



MISSISSIPPI RIVER ST. CLOUD WATERSHED ENTITY

2026 Annual Work Plan

Vision Statement: Collaborating to conserve, improve, and achieve measurable progress toward natural resource goals in our shared watershed.

Approved 02.05.2026

INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed Entity (MRSCWE) is a joint powers board that oversees the direction and execution of the 2025-2035 Mississippi River St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP). This CWMP was established through the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) "One Watershed, One Plan" program. Per the organization's bylaws the MRSCWE is to develop and consider approval of an Annual Work Plan. The Annual Work Plan outlines descriptions of current and projected activities, lead parties, and measurable outputs for the upcoming calendar year. Since, the CWMP is truly comprehensive and includes goals and objectives that require diverse and numerous funding mechanisms, the Annual Work Plan describes the activities being completed with both the Clean Water Fund sponsored Watershed Based Implementation Funds (WBIF) as well as other programs the members of the MRSCWE are working under ("Party-funded programs").

2025 RETROSPECTIVE

2025 marked a historic turning point for the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed. After years of preparation, the CWMP was 1) completed, 2) approved by the State of Minnesota and BWSR, and 3) adopted by 11 local governmental units. This marked the official transition from a vision on paper into a fully operational entity that is now prepared to deliver on-the-ground results.

Our first year focused on building the foundation of the Entity; that is, establishing the administrative and operational systems necessary to secure, manage, and deploy conservation funding across county lines with willing landowners.

Year One Milestones

January 2025	The 10-year CWMP received official approval from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).
February 2025	11 local governments officially formed the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed Entity (MRSCWE) to lead the plan's implementation.
April 2025	The MRSCWE Board held its inaugural meeting and approved its first major grant work plan as well as establishing guidance policies, bylaws, and other operational documents.
June 2025	Secured \$1.27 million in Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF FY25) to launch our regional conservation efforts.
August 2025	Completed and executed contracts between the MRSCWE and Member boards to distribute the first round of WBIF funding.
November 2025	Secured \$45,000 in CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) State Incentives Program to encourage landowners to enroll in this federal conservation program.

Putting Funds to Work

By late 2025, the WBIF funding was secured and necessary contracts were established between the MRSCWE and Member organizations, allowing for funding to be dispersed for targeted projects and programs. Between September and December, we successfully encumbered funds for five high-priority initiatives:

- **Water Quality Research:** Feasibility studies for the Upper Briggs Chain Carp Management (Sherburne SWCD) and targeted water quality analysis (Wright SWCD).
- **On-the-Ground Projects:** Shoreline restoration (Sherburne SWCD) and cover crop implementation (Mille Lacs SWCD) to reduce erosion and runoff.
- **Community Engagement:** New outreach efforts to connect residents with watershed health and promote both technical assistance and cost sharing programs (Sherburne SWCD).

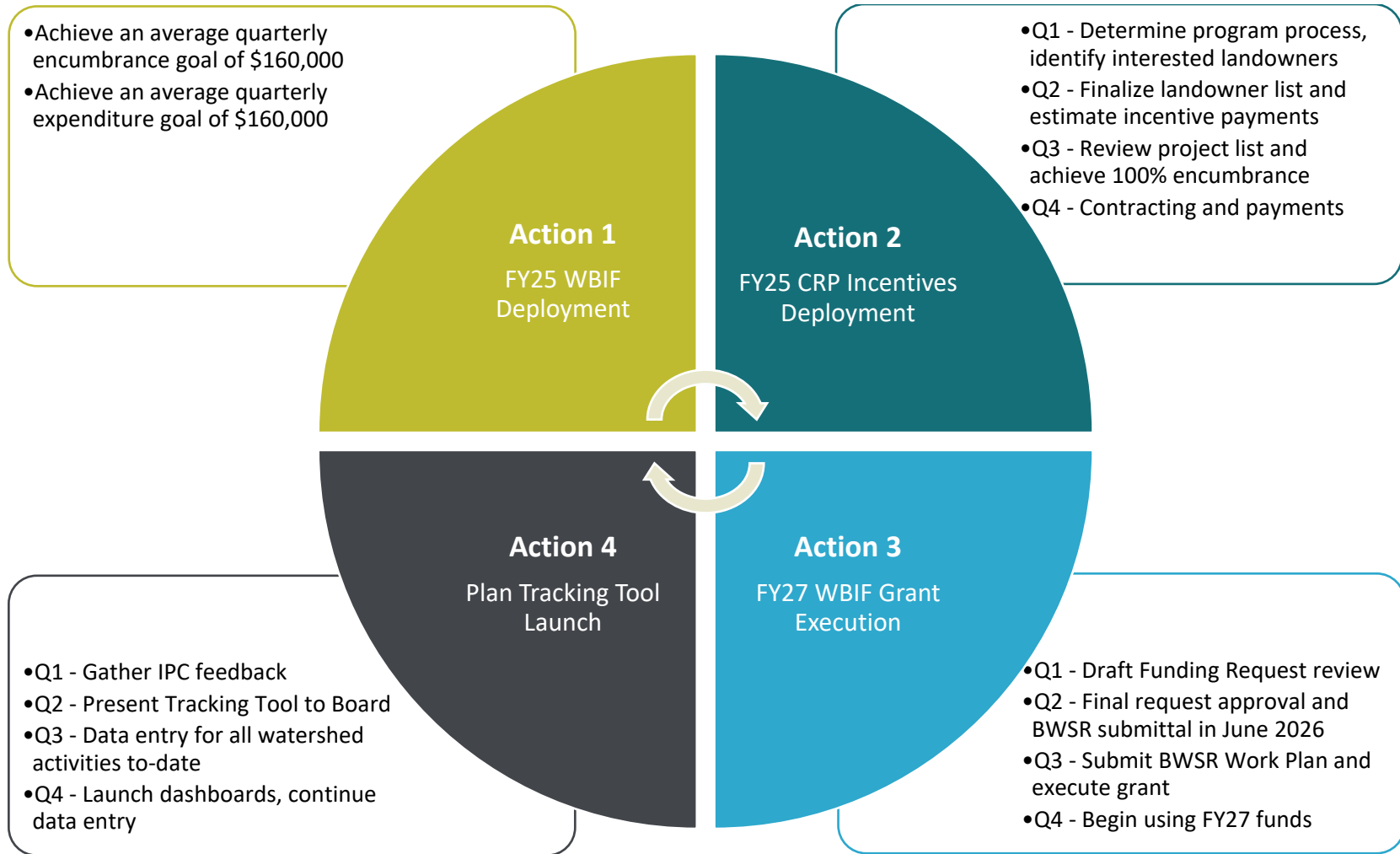
Additionally, the funding allowed for staff to dedicate time towards site visits with landowners regarding conservation concerns and potential projects, designing these projects, and developing foundational organization procedures and processes. The Fiscal Agent (Stearns CD) developed invoicing protocols, project encumbrance forms, and other procedural tools to streamline our work. Insurance coverage was arranged through Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust (MCIT) and a Request For Quotes (RFQ) created and distributed to potential attorney firms.

2026 STRATEGIC PRIORITIZES

Following a successful launch, our 2026 focus is to shift towards accelerating on-the-ground project installation, continue outreach and targeting efforts, and also secure the next phase of funding opportunity.

- **Accelerate Implementation:** In 2026 we aim to deploy (encumber and/or spend) 50% of our current FY25 Watershed-Based Implementation Funds (\$635,504) to local projects. We will review and reallocate resources to ensure funds are moving where they are needed most.
- **Maximize Landowner Support:** Fully invest \$45,000 in CRP State Incentives, ensuring 100% of these funds reach local landowners to support soil and water health.
- **Secure Future Funding:** Finalize the \$1.27 million FY27 WBIF grant to guarantee uninterrupted conservation work through the coming years.
- **Measure Progress:** Launch our new Plan Tracking Tool, providing a data-driven dashboard to measure our progress toward our 10-year CWMP goals. This tool will provide transparency with our spending and measure progress in real-time, while displaying how every dollar spent translates into cleaner water and healthier landscapes.

ACTION PLAN STEPS AND QUARTERLY OBJECTIVES



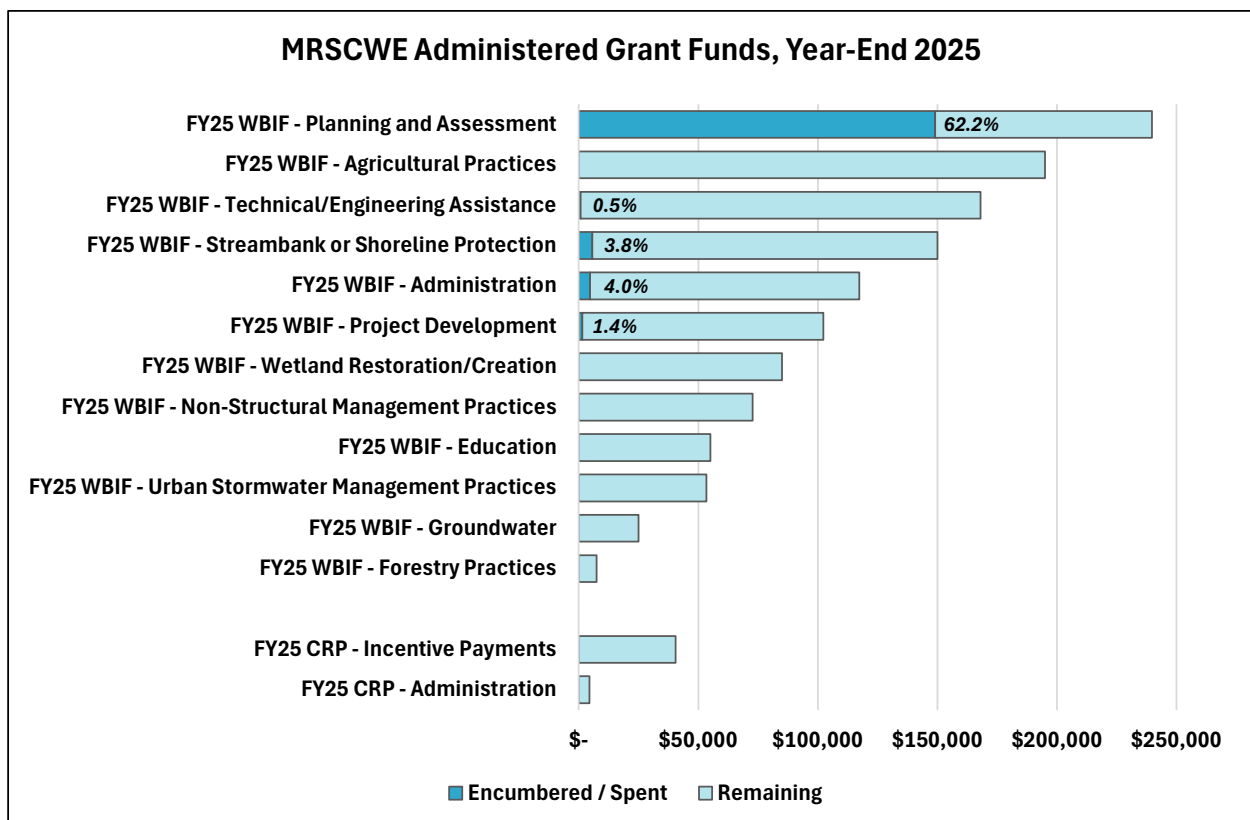
CWMP IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES

The MRSCWE will utilize a variety of resources to carry out these actions in 2026. Resources may include funding sources from federal, state, local or non-profit or private entities but may also include staff capacity and partnerships. The Mississippi River St. Cloud CWMP includes goals and actions that include a wide array of outcomes including on-the-ground projects, capacity building efforts, outreach efforts, targeting analyses, etc., so the resources we employ to reach these objectives need to be diverse as well.

Current Funding Programs

- FY25 Watershed Based Implementation Funds (\$1,271,008)
- FY25 Conservation Reserve Program Incentive Grant (\$45,000)

Figure 1: MRSCWE Administered Funds. Data includes amounts either encumbered or spent as well as those funds remaining.

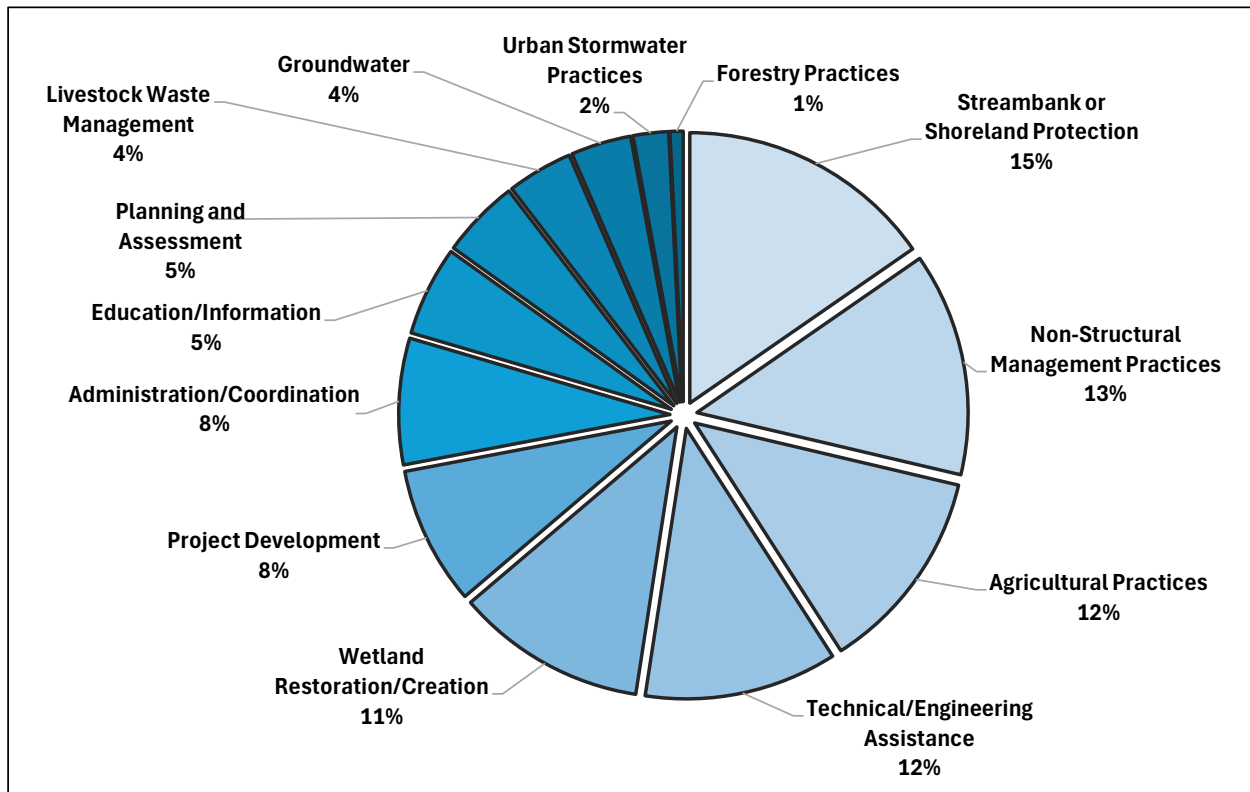


Anticipated Funding Programs

- FY27 Watershed Based Implementation Funds (\$1,279,055)

We anticipate receipt of FY27 WBIF grant funding in late summer of 2026. As described in the report sections above, the FY27 WBIF grant is to be developed in Q1 of 2026 and approved in Quarter 2. Accordingly, Figure 2 displays the preliminary breakdown of FY27 WBIF categories and is subject to change.

Figure 2: Anticipated MRSCWE Administered Funds. Preliminary (draft) categorical breakdown of FY27 WBIF grant.



Party-Funded Programs

The estimated cost to complete all MRSC Watershed activities is \$102,379,500, which is the equivalent to roughly \$10.2 million annually. This is a conservative estimate yet is substantially larger than the ~\$1.27 million the Entity is anticipating receiving biennially (every other year) through WBIF. Thus, WBIF alone will not come close to funding all plan activities. Additional sources of funding that are secured by the membership will provide the bulk of funding necessary to advance plan goals and improve the natural resources in our shared watershed.

2026 State, regional or larger-scale initiatives that members may utilize include:

- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP)
- DNR Fields to Forests
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Farm Bill
- Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP)
- Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP)
- Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Irrigation Management
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Soil Health
- SWCD State Aid
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service Private Lands Program
- The Nature Conservancy

2026 Locally sourced funding opportunities include:

- Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Aid
- BWSR Buffer Implementation
- BWSR Clean Water Fund Grants
- BWSR Natural Resource Block Grants
- BWSR Soil Health Grants
- Conservation Contract
- County Local Levy
- County Permit Application and Review Fees
- County Misc. Revenue Sources
- Minnesota AIS Research Center Lab to Lakes
- MDA County Agriculture Inspector Grant
- MNDNR Canopy Solutions Grant
- MDH Groundwater Protection Grant
- MPCA Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network
- MPCA Septic Improvement Grant
- MDH Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund
- National Association of Conservation Districts Technical Assistance Grant

Personnel

The people interacting with the MRSCWE are arguably the most critical components of the organization's capacity. People design the systems and procedures, carry out the objectives, and leverage additional resources to expand the work being done. There are individuals and organizations working directly under the MRSCWE, or in collaboration with it.

Administration

- Watershed Coordination - Sherburne SWCD
- Fiscal Agent - Stearns CD
- Website Manager - Mille Lacs SWCD
- Membership - 11 LGUs
- Insurance - MCIT
- Legal Counsel - to be determined
- Banking Institute - Bremer Bank

Partnerships

- Municipalities including Cities and Townships
- Federal Agencies
- State Agencies
- For-profit Organizations
- Non-profit Organizations
- Private Landowners

STRATEGIES FOR CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

A multitude of outside factors may influence the level of progress that the MRSCWE can demonstrate over the course of the CWMP's 10-year lifespan.

Voluntary Conservation

Low participation in voluntary programs can stall large-scale restoration goals, as most watersheds in Minnesota include 90%+ of their landscape being held in private ownership. Several strategies can be employed to effectively enroll landowners into voluntary conservation programs:

- Conduct one-on-one interactions with landowners to build relationships and trust.
- Review and enact competitive cost-share rates and incentive rates.
- Host educational events through the watershed and send targeted messaging where it is needed most through a variety of communication methods.

Contractor Availability and Market Forces

Demand for specialized construction and restoration services has increased over the years, despite the cost of labor services and materials also increasing. The potential for project delays and inflated project costs is noticeably higher compared to even 10 years

ago. Consequently, the number of projects ultimately installed may decrease. The MRSCWE may consider several strategies to manage these challenges:

- Continue to target and prioritize projects that deliver the highest level of benefit.
- Consider phasing projects to reduce high costs.
- Consider lumping efforts or projects to take advantage of bulk pricing.
- Plan early to ensure adequate time for bidding, seek numerous bids, and schedule projects in advance so available contractors have time to complete their workload.

Inclement Weather

Extreme weather and climate volatility are major drivers of pollutant loading to lakes and rivers, greatly contributing to reduced water quality. Weather conditions may also push back project timelines and impact the durability or lifespan of projects. The MRSCWE can mitigate the negative effects of inclement weather through several strategies:

- Consider future climate conditions in designing vegetation plans and structural elements, consistent with BWSR guidelines and Natural Resource Conservation Service or other engineering standards.
- Plan early to install projects during the optimal time of year and build in flexibility so work can be scheduled around the weather.

Legislative Priorities and Budget Challenges

Turnover with local, state and federal elected positions is a normal and healthy component of democratic governance. As turnover occurs and budgets fluctuate, priorities and the allocation of funding may change. Decisions made by officials at any level may impact funding levels, criteria or eligibility components of conservation programs, or the timing in which these programs are offered. The MRSCWE may address this fluctuation through several ways:

- Communicate often to elected officials the value of natural resource conservation including the tangible and intangible benefits of a healthy watershed, the service provided to landowners (constituents), and the economic benefits of this work.
- Promote the value of conservation work to the public, ensuring transparency with the spending of public dollars and the benefits to natural resources.

Personnel Changes

Staff changes within the member organizations can cause disruption of ongoing projects and administration. A loss of staff is also a loss of investment made in that person's training and experience. Finally, staff turnover may result in a loss of

relationships and trust built with landowners over time. Limiting the impacts of personnel changes can be achieved through:

- Established succession planning which identifies clear roles and responsibilities while documenting operating procedures and processes for future staff to reference.
- Ensure that more than one individual understands the responsibilities and operating procedures of administrative duties, the functionality of the JPE, technical knowledge of conservation planning and design, and landowners in the watershed (cross-training).
- Each member organization shall develop or follow a Strategic Plan or other operating document that specify recommended methods for staff retention.

TRACKING PROGRESS

Tracking the progress made on the CWMP's many goals and actions is an important task. Demonstrating completion of plan components ensures transparency in the spending of public funds and the value of conservation work. Success stories can also positively influence landowners who are undecided or leery of enrolling in conservation programs. Tracking the spending of funds and the outcomes received is also a required element of grant agreements held with BWSR or other funding entities. The MRSCWE will display progress achieved on the CWMP goals, and goals specific to Annual and Grant Work Plans, through a variety of ways:

- Quarterly progress reports will be provided to the MRSCWE Board in packet materials.
- The Plan Tracking Tool will spatially display the location of activities and summarize achievements across a variety of metrics.
- A summary report will be included in the Annual 2027 Work Plan.
- Required documentation of expenditures and outcomes delivered will be reported to funding agencies in full and on time.

BIENNIAL (2025 - 2026) BUDGET

The projected budget for 2025-2026, first approved by the JPE Board in June 2025, is displayed on the following page. This budget has been modified to include the new sources of funding (FY25 CRP Incentive Grant) that the Entity will be tracking in 2026.

**Mississippi River St Cloud Watershed Entity
Organizational Budget 2025-2026 (Accrual)**

	2025 Actual	2026 Updated	2025-2026
STARTING BALANCE	-	691.13	-
REVENUES			
INTERGOVERNMENTAL			
BWSR WBIF 2025	38,236.80	639,754.00	677,990.80
BWSR CRP Incentives 2025	54.86	44,945.14	45,000.00
TOTAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVENUE	38,291.66	684,699.14	722,990.80
Interest Earnings	781.79	2,400.00	3,181.79
TOTAL REVENUES	39,073.45	687,099.14	726,172.59
EXPENDITURES			
DIRECT VENDOR			
Bank Fees	90.66	360.00	450.66
Supplies	636.62	-	636.62
Insurance	-	4,000.00	4,000.00
Financial/Audit	-	3,500.00	3,500.00
Legal	-	7,000.00	7,000.00
TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES	727.28	14,860.00	15,587.28
PASS-THROUGH TO MEMBERS			
BWSR WBIF 2025			
Obj. 1: Administration/Coordination	11,461.40	48,400.00	59,861.40
Obj. 2: Planning & Assessment	19,754.00	118,628.00	138,382.00
Obj. 3: Project Development	5,164.24	51,154.00	56,318.24
Obj. 4: Education & Outreach	-	27,500.00	27,500.00
Obj. 5: Technical & Engineering	1,220.54	84,000.00	85,220.54
Obj. 6: Agricultural Practices	-	97,500.00	97,500.00
Obj. 7: Non-structural Management Practices	-	36,372.00	36,372.00
Obj. 8: Streambank or Shoreland Practices	-	75,000.00	75,000.00
Obj. 9: Forestry Practices	-	5,000.00	5,000.00
Obj. 10: Urban Stormwater Practices	-	26,700.00	26,700.00
Obj. 11: Wetland Practices	-	42,500.00	42,500.00
Obj. 12: Groundwater Practices	-	12,500.00	12,500.00
TOTAL BWSR WBIF 2025	37,600.18	625,254.00	662,854.18
BWSR CRP INCENTIVES 2025			
Program Administration	54.86	4,445.14	4,500.00
CRP Enrollment Incentives	-	40,500.00	40,500.00
TOTAL BWSR CRP INCENTIVES 2025	54.86	44,945.14	45,000.00
TOTAL PASS-THROUGH	37,655.04	670,199.14	707,854.18
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	38,382.32	685,059.14	723,441.46
NET CASH FLOW	691.13	2,040.00	2,731.13
ENDING BALANCE	691.13	2,731.13	2,731.13