



## Legislative Priority: Buffer Aid to Help Landowners Comply with Water Quality Standards

*The Association of Minnesota Counties supports ongoing funding for counties that opt to implement and enforce the requirements of the Minnesota buffer law.*

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**BACKGROUND:** As part of legislative negotiations in 2015, the legislature passed and the governor signed a law that requires all public waters to have an average of a 50-foot buffer of perennial vegetation. The law also requires a 16.5-foot buffer for public drainage systems. Because of confusion surrounding whether private ditches were subject to the requirements of the 2015 law, a clarification was passed in 2016 to make it clear that private ditches are exempt from the law passed in 2015. The 2016 law also clarified that enforcement of the buffer zones is left to local authorities (counties or local watershed districts). If they choose not to enforce the law, the state Board of Water and Soil Resources will be charged with enforcement.

**CURRENT SITUATION:** County officials agree that local implementation and enforcement of the new buffer law may be best to help address local needs and challenges unique to the county. However, these responsibilities will require additional staff time and resources, and ultimately, leave counties with an unfunded mandate from the state.

**2017 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY:** AMC supports securing state funding to help ensure the buffer program is implemented and enforced locally and consistently on a statewide basis. This will help counties improve and maintain water quality.