



GREENSTEP IMPACT 2026

Water Challenge

1ST ANNUAL COLLECTIVE ACTION CHALLENGE

ABOUT IMPACT 2026

Starting in 2026, GreenStep will invite cities and Tribal Nations to participate in an additional topic-based challenge each year. The idea behind the challenge is to highlight relevant GreenStep actions, events, workshops and funding opportunities, connect these actions to statewide goals, and to encourage collective action. Participating in the challenge is also one of the new options to reach Step 5.

For 2026, GreenStep has chosen to focus on water for several reasons. In the last few years, several state action reports related to water protection have been updated, and a collective effort to highlight Mississippi River protections will take place in 2026. A list of these reports is on the ‘Additional Information’ page and referenced throughout the actions.

WHY IS WATER ACTION IN MINNESOTA COMMUNITIES IMPORTANT?

Minnesota benefits from more freshwater than any other of the 48 contiguous U.S. states. The viability of Minnesota’s industries, farms, utilities, and municipalities hinges on an adequate supply of clean water. Minnesota’s water flows in three directions to other communities --north to the Hudson Bay (via the Red River), east to the Atlantic Ocean (via the Great Lakes), and south to the Gulf of Mexico (via the Mississippi River). Being a good upstream neighbor is essential for the health of communities within and beyond Minnesota.

THE ACTIONS AND PARTICIPATING IN THE CHALLENGE

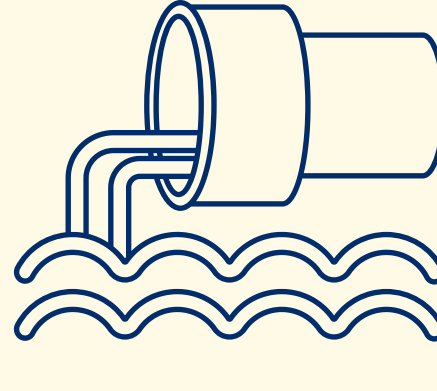
The actions are organized into three main categories: community outreach, regulatory, and infrastructure. Each section has actions related to groundwater, stormwater, and surface water (Note: Some actions could fit under multiple categories but are only in one section for clarity). All of these actions may not make sense in all communities depending on the facilities available or location to water.



COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

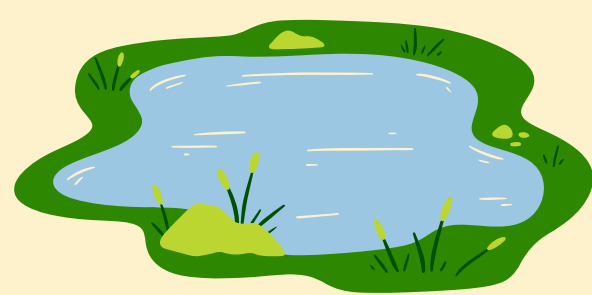


REGULATION



INFRASTRUCTURE

THE ACTIONS AND PARTICIPATING IN THE CHALLENGE



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Impact 2026: Water Year Recognition

If your community takes one or more of the 20 actions listed below, share with GreenStep staff anytime in 2026 (even after the regular April 2026 deadline). This is a year-long challenge. At the end of the year in December, we will have water awards that will go on your award blocks for that year (as seen in the photo above) and celebrate the collective action for water across Minnesota. Most of the actions below are already GreenStep actions, but some are new and can still be reported as part of GreenStep. The actions were selected because they can realistically be completed in a year (no focus on huge infrastructure projects). All actions should either take place in 2026 or be substantially in process in 2026. If you have already reported an action previously, it cannot count again for the Water Challenge, but you can update or expand on an existing effort (ex. an additional 2026 campaign promoting residential water conservation).

How to Report Actions

Email greenstep@state.mn.us with the action you completed or report the action on the GreenStep page noting it is for the Water Challenge 2026.

PARTICIPATE IN THE CHALLENGE TO REACH
STEP 5 IN 2026 (OPTION 5G)!



Community Outreach



GROUNDWATER

Action 1. Partner with surrounding jurisdictions that use private well or septic systems to provide outreach and education about how to test wells.

Resources and partners: Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), [Source Water Protection programs](#)

Funding Opportunities: [Safe Drinking Water for Private Well Users Grant](#), local Soil Water Conservation Districts may have water screening equipment for events

Support the goals of: [EQB Groundwater Report](#)

Action 2. Share information about soil health and cover crop practices by utilizing agricultural [Best Management Practices](#).

Resources and partners: BWSR, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, University of Minnesota Extension Nitrogen Smart, MDA nitrogen fertilizer application best management practices

Funding Opportunities: [Precision Irrigation Cost Share](#), [BWSR Soil Health Practices Grant](#)

Supports the goals of: [Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#), [EQB Groundwater Report](#)

STORMWATER

Action 3: Promote water softener optimization, maintenance, and upgrades to reduce softening salt and chloride discharge.

Resources/partners: [WaterSense](#), county or water management organization may have funds available

Supports the goals of: GreenStep Action [2.5](#) and [6.3](#), [Smart Salting](#)

Action 4: Develop a marketing, outreach, or incentive program for residential or business water use reduction and energy efficiency (ex. WaterSense program, rainwater harvesting). Record the number of households or businesses participating.

Resources/partners: [WaterSense](#), utility, county, or water management organization for rebates on low-flow water items.

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 2.1](#) and [2.4](#)

Action 5: Sponsor a sign up for volunteer water monitoring. Connect with volunteer water monitors in your community, lake association, or other local water steward groups. Assure that they are routinely sampling a river or lake or wetland in at least one location within the community’s watershed and sending results to the MPCA.

Resources/partners: [MPCA Volunteer Water Monitors](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 19.1](#)

Action 6: Goals to revegetate shoreland and create a local program or outreach effort to help property owners with revegetation.

Resources/partners: [MN DNR](#), [Minnesota Association of Floodplain Managers](#), [Score Your Shore](#) is a tool from the DNR to assess habitat conditions of developed lake lots, which can be used to set and track metric goals for shoreland revegetation and improvement

Funding Opportunities: The [Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources](#) and the [MN Dept. of Natural Resources](#) routinely fund restoration projects.

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 19.5](#)

SURFACE WATER

Action 7. Sponsor a sign up for volunteer water monitoring. Connect with [volunteer water monitors in your community](#), lake association, or other local water steward groups. Assure that they are routinely sampling a river or lake or wetland in at least one location within the community’s watershed and sending results to the MPCA.

Resources/partners: [MPCA Volunteer Water Monitors](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 19.1](#)

Action 8. Adopt goals to revegetate shoreland and create a local program or outreach effort to help property owners with revegetation.

Resources/partners: [MN DNR](#), [Minnesota Association of Floodplain Managers](#), [Score Your Shore](#) is a tool from the DNR to assess habitat conditions of developed lake lots, which can be used to set and track metric goals for shoreland revegetation and improvement

Funding Opportunities: The [Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources](#) and the [MN Dept. of Natural Resources](#) routinely fund restoration projects.

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 19.5](#)

WORKFORCE

Action 9. Hold a workshop or event related water workforce outreach and retention. Or start to develop workforce training opportunities with community colleges and job training centers to credential a water-related career.

Resources/partners: [Freshwater](#) has several resources, opportunities, and data related to water workforce in Minnesota [MPCA staff](#) for questions related to licensing programs related to wastewater operators

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 25.1](#)



Regulatory Actions



GROUNDWATER

Action 10. Create an ordinance for data centers that reflects your community’s values and addresses local water use.

Resources/partners: [York County Planning Commission](#), [Urban Land Institute](#),

Examples of communities with ordinances: [Bloomington](#), [Brainerd](#)

Supports the goals of: [EQB Groundwater Report](#)

Action 11. Incorporate protection of priority natural systems or resources such as groundwater through the subdivision or development process.

Resources/partners: See a [conservation design development prototype in Hanover, MN](#) and [subdivision ordinances](#) that will allow development in a way that cost-effectively protects the City's rural character and ecological resources, [Subdivision District model ordinance](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 10.1](#)

STORMWATER

Action 12. Adopt by ordinance three or more of the following stormwater infiltration/management strategies to reduce impervious surface:

- a) A narrower streets provision that permits construction of 24-foot roads for public, residential access and subcollector streets (with fewer than 400 average daily trips).
- b) Use of pervious pavements for streets, trails, parking areas and sidewalks.
- c) For sites less than one acre, retain the water quality volume of 1.1 inches of runoff from all impervious surfaces for new and fully-redeveloped construction sites.
- d) Prioritize stormwater retrofits in areas with flooding or drainage issues that impact low-income neighborhoods

Resources/partners: [Stormwater Model Ordinance](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 17.3](#), [Climate Action Framework](#), [Stormwater Manual](#)

Action 13. Adopt a Chloride Reduction ordinance

Resources/partners: [Chloride Model Ordinance](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 17.6](#)

Action 14. Adopt low-impact design standards in parks and trails that infiltrate or retain all 2 inch, 24-hour stormwater events based upon the Sustainable Sites Initiative

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 18.4](#)

Action 15. Adopt a complete streets policy, or a living streets policy, which addresses landscaping and stormwater management.

Resources/partners: The State of MN's Minimal Impact Design Standards (MIDS) include new [modeling methods and credit calculations](#), [SITES Rating System](#) - the most comprehensive tool for guiding and measuring landscape sustainability.

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 11.1](#)

Action 16. Adopt and implement design standards that includes at least three of the following stormwater infiltration and reuse practices:

- a) Rain gardens/infiltration practices.
- b) Rainwater harvesting practices.
- c) Green alleys or green parking lots.
- d) Pervious/permeable pavement or pavers.
- e) Green roofs / green walls.
- f) Tree trenches / tree boxes.
- g) Incorporate compost and/or native plants into landscape design.

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 17.5](#), [Climate Action Framework](#)

SURFACE WATER

Action 17. 1.Create city land management standards that maximize sources of non-potable water, or surface/rainwater, for irrigation

Resources/partners: The City of Burnsville uses storm water ponds for irrigation at: Youth Ball Field Complex Sioux Fisher Memorial, Crystal Park and Lac Lavon Park(use lake water), Ironwood Park is Carver's largest parks and has requires extensive irrigation, [Stormwater Reuse Projects - City of Hugo](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 18.5](#), [EQB Groundwater Report](#)

Action 18. Adopt a shoreland restoration and protection ordinance for all river and lake shoreland areas.

Resources/partners: [Shoreland Model Ordinance](#), [DNR Score Your Shore](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 19.4](#)

Action 19. Create a water-wise landscaping ordinance

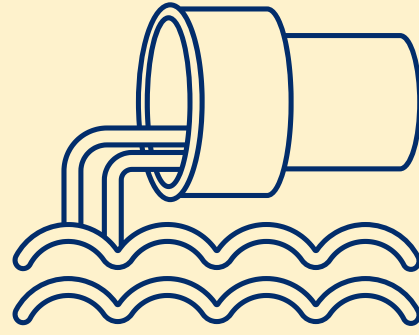
Resources/partners: [Landscaping Model Ordinance](#),

Funding Opportunities: [Lawns to Legumes program](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 2.5](#) and [6.3](#), [EQB Groundwater Report](#)



Infrastructure



GROUNDWATER

Action 20. Improve smart-salting by reducing chloride use in winter maintenance and dust suppressant applications to prevent permanent surface water and groundwater pollution.

Resources/partners: [Smart Salting Assessment Tool](#)

Grants: [Chloride Reduction Grant Program](#)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 17.6](#)

STORMWATER

Action 21. Install a rainwater harvesting system for building water use at a city-owned building.

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 1.7](#)

DRINKING WATER

Action 22. Optimize energy and chemical use at drinking water/wastewater facilities and decrease chloride in wastewater discharges.

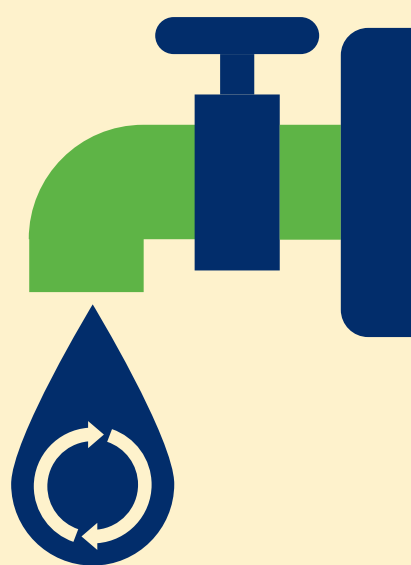
Resources/partners: [water permit holders and chloride reduction](#) and [Alternatives for addressing chloride in wastewater effluent](#)

Funding Opportunities: Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF)

Supports the goals of: [GreenStep Action 20.4](#)



Additional Information



GREENSTEP WATER-FOCUSED WORKSHOPS IN 2026

check back here for more dates announced

- January 7, 1-2pm [Virtual Coffee Break: MnTAP Wastewater Optimization Opportunities](#)
- January 8, 9-10:15am [Orientation to Low Salt Design Guidance](#)
- Data Centers and Local Jurisdiction
- Growing the Water Workforce in Minnesota

WATER EVENTS IN 2026

- [Salt Week in Minnesota](#) January 26th-30th
- [We are Water](#) (Celebrating 10 years!) events by the Mississippi
 - February 25-April 20, 2026: Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo – Byron
 - April 21-June 15, 2026: Capitol Region Watershed District – Saint Paul
 - June 16-August 10, 2026: Itasca State Park – Park Rapids
 - August 11-October 5, 2026: Great River Arts – Little Falls
 - October 6-November 30, 2026: Anoka County Northtown Library - Blaine
- Eco Experience at the State Fair-focused on water- August 27-September 7
- Metro Children’s Water Festival (September)

[TELL US ABOUT YOUR EVENT & WE’LL ADD IT HERE!](#)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- [EQB Groundwater Report](#)
- [Nutrient Reduction Strategy 2025](#)
- [Put Water First – A public blueprint and open-source hub for advancing Minnesota’s water future](#)
- Met Council Our Water Shared Future
- [Climate Action Framework 2026 update](#)
- [Smart Salting for Community Leaders Handbook](#)
- [Stormwater Manual Update](#)
- [Drinking Water Action Plan](#)

ANY QUESTIONS?

REACH OUT TO GREENSTEP@STATE.MN.US

OR

[SCHEDULE A TIME WITH US!](#)