

A BETTER AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT BILL

On May 23, 2015, [Governor Mark Dayton vetoed the Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Bill](#), because provisions in the bill would have threatened future generations' rights to clean water, land, and air. Governor Dayton knows that Minnesotans care deeply about our environment and expect us to protect our natural resources. That is why the Governor fought to improve the bill, making significant improvements that will protect our state's environment. Governor Dayton delivered a much better outcome for the quality of Minnesota's water and other natural resources.

Veto Reason	Description	A Better Outcome
Granting Amnesty to Polluters	House Republicans passed a provision that would have allowed polluters to get a permanent "get out of jail free" card. By simply admitting to pollution violations, and then agreeing to take care of it, polluters would not have been subject to pollution penalties – so long as they self-reported the violations.	Governor Dayton fought back, limiting the provision to only minor, first-time offenses. The Governor also required that the state's Pollution Control Commissioner would have ultimate authority over which instances such amnesty would actually apply.
Delaying Environmental Review	House Republicans initially passed a provision that allowed some polluters three additional weeks before the state could order them to stop polluting.	Governor Dayton fought to reduce that time period to two weeks. In an effort to improve transparency, the Governor also insisted that the public be notified whenever a regulated entity is accused of polluting by the Pollution Control Agency.
Weakening Water Quality Standards	House Republicans tried to prevent the Pollution Control Agency from implementing more protective water quality standards. The bill they passed initially would have required lengthy, expensive, and unnecessary steps in the rulemaking process.	Governor Dayton fought back, and these provisions were dropped from the bill.
Delaying Wastewater Treatment Protections in the Red River Valley	House Republicans passed legislation that would have ceded Minnesota's authority to adopt better water quality standards – giving North Dakota and Canada the opportunity to agree or disagree with the standards implemented by Minnesota.	Governor Dayton fought back, refusing to wait until North Dakota and Canada decide when it is time to clean up the Red River. This provision was dropped from the bill.
Preventing the MPCA from Honoring Commitments to Clean Up Superfund Sites	The bill passed by the House Republicans spent nearly \$4 million intended to clean up Superfund sites around the state on projects that don't qualify for the funds.	Governor Dayton fought on behalf of the dozens of communities that need this money, and the earmarks were removed.

No Funding for Environmental Review Efficiency	House Republicans claim to want a more efficient permitting process, but they refused to pay for it. They passed a bill with inadequate funding that would have limited the Environmental Quality Board’s ability to streamline the environmental review process.	Governor Dayton fought for an additional \$500,000 to streamline the environmental review process so that companies can get their permits and put people to work faster.
Eliminating the Citizens Board of the MPCA	The bill passed by the Legislature would have abolished the 48-year old Citizens Board, established to give citizens a voice in decisions made by the Pollution Control Agency that impact our water, land, and air.	Governor Dayton strongly opposed eliminating the Citizens Board and fought hard to keep the board; However, House Republicans refused to agree and were willing to risk the jobs of more than 9,500 state employees.
Raiding the Closed Landfill Account and the Metropolitan Landfill Contingency Action Trust	House Republicans raided these accounts of nearly \$50 million – funds that were intended to cover the cost of maintaining landfills to prevent pollution after they close.	Governor Dayton insisted that both accounts be repaid after the November forecast. House Republicans ultimately relented, and repaid the funds.

Landmark Buffer Legislation Will Improve Water Quality in Minnesota

One of Governor Mark Dayton’s major legislative priorities is on its way to becoming law this session. After working with farmers, landowners, and other stakeholders over the last few months, Governor Dayton and state lawmakers have reached agreement on a solution that will significantly improve water quality in Minnesota. The landmark legislation, which will now be taken up by the Legislature, will designate an estimated additional 110,000 acres of land for water quality buffer strips statewide. It will establish new perennial vegetation buffers of up to 50 feet along rivers, streams, and ditches.

With the support of local soil and water conservation districts, the new law will provide flexibility and financial support for landowners to install and maintain buffers, and boost compliance with buffer laws across Minnesota. Here are some of the highlights of how the new law would work:

- **Fifty-Foot Buffers on All Public Waters** – The legislation will require 50 foot buffers on all public waters (lakes, rivers, and streams). These new requirements will be enforced through state and local mechanisms and can be implemented quickly.
- **Better Compliance for Public Ditches** – The legislation will require 16.5-foot buffers around all public ditches. Right now, just 20 percent of public ditches are required to have a 16.5-foot buffer. By accelerating the requirements and providing better enforcement and additional support, this legislation will accomplish buffers on all public ditches.
- **Local Requirements along Other Waters** – Requirements on other waters will be set by local soil and water conservation districts to meet the needs and circumstances of individual parcels of land. These measures will be taken in consultation with local landowners, and adopted into local comprehensive water management plans approved by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).
- **Financial and Technical Support** – The legislation provides more than \$33 million in additional financial support for landowners to install and maintain buffers on their properties. This new financial support, included in this year’s Legacy Bill, supplements [other existing state and federal programs](#) that assist farmers and landowners in establishing effective conservation practices. The legislation also provides additional resources for local soil and water conservation districts to provide technical support for landowners to help them comply with the law. (There may be additional funding in the budget bill, so we would need to add that.)

- **More Flexibility** – Buffer widths will depend on the type of waterway each landowner is charged with protecting (depending on whether it is public water, a public ditch, or other waters). There will be exceptions included for areas covered by a road, building or other structures; areas enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program; public or private water access or recreational use areas; and municipalities in compliance with federal and state storm water requirements.