



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Approved Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-396

Staff Lead: Tom Dietrich

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: May 27, 2026

Project Title: Southeast Minnesota Groundwater Protection and Soil Health Initiative

Project Budget: \$2,817,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Skip Langer

Organization: Olmsted County

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Project Reporting

Date Work Plan Approved by LCCMR: June 17, 2026

Reporting Schedule: April 1 / October 1 of each year.

Project Completion: June 30, 2030

Final Report Due Date: August 14, 2030

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2026, Chp. 104, Sec. 2, Subd. 08p

Appropriation Language: \$2,817,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Olmsted County to provide results-based incentives, technical assistance, and educational tools to increase implementation of soil health practices on agricultural fields to prevent nitrate leaching to groundwater in karst regions of southeast Minnesota. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2030, by which time the project must be completed and final products delivered.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2030

Narrative

Project Summary: To collaboratively address rising nitrate trends in groundwater on a regional scale by implementing soil health practices on private land in southeastern Minnesota where groundwater is susceptible to contamination.

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Protecting groundwater in Southeast Minnesota is very important because it serves as most of the regions drinking water supply and sustains local industries and communities. Extensive research completed across southeast Minnesota has revealed soil health practice adoption is key to reducing nitrate leaching from agricultural sources into groundwater. Improving soil health through expansion of the Olmsted County program provides a long-term strategy to reduce drinking water nitrate contamination within karst regions of Southeast Minnesota. Groundwater is susceptible to contamination in karst geology because of shallow soils and carbonate bedrock which is porous and fractured. Karst drinking water aquifers have limited protection from pollutants such as nitrate which originate at the land surface and move readily within the karst system.

Olmsted County has piloted a successful soil health program since 2023. In 2024, nearly 25% of Olmsted County agricultural producers reported more than 19,000 acres under the local program. In year 2023 and 2024 reported practices have prevented an estimated 405,000 pounds of nitrogen from entering groundwater; this equates to 23.8 semi-loads of urea fertilizer. Each year, enrollment acres have increased and for each acre enrolled, two acres are planted, doubling the environmental impact from monies invested.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

The southeast regional groundwater protection and soil health initiative will promote management practices which reduce nitrate leaching from agricultural land. Practices such as converting traditional row crop systems to alternative nitrogen smart crops and small grains; cover crops to extend the duration living roots are in the ground; adding haying and grazing acres for our livestock operations and enhancing existing pasture conditions reduce nitrate leaching. They also increase carbon retention, limit soil erosion, and protect all water resources.

The initiative promotes practices and program requirements that are new and different from traditional conservation programs in the following ways: 1) It is a results-based incentive program where a producer is paid if requirements of the program are met (i.e. growing cover crop to a specific minimum height). 2) Includes a menu of add-on financial incentives to maximize groundwater protection and soil health impacts and provides producers with a variety of options that work best with their agricultural systems. 3) The web-based application and certification process can be easily and conveniently completed by a producer at home/anywhere. 4) Promoting soil health education opportunities and peer-to-peer learning is a priority to expanding participation, adoption rates and farmer success.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

The regional soil health program will reduce nitrate in groundwater, increase producer participation and acres enrolled in soil health practices. 45,000 acres are projected to be certified over the 3-year program timeframe which will prevent nearly 1.2 million pounds of nitrogen fertilizer from leaching into groundwater. A minimum of 300 producers will have the opportunity to participate in the program. Education is a cornerstone of this program, SWCDs will host up to 8 educational events throughout the region for farmers. Additional outcomes include reducing soil erosion, fuel consumption and increasing carbon sequestration.

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Region(s): SE

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Region(s): SE

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Increase the adoption of soil health practices into the crop rotations on Southeastern Minnesota farms

Activity Budget: \$2,640,000

Activity Description:

Engage southeastern Minnesota farmers on three objectives to expand soil health practice adoption on farms and protect groundwater. 1) Plant cover crops to increase roots in the ground on both sides of the annual cropping season. Cover crops uptake nutrient during their growth cycle and prevent leaching by storing nitrogen in its biomass. Once terminated, this nitrogen release is spread out over the annual crops growth cycle and provides a source of nitrogen as the cover crop breaks down, reducing commercial fertilizer needs. 2) Planting small grains/alternative crops brings diversity back into the agricultural landscape which is desired in healthy living systems. Alternative crops, like oats as an example, need less nutrient during their growth which means fewer nutrient inputs are required and nitrate losses during the growing season is reduced to nearly zero. Alternative crops break the nitrate loss cycle typically seen in a corn-corn or corn-soybean rotation. 3) Expanding opportunities for new haying and grazing acres engages livestock producers, an important sector of our southeastern Minnesota agriculture. Converting cropland acres to new haying or grazing also reduces commercial nutrient inputs dramatically. Cattle on pasture distribute manure randomly across the vegetated landscape and alfalfa's deep roots protect soil.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Year 1: implement soil health practices across the 11-county Southeast MN area	December 31, 2027
Year 2: Implement soil health practices across the 11-county Southeast MN area	December 31, 2028
Year 3: Implement soil health practices across the 11-county Southeast MN area	December 31, 2029

Activity 2: Provide technical assistance to farmers to aid in the implementation of soil health practices

Activity Budget: \$168,300

Activity Description:

SWCDs have a variety of qualified technical staff that earn and carry credentialing called Job Approval Authority (JAA). This credentialing is earned overtime through their commitment to providing on-farm assistance to farmers to address resource concerns that meet the requirements of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Ecological Sciences and Engineering Standards in their Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG). Once SWCD technical staff demonstrates proficiency in applying these practices to the landscape, they are assigned JAA and can continue to deliver the valued technical services to farmers. Southeast Minnesota SWCDs employs many staff that are technically proficient at designing and implementing soil health ecological sciences practices like cover crops, alternative cropping and haying and grazing systems management. As farmers enroll in the Soil Health Program, SWCD technical staff will work with them as needed to determine recommended seed varieties, seed planting rates, and planting timing. Technical staff are available to answer many questions that may arise when establishing new practices to ensure that the practice is implemented successfully. Assistance is also provided throughout the growing season to ensure that questions are addressed as well as providing guidance at termination or harvest when soil health practices are certified for payment.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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Year 1: SWCD staff provide technical assistance to farmers to successfully implement soil health practices	December 31, 2027
Year 2: SWCD staff provide technical assistance to farmers to successfully implement soil health practices	December 31, 2028
Year 3: SWCD staff provide technical assistance to farmers to successfully implement soil health practices	December 31, 2029

Activity 3: Administer LCCMR grant for the southeastern Minnesota region

Activity Budget: \$8,700

Activity Description:

Olmsted SWCD will dedicate staff time to the administration of the grant, its fiscal management and reporting. This will include subcontracting with each of the other ten entities, ensuring that program policies and procedures and cost sharing amounts for practices are uniform across the region. Olmsted SWCD's program experience will help ensure that certification requirements are met and that payment dissemination to farmers are all similarly implemented across the region. Olmsted SWCD will collect required data back from the other program participants to report back to LCCMR regarding the annual impacts of the program regionally and to keep regional staff on task with annual milestones.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Year 1: annual reporting to LCCMR	December 31, 2027
Year 2: Annual reporting to LCCMR	December 31, 2028
Year 3: Annual reporting to LCCMR	December 31, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Beau Kennedy	Goodhue Soil & Water Conservation District	Goodhue SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Goodhue.	Yes
Terri Peters	Wabasha Soil & Water Conservation District	Wabasha SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Wabasha.	Yes
Wanda Anderson	Winona Soil & Water Conservation District	Winona SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Winona.	Yes
Dave Walter	Root River Soil & Water Conservation District	Root River SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Houston.	Yes
Riley Buley	Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District	Fillmore SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Fillmore.	Yes
Cody Fox	Mower Soil and Water Conservation District	Mower SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Mower.	Yes
Steve Pahs	Rice Soil and Water Conservation District	Rice SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Rice.	Yes
Eric Gulbransen	Steele Soil and Water Conservation District	Steele SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Steele.	Yes
Lindsey Cornell	Freeborn Soil and Water Conservation District	Freeborn SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Freeborn.	Yes
Jessica Klingfus	Dodge Soil and Water Conservation District	Dodge SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Dodge.	Yes
Skip Langer	Olmsted Soil and Water Conservation District	Olmsted SWCD will be a partner in the regional program and implement practices within the county of Olmsted.	Yes

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

The Minnesota legislature authorized \$75,000 through their agricultural funding allocation during the 2025 legislative session to study the Olmsted County Groundwater Protection and Soil Health Program and provide a report back to the

agricultural committee in 2027. The Minnesota Office of Soil Health (MOSH) through the University of Minnesota (Anna Cates, Associate Professor, Department of Soil, Water, and Climate) is tasked with this research. The Olmsted SWCD staff is working collaboratively with MOSH to provide program statistics and supporting data collected over the last several years to ensure that a relevant product comes from this undertaking. We feel that the soil health program that has been created and is being implemented in Olmsted County can serve as a template for others to successfully complete similar work with beneficial outcomes. The paper will be available for public consumption once completed. The partnership of Southeast MN counties and SWCDs will be happy to utilize the ENRTF logos on communications and program documentation.

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

Southeast SWCDs have been implementing soil health practices on a small scale for many years and have an excellent track record of working with farmers to implement conservation practices that reduce erosion, improve surface water quality, and protect groundwater resources. This LCCMR program offers an opportunity to take that experience and expand it on a broader landscape scale where the practices can cumulatively impact a far greater number of cropland acres than ever before. This collaborative effort will incentivize the benefits of soil health practice adoption and seeks to normalize and integrate their use in southeast Minnesota's agricultural systems.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Olmsted SWCD Technical Assistance		Olmsted SWCD staff will provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. SWCD staff will also complete application evaluation, develop contracts, review post planting certifications, develop payment vouchers for approval and ensure timely cost share payment dissemination. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted) is required.			20%	0.12		\$15,300
Day to day & Fiscal Management - Olmsted SWCD		Olmsted SWCD staff will develop subagreements with 10 southeastern Minnesota partner counties to implement this soil health initiative within their respective county. Also, ensuring program goals are being met across the region, assisting with regional partner training through the application, implementation and certification process, work with southeast SWCDs on program results and reporting process.			20%	0.03		\$8,700
							Sub Total	\$24,000
Contracts and Services								
Goodhue SWCD	Subaward	Goodhue SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent required.				0.12		\$15,300
Wabasha SWCD	Subaward	Wabasha SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher				0.12		\$15,300

		development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)						
Winona SWCD	Subaward	Winona SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)				0.12		\$15,300
Root River SWCD	Subaward	RootRiver SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)				0.12		\$15,300
Fillmore SWCD	Subaward	Fillmore SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)				0.12		\$15,300
Mower SWCD	Subaward	Mower SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)				0.12		\$15,300
Freeborn SWCD	Subaward	Freeborn SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health				0.12		\$15,300

		conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)						
Steele SWCD	Subaward	Steele SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)				0.12		\$15,300
Rice SWCD	Subaward	Rice SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)				0.12		\$15,300
Dodge SWCD	Subaward	Dodge SWCD staff to be reimbursed for personnel costs to provide technical assistance to participating farmers to implement the selected soil health conservation practices. They will also complete application evaluation, approve contracts, review practice certification, payment voucher development and cost share payments dissemination to landowners. Reporting to Fiscal agent (Olmsted)				0.12		\$15,300
							Sub Total	\$153,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								

							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Payment of stipends to farmers to Implement soil health practices on private lands	Implementation of soil health practices on eligible cropland across 11 southeastern Minnesota counties following program requirements, accepted agricultural practice standards and specifications and approved program policies to reduce nitrate leaching into groundwater and improve soil health on agricultural lands. Stipend payment amount is based on the soil health practice selected and its successful implementation. The County's groundwater is a high-quality resource. It serves as our drinking water supply, sustains our agricultural community and other industries. How we manage the land in sensitive areas has introduced contaminants like nitrate-nitrogen into the groundwater system.	X				\$2,640,000

			Through careful research across Southeastern Minnesota, we know that incorporating soil health principles on the landscape can make a difference.					
							Sub Total	\$2,640,000
							Grand Total	\$2,817,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Other Expenses		Payment of stipends to farmers to Implement soil health practices on private lands	Stipends are paid to participants to promote increased adoption of soil health practices that reduce nitrate leaching into groundwater. The stipends mitigate producer risk as they learn to integrate these soil health practices into their cropping systems.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$2,817,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [eb40f453-e9d.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Southeast Regional Groundwater Protection and Soil Health Initiative fact sheet...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Olmsted SWCD 2023 Financial Statement/Audit by Peterson Company Inc	52a9416f-8db.pdf
2023 Olmsted County Financial Statement	40d3bba9-689.pdf
2024 Olmsted SWCD Financial Report	a43e28f8-d90.pdf
Olmsted SWCD Balance Sheet_ October 2025	77bc2376-75b.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Resolution 25-40_LCCMR application submittal approval by Olmsted Co Board	376c14b5-ebc.pdf
25-125 Resolution to Approve LCCMR grant application_ revised 090225_ Received 9-10-25	f2e18e01-db3.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
LCCMR responses & revisions #3_Olmsted SWCD_11.11.25	c1e33a94-a61.docx
Olmsted Co Cover Crop Program Requirements	f0a5e760-064.pdf
Olmsted Co Alternative Crop Requirements	39cf9c15-b15.pdf
Olmsted Co Haying_Grazing_Pasture Enhancement Program Requirements	cefb4f2a-c2a.pdf

Media Links

Title	Link
Olmsted County's Groundwater Protection & Soil Health Initiative webpage	https://olmsted-soil-health-program-gis-olmsted.hub.arcgis.com/

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

Work plan changes reflect the reduction in grant funding available for the project from the original application and include a reduction in acres impact, a reduction in pollutant loading, a reduction in funding (incentive payments) available to farmers for implementing soil health practices, a reduction in funding available to participating SWCDs for staff technical assistance provided and a reduction in the funding available to the applicant SWCD (Olmsted) for its administrative time to coordinate these efforts regionally.

The financial statements provided for both Olmsted SWCD and Olmsted County are up-to-date and the most current year available. The audit for 2024 is underway but will not be available until late 2025 or early 2026. Audits are generally always one year behind.

Also, I have requested to take the revised resolution (as requested by LCCMR), including the missing "be it further

resolved" before the Olmsted County Board for approval at their Tuesday September 2nd meeting. Once I have secured the signed copy of the updated resolution post Sept 2 meeting, I will submit through the LCCMR work plan for review. Let me know if questions. Thank you. (skip.langer@olmstedcounty.gov)

10/6/25: The 2024 Olmsted SWCD Financial Report has been added. Updates were made to the Subawards category, budgets tab regarding expenses by the other SWCDs involved in the grant. The link to Olmsted County's Groundwater Protection & Soil Health Initiative was added for reference and will serve as a model for the regional program. The general location of the project was entered into the appropriate box as requested. If questions, please reach out to Skip Langer, Olmsted SWCD. Thank you!

11/19/25-Good Afternoon, all questions have been answered and are either incorporated as asked into the application narrative or are detailed in the documentation attached by Olmsted SWCD. Additional information included as attachments: Cover crop program requirements, Alternative crop program requirements, Haying & Grazing program requirements. The Olmsted SWCD financial position from October 2025 is attached. Thank you! ~Skip Langer, OSWCD

5/27/26 - completion date has been update to June 30, 2030 as suggested in the LCCMR staff comments. Thanks.

Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?

N/A

Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

N/A

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

Yes, Olmsted County Finance

Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

No

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?

No

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this project:

Skip Langer, Olmsted County & SWCD

Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements

N/A