

FRESHWATER

2025 Legislative Agenda

Freshwater is a Minnesota-based nonprofit organization working to inspire and empower people to value and preserve water. Since 1968, Freshwater has used science to engage communities on how to equitably improve water today and for future generations.

➤ **Safe drinking water for all: Support for private well owners and continued nitrate contamination mitigation.**

Unsafe levels of nitrate and other contaminants in drinking water are a serious health concern across Minnesota, especially in the southeastern part of the state where the karst topography makes groundwater particularly vulnerable to land-use practices.

- Freshwater supports strong legislative action to increase well testing, provide protection and treatment for impacted well owners, and prevent groundwater contamination.

➤ **Passage of 2025 bonding bill to fund urgent water infrastructure needs.**

The 2024 Minnesota Legislature did not pass a bonding bill, leading to another year of deferred infrastructure projects. Water infrastructure is critical to support public health and the economy. The 2025 Legislature can address these needs, including aging drinking water, stormwater and wastewater infrastructure projects urgently needed all across Minnesota.

- Freshwater supports water infrastructure investments for the Public Facilities Authority. We also encourage equity-based project prioritization, so that low-income communities have increased access to the state revolving funds.
- Freshwater also supports funding for the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). This successful program leverages federal dollars to compensate landowners for granting conservation easements for soil protection, water improvement and habitat.

➤ **Increased support and incentives to farmers for evidence-based agricultural practices that are climate and water friendly.**

Many best management practices have a multitude of benefits including soil health, carbon sequestration, resilience to flood and drought, and reduction of excess nutrients in groundwater. Done right, these practices can also improve the farmers' bottom line.

- Freshwater supports legislation to provide incentives for farmers to adopt a suite of practices that are documented to benefit Minnesota's climate, soil, and water quality. These targeted practices and incentives would be piloted in southeastern Minnesota, the most vulnerable region of the state.

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➤ **Increase to soil and water conservation district funding.**

Freshwater supports an increase in long-term funding for soil and water conservation districts (SWCD's). SWCD's are frontline partners for implementing soil health and water conservation programs designed to ensure clean water and resilient landscapes.

- SWCD's have historically been funded at insufficient levels, with the Clean Water Fund providing supplemental support in recent years. In 2023, the Legislature created a SWCD aid fund with \$30 million for FY 24-25 (\$15 million per year) and \$12 million per year in FY 26-27. It was appropriate to shift base funding for SWCD's to the General Fund, but this resulted in a significant reduction in services that are key to achieving state climate and water goals.

➤ **Maintaining integrity of state environmental funds.**

Minnesota is fortunate to have constitutionally dedicated environmental funds from the Minnesota Lottery (Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund) and the Legacy Amendment (Clean Water Fund and Outdoor Heritage Fund). These funding sources were both approved by an overwhelming majority of Minnesotans, and they are intended to supplement – not supplant or replace – General Fund dollars for conservation, clean water, environmental research and outdoor recreation.

- Freshwater is opposed to any use of these funds that circumvents or diminishes established processes, such as formal recommendations made by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) and the Clean Water Council. Legislative oversight of these processes is essential, but the integrity of these funding recommendations must remain transparent, deliberate and carefully structured.

➤ **Other items to monitor in 2025**

- Chloride/smart salting legislation
- Sustainable Aviation Fuel feedstock policies
- Watershed plan implementation and community engagement
- Lead service line replacement
- PFAS
- White Bear Lake water supply planning
- Urban/rural divides in water
- Siting of water-intensive industry and new development with consideration of long-term water impacts
- Saint Anthony Falls cutoff wall study and funding
- Potential state markets for carbon credits and ecosystem services

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