

Non-structural Ag Project Policy: County Wide Policy for Project Implementation

Pine County Soil and Water Conservation District is planning to utilize state grant funds, district funds, and other funding sources for implementation of non-structural agricultural best management practices (BMP) in the Snake River, Kettle River, Upper St. Croix, and Nemadji Watersheds. The Lower St. Croix Watershed has its own non-structural policy that enables access to funds through the Lower St. Croix Partnership. The primary focus will be cover crops, with nutrient management, prescribed grazing, residue and tillage management, conservation cover, and pasture and hay planting also potential opportunities if demand is present in the county.

Non-structural and agricultural BMPs will be planned and implemented according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) standards and specifications found on the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (EFOTG). Seeding dates for cover crops will follow the Midwest Cover Crop Council's seeding guide recommendations. District staff will work towards receiving NRCS Job Approval Authority (JAA) in order to provide technical assurance on these practices. If no staff have JAA for these practices, projects will be reviewed and approved by partnering staff with JAA, such as NRCS and MAWQP staff.

The policy will follow the most up to date Grants Administration Manual and the current Grant Policy guidelines for active fund sources.

Nonstructural Ag BMPs must be an enhancement of existing management practices that will reduce soil erosion, improve soil health, and improve water quality.

No acreage or dollar caps will be utilized. A single lump sum payment will be dispersed after a successful first year of implementation.

Practice specific policies:

- **Cover Crops**
 - Must follow NRCS Practice Standard 340
 - Three-year contract
 - 1-2 species \$50/acre/year
 - 3+ species \$60/acre/year
 - Implementation can occur on different acres within the three-year contract or on the same acres consecutively but must be implemented on the same amount or greater acres in years 2 and 3
 - Seeding dates will follow the Midwest Cover Crop Council Seeding Guide recommendations
 - Cover crop must be applied to acres in annual crop production. Eligible crops include corn, soybeans, or small grains
 - Cover crop cannot be terminated until after January 1 of the following year
 - Stand alone practice

- **Nutrient Management**
 - Must follow NRCS Practice Standard 590
 - \$20/acre/year
 - Implemented on the same acres annually
 - Add on practice eligible only on acres implementing core soil health practices

- **Prescribed Grazing**
 - Must follow NRCS Practice Standard 528
 - \$40/acre/year
 - Implemented on the same acres annually
 - Stand alone practice

- **Residue and Tillage Management – No-Till & Strip Till**
 - Must follow NRCS Practice Standard 329
 - Three-year contract
 - \$20/acre/year
 - Implementation can occur on different acres within the three-year contract or on the same acres consecutively but must be implemented on the same amount or greater acres in years 2 and 3.
 - Stand alone practice

- **Residue and Tillage Management - Conservation Tillage**
 - Must follow NRCS Practice Standard 345 for Conservation Till
 - Three-year contract
 - \$10/acre/year
 - Residue cover following a corn crop at the time of planting the subsequent crop must be 60% or greater
 - Residue cover following a soybean crop at the time of planting the subsequent crop must be 30% or greater
 - Residue cover following a small grain crop at the time of planting the subsequent crop must be 60% or greater
 - Implementation can occur on different acres within the three-year contract or on the same acres consecutively but must be implemented on the same amount or greater acres in years 2 and 3
 - Stand alone practice

- **Pasture and Hay Planting**
 - Must follow NRCS Practice Standard 512 for Pasture and Hay Planting
 - \$150/acre one time payment
 - 10 year contract and practice lifespan
 - Requires conversion from row crop
 - Stand alone practice

- **Conservation Cover** - Must follow NRCS Practice Standard 327
 - Contract duration 10 yrs, practice lifespan 10 yrs
 - Introduced species \$200/ac
 - Native species \$350/acre
 - Pollinator species \$500/ac.
 - Stand-alone practice

Application/Contract:

- Incentives to install or adopt land management practices must have a minimum duration of 3 years.
- The applicant is responsible for full installation of the project before the project installation deadline listed on the cost share contract. If a deadline extension is required to complete the project, the applicant must make the request no less than 30 days prior to the project installation deadline. All contract deadline extension request require approval by the District Board.
- Upon approval by the District Board, the applicant will receive a letter with copy of executed cost share contract stating details of the practice that has been approved, the funding amount, and time schedule to start and complete the project, and a copy of the Operations and Maintenance Plan.
- The landowner and applicant shall allow District staff access to property for which the installed conservation practice is located during the life of the contract. The installed practice will be subject to periodic inspections by District staff. If it is found at any point over the life of the contract that the practice is not being maintained as agreed upon within the contract, the landowner is liable to repay up to 150% of the flat-rate payment received.

Application Criteria/Project Ranking Criteria:

- Non-Structural and agricultural program participants will be selected and prioritized based on whether the majority of the land is located in an ag priority locations identified in a comprehensive watershed management plan for the specific watershed, if the area or practice is identified as a priority in another conservation management plan, or if district staff can demonstrate how resource concerns are met through the implementation of the practice.

Reimbursement:

- The Landowner/Applicant is responsible to pay, in full, all receipts and invoices directly to the contractor or vendor.
- The applicant must certify, by signing the Flat Rate Voucher, and Practice Certification form, that the practice was completed according to plans and specifications developed by the district.
- A cost share reimbursement payment will be approved by the District Manager or other assigned staff, and certified by the District Board upon certification that the project has been installed and completed to specifications.

Technical staff with the appropriate skills, training, and credentials will be used to ensure projects meet the requirements of local guidelines and are installed and maintained according to standards and specifications. In the event where staff does not have existing Job Approval Authority or does not have adequate experience as detailed and approved above, guidance and assistance from neighboring SWCDs and the USDA NRCS will be utilized.