



Sherburne SWCD

EDUCATION & OUTREACH PLAN

Mission Statement

Partnering with the community to preserve and enhance our natural resources and native habitats for present and future generations.

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Objective

The Education and Outreach Plan (EOP) describes how the Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will prioritize and organize its education and outreach activities in the County from the years 2026 through 2028. The plan describes the goals, objectives, target audiences, strategies, and tactics that will be used to support the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans (CWMPs) for the Rum and Mississippi River watersheds and contributes towards the education requirements of the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit for Sherburne County. The purpose of the Education and Outreach program is to improve understanding of local natural resources and practices among all stakeholders in the County.

The contents of this plan were informed in part by feedback gained through the public input process as part of the 10-year Local Water Management Plan update and the development of the CWMPs. The process engaged multiple stakeholder groups, including residents, teachers, technical experts and leaders. The SWCD thanks all those who made their voices heard throughout the process.

The EOP provides the overall goals and objectives for Education and Outreach by the SWCD. Each year the SWCD will use the EOP to develop a focused work plan. Events and programs for each year are reflected on the SWCD’s

website: www.sherburneswcd.org. The EOP will be evaluated every three years and updated as needed at that time.

Goals & Strategies

The EOP supports the Education & Outreach Goals and Strategies described in the Mississippi River St. Cloud and Rum River Watershed Comprehensive Plans. As noted in the previous section, these goals and strategies were developed through the public engagement process as a part of the 10-Year Plan update and development of the CWMPs.

Education & Outreach Goal

Design, maintain, and implement Education and Outreach program to educate the community and engage them in the work of protecting, managing, and restoring our natural resources.

Education & Outreach Strategies

The SWCD will develop and implement its EOP. The EOP specifies the objectives, guiding questions, target audiences, and methods to achieve the SWCD's education and outreach goal. The SWCD will regularly review its EOP and update it as necessary.

The SWCD will collect data to evaluate the success of its education and outreach program and adjust its program to improve effectiveness.

The SWCD will tailor its education and outreach strategies to present complex and/or technical issues in a manner that is appropriate for each audience.

The SWCD will use its education and outreach program to raise awareness of natural resource issues and best practices (e.g., aquatic invasive species, conservation, habitat enhancement).

The SWCD will seek opportunities to engage the public in its projects and programs through diverse methods outlined in the EOP, including but not limited to: electronic communications, social media, website, informational signage, demonstration projects, tours, and open houses.

The SWCD will provide resources to increase stewardship within the community.

The SWCD will build community capacity by working with schools, lake associations, non-profits, municipalities, or other stakeholders to develop a network of engaged citizens.

The SWCD will continue to implement its cost-share program to provide incentive for residents, businesses, institutions, and local governmental units to implement best management practices.

Planning Strategy

The SWCD will collaborate with cities, state and federal agencies, watershed partners, and other entities to implement projects and programs to meet SWCD goals.

Engaging the Community

Community-scale problems require community-scale actions, and water quality is an issue that affects and belongs to all. The EOP aims to fulfill the SWCD's clean water objectives by fostering a community of stewards. The issues and priorities related to EOP generally fell into one of four categories of action: public engagement, awareness, stewardship, and capacity.

Public Engagement

Public Engagement as used in this document describes direct action by the SWCD to share and seek information and include the community in SWCD processes. It includes asking questions of stakeholders to learn their interests and concerns and gain a deeper understanding of community needs. Actions that could fall under the public engagement category include public meetings and discussions about upcoming projects, presentations at association meetings, news releases to local papers, and conversations at community events, and growing newsletter and social media audiences.

Listening Sessions

This approach emphasizes two-way communication between the SWCD and landowners, fostering dialogue rather than one-way information sharing. The goal is to actively listen to landowner perspectives, gather feedback, and incorporate their insights into SWCD decision making. Actions under this category include hosting informal gatherings like Coffee and Conservation, engaging through AIS Taskforce meetings, collaborating with a Citizen Advisory Committee, and using surveys at events to capture community input.

Awareness

While awareness alone may not be sufficient to change behavior, it is an important and necessary component of education and outreach. Increased awareness is needed not only because of the threats to our natural resources, but of a general understanding of the work and role of the SWCD in protecting clean water, healthy soils, thriving habitat and the wealth of natural resources within the County. To effectively raise awareness, science and data must be translated into clear messages, utilizing audience-specific language. Actions to increase awareness range from news releases to local papers and social media, to events that celebrate the many and varied natural resources in the County.

Stewardship

Stewardship is the act of caring for or managing something. To become a steward of natural resources might involve changing a habit, or many habits over time. Awareness alone may not be sufficient to prompt behavior change, as there may be barriers to action in addition to knowledge (time constraints, cost, etc.). Supporting stewardship requires identifying desired behavior change and the barriers to that action and creating programs and resources to help overcome them.

Capacity

The threats to our natural resources are large-scale, community issues. The work to address them needs to be at that same scale. The SWCD will build capacity to do this work by partnering with stakeholders to create a network of engaged citizens. These citizens will not only act themselves but advocate for others in their communities to join them in stewardship.

Audiences

Audiences are groups within a community who likely share motivations and common goals, needs, or issues. The topics of interest for each group, and the SWCD's messaging for each may vary considerably, as will the best methods of delivery. It is therefore important that programs and resources be created with specific audiences in mind. The SWCD has identified four general audiences for its education and outreach programming.

Landowners

This is a diverse audience that includes residents, non-resident property owners, and renters from urban and rural communities. Their local identity may be influenced by the city or township they live in, their proximity to a water body, land use practices on their property and the community groups associated with. These groups can be

informal and formal and include neighborhood organizations, lake and home-owner associations, commodity groups, farmer led groups and community and outdoor groups. One task with this audience is to create awareness that the behavior of each resident can affect our natural resources within the County.

Local Leaders

Local leaders may include elected and appointed officials such as legislators, commissioners, SWCD supervisors, mayors, city council members and township supervisors. This audience generally includes individuals with decision-making power on a local (city, county, state) level. It may also include leaders on a smaller or non-governing scale, for example lake/homeowner association presidents, or heads of environmental and sporting groups. This audience typically is involved with visible projects on public or private property and may have the opportunity to influence public policy or social norms.

K-12

The K-12 audience includes children, their parents, teachers and administration. Effectively reaching this audience requires not just the creation of new engaging youth programs but identifying how best to support the current work of educators and tapping into existing programs. There are seven school districts within the County. Local schools include, Elementary, Middle, and High Schools. There are both public and private schools, as well as charter schools and home school groups.

Business & Professionals

Local businesses and non-profits (including faith-based organizations) have the potential to be leaders in the implementation of best practices to our natural resources. Their campuses often have large footprints, and their own community of employees or members are impacted by the organization’s culture. Professionals may be private businesses or government whose work may impact our natural resources. These include individuals who manage winter snow and ice, turf grass, landscape restoration, as well as landscapers, and builders and developers.

Implementation

To implement the EOP, the SWCD will annually create a work-plan that identifies specific events and activities based on the Audiences, Goals & Strategies, and Methods described in this plan. The annual work-plan will cover all engagement categories and address all target audiences. The SWCD will stay up to date on emerging topics and delivery methods and incorporate modifications as appropriate. Programs that the SWCD will implement include but are not limited to those described below. Example work plan table below.

Resource Concern	Actions
Protect and/or Improve Water Quality and Quantity	
Promote Healthy Soils	
Provide Forest Management Support	
Protect, Enhance, and Establish Native Habitat	
Increase District Awareness	

Methods

There are many and varied methods the SWCD can use to deliver its programs. Below is a description of the main methods that will be utilized. As noted in the goals and strategies section, partnerships will be sought to strengthen messaging and increase efficiency and capacity.

Method Type	Description
Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-media internet-hosted resource website • Online document library • Social media • Forums • Instructional videos • Online newsletters
Print media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical materials and resources handouts • Press releases • Flyers • Signage • Newsletters
Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person presentations and demonstrations • Evening workshops on emerging topics and best practices
Hands-on programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training or field activities • Volunteer planting events • Working with school groups
Active engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with existing community networks • Participate at community events • Presentations at association meetings
Outdoor activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs with an outdoor component • Tours • Demonstration events

Tracking and Evaluation

Understanding program effectiveness requires collecting and analyzing data on outcomes over time. The types and methods to collect data depend on the program implementation. Below are general evaluation strategies by method. Overall evaluation of the EOP requires looking at whether the EOP goals are being addressed, all the SWCD's audiences are being targeted, and all topics are being incorporated. A database will be created, and this will be assessed on an ongoing basis, and evaluated annually. The EOP will be evaluated every three years and updated as needed at that time. This may include gathering additional community input to reassess and update community needs and issues.

Evaluation Tools

Method	Description
Web-based	Track usage through website/social media/list-serve analytics using subpages and unique URLs and calls to action whenever possible
Seminars	Track participation, program evaluations
Hands-on programs	Track participation, program evaluations
Active engagement	Track number of individuals engaged in some capacity with the SWCD (ex: attend an event, join the mailing list) and whether they engage again with the SWCD (ex: attend a second event).
Outdoor activities	Track participation, program evaluations

Incentive programs	Track participation, track pollution reduction/habitat enhancement as possible/appropriate; track how participants find out about the programs; participant evaluations
Action projects	Track participation, track how participants find out about the programs; track project success; participant evaluations
Trainings	Track participation, collect feedback/quotes from participants to prompt future engagement, participant evaluations

Education Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Environmental Educator Articles												
Annual Report/Highlights												
Quarterly Newsletter												
Operator Opportunities												
Conservation Webinar Series/SWCD Podcast												
Citizen Pruner												
Adopt a Storm Drain Outreach												
Nitrate Clinics												
Lunch N Learn												
NEMO Event/MS4												
Day at the Capitol												
County Board Workshop												
Poster Contest												
Metro Envirothon												
Tree Sale Pick Up												
State Envirothon												
Pollinator Week												
Local Work Group Meeting												
PMES Weed N Feed												
Outstanding Conservationist												
Starry Trek												
SWCD Tour of Practices												
Field Demonstration												
Wildlife Festival Booth												
Elk River Clean Up												
Conservation Appreciation Dinner												
Women in Ag Night												

*The list of education activities provided is not exhaustive. Additional events, programs, or opportunities may arise throughout the year based on community needs, emerging priorities, or new partnerships.