



# INVESTING IN CLEAN WATER AND LIVING LANDSCAPES

Clean, safe water is important to Minnesota's families, communities, and economy, and yet many of our rivers, lakes, and streams remain polluted. Smart investments in promising solutions are needed to protect and restore our water quality.

## THE PROBLEM

Despite decades of voluntary conservation and cost-share programs, farm runoff remains the largest source of surface water pollution in Minnesota. The summer-annual crops (corn and soybeans) that dominate Minnesota agriculture leave fields unproductive, bare, and unprotected by active root systems or leafy green cover for more than eight months each year. Bare soil has little wildlife value and is prone to runoff and erosion, carrying sediment and farm chemicals into nearby streams, rivers, and lakes.

Fields lacking active root systems also leach nitrogen into the groundwater. In central Minnesota, 40% of tested shallow wells contain nitrate concentrations that exceed the state health risk limit, and groundwater contamination remains high in certain other parts of the state. At the same time, Minnesota has lost more than 859,000 acres of Conservation Reserve Program lands since 2007, reducing the perennial vegetation necessary for clean water, soil conservation, and healthy lands. Nearly 400,000 more acres of CRP lands are due to expire in the next three years.<sup>1</sup> We need innovative, transformational solutions.

<sup>1</sup> Statewide, 64% of impaired rivers and 57% of impaired lakes are impacted primarily by agriculture. Source: Minnesota Water Quality – David Fairburn – University of MN Water Resources Center – MN Water Sustainability Framework – page 24; Minnesota’s “Nitrogen in Minnesota Surface Waters” study found high nitrate pollution in much of Minnesota’s waters with 73% of nitrates coming from cropland.

<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Summary: Conditions of Minnesota’s Groundwater, July 2013

<sup>3</sup> BSWR Statewide Conservation Lands Summary - updated Summer 2015.

<sup>4</sup> <ftp://ftp.fsa.usda.gov/crpstorpt/RMEPEGG/MEPEGGRI.HTM>

## THE SOLUTION

The state has an opportunity to provide support for new initiatives that diversify the agricultural landscape and help ensure continuous living cover that protects soil health and water quality while maximizing economic return for producers. Realizing the opportunity requires smart investment from the state.

**Two key steps to reach our clean water future include:**

- ▶ **Fully funding the University of Minnesota’s Forever Green Initiative** to accelerate development of economically viable cover crops and perennial crops that enhance water quality, soil health and habitat while providing an economic return for producers.
- ▶ **Completing the Minnesota Perennial Biofuels Program** by funding the incentive program for farm operations to grow perennial crops suitable for advanced cellulosic biofuel production in Minnesota.

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### KEY CONTACTS:

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Photo: Land Stewardship Project

