

**Press Release - Minnesota Rural Water Association**

**March 18, 2026**

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**Minnesota Rural Water Association (MRWA) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) present the Dave Neiman Large Public Water Supply System Source Water Protection Award to the City of Baxter.**

**The MRWA/MDH Source Water Protection Award** is given annually at the MRWA Technical Conference to recognize the importance and value of source water protection efforts in Minnesota and to recognize individuals, public water systems, and organizations that have shown long-term commitment, initiative, leadership, sharing of successes, and initiation or participation in activities which resulted in the protection or improvement of their source water.

The city of Baxter has been very active and taken an aggressive approach to protect their drinking water by developing robust public education, potential contaminant source management, and data collection programs. They have completed too many tasks to list; however, here are a few highlights:



- Developed and distributed over 500 letters and SWP educational packets to city residents.
- Annually provide groundwater and wellhead education packets to the 5th through 8th grades at Forestview School.
- Conducted door-to-door surveys to inventory potential contaminant sources in the wellhead.
- Routinely hold coordination meetings with MNDOT to ensure groundwater protection practices are planned and implemented for work completed within the wellhead.
- Conducted in-person training with MnDOT, Crow Wing County Highway Dept., Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, and Brainerd Fire Department staff to educate them about the wellhead protection area and increase their awareness of how they can help protect the city's drinking water supply through emergency planning.
- Reviewed and modified city ordinances to provide greater protection for the city's drinking water, including stricter stormwater runoff standards requiring greater on-site infiltration.
- Collected subsurface soil samples from three stormwater basins within the DWSMA and tested for 8 heavy metals and organic compounds to better understand which land uses were a threat to the city's drinking water.

•Worked collaboratively with multiple agencies, including MPCA, MN Board of Water and Soil Resources, MN Depart. of Agriculture, Enbridge, Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District, Mississippi Headwaters Board, MNDNR, and City of Brainerd to construct a 13 acre, \$2.6 million stormwater wetland project to treat stormwater before entering the Mississippi river.

*Photo left to right: Lori Blair, Executive Director, Minnesota Rural Water Association, James Lueck, City of Baxter, and Tom Dowdle, Chairman, Minnesota Rural Water Association.*