



Kanabec Soil and Water Conservation District

Strategic Plan

2021-2025

Board Approved: April 20, 2021

(From Board Meeting 12/15/20 & 3 subsequent meetings in 2021)

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Background

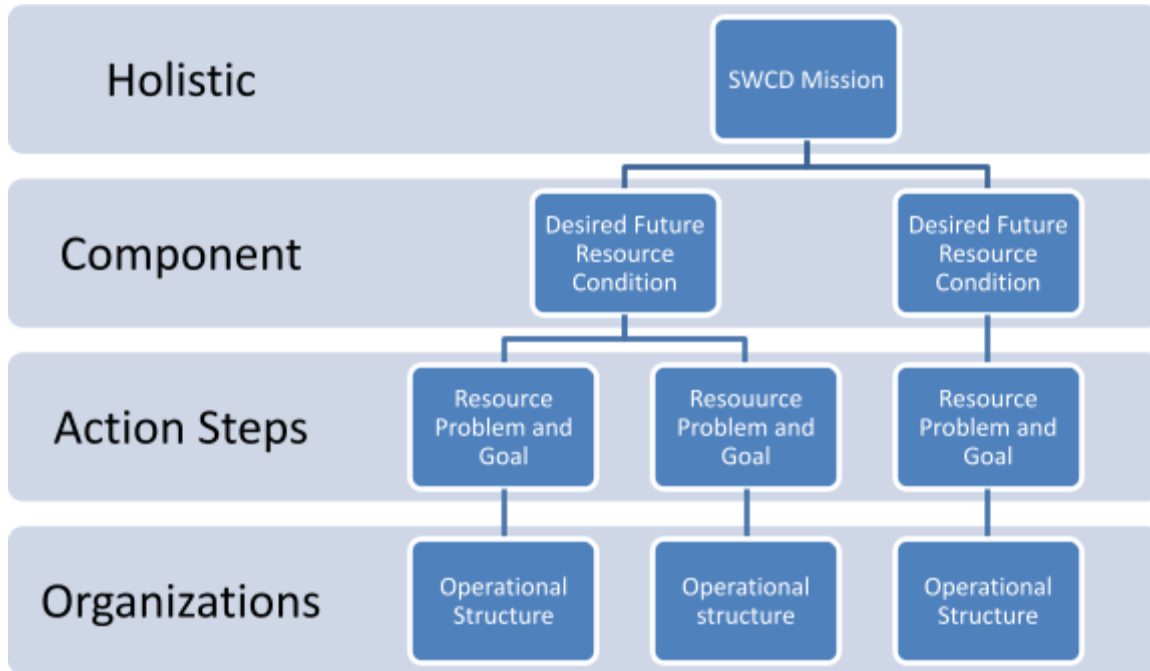
The Kanabec Soil and Water Conservation is a special purpose unit of government established and managed under M.S. 103C Soil and Water Conservation Districts. MS103C.005 is the Soil and Water Conservation Policy, which states:

103C.005 SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION POLICY.

Maintaining and enhancing the quality of soil and water for the environmental and economic benefits they produce, preventing degradation, and restoring degraded soil and water resources of this state contribute greatly to the health, safety, economic well-being, and general welfare of this state and its citizens. Land occupiers have the responsibility to implement practices that conserve the soil and water resources of the state. Soil and water conservation measures implemented on private lands in this state provide benefits to the general public by reducing erosion, sedimentation, siltation, water pollution, and damages caused by floods. The soil and water conservation policy of the state is to encourage land occupiers to conserve soil, water, and the natural resources they support through the implementation of practices that:

- (1) control or prevent erosion, sedimentation, siltation, and related pollution in order to preserve natural resources;
- (2) ensure continued soil productivity;
- (3) protect water quality;
- (4) prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs;
- (5) reduce damages caused by floods;
- (6) preserve wildlife;
- (7) protect the tax base; and
- (8) protect public lands and waters.

The Kanabec SWCD Board and staff (hereinafter referred to as SWCD) used this policy as the framework under which they conducted this strategic direction exercise. The exercise to update our Strategic Plan started with a special session held 12/15/20 with input from incoming and outgoing SWCD Supervisors. The plan was fine-tuned during regularly scheduled board meetings in 2021. The SWCD framed their strategic planning exercise using the following system:



SWCD Mission

The Kanabec Soil and Water Conservation District is dedicated to promoting the wise and sustainable use of our land and water related resources; to work with and empower landowners and groups on conservation options; work in partnership with other agencies; educate the public, provide technical assistance, administer state programs and serve as a county wide soil and water conservation and natural resource information and referral center.

District Practices

Within MS 103C.005, there are eight focus areas within which conservation districts are encouraged to work with landowners to protect the State's soil and water resources. Within these eight focus areas, the SWCD will focus on the following as priorities, listed in order as prioritized by SWCD board and staff:

Work Priorities:

1. Protect & Improve Water Quality
2. Control or prevent erosion, sedimentation, siltation and related pollution in order to preserve natural resources
3. Ensure continued soil productivity
4. Protect Public Lands and Waters
5. Provide Education and Outreach (Added by the Kanabec SWCD Board)
6. Reduce damages caused by floods

Secondary Priorities – Support Role:

- Prevent Impairment of Dams and Reservoirs
- Preserve Wildlife
- Protect the Tax Base

The SWCD will work on the following focus areas as appropriate but will serve as a project partner rather than a lead agent.

Primary Priorities

Protect Water Quality (#1)

Desired Future Condition:

Every major lake and river in the county meet water quality standards for its' given use.

Groundwater quality meets drinking water standards

Action Steps:

- Complete the Snake 1W1P plan and foster the new development of the new implementation organization
- Coordinate the development of one demonstration shoreland restoration project per each 6 lakes (with lake assn.)
- Coordinate the development of one feedlot runoff control project
- Decide on a treatment option for Ann Lakes' high internal load
- Seek funding for Ann Lake Treatment with partner support
- Implement Phase #1 of Ann Lake Treatment
- Annually offer private well water testing to develop a sense of where we have higher groundwater sensitivity – goal to test 20 wells / year
- Coordinate the sealing of 3 abandoned wells
- Coordinate the abandonment of 2 manure storage pits – protect against leaching or a breach
- Promote the development of 2 clients to seek nutrient management planning on their operation (groundwater protection)
- Seek out and certify 2 MAWQCP producers each year

Potential Operational Structure:

A formal structure for regular communications between the county regulatory arm and the SWCD to address issues related to ground and surface water degradation.

Five Year Goal Statement:

- Conduct investigations to target conservation practices to priority areas (follow the lead of the Snake 1W1P priority area once finalized)
- Target Phosphorus reduction – goal 190# P reduced
- 1st Phase of Ann Lake Treatment – goal 2,050# P reduced
- Determine private well nitrate hot spots for targeting BMPs to protect sensitive areas from groundwater contamination.

Control or Prevent Erosion (#2)

Desired Future Condition:

Soils need to be sustainable and healthy to support a natural community of life while reducing erosion and remaining productive for a diversity of uses.

Action Steps:

- Outreach with townships to gauge locations of priority erosion sites
- Coordinate the development and installation of 3 erosion control Best Management Practices (BMP)
- Conduct buffer law monitoring on 1/3 of the county per year
- Outreach to questionable buffer law compliant producers as needed each year
- Coordinate the development and installation of 3 shoreland protection erosion control practices per year in identified priority areas

Potential Operational Structure:

Designate SWCD staff time in the promotion of good land stewardship and best management conservation agriculture practices.

Five Year Goal Statement:

- Target soil saved – goal 10 Tons soil saved
- Target priority erosion sites
- Maintain buffer law compliance and provide technical assistance as needed
- Follow through on Soil Productivity #3 priority goals, which aid in preventing soil erosion
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Ensure Soil Productivity (#3)

Desired Future Condition:

Soils are sustainable and healthy to support a natural community of life while reducing erosion and remaining productive for a diversity of uses.

Action Steps:

- Promote and incentivize soil health practices either through NRCS or SWCD funds
- Coordinate the implementation of 3 client soil health practices per year
- Develop 3 new client interests in soil health practices per year
- Partner in promoting and providing one prescribed grazing technical assistance conservation planning per year
- SWCD staff annually attend training to expand and maintain technical assistance proficiency in sustainable ag. practices

Potential Operational Structure:

Designate SWCD staff time in partnership with others regarding soil health and agricultural sustainability issues.

Five Year Goal Statement:

- Provide technical assistance on soil health and sustainable grazing practices
- Develop a producer led soil health team that provides direction on promoting soil health principles and practices
- Promote and incentivize 15 soil health practices
- Partner in planning 5 projects promoting and providing prescribed grazing technical assistance through NRCS
- Ensure SWCD staff are well educated to provide the above technical assistance

Protect Waters and Lands (#4)

Desired Future Condition:

The protection and management of the water quality of public waters falls under the scope of goal of protecting water quality.

The Kanabec SWCD will work in partnership with the owners of public land to provide the appropriate technical assistance and recommendations in the management of these resources.

Action Steps:

- Promote Forest Stewardship Planning – referrals to the private sector
- Optional, as staff time allows work on Forest Stewardship Planning (fee for services) on smaller acreage or in priority areas (along waters) so as not to compete with private sector foresters
- Promote, coordinate the development & implementation of 2 protection BMPs per year in our non-impaired sub-watersheds
- When RIM funds are obtained, dedicate staff time to promote & facilitate the development of RIM easements in areas of high priority, for example along waters and/or in forested lands
- Provide forestry technical assistance through our seasonal tree sales

Potential Operational Structure:

Establish partnerships with the appropriate agencies for joint progress on protection and proper management of unimpaired sub-watersheds. As able dedicate new SWCD staff time to protection efforts

Protection – conservation easements

Management – forest stewardship plans, good riparian management

Five Year Goal Statement:

- Protect our healthy forested land in our non-impaired waters
- Seek Reinvest in MN (RIM) permanent conservation easement funds for the Snake River Watershed
- Fill the gap in SWCD staff to ensure at a minimum part of a staff position is dedicated to working with our forested land owners
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Provide Education and Outreach (#5)

Desired Future Condition:

- Kanabec County citizens are adequately informed about soil and water conservation so they can make responsible land management decisions
- Local government partners are technically sound for promoting soil and water conservation principles for continued adoption of practices

Action Steps:

- Hire 2 summer seasonal boat inspectors (AIS) per year
- Coordinate 1 soil health outreach event per year
- Develop a SWCD atmosphere that promotes 1-on-1 interactions with the public to further educate, develop relationships and promote & empower conservation efforts into action
- Partner with individuals, local governments, NRCS and other organizations whenever practical to expand our conservation efforts
- Start a Face Book page and maintain periodic postings
- Annually promote an open house to further promote our activities with the public
- Partner with school on environmental education – conservation project video, 4H, boy scout troop / eagle scout project
- Compose conservation video (contest option)
- Continue our Newsletter – transitioning from paper to electronic over a period of years
- Outreach (attend their meeting) to all 15 townships – communicate what we do
- Present at the annual Pokegama Water Fair in Pine City to grade school children
- Volunteer annually at the area's Envirothon Event for high schoolers
- Continue to provide a SWCD and AIS presence at the County Fair, use physical props for better engagement

Potential Operational Structure:

Designate SWCD staff time to education / outreach with a purposeful plan, focusing on a few key objectives. Targeted outreach

Five Year Goal Statement:

- Expand on the general public's understanding of what we do
- Continue the expansion of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) education, outreach & monitoring of boats
- Expand the understanding and implementation of soil health principles and practices
- After outreach events strategically evaluate the event's effectiveness against our anticipated objectives

Improve Resiliency Against Floods / Severe Weather – Climate Change (#6) Reduce Damages Caused by Floods (reworded)

Desired Future Condition:

Kanabec County has a flood prone resilient landscape that can tolerate flooding without significant damage and recover from high intensity low frequency flood events.

Action Steps:

- Conduct a remote survey to prioritize parcels that may be good candidates for water storage projects, ex: along county ditch systems.
- Seek out sections of county ditch as candidates for ditch abandonment
- Reactive – provide technical assistance on flooding erosion repair as needed
- Participate in the Wetland Conservation Act – Technical Evaluation Panel (WCA-TEP) to promote and provide technical assistance for wetland banking

Potential Operational Structure:

Include the promotion of flood resistant environments into the conservation district messaging. Establish partnerships with the appropriate agencies for joint progress on added water storage in the watershed and appropriately managed and protected areas prone to flooding.

Five Year Goal Statement:

- Follow through on Soil Productivity #3 priority goals, which aid in capturing more upland waters, less runoff
- Seek out targeted sites for wetland restoration to relieve flooding pressures
- Where and when identified, aid in the restoration of altered hydrology / enable fish passage

Secondary Priorities – Support Role

Prevent Impairment of Dams and Reservoirs

Desired Future Resource Condition Statement

Dams and reservoirs in Kanabec County are properly managed in such a way as to function effectively, maintain water quality, and protect life and property.

Operational Structure

The Kanabec SWCD will work in a supporting role with other state, local, or federal agencies in the management of dams and reservoirs.

Preserve Wildlife

District Perspective

Good soil and water conservation practices provide habitat as a secondary benefit. While wildlife conservation is an important consideration, the Kanabec SWCD will not pursue wildlife conservation as a primary driver of the organization's strategic or operational plan.

Protect the Tax Base

District Perspective

Good water quality and healthy soils are an important component of the quality of life for Kanabec County and provide the natural infrastructure upon which the county's citizens live and work. These benefits are derived from the proper management of the county's soil and water resources. Protecting the tax base is a secondary benefit that is generated from the proper management of the local water and soil resources.

District Funding Partners

In order to fulfill the SWCD's mission, there are a variety of partners that provide both technical and financial assistance. The following is a brief list of partners who have provided funding in the past and are likely to be continuing partners in the future.

Kanabec County

- County General Fund
 - Used for general SWCD operating expenses
 - Allows SWCD to work with landowners to protect water quality and protect the tax base
 - Allows SWCD to maintain relations with the county citizens
 - Demonstrate a level of trust between the SWCD and the County Board
 - SWCD attends two County Commissioner meetings per year
 - Pursue increases in the county general fund request
- Natural Resources Block Grant Pass Through
 - Wetlands
 - Participate in the Technical Evaluation Panel
 - Review applications
 - Write restoration orders
 - Local Water Management
 - Write management plans for the implementation of conservation best management practices
- Snake River Watershed Management Board (SRWMB) – multi-county board
 - Partner with and provide technical assistance for conservation project work

State Funding

- Board of Water and Soil Resources
 - Watershed Implementation Funds (after 1W1P)
 - Funding to implement the plan's targeted priorities
 - Continue building partner relationships to foster smooth project implementation and conservation promotion
 - Conservation Delivery
 - Office management
 - Access to technical resources
 - Connection to local partners
 - Easement Services
 - Monitor the Re-Invest in Minnesota (RIM) easements to support appropriate easement land management
 - Cost-Share
 - Primary: Installation of best management practices

- Secondary: Assist in the development of best management practices funded with other funding sources (example: Federal – EQIP, MDA-MAWQCP)
 - o Clean Water Funds
 - Competitive funding
 - Cost share for water quality projects
 - Provide additional funding for technical assistance to accelerate project development and installation
 - Funding allows for administrative dollars to oversee the implementation of the grant
 - Funding needs to be above and beyond what a Conservation District normally does (supplemental)
 - o Buffer Law
 - o MN Ag. Water Quality Certification Program (Carlton SWCD)
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
 - o Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy
 - Funding to develop watershed strategy for specific watersheds
- Department of Natural Resources
 - o Forestry Cost Share Program
 - Forest Stewardship Plans
 - Forestry BMPs
 - o Conservation Partnership Legacy (CPL)
- o Area Forestry Association
 - Forestry protection funding collaboration

Federal Funding

- Natural Resources Conservation Service
 - Technical support
 - Share Building space
 - Information Technology provision and support
 - Conservation support
 - Agricultural management resources
 - Partnership on conservation projects, joint funding
- Clean Water Partnership (319 grants) MPCA
- Farm Services Agency
 - Support

Locally Generated

- Plat books
- Seasonal Tree Sales