

THE MINNESOTA BUFFER LAW

The [Minnesota Buffer Law](#) requires landowners to establish perennial vegetation buffers of up to 50 feet along lakes, rivers, and streams and buffers of 16.5 feet along ditches in order to reduce nutrient and sediment impacts to the state's waterways.



Seeding along the stream bank to grow a buffer strip.

The Buffer Law was [originally signed into law](#) in 2015 and was updated with amendments in 2016 and 2017. In addition to protecting waterways from runoff pollution, [the law](#) also has the stated purposes of stabilizing soils along shorelines and protecting or creating riparian corridors. Research by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency showing that buffers are critical to protecting and restoring water quality, natural stream functions, and aquatic habitat was critical during the drafting and passing of this law. However, the state recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for optimizing conservation across varied agricultural land. As a result, the 2017 amendments seek to improve

conservation outcomes by allowing farmers to install [common alternative practices](#) that can also satisfy the law's requirements.

The Minnesota State Board of Water and Soil Resources oversees and reports on the statewide application of the law, while its implementation is carried out locally through county soil and water conservation districts. The board provides program information and support to ensure local staff are successful and consistent when working with landowners to install the required buffers. The counties have authority to validate alternative practices (and combinations of practices) based on the USDA-NRCS Field Office Technical Guide. When necessary, counties can request additional input from other technical experts to ensure they are sufficiently informed when working with landowners. In addition to working with landowners to install buffers, each county may elect to enforce the law locally. Counties can use several state-provided options as guidelines for how to structure local enforcement. In most cases, counties choose to delegate this authority to the soil and water conservation district or a local watershed district. If a local entity chooses not to take on enforcement, then the State Board of Water and Soil Resources fills this role.

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