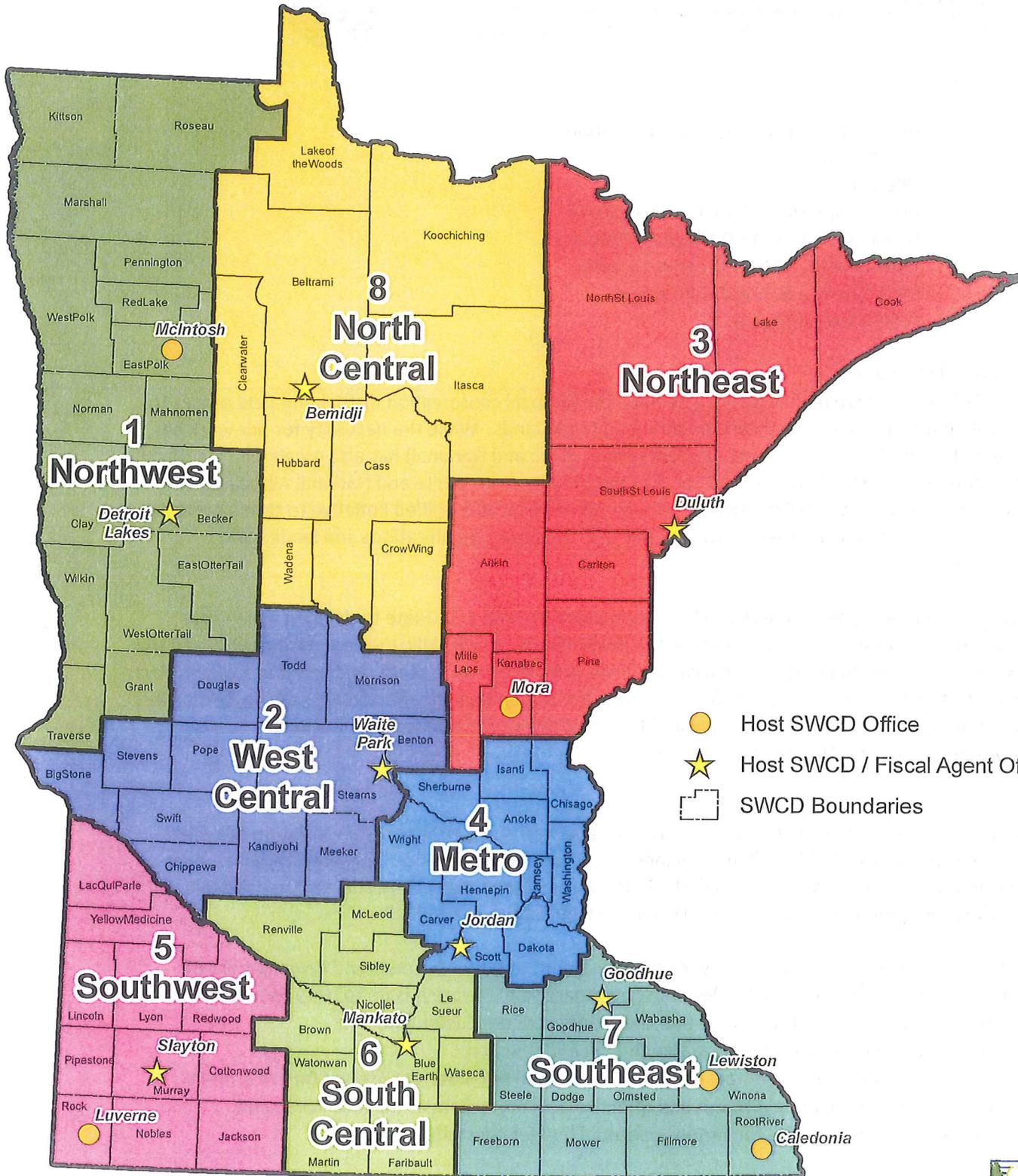


# Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts & SWCD Technical Service Areas





April 23, 2012

To: Minnesota Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
BWSR Staff  
NRCS Staff

From: Don Baloun, NRCS State Conservationist  
LeAnn Buck, MASWCD Executive Director  
John Jaschke, BWSR Executive Director  
Matt Solemsaas, MACDE President

Subj.: Field Office of the Future

### Field Office of the Future

The year 2012 brings with it an increasing demand on our local conservation district and field offices to deliver voluntary, incentive-based conservation on private lands. While the necessity for our work has never been higher, the pressure on our budgets (local, State and National) has also escalated. On March 1, 2012 Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Dave White and National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) President Gene Schmidt announced a unified initiative to take a proactive look into the future to ensure that we control our own destiny as organizations and leaders in conservation.

As part of this initiative, NRCS and NACD have formally requested each State to develop a plan that evaluates the organizational effectiveness of the field offices. Specifically, they are asking NRCS and the MASWCD ***"to develop an open, transparent and inclusive process with staff, partners and stakeholders and our customers to develop a plan that evaluates the organizational effectiveness of the field offices within our authority."*** Each state is requested to submit their final plan to NRCS Regional Conservationists and NACD by September 1, 2012.

### Partnership Stakeholder Process

On March 27, 2012 the MASWCD Board of Directors adopted policy to support the creation of a *Field Office of the Future Stakeholder Initiative* to identify Minnesota's organizational efficiencies to meet the conservation needs delivered through the field offices of the future. The stakeholder initiative will include the preparation of a report to NACD and NRCS by September 1, 2012.

We view this invitation as an opportunity for an assessment of business needs and development of alternatives for meeting those needs. We must be proactive therefore it is up to us to determine:

- How we can best meet the needs and expectations of our customers;
- How the field offices of the future should look and function;
- How we can focus our resources to get the most from our State's conservation investments;
- How we design the most efficient and effective delivery system at the local level; and
- How we can best prepare for various potential budget constraints.

### **Plan Development Outcomes**

The Conservation Partnership will develop a plan by September 1, 2012 to highlight Minnesota's vision of local conservation delivery including identification of:

- The types and levels of priority services to be provided through field offices over the next ten years (regardless if they are co-located);
- Opportunities for increased operational efficiencies including needs related to: technology, coordinated labor and expertise, location, costs, program workload, etc.;
- Strategies and mechanisms that will be useful for local implementation pending future changes to the local conservation delivery system.

The Minnesota Conservation Partnership (MASWCD, NRCS, MACDE and BWSR) has established a work group to lead this undertaking.

The Minnesota *Field Office of the Future* workgroup includes:

- Co-Chairs – MASWCD President Kathryn Kelly & NRCS State Conservationist Don Baloun
- MASWCD Executive Director LeAnn Buck
- NRCS Assistant State Conservationist Colleen Oestreich
- BWSR Board Representative Paul Langseth, Nobles SWCD Supervisor
- BWSR Assistant Director Steve Woods
- MACDE President Matt Solemsaas (Stevens SWCD Manager)
- MACDE Rep – TBD
- MACDE Rep – TBD

The work group may consider the following information (but not limited to):

- A review of the field offices co-located by NRCS and SWCDs
- Input from members
- Input from customers
- Input from stakeholders and partners
- Joint meeting with the Non-Point Engineering Technical Service Area representatives
- Review information with other state processes
- Workload and program analysis
- Identification of a process to summarize feedback and recommendations
- Identification of additional resources (staff or funding) for compilation of report
- MOU and/or cooperative working agreement templates

Our collective partnership is experiencing changes at all levels including how we share information, use new technology, provide specialized technical assistance, leverage programs and address public budget constraints while servicing the public. This initiative will build upon our past collective efforts and will prepare us for the future. The conservation partnership will continue to keep you updated on this initiative. Thank you.

