

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2012-2013 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

Project Title:

ENRTF ID: 110-F

Accelerate Soil and Water Conservation District Technical Credentials

Topic Area: F. Outreach/Education/Training

Total Project Budget: \$ 197,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 2 yrs. July 2013 - June 2015

Other Non-State Funds: \$ 0

Summary:

This project accelerates the technical credentials of Soil and Water Conservation District technicians statewide and enhances current credentialing processes, to accelerate water quality and associated conservation practices on private lands.

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Sponsoring Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

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Location

Region: Statewide

County Name: Statewide

City / Township:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Funding Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple Benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	Outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Knowledge Base
<input type="checkbox"/>	Extent of Impact	<input type="checkbox"/>	Innovation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Scientific/Tech Basis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urgency
<input type="checkbox"/>	Capacity Readiness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Leverage	<input type="checkbox"/>	Employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	TOTAL <input type="checkbox"/> %



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) 2012-2013 Main Proposal

PROJECT TITLE: Accelerate Soil and Water Conservation District Technical Credentials

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

Purpose: This project will accelerate the capacity of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to provide technical assistance for traditional and new water quality and other conservation practices in Minnesota by increasing their technical credentials. This project will provide high priority technical training for SWCD staff, establish an accelerated on-the-job training system, and establish a process for SWCD area engineers to recommend credentials (Technical Approval Authority) for SWCD technicians.

Problem / Issue: Historically, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been a key partner for providing classroom and on-the-job training for SWCD staff. However, in recent years NRCS's workload and staffing limits have greatly diminished this training, including for traditional and new water quality practices. BWSR does not have all of the necessary expertise and is also limited by workload and staffing. Only NRCS staff can currently recommend technical approval authority credentials for SWCD technicians.

Context: Many state and federal programs for conservation on private lands are implemented through Minnesota's conservation delivery system. The 90 SWCDs statewide, and their 8 joint powers Technical Services Areas (TSAs) for sharing engineering assistance, are critical components of this delivery system. SWCDs have a total of approximately 350 staff (technical and administrative) statewide providing front line technical assistance for engineering and ecological science conservation practices, with an increasing focus on water quality.

A key measure of SWCD technical credentials is conservation practice Technical Approval Authority (TAA). The TAA system is used by the USDA-NRCS, SWCDs and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for technical assistance sign-off and quality assurance. TAA credentials are based on training, experience and demonstrated competence.

BWSR recently conducted an inventory of SWCD TAA credentials statewide and an associated survey of priority training and experience needs to maintain and accelerate technical credentials. This inventory and survey indicate the need for targeted technical training and on-the-job experience to accelerate SWCD technical credentials for implementation of traditional and new conservation and water quality practices. SWCDs currently have a total of about 150 staff with technical approval authority.

Project Outcomes: Approximately 30 SWCD staff achieve or increase technical credentials for high priority water quality protection and restoration practices, which is an increase of approximately 20% from current capacity. Ongoing processes are in place to help maintain and increase SWCD technical credentials.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Clarify, design and deliver targeted training for SWCD credentialing Budget: \$133,000

Contract with a training and development professional to serve as the lead person for this project. Based on the SWCD Technical Approval Authority inventory and survey, as well as input from a project advisory committee, priority training courses and content will be designed and delivered (estimate 3 courses at 2 or 3 locations in two years). This will involve coordination with the USDA-NRCS to take advantage of opportunities for partnering to develop training that serves both state and federal conservation and water quality programs through SWCDs.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Project lead professional contracted	September 2013

Accelerate Soil and Water Conservation District Technical Credentials

2. Project advisory committee established and work plan details clarified	October 2013
3. Targeted training clarified based on TAA inventory, survey and advisory cmte.	November 2013
4. Targeted training courses developed to accelerate SWCD technical credentials	February 2014
5. Training delivered statewide at multiple locations and/or via webinar	July 2014
6. Repeat targeted training development and delivery in fiscal year 2015	June 2015

Activity 2: Implement process for SWCD area engineers to recommend TAA **Budget: \$20,000**

Coordinate with NRCS and SWCD TSAs to define and implement a process for SWCD TSA engineers to recommend engineering TAA for SWCD technicians.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Process developed for TSA engineers to recommend TAA for SWCD staff	October 2014
2. Outreach and consultation to SWCD TSAs, SWCDs and NRCS to implement	June 2015

Activity 3: Implement accelerated on-the-job experience process for SWCD TAA **Budget: \$44,000**

Based on leadership and coordination with NRCS and SWCDs, develop and implement a partnership process to accelerate on-the-job experience for conservation practice planning, design and/or construction experience of SWCD technicians leading to accelerated SWCD technical approval authority.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Coordination to define a process to accelerate mentoring for SWCD TAA	August 2014
2. SWCD technician on-the-job experience process for TAA developed	October 2014
3. Outreach and support to NRCS offices, SWCD TSAs and SWCDs to implement	June 2015

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

Roles to be funded by requested ENRTF grant:

- *Training and Development Professional:* Provide leadership, training course development, outreach and delivery of targeted conservation training and processes to accelerate SWCD technical credentials.
- *SWCD Area Engineers and Lead Technicians:* Grants to participating SWCD TSAs to provide accelerated, structured supervision of on-the-job experience for SWCD technicians for priority water quality and associated conservation practices.

Roles to be funded by sources other than ENRTF:

- *Al Kean, P.E., Chief Engineer, BWSR:* Project management, oversight and coordination.
- *BWSR Training Coordinator:* Coordination with SWCDs, MASWCD, MACDE and NRCS. Advice and assistance for technical training courses and TAA acceleration processes design and delivery.
- *Advisory committee members:* Provide advice and perspective regarding targeted training, as well as on-the-job experience and TAA recommendation processes to accelerate SWCD technical credentials.

B. Timeline Requirements

This project will require a total of 2 years, from July 2013 to July 2015

C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs

This project will provide dedicated funding and priority to accelerate SWCD technical credentials and to develop and implement processes that will be carried on by the conservation partnership of BWSR, SWCDs and USDA-NRCS to maintain and increase SWCD technical credentials. Future ENRTF funding needs are not anticipated.

2012-2013 Detailed Project Budget

Project Title: Accelerate Soil and Water Conservation District Technical Credentials

IV. TOTAL ENRTF REQUEST BUDGET 2 years

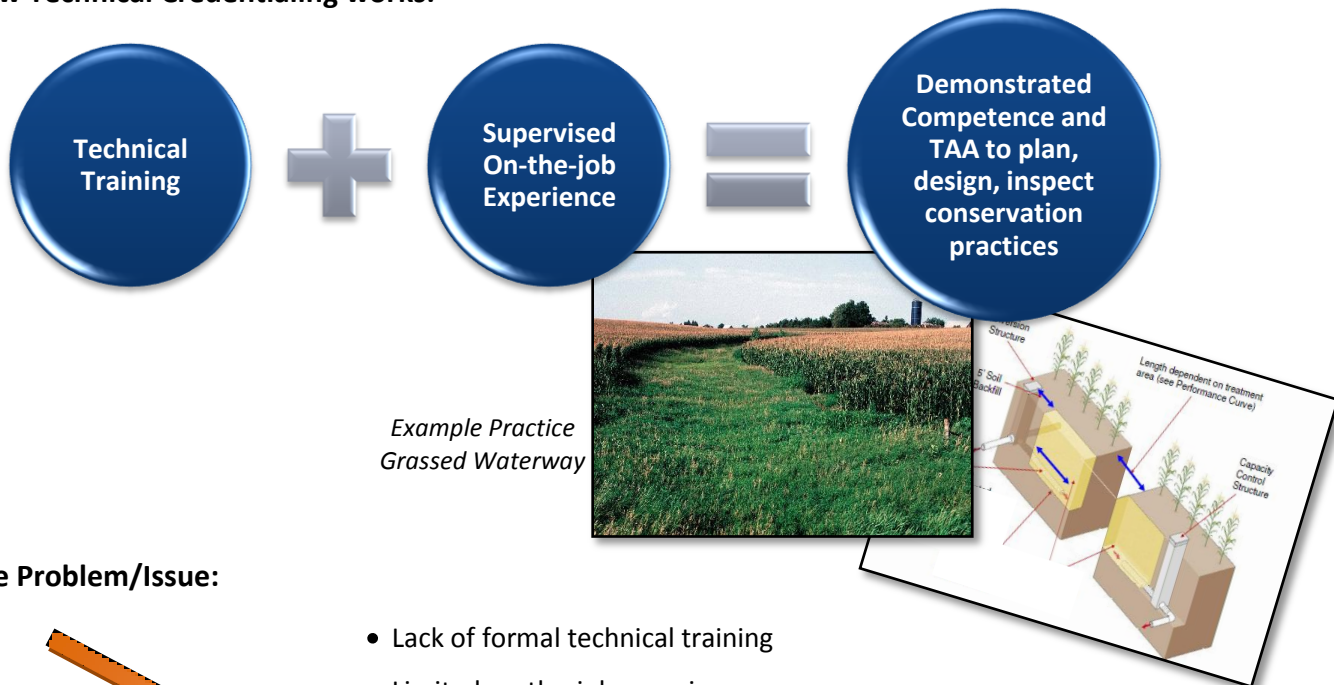
BUDGET ITEM	AMOUNT
Contracts: Training and development professional with applicable expertise for: leadership, coordination, development and delivery of targeted technical training; development and implementation of a process for SWCD TSA engineers to recommend TAA for SWCD staff; and development and implementation of a system for accelerated on-the-job experience for SWCD staff leading to technical credentials (i.e. Technical Approval Authority).	\$ 170,000
Travel: Mileage, lodging, per diem for advisory committee meetings, technical training sessions, outreach and other consultation with SWCDs, SWCD TSAs, NRCS and other project participants.	\$ 3,000
Additional Budget Items: Grants to SWCD TSAs for area engineers and lead technicians to provide accelerated, structured supervision of on-the-job experience for SWCD technicians for priority water quality and associated conservation practices.	\$ 24,000
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =	\$ 197,000

V. OTHER FUNDS

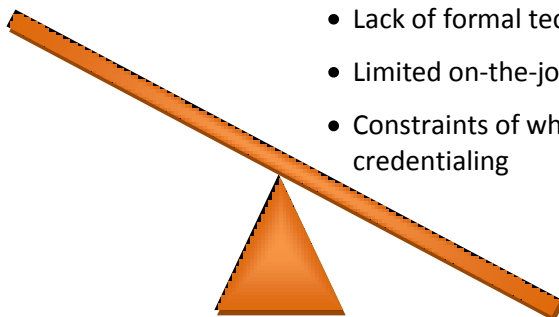
SOURCE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT	Status
In-kind Services During Project Period: BWSR Staff Time: (3% Al Kean, Project Manager; 3% BWSR Training Coordinator) (salary, benefits, other OH)	\$ 14,000	Secured

Accelerate Soil and Water Conservation District Technical Credentials

How Technical Credentialing works:



The Problem/Issue:



- Lack of formal technical training
- Limited on-the-job experience
- Constraints of who can recommend credentialing

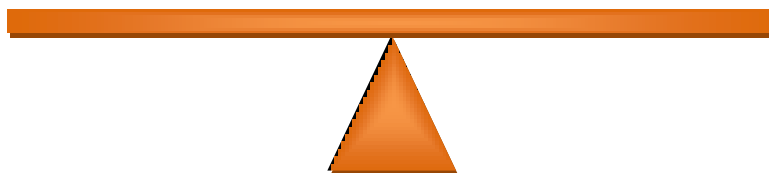
*Example Practice
Denitrifying Woodchip
Bioreactor*

How this Project Addresses the Problem:

- ★ Uses existing survey data and advisory input to define critical credentialing needs for water quality
- ★ Develops and delivers high priority training for water quality practices
- ★ Creates and accelerates a process for on-the-job experience of SWCD technical staff
- ★ Establishes a way for SWCD area engineers to credential SWCD technicians

Outcomes:

- 30 SWCD staff achieve or increase technical credentials for high priority water quality protection and restoration practices. (Approx. 20% increase)
- Ongoing processes in place to maintain and increase SWCD technical credentials



2012-2013 Project Manager Qualifications / Organization Description

PROJECT TITLE: Accelerate Soil and Water Conservation District Technical Credentials

Project Manager Qualifications

Allan Kean, P.E., serves as Chief Engineer and manager of the Technical Services Section at the Board of Water and Soil Resources. This role involves associated supervision, financial management and leadership. Mr. Kean has served as a section manager for BWSR since 1992. He also provides leadership for coordination with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) regarding the Technical Approval Authority (TAA) system used by NRCS, SWCDs and BWSR for technical assistance sign-off and technical quality assurance. Since 1994, Mr. Kean has served as a BWSR liaison and consultant to the current 8 joint powers Technical Services Areas of SWCDs statewide, which share engineering assistance with member SWCDs.

Mr. Kean served as project manager and editor for the *“Public Drainage Ditch Buffer Study, February 2006”* and the *“Drainage Records Modernization Guidelines, September 2008”*, which involved contracts with the University of Minnesota, Water Resources Center and the Minnesota State University, Mankato, Water Resources Center.

As project manager, Mr. Kean will be responsible for oversight of project team and advisory committee establishment, help facilitate coordination with stakeholders, and ensure project completion within budget and on schedule.

Organization Description

The mission of the Board of Water and Soil Resources is to: “Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners”. The 90 SWCDs statewide are a critical part of the conservation delivery system in Minnesota, which is in turn critical for implementation of Clean Water Fund and numerous other programs administered by BWSR. This project will support BWSR’s mission by accelerating targeted Technical Approval Authority of SWCDs, thereby increasing their capacity to design and implement conservation and water quality protection and restoration projects on private lands statewide.

This project helps implement the following 2012 updates of BWSR’s Strategic Plan:

- Develop, in concert with state and federal partners, credentialing mechanisms for technical conservation proficiencies.
- Institute and lead a cost-effective training program aimed at growing LGU capacity and performance.

BWSR administers Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103C, which governs and supports SWCDs and their local roles for implementation of water and soil conservation on private lands. Therefore, BWSR is well positioned to lead this project.