



Dakota County Soil & Water Conservation District

Strategic Plan 2020-2024



Framework

In August of 2019, the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors and staff engaged in a strategic planning workshop to establish guiding principles and outline goals for the next five years. Ten Guiding Principles were developed and will be used as a set of values that establish expectations and decision making. Six Goals were then identified which are designed to work towards achieving the vision of the District.

Each Goal was refined into a number of strategies with examples that will shape how goals will be pursued over time. Other “key watch areas” were identified and include legislative efforts, particularly with stable funding options for soil and water conservation districts; and the ongoing collaborative work between county departments and the District with a focus on limiting duplication of voluntary conservation work with private landowners.

The District will continue to monitor success and share experiences to create an efficient, effective and responsive local unit of government for the citizens of Dakota County.

Vision

CLEAN WATER AND HEALTHY SOIL

Mission

PARTNERS IN LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION

Guiding Principles

- ⇒ Customer driven service through relationships
- ⇒ Voluntary conservation focus
- ⇒ Know community and landscape
- ⇒ Prioritize projects that make a positive change
- ⇒ Contribute to strong partnerships and collaborations
- ⇒ Manage and train employees so projects are well-designed and functional
- ⇒ Science used is technically sound and field verified
- ⇒ Staff and board are competent, approachable, and reliable
- ⇒ Pursue cost effective strategies and use resources wisely
- ⇒ Be a conservation leader

Goals

1. Collaboration and Financial Stability
2. Protect, Restore, and Improve Water Resources
3. Civic Engagement and Public Outreach
4. Partnerships to Manage Watersheds
5. Land and Habitat Restoration and Protection
6. Adaptation to Changing Climate Conditions

Goal 1 - Collaboration and Financial Stability

The District will pursue and advance partnerships to implement programs and activities.

The District is governed by five Dakota County citizens that are elected to four year terms and are responsible for developing policies of the District.

Under Minnesota State Statute the District has no land use or taxing authorities.

In 2019 the District managed 48 grants and agreements with State agencies and other local units of government.

DIVERSIFY FUNDING OPTIONS

Example: Pursue federal, state and local options with support towards the development of a new State funding equation that better addresses required operational expenses and conservation delivery needs.

DELIVER QUALITY SERVICE BY BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY

Example: Retain qualified staff who continue to advance skills and knowledge for increased partnerships in conservation delivery.

BE A LEADER IN WATERSHED MANGEMENT

Example: Expand partnerships with other watershed management authorities to assist with planning and implementation.

EVALUATE NEW COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES WITH DAKOTA COUNTY

Example: Evaluate how tactics of approved County Plans could be implemented through the District with consideration towards technical expertise and administrative efficiencies while maintaining autonomy of the District.

PLAN FOR HUMAN RESOURCES NEEDS

Example: Develop annual staff plans that balance workload with anticipated revenue and create internal and external training opportunities.

Goal 2 - Protect, Restore and Improve Water Resources

The District will help landowners protect and enhance groundwater and surface waters.

Go to the District's web home page and click on the interactive map to see installed conservation practices www.dakotaswcd.org

Conservation practices installed through the District's cost share programs must meet specific design criteria.

In 2019, the SWCD gathered irrigators and industry professionals to discuss new tools for irrigation water management and gaps in current financial assistance for irrigators.

PROVIDE QUALITY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Example: Develop site appropriate, adaptive and flexible conservation practices with consideration towards landowner goals and suitable design standards.

PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Example: Link landowner incentives to priorities identified within local plans, the District's comprehensive plan or watershed plans with focus on voluntary implementation.

SEEK GRANT FUNDS TO REACH WATER QUALITY GOALS

Example: Be proactive in pursuing grant opportunities that provide education, technical assistance and cost share opportunities to Dakota County residents.

ADVOCATE FOR RESEARCH

Example: Facilitate and partner in new conservation efforts while weighing time and resources necessary vs. outcomes before considering participation.

ASSIST WITH REGULATORY PROGRAMS

Example: Conduct site inspections and provide landowner information leaving the pursuit of enforcement to those with appropriate land use or legal authority.

ENGAGE LANDOWNERS IN DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

Example: Encourage landowners to provide feedback on emerging needs while providing information on water data and trends.

Goal 3 - Civic Engagement and Public Outreach

The District will work to bring communities and people together for protecting water quality and natural resources.

In partnership with Dakota County, Cities and Townships, and Dakota County Watershed Management Organizations, over 4,600 people have participated in the District's Landscaping for Clean Water (LCW) program, completing 575 projects.

As of 2019, four sub-watershed analysis (SWAs) have been completed for Trout Brook, Pine Creek, North Lake Byllesby and Vermillion River Upper Main Stem. These SWAs are used for direct outreach to landowners

CREATE OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC INPUT

Example: Ensure a transparent organization that offers opportunity for public participation and feedback.

GATHER FACTS GATHER PEOPLE

Example: Conduct workshops through partnerships to explain benefits of conservation and encourage implementation.

ENGAGE CITIZENS USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Example: Create new website and continue utilizing social media outlets to inform residents and landowners.

RECOGNIZE LANDOWNER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Example: Continue to maintain and improve an interactive web site that actively displays the good conservation work landowners have implemented with or without cost share.

SERVE AS INFORMATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE

Example: Be responsive in assisting the public and other local units of government in providing program information while being consistent with messaging among our partners.

PLAN FOR CONTINUED AND EXPANDED EFFORTS

Example: Update Education and Outreach Plan with renewed vision for equity and inclusion.

Goal 4 - Partnerships to Manage Watersheds

The District will provide leadership and services to manage watersheds.

The District partners with each of the six watershed management organization's located in Dakota County through annual work agreements to deliver education, water monitoring, administration, technical assistance, project funding and other services.

In 2019, the District signed a joint powers agreement along with 13 other local units of government over a six county area to form a Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Board.

PURSUE LEADERSHIP ROLE

Example: Provide organizational leadership to watershed management organizations.

PURSUE JOINT PLANNING EFFORTS

Example: In conjunction with State and regional agencies, develop a planning approach that recognizes the soil and water conservation districts as a part of the watershed management framework for both metro and non-metro land areas and evaluate options for joint planning efforts.

USE BEST AVAILABLE TOOLS TO PRIORITIZE EFFORTS

Example: Evaluate methodologies to develop consistency with scientific approaches to prioritize, target and measure results based on type of land use and specific resource of concern.

WORK TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT CONSERVATION

Example: Link similar organizational goals and implementation strategies to efficiently and effectively install land and water conservation projects.

DEVELOP SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO WATER MONITORING

Example: Partner with others to collect water samples, generate reports and evaluate trends for improved watershed based information.

Goal 5 - Land and Habitat Restoration and Protection

The District will promote soil health, water retention and native plant communities.

Healthy soils produce organisms that break down compaction and greatly increase water infiltration which reduces runoff to our streams.

Five Soil Health Principles:

- 1. Minimize soil disturbance - both physical and chemical disturbance*
- 2. Keep the soil covered with plants and plant residue*
- 3. Maximize diversity of plants in a rotation*
- 4. Keep living roots in the soil as much as possible*
- 5. Create a favorable habitat for the soil food web*

ENCOURAGE SOIL HEALTH

Example: Encourage all aspects to improve soil health including cover crops, tillage, nutrient management plans and crop rotation.

SUPPORT NATIVE PLANT COMMUNITIES

Example: Develop landowner planting recommendations and maintenance plans that improve the potential for successful establishment of native plant communities.

PURSUE WETLAND RESTORATION AND WATER RETENTION OPPORTUNITIES

Example: Partner with Dakota County to develop new funding options that promote the voluntary restoration of wetlands and water storage basins on the landscape.

INCREASE POLLINATOR HABITATS

Example: Provide incentives for native habitats that support pollinators.

INITIATE FORESTRY AND WOODLOT IMPROVEMENTS

Example: Evaluate reinstating the Tree Sale Program and partner with others to educate and enhance timber resources.

Goal 6 - Adaptation to Changing Climate Conditions

The District will consider anticipated impacts of amplified events and plan projects to mitigate the impact of changing climate conditions.

Climate change is one of the largest threats to biodiversity and native plant communities. Recent changes in climate are driving shifts in the timing of ecological events, the distribution of species, and the functioning of ecosystems. Models project even greater changes for the future.

In four of the last five years, the Vermillion River has exceeded the median cumulative daily discharge reported over the last 47 years. As the watershed continues to experience high water events increasing in both size and frequency, elevated water levels through much of the year may become the new normal.

MONITOR EFFECT OF PRECIPITATION EVENTS ON INSTALLED CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Example: Continue to utilize monitoring protocol to evaluate installed practices so adjustments can be considered moving forward.

MONITOR EFFECTS OF CLIMATE ON WATER AND MACROINVERTABRATES

Example: Use water monitoring data to evaluate both chemical and physical changes to surface waters.

PROMOTE FLOOD STORAGE

Example: Partner with Dakota County to evaluate and pursue water retention and flood storage opportunities.

PROMOTE CARBON STORAGE

Example: Promote implementation of vegetative cover, maintain or improve soil health and remove poorly drained soils from production.