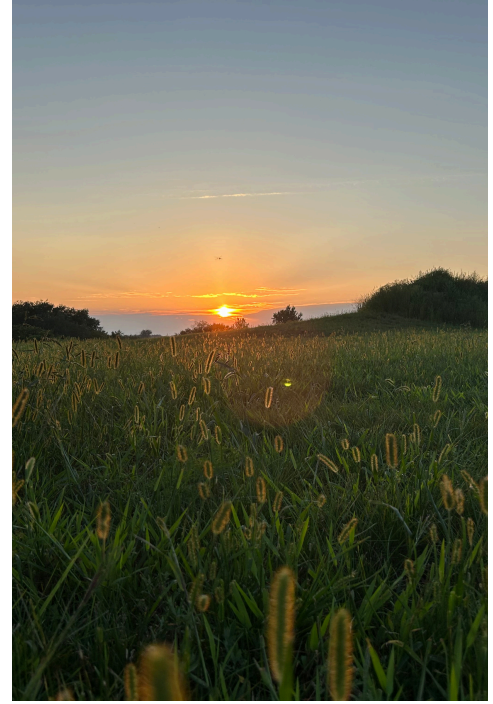
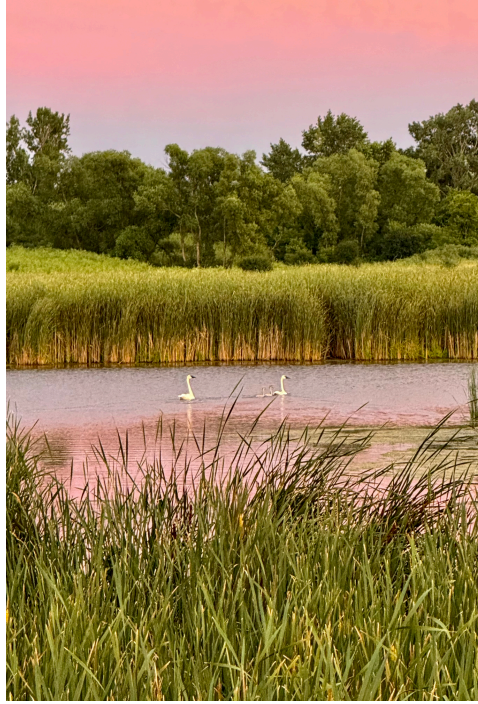




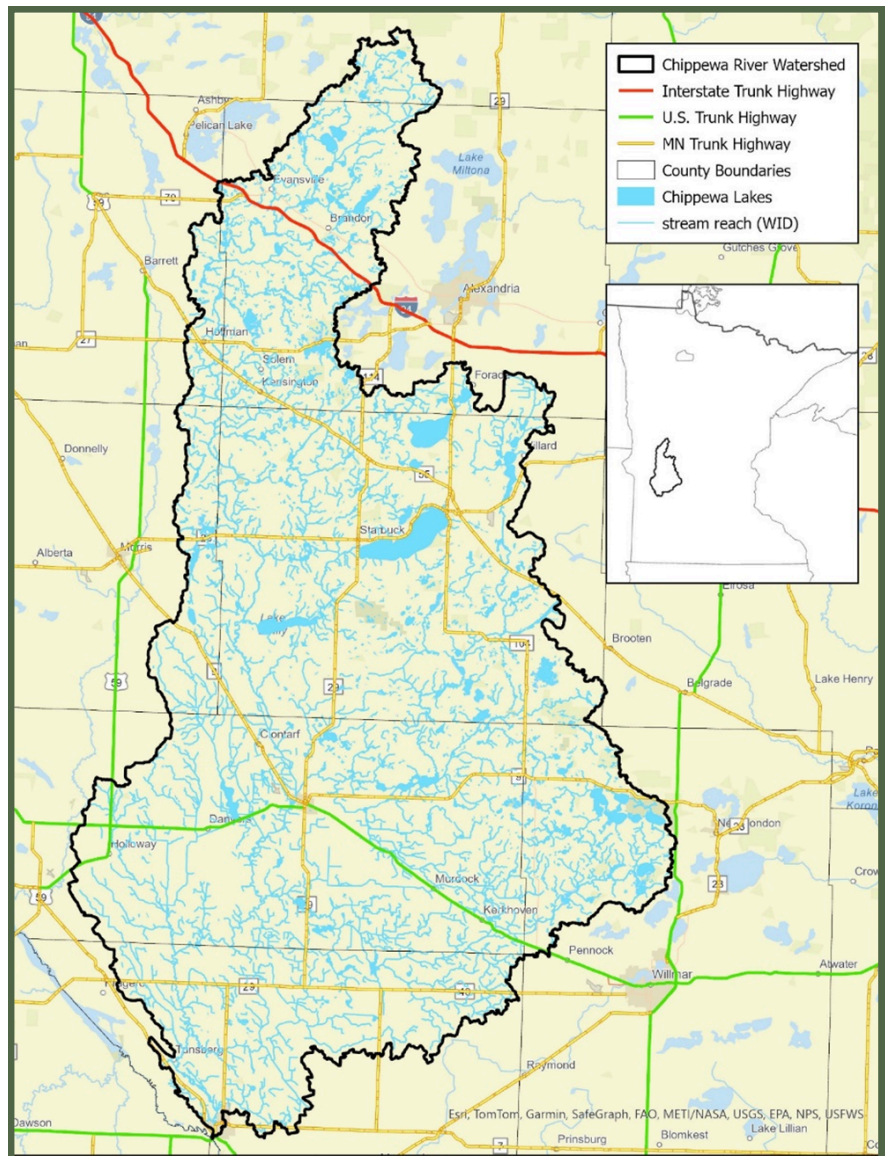
# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT





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# Who We Are

The Chippewa River Watershed Association is a non-regulatory Joint Powers Board formed by eight counties and eight Soil and Water Conservation Districts across west central MN.

## Joint Powers Board

Michelle Overholser-Chippewa SWCD  
Matt Gilbertson-Chippewa County  
John Lederman-Douglas SWCD  
Jeff Way-Douglas County  
Darin Hanson-Grant SWCD  
Ken Johnson-Grant County  
Steve Friedlein-Kandiyohi SWCD  
Dale Anderson-Kandiyohi County  
Rod Wenstrom-West Ottertail SWCD  
Robert Lahman-Ottertail County  
Randy Mitteness-Pope SWCD  
Paul Gerde-Pope County  
Dennis Feuchtenberger-Stevens SWCD  
Ron Staples-Stevens County  
Mark Weimerskirch-Swift SWCD  
Larry Mahoney-Swift County

## Technical Advisory Committee

This committee includes one representative from each SWCD and county partner, with advisory support from state agencies.

# History

The Chippewa River Watershed has a long history of collaboration dating back to the late 1990s, when counties and state agencies first partnered to study water quality and support conservation projects. This work evolved into the Chippewa River Watershed Project that guided watershed efforts for many years.

A major step forward came with Minnesota's One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program, which encouraged planning along watershed boundaries. Local partners reorganized, forming the Chippewa River Watershed Association in 2020 and developing the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, approved in 2024. The plan prioritizes and targets actions based on science-driven goals.

In November 2024, the partnership received its first Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) grant from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, providing dedicated funding to begin carrying out the plan. With a coordinator hired in 2025, the watershed entered a new chapter of coordinated, locally led conservation.

Now, just one year into implementation, we're already seeing progress and excited about the momentum building for future accomplishments across the watershed.

# 2025

## By the Numbers



# 13

Contracts Completed

Hours Dedicated to WBIF Conservation Projects & Technical Assistance:

# 2,671

# 27

Signed Contracts

# \$2.4M

Leveraged Dollars for Implementation

Conservation Practices Installed

# 77

Est. Tons of total Sediment saved per year:

# 11,564.7

That's nearly 578 Large Dump Trucks worth!



# 542.5

Funded Acres Newly enrolled into CRP



# \$796,182.66

Total WBIF Dollars on Completed Project Costs

# Watershed Based Implementation Funding - Chippewa River Watershed

In this initial year of implementation, we successfully completed 11 projects using Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF). Of the completed projects, 71 erosion control structures were built! An additional 13 projects are currently in progress, with plans for completion in 2026. Altogether, our first year resulted in 27 contracts with landowners across the watershed through this WBIF support. The projects happening with this funding accelerates work that the partners have been doing across the watershed for many years.



Erosion Issue to be corrected



Construction of Urban Stormwater project



Lined Channel



Construction of Erosion Control Project



## 2025 POLLUTION REDUCTION TOTALS:

<b>2000</b>	<b>156.1</b>	<b>1023</b>	<b>63.5</b>
<b>NITROGEN</b> (Pounds per Year)	<b>PHOSPHORUS</b> (Pounds per Year)	<b>SEDIMENT (TSS)</b> (Tons per Year)	<b>WATER STORAGE</b> (Acre-Feet per Year)

# Partnerships Make Progress Possible

While Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) provides a critical foundation for project work across the Chippewa River Watershed, it is not enough on its own to meet the goals outlined in our Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The scale of work needed requires a broader network of support.

Important conservation practices fall outside the current WBIF work plan or are not eligible for WBIF dollars. That’s why strong partnerships with other agencies and local work groups are essential. These partners help fund, promote, and implement projects that complement our watershed priorities.

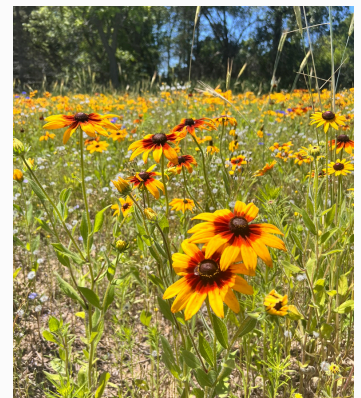
Valued partnerships include, but not limited to:

- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- Board of Water and Soil Resources
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- United State Department of Agriculture
- Farm Service Agency
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Minnesota Department of Health
- MN Department of Natural Resources
- and many more!

In 2025 alone, an estimate of 139 projects were completed using “other” funding sources. Some of these projects include septic improvements, well decommissioning, cover crops, erosion control projects, windbreaks, soil health practices and many others. These projects are helping us begin to truly “move the needle” toward long-term watershed goals—work that simply wouldn’t be possible with WBIF funding alone.

As we continue implementing the plan, these partnerships will remain key to delivering meaningful, measurable progress across the watershed.

<b>139</b> PROJECTS	<b>6</b> ACTIVITY CATEGORIES	<b>93</b> SEPTIC IMPROVEMENTS	<b>\$2.4M</b> OTHER FUNDED DOLLARS
------------------------	------------------------------------	-------------------------------------	--





## PROJECT POLLUTION REDUCTION TOTALS:

**2000**  
NITROGEN  
(Pounds per Year)

**156.1**  
PHOSPHORUS  
(Pounds per Year)

**1023**  
SEDIMENT  
(TSS)  
(Tons per Year)

**63.5**  
WATER STORAGE  
(Acre-Feet per Year)



Stabilizing the ravine



Rock Structure with Vegetative Buffer



Stabilizing the erosion on slopes

# Watershed Wins - Project Highlights

One of the projects completed in 2025 utilizing WBIF dollars was an Urban Ravine Stabilization Project in the City of Glenwood, led by Pope SWCD. Finished in fall 2025, this project addresses stormwater and erosion concerns in a steep urban ravine while improving downstream water quality.

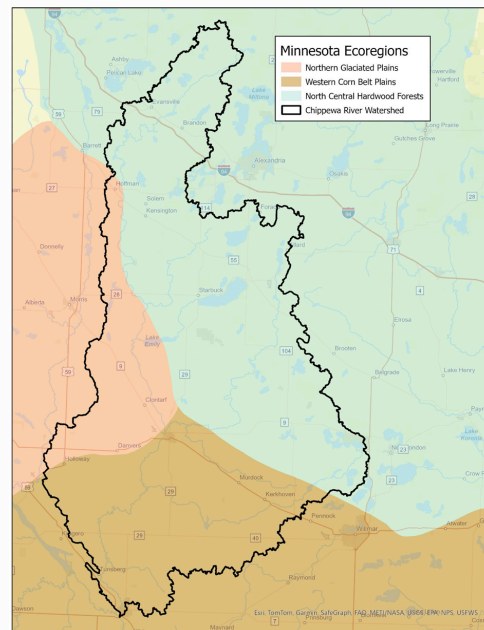
The work focused on stabilizing eroding slopes that had been losing soil during heavy rain events. Rock structures and vegetative buffers were installed to slow stormwater, reduce sediment loss, and prevent material from washing into Lake Minnewaska. Native plantings were added throughout the site to strengthen the ravine banks, filter runoff, and enhance habitat for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife.

This project reflects the strong collaboration among watershed partners and the shared commitment to protecting local water resources across the Chippewa River Watershed.

# Water Quality Update

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) has completed the second cycle of the Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) report for the Chippewa River Watershed. These reports assess watershed health, identify impairments, and provide science-based strategies that guide our Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The first WRAPS cycle covered 2001–2010; this second cycle evaluates conditions from 2011–2020.

Spanning three eco-regions, the Chippewa River Watershed contains a large number of lakes assessed under multiple nutrient and sediment standards. According to the WRAPS 2026 update, the watershed is showing several positive trends: phosphorus levels in most lakes are declining, aquatic life is improving—slightly for fish and more noticeably for macroinvertebrates—and long-term stream pollutant levels continue to decrease. Nitrogen remains below aquatic life standards, though a gradual upward trend will require continued monitoring.

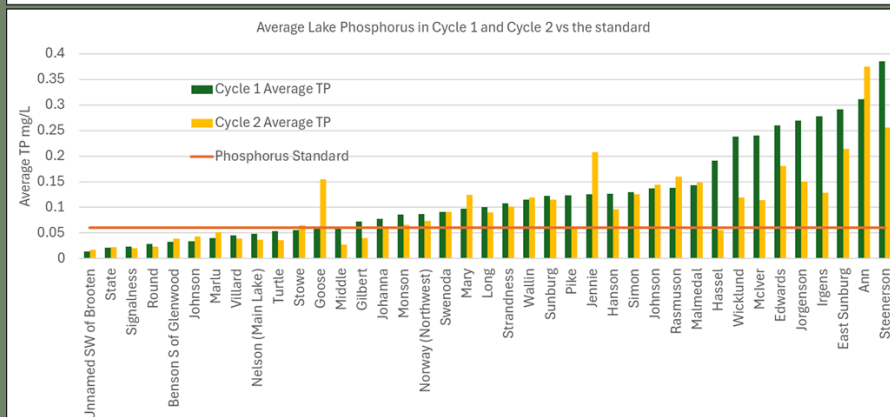
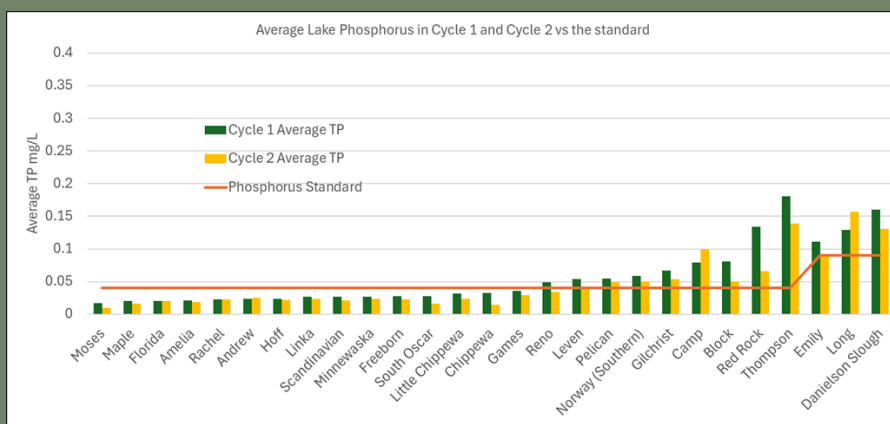


Shakopee Creek continues to show higher pollutant levels than other subwatersheds, and while phosphorus conditions are improving overall, many areas still exceed state standards.

Phosphorus levels in many of the watershed lakes are showing meaningful improvement, with an average decrease of 0.017 mg/L between WRAPS cycles. This reduction is not only statistically significant but also ecologically important, as even small increases in phosphorus can trigger algal blooms, reduce water clarity, and shift a lake’s trophic status.

While the overall trend is positive, several lakes are now approaching or exceeding the phosphorus standard, and a few have shown notable increases over the past two decades—indicating localized nutrient concerns that may require targeted management.

Figure 9 from the MPCA WRAPS Report 2026 illustrates average lake phosphorus levels in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 compared to the applicable lake standards.



The WRAPS report also highlights climate changes. The Chippewa River Watershed is becoming wetter and warmer, with shorter winters, more intense rainfall events, and a roughly 50% increase in average annual flow between WRAPS cycle 1 and cycle 2. These shifts expand the window for nutrient movement, intensify hydrology, and increase the need for water storage and land management practices.

Despite these challenges, conservation efforts are making a measurable difference: sediment and phosphorus levels are trending downward even as flows increase, lakes are largely stable or improving, and the watershed shows signs of hydrologic resilience. At the same time, several challenges remain; nitrogen is slowly rising, E. coli levels are not improving, and localized impairment hotspots persist. This updated WRAPS information provides a strong scientific foundation as we continue work of protection and restoration work across the Chippewa River Watershed.

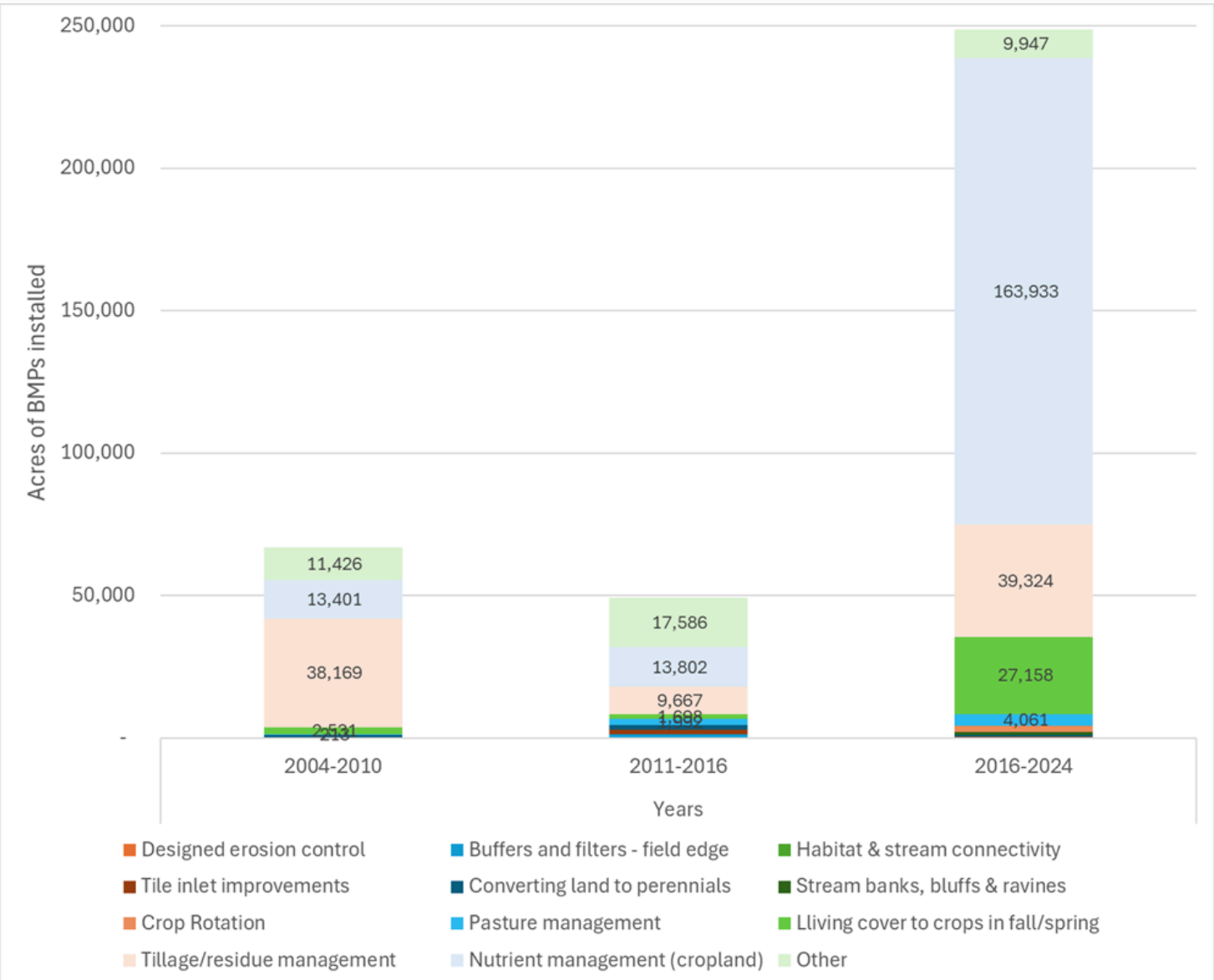


Figure 37 from MPCA WRAPS 2026 report shows the total acres of conservation best management practices installed in the watershed over time.

# Learn More About Watershed Health & Water Quality

For readers interested in exploring the full picture of water quality in the Chippewa River Watershed, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) provides extensive public resources.

The recently updated Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) report—along with lake and stream data, monitoring results, interactive maps, and long-term trends—can all be accessed through the MPCA’s watershed webpages. These tools offer a deeper look at local conditions, pollutant trends, and the science behind our watershed planning efforts.

To learn more, visit the MPCA’s website and search for the Chippewa River Watershed.



## Local Impacts Of Funding

Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF), made possible through Minnesota’s Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, does more than support clean water—it brings real economic benefits back to our communities.

When these funds are awarded, the dollars stay local. They are used locally to install conservation practices, complete studies, and support projects that improve soil health, reduce erosion, protect drinking water, and enhance habitat. This work often involves local contractors, local suppliers, and local landowners, meaning the funding directly supports the local economy.

WBIF ensures that the investments Minnesotans made through the Legacy Amendment return home as on-the-ground projects that benefit both our natural resources and the people who live and work here.

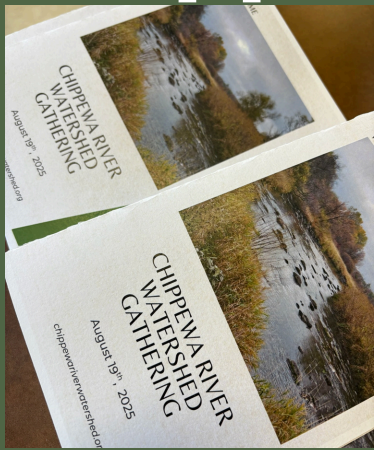
## Funding Progress

The Chippewa River Watershed has implemented nearly 50% of its FY25 Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) grant, reflecting strong early progress across priority projects.

The FY25 Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Incentive Grant has been fully implemented, supporting 13 completed contracts across four counties. Through this funding, 542.55 acres were newly enrolled in eligible conservation practices, including 391.77 acres in Restoring Native Tallgrass Prairie, 139.82 acres in Wetland Restoration, and 10.96 acres in Prairie Strips.

Looking ahead, the watershed is preparing for the next round of WBIF funding, which will expand opportunities to address groundwater protection, wind erosion, and irrigation-related concerns. This upcoming grant will open new pathways to support projects and advance long-term watershed health.

# Chippewa Gathering



The Chippewa Gathering was held in August 2025 in Starbuck, MN. The event highlighted the long history of the Chippewa River Watershed, celebrated the early successes of project implementation aligned with the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The gathering featured guest speaker Paul Wymar from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, who presented findings from the WRAPS report. A total of 69 people attended the event. We look forward to another gathering soon!

## Endowment Fund

An endowment fund was established in 2006 to support the long-term work of the Chippewa River Watershed Association. Built through generous gifts from individuals committed to restoring and enhancing the watershed, this fund provides ongoing support for projects that protect water quality and strengthen the health of the watershed.

Endowment earnings are utilized in ways that directly benefit the Chippewa River Watershed—such as natural resource protection, water quality improvements, sustainable land-use practices, education, and community engagement. Each funded project must show clear value to the watershed and align with the mission of the Chippewa River Watershed Association.

To learn more or make a gift, please visit [chippewariverwatershed.org](http://chippewariverwatershed.org).

Donations ensure the Chippewa River Watershed Association has the resources needed to protect water, soil, habitat, and community well-being—now and for future generations.

## Save the Date Well Screening Event



A watershed well-screening program will launch in summer 2026, offering free nitrate and chloride testing, discounted arsenic testing, and on-site well experts.

**Our first event will be held  
July 16th, 2026 in Glenwood, MN.**

These events support watershed goals and help ensure safe, informed well owners and drinking water across the region.

More details will be shared as the date approaches.

# A Strong Start

The Chippewa River Watershed Association partners have made strong early progress, building a solid foundation for long-term success. As measurable improvements continue to take shape, we are already advancing new projects, events, and initiatives that will build on this momentum.

In the coming year, we expect to receive an additional WBIF grant, allowing us to focus on priorities such as groundwater and wind erosion. Through this funding, we expect to execute a targeted push on well sealings, drinking-water analysis and continue conservation efforts through the watershed!

Stay tuned—there’s much more progress ahead! Contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District if you would like to do a project!

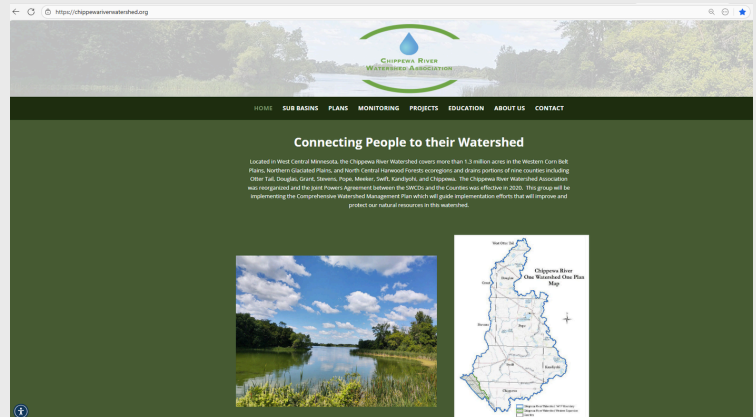


**Erosion Control Project in Construction**

## Funding Opportunities

The Chippewa River Watershed works closely with local SWCD offices to provide cost-share assistance for landowners implementing conservation practices. If you’re interested in starting a project, we encourage you to contact your local SWCD office.

- |                        |                |
|------------------------|----------------|
| • West Otter Tail SWCD | (218) 998-5300 |
| • Grant SWCD           | (218) 685-5395 |
| • Douglas SWCD         | (320) 763-3191 |
| • Stevens SWCD         | (320) 589-4886 |
| • Pope SWCD            | (320) 634-5327 |
| • Swift SWCD           | (320) 289-6033 |
| • Chippewa SWCD        | (320) 269-2696 |
| • Kandiyohi SWCD       | (320) 403-4350 |



To follow the progress being made across the watershed, and see upcoming events visit [chippewariverwatershed.org](http://chippewariverwatershed.org).

