

AITKIN COUNTY SWCD ANNUAL PLAN OF WORK



2009

**AITKIN COUNTY PLAN OF WORK
JANUARY THROUGH DECEMBER 2009**

AITKIN COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

March 6, 2009

MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The Aitkin County Soil and Water Conservation District's (SWCD) Management Discussion and Analysis provides an overview of the SWCD's financial activities for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2008.

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS:

The loss of significant State funding in 2003, and the reduction in Water Planning funding that continues from year to year, forces the SWCD to increase funds from other sources and to reduce spending. The SWCD has managed to maintain its programs and personnel but is still faced with financial uncertainties. A stable funding source should be established for SWCD's throughout the State.

2008 ended with a net gain of \$ 61,903.99. It must be understood that a significant portion of our fund balance is deferred revenue that was received in 2008 for project activities and will continue to be used to implement those projects in the next 1 or 2 years. Additional deferred revenue was received in 2008 to be spent in future years for a variety of projects. It is possible that we will experience years that show a net loss due to the fact that funding was received in 2008 for project expenses that will occur in 2009 and 2010. The SWCD goal is to increase and maintain our operating cushion to at least 4 months (approximately \$120,000) in order to ensure that continued services are provided to our clientele. Due to the timing of State and County fund allocations, cash flow can be a problem.

USING THIS ANNUAL REPORT

This annual report consists of three parts: management discussion and analysis (this section), the basic financial statements, and required supplementary information. The financial statements provide information about the activities of the SWCD as a whole and present a view of the SWCD's finances. We need about \$30,000 per month on which to operate. Some months are less expensive (perhaps as low as \$22,000) while others require more than \$32,000 (e.g. when rent, project expenses or insurances are due). Building the cash reserve continues to be a two-part process. 1. We have aggressively

sought programs or projects that fulfill our mission and provide at least partial funding for staff time and other expenses. The SWCD staff should be commended for their efforts at procuring funds and working hard to complete the additional tasks. 2. Spending has been kept to a minimum where possible. We receive vehicles through an agreement with Aitkin County. Periodically the County sells vehicles on public auction and replaces them with newer vehicles. We have been allowed to view the vehicles that are about to be sold and use one or two of them for SWCD purposes. Title is transferred to us and we must return it to the County for public auction when the vehicle is no longer of use to us. We are currently on our fourth and fifth vehicles from the county. The first three were returned to the County. These cost-saving measures have helped us survive financially and have not caused undue hardship.

GENERAL FUND BUDGETARY HIGHLIGHTS

Over the course of 2008, it became apparent that both the Revenues and Expenditures were under-estimated for the year. This is due to the fact that budgeting occurs several months before the start of each fiscal year. It is not unusual for new projects to be added after the budget has been approved by the SWCD. A significant project that was added was the TMDL (total maximum daily load) study in the Big Sandy watershed. Approved projects involve both revenues and expenses and result in additional revenues and expenses being added to the budget for that year.

Questions or comments regarding these financial reports should be addressed to:

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I. INTRODUCTION

Aitkin County is located in the northeastern part of central Minnesota. The county seat, Aitkin, is approximately 126 miles north of Minneapolis-St. Paul and 87 miles west of Duluth. Aitkin County has an area of about 1.2 million acres of which 113,000 acres is surface water. Land ownership in the county is approximately 46 percent private, 34 percent state, 19 percent county, and 1 percent federal. The county's population is about 15,300 (2000 data).

There are 580 farms (155,000 acres) in the county with an average size of 267 acres. Beef cattle and hay constitutes the largest single source of farm income. Of the 580 farms, approximately 51 are dairy farms, 225 beef, 17 hog, 16 sheep, and 24 poultry. These numbers represent about a 20% overall decline in agricultural activities since 1990.

It is speculated that agricultural downturns may slow somewhat but that may be dependant on prices producers receive for their products.

Privately owned lands comprise 46 percent of Aitkin County, with approximately one-fourth in some form of agricultural usage (not including forestry activities). About 65 percent of the county is forestland. Of this forested area, approximately 40 percent are under-stocked cover types (marsh, bog, brush land). The other major cover types include: aspen-birch, northern and lowland hardwoods, and conifers.

Development trends: In the past 10 to 15 years, Aitkin County has experienced rapidly increasing residential development. Lakes and rivers are being developed for weekend cabins so quickly that demand for riparian lands has forced prices to more than double in the past ten years. (Woods and Shores Real Estate). The trend is toward larger homes and larger related buildings (i.e. garages, pole buildings) on existing lakeshore lots. To a much smaller degree, some small lots are being consolidated with adjacent lots to create a larger building and recreation area. Second and third tier development will accelerate as well as development pressures increasing along rivers and wetlands.

The second major development trend applies to recreational acreages. These parcels typically vary between 10 and 100 acres with most parcels averaging about 40 acres in size. These parcels are usually used for seasonal cabins and outdoor recreation. Demand for this type of property has also increased dramatically as evidenced by approximately a doubling of recreational property values. It should be noted that accessibility, location, and other factors influence values.

Current trends are that demand and prices will continue to increase, however possibly at a slower rate than was experienced in the past ten years.

AITKIN COUNTY SWCD MISSION AND PURPOSE

OUR MISSION IS TO APPLY CONSERVATION PRACTICES TO THE LAND AND PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO LANDOWNERS AND GROUPS.

WE STRIVE TO DEVELOP COMMON SENSE, COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS RESOURCE NEEDS.

OUR PURPOSE IS TO WORK WITH OTHERS TO ACHIEVE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF OUR NATURAL RESOURCES.

AITKIN COUNTY SUPERVISORS

**CHAIR
SECRETARY**

**DONNA RAE ASP
RUSS RUUD**

REPORTER
TREASURER
VICE-CHAIR

FRANK TURNOCK
MIKE LENTZ
BOB JANZEN

AITKIN COUNTY STAFF

DISTRICT MANAGER
DISTRICT SECRETARY
DISTRICT TECHNICIAN
DISTRICT FORESTER

STEVEN R. HUGHES
LORI M. NELSON
JANET L. SMUDE
DENNIS J. THOMPSON

II. OBJECTIVES

This annual plan will be used to guide our activities to accomplish the long-term objectives that are outlined in the SWCD Mission and Purpose section and in the introduction. We understand that annual goals are necessary to ensure steady progress. The following actions will keep our staff and cooperating agencies working together to achieve the annual goals:

LOCAL WATER PLANNING

Aitkin County administers Local Water Planning through the Soil and Water Conservation District.

III. COST-SHARE HIGH PRIORITY AREAS

HIGH PRIORITY CONSERVATION PRIORITY AREAS INCLUDE ALL LANDS DESIGNATED AS SHORELAND AREAS. COST-SHARE FUNDING WILL BE DIRECTED BY THE SWCD BOARD AND STAFF TOWARD THESE HIGH PRIORITY AREAS. (AREAS WITHIN 1000 FEET OF LAKES OR 300 FEET OF RIVERS) THESE AREAS TYPICALLY CONTAIN A MIXTURE OF SOILS AND SLOPES AND ARE THE MOST IMPACTED BY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT. MOST CONSERVATION CONCERNS AND PROJECTS OCCUR IN SHORELAND AS EVIDENCED BY THE ENCLOSED BUDGETS. MANY TIMES THE PRIORITY AREA IS EXPANDED TO INCLUDE ENTIRE WATERSHEDS. OF SPECIAL CONCERN ARE THOSE FEEDLOTS, PASTURE AREAS AND EROSION SITES THAT MAY IMPACT SURFACE WATERS. PRIORITIES FOR 2009 AND BEYOND ARE OUTLINED BELOW:

1. Surface Water Management

- A. Coordinate with cities and townships on storm water management plans
 - 1. Encourage all municipalities to develop new or update existing storm water management plans.

2. Promote educational awareness of current National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) regulations and encourage its compliance
3. The County will oversee the operation and maintenance of the public ditch system
4. The County will take on the responsibility of operation and maintenance of the Flood Diversion Channel
5. The County will continue to be involved in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ROPE Study. This Operating Plan may have significant impacts on water levels and water quality throughout the Mississippi River Basin.

B. Update and expand data collection and monitoring through Water Planning funds and MPCA CLMP Plus.

1. Coordinate with the MPCA to continue baseline water quality monitoring on at least several lakes per year throughout the county
2. Apply for and receive funding through external sources to accomplish desired testing
3. Continue to coordinate and promote the Citizens Lake Monitoring Program (CLMP) and CLMP+ programs

C. Participate in Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) studies where appropriate.

1. One section of the Mississippi River, and all of Big Sandy and Minnewawa Lakes have been added to the MPCA's list of impaired waters. This water plan will identify mitigation measures that may be used to help improve these and other threatened waters.

2. Land Use and Development

A. Support Shoreland Management and Protection

1. Be involved with the design of major projects from an environmental review stand point and how they compare with the County Water Plan
2. Review storm water run-off designs
3. Look at total watershed cumulative impacts
4. Promote the enforcement of current shoreland ordinances
5. Provide education of current regulations to property owners, contractors, developers
6. Promote conservation easements for water quality and other environmental purposes

B. Promote riparian buffer zones

1. Continue to provide shoreland revegetation workshops
2. Promote no mow zones on waterfronts and wetlands
3. Continue to support the use and sale of native plants

C. Continue and expand the appropriate use of conservation easements on high priority sites.

1. Work with landowners to protect shoreland property from subdivision and intensive development
2. To address the problems of forest fragmentation, explore the concept of forest legacy conservation easements.
3. Promote Forest Stewardship plans and Sustainable Forest Incentive Act as incentives for landowners to retain their properties and delay or avoid subdivision
4. Support Conservation Design Sub-divisions where appropriate

3. Ground Water Quality

- A. Maintain and protect the quality of Aitkin County's ground water resources.
 1. Encourage Well Construction and Abandonment that follows State Guidelines
 2. Continue cost-share assistance to private landowners for sealing abandoned water wells.
 3. Request MPCA inspection of records and sites of MPCA-approved septage and municipal sludge disposal areas for runoff control and correct disposal amounts.
 4. Support increased levels of assistance to local landowners for agriculture erosion and sediment control.
 5. Identify and increase funding sources for upgrades, including cluster systems

4. Fish and Wildlife Habitat

- A. Develop a plan for lake users to evaluate the presence/absence of invasive and endangered species, then use this data as a baseline for ongoing monitoring
- B. Monitor new development to encourage use of riparian and littoral aquatic best management practices
- C. Promote riparian buffer zones
 1. Continue to support shoreland restoration workshops and secure funding for continuation and on the ground project completion
 2. Promote the protection and re-establishment of native vegetation along shorelines
 3. Encourage adoption of appropriate portions of the Alternative Shoreland Standards

5. Education

Education is a major component of all of the previous priority concerns. It was felt that in order to raise the awareness of the role that environmental education plays in maintaining and improving our water resources and other associated natural resources that it warranted a priority of its own. We have identified many target audiences Current and

seasonal residents including: new property owners, recreational users, Lake and River Associations, Contractors, Realtors, and students.

A. Develop presentations and/or brochures that focus on providing solutions and the positive aspects of being good land and water stewards

1. Actively pursue opportunities to conduct meetings, training sessions, and professional development
2. Promote the quality of Aitkin County and the need to protect and enhance its natural resources

B. Promote the development of new lake and watershed organizations

1. Continue to seek out interested groups willing to take an organized approach to watershed management
2. Continue to support and foster the development of existing associations that exemplifies the best management practices implemented at the grass roots level

C. Promote the importance and value of fish and wildlife habitat to our residents and recreational users and to the economic viability of the county

The overall budget for 2009 is included as a part of this Annual Plan.