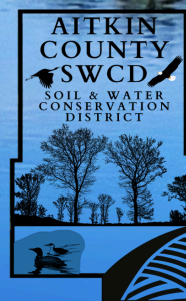


Snake River Watershed Plan Partnership 2025 Annual Report



Working Together for Clean Water and Healthy Lands

A Year of Progress • Partnerships • Implementation



KANABEC
COUNTY
Minnesota



MESSAGE FROM THE PARTNERSHIP

2025 was a year of building momentum across the Snake River Watershed. Through strong partnerships between counties, soil and water conservation districts, townships, state agencies, and local landowners, the Snake River Watershed Plan Partnership continued moving from planning to **real conservation work on the ground.**

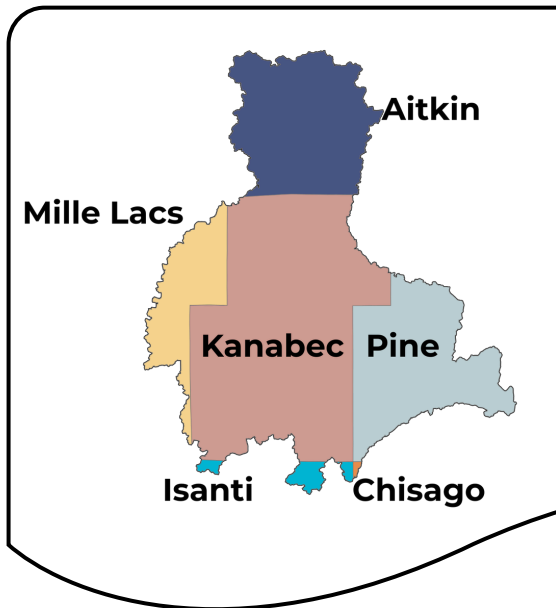
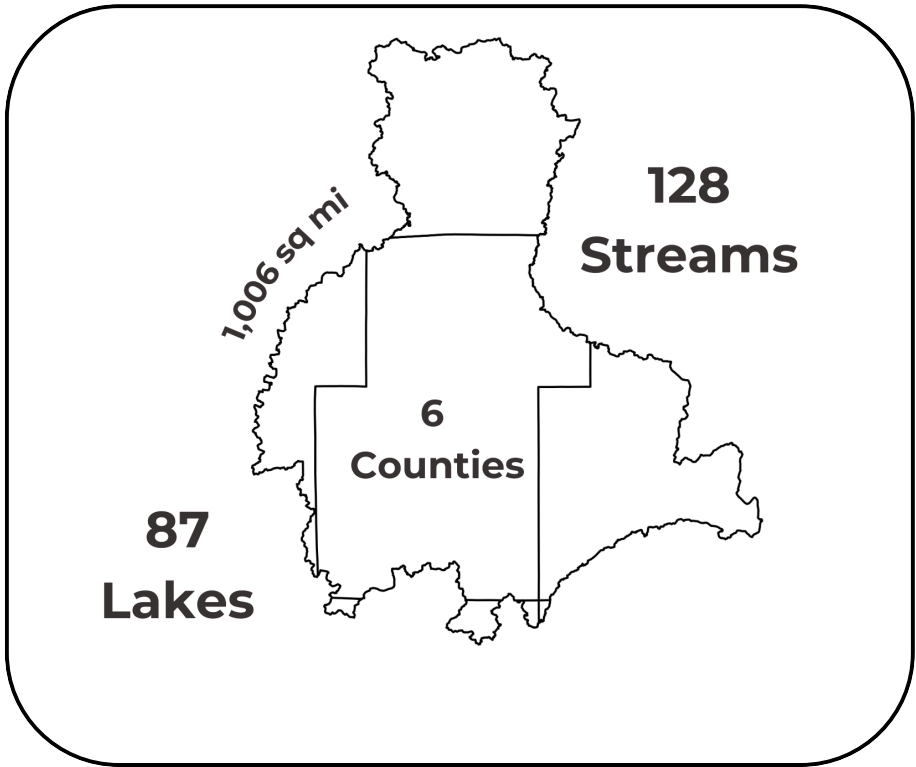
Over the past year we:

- Targeted and advanced watershed priority projects
- Supported landowners implementing conservation practices
- Expanded outreach and community engagement in our communities
- Strengthened collaboration between local governments
- Increased awareness of watershed conditions and opportunities

But, none of this work happens alone. Every success in this watershed is the result of collaboration between our dedicated partners, staff, board members, and community members who care deeply about the land and water, working together to protect the watershed.

This report highlights the people, projects, and partnerships that made 2025 successful and sets the stage for an exciting year ahead in 2026.



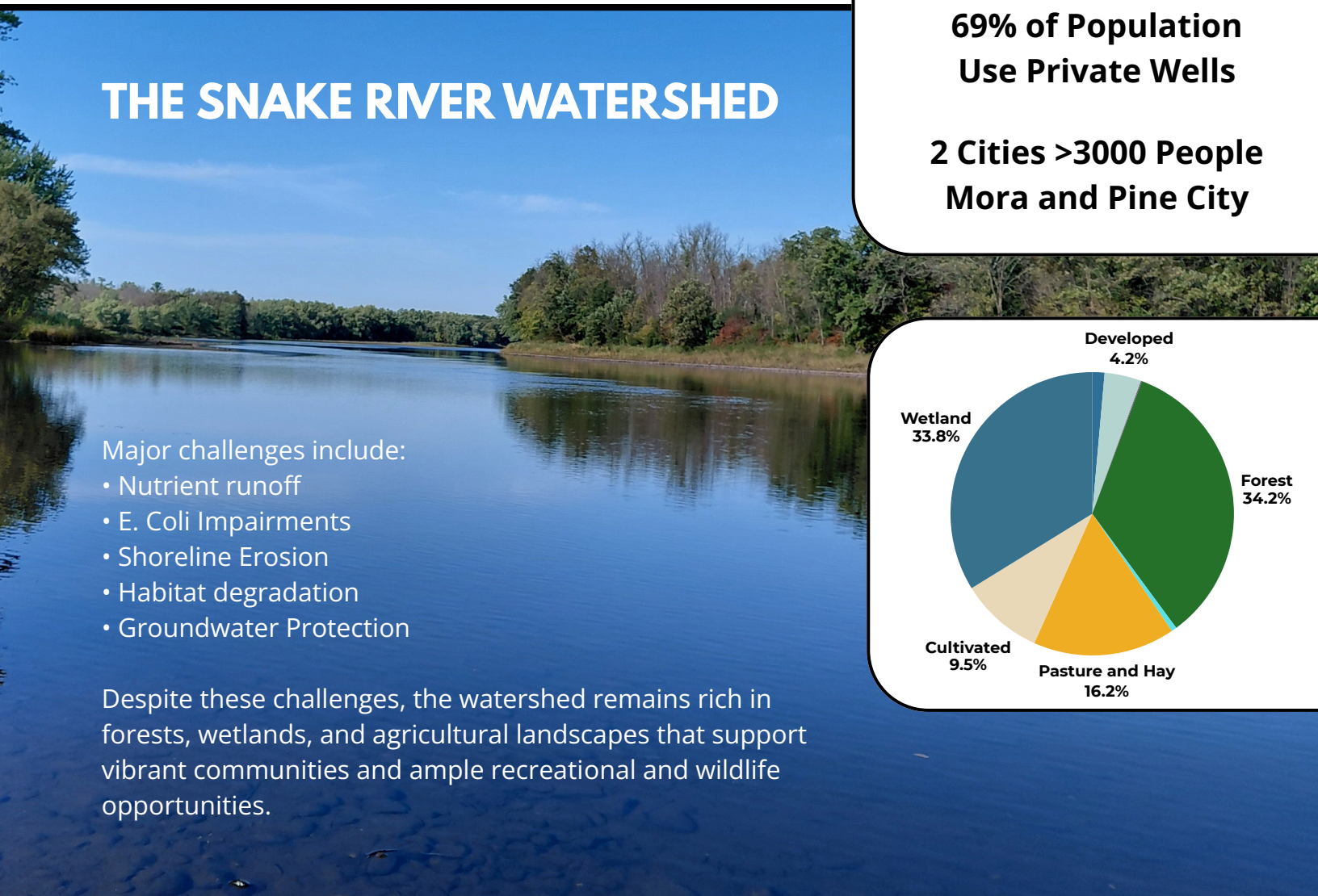


**Watershed Population
32,390**

**69% of Population
Use Private Wells**

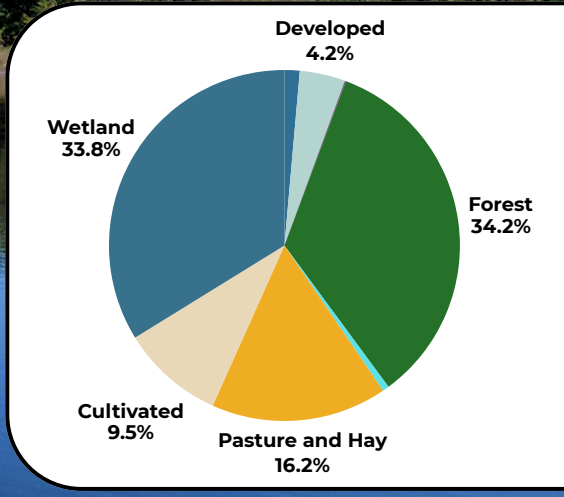
**2 Cities >3000 People
Mora and Pine City**

THE SNAKE RIVER WATERSHED



- Major challenges include:
- Nutrient runoff
 - E. Coli Impairments
 - Shoreline Erosion
 - Habitat degradation
 - Groundwater Protection

Despite these challenges, the watershed remains rich in forests, wetlands, and agricultural landscapes that support vibrant communities and ample recreational and wildlife opportunities.



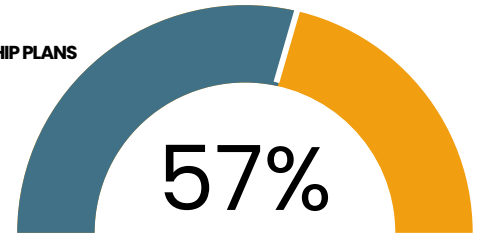
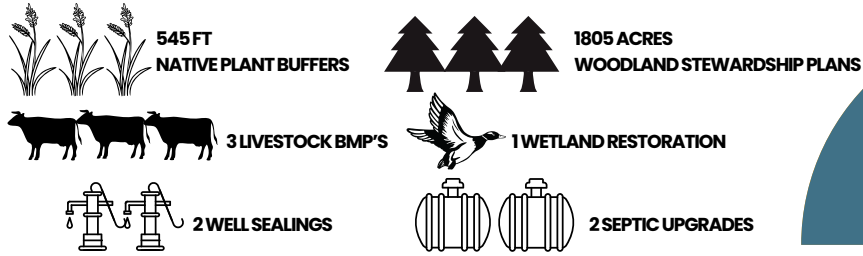


Progress Towards the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

A Special Thanks for photos from:

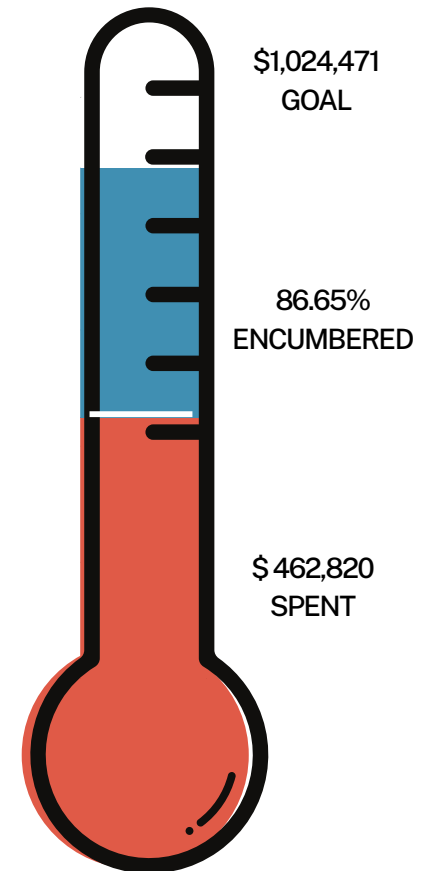
Krista Arne
Eddie Johnson
Josh Reins
Mary Poelman

All other photos credit to the SWCD Archives



57%
57% OF GOALS FOR THE FY24
WORK PLAN HAVE BEEN
ACCOMPLISHED

| | |
|--|--|
| | GOAL: 107 LBS REDUCTION IN TOTAL PHOSPHORUS ACTUAL : 240 LBS PHOSPHORUS/ YEAR ; 20 ENCUMBERED |
| | GOAL: 170 TON REDUCTION IN TOTAL SUSPENDED SOLIDS (TSS) ACTUAL : 293 TON TSS REDUCED |
| | GOAL: 5 OUTREACH DOCUMENTS OR DEMONSTRATIONS ACTUAL : >5 OUTREACH DOCUMENTS OR DEMONSTRATIONS |
| | GOAL: 1 ACRE FEET OF WETLANDS RESTORED ACTUAL : 31 ACRES OF WETLAND RESTORED |
| | GOAL: 800 FT OF BUFFERS INSTALLED ACTUAL : 545 FT OF BUFFER INSTALLED ; 100 ENCUMBERED |
| | GOAL: 3 UNUSED WELLS SEALED ACTUAL : 2 WELLS SEALED |
| | GOAL: 800 ACRES OF FOREST STEWARDSHIP PLANNING WRITTEN ACTUAL : 1805 ACRES PLANNED (19 PLANS) |
| | GOAL: 100 ACRES OF FORESTRY BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ACTUAL : 4 ACRES INSTALLED (53.7 ACRES CONTRACTED) |
| | GOAL: 1 LIVESTOCK BMP INSTALLED ACTUAL : 1 INSTALLED (2 CONTRACTED) |
| | GOAL: 1 NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN COMPLETED ACTUAL : 0 PLANS COMPLETED (3 PLANS CONTRACTED) |
| | GOAL: INCREASE CAPACITY 1.5 FY FTE EMPLOYEES ACTUAL : 1.5 FY FTE EMPLOYEES |
| | GOAL: 3 SUB-WATERSHED ASSESSMENTS ACTUAL : 1 COMPLETED (1 FEASIBILITY STUDY CONTRACTED) |
| | GOAL: 70 OUTREACH CONTACT HOURS COMPLETED ACTUAL : ESTIMATED 70 CONTACT HOURS |
| | GOAL: 3 PRIVATE SEPTIC SYSTEMS BROUGHT INTO COMPLIANCE ACTUAL : 2 SSTS BUILT (1 ACTIVE APPLICATION) |



FY 24 WBIF Grant



Success Story: Wetland Restoration

Rebuilding Wetlands, Protecting Water

Wetlands play a vital role in protecting water quality by capturing nutrients and sediment before they reach rivers and lakes. When water enters a wetland, it slows down, giving time for sediment to settle out, bacteria to break down pollutants, and plants to absorb excess nutrients, naturally improving water quality before it flows downstream.

The Snake River Watershed Plan Partnership working with the Fish and Wildlife Service restored 31 acres of wetlands **near Cross Lake** in Pine County, significantly exceeding initial restoration goals.

These wetlands now:

- Filter runoff
- Store floodwaters
- Improve wildlife habitat
- Protect downstream water quality



The Problem

Sediment and Nutrients were flowing through the degraded berm



The Solution

The earthen berm was repaired and an approved water control structure installed



Success Story: Forest Protection

Supporting Landowner Stewardship

Forests are one of the watershed's greatest natural assets. Through Woodland Stewardship Plans, landowners receive parcel specific guidance on managing their forests in ways that protect soil, water, and wildlife.

In 2025:

By partnering with Staff and Private Foresters **1,805 acres** of forest stewardship planning were completed. Starting the process for many of these forests to be enrolled into long term protection programs such as SFIA, 2C, and RIM.

Emerald Ash Borer

An Extreme Threat to our Healthy Forests

Ash Trees infected with Emerald Ash Borer have a 99% Mortality Rate.
Trees die 2-4 years after initial infection.

Emerald Ash Borer has spread to the Snake River Watershed. It was first detected in Kanabec County in 2023 and observations throughout the watershed by 2025.

What can you do?

Identify Ash Trees on your Property
Plant Replacement Trees
Do NOT move firewood

Native Replacement Species
Eastern Cottonwood
Bur Oak
Black Willow
Silver Maple



Black Ash Leaf

Look for the compound leaf
shape with 5-11 leaflets



Success Story: Protecting Our Water



This manure pit closure will protect water in the Groundhouse River

Protecting Groundwater and Surface Water

Groundwater provides drinking water for communities across the watershed.

Unused wells and failing septic systems can become pathways for pollutants, allowing bacteria, nutrients, and other contaminants to seep into this critical resource, threatening both public health and the health of local ecosystems. Properly constructed manure pits protect our surface waters and groundwater, but need to be properly closed when livestock operations cease.

This year working with local community contractors the partnership supported:

- 2 Well sealing projects
- 2 Manure Pit closures
- 2 Septic system replacements

These efforts help ensure clean and safe drinking water for residents as well as reduce nutrients and pathogens from entering our recreational streams and lakes.



New septic mound installation protecting the Snake River



After a manure pit closure, the ground is protected from erosion by mulch blanket until vegetation establishes

Economic Benefits to the Region

Snake River Watershed projects support local communities and businesses. More than \$1 million in Watershed Based Implementation Funding has been secured for watershed projects.

These funds support:

- Staff and Local contractors
- Engineering and technical services
- Conservation projects on private lands
- Restoration of lakes, streams, and wetlands

These investments protect natural resources while also supporting the local economy.





FY24 Funding

**Income: \$1,024,471.00 - Watershed Based Implementation Funding
(MN State Tax Funding- Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Funds)**

This data covers spending Jan 2024-Dec 2025

Staff Time: \$ 296,066.44

Administration: \$130,215.10

Education/Information: \$43,685.52

Project Development: \$122,165.82

Project Dollars: \$166,753.69

Non-Structural Management Practices: \$5,341.75

Planning and Assessments: \$61,401.80

Sub-Surface Sewage Treatment Systems: \$38,875

Stream/Shoreline Protection: \$6,583.30

Urban Stormwater Practices: \$202.50

Forest Practices:\$2,623.84

Groundwater Practices: \$2,081.25

Livestock Waste Practices: \$32,474.25

Technical/Engineering: \$9,970.00

Wetland Restoration/Creation: \$7,200.00

FY24 Funding

Total Expenditures: \$462,820.13

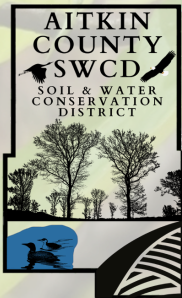
FY24 Funding

Match Leveraged: \$26,341.99

***This report has not been audited or reviewed by an external accountant**



Pine County
Soil & Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Working Together Across the Snake River Watershed



**PINE
COUNTY**
MINNESOTA





Water does not follow county boundaries.

The Snake River Watershed Partnership brings together counties, SWCDs, state agencies, and local communities to address water challenges at the watershed scale.

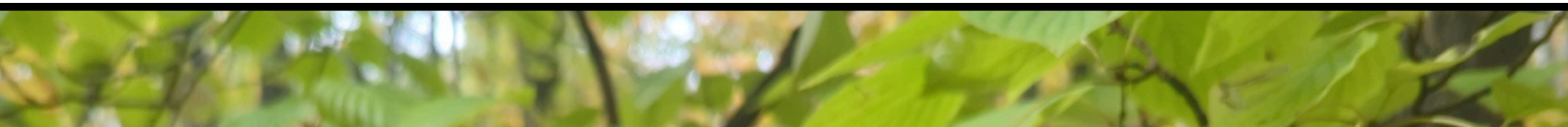
Together we combine:

- Local knowledge
- Technical expertise
- Funding opportunities
- Community relationships

This collaboration allows partners to:

- Share expertise
- Coordinate funding
- Support landowners
- Implement larger conservation projects

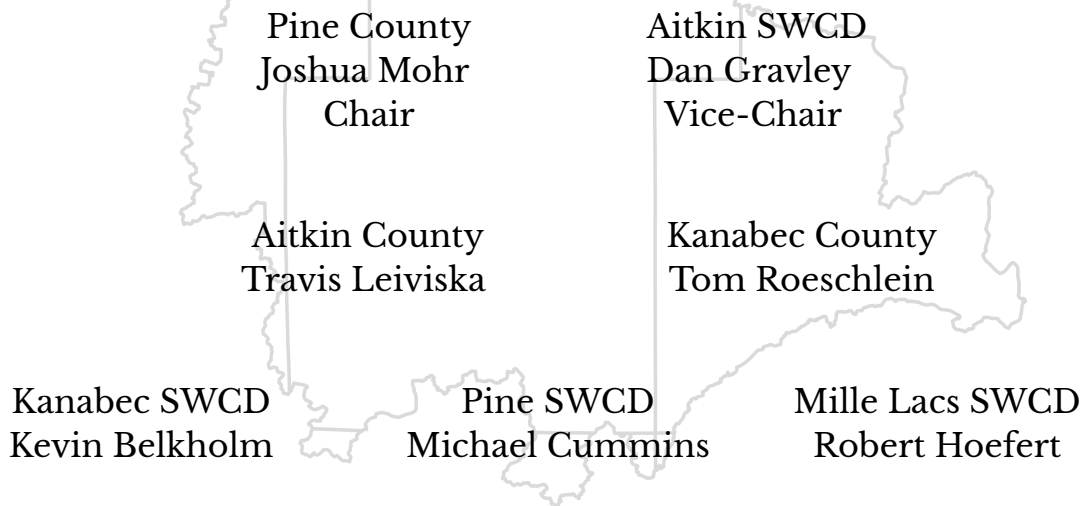
Partnership makes watershed progress possible. The result is stronger conservation outcomes and better support for landowners working to protect soil and water.



Board Leadership

The Snake River Watershed Plan Partnership Board provides guidance and leadership for watershed implementation.

Board members represent the counties and Soil and Water Conservation Districts throughout the watershed and help ensure that projects reflect local priorities.



Staff in the Watershed

Staff from SWCD's and Counties across the watershed provide technical assistance, conservation planning, and program support that make watershed implementation possible.

Their work includes:

- Working directly with landowners
- Designing conservation practices
- Providing outreach and education
- Managing conservation funding programs



Looking Ahead to 2026

The coming year offers exciting opportunities for continued watershed progress.

Priorities include:

- Expanding conservation practice implementation
- Expanding landowner outreach
- Supporting landowner projects
- Strengthening township engagement
- Increasing community awareness of watershed health

Together we will continue building momentum toward a healthier Snake River Watershed.

By continuing to work together, the partnership can build on the momentum of 2025 and make meaningful progress toward the goals of the Snake River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.

Interested in getting involved?

Contact your local SWCD

Aitkin SWCD: 218-927-7284

Kanabec SWCD: 320-679-1391

Mille Lacs SWCD: 320-983-2160

Pine SWCD: 320-216-4240

Contact your Environmental Services:

Aitkin Environmental Services: 218-927-7342

Kanabec Environmental Services: 320-679-6456

Pine Environmental Services: 320-591-1674



**SNAKE
RIVER
WATERSHED
PLAN
PARTNERSHIP**

Visit the
Snake River Watershed
Plan Partnership



millelacsswcd.org/snake-river-watershed

