded in October.

Technical Service Areas (TSAs) are joint powers organizations that provide technical assistance and guidance to member soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs). Eight TSAs operate throughout the state. TSA 5 supports 11 SWCDs: Cottonwood, Jackson, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock and Yellow Medicine.



*Wilkin SWCD Co-Administrators Beatrice Newman and Eric Stroh reviewed a final report for a staffing assessment prepared by Houston Engineering and supported by a PRAP grant from BWSR. SWCD staff applied for the grant to get a comprehensive look at district workloads and evaluate if changes were needed. Photo Credit: Wilkin SWCD*

TSA 5 is involved with eight separate One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) planning partnerships. TSA 5 Manager Kay Gross, who also is the SWCD's district administrator, said she applied for the PRAP grant to help navigate staffing needs related to implementing 1W1P.

"With multiple plans coming online, I wondered, 'Do we have enough staff out here to do what we need to do?'" Gross said. "It really comes down to what our districts need to get done when we look at these plans. It can feel daunting."

TSA 5 contracted Houston Engineering to complete the workload assessment. The process began with a kickoff meeting for SWCD supervisors within TSA 5, and included workshops and surveys for TSA 5 staff and the TSA's associated SWCDs. Houston Engineering

used information from these meetings and surveys to review and analyze TSA 5's staffing and workload needs.

This analysis determined that the TSA should ideally hire an additional full-time employee to meet staffing needs. Gross said the TSA had been hoping to add an additional staff member and now aims to hire someone in 2026.

"I would recommend PRAP grants to other districts," Gross said. "It really helps to see if you're missing something. Having another pair of eyes coming in from outside to analyze things is a big benefit."

## Morrison SWCD

The Morrison SWCD received a \$10,000 PRAP grant last year and

“ The most useful outcome out of this whole process has been the conversations we’ve had between staff and the board. It was great to have those discussions, and to have them not out of fear or stress. It was more, ‘We’re in a really good position right now, let’s evaluate where we’re at.’ ”

— Shannon Wettstein, Morrison SWCD



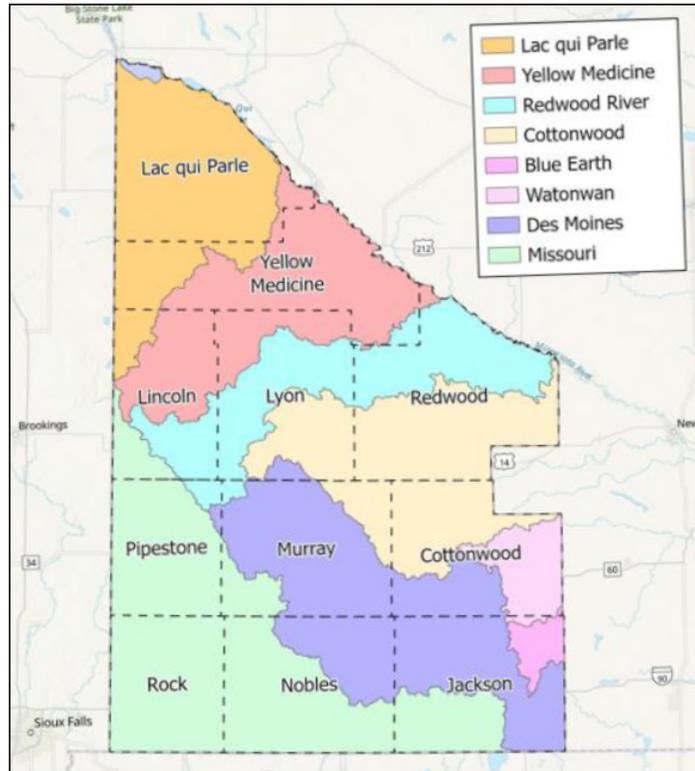
provided a \$5,750 match. Grant work began in December 2023 and concluded in December 2024.

The Morrison SWCD contracted with Houston Engineering to perform the workload and staffing assessment. This effort began with two workshops — one for SWCD supervisors, the other for staff — and included an in-depth analysis of district documents such as work plans and program evaluations.

Morrison SWCD District Administrator Shannon Wettstein said she applied for the grant for several reasons. Two longtime SWCD employees retired last year, prompting a look at organizational structures. Additionally, the SWCD in recent years has explored more federal funding opportunities, and Wettstein was interested in the potential impacts of working with more federal grants.

The recommendation: hire two additional full-time employees to meet staffing needs. Wettstein said the uncertainty of federal funding put hiring on hold, but the discourse spurred by the grant work was more than worthwhile.

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TSA 5 is involved in eight separate One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) planning partnerships. Watershed planning boundaries are shown in relation to TSA 5 counties above. TSA 5 Manager Kay Gross said she applied for a PRAP grant to help navigate staffing needs related to implementing the large number of plans. **Map Credit:** TSA 5

we’ve had between staff and the board,” Wettstein said. “It was great to have those discussions, and to have them not out of fear or stress. It was more, ‘We’re in a really good position right now, let’s evaluate where we’re at.’”

The Morrison SWCD is working on another PRAP grant focused on updating its employee policy. It is slated to wrap up in December.

## Wilkin SWCD

The Wilkin SWCD received a \$10,000 PRAP grant in February 2024, which it matched at over 100% with a \$12,650 contribution. Grant work concluded in October.

Wilkin SWCD Administrator Eric Stroh applied for the grant to get a comprehensive look at district workloads and evaluate if changes were needed. Recent turnover in SWCD management

also prompted the staffing assessment. Wilkin SWCD is co-managed by two district administrators: Stroh and Beatrice Newman.

“It helped us reprioritize things,” Newman said. “We were able to say, ‘Here are our priorities, but here’s where we’re spending our time.’ This helped us ask how we can take our time and better put it toward our priorities.”

Like Morrison SWCD and TSA 5, Wilkin SWCD worked with Houston Engineering. The consultant helped facilitate a survey for supervisors, plus several workshops for staff, and analyzed district documents to prepare their assessment. The recommendation: hire a seasonal worker. Other recommendations included updating employee job descriptions and looking into time tracking systems for district activities.

Newman said she agreed that adding a seasonal employee could benefit the SWCD and was exploring that option. “The PRAP grant helped us accurately and physically see where all the work is going for the district,” Newman said. “It really helped us visualize everything.”

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