



2025



# Annual Report

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[www.ricecreek.org](http://www.ricecreek.org)

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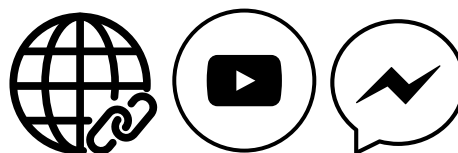
*\*Photo Pages Throughout Report*

# About Us

- A special-purpose unit of government
- Established by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources on January 18, 1972, upon petition by county boards with support from citizens and cities.
- Approximately 186 square miles of urban and rural lands in Anoka, Hennepin, Ramsey, and Washington Counties.
- Includes all or portions of 28 cities and townships. (Arden Hills, Birchwood Village, Blaine, Centerville, Circle Pines, Columbia Heights, Columbus, Dellwood, Falcon Heights, Forest Lake, Fridley, Grant, Hugo, Lauderdale, Lexington, Lino Lakes, Mahtomedi, May Township, Mounds View, New Brighton, Roseville, Saint Anthony, Scandia, Shoreview, Spring Lake Park, White Bear Lake, White Bear Township and Willernie).



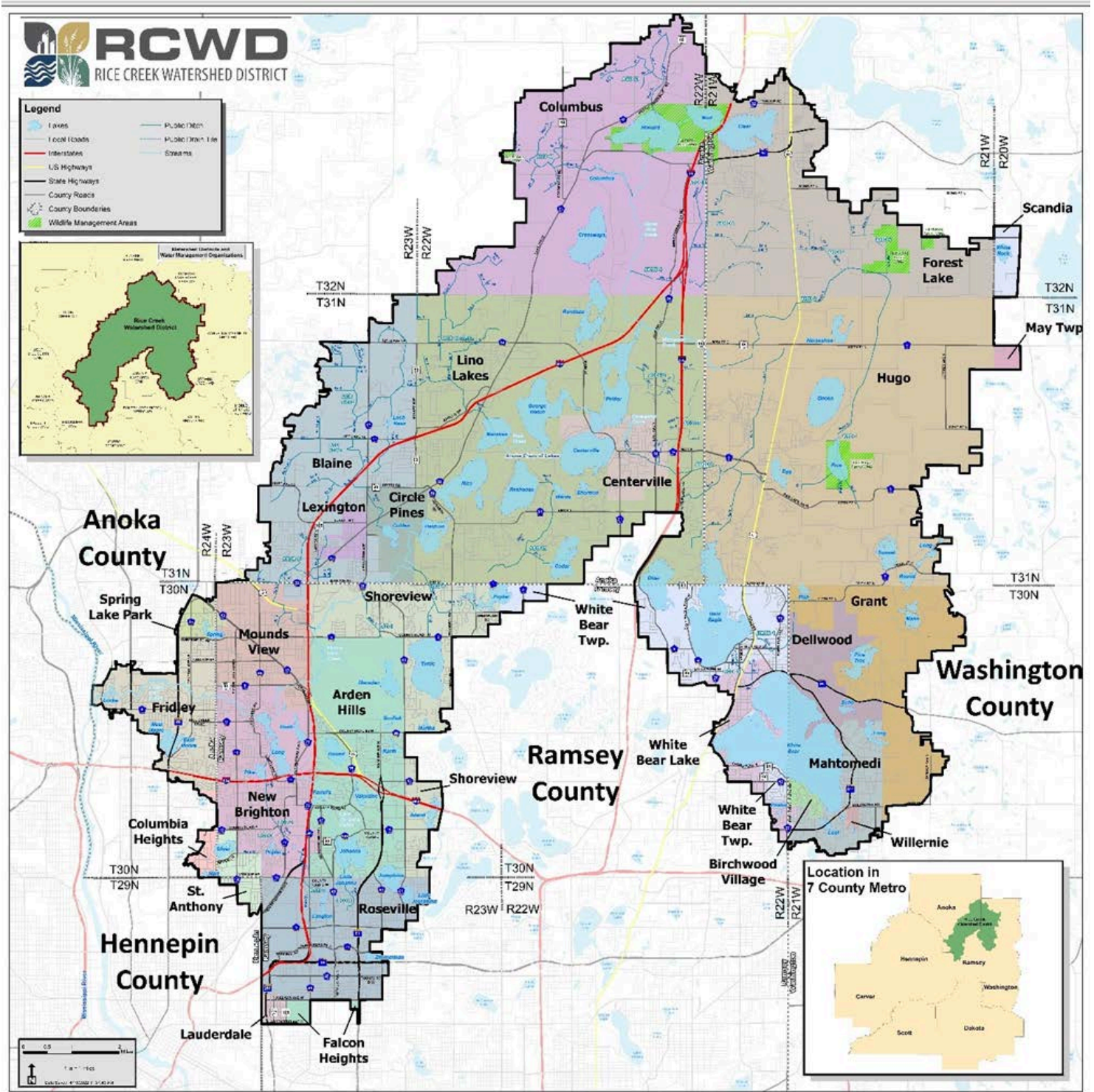
## Contact Us



### **Rice Creek Watershed District's Mission:**

To manage, protect, and improve the water resources of the District through flood control and water quality projects and programs.

# Rice Creek Watershed District Map



## Rice Creek Watershed District's Mission:

To manage, protect, and improve the water resources of the District through flood control and water quality projects and programs.

# Meet Our Team

## Board of Managers

### **Mike Bradley, President**

County: Ramsey | Term Expires: January 2027

### **John Waller, 1st Vice President**

County: Washington | Term Expires: January 2028

### **Steve Wagamon, 2nd Vice President**

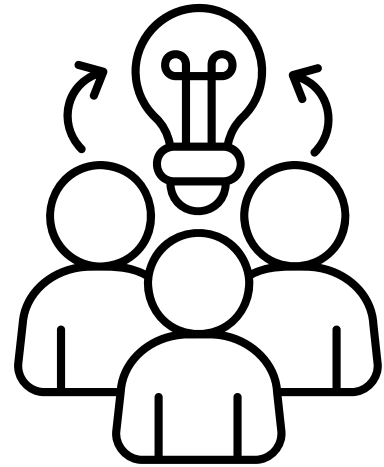
County: Anoka | Served 2011 to January 2026

### **Marcie Weinandt, Treasurer**

County: Ramsey | Term Expires: January 2029

### **Jess Robertson, Secretary**

County: Anoka | Term Expires: January 2029



## Staff

Nick Tomczik – District Administrator

Patrick Hughes – Regulatory Manager

Matthew Kocian – Lake & Stream  
Manager

Tom Schmidt – Drainage and Facilities  
Manager

Theresa Stasica – Office Manager

Kendra Sommerfeld – Communications  
& Outreach Manager

Molly Nelson – Outreach and Grants  
Technician

Ali Chalberg – Watershed Technician  
and Inspector

Anna Grace – Regulatory Technician

Kelsey White – Permit Technician

Catherine Nester – Water Monitoring  
Technician

Abel Green – Operations and  
Maintenance Inspector

Will Roach – Watershed  
Technician/Inspector

Erik Larson – Watershed Inspector

Sarah Struntz – Watershed Inspector

David Petry – Project Manager

Sara Belden – Project Technician

Emmet Hurley – Program Support  
Technician

Connor Price – Technical Field  
Assistant

## Legal, Professional, and Consulting Services

Rinke Noonan for legal counsel, Redpath and Company for accounting, Houston Engineering for technical consulting, and RYMARK for information technologies.



RCWD Staff and Board Managers at MN Watersheds Conference



Mng. Bradley, Nick Tomczik, Mng. Weinandt at MN Watersheds conference



Mng. Weinandt getting recognized at MN Watersheds Conference as Clean Water Council Rep

# Introduction and Mission

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## What's in Our Annual Report

- This annual report reviews and assesses the previous year's work and its progress toward the goals of the RCWD 2020–2029 Watershed Management Plan (WMP).
- *There are clickable links throughout the report to bring you to additional information.*
- This report is organized by RCWD's primary program areas, summarizing 2025 accomplishments and the 2026 work plan within each
- The report fulfills the requirements of MN Statute Chapter 103D.351, which requires watershed districts to file an annual report with the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).

## Rice Creek Watershed District's Watershed Management Plan (WMP)

The 2020 WMP outlines RCWD's goals and strategies for addressing watershed challenges, focusing on water quality management, flood control, and resource preservation. Key initiatives include monitoring programs, regulations, and best management practices.

[Full WMP Here.](#)

Community engagement and stakeholder involvement are emphasized for effective management. The next 10-year watershed management plan planning process will start in 2028.



Hansen Park, New Brighton

# 2025 Highlights

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## **Administration & Budget**

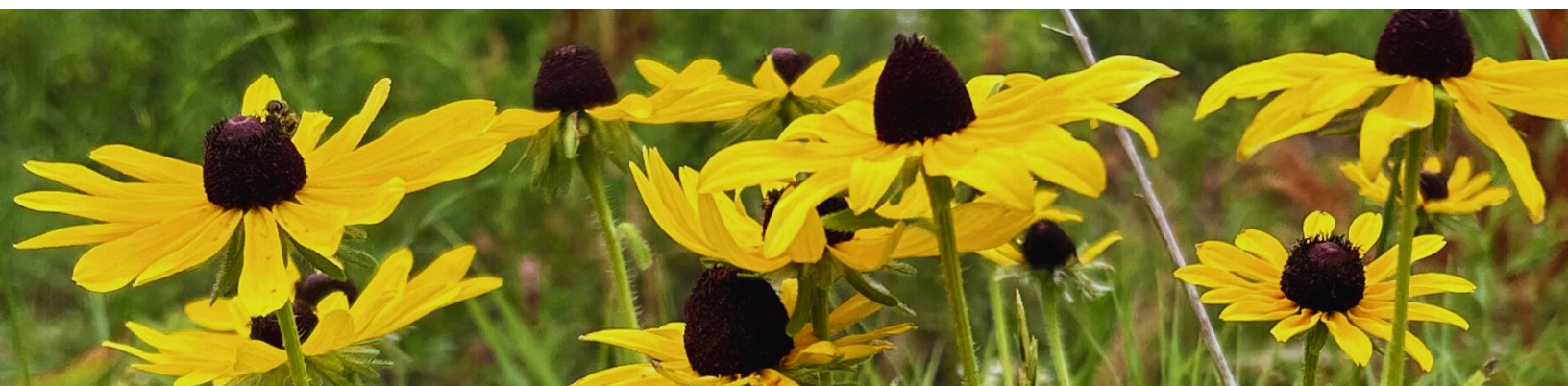
- Levy increase of 0.72% for 2025; District maintained required 40% General Fund and Implementation Fund balance reserves.
- Total expenditures of \$5.32 million against a budget of \$8.33 million; \$4.5 million in Project Anticipation Fund carried forward.
- All 28 communities now have RCWD Board-approved Local Water Management Plans.

## **Public Drainage**

- Completed 160 inspections and 45 maintenance projects on 11 of 22 public drainage systems (68% of systems, exceeding the 20% annual minimum goal).
- Initiated repair of Anoka County Ditch 5 #3-62 (Branches 5 & 6), allocating costs using a blend of ad valorem (60%) and water management district funds (40%).
- In 2025, MPCA requested updated MS4 mapping; current guidance suggests public drainage systems and District-owned facilities may not meet MPCA's requirements to necessitate RCWD holding an MS4 permit. MPCA provided a petition for RCWD to request reevaluation of its MS4 status.
- RCWD is no longer regulated under the General Stormwater Permit for Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4).

## **Grant Programs**

- Stormwater Management Grant Program: Awarded \$300,000 to 5 cities (1 in Anoka County, 4 in Ramsey County) for water quality and flood control projects, providing estimated removal of 18.2 lbs phosphorus and 8,600 lbs sediment.
- Water Quality Grant Program: Awarded approximately \$119,705 to 15 projects assisting landowners with installation of BMPs.
- Mini-Grants Program: Issued 40 mini-grants (rain barrels, low-mow turf, native plantings, and water outreach/education) totaling \$17,341.



# 2025 Highlights

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## Projects

- Secured \$1.173 million Stormwater Implementation Grant from the MPCA for final design and Phase 1 construction of the Jones Lake Project (flood mitigation along Ramsey County Ditches 2, 3, and 5).
- Submitted \$6.84 million bonding request to Minnesota Management and Budget to complete the Jones Lake Project.
- Awarded \$108,900 from the Clean Water Fund (**WBIF**) to complete final designs for Clearwater Creek channel restoration (Main Trunk of Anoka Washington Judicial Ditch 3).
- Awarded \$50,000 from BWSR through a Water Quality and Storage Grant for a stormwater storage feasibility study along Hardwood Creek (Main Trunk of Anoka Washington Judicial Ditch 2).
- Awarded \$71,000 from MPCA for a feasibility analysis and preliminary designs for stormwater BMPs in the East Moore Lake subwatershed in Fridley.
- Initiated a feasibility study to assess streambank stabilization and stormwater treatment alternatives along Lower Rice Creek near Old Central Ave in Fridley.
- Completed the Hwy 61 Ponds Project and the Clearwater Creek / JD3 Feasibility Study.

## Water Quality & Monitoring

- Staff monitored 13 lakes, 12 long-term stream/ditch sites, and 5 synoptic sites; partners and volunteers monitored an additional 17 lakes.
- Collected 413 water samples from lakes, streams, and ditches, resulting in 2,035 individual laboratory analyses.
- Four lakes (Bald Eagle, Golden, Island, and White Rock) were removed from the MPCA Impaired Waters list, transitioning to 'protection' status.
- Completed the first phase of alum treatment at Centerville Lake (Clean Water Fund grant-supported).
- Removed 419 adult carp from the Long Lake/Lino Chain of Lakes; cumulative removals since program inception: 57,934 carp (~40,000 lbs). Carp biomass reduced to ~92 kg/ha, meeting the District's <100 kg/ha long-term goal. **Learn more about carp management in the watershed [here](#).**
- Partnered with seven lake associations to manage curlyleaf pondweed on Bald Eagle, Clear, Centerville, Josephine, Johanna, Peltier, Reshanau, Golden, and Silver Lakes.
- Aquatic plant surveys conducted at 10 lakes. **Learn more about native aquatic plants [here](#).**

# 2025 Highlights

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## District Facilities

- Inspected 23 of 32 inventoried facilities (72%), exceeding the 10-year plan target. Legal access secured for 20 of 32 facilities (63%).
- Completed non-routine maintenance at 10 facilities, with focus on troubleshooting and repairing Iron-Enhanced Sand Filters (IESFs) at Hansen Park, Oasis Pond, and Bald Eagle Lake.

## Regulatory (Permitting)

- Received 123 permit applications; issued 102 permits; closed 153 permits.
- Conducted 1,186 total inspections which included 309 construction sites.
- Updated District rules took effect January 1, 2025 and were successfully implemented.
- Extended inspection service agreements with Ramsey County Soil and Water Conservation District and Washington Conservation District through December 31, 2026.
- Amended Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Centerville for erosion and sediment control inspections, incorporating a two-year automatic term renewal.

## Outreach & Communications

- Sponsored 4 Blue Thumb shoreline and rain garden workshop, a U of M AIS Detector Workshop, and 2 Smart Salting certification workshops (for Anoka and Ramsey County.)
- Installed the District's first water-themed public art project at Moore Lake Park; sponsored 3 additional water/nature art opportunities with White Bear Center for the Arts.
- Installed a rain garden at Hayes Elementary School (Fridley) in partnership with Anoka County SWCD through the Pollinator Pathway Grant.
- Participated in Growing Green Hearts activities at Highview Middle School, Hayes Elementary, and Centennial Library.



# Administration & Budget

RCWD developed its 2025 budget to align with the Watershed Management Plan and deliver transparency regarding its long-term financial stability.

The 2025 levy increase was 0.72%. The District estimates its levy impact on every \$400,000 of taxable market value to be approximately \$63. The remainder of revenue came from water management districts, fees, grants, investment income, and use of the District's fund balance.

The District maintained a 40% assigned administrative fund and unassigned implementation fund balance per its General Fund Balance Policy. The 2025 budget included approximately \$2.6 million in project anticipation/fund balance fund, earmarking dollars for future projects without the need to borrow funds.

## Outside Funding Sources

BWSR Clean Water Fund Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF), MPCA Clean Water Fund grants, and other state grant programs.

For the FY24–25 WBIF program year, RCWD applied for funds for the design of restoration and stabilization work on Anoka Washington Judicial Ditch 3 (Clearwater Creek) downstream of I-35W.



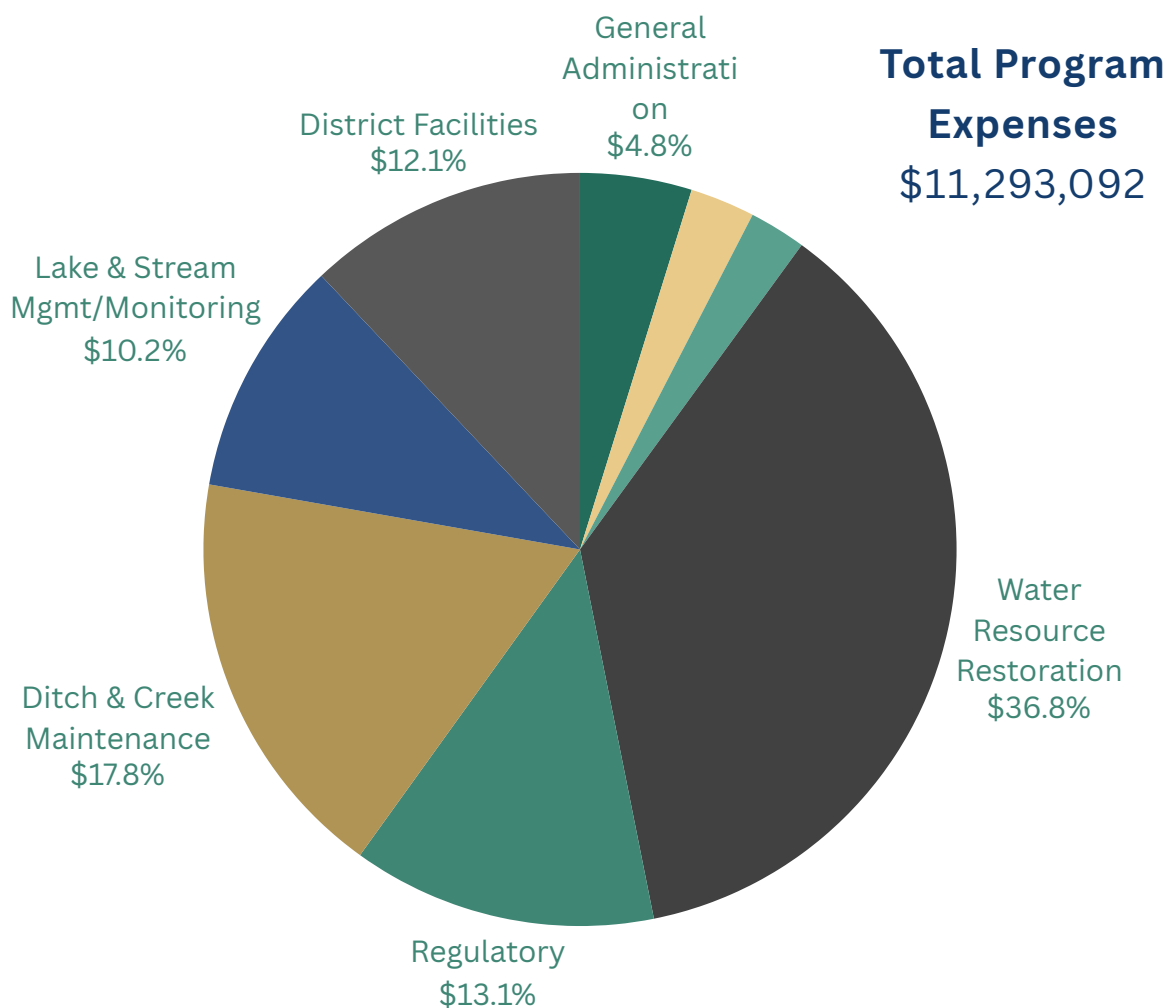
## 2026 Work Plan – Administration & Budget

- Continue to develop a transparent budget in consideration of the District's mission and stakeholder needs.
- Re-evaluate the prioritization of District capital projects and protection of past public dollar infrastructure investments during the annual budgeting cycle.
- Continue to develop and implement an effective framework for securing outside funding.
- Evaluate new concerns or assistance requests with consideration to urgency, the nature of the District's responsibility, and available funding and staffing capacity.

# Budget Allocations

Program	2026 Budget
General Administration	\$541,279
Environmental Education	\$314,720
Information Mgmt/Technology	\$275,386
Water Resource Restoration	\$4,159,896
Regulatory	\$1,476,440
Ditch & Creek Maintenance	\$2,014,514
Lake & Stream Mgmt/Monitoring	\$1,149,963
District Facilities	\$1,360,895

## 2026 Budget



# Public Drainage

RCWD serves as the Drainage Authority for approx. 114 miles of public drainage systems (county and judicial ditches) established under MN Statute 103E. The District's goal is to schedule, prioritize, and execute inspection and maintenance to preserve and restore drainage function.

## 2025 Accomplishments

Staff exceeded 160 inspections and completed 45 maintenance projects on 11 of 22 drainage systems in 2025 – 68% of all systems, well above the 20% annual minimum goal. All 17 scheduled inspections were completed. Inspections also included illicit discharge detection in recognition of MS4 protocols.

### Examples of completed 2025 maintenance projects include:

- ACD 10-22-32 – main trunk channel excavation from Jodrell to south of Pine Street and Branch #4 Pine Street to Andall Street.
- ACD 72 – replacement of existing clay tile with HDPE tile on various branches.
- ACD 46 – bank failure repair.
- WJD 2 – multiple beaver dam removals.
- AWJD 4/ACD 15 – excavation of channel through Brown's Preserve and large sections of main trunk and Branch 2 north of 195th Street N.

The District continued to allocate costs for the ACD 53-62 Main Trunk repair project using a hybrid legal framework: 40% allocated to the whole district via ad valorem funds and 60% allocated to landowners directly draining to the system. Landowners with charges under \$300 pay a single annual installment; charges over \$300 are paid in three equal annual installments with no interest accruing in the first three years.

The District continued to update its Drainage Portal for landowner access to official drainage system records, and communicated its role and authority through stakeholder outreach in advance of maintenance activities.

### Non-103E Drainage Systems

The District engaged with private partners on non-103E drainage issues following its Natural Channel Management Policy. Staff communicated this policy to landowners and partners regarding private drainage inquiries. Updated information on the policy is available on RCWD's website.

# Public Drainage

## 2026 Work Plan

- Continue to inspect and maintain public drainage systems and complete maintenance projects per the Inspector's recommendations.
- ACD 53-62 – tile excavation and vegetation management on multiple branches.
- AWJD 3, Branch 3 – tree/brush mowing; Branch 4 – culvert relocation/bank stabilization.
- ARJD 1 – Naples to I-35W.
- Continue ditch bank mowing and right-of-way maintenance on various systems.
- Promote agreements with municipal partners to increase collaborative cost-effective maintenance activities on public drainage systems.
- Continue to hold informational meetings prior to public hearings and send notices in advance of maintenance activities when feasible.
- Continue inspecting public drainage systems for illicit discharges.



# District Facilities

The District owns and maintains water management structures and properties constructed for purposes of addressing water quality, regional flooding, or wetland habitat. The District's goals are to inspect all facilities over the 10-year WMP period (2020–2029), maintain their water management function, and obtain legal access to 75% of facilities during the same period.

## 2025 Accomplishments

Of the 32 total inventoried facilities, 23 were inspected in 2025 (72%). At the end of 2025, the District had legal access to 20 of 32 facilities (63%). Non-routine maintenance was completed at 10 facilities.

A primary focus was troubleshooting and repairing the three Iron-Enhanced Sand Filter (IESF) sites:

- Hansen Park IESF – pump damaged by animals; pump repaired and operational for the season.
- Oasis Pond IESF – cracked pipe repaired; site expected to operate normally.
- Bald Eagle Lake IESF – faulty Electronic Control Unit identified and scheduled for retrofit with an updated unit.
- All three IESF sites were inoperable for much of 2025, resulting in 0 gallons treated at Hansen Park and 0 gallons treated at Bald Eagle Lake. Repairs are complete or underway for the 2026 season

## Flooding & Regional Flood Control

The District utilizes a combination of regulation, projects, and programs to manage flooding, recognizing that stormwater management rules alone cannot meet current and future flood management needs.

Ramsey County Ditches 2, 3 & 5 Basic Water Management Project: The current focus is Jones Lake Improvements, which is critical for achieving regional flood risk reductions and must be completed prior to other project components.

The District secured \$1.173 million in MPCA Stormwater Implementation Grant funding for final design and Phase 1 construction. A \$6.84 million bonding request was submitted to Minnesota Management and Budget. The District has cumulatively invested over \$5 million on Hansen Park, Mirror Pond, and RCD 2, 3, 5 to date.

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# District Facilities

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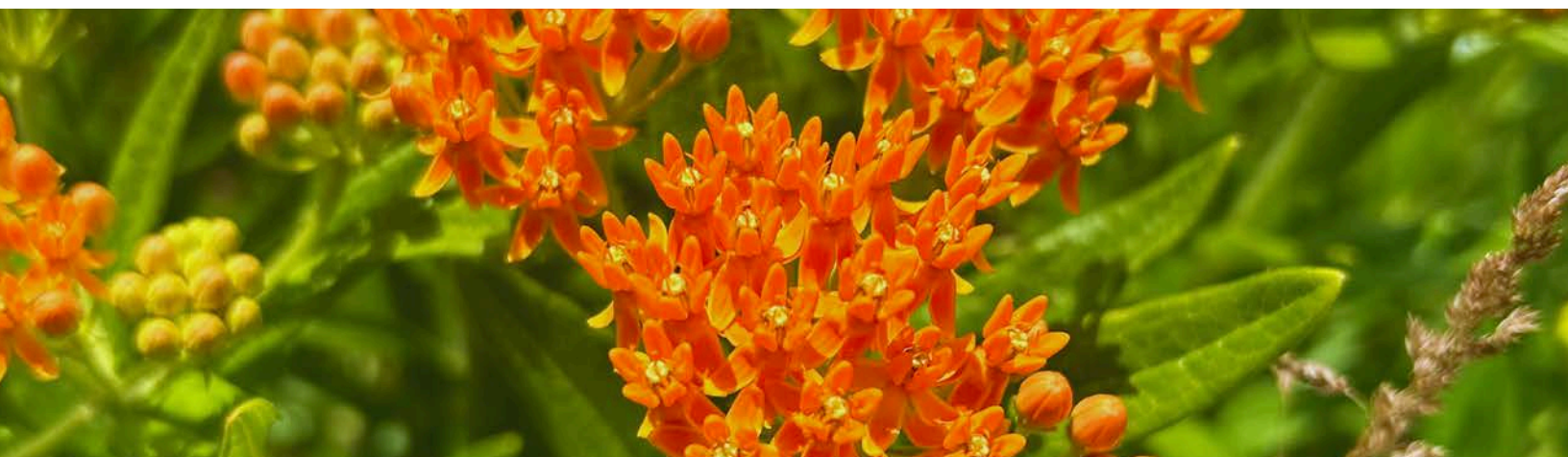
## **Flooding & Regional Flood Control (Continued)**

Priebe Lake Outfall Project (PLOP): RCWD continued extensive collaboration with Birchwood Village, Mahtomedi, and White Bear Lake to address landowner and city concerns at the PLOP outlet in Hall's Marsh. The District continued dialog with partner cities on facility function and establishing long term framework for clear operational terms, initially a MOA, and will fulfill its obligation to inspect and maintain District facilities independent of any MOA.

The District also completed its annual update of the District-wide hydrologic/hydraulic model, incorporating landscape-scale changes from new developments and major capital projects completed during 2025.

## **2026 Work Plan**

- Continue inspecting all facilities; complete more detailed evaluation of each facility's physical location and condition.
- Continue active operational activities at Hansen Park IESF, Bald Eagle Lake IESF, and Oasis Pond IESF (support to City of Roseville), and Oneka Ridge Golf Course stormwater reuse system.
- Continue collaboration with Birchwood Village, Mahtomedi, and White Bear Lake on the Priebe Lake Outfall Project operational terms.
- Support the City of New Brighton's FEMA Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) for the area around Hansen Park, including cost-share and modeling support.
- Continue to advance Jones Lake component of Ramsey County Ditches 2, 3 & 5 Project; pursue all available funding sources including MN DNR, MPCA, legislature, and grants.
- Allocate \$400,000 in Stormwater Management Grant Program funding to assist public and private entities with stormwater quality, volume reduction, and rate control projects.





Staff, Board Managers, Rep David Gottfried, New Brighton Mayor Kari Niedfeldt-Thomas and Staff, Houston Engineering at the MN Bonding Tour presenting the Jones Lake Flood Mitigation project.



Abel Green and Molly Nelson installing a project sign at PCOTW's Water Quality Grant project in Shoreview.



Ali Chalberg water monitoring.



Molly Nelson presenting about rain gardens to PCOTW in Shoreview.

# Projects

The District pursues capital projects and feasibility studies in collaboration with municipal partners to address flooding, water quality, and habitat restoration across the watershed.

## 2025 Project Accomplishments

- Jones Lake Project (New Brighton): Secured \$1.173M MPCA Stormwater Implementation Grant for final design and Phase 1 construction. Submitted \$6.84M state bonding request to Minnesota Management and Budget.
- Clearwater Creek / Anoka Washington Judicial Ditch 3 (Lino Lakes and Centerville): Completed feasibility study. Awarded \$108,900 in WBIF Clean Water Fund grant for final restoration designs of the downstream channel reaches.
- Hardwood Creek / Anoka Washington Judicial Ditch 2 (Hugo and Forest Lake): Awarded \$50,000 BWSR Water Quality and Storage Grant for a stormwater storage feasibility study.
- East Moore Lake (Fridley): Awarded \$71,000 from MPCA for feasibility analysis and preliminary designs for stormwater management BMPs addressing water quality and flooding.
- Lower Rice Creek (Fridley): Initiated feasibility study to assess streambank stabilization and stormwater treatment alternatives near Old Central Ave.
- Hwy 61 Ponds Feasibility Study (White Bear Township): Completed in 2025.
- Centerville Alum Treatment (Centerville): Completed the first half of the alum treatment (Clean Water Fund grant-supported).

**To see an interactive map of RCWD's projects, [click here](https://www.ricecreek.org/projects/), (or go to <https://www.ricecreek.org/projects/>)**

## 2026 Work Plan

- Continue implementation of the Jones Lake component of the Ramsey County Ditches 2, 3 & 5 project; pursue remaining funding needs.
- Advance Clearwater Creek final design work with WBIF funding.
- Complete Hardwood Creek stormwater storage feasibility study.
- Advance East Moore Lake feasibility into preliminary design phase.
- Continue Lower Rice Creek streambank stabilization feasibility study.
- Complete second half of Centerville Alum Treatment.

# Water Quality

## Surface Water Monitoring – 2025 Accomplishments

- Collected 413 water samples across lakes, streams, and ditches; 2,035 individual laboratory analyses.
- Regularly monitored 13 lakes (water samples and physical measurements); partners and volunteers monitored an additional 17–18 lakes through the Metropolitan Council's Community Assisted Monitoring Program (CAMP).
- Monitored water quality and physical parameters at 12 long-term stream and ditch sites and 5 synoptic/project-specific sites.
- Continued partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey to operate a continuous stream gage on Rice Creek in Mounds View.
- Conducted aquatic plant surveys at 10 lakes for invasive species management and overall lake health assessment.
- Supported the Friends of the Mississippi River Stream Health Evaluation Program (SHEP) for biological health monitoring.

## Water Quality – 2025 Accomplishments

**Nutrient Enrichment & Eutrophication:** Four lakes – Bald Eagle, Golden, Island, and White Rock – were removed from the MPCA Impaired Waters list in 2025 due to improved nutrient conditions. Delisting celebrations were held with lake associations and cities. These lakes transitioned from 'restoration' to 'protection' status, meeting the District's measurable goal for this category. Stormwater Management Grant projects are expected to reduce annual TSS loading by approximately 1.3 tons and annual total phosphorus loading by approximately 8 lbs.

### **Carp Management:**

- 419 adult carp were removed from the Long Lake/Lino Chain of Lakes system in 2025 (lower removal due to reduced population).
- Since program inception, 57,934 carp (~40,000 lbs) have been removed.
- Carp biomass is now approximately 92 kg/ha. Meeting the District's long-term goal of <100 kg/ha, and approximately 87% below pre-program levels (~700 kg/ha).
- A carp population survey on Silver Lake found moderate-to-high density (~250 kg/ha); a small number of carp were removed as part of the survey.

# Water Quality

## Water Quality – 2025 Accomplishments Continued

### Curlyleaf Pondweed:

Partnered with 7 lake associations to manage curlyleaf pondweed on Bald Eagle, Clear, Centerville, Josephine, Johanna, Peltier, Reshanau, Golden, and Silver Lakes. Staff are delineating beds, procuring DNR permits, and hiring contractors to apply herbicide as permitted.

### Wetlands:

- The District continued its administration of the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) as the Local Government Unit (LGU), except within Hugo, Circle Pines, and Mounds View.
- Staff reported all 2025 WCA activity to BWSR and completed audit reviews of those cities that have accepted LGU responsibility.
- 18 permit applications were approved that included at least one infiltration or filtration stormwater BMP, resulting in 10 infiltration and 18 filtration BMPs constructed throughout the District.

### Accelerated Sedimentation:

Staff completed inspections of 1 of the 3 stream stabilization and restoration sites; sites were found in good condition and continuing to provide intended sediment reduction benefits.

### Groundwater / Surface Water Interactions

RCWD's role in groundwater management is primarily as a collaborator and advisor, promoting stormwater infiltration and reuse. In 2025, 18 permit applications were approved that proposed at least one infiltration or filtration BMP, resulting in 10 infiltration and 18 filtration practices constructed District-wide.



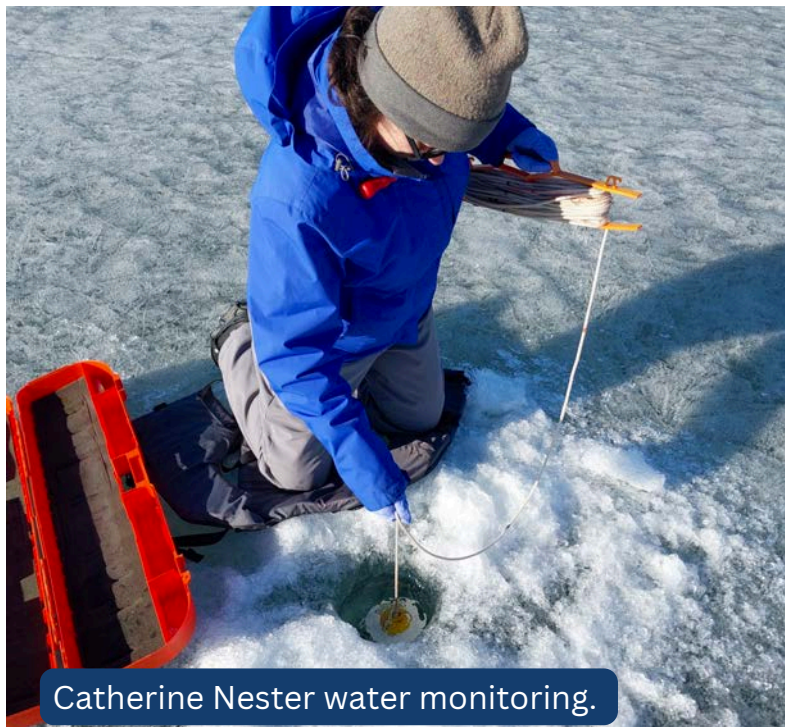
Curlyleaf pond weed, an aquatic invasive plant in the watershed.



# Water Quality

## 2026 Work Plan

- Continue monitoring lakes, streams, and ditches per the RCWD Monitoring Program Plan; continue USGS stream gage partnership.
- Continue SHEP program support and aquatic plant surveys.
- Continue implementing the Long Lake/Lino Chain of Lakes Carp Management Plan using the NEPTUN electronic guidance system and a new electrical aggregating system. Maintain and monitor the Johanna Creek Carp Barrier.
- Ramp up Silver Lake carp management with blocked spawning access and baited box nets for adult removal.
- Continue curlyleaf pondweed partnerships with same homeowner groups; follow DNR technical guidance.
- Continue WCA and CWPMP administration; participate in BWSR WCA rulemaking and consider any needed RCWD rule changes. Review and notice all WCA applications.
- Continue tracking water quality project information through MS4Front to monitor TMDL progress.
- Continue stormwater reuse promotion through direct funding and grant programs.
- IESFs at Hansen Park, Oasis Pond, and Ramsey County Ditch 11 will continue operation, reducing sediment and nutrient loads from Ramsey County Ditches 2, 4, and 11.



Catherine Nester water monitoring.



Golden Lake, Circle Pines.

# Grant Programs

RCWD administers 3 grant programs that collectively offer cost-share opportunities to municipalities, landowners, businesses, and other partners for water quality improvement and stormwater management.

## Stormwater Management Grant Program

Funds capital improvements constructed by counties, cities, townships, school districts, libraries, and other entities to enhance water quality, alleviate flooding, or increase groundwater recharge.

- RCWD allocated \$300,000 for the 2025 program year. 5 projects were approved – 1 in Anoka County and 4 in Ramsey County – providing an estimated total removal of 18.2 lbs. of phosphorus and at least 8,600 lbs. of sediment, as well as reductions in peak flow rates during 10-yr and 100-yr rain events.

## 2025 Stormwater Management Grant Projects:

- City of Centerville – City Hall Stormwater Reuse: Installation of a stormwater reuse system at Centerville City Hall. Grant award: \$25,000.
- City of Mounds View – Silver View Park Improvements: Forebay with iron-enhanced filtration bench, infiltration/biofiltration ponds, SAFL Baffles, and improvements to existing stormwater ponds. Grant award: \$100,000.
- City of New Brighton – CP25-1 Street Rehabilitation: Replacement of 3 catch basins with sump manholes and SAFL Baffles. Grant award: \$28,611.
- White Bear Township – Bellaire Park Underground Storage: Underground stormwater detention chamber to reduce flooding and erosion. Grant award: \$100,000.
- White Bear Township – Silver Fox Area SAFL Baffles: Replacement of 3 existing catch basins with sump manholes and SAFL Baffles. Grant award: \$46,389.



# Grant Programs

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## Water Quality Grant Program

Provides funding for landowners to install BMPs or projects to improve surface water quality. RCWD has technical services agreements with Anoka Conservation District (ACD), Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Soil and Water Conservation Division (RSWCD), and Washington Conservation District (WCD) for site assessments, project design, and landowner applications.

### 2025 Water Quality Grant Projects:

Approx. \$119,705 was awarded to 15 projects (4 in Anoka County, 9 in Ramsey County, 2 in Washington County), including shoreline restorations and rain gardens.

**Planned 2026 Water Quality Grant Projects include:** 6 shoreline stabilization and restoration projects, and 10 rain gardens/vegetated infiltration basins. 2 notable 2026 projects involve public park sites resulting from multi-partner collaboration: Tighe Schmitz Park in Birchwood Village (infiltration basin, engineered catch basin, and shoreline stabilization) and Wildwood Park on Lost Lake in Mahtomedi (infiltration basin and upland shoreline stabilization).

## Mini-Grants Program

Mini-Grants Program: Issued 40 mini-grants (rain barrels, low-mow turf, native plantings, and water outreach/education) totaling \$17,341.

## 2026 Work Plan

- Continue all grant programs.
- Stormwater Management Grant Program increase budget to \$400,000 (\$100,000 increase from previous year)
- Mini Grant Program (increased to \$30,000) for 2026.
- Prioritize projects in TMDL areas, those identified in completed subwatershed assessment reports, and city local water plans.
- Continue outreach to agricultural and rural landowners to expand the types and geography of grant-funded projects.
- Continue technical services agreements with ACD, RSWCD, and WCD for Water Quality Grant Program delivery.

# Regulatory (Permitting & Enforcement)

RCWD administers a regulatory program to protect public health and natural resources through rules governing stormwater management, soil erosion and sediment control, floodplain alterations, wetland alterations, illicit discharge, and more. Rules incorporate NPDES requirements and MS4 standards despite no longer being an MS4 permit holder. The current rule set has been in effect since January 1, 2025, and was successfully implemented in its first year. Additionally, the District is the Local Government Unit (LGU) responsible for the implementation of the state's Wetland Conservation Act (WCA).

Hugo, Circle Pines, and Mounds View administer District Rules C–F and WCA in their city limits, with staff providing ongoing support and yearly audits.

## 2025 Accomplishments

- Continued to improve its regulatory processes, including simplified 'insufficient' emails, increased phone outreach during application review, and pre-application meetings. Staff improved the online permit application system for guided-field submission and electronic upload. The GIS-based public viewer on the District's Permitting Information webpage continues to assist applicants and consultants in project planning.
- Completed its fourth full year of the MS4Front permit database, improving tracking of permits, stormwater BMPs, inspection reporting, and annual MS4 reporting. The permit fee schedule (adopted 2021, effective 2022) continues to recover approximately 60% of private permit review costs with no changes recommended in 2025.
- Inspection service agreements with Ramsey County SWCD and Washington Conservation District were both extended in 2025 and will expire December 31, 2026. The JPA with the City of Centerville for erosion and sediment control inspections was amended to incorporate a two-year automatic renewal and updated administration fee schedule.
- Received 123 permit applications; issued 102 permits; closed 153 permits.
- Conducted 1,186 total inspections across 309 construction sites.
- Inspectors maintained regular presence on active construction sites and continued to close out inactive permit files

# Regulatory (Permitting & Enforcement)

## 2026 Work Plan

- Host a stakeholder feedback event on the regulatory program in 2026 to solicit input on potential program improvements.
- Continue to increase efficiency of permit processing.
- Utilize MS4Front for permitting administration and inspection efficiency.
- Work with cities to ensure RCWD rules are well-understood through partnership meetings and direct communications.
- Ensure the permit program and WCA LGU responsibilities are applied fairly and uniformly throughout the District.
- Continue contracted MCM 4 inspections under the amended JPA with the City of Centerville.
- Continue to coordinate with Ramsey SWCD and Washington Conservation District for inspection services.
- Review and consider changes to enforcement procedures and surety fee schedule.
- Improve the readability of regulatory materials on the District's website.
- Continue annual/semi-annual RCWD and consulting engineer permit team training seminar.
- Encourage early project coordination through pre-application meetings.
- Review open, unresolved permit files and develop strategies for closure

## Permitting & Inspection Activity in 2025

Activity	2025
Review Files	231
Permit Applications	123
General Permits Issued	102
Variances Issued	2
Enforcement Actions Taken	0
Construction Sites Inspected	309
Notices of Violation	151
Total Inspections	1,186
Stop Work Orders (10-day notice)	0
Site Inspections Frequency	Weekly
Permits Closed	153
Board Orders	0

# Outreach & Communications

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## 2025 Accomplishments

### Workshops & Community Engagement

- Sponsored and completed Blue Thumb shoreline and rain garden maintenance workshops in spring 2025 and two workshops in fall 2025.
- Sponsored a University of Minnesota AIS Detector Workshop.
- Led a Watershed Walk at Wargo Nature Center focused on water quality, watershed management, and lake education.
- Sponsored 2 Smart Salting certification workshops for Anoka and Ramsey County public works staff; over 80 staff recertified.
- Conducted community engagement events at Christ the King Lutheran Church (New Brighton), Hansen Park/West Hansen Park (New Brighton), Hayes Elementary School (Fridley), and Centennial Library.

### Partnerships & School Engagement

- Partnered with Anoka County SWCD through the Pollinator Pathway Grant to install a rain garden at Hayes Elementary School in Fridley, incorporating stormwater management curriculum and student activities.
- Partnered with Growing Green Hearts activities including the Native Prairie Plants Are Superheroes Relay at Highview Middle School, Hayes Elementary School, and Centennial Library.
- Partnered with Freshwater and U of M Water Resource Center on an Iron-Enhanced Sand Filter workshop for professionals.

### Outreach Campaigns & Public Education

- Sponsored a lakeshore education campaign in partnership with Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates (MLR) to promote natural shorelines.
- Mailed postcards to Centerville/Lino Lakes residents regarding shoreline erosion concerns and restoration grant opportunities through the RCWD grant programs.

### Creative, Art & Educational Initiatives

- Installed the District's first public art project at Moore Lake Park, Fridley.
- Sponsored 3 new water and nature-themed art opportunities in partnership with White Bear Center for the Arts (Fall 2025).
- Completed multiple educational and project signs for District initiatives, including three on-site educational signs at District project locations.

# Outreach & Communications

## 2026 Work Plan

- Continue hands-on workshops on native plants, shoreline restoration, and stormwater practices.
- Continue arts and visual media programs and initiatives to reach more residents
- Develop additional water and nature-based art partnerships and programming across the District.
- Increase the use of GIS and animated visuals to improve communications.
- Expand targeted lakeshore and shallow lake education campaigns.
- Continue supporting grant program promotion through direct mail, workshops, and partner collaborations.
- Increase educational signage and place-based interpretation at District project sites.
- Continue collaboration with Blue Thumb, EMWREP, SWCD partners, counties, and municipalities.

Kendra Sommerfeld and Rachel Workin at City of Fridley leading a shoreline planting workshop.



Staff at Moore Lake Park with the District's first public art project.



Staff presenting at an IESF workshop with Freshwater at Hansen Park.



## Rice Creek Watershed District's Sommerfeld recognized for excellence in outreach, communications



**Top:** Rice Creek Watershed District (RCWD) staff celebrated the district's first public art project at Moore Lake Park in September 2025. RCWD Outreach and Communications Manager Kendra Sommerfeld (right) is shown with RCWD staff at the art installation, which was created in partnership with the city of Fridley. From left: RCWD outreach and grant technician Molly Nelson, RCWD project manager David Petry and RCWD administrator Nick Tomczik. Beyond this installation, Sommerfeld has supported three water-focused art workshops through White Bear Center for the Arts and launched a partnership with Springboard for the Arts to support artists creating water-centered community pieces. **Photo Courtesy of Kendra Sommerfeld**

From setting prescribed burns and restoring prairies to creating digital tools, crafting stories and explaining stormwater science through art, Rice Creek Watershed District (RCWD) Outreach and Communications Manager Kendra Sommerfeld's career took a sharp, unexpected turn.

After hands-on land management and restoration work early on, Sommerfeld found herself increasingly drawn to helping people understand and care about conservation in Minnesota. That motivation led to her current position and continues to drive her work at RCWD.

That work earned Sommerfeld the 2025 Outstanding Watershed Organization Employee Award from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). BWSR Assistant Director for Regional Operations Justin Hanson presented Sommerfeld with the award on Dec. 4 during Minnesota Watersheds' annual conference at Grand View Lodge in Nisswa.

Sommerfeld serves as a spokesperson for the RCWD and leads its outreach and communication strategies. She manages media and public engagement, coordinates project communications and works to strengthen relationships with local governments and



community organizations.

"I want to inspire other people to care about the environment and wildlife ... and for ourselves because we live on this planet," Sommerfeld said.

Sommerfeld earned a bachelor's degree in environmental science at the

**Bottom:** Sommerfeld accepted the award for 2025 Outstanding Watershed Organization Employee from BWSR Assistant Director for Regional Operations Justin Hanson on Dec. 4 at Minnesota Watersheds' annual conference in Nisswa. **Photo Credit:** Erin Loeffler, BWSR

University of Minnesota and earned a master's degree in natural resource management from Colorado State University in Fort Collins. She spent her early career as a field technician for private industry and nonprofit groups, including Great River Greening, The Nature Conservancy and Prairie Restorations Inc. Then she worked in project management at the Benton Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), aiming for a career with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources restoring prairies and streams.

But her path shifted in 2022, when she took the outreach and communications job with RCWD.

"I really like sharing the work that we do and breaking down these complex scientific things and projects so the public can understand," Sommerfeld said.

Sommerfeld noted the award highlighted a different side of water resource work.

"I know the last couple award-winners, and they were doing multimillion-dollar projects," Sommerfeld said. "It's hard to put a dollar amount on the work I do. The award brought light to a different program and a different piece of the water resource field."

She emphasized that outreach is essential for promoting the district's work and educating the public.

Many district projects, such as stormwater



Sommerfeld (left) and city of Fridley Environmental Planner Rachel Workin hosted a community shoreline planting at Moore Lake Park in Fridley with Blue Thumb – Planting for Clean Water in October 2025.

**Photo Courtesy of Kendra Sommerfeld**

infrastructure and flood mitigation systems, are physically out of sight.

"The things that we do are sometimes invisible, they can be underground and hard to visualize," Sommerfeld said. "Outreach and communication are where all of that is sort of brought to light. For every program and everything we do, there's always an outreach, communications or education component."

Over the past three years, Sommerfeld has helped transform the district's approach to outreach by building meaningful partnerships across the watershed's nearly 30 cities and townships in four metro-area counties. By meeting regularly one-on-one with city staff, she strengthened coordination around stormwater messaging, expanded outreach events and supported increased

project implementation across the district.

In 2024, Sommerfeld planned three major celebrations for Bald Eagle, Golden and Island lakes' removal from Minnesota's impaired waters list — coordinating communications and events across multiple cities, staff and lake associations.

RCWD Administrator Nick Tomczik, who has worked closely with Sommerfeld and was part of the team that hired her, said her work has shaped how the district approaches outreach and communications.

"The program has greater flexibility in its approach," Tomczik said. "Try new things and see where they go. If that is ineffective, let's try something else. So very much, staying well-informed of what is new in the field and how

might the district use it to fulfill its mission."

Tomczik pointed to Sommerfeld's work on the district's [Jones Lake flood mitigation and restoration project](#) as one example. Sommerfeld has helped develop and manage new ways to engage residents and landowners by using flood simulation tools that allow people to see how future rain events could affect their properties — and how the project is expected to reduce that flood risk.

"It's so hard to show people a flood mitigation project if there's not active flooding," Sommerfeld said. "These animation tools can literally simulate different flood scenarios. They help tell the story so well."

In addition to building partnerships with organizations such as the Freshwater Society, Friends of the Mississippi River, Springboard for the Arts and the White Bear Center for the Arts, Sommerfeld has led major digital and communication improvements at RCWD.

She oversaw RCWD's 2023 website redesign, improving access to permitting, projects and district information. During that period, annual website visits increased from 50,000 to 150,000. She significantly expanded RCWD's social media engagement, created the district's first communication protocol for projects, and developed its first ArcGIS StoryMaps and dashboards.

She contributed to RCWD's first climate

resiliency plan in 2023 and presented results at Minnesota Watersheds' annual conference and at the Minnesota Water Resources conference in 2024. The completed plan helped secure \$1.7 million from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency in 2025 for the Jones Lake flood mitigation and restoration project.

Sommerfeld expanded RCWD's work with educators and schools, helped develop stormwater curriculum and supported the creation of "live classrooms" through rain gardens and native plantings. She introduced new practices that directly involve residents in water-quality grant projects, such as rain garden planting events, which have now become standard across the district.

Local workshop attendance has increased by 50% under her leadership, averaging 35 participants per session.



*Tour attendees posed during a Minnesota State Bonding Tour stop at Hansen Park in the city of New Brighton in November 2025. The Minnesota State Senate's Capital Investment Committee visited RCWD's Jones Lake flood mitigation and restoration project. From left: RCWD board manager Marcie Weinandt, Sommerfeld, Minnesota Rep. Matt Gottfried, RCWD administrator Nick Tomczik, RCWD project manager David Petry, Houston Engineering Inc. senior civil engineer Chris Otterness, city of New Brighton Director of Community Assets and Development Craig Schlichting and city of New Brighton Mayor Kari Niedfeldt-Thomas. **Photo Courtesy of Kendra Sommerfeld***

Hosting workshops with cities at local stormwater sites has increased public visibility while supporting long-term community engagement.

One of Sommerfeld's proudest achievements is incorporating visual art into stormwater education. Sommerfeld created RCWD's visual arts media program in

2025 to integrate art into stormwater education. Full implementation is expected in 2026. She completed the district's first public art installation in Moore Lake Park in Fridley, where a giant frog sculpture connects habitat improvements to restored water quality, giving visitors a tangible way to understand stormwater management.

RCWD has another public art installation planned for later this year in the city of New Brighton at Hansen Park.

"Using art as a communication and outreach tool at RCWD is new way to connect, educate and inspire our communities throughout the watershed to care for our water resources," Sommerfeld said.

She serves as RCWD's in-house illustrator, producing custom graphics and hand-drawn artwork for project signs and educational materials.

"Kendra will take in information, and the next thing I see is an action in a direction to address the situation," Tomczik said. "Instead of pondering, she's action-oriented seeking success for the district."

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



Christ the King Church in New Brighton planting their Water Quality Grant project



Centennial Library native plant garden for clean water planted by the community.



RCWD CAC learning about watersheds through art and wool felting.



Hayes Elementary students planting their rain garden on school grounds.

