

2024 Legislative Session Overview

May 30, 2024

The 2024 Legislature adjourned on May 20th, concluding its work for the biennium. Actions taken during this legislative session created opportunities for the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to continue efforts on protecting and improving water quality, pollinator habitat, and related conservation initiatives.

In even-numbered years, the Legislature traditionally focuses on policy, supplemental funding and bonding since agency budgets are typically passed during the biennial budgeting process that takes place in odd-numbered years.

The following is an overview of various Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) policy changes and supplemental budget appropriations passed during the 2024 Legislative Session. For a more detailed explanation of these, you can view the [2024 Legislative Summary](#) found on the BWSR website.

Passed: Omnibus Environmental Policy bill (SF2904)

[Minnesota Laws, Chapter 90](#)

Important updates were passed in this bill including:

- Modernization changes to statutes impacting both Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Watershed Districts – some of which had not been updated in decades.
- Changes to the Wetland Conservation Act to help fill regulatory gaps for otherwise federally unregulated waters following a United States Supreme Court case that diminished federal protection.
- Administrative adjustments to the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program to repeal a Minnesota rule and consolidate its relevant components into the statutory framework for the program.
- Clarifying wetland banking provisions to better match local and federal expectations
- Recognizing the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual in statute
- Clarifying jurisdictional authority for implementing riparian buffer protection
- Repeal of an outdated beaver damage control grant program last funded in 2006

Passed: Environment and natural resources supplemental budget bill (HF3911)

[Minnesota Laws, Chapter 116](#)

BWSR received three one-time appropriations totaling \$1,950,000, in this bill including:

- Funding for manure management activities to enhance groundwater protection and reduce greenhouse gases associated with agriculture, prioritizing areas of the state with high nitrate levels in groundwater, or that have geology that makes groundwater vulnerable to contamination, such as the karst region of southeast Minnesota
- Pass-through grant to the Red River Basin Commission to facilitate development of a feasibility assessment of adaptive phosphorous management with other partners in the region
- Funding for the existing Lawns to Legumes program

Newly created this year is a pollinator account to support BWSR's pollinator activities. A portion of the state lottery-in lieu account is deposited into this pollinator account.

This bill also contained policy changes including:

- Establishing data privacy expectations for participants in the Lawns to Legumes program
- Increasing the administrative penalty authority amounts on riparian buffer violations for BWSR and local governments to match other BWSR programs (up to \$10,000) and recognize that this can be forgivable if the corrective actions are implemented
- Submitting a legislative report for the one-time 2023 soil health appropriation

Passed: Legacy Omnibus (HF4124)

[*Minnesota Laws, Chapter 106*](#)

Outdoor Heritage Fund - eight appropriations to BWSR totaling \$19,388,000, for the following BWSR-related projects:

- Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape ACUB Program, Phase 12
- Riparian Habitat Protection in Kettle and Snake River Watersheds, Phase 2
- Wild-Rice Shoreland Protection, Phase 9
- RIM Wetlands – Restoring the Most Productive Habitat, Phase 13
- Pine and Leech Watershed Targeted RIM Easement Permanent Land Protection, Phase 3
- Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project, Phase 8
- Red River Basin Riparian Habitat Program
- Lower Wild Rice River Corridor Habitat Restoration, Phase 4

Supplemental Clean Water Fund – five appropriations to BWSR totaling \$11,434,000, for the following programs:

- Working-lands floodplain program
- Critical shoreland protection - permanent easements
- Legacy partners grant program, including targeted watershed district rain garden grants
- Match for Lake Superior basin area local partners seeking available federal funding
- Long-term protection for groundwater protection through easements, grants, or contracts with priority for vulnerable drinking water concerns

Passed: Tax Omnibus (HF5247)

[*Minnesota Laws, Chapter 127*](#)

In the final Tax Omnibus bill, clarifications were made regarding sale of tax-forfeited lands, including rights affected by forfeiture. The forfeiture of the property extinguishes all liens, claims, and encumbrances other than specified items such as easements and right-of-way holders who are not interested parties. Also, this bill establishes a Minnesota Advisory Council on Infrastructure for proper management coordination and future investment of Minnesota's infrastructure. Along with other agencies, BWSR is included as a non-voting member.

Not passed: Bonding bill

Neither a general fund capital investment bill nor a general obligation bonding bill was passed during the 2024 Regular Session. While there were BWSR provisions for the RIM Reserve Program and the Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program mentioned in earlier versions of the general obligation bonding bill, an agreement was not reached to meet the three-fifths votes needed to pass.