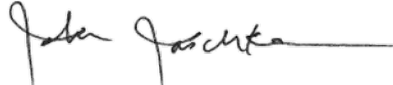




DATE: January 14, 2025

TO: Board of Water and Soil Resources' Members, Advisors, and Staff

FROM: John Jaschke, Executive Director 

SUBJECT: BWSR Board Meeting Notice – January 22, 2025

The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) will meet on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, beginning at 9:00 a.m. The meeting will be held in the lower-level Board Room, at 520 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul and by Microsoft Teams. Individuals interested in attending the meeting through Teams should do so by either 1) logging into Teams by [clicking here to join the meeting](#) or 2) join by audio only conference call by calling telephone number: 651-395-7448 and entering the conference ID: 494 929 717#.

The following information pertains to agenda items:

## COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Grants Program and Policy Committee*

- 1. Water Quality and Storage Program FY26 Criteria** – The purpose of this agenda item is to provide the Board with the FY26 scoring and ranking criteria for the Water Quality and Storage Program. The Water Quality and Storage Program is intended to fund modeling, conceptual and final design, and construction of projects that will reduce peak flow rates and/or volumes. The program is funded through the General Fund and the proposed projects must reduce flooding, improve water quality, or mitigate climate change impacts. This will be the fourth request for proposals (RFP) released for this program, and there were very minor changes to the program from the FY25 RFP. The application period will close in April, and we anticipate bringing the highest-ranking applications to the board for funding consideration this summer. **DECISION ITEM**
- 2. FY 25 Soil Health Practices Grants authorization** – On November 1, 2023, the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) was awarded a \$25 million allocation from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to support the implementation of soil health practices. On December 17, 2024, BWSR staff, in collaboration with NRCS, finalized and approved the negotiated agreements. BWSR staff, in coordination with NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District personnel, developed comprehensive grant guidelines and requirements for this initiative.

Federal agreements mandate that BWSR perform quality assurance assessments on practices funded through the RCPP. The Laws of Minnesota 2021 First Special Session, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 6(p) appropriated \$4,000,000 for grants to farmers aimed at enhancing the adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices, with approximately \$197,052 currently unallocated. Furthermore, Section 6(t) authorizes the Board to reallocate funds within this section in order to leverage federal or non-state funds. The reallocation of unobligated funds from the 2021 Clean Water Fund (CWF) Soil Health allocation to the 2021 Accelerated Implementation fund will facilitate the fulfillment of technical oversight responsibilities outlined in RCPP agreement #3053. – **DECISION ITEM**

### ***Central Region Committee***

1. **Mississippi River St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan** - The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), at their August 26, 2021 meeting, selected the Mississippi River St. Cloud Partnership (Partnership) for a planning grant as part of the One Watershed, One Plan Program. Their Policy, Advisory, Steering, and Citizen Advisory Committees met for nearly three years to discuss priority issues, goals, and implementation actions to protect and restore natural resources in the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed. The Partnership developed the Mississippi River St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) and submitted it to BWSR on December 16, 2024 for review and approval. The Central Region Committee met on January 6, 2025 to review the content of the Plan and recommends approval of the submitted Plan by the full Board. **DECISION ITEM**

### ***Southern Region Committee***

1. **Approve Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan Cottonwood- Middle Minnesota River** – The Cottonwood- Middle Minnesota partnership was selected for a 1W1P Planning Grant in August of 2022 and established a Memorandum of Agreement between the planning partners for the purposes of writing a Plan on December 29, 2022. The partners include: The Counties of Brown, Cottonwood, Lyon, Murray, and Redwood and The Brown, Cottonwood, Lyon, Murray and Redwood Soil and Water Conservation Districts, The Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects and Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area Joint Powers Organizations (RCRCA), and the City of Springfield. The 1W1P Planning Grant was executed on February 23, 2023. The Policy Committee was formally established with signing of bylaws on May 17th, 2023. A Request for Proposals (RFP) process was utilized, by invitation from the partnership to contract with a consultant on May 17, 2023. The partnership held a 60-day review process that ended August 30, 2024, and the required public hearing on September 18, 2024. The final draft of the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses were submitted on October 17, 2024, to the state review agencies. The Southern Committee met on December 9, 2024 and recommend approval of the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan to the full BWSR Board. **DECISION ITEM**

### ***Audit and Oversight Committee***

1. **2024 Performance Review and Assistance Program Legislative Report** – This agenda request item is an annual request for the BWSR January meeting to approve and adopt the required PRAP report to be disseminated to the legislature during the current session. Minnesota statute 103B.102, Subdivision 3 describes BWSR's responsibility to provide this activity summary each year. BWSR staff have prepared the report, presented it to the BWSR Audit and Oversight committee and are now presenting it to the board for their consideration. **DECISION ITEM**

### ***Northern Region Committee***

1. **Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan** – The Crow Wing River Watershed Partnership was approved for a One Watershed, One Plan planning grant in August 2022. The Plan, all written public comments and responses, and public hearing comments and responses were submitted on November 20, 2024, to the state review agencies and BWSR for the final 90-day review period. The Northern Regional Committee met on January 6, 2025, to review the content of the Plan, State agency comments on the Plan, and to make a recommendation. The Committee recommends approval of the submitted Plan by the full Board. **DECISION ITEM**
2. **Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan** – The planning partnership received a grant through the One Watershed, One Plan program in 2021 to begin the process of developing a comprehensive watershed management plan. On December 2, 2024, BWSR received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses pertaining to the Plan for final State review. The Northern Regional Committee met on January 6, 2025, to review the content of the Plan, State agency comments on the Plan, and to make a recommendation. The Committee recommends approval of the submitted Plan by the full Board. **DECISION ITEM**

3. **Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan** – The Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed planning area was approved for a One Watershed, One Plan planning grant at the regularly scheduled meeting of the BWSR on August 16, 2022. The partnership held a 60-day plan review process that ended on September 20, 2024, and held the required public hearing on October 22, 2024. The final draft of the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments were submitted to the state review agencies on November 26, 2024, and the Northern Regional Committee reviewed and discussed the submitted information on January 6, 2025. The Committee recommends approval of the submitted Plan by the full Board. **DECISION ITEM**

#### ***Buffers, Soils, and Drainage Committee***

1. **Drainage Work Group Recommendation for Minnesota Public Drainage Manual Adoption and Maintenance Plan** – 2024 Legislation amended 103B.101 Sub 13 to include BWSR adoption of the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual (MPDM). The original MPDM was created in 1991 and the current web-based version of the MPDM represents the current working version recommended by the Drainage Work Group (DWG) for use. The MPDM does not replace drainage law or create associated rules for public drainage authorities to follow. It does not have legal precedent or authority other than that provided by the drainage law and associated case law. It does attempt to capture current practice, case law, and helpful forms/templates and information that can be utilized by drainage authorities, their key advisors and various stakeholders working with and interested in Chapter 103E public drainage systems. The DWG is a drainage stakeholder group facilitated by BWSR under 103B.101 Subd 13 which fosters mutual understanding and provide recommendations for drainage system management and related water management, including recommendations for updating the drainage law in chapter 103E, the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual, and other related provisions. In October of 2018 the DWG established a process summary which guides its decision-making process which was used to support this recommendation to the BWSR Board. **DECISION ITEM**
2. **Drainage Work Group Recommendation for Repeal of 103E.067 (103E Ditch Buffer Annual Reporting)** – The DWG is a drainage stakeholder group facilitated by BWSR under 103B.101 Subd 13 which fosters mutual understanding and provide recommendations for drainage system management and related water management, including recommendations for updating the drainage law in chapter 103E, the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual, and other related provisions. In October of 2018 the DWG established a process summary which guides its decision-making process which was used to support this recommendation to the BWSR Board.

The DWG has reviewed the supporting memo and recommends that the BWSR Board forward it for legislative consideration. **DECISION ITEM**

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

1. **Minnesota River Collaborative** – The purpose of the Collaborative presentation is to describe the Collaborative, its membership, work process, and review efforts in cooperation with BWSR staff and other agencies.

The Minnesota River Collaborative, now in its eighth year, is made up of individuals and NGOs who come together to support natural resources of the Minnesota River Valley. Their mission is improving and protecting Minnesota's water and soil resources. They meet weekly where work plans and efforts are coordinated. Members under the umbrella of the Collaborative have formally engaged as intervenors or commenters on several drainage improvement projects, and advocated for public policy such as Water Storage funding. **INFORMATION ITEM**

If you have any questions regarding the agenda, please feel free to call me at 651-539-2587. We look forward to seeing you on January 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES  
520 LAFAYETTE ROAD NORTH  
ST. PAUL, MN 55155  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2025**

**PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

**9:00 AM CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

**MINUTES OF DECMEBER 19, 2025 BOARD MEETING**

**PUBLIC ACCESS FORUM** (10-minute agenda time, two-minute limit/person)

**INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF**

- Mandy Duong, Organizational Development/DEI Coordinator
- Ann Gunness, Board Conservationist

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

*A conflict of interest, whether actual, potential, or perceived, occurs when someone in a position of trust has competing professional or personal interests, and these competing interests make it difficult to fulfill professional duties impartially. At this time, members are requested to declare conflicts of interest they may have regarding today's business. Any member who declares an actual conflict of interest must not vote on that agenda item. All actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest will be announced to the board by members or staff before any vote.*

**REPORTS**

- Chair & Administrative Advisory Committee – Todd Holman
- Executive Director – John Jaschke
- Audit & Oversight Committee – Joe Collins
- Dispute Resolution and Compliance Report – Travis Germundson/Rich Sve
- Grants Program & Policy Committee – Mark Zabel
- RIM Reserve Committee – Jayne Hager Dee
- Water Management & Strategic Planning Committee – Joe Collins
- Wetland Conservation Committee – Jill Crafton
- Buffers, Soils & Drainage Committee – LeRoy Ose
- Drainage Work Group – Neil Peterson/Tom Gile

**AGENCY REPORTS**

- Minnesota Department of Agriculture – Thom Petersen
- Minnesota Department of Health – Steve Robertson
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Sarah Strommen
- Minnesota Extension – Joel Larson
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency – Glenn Skuta

## **ADVISORY COMMENTS**

- Association of Minnesota Counties – Brian Martinson
- Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees – Mike Schultz
- Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts – LeAnn Buck
- Minnesota Association of Townships – Eunice Biel
- Minnesota Watersheds – Jan Voit
- Natural Resources Conservation Service – Troy Daniell

## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Grants Program and Policy Region Committee***

1. Water Quality and Storage Program FY26 Criteria – Rita Weaver – ***DECISION ITEM***
2. FY 25 Soil Health Practices Grants authorization – Tom Gile and Jared House – ***DECISION ITEM***

### ***Central Region Committee***

1. Mississippi River St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – ***DECISION ITEM***

### ***Southern Region Committee***

1. Approve Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota River– Ted Winter and John Shea – ***DECISION ITEM***

### ***Audit and Oversight Committee***

1. 2024 Performance Review and Assistance Program Legislative Report – Don Bajumpaa – ***DECISION***

### ***Northern Region Committee***

1. Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – Tom Schulz, Ryan Hughes, and Darren Mayers – ***DECISION ITEM***
2. Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – Ryan Hughes and Darren Mayers – ***DECISION ITEM***
3. Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – LeRoy Ose and Ryan Hughes – ***DECISION ITEM***

### ***Buffers, Soils, and Drainage Committee***

1. Drainage Work Group Recommendation for Minnesota Public Drainage Manual Adoption and Maintenance Plan – Tom Gile – ***DECISION ITEM***
2. Drainage Work Group Recommendation for Repeal of 103E.067 (103E Ditch Buffer Annual Reporting) – Tom Gile – ***DECISION ITEM***

## **NEW BUSINESS**

1. Minnesota River Collaborative – Ted Suss and Suzane Jiwani – ***INFORMATION ITEM***

## **UPCOMING MEETINGS**

- Grants Program and Policy Committee is scheduled for February 10<sup>th</sup> in St. Paul and by MS Teams.
- BWSR Board meeting is scheduled for March 26<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m. in St. Paul and by MS Teams.

## **ADJOURN**

**BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES  
520 LAFAYETTE ROAD NORTH  
LOWER-LEVEL BOARD ROOM  
ST. PAUL, MN 55155  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2024**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Joe Collins, Jill Crafton, Jayne Hager Dee, Mike Runk, Neil Peterson, Rich Sve, Lori Cox, Ted Winter, LeRoy Ose, Kelly Kirkpatrick, Eunice Biel, Todd Holman, Ron Staples, Tom Schulz, Glenn Skuta, MPCA; Joel Larson, University of Minnesota Extension; Jeff Berg, MDA; Steve Robertson, MDH; Sarah Strommen, DNR

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Mark Zabel

**STAFF PRESENT:**

John Jaschke, Rachel Mueller, Tom Gile, Travis Germundson, John Shea, Brett Arne, Shane Bugeja, Denise Lauerman, Dave Weirens, Luke Olson, Melissa King, Suzanne Rhees, Anne Sawyer, Marcey Westrick, Michelle Jordan, Craig Engwall

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Brian Martinson, AMC; Jan Voit, Minnesota Watersheds; Sheila Vanney, MASWCD; Holly Bushman, Le Sueur County; Emily Heinz, Comfort Lake Forest Lake WD; Alex Trunnell, MN Corn; Dee McDaniels, Dakota County; Erin Spry, City of Vadnais Heights; Blayne Eineichner, Tim Kelly, Sara Boser

**Chair Todd Holman called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM.**

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24-55 **MINUTES OF OCTOBER 23, 2024 BOARD MEETING** – Moved by Ron Staples, seconded by Joe Collins, to approve the minutes of October 23, 2024, as amended. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

#### **PUBLIC ACCESS FORUM**

No members of the public provided comments to the board.

#### **INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF**

Marcey Westrick introduced Cameron Gaspord, Outcomes Analyst.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

*“A conflict of interest, whether actual, potential, or perceived, occurs when someone in a position of trust has competing professional or personal interests, and these competing interests make it difficult to fulfill professional duties impartially. At this time, members are requested to declare conflicts of interest they may have regarding today’s business. Any member who declares an actual conflict of interest must not vote on that agenda item. All actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest will be announced to the board by members or staff before any vote.”*

#### **REPORTS**

**Chair & Administrative Advisory Committee** – Chair Todd Holman reported he attended the EQB meeting, stated they will be developing bylaws and approval was given to update the alternative feed lot application.

**Executive Director’s Report** - John Jaschke reported Minnesota Watersheds, Soil Water and Conservation Districts, and AMC held their annual conferences. Several awards were provided to different organizations and individuals. Rachel will send out a link with the winners of those awards.

There was an updated fiscal forecast for state government, slightly positive in the current biennium and negative in the years beyond. Another forecast will be provided in February. John highlighted the federal funding elements being worked on. Stated they are meeting and consulting with Tribes. Tribal-State Relations Training is available to board members if they are interested.

John thanked Kelly Kirkpatrick for her service on the board.

John reviewed the day of packet that included a technical update in the CWF board order and Tribal update.

**Audit and Oversight Committee** – Joe Collins reported they have not met. They are planning a meeting in January and will be talking about Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP).

**Dispute Resolution and Compliance Report** – Rich Sve reported they have not met. Travis Germundson reported there are no new appeals and one appeal pending for a restoration order for a property in Beltrami County. Stated they will be having three appeals coming in the next month. Travis provided a buffer compliance status update. Stated end of year reporting is due this January and compliance numbers will be incorporated into the BuffCAT Tracking Tool. Stated the Buffer APO Plan update is on the agenda for today.

Lori Cox stated when looking at the buffer compliance updates, when you see they're stagnant, she asked if there are timeframes attributed to some of those noncompliance orders. Travis stated there are not hard and fast timelines, stated it's up to the County Attorney to prioritize.

**Grants Program & Policy Committee** – Marcey Westrick reported a recommendation was made for the Clean Water Fund Competitive Grants, which is on the agenda for today. There were some informational items presented on Soil Health and Water Quality Storage Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The next meeting is in January.

**RIM Reserve Committee** – Jayne Hager Dee reported they have not met.

**Water Management & Strategic Planning Committee** – Joe Collins reported they have not met.

**Wetland Conservation Committee** – Jill Crafton reported they met November 26<sup>th</sup> and are going through the rules, they will have another meeting in January.

**Buffers, Soils & Drainage Committee** – LeRoy Ose reported they met, and Tom Gile will provide more details. Tom Gile reported there is an item on the agenda for today. Stated they will be making revisions to the Buffer Procedure #7, which is a procedure established for failure to implement.

**Drainage Work Group (DWG)** – Neil Peterson reported they have met twice since our last meeting and will be meeting again in January. They are working through some items to change the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual. Tom Gile stated he is optimistic there will be a recommendation to move forward with a repeal of 103E.067, which is the drainage law related buffer strip reporting requirements. After the next committee meeting, they will be providing a recommendation to the board for adoption and maintenance of the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual.

## **AGENCY REPORTS**

**Minnesota Department of Agriculture** – Jeff Berg reported he attended the SWCD and WD conferences. Minnesota has a draft Minnesota Aquaculture Plan that is out for public comment and will be presented to the legislature this session. Stated they have resiliency grants available to help livestock farmers and specialty crop farmers with bad weather events. Green fertilizer grants are also open. The soil health equipment grant applicants have been selected. Commissioner Petersen was in southeast Minnesota earlier this week talking about the nitrate EPA petition.

Lori Cox asked if the Minnesota Department of Health was involved in the Green Fertilizer Program and the grant. Jeff stated they were not involved, and they worked with the University of Minnesota Morris.

**Minnesota Department of Health** – Steve Robertson reported that on Monday partners gathered to celebrate the past half century of drinking water protection as the Safe Drinking Water Act was signed into law 50 years ago. Stated the Clean Water Council will be bringing forward policy statements to the legislature. There are two principal ones, and one entitled the Advanced Drinking Water Protection Policy. The policies acknowledge that private wells provide drinking water for a significant fraction of the state's population, and they face challenges of quality and quantity and need more support.

John Jaschke stated one of the private well considerations is the abandonment of private wells and the potential harm to groundwater. Steve stated that filling of old abandoned wells is currently required under the Minnesota Well Code. Sometimes they can get lost or forgotten and it is a priority of a variety of other programs to try and address those.



**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources** – Sarah Strommen reported they are highlighting some of their work from the last year and a list is available on their website. Stated with the aquatic habitat projects across the state they restored 26,000 acres of lake habitat, more than 3,800 feet of shoreline along lakes, rivers, and streams, 175 wetlands and wildlife management areas, they also reconnected 120 miles of stream habitat throughout the state. Stated they are in the 10-year cycle when they update conservation status rankings for native plants and animals in preparation for the update of the state Wildlife Action Plan. In that work this past year, their team along with others discovered 15 plant and animal species not previously known to occur in Minnesota. Stated they completed the comprehensive planning and decisions about where the Get Out More funding will be allocated.

**Minnesota Extension** – Joel Larson reported the Minnesota Climate Adaption Partnership has released a series of regional climate studies for 9 areas across the state, information is available online. They are in the process of awarding funds for urban stormwater research work. This is part of a series of funding provided by the Clean Water Funds. Stated the University of Minnesota Morris is the leader in green fertilizer work. They are working on developing community engagement efforts for areas that may be suitable for production of green fertilizer and are looking at potential impacts and benefits of that production.

Stated the Minnesota Sea Grant based in Duluth, but also in the Twin Cities campus, have been doing work the past several years on aquaculture production and specifically on yellow perch production.

Jill Crafton asked if the perch are domesticated. Joel stated its small scale, and they maintain closed systems to prevent any potential water quality impacts from inadvertent releases.

**Minnesota Pollution Control Agency** – Glenn Skuta reported the feedlot general permits were on public notice this fall. They received almost 200 comments and intend to issue the permits in January. Stated MPCA and MASWD awarded the annual Community Conservation Award to Robyn Dwight of Keep it Clean. Stated the recommendations for the Clean Water Fund will be presented to the legislature.

## **ADVISORY COMMENTS**

**Association of Minnesota Counties** – Brian Martinson reported they had their annual conference last week. Had two conservation awards this year, one to Goodhue County and one to Kandiyohi County. AMC has been involved in workgroups organized by BWSR staff including a group on Local Road Wetland Replacement funding. They explored some new proposals on how to help fund that program. They have been engaged in the wetland conservation act rule making discussions. They have prioritized continued efforts on water storage and flood mitigation efforts. Stated they received a slight increase in funds for the Natural Resources Block Grant that they're hoping they can maintain what was gained in the last biennium.

**Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees** – No report was provided.

**Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts** – Sheila Vanney reported their annual convention took place and had record attendance. Their Legislative committee met this week to start drafting a platform for the 2025 session, Soil and Water Conservation District Aid is going to be one of their priorities.

**Minnesota Association of Townships** – Eunice Biel reported they had their annual conference in St. Cloud. Township Day at the Capitol will be on Monday, January 27<sup>th</sup> where all Township officers are invited to join.

**Minnesota Watersheds** – Jan Voit reported they had their annual conference and had record attendance. Appreciate all the BWSR staff that helped. They also had their annual business meeting and have set their legislative priorities for 2025. Their legislative briefing will be held on February 19<sup>th</sup>.

Jill Crafton stated she appreciated all the state agencies that attended the annual conference.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service** – No report was provided. John Jaschke stated he met with Troy Daniell and talked about the federal agreements, the Technical Training and Certification Program, and about upcoming national meetings.

Chair Holman stated the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) annual conference is in Salt Lake City, Utah in February.

#### **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Grants Program and Policy Committee**

**CWF FY 25 competitive grant application recommendations** – Marcey Westrick presented CWF FY 25 competitive grant application recommendations.

On June 26, 2024 the Board adopted Board Order #24-33 which authorized staff to conduct a request for proposals from eligible local governments for Clean Water Fund projects in the following program categories: Projects and Practices, Drinking Water, and Accelerated Implementation. Applications for the FY2025 Clean Water Fund Competitive Grants were accepted from June 28 through August 22, 2024. Local governments submitted 66 applications requesting \$20,682,760 in Clean Water Funds. BWSR staff conducted multiple processes to review and score applications and involved staff from other agencies to develop the proposed recommendations for grant awards per the attached board order.

Lori Cox asked if projects would get postponed if there were project changes. Marcey stated she doesn't anticipate that but couldn't say for certain and would need to follow-up. Stated these grant funds are for three years with a possible extension beyond that. They anticipate that the projects that are presented are ready to go.

Glenn Skuta asked about the dollar amounts being allocated not matching. Marcey stated that estimates are used for the RFP.

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24-56

Moved by LeRoy Ose, seconded by Joe Collins, to approve the CWF FY 25 competitive grant application recommendations. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

Chair Holman called a recess at 10:35 AM and called the meeting back to order at 10:46 AM.

##### **Administrative Advisory Committee**

**Local Water Plan Extension and Amendment Policy – Rescindment** – Michelle Jordan presented Local Water Plan Extension and Amendment Policy – Rescindment.

The Board previously adopted a Local Water Plan Extension and Amendment Policy on December 18, 2019 (Board Order #19-69) to provide administrative flexibility for partners to transition to the One

Watershed, One Plan program and allow for effective participation and use of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS).

The Local Water Plan Extension and Amendment Policy has been found to be unnecessary due to prior Legislative Session revisions, specifically 2024, to Minnesota Statutes Chapters 103B, 103C, and 103D and the agency has authority for plan extension approvals through Minnesota Statutes §103B.3367 and authority for plan amendment approvals through the applicable Minnesota Statute Chapters 103B, 103C, 103D and Board Orders.

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24-57 Moved by Joe Collins, seconded by Ted Winter, to approve the Local Water Plan Extension and Amendment Policy – Rescindment. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**Local Water Plan Status and Grant Eligibility Policy – Rescindment** – Brett Arne presented Local Water Plan Status and Grant Eligibility Policy – Rescindment.

The Local Water Plan Status and Grant Eligibility Policy has been found to be unnecessary due to prior Legislative Session revisions, specifically most recently in 2024, to Minnesota Statutes Chapters 103B, 103C, and 103D and the agency utilizes external and internal procedures developed and implemented consistent with Board Orders, Minnesota Statutes, Legislative appropriations, and Office of Grants Management policies that address the requirements of the Local Water Plan Status and Grant Eligibility Policy. The policy is duplicative with the agency requirements completed in accordance with Minnesota Statutes §103B.102, Subd. 3 and 4 (Local Water Management; Accountability and Oversight) that provide for the evaluation, reporting, and corrective actions for each local water management entity under Minnesota Statutes Chapters 103B, 103C, 103D, or 103G and chapter 114D.

Ted Winter asked how this impacts metro areas, asked if they have their own water plans. John Jaschke stated metro areas have plans and could participate via 1W1P but most of them won't.

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24-58 Moved by Joe Collins, seconded by Jayne Hager Dee, to approve the Local Water Plan Status and Grant Eligibility Policy – Rescindment. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**Board Order Delegating Certain Authorities to the Executive Director** – Craig Engwall presented Board Order Delegating Certain Authorities to the Executive Director.

Previously, the Board has delegated various authorities to the Executive Director in numerous Board Orders, Resolutions and Policies spread out over many years. The variety of these delegations in a range of formats may create difficulty in tracking delegated authorities, causing confusion for interested parties and reducing overall agency efficiency. It is in the interest of the Board, staff, Local Governmental Units (LGUs), partners and the public for the Board to consolidate and clarify the authorities delegated to the Executive Director. The Board's Senior Management Team reviewed this Board Order on October 1, 2024, and October 22, 2024, and recommended approval of this item. The Board's Administrative Advisory Committee reviewed this Board Order on November 21, 2024, and also recommended approval of this item to the Board.

Lori Cox asked where the orders are being consolidated to. Craig stated it will be housed with our other orders. John stated this is for record keeping having them all in one order. Lori asked if some of these are day to day decisions and not what always comes to the board. John stated they are for things that are administrative in nature or have been delegated by the board. Lori asked if anything would need to

be discussed, added, or changed in the bylaws with this. John stated we wouldn't need to look at the bylaws for this item.

Jill Crafton agrees this will help streamline decisions.

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24-59 Moved by Joe Collins, seconded by Ron Staples, to approve the Board Order Delegating Certain Authorities to the Executive Director. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

**Buffers, Soils, and Drainage Committee**

**Buffer Administrative Penalty Order (APO) Plan update** – LeRoy Ose and Tom Gile Buffer Administrative Penalty Order (APO) Plan update.

In 2024, the Legislature made changes to Minnesota Statutes § 103B.101, subd. 12, and 12a, on the authority to issue penalty orders. The changes increased the monetary penalties from up to \$500 to \$10,000 for noncompliance. The amendment to statute also clarifies that all or part of the penalty may be forgiven. The Administrative Penalty Order (APO) Plan for Buffer Law implementation, previously approved via Board Resolution No. 17-60, is amended to provide revised procedures for issuance of APOs for counties, watershed districts, and BWSR under the Buffer Law. The penalty range in the plan was adjusted to account for the increase in monetary penalties along with other minor wording changes.

The Board has the statutory authority to amend the Buffer APO plan and publish in the State Register. This will require counties and watershed districts that elected jurisdiction to amend their ordinances and rules to be consistent. The Buffers, Soils & Drainage Committee met on October 22, 2024 and recommend to the full Board that the APO Plan as amended be approved per the attached APO Plan and Board Order.

Lori Cox asked about the date and if we adopt today, can staff publish to the State Register and then its effective 30 days after. Tom stated that is correct and depends on the timing of when we're able to get it in the State Register for that announcement. Lori asked if they get posted in a timely manner. Tom stated they work as swiftly as possible.

Ron Staples asked if there was a timeline for the counties to change their ordinance to adopt this. Tom stated they'll be working with AMC and MN Watersheds to discuss a reasonable timeline.

Joe Collins asked about the counties in the Watershed District choosing the administrative enforcement. Tom stated the buffer law is permissive as to the mechanism for enforcement by counties or watershed districts.

Ron Staples asked if the APO can be forgiven by the LGU. Tom stated the APO is forgivable at the discretion of the enforcement entity.

Jeff Berg asked what's been done and will be done to public notice the increase in fines and the forgiveness part at a landowner level. Tom stated it will be noticed in the State Register, they will work with AMC and Watershed District staff, and will have roll out of the administrative penalty order posted on the agency website.

Ron Staples asked if the penalty is per parcel. Tom stated that is correct.

Lori Cox asked if those that are currently in noncompliance would be put into a new or revised order. Tom stated the existing order associated with the parcel would remain in effect.

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24-60 Moved by Ted Winter, seconded by Joe Collins, to approve the Buffer Administrative Penalty Order (APO) Plan update. ***Motion passed on a roll call vote.***

#### **UPCOMING MEETINGS**

- Northern Region Committee is scheduled on January 6th at 9:30 a.m. in Bemidji and by MS Teams.
- Grants Program and Policy Committee is scheduled for January 13th in St. Paul and by MS Teams.
- BWSR Board meeting is scheduled for January 22nd at 9:00 a.m. in St. Paul and by MS Teams.

Chair Holman adjourned the meeting at 11:31 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Holman  
Chair

**BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM**

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** Dispute Resolution/Compliance Report

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**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**  Committee Recommendation  New Business  Old Business

**Item Type:**  Decision  Discussion  Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** Wetland Conservation Act Appeals/Buffer Compliance

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**Section/Region:** Resource Conservation/Central

**Contact:** Travis Germundson

**Prepared by:** Travis Germundson

**Reviewed by:** \_\_\_\_\_ Committee(s)  
Rich Sve DRC Chair and Travis Germundson

**Presented by:** Germundson

**Time requested:** 5 minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**  Resolution  Order  Map  Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- None  General Fund Budget
- Amended Policy Requested  Capital Budget
- New Policy Requested  Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget
- Other:  Clean Water Fund Budget

**ACTION REQUESTED**

None

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

See attached report.

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

The report provides a monthly update on the number of appeals filed with the Board of Water and Soil Resources and summary on buffer compliance/enforcement actions statewide.

# Dispute Resolution and Compliance Report

January 3, 2025

By: Travis Germundson

There has been **one** new appeal filed since the last report and there are **two** appeals pending.

Format note: New appeals that have been filed since last report to the Board.  
~~Appeals that have been decided since last report to the Board.~~

File 24-9 (12-20-24) This is an appeal of a WCA notice of decision in Morrison County. The appeal regards the approval of an exemption and no-loss decision for an access road associated with a township cartway. Morrison SWCD Board of Supervisors affirmed a decision made by staff under a local appeal and now that decision is being appealed. Note this involves the same property and wetland area associated with previous appeals (Files 23-8 and 23-15) of a wetland boundary and type decision. *No decision has been made on the appeal.*

File 24-8 (9-13-24). This is an appeal of a WCA Restoration Order for a property located in Beltrami County. The appeal regards the placement of fill material in wetland to create berms. The petition claims that drainage was in place prior to 1991 and the area is considered an artificial wetland. *The appeal was placed in abeyance and the Restoration Order stayed to allow time for completion of a wetland assessment and plan to comply with EPA's requirements of restoration and conditions of the WCA Restoration Order.*

Summary Table for Appeals

Type of Decision	Total for Calendar Year 2023	Total for Calendar Year 2024
Order in favor of appellant		
Order not in favor of appellant	9	5
Order Modified	1	1
Order Remanded	2	1
Order Place Appeal in Abeyance	1	1
Negotiated Settlement	1	
Withdrawn/Dismissed	3	

Buffer Compliance Status Update: BWSR has received Notifications of Noncompliance (NONs) on 64 parcels from the 12 counties BWSR is responsible for enforcement. Currently there are six Corrective Action Notices (CANs) and two Administrative Penalty Orders (APO) issued by BWSR that are still active. Of the actions being tracked over 55 of those have been resolved.

Statewide 37 counties are fully compliant, and 50 counties have enforcement cases in progress. Of those counties (with enforcement cases in progress) there are currently 329 CANs and 57 APOs actively in place. Of the actions being tracked over 2,869 of those have been resolved.

*\*Disclaimer: These numbers are generated monthly from BWSR's Access database. The information is obtained through notifications from LGUs on actions taken to bring about compliance and may not reflect the status of compliance numbers.*

## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Grants Program and Policy Committee***

1. Water Quality and Storage Program FY26 Criteria – Rita Weaver – ***DECISION ITEM***
2. FY 25 Soil Health Practices Grants authorization – Tom Gile and Jared House – ***DECISION ITEM***



## BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** Water Quality and Storage Program FY26 Criteria

---

**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**  Committee Recommendation     New Business     Old Business

**Item Type:**  Decision     Discussion     Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** Water Quality and Storage; competitive grants, RFP, general fund

**Section/Region:** Engineering

**Contact:** Rita Weaver

**Prepared by:** Rita Weaver

**Reviewed by:** Grants Program and Policy Committee(s)

**Presented by:** Rita Weaver

**Time requested:** 25 minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**     Resolution     Order     Map     Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General Fund Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amended Policy Requested | <input type="checkbox"/> Capital Budget                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Policy Requested     | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Water Fund Budget        |

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Request that the board adopt the scoring and ranking criteria for the FY26 Water Quality and Storage Program, and authorize staff to issue the FY26 request for proposal, score and rank the responses to bring back to the board.

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

This will be the fourth request for proposal under the Water Quality and Storage Program since 2021. While we received significant federal funding to support this program moving forward, we are not able to use the federal funding until the contracts are completed with the NRCS (likely 9-12 months). We would like to utilize some of the remaining state funds in the meantime to keep up the momentum of the program.

**BOARD ORDER****Fiscal Year 2026 Water Quality and Storage Program****PURPOSE**

Authorize a FY26 Water Quality and Storage Program.

**RECITALS /FINDINGS OF FACT**

1. Minn. Stat. 103F.05 provides the statutory authority for the Water Quality and Storage Program. The purpose of the Program is to control water volume and rates to protect infrastructure, improve water quality and related public benefits, and to mitigate climate change impacts. Statute establishes that the priority areas for the program are the Minnesota River basin and the lower Mississippi River basin in Minnesota.
2. Laws of Minnesota 2023, Regular Session, Chapter 60, Article 1, Sec. 4(p), appropriated \$17 million in Fiscal Years 24-25 to a water quality and storage program.
3. The Request for Proposals and frequently asked questions documents have been prepared for the fiscal year 2026 Water Quality and Storage Program application period.
4. The Grants Program and Policy Committee, at their January 13, 2025 meeting, reviewed the proposed Water Quality and Storage Program RFP and associated documents and recommend approval to the board.

**ORDER**

The Board hereby:

- A. Adopts the attached scoring and ranking criteria.
- B. Authorizes staff to issue the FY26 Request for Proposal, in the amount of \$3 Million, and score and rank the responses for future consideration by the board.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, January 22, 2025.

**MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Water Quality and Storage Program – Modeling and Conceptual Design Grants

Scoring and Ranking Criteria	Maximum Points Possible
<p><u>Activity Eligibility:</u> The proposed grant-funded activities are eligible under this RFP.</p>	YES
<p>1. <u>Project Description:</u> Applicant has clearly described the area of interest and the flooding concerns, water quality issues, or climate change vulnerabilities at this site. Applicant has provided a watershed extent that will be modeled and the modeling software and methodology that will be used for this effort.</p> <p>Additional points will be awarded if more than one issue will be considered with the modeling effort and how the issue(s) change during different flood events (i.e. 10-year vs. 50-year).</p>	20
<p>2. <u>Priority Location:</u> Projects located in the priority areas of the Minnesota River Basin and the Lower Mississippi River Basin in Minnesota (as stated in MN Statute 103F.05 Subd. 2 (b)) will be awarded the maximum points in this category. Projects outside of this priority area will receive zero points in this category.</p>	10
<p>3. <u>Prioritization:</u> The area to be modeled is referenced within a watershed management plan locally adopted and approved by the state or tribal government (include plan title, section and page number). Applicant describes how a comprehensive approach is being taken by the LGUs and other practices that are being installed to support the plan's efforts.</p>	5
<p>4. <u>Measurable Outcomes:</u> Applicant has explained the intended deliverables of this project. Examples of this include: which storm events will be modeled, how results will be quantified upon completion of the modeling, and/or how sites will be selected for conceptual and final design. Applicant has shown that this project will result in a feasibility study that can be used for a final design and construction application.</p>	25
<p>5. <u>Project Readiness:</u> Applicant has described steps and actions taken to ensure that this effort will move into a final design and construction phase, such as partner coordination, coordination with landowners, and preliminary discussions with permitting authorities, including the DNR Area Hydrologist and the Minnesota Department of Health if drinking water or groundwater is a concern in the area of the proposed work. Discuss if an alternative path(s) forward will be pursued for this area if this grant is not received.</p>	30
<p>6. <u>Cost Effectiveness:</u> The application identifies a cost-effective solution to evaluate the issue at the area of concern. Include a consideration of other modeling efforts of this system and why this additional effort is needed.</p>	10
<p>7. For projects that propose to use or modify a RIM easement: This question is N/A for modeling and conceptual design grant applicants. Applicant can enter N/A.</p>	N/A
<p><b>Total Points Available</b></p>	<p><b>100</b></p>

# Water Quality and Storage Program – Final Design and Construction Grants

Scoring and Ranking Criteria	Maximum Points Possible
<p><u>Activity Eligibility:</u> The proposed grant-funded activities are eligible under this RFP.</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>1. <u>Project Description:</u> Applicant has clearly described the area of interest and the flooding concerns, water quality issues, or climate change vulnerabilities at this site. Additional points will be awarded if more than one issue is addressed with this project and if the applicant can describe how the issue has changed over time (i.e. increase in water quality concerns) OR how the issue varies under different flood events (i.e. 10-year vs. 50-year).</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>2. <u>Priority Location:</u> Projects located in the priority areas of the Minnesota River Basin and the Lower Mississippi River Basin in Minnesota (as stated in MN Statute 103F.05 Subd. 2 (b)) will be awarded the maximum points in this category. Projects outside of this priority area will receive zero points in this category.</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>3. <u>Prioritization:</u> The project or practice type (i.e. storage) is referenced within a watershed management plan locally adopted and approved by the state or tribal government (include plan title, section and page number). Applicant describes how a comprehensive approach is being taken to water management and the placement of the practice will support that management.</p> <p>Applicant includes other measures or actions are being taken in the watershed to reduce peak flooding or improve water quality, such as soil health practices or other structural practices and a variety of funding sources is being used to implement these practices.</p> <p>Include any consideration given to how the proposed project may change the timing of peak runoff from the area of interest and if that will positively or negatively impact areas downstream.</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>4. <u>Measurable Outcomes:</u> Applicant provides calculated results for peak flow reduction, water quality improvements, or measurable climate impact improvements and the methodology used for these calculations. Applicant must provide the total storage volume provided by the projects and/or practices.</p> <p>Applicant should consider the following questions when deciding what outcomes to report: What is the reduction in peak flow during different storm events? What is the estimated annual reduction in pollutant(s) being delivered to the water resource(s) of concern by this project? If there have been specific pollutant reduction goals set for the pollutant(s) and resource(s) of concern, please indicate the goals and the process used to set them.</p>	<p>20</p>

<p>5. <u>Project Readiness</u>: Describe steps and actions have been taken to ensure that project implementation can begin soon after grant award, such as partner coordination, preliminary identification of potential conservation practice/activity locations, coordination with landowners, and preliminary discussions with permitting authorities, including the DNR Area Hydrologist and Minnesota Department of Health regarding effects on drinking water. Provide information on if the proposed project in a Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA), Historical Source Water Assessment Area, or a groundwater or surface water Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA). If so, describe any potential impacts of the project on ground water aquifers or surface water drinking water resources.</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>6. <u>Cost Effectiveness</u>: The application identifies a cost-effective solution to address the issue at the area of concern. Applicant should consider factors such as, but not limited to, BMP effectiveness, timing, site feasibility, practicality, property owner willingness, and public acceptance. The cost per acre-foot of storage is reasonable and the cost for the resulting flow reduction is reasonable.</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>7. For projects that propose to use or modify a RIM easement: Applicant should describe the modifications proposed to the RIM easement, and the current status of their discussions with BWSR staff. Note that if the project will affect a RIM easement and BWSR staff were not notified by the date stated in Application Guidelines, Section C, the project is ineligible.</p>	<p>Eligible</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Total Points Available</b></p>	<p><b>100</b></p>

## BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** FY 25 Soil Health Practices Grants Authorization

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**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**  Committee Recommendation     New Business     Old Business

**Item Type:**  Decision     Discussion     Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** RCPP, Clean Water Fund, Soil Health, Non-Competitive, FY 2025

**Section/Region:** Resource Conservation

**Contact:** Jared House

**Prepared by:** Jared House

**Reviewed by:** Grants Program & Policy Committee(s)

**Presented by:** Tom Gile and Jared House

**Time requested:** 15 minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**     Resolution     Order     Map     Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None                     | <input type="checkbox"/> General Fund Budget                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amended Policy Requested | <input type="checkbox"/> Capital Budget                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Policy Requested     | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clean Water Fund Budget |

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Authorize the establishment of the Soil Health Practices Grants and shifting of unencumbered funds from 2021 CWF Soil Health to 2021 Accelerated Implementation.

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

On November 1, 2023, the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) was awarded a \$25 million allocation from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to support the implementation of soil health practices. On December 17, 2024, BWSR staff, in collaboration with NRCS, finalized and approved the negotiated agreements. BWSR staff, in coordination with NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District personnel, developed comprehensive grant guidelines and requirements for this initiative.

Federal agreements mandate that BWSR perform quality assurance assessments on practices funded through the RCPP. The Laws of Minnesota 2021 First Special Session, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 6(p) appropriated \$4,000,000 for grants to farmers aimed at enhancing the adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices, with approximately \$197,052 currently unallocated. Furthermore, Section 6(t) authorizes the Board to reallocate funds within this section in order to leverage federal or non-state funds. The reallocation of unobligated funds from the 2021 Clean Water Fund (CWF) Soil Health allocation to the 2021 Accelerated Implementation fund will facilitate the fulfillment of technical oversight responsibilities outlined in RCPP agreement #3053.

## BOARD ORDER

### Soil Health Practices Program: RCPP Soil Health Practices Grants

#### PURPOSE

Authorizes staff to issue an RFI for participation by SWCDs in the RCPP Soil Health Practices Grants and to authorize staff to distribute funds as requested by participating Districts.

#### FINDINGS OF FACT / RECITALS

1. The Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) received funding and authorization for soil health grants from the following appropriations and agreements:
  - A. The Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Special Session, Chapter 1, Article 2, Sec. 6(p): *\$2,000,000 the first year and \$2,000,000 the second year for grants to farmers who own or rent land to enhance adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices in areas where there are direct benefits to public water supplies.*
  - B. The Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Special Session, Chapter 1, Article 2, Sec. 6 (c) *\$4,841,000 the first year and \$4,841,000 the second year are for accelerated implementation, local resource protection, enhancement grants, statewide analytical targeting or technology tools that fill an identified gap, program enhancements for technical assistance, citizen and community outreach, compliance, and training and certification.*
  - C. Laws of Minnesota 2023, Regular Session, Chapter 40, Article 2, Section 6, paragraph (o): *\$6,039,000 the first year and \$6,038,000 the second year are for financial and technical assistance to enhance adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices to achieve water quality or drinking water benefits. The board may use grants to local governments and agreements with the United States Department of Agriculture, AgCentric at Minnesota State Center for Excellence, and other practitioners and partners to accomplish this work.*
  - D. *BWSR was awarded \$25,000,000 in NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program funding on November 1, 2023 and has executed the appropriate agreements under contract # RCPP Project ID: 3053 for implementation of soil health practices in counties with a minimum of 30% agricultural land via grants and agreements with participating SWCDs.*
2. "Soil Health" is defined in MN Statute Section 103C.101, Subd. 10a. "Soil Health" means the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living system that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Indicators of soil health include water infiltration capacity; organic matter content; water holding capacity; biological capacity to break down plant residue and other substances and to maintain soil aggregation; nutrient sequestration and cycling capacity; carbon sequestration; and soil resistance.
3. MN Statute Section 103F.06 establishes the Soil Health Practices Program to accomplish soil health activities and to achieve water quality, soil productivity, climate change resiliency, or carbon sequestration benefits.
4. The Board has authorities under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B to award grants and contracts to accomplish water and related land resources management.
5. Soil Health Staffing and Capacity Grants were awarded by staff, as provided by Board Order #23-60, to 40 SWCDs to increase capacity to expand local capacity for Soil Health.



6. Soil Health Delivery Grants were awarded by staff, as provided by Board Order #23-60, to 89 SWCDs to deliver Soil Health programming and support locally.
7. The Laws of Minnesota 2021 First Special Session, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 6 (p) appropriated \$4,000,000 for grants to farmers to enhance adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices, of which approximately \$197,052 is currently unallocated; and (t) the board may shift grant, cost-share, or easement funds in this section and may adjust the technical and administrative assistance portion of the funds to leverage federal or other nonstate funds or to address oversight responsibilities or high-priority needs identified in local water management plans.
8. The Grants Program and Policy Committee, at their January 13, 2025, meeting, reviewed the proposed RCPP Implementation Grants and proposed funding shift and recommended approval.

## **ORDER**

The Board hereby:

### **I. RCPP Soil Health Practice Grants**

- A. Authorizes establishment of a RCPP Soil Health Practices Grants consistent with MN Statutes Section 103F.06 and RCPP Agreement #3053 including up to \$25,000,000 of RCPP agreement funding (FOF 1D) and \$5,000,000 from 2023 CWF Soil Health appropriation (FOF 1C).
- B. Authorizes staff to use a Request For Interest (RFI) to determine participation in RCPP Soil Health Practices Grants among the 70 eligible SWCDs.
- C. Authorizes staff to award Initial RCPP Soil Health Practices Grants in the amount of \$180,000 per SWCD based on responses to the RFI.
- D. Authorizes staff to establish a process for the award of subsequent RCPP Soil Health Practices Grants based on SWCD utilization and request until Federal funds under RCPP Agreement #3053 have been allocated.

### **II. Soil Health Technical Oversight funding shift**

- A. Authorizes staff to shift unobligated funds from 2021 CWF Soil Health to 2021 Accelerated Implementation to address technical oversight responsibilities of RCPP agreement #3053.

### **III. Program Reporting**

- A. Directs staff to report to the Board on the status of Soil Health Staffing and Delivery and RCPP Soil Health Practice Grants awarded.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, this January 22, 2025.

**MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# FY 2025 - Soil Health Practices Grant

## Funding Allocation

Funding Overview	Federal RCPP	CWF
Available Funds	\$ 25,000,000.00	\$ 5,000,000.00
Base Allocations	\$ 10,500,000.00	\$ 2,100,000.00
Additional Grants	\$ 14,500,000.00	\$ 2,900,000.00

Additional Grants	
Available Grants	145
Federal RCPP	\$ 100,000.00
CWF	\$ 20,000.00
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>\$ 120,000.00</b>

Base Allocation					
SWCD	Federal RCPP	CWF	SWCD	Federal RCPP	CWF
Becker	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Murray	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Benton	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Nicollet	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Big Stone	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Nobles	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Blue Earth	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Norman	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Brown	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Olmsted	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Carver	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Pennington	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Chippewa	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Pipestone	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Chisago	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Pope	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Clay	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Red Lake	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Cottonwood	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Redwood	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Dakota	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Renville	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Dodge	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Rice	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Douglas	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Rock	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
East Otter Tail	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Root River	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
East Polk	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Roseau	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Faribault	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Scott	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Fillmore	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Sherburne	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Freeborn	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Sibley	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Goodhue	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Stearns	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Grant	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Steele	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Isanti	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Stevens	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Jackson	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Swift	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Kandiyohi	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Todd	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Kittson	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Traverse	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Lac Qui Parle	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Wabasha	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Le Sueur	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Wadena	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Lincoln	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Waseca	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Lyon	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Washington	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Mahnomen	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Watonwan	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Marshall	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	West Otter Tail	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Martin	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	West Polk	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
McLeod	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Wilkin	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Meeker	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Winona	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Morrison	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Wright	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Mower	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	Yellow Medicine	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 30,000.00



**DRAFT**

**FY 2025**

**SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES GRANT  
REQUEST FOR INTEREST (RFI)**

**Funding Requests due by 4:30 pm, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

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## PROGRAM PURPOSE AND TIMELINE

The Soil Health Practices Grant is enabled via Minnesota Statutes (M.S.) §103F.06 to provide a financial and technical support program to produce soil health practices that achieve water quality, soil productivity, climate change resiliency, or carbon sequestration benefits. This Soil Health Practice Grants are also enabled through the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (Partnership Agreement #3053). The intent of this grant opportunity is to enhance the adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices.

The purpose of this funding request is to:

- 1) Provide expectations for soil health activities implemented through the Soil Health Practices Grant, and
- 2) Identify those Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) which intend to participate in the program.

Funding requests must be received by **4:30pm on February 28, 2025**. Late requests will not be considered.

Grant Cycle	Grant Cycle Dates
Request for Interest - Open Period	February 17 <sup>th</sup> – 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2025.
Anticipated grant agreements sent to grantees	March 2025
Work plan submittal deadline	May 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2025
Grant execution deadline	May 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2025
Grant agreement end date	December 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2028

## ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS

Minnesota Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) located in counties identified in the Regional Conservation Partnership Program proposal (**Attachment A**).

## FUNDING ALLOCATION AND MATCH

This is a non-competitive grant opportunity that offers funding for soil health conservation projects. The total funding appropriation for this program is \$30,000,000. There are two sources of funding:

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Funds:** (\$25,000,000) This funding source can only be used for Financial Assistance with conservation projects.

**Clean Water Funds:** (\$5,000,000) These funds can be used for staff Technical Assistance/Engineering or Financial Assistance with conservation projects.

No match is required by the grantee.

The federal appropriation language governing the use of these funds includes Subtitle I of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill; P.L 115-334), The Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 USC 714 et seq.), and 7 CFR Part 1464.

The state appropriation language governing the use of these funds is in Laws of Minnesota 2023, Regular Session, Chapter 40, Article 2, Section 6(o).

The Clean Water Fund was established in Minnesota Statute 114D.50 to implement part of Article XI, Section 15, of the Minnesota Constitution, with the purpose of protecting, enhancing, and restoring water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams in addition to protecting ground water and drinking water sources from degradation. These funds must supplement traditional sources of funding and may not be used as to substitute for other funds, existing activities, or programs.

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## FUNDING DISTRIBUTION

**Base Grant:** Each eligible and participating grantee will receive an initial base grant of \$180,000, consisting of \$150,000 for Financial Assistance (Federal RCPP Funds) and \$30,000 for Technical Assistance/Engineering or Financial Assistance (Clean Water Funds).

**Requesting Additional Grants:** Grantees are eligible to request additional grants of \$120,000 on a monthly basis. Additional grants will be processed by BWSR on the last workday of every month. Additional grants are available to those that have obligated (in-contract) 80% of prior federal RCPP funds and is compliant with program guidelines. The additional grants will consist of \$100,000 for Financial Assistance (Federal RCPP Funds) and \$20,000 for Technical Assistance/Engineering or Financial Assistance (Clean Water Funds). Requests are limited to one grant per grantee per month. Additional grant requests submitted from April-June may not be processed until after July 1<sup>st</sup>, in accordance with BWSR financial procedures around the new state fiscal year. There is no limit to the number of additional grants a grantee can receive. These additional grant periods will continue until all program funds have been disbursed.

**Payment Schedule:** Each executed grant will be distributed in one advanced payment (100%) to the grantee.

## ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Land management activities must be offered to eligible land occupiers on eligible lands for the implementation of soil health management systems and practices. All practices must be planned, designed, and implemented to Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) standards.

Participating Individuals or entities must meet compliance checks for program eligibility under 7 CFR part 12 and part 1400, subpart F; compliance activities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and Endangered Species Act (ESA) will be eligible for this program.

Additional resources for eligible activities can be found within the most up to date [NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook \(NPPH\)](#), [Minnesota NRCS eFOTG](#), and [NRCS National Resource Concern List and Planning Criteria](#).

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## LAND USES

This program is limited to the following NRCS designated land uses: Crop, Forest, Range, Pasture, Farmstead, Other Rural Land, and Associated Agricultural Land.

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## RESOURCE CONCERNS

Eligible practices must address, at minimum, one of the following resource concerns:

Resource Category	Resource Concern
Soil quality limitations	Subsidence
	Compaction
	Organic matter depletion
	Concentration of salts or other chemicals
	Soil organism habitat loss or degradation
	Aggregate instability
Field sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loss	Nutrients transported to surface water (P&N)
	Nutrients transported to groundwater (P&N)
	Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to surface waters
	Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to groundwater
	Sediment transported to surface water (Erosion sources)
Source water depletion	Surface water depletion
	Inefficient irrigation water use
	Groundwater depletion

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## PRACTICES

NRCS practice standards must be followed for the assessment, design, and certification of the following list of practices.

### Eligible Practices:

- Alley Cropping
- Conservation Cover
- Contour Buffer Strips
- Cover Crop
- Critical Area Planting
- Field Border
- Filter Strip
- Forest Farming
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Pasture and Hay Planting
- Prescribed Grazing
- Residue and Tillage Management (no till)
- Riparian Forest Buffer
- Silvopasture
- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation
- Nutrient Management

Practice standards can be found on the Minnesota eFOTG website under [Section 4 – Conservation Practice Standards & Support Documents](#)

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## STAFF EXPENSES

Staff expenses are limited to Technical Assistance and Engineering and must fully support activities on eligible land, with eligible land occupiers, for eligible project activities. **Technical Assistance and Engineering expenses must be tied to individual contracts.**

## INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Funds may only be used for activities specified in the eligible practices list. Ineligible activities include, but are not limited to, project development, administration/coordination, and equipment purchases.

## SUBMITTING FUNDING REQUESTS

### HOW TO SUBMIT A QUESTION

Questions regarding funding requests should be directed to your Board Conservationist; a map of work areas and contact information is available at [BWSR Work Area Maps](#). Questions may also be submitted by email to [Jared.House@state.mn.us](mailto:Jared.House@state.mn.us).

### HOW TO SUBMIT A FUNDING REQUEST

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## BASE GRANT

Requests should be submitted through the following link: [NEED NEW LINK](#). Only one request from each SWCD will be accepted. Responses to the funding request form will be used to generate grant agreements for program funding.

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## ADDITIONAL GRANTS

To request additional grant funds, please submit an eLINK Interim Report within your most recent Soil Health Practices Grant. Eligible requests must demonstrate, through eLINK budgeting, 80% obligation (contracts in-place) of federal RCPP funding allocations of prior Soil Health Practices Grants and adherence to program guidelines. Eligible requests will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis on the last business day of the month, until all funds are expended.

## GRANT RECIPIENT INFORMATION

### GRANT AGREEMENT

BWSR will use grant agreements for assurance of deliverables and compliance with appropriate statutes, rules, established policies, and administrative procedures. Willful or negligent disregard of relevant statutes, rules, and policies may lead to imposition of financial penalties or future sanctions on the grantee.

In the event there is a violation of the terms of the grant agreement, BWSR will enforce the grant agreement and evaluate appropriate actions, up to and including repayment of grant funds at a rate up to 100% of the grant agreement.

The grant agreement will further define grant program requirements.

The BWSR Grants Administration Manual is the primary resource for grant management information. Further guidance and requirements regarding BWSR grant administration can be found in the Grants Administration Manual (<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/grants/manual/>).



## GRANT WORK PLAN

Work plans are required for Soil Health Practice Grants and must be developed following the requirements outlined in this Request for Interest.

Work plans must be established in eLINK and approved before execution of the grant agreement. Initial work plans need only reflect technical assistance/engineering activities. This activity needs to contain a brief description of the anticipated outcomes or accomplishments, and the grant funding amounts budgeted. Additionally, district financial assistance policies and ranking/batching forms must be uploaded into eLINK prior to workplan approval.

It is required that grantees report conservation practice grant funds into eLINK as they are obligated, with a signed and approved contract in place. **A new activity must be created for each contract.** Lumping of grant activities will not provide the level of detail needed to satisfy federal reporting requirements. Workplans will be unlocked after grant execution and remain unlocked throughout the grant agreement period. The addition of each contract will provide BWSR the means to assess the level of funding obligation (contracts in-place) for additional grant requests.

## PROJECT PERIOD

The project period starts when the grant agreement is executed, meaning all required signatures have been obtained. Work that occurs before this date is not eligible for reimbursement with grant funds.

Grant contract agreement templates can be reviewed on the [Office of Grants Management Forms and FAQs website](#).

All grants and grant activities must be completed by December 31, 2028.

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Grantees may provide financial assistance to land occupiers for eligible activities up to the maximum program payment rates (Attachment B). Periodically the maximum payment rates may be reviewed upon a written grantee request. Such requests must include quantitative justifications for any requested increase to a payment rate.

If local financial assistance policies exceed program payment maximums, additional non-federal funding sources can be used to cover the cost difference.

Flat rates or percentage of installation cost contracts may be used. However, program reporting must follow the structure and/or units outlined within Attachment B (exp. cover crops can be paid under single or multiple species rates and should be based on per/acre calculations). Percentage of installation cost must not exceed the maximum payment rates.

Prepayments for contracts are not allowed. **Payments to the contracted land occupier can only occur after practices have been properly certified as complete based on NRCS standards.** Partial contract payments will be allowed to account for contracts that contain multiple practices or that span multiple years.

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## DISTRICT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

A local SWCD financial assistance policy must be referenced in the work plan and attached within eLINK. Financial Assistance Policies should describe local program information such as payment rates, contract terms, inspection schedules, and payment schedules.

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## PRACTICE BATCHING & RANKING

It is a requirement of the Soil Health Practices Grant for the grantee to complete batching periods prior to contracting with land occupiers.

Batching periods may occur as frequently as once per month.

Ranking criteria must be developed and used to review every proposed project. At a minimum the following categories must be included:

- Proposed practice addresses an eligible program resource concern.
- Historically underserved producer: Determined through a self-certification form.
- First time practice implementor: Priority to those having limited experience with the proposed practice.
- Drinking water supply management areas (DWSMA).
- Sensitive ground water susceptibility regions outside of a DWSMA.
- High priority regions (Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan or other State Approved Plan)

In addition to the minimum requirements, grantees are encouraged to add other local priorities when developing their ranking criteria. Batching and Ranking criteria will be reviewed by NRCS to ensure criteria does not contain any discriminatory items.

An example ranking form and a historically underserved producer self-certification form will be provided to those requesting to participate in this program.

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## FARM BILL PAYMENT ELIGIBILITY

To ensure that both the land occupier and land are eligible for a Farm Bill payment an eligibility review must be conducted by NRCS staff.

Upon the obligation and approval of every practice contract, grantees must submit required documentation into SharePoint to allow NRCS to conduct payment eligibility determinations. Documentation can be uploaded at any point, but reviews will only be conducted on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of every month. NRCS will provide notice of eligibility to the grantee within 10 business days from the date the review was initiated.

Prior to disbursing funds to a land occupier, but after practice certification, the grantee must obtain a Producer Farm Data Report and Subsidiary print with Business report. The grantee must confirm that the land remains under the control of the contracted land occupier and that both the land occupier and the land have maintained eligibility for Farm Bill payments.

## PROJECT AND PRACTICE ASSURANCES

BWSR requires assurances from grantees that installed conservation practices and projects meet the purposes of the grant program, will remain in place for the expected practice lifespan, and will provide the benefits for which they were designed. Practice Design and Certification documentation must be signed by individuals with appropriate levels of Job Approval Authority.

Grantees have the following responsibilities to ensure long-term public benefit of projects:

- **Technical Assistance Providers.** Ensure that identified technical assistance provider(s) have the appropriate Job Approval Authority, technical expertise, skills, and training to their assigned role(s). Technical Approval Authority is not an approved credential for this grant.
- **Standards.** Ensure the use of appropriate NRCS practice standards for the identification of resource concerns, designs, and installations.
- **Certification.** Certify that the project was installed according to applicable NRCS plans, specifications, and standards.
- **Operation and Maintenance.** Ensure an appropriate NRCS operation and maintenance plan is implemented that identifies necessary activities and timing.
- **Periodic Project Inspection.** Conduct periodic project inspections to confirm the operation and maintenance plan is being followed and the project has not been altered or removed (M.S. §103C.501, Subd. 7).

NRCS will conduct quality assurance spot checks on a minimum of 5% of all **completed** practices. These spot checks will occur after a payment has been made to the contracted individual or entity.

BWSR may contract with a third party to conduct quality assurance spot checks on up to 5-10% of all **designed** practices to ensure eligible activities were planned and follow NRCS practice requirements.

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## FILE DOCUMENTATION

Completed project files must contain, but are not limited to, the following completed documents:

- Certification of Identity/Authorization to Release Information to a Third Party Form
- Producer Farm Data Report
- Subsidiary Print with Business Report
- Completed Batching & Ranking Form (If applicable, include the Historically Underserved Self-Certification Form)
- Plan Map
- Soils Map and map unit description
- Practice Design
  - Implementation Requirement (IR) Form, identifying resource concern(s)
  - Additional design requirements designated in practice standard
- CPA 52 – Environmental Evaluation, identifying resource concerns.
- CPA 6 – Conservation Notes
- CPA 48 - Cultural Resource Form (If applicable)
- Practice Contract
- Payment Voucher
- Supporting Documentation:
  - Quantities, Materials, Seed Tags, etc.
  - Applicable Invoices
  - Photos of implemented practices not required but strongly encouraged.

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## CONTRACTS

Conservation practice or financial assistance contracts between grant recipients and landowners are required when funds are used to provide financial assistance to install practices. When used, these contracts must, at a

minimum: provide financial assistance information and expectations; identify the responsibility for operation and maintenance, including maintenance or control of the contributing watershed; include a technical and financial plan for failures; allow for inspections by the grantee of the practice; be in effect for a period corresponding to the expected life of the project; and may be required to include replacement provisions and pro-rated pollution effectiveness replacement. All contracts are recommended to be reviewed by the grantee's legal counsel.

**Due to federal requirements, the following statements must be added to practice contracts:**

- “This contract is contingent on maintaining eligibility for federal farm bill payments.” This will protect the grantee and BWSR in the instance a landowners eligibility changes during the contracted period.
- “The land occupier acknowledges they have received a copy of the historically underserved producer self-certification form.”

**Contract numbers must follow a specific unique identification format:**

County Code – Grant Number (1, 2, etc.) – Contract Number

Example: 14-1-1 (Clay SWCD – Base Grant – Contract 1)

Contract lengths cannot exceed December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2028.

Additional details on contracting are in the [Implementing Contracts with Landowners](#) chapter of the BWSR Grants Administration Manual.

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## DATA CONFIDENTIALITY

Activities performed under this grant may involve access to confidential and potentially sensitive information about governmental and landowner issues. The term “confidential information” means proprietary information or data of a personal nature about an individual, or information or data submitted by or pertaining to an organization. This information must not be disclosed without the prior written consent of NRCS.

The grantee's personnel will follow the rules and procedures of disclosure set forth in the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. Section 552a, and implementing regulations and policies with respect to systems of records determined to be subject to the Privacy Act. The recipient's personnel must also comply with privacy of personal information relating to natural resources conservation programs in accordance with section 1244 of Title II of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171).

The grantee agrees to comply with NRCS guidelines and requirements regarding the disclosure of information protected under Section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (PL 110-246), 7 U.S.C. 8791.

The grantee also agrees to comply with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (Minn. Stat. Ch 13).

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## TENNESSEN WARNING NOTICE

Local governments must give individuals notice when collecting private or confidential information from them. This is referred to as a “Tennessee warning notice”. The purpose of the notice is to enable people to make informed decisions about whether to give information about themselves to the government (see Minnesota Statutes, section 13.04, subdivision 2). If Private Data is collected and disseminated as part of a BWSR Grant, BWSR will take the position that a Tennessee warning notice was provided by the LGU to all necessary individuals.

- Local Governments and grant recipients should ask the individual(s) to sign and date a Tennessee warning notice and give the individual(s) a copy as a best practice. However, notices do not need to be in writing.
- Local Governments and grant recipients should limit the private data collected or disseminated to only the data that is necessary to administer a program.
- Local Governments may also want to request assistance from their legal counsel.

## TIME AND EFFORT DOCUMENTATION

Grant recipients are required to account for the staff time charged to BWSR grants in order to track the expenditure of grant funds to ensure the use of the funds is consistent with applicable State and BWSR requirements. Accounting for staff time is important for budgeting, planning, and reporting.

Recipients of BWSR grants may use one of two options for tracking staff time charged to grants:

1. Direct time tracking.
2. Personnel activity reports (PARs) or the equivalent that constitute after-the-fact determinations of grant activities. Activity reports must be prepared and signed at least semiannually by the employee.

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## BILLING RATE

A billing rate is an hourly rate used to charge staff time to BWSR grants. It consists of the employee's base hourly rate plus the costs of benefits, leave, and facilities; and administrative costs necessary to keep a person employed and an office running.

Additional details on Time and Effort Documentation are in the [Time and Effort Documentation](#) and [Determining a Billing Rate](#) chapters of the BWSR Grants Administration Manual.

## GRANT REPORTING AND ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Grant reporting is a means to illustrate achievements and progress made towards program goals and to ensure accountability and transparency in the use of State funds. In general, reports are to contain updates on activities and expenditures that occurred since the previous report and are to be completed **by June 30 and February 1 of each year and within 30 days of the completion of a grant.**

All land occupier data will be reported via a restricted access, grantee specific, SharePoint folder at the time of NRCS farm bill payment eligibility review and at time of financial assistance payment to the producer.

BWSR will use eLINK to report on grant progress, including expenditures, practice details, and mapping of practices.

Minnesota Statute §103B.3369, Subdivision 9 allows BWSR to consider additional performance-based criteria for grant programs and the Office of Grants Management's Policy on Grant Closeout Evaluation (08-13) requires BWSR to consider a grant applicant's past performance when awarding grants. BWSR may consider withholding grant payments if the grantee is not in compliance with all Board reporting requirements.

Additional details on Grant Reporting and Administrative Requirements are in the [Grant Reporting Requirements for BWSR Grants](#) and [Closing out a BWSR Grant](#) chapters of the BWSR Grants Administration Manual.

- All grant recipients are required to report on the outcomes, activities, and accomplishments of Clean Water Fund grants. Outputs will serve as surrogates for outcomes.
- When practicable, grant recipients shall prominently display on their website the legacy logo. Grant recipients must display on their website either a link to their project from the Legislative Coordinating Commission Legacy Site (<http://legacy.leg.mn>) or a clean water project summary that includes a description of the grant activities, including expenditure of grant funds and measurable outcomes.
- When practicable, grant recipients must display the Legacy Logo on printed and other media funded with money from the Clean Water Fund. The logo and specifications can be found at <http://www.legacy.leg.mn/legacy-logo>.

DRAFT



## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Central Region Committee***

1. Mississippi River St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – Zach Guttormson –  
***DECISION ITEM***





The Plan actions generally focus on implementation of best management practices in agricultural and urban areas to address priority issues, development of studies and data collection to better target implementation actions, policy improvements where feasible and timely, and active public outreach and engagement by local partners. The total 10-year estimated cost of Plan implementation is \$102,379,500, of which 82% is budgeted for implementing practices on the ground. Technical Assistance is anticipated to utilize 12% and education/outreach and data, studies, and monitoring will utilize another 4%. The remaining funds will be spent on activities related to policy and regulation and Plan administration.

The Partnership held a 60-day review process that ended on September 6, 2025, and held a public hearing on December 16, 2024, in Becker – a central location within the watershed. The final draft of the updated Plan, all written public comments and responses, and public hearing comments and responses were submitted on December 16, 2024, to the state review agencies and the BWSR Board for the final 90-day review and approval of the Plan.

On January 6, 2025, the Central Region Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. The committee's decision was to recommend approval of the Mississippi River St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan as submitted to the full Board per the attached draft Order.

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources  
520 Lafayette Road North  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

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**In the Matter** of the review of the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Mississippi River - St. Cloud Watershed, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801.

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**ORDER  
APPROVING  
COMPREHENSIVE  
WATERSHED  
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**Whereas**, the Mississippi River - St. Cloud Partnership submitted a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) on December 16, 2024 pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801 and Board Resolution #21-08, and;

**Whereas**, the Board has completed its review of the Plan;

**Now Therefore**, the Board hereby makes the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Order:

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

- Partnership Establishment.** The Mississippi River - St. Cloud Partnership (Partnership) was established through adoption of a Memorandum of Agreement for the purposes of developing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The members of the Partnership include Benton County, Benton Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Meeker County, Meeker SWCD, Mille Lacs SWCD, Stearns County, Stearns SWCD, Sherburne County, Sherburne SWCD, Wright County and Wright SWCD.
- Authority to Plan.** Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 allows the Board to adopt resolutions, policies or orders that allow a comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapters 103B, 103C, or 103D to serve as substitutes for one another or be replaced with a comprehensive watershed management plan. Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.801, established the Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning Program; also known as the One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program. Board Decision #21-08 adopted the One Watershed, One Plan Program's *Operating Procedures (Version 2.1)* and Board Decision #19-41 adopted the One Watershed, One Plan Program's *Plan Content Requirements (Version 2.1)* policies.
- Nature of the Watershed.** The Mississippi River - St. Cloud watershed covers 1,080 square miles (691,200 acres), spanning seven counties. Most of the watershed is dominated by agricultural land use (54% by area), but also includes large areas of deciduous forest (13%) and emergent wetlands(11%) The watershed has 374 lakes and 907 stream miles, with 59.5 of those miles being Mississippi River reaches. Within the watershed, there are ample recreational opportunities and valuable habitat.

4. **Plan Development.** The Plan was developed as a single, concise, and coordinated approach to watershed management. The Plan consolidates policies, programs, and implementation strategies from existing data, studies and plans, and incorporates input from multiple planning partners and public input to provide a single plan for management of the watershed. The Plan focuses on prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation actions to protect and restore the water quality of lakes and streams, address groundwater quality and knowledge gaps, restore and preserve habitat and natural resources, and tackles surface water hydrology issues in the watershed.
5. **Plan Review.** On December 16, 2024, the Board received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses for final State review pursuant to Board Resolution #21-08. During the development of the Plan, State agency representatives attended and provided input at advisory committee meetings. The following review agency comments were received during the comment period.
  - A. Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA): “Thank you for the opportunity to review the Mississippi River-St. Cloud One Watershed One Plan (plan). The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) appreciates the opportunity to work with BWSR and local staff on the development and review of this plan. As written, we believe this plan sufficiently addresses the resource concerns present in this watershed. The MDA recommends the approval of this plan.  
Thanks again for the opportunity to participate and provide comment.”
  - B. Minnesota Department of Health (MDH): “On behalf of MDH and consistent with the 60-day letter I submitted on August 13, 2024, I am recommending approval of the Mississippi River-St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Plan. I feel the Plan is written in a manner that satisfactorily incorporates MDH’s priority concerns pertaining to groundwater and drinking water, while reflecting the priorities of residents of the watershed and the capacities of the local entities that will implement the Plan.”
  - C. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR): “The Minnesota DNR has received the final Mississippi River – St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (1W1P) and reviewed responses to comments submitted of the draft plan. The DNR is satisfied with the responses to issues raised during our review, has no additional comments, and recommends that BWSR approve the plan.  
Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this process. We look forward to working with watershed partners to help implement the plan.”
  - D. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA): “The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) has reviewed the draft Mississippi River - St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) dated December 2024. Overall, the Plan is very well written, concise, and thorough. We have no further comments as part of the official 90-day Review and Comment Period and recommend it for approval.  
The MPCA greatly appreciates the opportunity to participate and provide input throughout the Plan development process. The MPCA sincerely values the efforts that you and the watershed partners put forth in coordinating and completing this important Plan.”
  - E. Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB): Policy requires that EQB be notified of the final draft document. EQB confirmed receipt of the Plan and did not provide comments on the 90-day final draft Plan.

F. Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR): BWSR finds that the partnership has adequately addressed our comments provided during the 60-day review. During our final review, we find that the plan meets all items found within the One Watershed, One Plan Content Requirements (version 2.1). Therefore, we recommend approval of the plan as submitted.

6. **Plan Summary and Highlights.** The highlights of the Plan include:

- The Partnership sought community engagement during the early stages of the planning process including public input from two public kick-off meetings (in person and virtual), and several Citizen Advisory Committee meetings throughout the planning process. The comments were used during plan development to inform issues, goals, and actions and provided an opportunity for public input on the implementation actions.
- The advisory committee identified 27 original resource concerns, which were narrowed down to seven priority issue statements grouped into seven resource categories. The partnership identified 42 lakes as a priority for restoration or protection.
- Within those seven issue categories, the partners developed 21 measurable goals for the watershed. These goals include reducing sediment loading in the watershed by 2,200 tons/year, reducing phosphorus loading within the watershed by 10,200 pounds/year, delisting 10 waterbodies from the state's impaired waters list, reducing high stream flows by storing 5,200 acre feet of water, conducting feasibility studies and reducing internal phosphorus budgets by 60% on 5 waterbodies, sealing 77 wells, increasing permanently protected land by acquiring 23 new conservation easements, increasing landscape resiliency by implementing 47,700 acres of soil health practices, among other goals.
- The partnership undertook a Multi-Benefit Analysis (MBA) which consisted of the compilation of numerous available data layers related to each priority issue. The layers were overlapped, evaluated, and refined to reflect the areas within the watershed where maximum progress towards watershed goals would be achieved.
- The Plan goals were estimated using models (primarily HSPF and HSPF-SAM) and then further refined based on local staff professional judgement for realistic, yet optimistic, expectations for what could be accomplished over 10 years.

7. **Planning Boundary Adjustment.** The Board maintains a suggested boundary map for the One Watershed, One Plan program. The Mississippi River St. Cloud partnership proposed a boundary adjustment that divided the suggested Planning Area 11 boundary into two HUC 8 Watersheds – Mississippi River – St. Cloud and Mississippi River - Sartell. The partnership provided documentation of local concurrence, rationale, and justification for the adjusted boundary, including support from 18 of the 19 potential partners in the Area 11 suggested planning boundary. The adjusted boundary was approved by Board staff per the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures. The adjusted boundary is included as an attachment to the Board Order. Additionally, a detailed review of the boundary found that a small area of Sherburne County, approximately 175 acres, was not covered by the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed Planning boundary. For planning and implementation purposes, the Mississippi River St. Cloud Policy Committee requested that BWSR approve the addition of this area as a part of the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed. This request was approved. Maps have not been recreated to accommodate this change. Figure 0.1 on page 10 of the plan shows this area in relation to the rest of the Watershed.

8. **Central Regional Committee.** On January 6, 2025, the Central Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. Those in attendance were Joe Collins, Jill Crafton, Joel Larson, Jayne Hager Dee, Heather Johnson, Grant Wilson, Steve Robertson, Mark Zabel, and Mike Runk. The representatives from the Partnership were Dan Cibulka and Stephanie Hatzenbihler. BWSR staff in attendance were Brad Wozney, Zach Guttormson, and Marcey Westrick. Board regional staff provided its recommendation of Plan approval to the Committee. After discussion, the Committee’s decision was to present a recommendation of approval of the Plan to the full Board.
9. This Plan will be in effect for a ten-year period until January 22, 2035.

**CONCLUSIONS**

1. All relevant substantive and procedural requirements of law have been fulfilled.
2. The Board has proper jurisdiction in the matter of approving a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Mississippi River - St. Cloud Watershed pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Resolution #21-08.
3. The Mississippi River - St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan attached to this Order states water and water-related problems within the planning area; priority resource issues and possible solutions thereto; goals, objectives, and actions of the Partnership; and an implementation program.
4. The attached Plan is in conformance with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes Section 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Resolution #21-08.
5. The attached Plan when adopted through local resolution by the members of the Partnership will replace the comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapters 103B, 103C, or 103D, but only to the geographic area of the Plan.

**ORDER**

The Board hereby approves the attached Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan of the Mississippi River - St. Cloud Watershed, submitted December 16, 2024.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, this twenty-second day of January 2025.

**MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

January 22, 2025

Mississippi River St Cloud Watershed Policy Committee  
c/o Dan Cibulka, Sherburne Soil & Water Conservation District  
425 Jackson Ave NW  
Elk River, MN 55330

**RE: Approval of the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed Comprehensive Watershed  
Management Plan**

Dear Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed Policy Committee:

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is pleased to inform you the Mississippi River St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) was approved at its regular meeting held on January 22, 2025. Attached is the signed Board Order that documents approval of the Plan and indicates the Plan meets all relevant requirements of law, rule, and policy.

This Plan is effective for a ten-year period until January 22, 2035. Please be advised, the partners must adopt and begin implementing the plan within 120 days of the date of the Order in accordance with Minnesota Statutes §103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801, and the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures.

The members of the partnership and participants in the plan development process are to be commended for writing a plan that clearly presents water management goals, actions, and priorities of the Partnership, and for participating in the One Watershed, One Plan program. BWSR looks forward to working with you as you implement this Plan and document its outcomes.

Please contact Board Conservationist Zach Guttormson of our staff at 320-407-2339 or [zach.guttormson@state.mn.us](mailto:zach.guttormson@state.mn.us) for further assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Todd Holman, Chair  
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

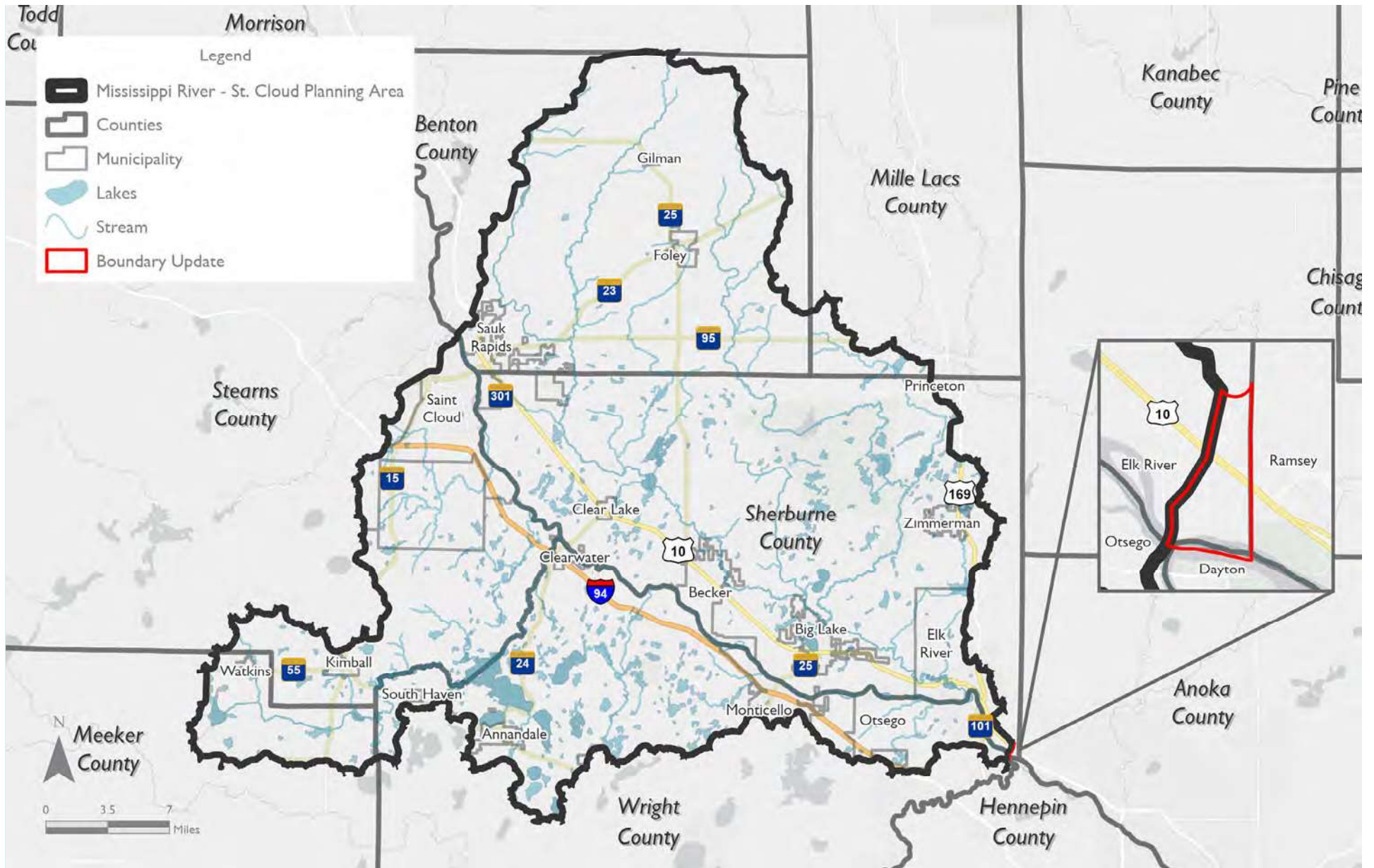
Enclosure: BWSR Board Order

CC: Listed on next page.

CC: Reid Christianson, MDA (via email)  
Casey Field, MDA (via email)  
Carrie Raber, MDH (via email)  
Chad Anderson, MDH (via email)  
Dan Lais, DNR (via email)  
Reid Northwick, DNR (via email)  
Barbara Weisman, DNR (via email)  
Phil Votruba, MPCA (via email)  
Jeff Risberg, MPCA (via email)  
Catherine Neuschler, EQB (via email)  
Marcey Westrick, BWSR Central Region Manager (via email)  
Zach Guttormson, BWSR Board Conservationist (via email)  
Rachel Mueller, BWSR (file copy)  
Julie Westerlund, BWSR 1W1P Coordinator (via email)

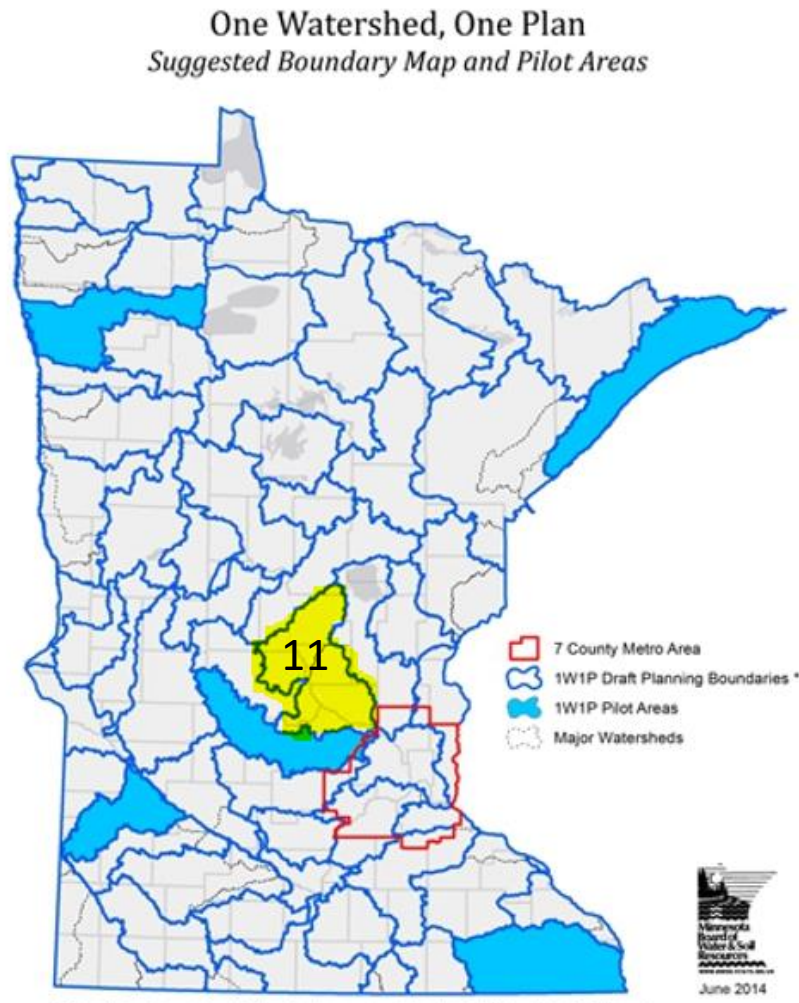
*Equal Opportunity Employer*





**Figure 0.1** Overview of the Planning Area for the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed

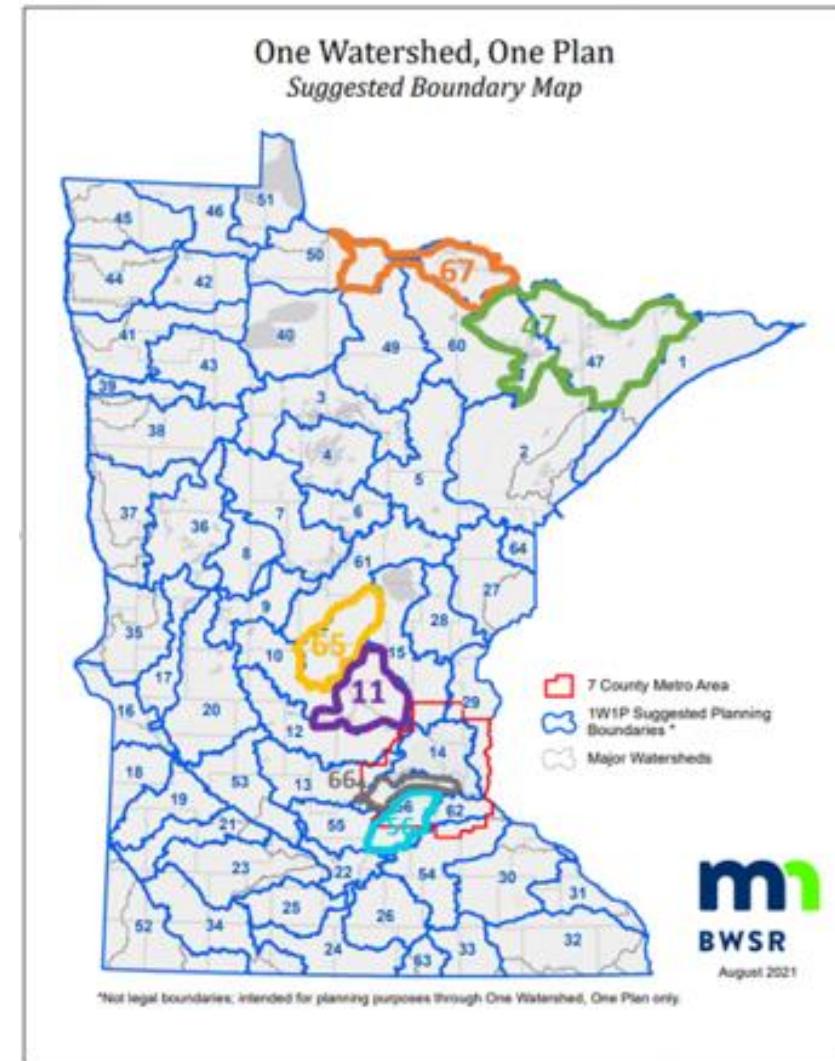
# Original Suggested Planning Boundary - 11



\*Not legal boundaries; intended for planning purposes through One Watershed, One Plan only.

Copyright: ©2013 Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ

# Revised Planning Boundary – Split into two HUC 8 Watersheds (65&11)



\*Not legal boundaries; intended for planning purposes through One Watershed, One Plan only.



## **Executive Summary**



Island View Park - Photo Provided by Sherburne SWCD

# Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi River St. Cloud Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) is a unifying water management strategy for the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed (Watershed). It was developed and will be implemented by local government units across the Watershed (Partnership), as well as their partners from state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, citizens, and other stakeholders. The Plan focuses on restoring impaired waters and habitats, protecting high quality water resources and habitat, and protecting groundwater quality through holistic management.

For Planning purposes, the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) established Planning Boundaries, based on watershed hydrologic boundaries. At the beginning of the Planning process, a detailed review of the boundary found that a small area of Sherburne County, approximately 175 acres, is not covered by the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed Planning boundary. For planning and implementation purposes, the Mississippi River St. Cloud Policy Committee requested that BWSR approve the addition of this area as a part of the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed. This request was approved. Maps have not been recreated to accommodate this change. Figure 0.1 shows this area in relation to the rest of the Watershed.

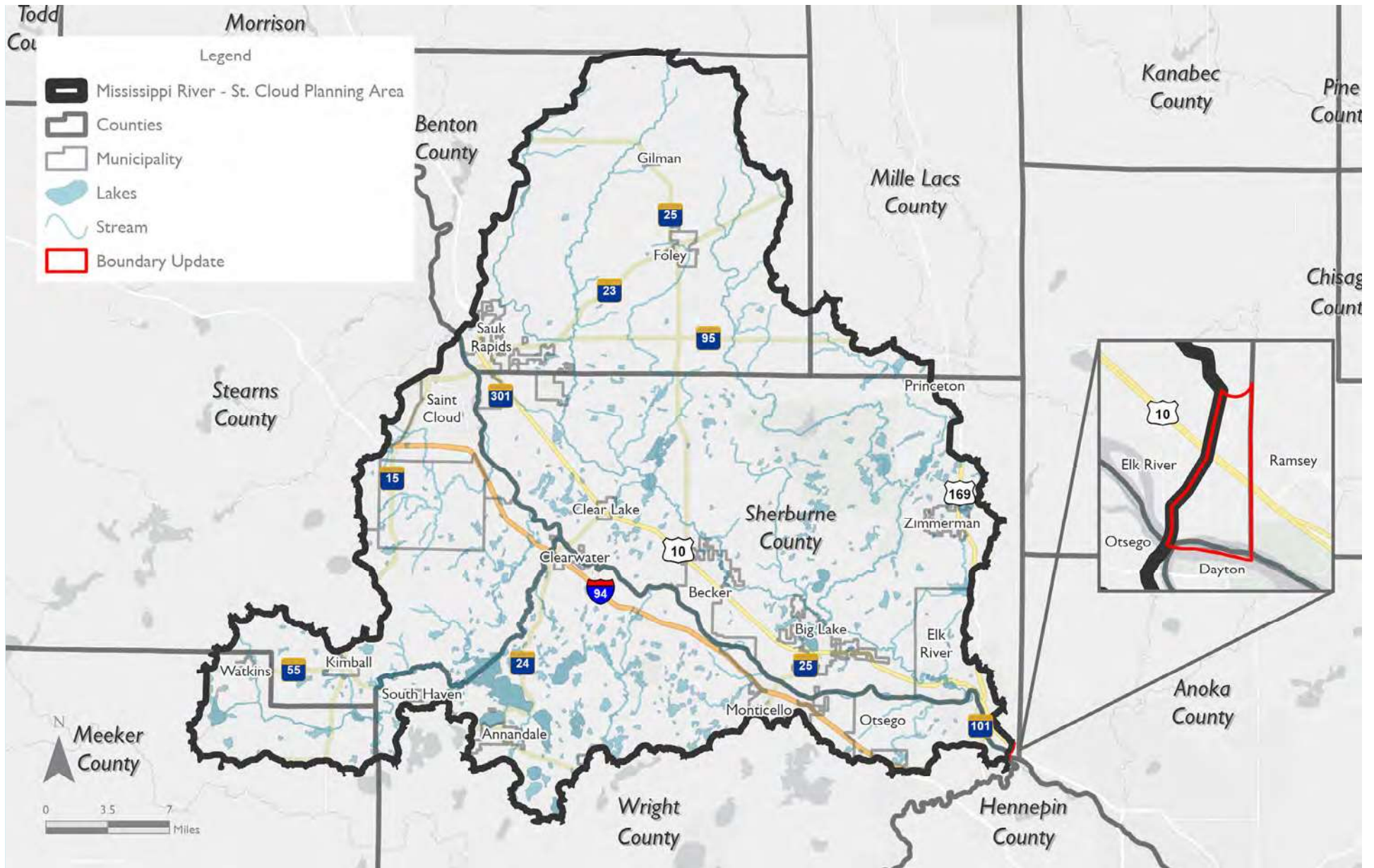
## Vision Statement

To align the planning process with the intent of the Partners, a vision statement was developed during the early stages of planning. The vision statement of the Partnership is:

**Collaborating to conserve, improve, and achieve measurable progress toward natural resource goals in our shared watershed.**

## PLANNING TERMINOLOGY

A set of terminology was adopted at the beginning of the planning process to ensure consistency and application of planning terms. The terminology and definitions are included in the glossary and used throughout this Plan. Terms adopted include, but are not limited to, **Target, Outcome, and Measurable Goal.**



**Figure 0.1** Overview of the Planning Area for the Mississippi River St. Cloud Watershed

## COUNTIES IN THE WATERSHED

- » Benton
- » Meeker
- » Mille Lacs
- » Sherburne
- » Stearns
- » Wright

## PRIMARY TRIBUTARIES TO THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

- » Battle Brook
- » Clearwater River
- » Elk River
- » Johnson Creek
- » Otsego Creek
- » Plum Creek
- » Rice Creek
- » Silver Creek
- » Snake River
- » St. Francis River

## 0.1 PLANNING AREA OVERVIEW

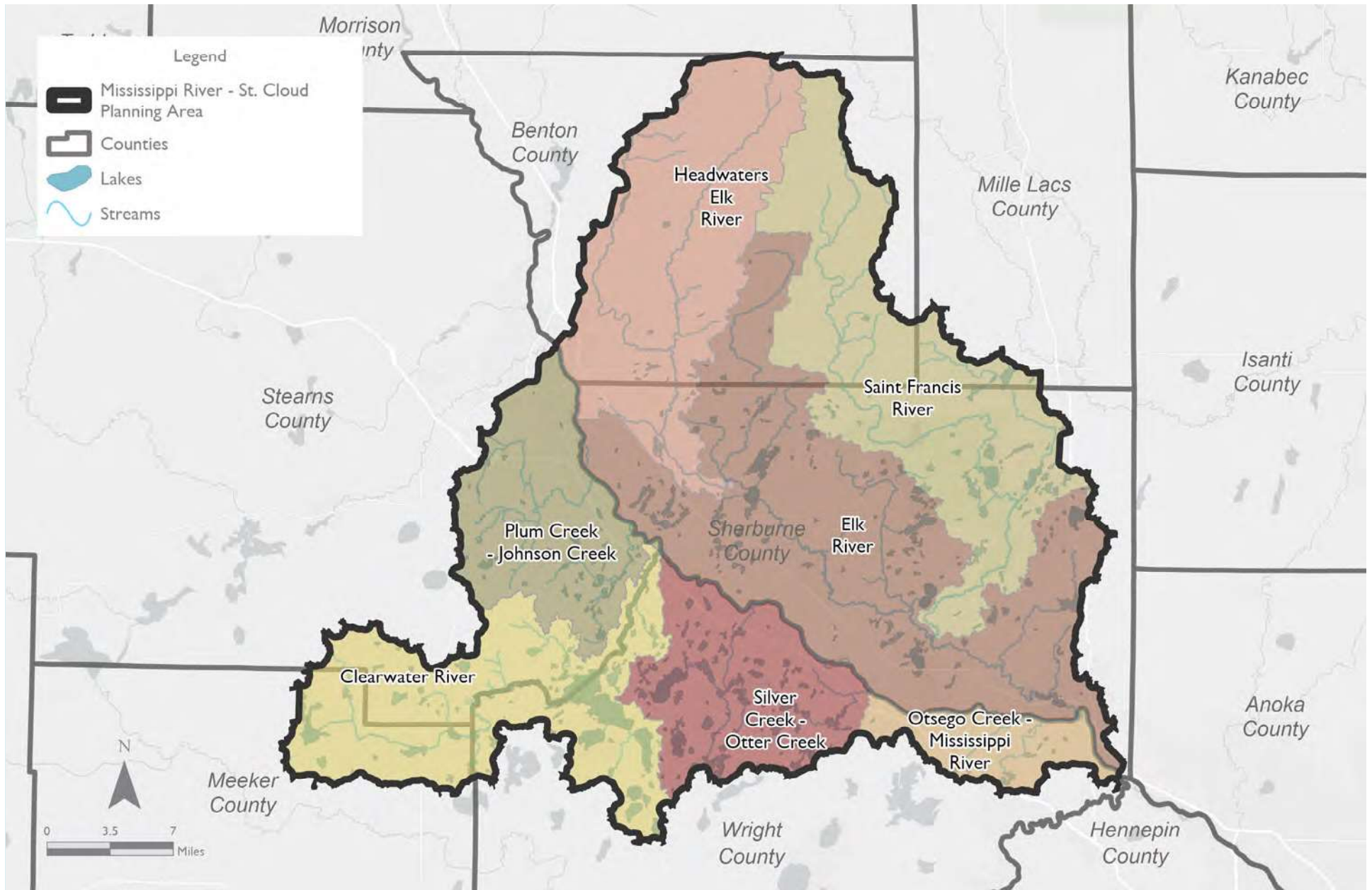
The Planning Area (Watershed) includes portions of Benton, Meeker, Mille Lacs, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright counties. In addition to the Mississippi River, the primary tributaries within the watershed include Battle Brook, Elk River, Rice Creek, St. Francis River, and Snake River. The Watershed is **1,080 square miles (691,200 acres)** and is located in central Minnesota. The Watershed is predominately agricultural land use, although **24 municipalities** are entirely or partially located within the Watershed.

## 0.2 PLANNING MANAGEMENT ZONES

For planning purposes, the Watershed has been divided into seven management zones (Figure 0.2). These zones were developed during the planning process by dividing the overall HUC-8 watershed into smaller subwatersheds that share similar physical, social, and environmental characteristics, and adjusted to align with the Mississippi River. These zones were developed to make the process of developing implementation tables and future work plans more focused and manageable.



Elk River - Photo Provided by Benton SWCD



**Figure 0.2** Mississippi River St. Cloud Planning Management Zones

## PLANNING PARTNERS



Benton SWCD and Benton County



Meeker County SWCD and Meeker County



Mille Lacs SWCD



Sherburne SWCD and Sherburne County



Stearns SWCD and Stearns County



Wright SWCD and Wright County

## 0.3 PARTICIPATING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The local government units (LGUs) involved in managing the watershed resources recognized that the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)'s One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program provided a unique opportunity to develop a management plan that unifies and accelerates the restoration of degraded resources and protection of high-quality resources. The planning partners recognized the need to increase coordination, reduce potential duplication of activities, and provide greater assurances for meeting goals and measurable outcomes.

The LGUs involved at the Steering Committee (SC) level include:

- » Benton Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- » Benton County
- » Meeker County SWCD
- » Meeker County
- » Mille Lacs SWCD
- » Sherburne SWCD
- » Sherburne County
- » Stearns County SWCD
- » Stearns County
- » Wright SWCD
- » Wright County

Mille Lacs County opted not to participate in the planning process, but was included on correspondence from the Partners throughout the planning process.

Morrison County and SWCD make up a very small portion of the Watershed. Both LGUs were invited to participate in the 1W1P grant application and planning process, but opted not to due their small area within the Watershed. These LGUs were included on correspondence throughout the planning process.

The Clearwater River Watershed District (CRWD) is also located within the planning area, and will continue to implement their own Comprehensive Watershed Plan that was developed for the years 2021 to 2030. Since the CRWD has a Comprehensive Watershed Plan that they have developed, they opted not to participate in the MRSC planning process as a committee member. The CRWD did, however, provide insight and feedback to the Plan development upon request throughout the planning process.

The City of St. Cloud took an active role in the planning process by participating as a technical expert on the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).



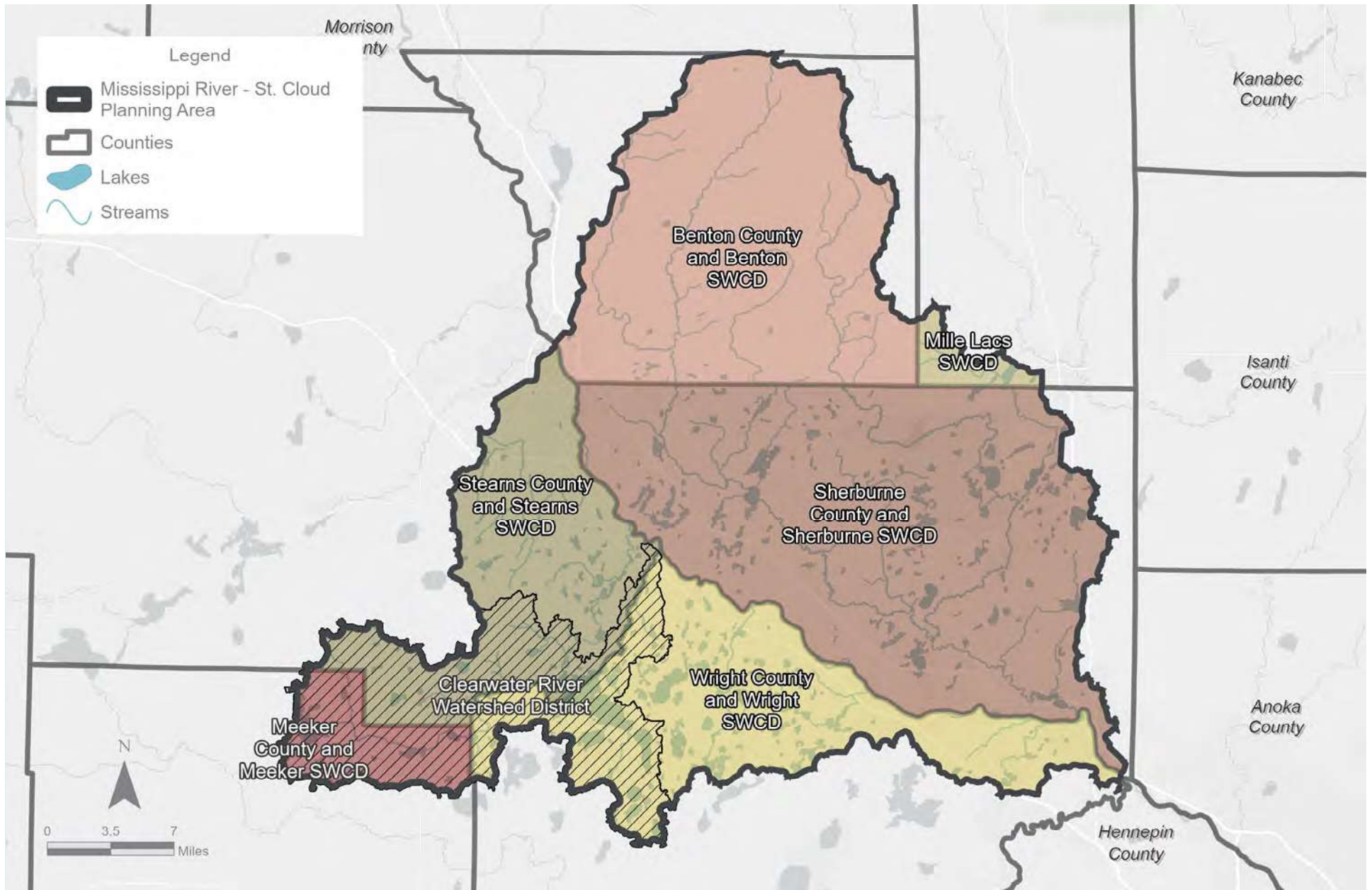


The MRSC IWIP planning team (Partnership) was established and worked collaboratively to develop and submit a response to a BWSR-generated Request for Interest. Upon BWSR nomination and funding approval, the collaborative arrangement was formalized through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and subsequent bylaws that were approved by the Policy Committee (PC).

The local governments that entered into the Memorandum of Agreement include:

- » Benton SWCD
- » Benton County
- » Meeker County SWCD
- » Meeker County
- » Mille Lacs SWCD
- » Sherburne SWCD
- » Sherburne County
- » Stearns SWCD
- » Stearns County
- » Wright SWCD
- » Wright County

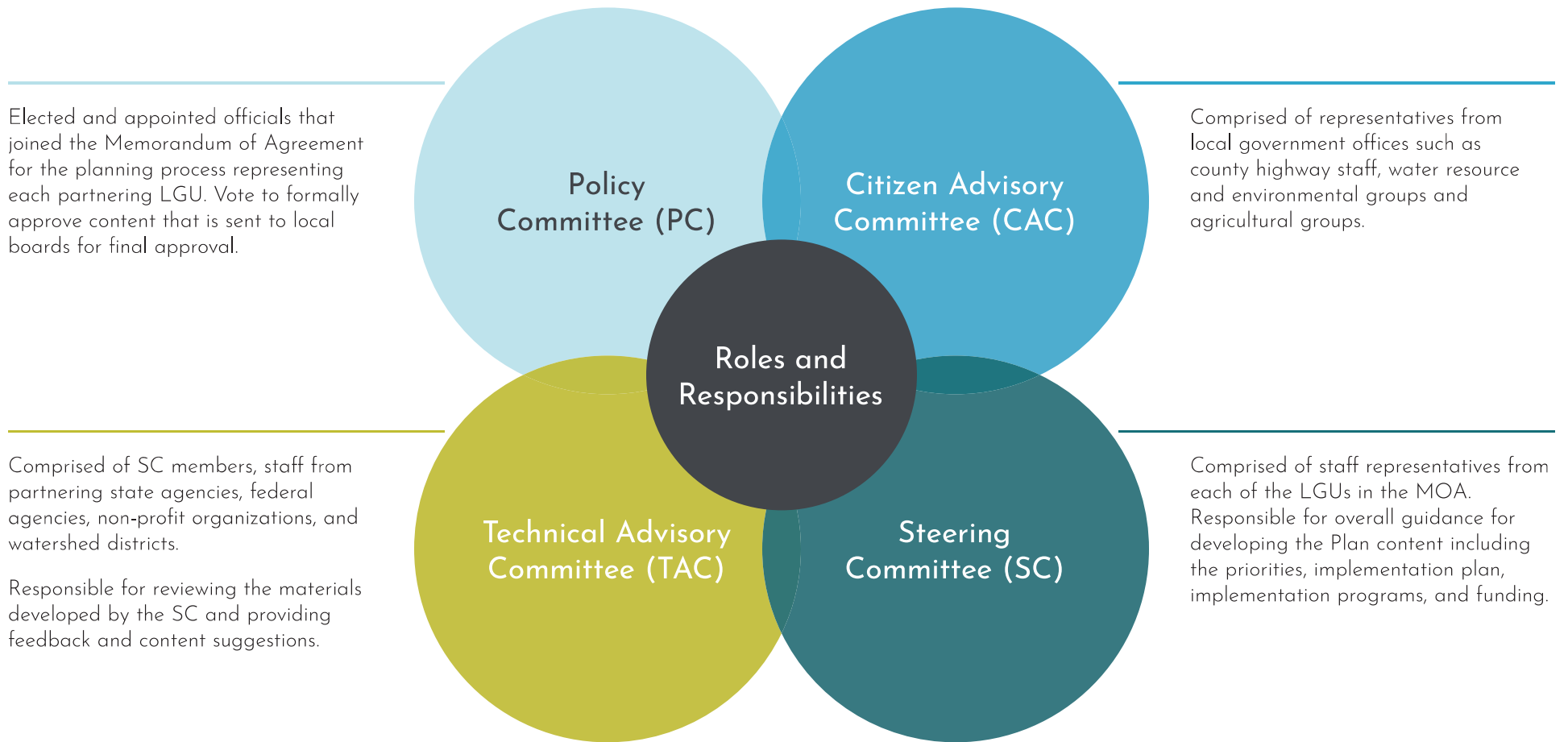
Figure 0.3 shows the jurisdictional boundaries in the Watershed.

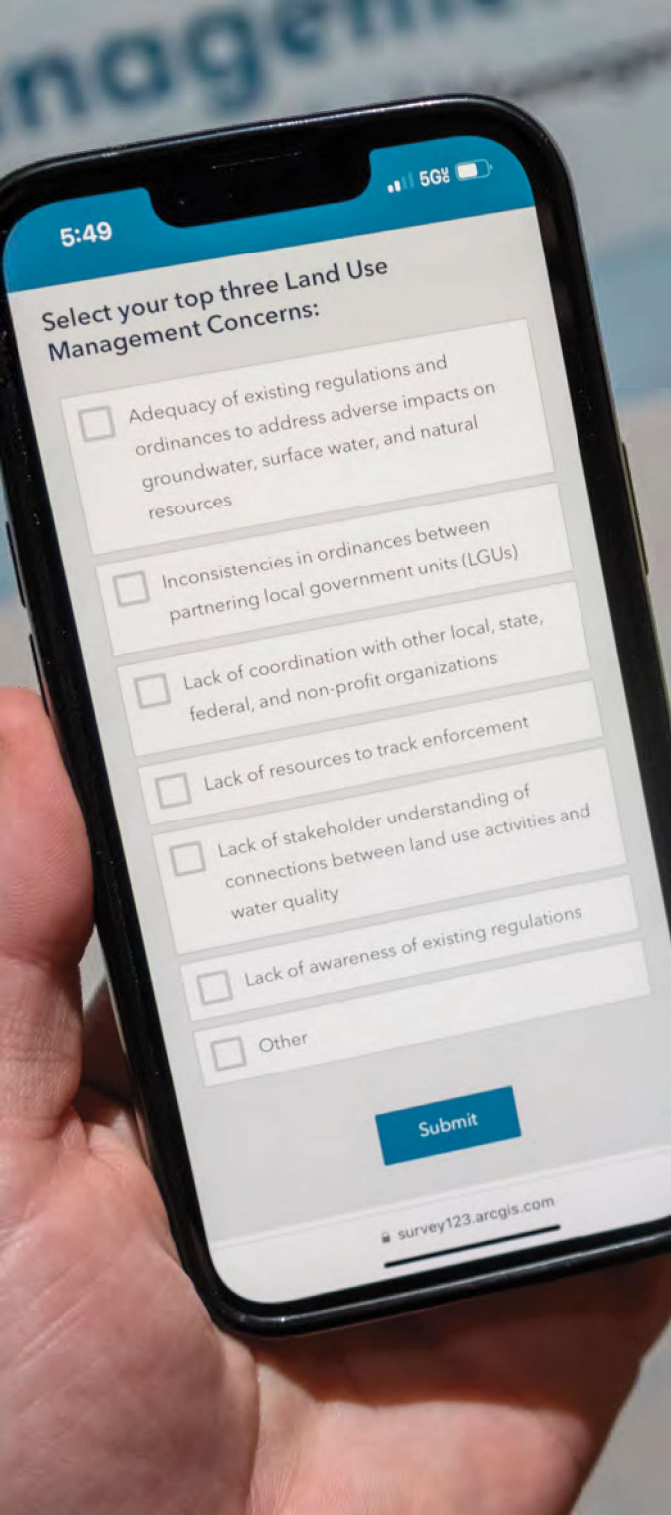


**Figure 0.3** Jurisdictional Boundaries within the Mississippi River St. Cloud CWMP

## 0.4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The development of the Plan was a collaborative effort by all members of the Partnership. Four committees: Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Steering Committee (SC), Policy Committee (PC), and Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), were established to facilitate the creation of plan content as well as manage day-to-day operations. Committee membership is detailed in Appendix A.





## 0.5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### Public Notices

This Plan is governed by Minnesota Statute 103B, and public notices were published in each local government's designated legal newspaper. The official 60-day plan kickoff public notice and comment period began on November 30, 2022 and ended on January 30, 2023. Eight comment letters were received from state and local government stakeholders (see Appendix B). A final public notice and comment period was held at the end of the Planning process.

### Public Input

The public engagement process included one kickoff meeting at the beginning of the planning process that gathered input from community members and stakeholders. The kickoff meeting consisted of one in-person meeting, held January 31, 2023, and engagement session as well as a corresponding virtual open house. The virtual version of the kickoff meeting mirrored the format of the in-person meeting, containing poster boards with information and questions for attendees to answer. The in-person meeting hosted approximately 60 attendees and allowed for detailed conversations to occur between attendees and staff, while the virtual option featured flexibility with busy schedules and was available for several weeks.

The information gathered from the kickoff meeting and corresponding virtual open house was used as a starting point for developing a list of priority issues and concerns that were later aggregated and used to help inform the Plan. To ensure that community input was adequately captured and incorporated into the Plan, the Partnership also developed a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) that met several times throughout the planning process to review draft plan content and provide feedback. Adjustments to the Plan framework were made as needed to further incorporate the feedback received.

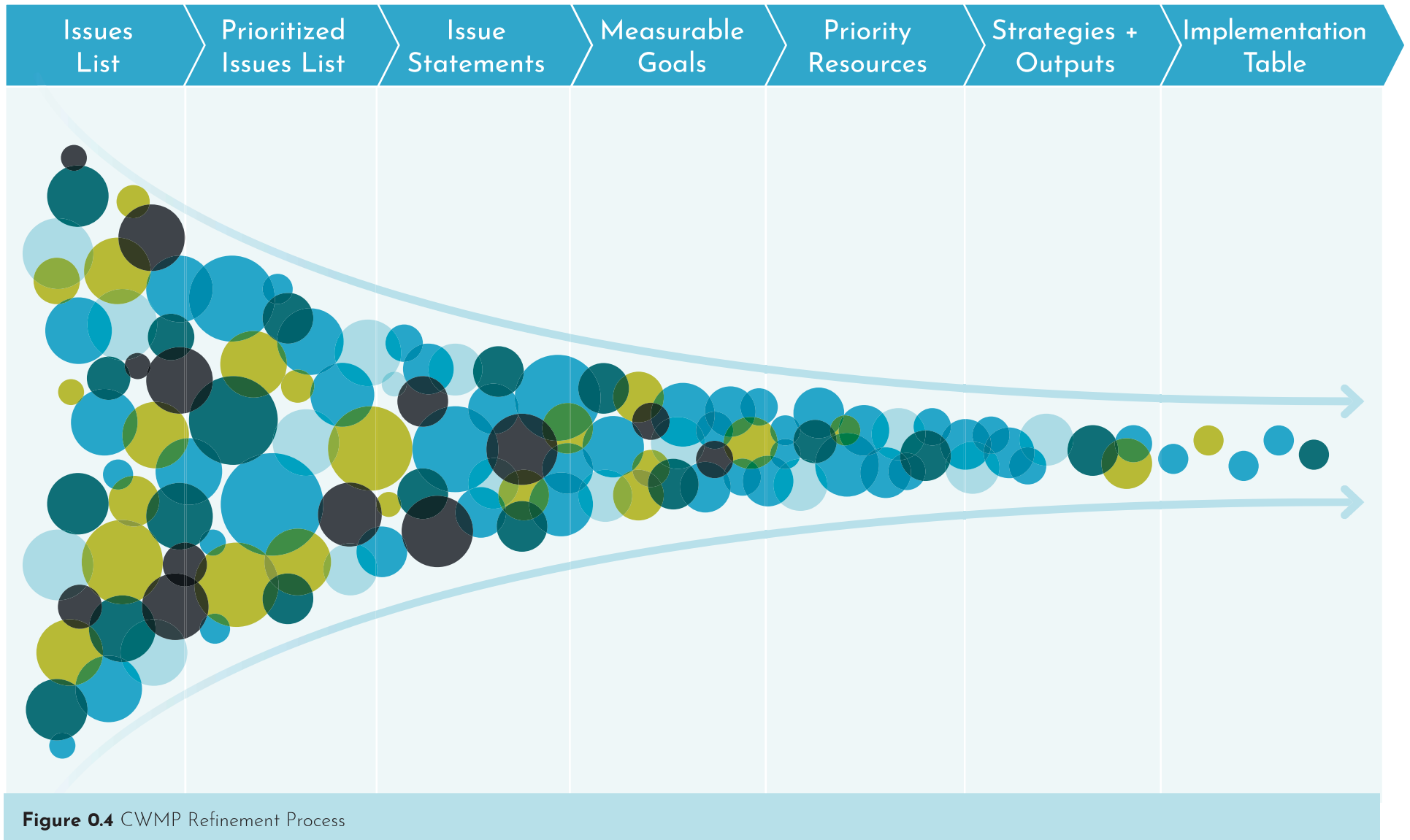


Virtual Open House  
[bit.ly/mrsc-watershed-openhouse](https://bit.ly/mrsc-watershed-openhouse)



## 0.6 PLAN DEVELOPMENT AT A GLANCE

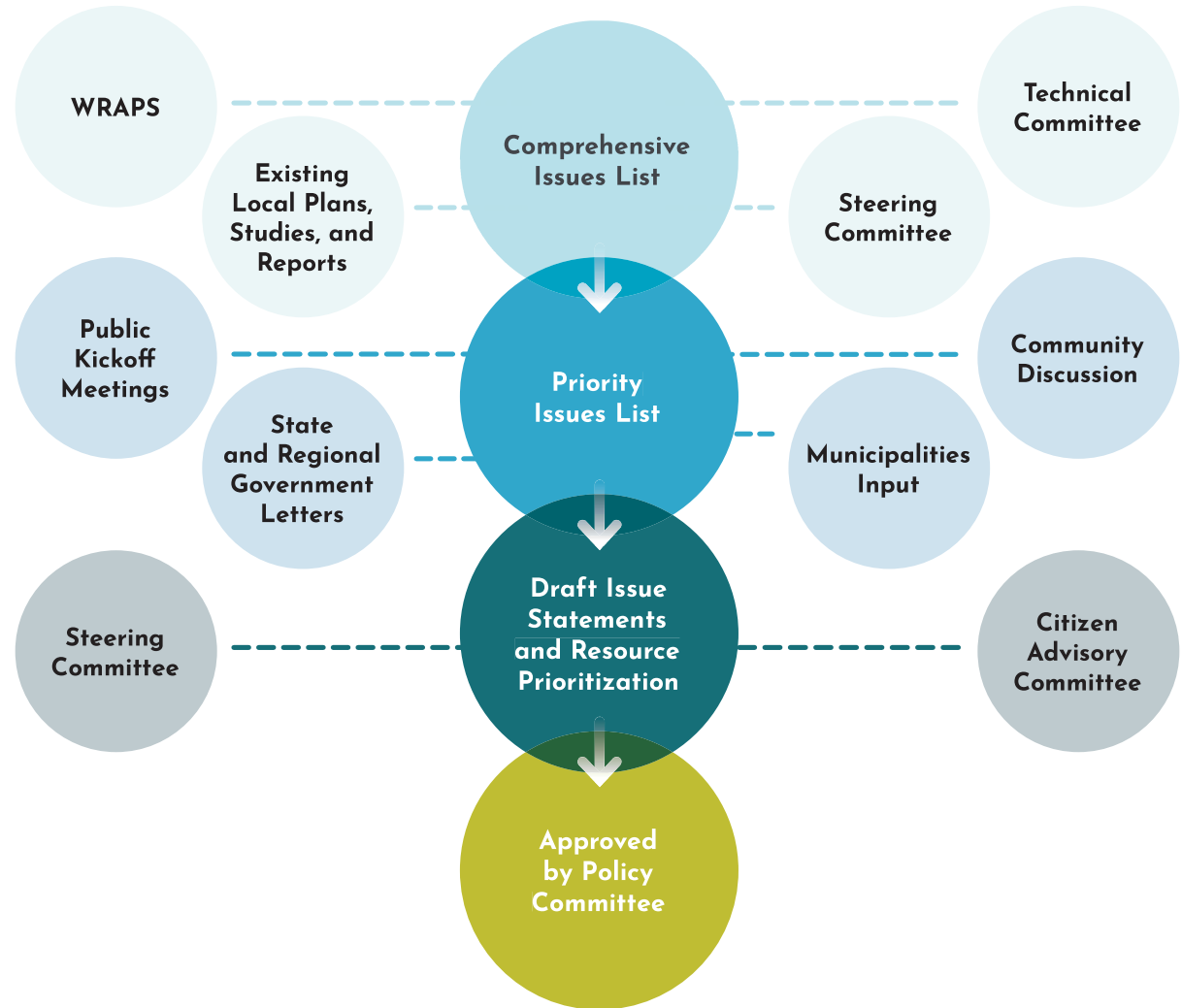
Figure 0.4 represents the process of gathering, refining, and prioritizing issues, resources, and implementation actions related to watershed management throughout the planning process.



## 0.7 ISSUE PRIORITIZATION

The issues for the Plan were generated and prioritized with input from the public, SC, TAC, PC, CAC, and state agencies, along with the data aggregated from existing local management plans and studies. A graphical representation of the issue prioritization process, along with the primary sources of input at each stage in the process is shown in Figure 0.5.

**Figure 0.5** Priority Issue Identification Process



## 0.8 RESOURCE CATEGORIES

One of the first steps of the planning process was data aggregation. This process involved the review of all existing natural resource plans, studies, and related documents within the watershed and compiling priorities and key takeaways from each document. Comments from the public, state agencies, local units of government, and other interested parties were also reviewed and incorporated into this process, along with the input received from the public kickoff meeting. All the comments and data gathered during the data aggregation process were grouped according to the type of resource the data addressed, resulting in **517 data points**. There were three broad resource types: surface water, groundwater, and natural resources and habitat.

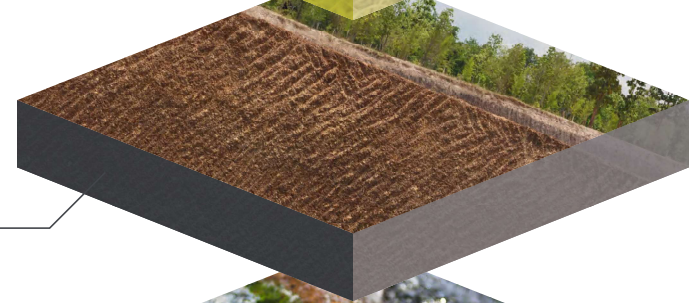
Detailed review of the resource categories and known watershed issues identified a gap in adequately addressing landscape resiliency, specifically as it relates to soil health. As a result, the committees added landscape resiliency as an issue category within the Plan. Categories that contained fewer concerns and were therefore not directly considered resource categories, but were still worth mentioning, included land use management; data, studies, and monitoring; and quality of life. Within each resource type, data were categorized according to major themes, such as the quality or quantity of the resource. Finally, each comment and data point was further classified as a **value, concern, or strategy**. The **values** and **concerns** for each resource category were considered in drafting the issue statements. **Strategies** were considered as means to address the issue statements after the preliminary goals were established.



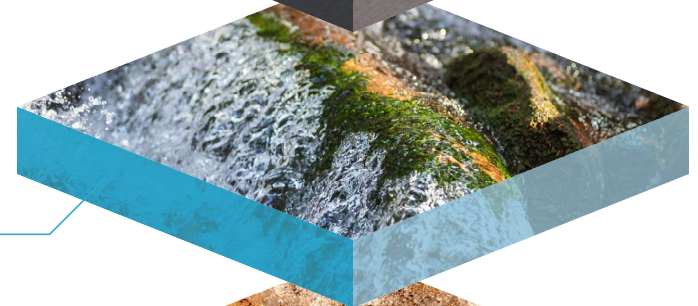
### HABITAT AND NATURAL RESOURCES



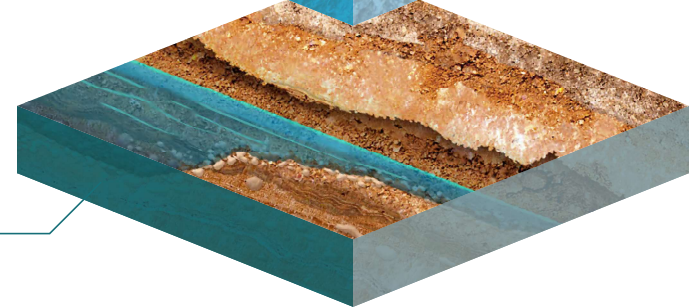
### LANDSCAPE RESILIENCY



### SURFACE WATER



### GROUNDWATER



**Table 0.1** Priority Issues

Issue	Concern
 Surface Water	Pollutant Runoff
	Altered Hydrology
	Internal Load Processes
 Groundwater	Groundwater Quantity
	Groundwater Quality
 Habitat and Natural Resources	Restoration, Protection, Preservation
 Landscape Resiliency	Soil Health

## 0.9 PRIORITY ISSUE STATEMENTS AND MEASURABLE GOALS

### Issue Statements

To develop priority issue statements, draft statements for each of the ranked issue categories and associated top concerns were presented to the TAC for review and refinement. Seven issue statements were drafted, one for each of the following categories:

- » **Surface Water** - Pollutant Runoff
- » **Surface Water** - Altered Hydrology
- » **Surface Water** - Internal Lake Processes
- » **Groundwater** - Quality
- » **Groundwater** - Quantity
- » **Habitat and Natural Resources** - Restoration, Protection, and Preservation
- » **Landscape Resiliency** - Soil Health

Priority resources were also identified. Priority surface water resources are shown in Figure 0.7.

### Measurable Goals

Goals were established for each issue statement to guide the development of strategies and implementation action items. A review of information from the last 10 years within the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)'s visual analytics platform, Tableau, was completed to compile a draft list of strategies and implementation actions, along with a baseline level of effort for each of the respective practices. This list was reviewed, along with the issue statements, to determine what additional strategies and implementation actions were needed to fully address the priority issue statement goals. This process led to a final list of strategies and implementation actions that would be used to develop the measurable outcomes.

The Hydrologic Simulation Program-Fortran (HSPF) watershed model provided the SC with the necessary information to simulate the impacts of their selected implementation actions and develop numeric, measurable outcomes. Existing and desired level of effort was used for measurable outcomes that lack appropriate models or studies to quantify, such as outreach and education and groundwater quality actions. Once the implementation tables were assembled, the goals and measurable outcomes were refined to better align with the anticipated level of effort and expected funding levels for each action item, creating measurable outcomes that challenge the partners but also are achievable. Details for each priority issue and targeting approach are provided in Chapters 3 and 4.





## SURFACE WATER

**Table 0.2** Surface Water Issue 1: Pollutant Runoff

Surface Water Issue 1: Pollutant Runoff	
<b>Issue Statement</b>	Surface waters threatened or impaired by pollutants result in damaging impacts to the environment, economy, and quality of life.
<b>Desired Future Condition</b>	Surface waters across the Watershed have a healthy and thriving environment that supports aquatic life, drinking water consumption, and human recreation.
Measurable Goals	
<b>Goal 1</b>	Delist 10 waterbodies from the state's impaired waters list.
<b>Goal 2</b>	No new nutrient impairments on priority protections waterbodies.
<b>Goal 3</b>	Achieve <i>E.coli</i> reductions in priority restoration streams through completing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» 9,800 new acres Soil Health Practices</li> <li>» 111,900 feet Ag BMPs</li> <li>» 40 Ag BMPs (unit = each)</li> <li>» 81 Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) Improvement/Replacements</li> </ul>
<b>Goal 4</b>	Reduce watershed pollutant runoff by 2,210 tons per year (8%) of sediment and 11,430 pounds per year (8%) of phosphorus.* *Pollutant load reductions equal the cumulative in-reach reductions calculated at the outlet of each HSPF watershed and corrected for upstream contributions.
<b>Goal 5</b>	Reduce total phosphorus loading to priority lakes by 8,700 pounds per year.

**Table 0.3** Surface Water Issue 2: Altered Hydrology

Surface Water Issue 2: Altered Hydrology	
<b>Issue Statement</b>	Altered hydrology changes the timing, flow rate, and volume of water delivered downstream negatively impacting the environment (stream stability, pollutant loading), economy (risk of flooding, drainage system maintenance), and quality of life (flooding and recreation).
<b>Desired Future Condition</b>	The Watershed has achieved a balanced surface water hydrologic regime with timing and volume of water delivered downstream supporting human activity and the ecological functioning of riparian areas and aquatic habitats.
Measurable Goals	
<b>Goal 1</b>	Reduce the magnitude of high stream flows by storing 5,200-acre feet of water in the Watershed.
<b>Goal 2</b>	Address altered hydrology related stream stability issues through 25,750 linear feet of BMPs.
<b>Goal 3</b>	Reduce flooding impacts in developed areas by implementing 108 stormwater BMPs.



## SURFACE WATER

**Table 0.4** Surface Water Issue 3: Internal Load Processes

Surface Water Issue 3: Internal Load Processes	
<b>Issue Statement</b>	Surface waters are impaired by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Internal cycling of sediment</li> <li>» Nutrient release</li> <li>» Recreational activities</li> <li>» Invasive species</li> </ul>
<b>Desired Future Condition</b>	Internal nutrient cycling and disturbance of bottom sediments are properly managed for phosphorus in lakes throughout the Watershed.
Measurable Goals	
<b>Goal 1</b>	Complete feasibility studies and/or lake management plans to address potential internal nutrients on 11 waterbodies.
<b>Goal 2</b>	<p>Achieve 60% reduction of internal phosphorus budget in 5 waterbodies through internal nutrient source management. Potential lakes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Fremont</li> <li>» Indian</li> <li>» Fish</li> <li>» Julia</li> <li>» Eagle</li> <li>» Briggs</li> <li>» Rush</li> <li>» Mink</li> <li>» Somers</li> </ul> <p>Reduction is an average of the reductions provided for each lake. This list does not include lakes with feasibility studies planned in supporting programs tables.</p>



## GROUNDWATER

**Table 0.5** Groundwater Issue 1: Groundwater Quantity

Groundwater Issue 1: Groundwater Quantity	
<b>Issue Statement</b>	Groundwater quantity resiliency is threatened when there is an imbalance between recharge and withdrawals.
<b>Desired Future Condition</b>	Groundwater systems demonstrate a balanced relationship between recharge and withdrawals.
Measurable Goals	
<b>Goal 1</b>	No change in groundwater level based on trends from 2013-2022 (GRAPS 2024) relative to precipitation.

**Table 0.6** Groundwater Issue 2: Groundwater Quality

Groundwater Issue 2: Groundwater Quality	
<b>Issue Statement</b>	Groundwater quality is impacted by naturally occurring processes and land use practices that degrade drinking water and surface water connections.
<b>Desired Future Condition</b>	Land use practices are managed sustainably to minimize adverse impacts to groundwater quality and allow safe drinking water for all people in the Watershed.
Measurable Goals	
<b>Goal 1</b>	Minimize groundwater source contamination by sealing 77 wells.
<b>Goal 2</b>	Establish 18,640 acres in a nutrient or nitrogen management federal, state, or local program.
<b>Goal 3</b>	Establish 41,434 acres of newly enrolled cover crop in groundwater protection priority areas.
<b>Goal 4</b>	Establish 38 acres of new turf management BMPs in priority areas.



## HABITAT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

**Table 0.7** Habitat and Natural Resources Issue 1:  
Restoration, Protection, and Preservation

Habitat and Natural Resources Issue 1: Restoration, Protection, and Preservation	
<b>Issue Statement</b>	Restoration, Protection, and Preservation - Aquatic and terrestrial habitats are diminished due to fragmentation, degradation, and loss, which risks the stability of native species and ecosystems.
<b>Desired Future Condition</b>	Aquatic and terrestrial habitats are enhanced, restored, and connected with existing habitat complexes to build resiliency for native plant and animal communities in priority areas.
Measurable Goals	
<b>Goal 1</b>	Increase protected landscape by 23 easements in priority areas.
<b>Goal 2</b>	Restore landscape habitat acreage by 1,044 in priority areas.
<b>Goal 3</b>	Improve aquatic habitat within priority waterways through completion of 11,000 linear feet of restoration projects.
<b>Goal 4</b>	Restore or permanently protect 21,750 linear feet of shoreline habitat along priority waterbodies.



## LANDSCAPE RESILIENCY

**Table 0.8** Landscape Resiliency Issue 1: Soil Health

Landscape Resiliency Issue 1: Soil Health	
<b>Issue Statement</b>	Degraded soil health diminishes resiliency and limits the ecological functions of the landscape.
<b>Desired Future Condition</b>	Adoption of soil health practices across the Watershed that results in increased resiliency and ecological functions of the land.
Measurable Goals	
<b>Goal 1</b>	Implement soil health practices in each management zone as outlined in Table 3.6. <i>Note: Table 3.6 includes agricultural land, pastureland, and turfgrass.</i>
<b>Goal 2</b>	Demonstrate an increase in soil health adoption amongst agricultural producers in the Watershed.

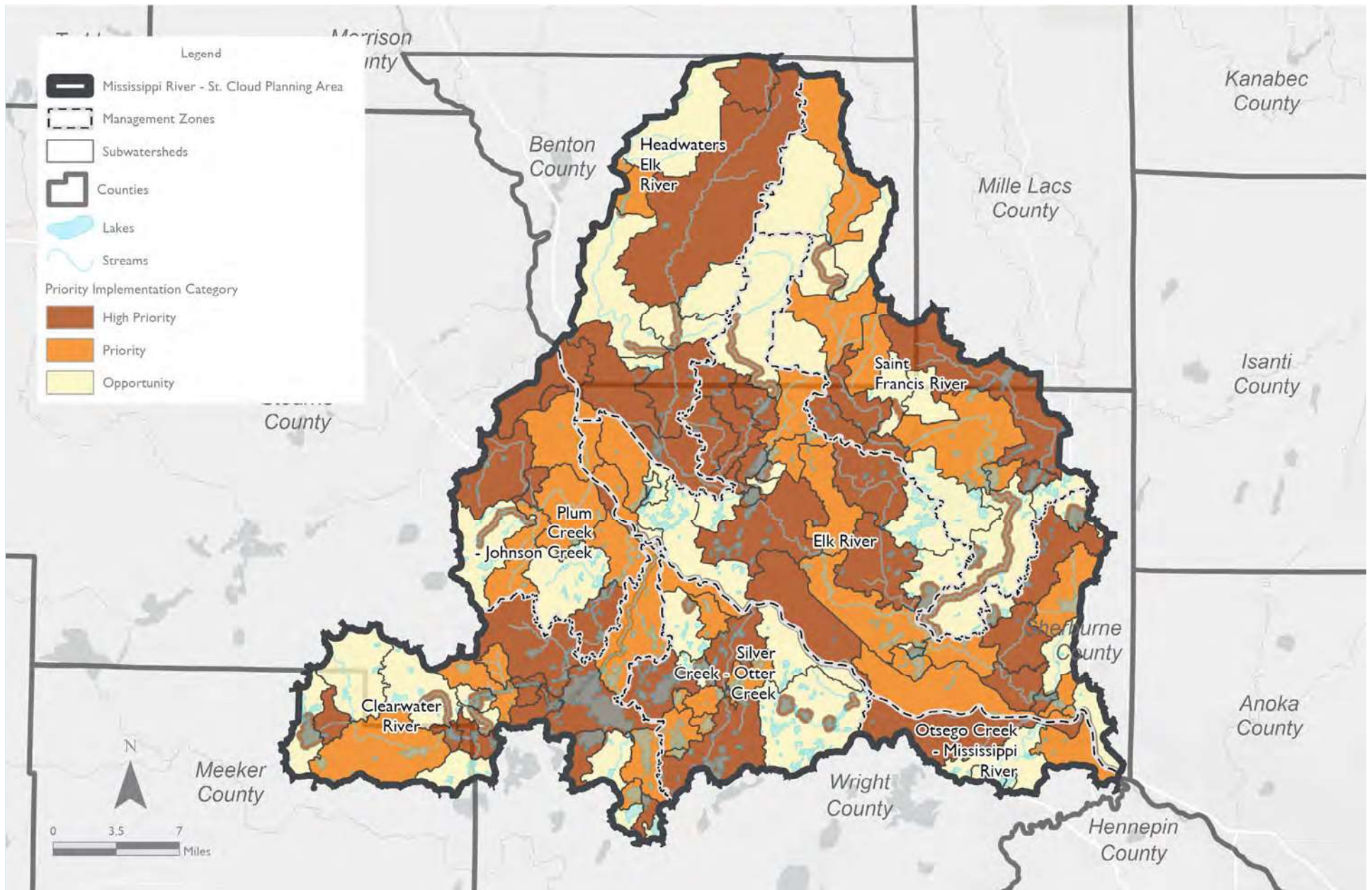


## KEY PROGRAMS

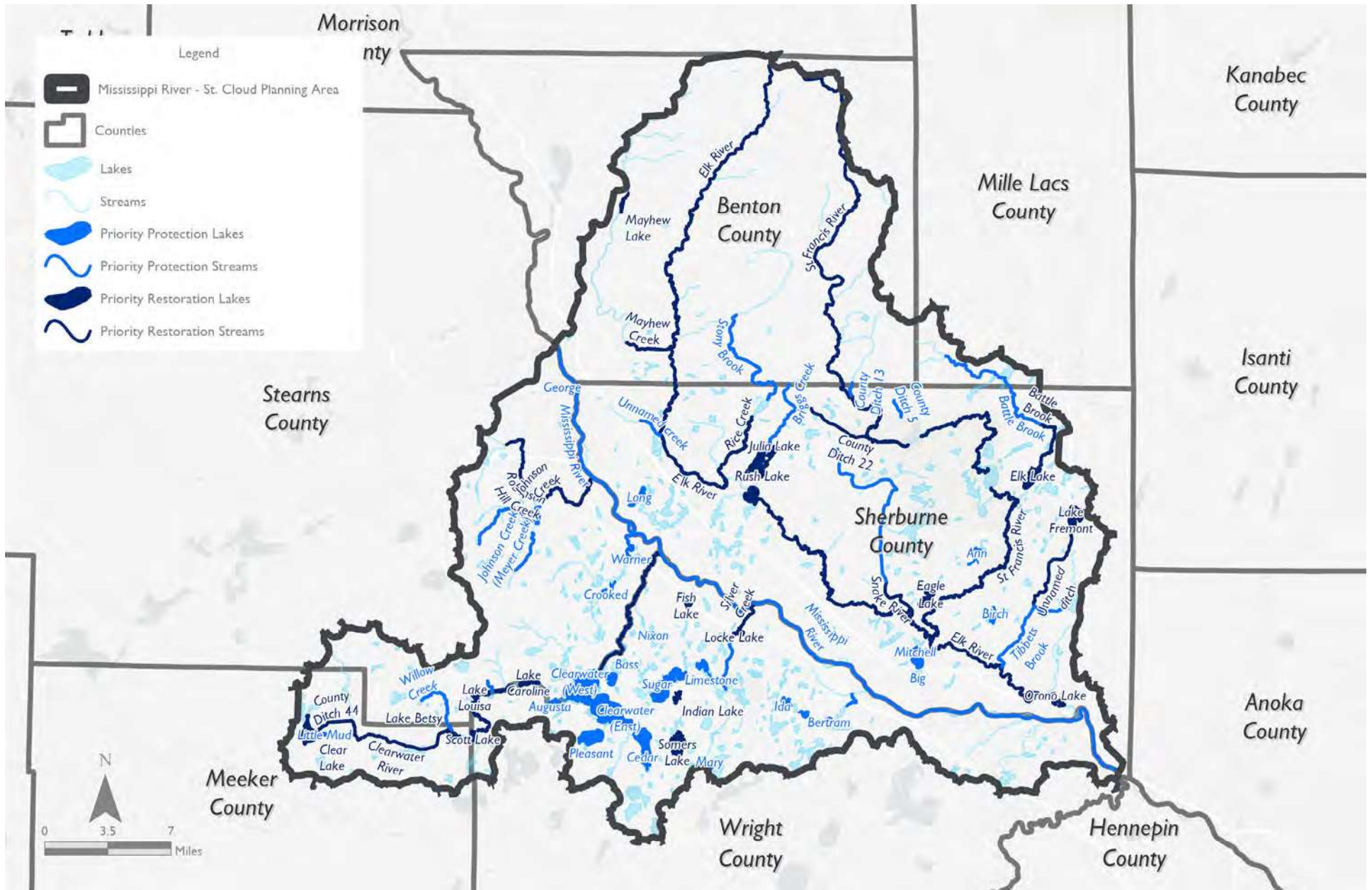
- ✓ Land Use Management
- ✓ Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Programs
- ✓ Education and Outreach
- ✓ Data and Studies
- ✓ Monitoring

## 0.10 IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS AND PROGRAMS

The activities that will be undertaken to address the priority issues are presented in the Plan and included in the implementation tables. The existing implementation programs are detailed in Chapter 5, and the anticipated efforts for implementation actions are summarized within the implementation tables in Chapter 4. To keep implementation efforts organized, a watershed-wide table for key strategies was developed, including land use management strategies. The majority of the Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Programs; Education and Outreach; and Data, Studies, and Monitoring activities are all within the same table, but separated by management zone (Figure 0.2). This organization will allow the Partners to review all implementation efforts related to a specific area within the watershed in one table. A multiple benefit analysis was completed to assist the Partners with project selection by identifying areas where project implementation will make progress toward multiple plan goals (Figure 0.6). Tracking implementation and completion of items within the implementation tables will assist the Partnership with reporting progress towards achieving the identified measurable outcomes detailed in Chapter 3. Tracking will be completed by calculating project reductions and compiling them in a spreadsheet to develop running totals. The spreadsheet will be developed by the SC after the Plan has been adopted. The Excel file associated with the implementation tables presented in the Plan may be used as a starting point by the SC.



**Figure 0.6** Multi Benefit Analysis



**Figure 0.7** Surface Water Priority Resources

## 0.11 PLAN ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATION

After the draft plan was reviewed by the planning committees, the formal review process began and was conducted in accordance with Minnesota Statute 103B.315 Comprehensive Water Plan Review and Adoption (1990 as revised in 2003). The PC approved the draft and initiated the formal notice, comment period, and process. The draft document was submitted to the plan review authorities who had 60 days to submit comments to both the PC and BWSR. The Plan was publicly noticed and available for public review. Members of the public wishing to provide comments on the Plan submitted their comments to the PC and BWSR. The PC scheduled and held a public hearing no sooner than 14 days after the 60-day review period ended. After the public hearing, the PC submitted the draft final plan, along with a summary of all comments received, the response to each comment, and additional public hearing details to BWSR and the Plan review authorities. BWSR completed its review and approval within 90 days of receiving the Plan. Once BWSR had approved the Plan, it was adopted by the local governments Joint Powers Entity (JPE) that are signers of the Joint Powers Agreement (JPA). The JPE was established for the purposes of Plan implementation, and will be known as the MRSC Watershed Partnership (MRSCWP). Details on how Plan administration will occur during the implementation phase is located in Chapter 6.





## COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Southern Region Committee*

1. Approve Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota River– Ted Winter and John Shea – **DECISION ITEM**

**BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM**

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** Approve Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan  
Cottonwood- Middle Minnesota River

**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**  Committee Recommendation     New Business     Old Business

**Item Type:**  Decision     Discussion     Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** 1W1P, Cottonwood- Middle Minnesota, Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

**Section/Region:** Southern

**Contact:** Ed Lenz

**Prepared by:** John Shea

**Reviewed by:** Southern Regional Committee(s)

**Presented by:** Ted Winter, John Shea

**Time requested:** 15 minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**     Resolution     Order     Map     Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- None
- Amended Policy Requested
- New Policy Requested
- Other:
- General Fund Budget
- Capital Budget
- Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget
- Clean Water Fund Budget

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Approval of Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan; Cottonwood- Middle Minnesota River

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

-  [Cottonwood Middle Minnesota CWMP BWSR Approval Draft 10162024.pdf](#)
-  [Cottonwood Middle Minnesota CWMP BWSR Approval Draft Appendix 10162024.pdf](#)

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

The Cottonwood- Middle Minnesota partnership was selected for a 1W1P Planning Grant in August of 2022 and established a Memorandum of Agreement between the planning partners for the purposes of writing a Plan on December 29, 2022. The partners include: The Counties of Brown, Cottonwood, Lyon, Murray, and Redwood and The Brown, Cottonwood, Lyon, Murray and Redwood Soil and Water Conservation Districts, The Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects and Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area Joint Powers Organizations (RCRCA), and the City of Springfield. The 1W1P Planning Grant was executed on February 23, 2023. The Policy

Committee was formally established with signing of bylaws on May 17th, 2023. A Request for Proposals (RFP) process was utilized, by invitation from the partnership to contract with a consultant on May 17, 2023. The partnership held a 60-day review process that ended August 30, 2024, and the required public hearing On September 18, 2024. The final draft of the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses were submitted on October 17, 2024, to the state review agencies. The Southern Committee meet on December 9, 2024 and recommend approval of the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan to the full BWSR Board.

## BOARD ORDER

Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

### PURPOSE

In the Matter of the review of the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota River, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801.

### RECITALS /FINDINGS OF FACT

**Whereas**, the Policy Committee of the **Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota River** submitted a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) on October 11, 2024 pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision(s) #21-08 and #19-41

**Whereas**, the Board has completed its review of the Plan;

**Now Therefore**, the Board hereby makes the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Order:

### FINDINGS OF FACT

1. **Partnership Establishment.** The partnership was established in 2022 through adoption of a Memorandum of Agreement for the purposes of developing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The membership of the partnership includes: The Counties of Brown, Cottonwood, Lyon, Murray, and Redwood and The Brown, Cottonwood, Lyon, Murray and Redwood Soil and Water Conservation Districts, The Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects and Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area Joint Powers Organizations, and the City of Springfield.
2. **Authority to Plan.** Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 allows the Board to adopt resolutions, policies or orders that allow a comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D to serve as substitutes for one another or be replaced with a comprehensive watershed management plan. Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.801 established the Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning Program; also known as One Watershed, One Plan. Board Resolution #16-17 adopted the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures and Plan Content Requirements policies; Board Decisions #18-14, #19-41, #21-08, #23-50 adopted subsequent versions of the program policies.
3. **Nature of the Watershed.** The Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Watershed (CMMW) spans 1,076,000 acres of land that drains into the Cottonwood and Minnesota Rivers. It consists of two major Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC)-8 watersheds: all the Cottonwood River Watershed plus part of the Minnesota River – Mankato Watershed. The Cottonwood River flows 144 miles east from its headwaters to its confluence with the Minnesota River near New Ulm. The watershed boundary is determined by the area draining into the Cottonwood River and its many tributaries.
4. **Plan Development.** Two public kickoff events were held in 2023 to inform watershed residents about the Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning process and solicit feedback on perception of issues that

should be included in the plan. The nearly 40 attendees identified streambank erosion, flooding and high flows, and pollutants such as sediment, nutrients, and bacteria as top issues. Public opinion, state priority letters, existing reports, and committee expertise were utilized to develop a list of high, medium, and low priority issues.

5. **Plan Review.** On October 17, 2024, the Board received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments pertaining to the Plan for final State review pursuant to Board decisions #21-08 and #19-41. State agency representatives attended and provided input at advisory committee meetings during development of the Plan. The following state review comments were received during the comment period.
  - A. Minnesota Department of Agriculture: Received the Plan for Final Review October 17, 2024, and recommended approval of the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan on November 1, 2024.
  - B. Minnesota Department of Health: Received the Plan for Final Review October 17, 2024, and recommended approval of the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan on October 24, 2024
  - C. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources : Received the Plan for Final Review October 17, 2024, and recommended approval of the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan on November 4, 2024
  - D. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency: Received the Plan for Final Review October 17, 2024, and recommended approval of the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan on October 31, 2024
  - E. Minnesota Environmental Quality Board: Received the Plan for Final Review October 17, 2024, and conformation of receipt with no comments October 18, 2024.
  - F. Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources regional staff: Received the Plan for Final Review October 17, 2024, and recommended approval of the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan on November 15, 2024.
  - G. Local Review:
    - a. No comments from County, SWCD, City, or public.
6. **Plan Summary and Highlights.** The highlights of the plan include:
  - Watershed wide goals
    - i) Sediment and Nutrients reduction
      - Nitrogen: 5%, or 328,800 lbs/yr
      - Total Phosphorus: 5%, or 17,600 lbs/yr
      - Sediment: 12%, or 135,700 tons/yr
    - ii) Storage Flooding and Hydrology
      - Add 7,000 acre-ft of storage
    - iii) Groundwater
      - Improve groundwater recharge and protection on 1,000 acres of vulnerable Drinking Water Supply Management Areas.
    - iv) Soil health
      - Implement soil health practices on 18,150 acres.
7. **Southern Regional Committee.** On December 9, 2024, the Southern Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. Those in attendance from the Board’s Committee were Ted Winter, Chair; Jeff Berg, Steve Robertson, Scott Roemhildt, Heather Johnson, Kelly Kirkpatrick. Board staff in attendance were Ed Lenz, Southern Regional Manager; John Shea, Mark Hiles, Julie Westerlund, Denise Lauerman. The representatives

from the Partnership were Kerry Netzke, Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area (RCRCA); Rachel Olm, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Melanie Krueger, Brown SWCD; Kay Gross, Cottonwood County; Allison Kletscher; Brown County; Nick Brozek; Sarah Soderholm, Murray County. Board regional staff provided its recommendation of Plan approval to the Committee. After discussion, the Committee's decision was to present a recommendation of approval of the Plan to the full Board.

8. This Plan will be in effect for a ten-year period until February 1, 2035.

### CONCLUSIONS

1. All relevant substantive and procedural requirements of law have been fulfilled.
2. The Board has proper jurisdiction in the matter of approving a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota River pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decisions #21-08 and #19-41.
3. The Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan attached to this Order states water and water-related problems within the planning area; priority resource issues and possible solutions thereto; goals, objectives, and actions of the Partnership; and an implementation program.
4. The attached Plan is in conformance with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes Section 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decisions #21-08 and #19-41.
5. The attached plan when adopted through local resolution (contingent on BWSR approval [Minnesota Statutes 103B.801 and Board Resolution #21-08 and #19-41]) by the members of the Partnership will serve as a replacement for each partners' comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D, but only to the geographic area of the Plan and consistent with the One Watershed, One Plan Suggested Boundary Map.

### ORDER

The Board hereby:

1. The Board hereby approves the attached Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan of the Cottonwood-Middle Minnesota River, dated January 2025.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, this January 22, 2025.

### MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



December 19, 2024

Cottonwood Middle Minnesota River Planning Work Group  
c/o Kerry Netzke, Executive Director  
RCRCA  
1424 East College Drive  
Marshall, MN 56258

**RE: Approval of the Cottonwood Middle Minnesota River Watershed Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan**

Dear Cottonwood Middle Minnesota River Planning Work Group:

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is pleased to inform you the Cottonwood Middle Minnesota River Watershed (Plan) was approved at its regular meeting held on January 22, 2025. Attached is the signed Board Order that documents approval of the Plan and indicates the Plan meets all relevant requirements of law, rule, and policy.

This Plan is effective for a ten-year period until February, 2035. Please be advised, the partners must adopt and begin implementing the plan within 120 days of the date of the Order in accordance with Minnesota Statutes §103B.101, Subd. 14, and the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures.

The members of the partnership and participants in the plan development process are to be commended for writing a plan that clearly presents water management goals, actions, and priorities of the Partnership, and for participating as a pilot in the development of the One Watershed, One Plan program. The BWSR looks forward to working with you as you implement this Plan and document its outcomes.

Please contact Board Conservationist John Shea of our staff at 507-838-9423 or [john.shea@state.mn.us](mailto:john.shea@state.mn.us) for further assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Todd Holman , Chair  
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Enclosure: BWSR Board Order

CC: Listed on next page.

Bemidji Brainerd Detroit Lakes Duluth Mankato Marshall Rochester St. Cloud St. Paul

St. Paul HQ 520 Lafayette Road North St. Paul, MN 55155 Phone: (651) 296-3767

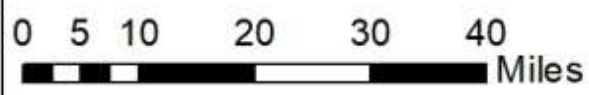
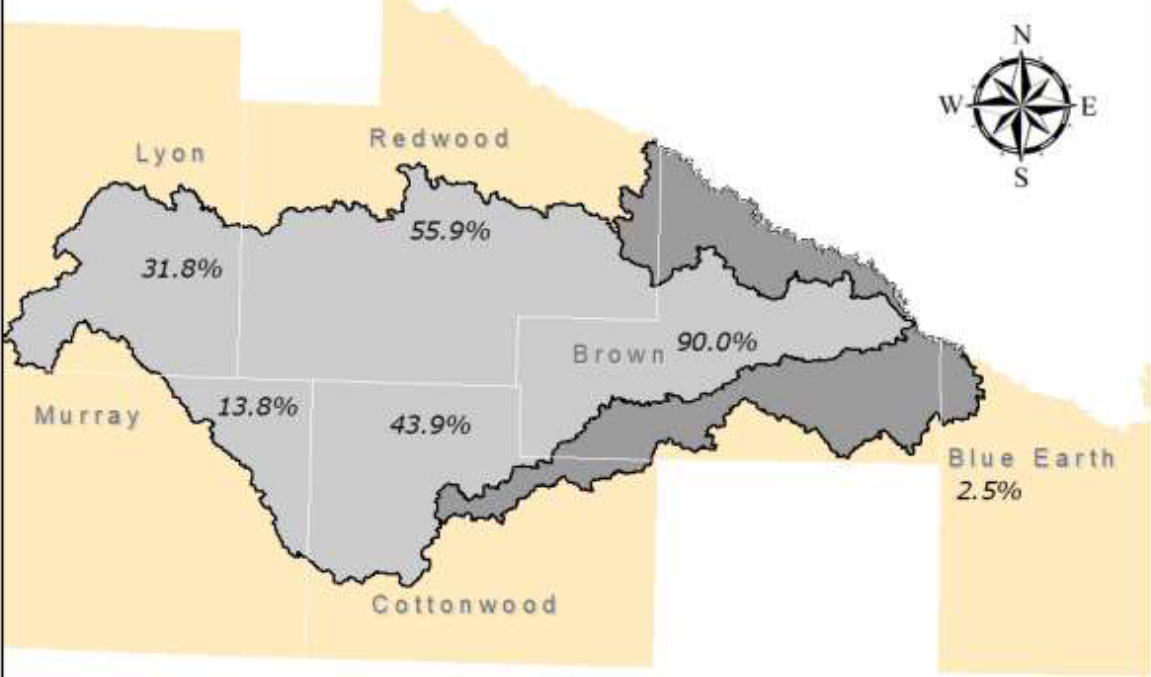
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CC: Reid Christianson, MDA (via email)  
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Barbara Weisman, DNR (via email)  
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John Shea, BWSR (via email)  
Mark Hiles, BWSR (via email)  
BWSR Executive Assistant (currently Rachel Mueller), BWSR (file copy)

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# Cottonwood - Middle Minnesota 1W1P Boundary



**Legend**

- Middle Minnesota
- Cottonwood
- County Name
- Counties
- % of County in 1W1P



## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Audit and Oversight Committee***

1. 2024 Performance Review and Assistance Program Legislative Report – Don Bajumpaa –  
***DECISION ITEM***

**BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM**

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** 2024 Performance Review and Assistance Program Legislative Report

---

**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**  Committee Recommendation  New Business  Old Business

**Item Type:**  Decision  Discussion  Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** PRAP, Legislative Report, Audit and Oversight, 2024 PRAP, Audit

---

**Section/Region:** Organizational Effectiveness

**Contact:** Jenny Gieseke

**Prepared by:** Don Bajumpaa

**Reviewed by:** Audit and Oversight Committee Committee(s)

**Presented by:** Don Bajumpaa

**Time requested:** 15 minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**  Resolution  Order  Map  Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- None  General Fund Budget
- Amended Policy Requested  Capital Budget
- New Policy Requested  Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget
- Other:  Clean Water Fund Budget

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Approval

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

BWSR is required to provide a report annually to the legislature on Performance Review and Assistance Program activities as prescribed by Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B.102, Subdivision 3, effective February 1, 2008. BWSR staff have prepared a report that describes the program activities for 2024, including summaries of the activities of BWSRs local government partners, and goals and objectives for future PRAP activities. The report was presented to and has a recommendation from the BWSR Audit and Oversight Committee for BWSR Board approval.

## BOARD ORDER

### Performance Review and Assistance Program 2024 Report to the Minnesota Legislature

#### PURPOSE

#### Adopt 2024 PRAP Legislative Report

#### FINDINGS OF FACT / RECITALS

1. The 2007 Legislature directed the Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) to develop and implement an ongoing program to evaluate and report on the performance of each local water management entity.
2. In 2007 the Board developed a set of guiding principles and directed staff to implement a program for reviewing performance, offering assistance, and reporting results, now called the Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP), in consultation with stakeholders and consistent with the guiding principles as published on the BWSR website.
3. According to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B.102, Subdivision 3, beginning February 1, 2008, and annually thereafter, the Board shall provide a report of local water management entity performance to the chairs of the House and Senate committees having jurisdiction over environment and natural resources policy.
4. The 2024 PRAP Report to the Minnesota Legislature contains the summaries of the local water management entity performance reviews conducted by BWSR staff in 2024 and a summary of findings describing the performance of local water management entities regarding compliance with plan status and basic reporting requirements.
5. The 2024 PRAP Report to the Minnesota Legislature was reviewed by the Board's Audit and Oversight committee on January 15, 2025 and was recommended for Board adoption by the committee.

#### ORDER

The Board hereby:

Adopts the 2024 Performance Review and Assistance Program Report and directs staff to submit the report to the Minnesota Legislature and publish it on the Board's website, with allowance for any minor editing modifications necessary for finalization.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, this January 22, 2025.

**MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# 2024 Performance Review and Assistance Program

Report to the Minnesota Legislature

January 22, 2025

**Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources**

520 Lafayette Road North

St. Paul, MN 55155

651-296-3767

[www.bwsr.state.mn.us](http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us)

## 2024 PRAP Legislative Report

This report has been prepared for the Minnesota State Legislature by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in partial fulfillment of Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B.102, subdivision 3.

Prepared by Don Bajumpaa, PRAP Coordinator ([don.bajumpaa@state.mn.us](mailto:don.bajumpaa@state.mn.us))

The estimated cost of preparing this report (as required by Minn. Stat. 3.197) was:

Total staff time: \$3,500

Production/duplication: \$300

Total: \$3,800

BWSR is reducing printing and mailing costs by using the Internet to distribute reports and information to wider audiences. This report is available at [PRAP Legislative Reports | MN Board of Water, Soil Resources \(state.mn.us\)](#) and available in alternative formats upon request.

## MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP)

### Executive Summary

Since 2008, BWSR's Performance Review and Assistance Program has assessed the performance of the local units of government constituting Minnesota's delivery system for conservation of water and related land resources. These local units of government include 88 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), 87 counties, 45 watershed districts (WDs) and 18 watershed management organizations (WMOs). The program goal is to assist these local government partners to be the best they can be in their management of Minnesota's land and water resources.

#### **PRAP focuses on three aspects of Local Governmental Unit (LGU) performance:**

- 1) Plan Implementation—how well an LGU's accomplishments meet planned objectives.
- 2) Compliance with performance standards—meeting administrative mandates and following best practices.
- 3) Collaboration and communication—the quality of partner and stakeholder relationships.

BWSR's PRAP uses four levels of review to assess performance ranging from statewide oversight in the statewide summary, to a focus on individual LGU performance in the Organizational Assessment, review of comprehensive watershed management plan progress in the Watershed-based Assessment, and Special Assessment for organizations needing additional assistance.

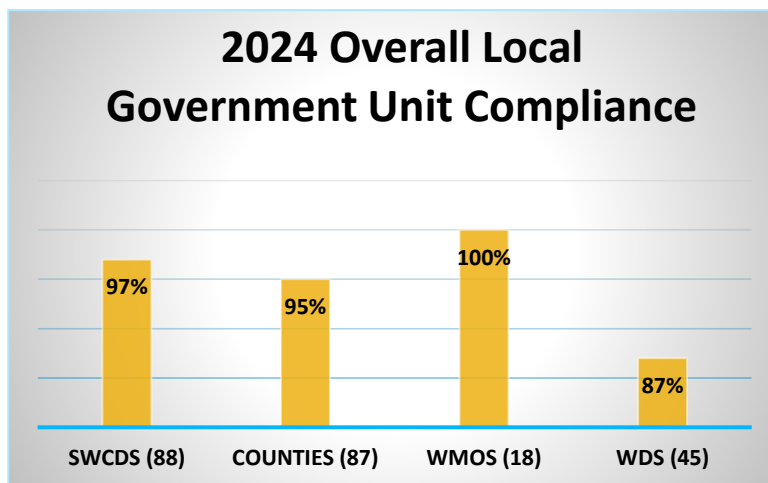
#### **2024 Program Summary**

- Continued training new PRAP Coordinator hired in 2023.
- Tracked 238 LGU's performance via Statewide Summary.
- Continued efforts to improve statewide summary performance review reporting of all LGUs through LGU cooperation and persistent follow-up by BWSR staff and increase compliance with SWCD audit requirements.
- Completed three Watershed-based Performance Reviews, with 34 LGU partners.
- Completed 13 Organizational Assessments.
- Evaluated PRAP Program and developed changes to process materials based on findings.
- Emphasized the importance of measuring outcomes in PRAP reviews, ways of demonstrating resource outcomes resulting from plan implementation, and set specific expectations for reporting resource outcomes to LGUs.
- Surveyed LGUs from 2021 Organizational Assessment PRAP review to track LGU implementation of PRAP recommendations.
- Monitored and review compliance with Action Items identified during Organizational Assessment review to measure progress toward the goal of 100% compliance within 18 months for required Action Items.
- Continued to promote PRAP Assistance Grants to enhance LGU organizational effectiveness.
- Updated Watershed-based PRAP Performance Standards checklist, guidance document and Survey questions for Watershed-based PRAP process.
- Provided PRAP Assistance Grants for nine LGUs.
- Continued review of Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) program implementation as part of Organizational Assessments to measure local government unit compliance.
- Met with BWSR easement staff to discuss incorporating future assessments related to the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program.

- Completed two PRAP onboarding trainings for new organization administrators to help them prepare for future organizational assessments.
- Completed seven PRAP onboarding trainings for watershed partnerships to help them prepare for 2025 watershed-based assessments.

### 2024 Results of Annual Tracking of 238 LGU Plans and Reports (PRAP Annual Statewide Summary)

In 2024, overall compliance with LGU plan revision and reporting requirements was 94%, the same as 2023. All drainage buffer reports were submitted on time. Annual audit submittals increased from the previous year. In 2024, reminders were sent to improve compliance. Staff efforts will continue in 2025 to identify issues and improve overall LGU compliance.



#### Long-range Plan Status:

The number of overdue plans is one in 2024 (*same as 2023*).

- Counties: No water plans are overdue.
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts: No plans are overdue.
- Watershed Districts: One watershed plan is overdue (Two Rivers).

#### (Plan Revision in Progress)

- Watershed Management Organizations: No watershed management plans are overdue.

#### LGUs in Full Compliance with Level I Performance Standards: 94%.

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts: 97% compliance (85/88), down from 98% in 2023.
- County Water Management: 95% compliance (83/87), same as 2023.
- Watershed Districts: 87% compliance (39/45), up from 82% in 2023.
- Watershed Management Organizations: 100% compliance (18/18), up from 94% in 2023.

### Selected PRAP Program Objectives for 2025

- Track 238 LGUs' performance via Statewide Summary.
- Continue efforts to improve Statewide Summary performance review reporting of all LGUs through LGU cooperation and persistent follow-up by BWSR staff.
- Complete up to seven watershed-based reviews and 22 organizational reviews.
- Continue to evaluate the PRAP Program and make changes to processes and materials based on findings.
- Emphasize the importance of measuring outcomes in PRAP reviews, ways of demonstrating resource outcomes resulting from plan implementation, and set specific expectations for reporting resource outcomes by LGUs.



- Survey 16 LGUs and one Watershed Partnership from 2022 Organizational and Watershed-based PRAP reviews to track LGU implementation of PRAP recommendations.
- Continue monitoring and reviewing compliance with Action Items identified during Organizational and Watershed-based Assessments (One Watershed One Plan) to measure progress toward the goal of 100% compliance within 18 months for required Action Items.
- Continue the promotion and use of PRAP Assistance Grants to enhance LGU organizational effectiveness.
- Explore opportunities to secure stable funding source for PRAP assistance grants.
- Explore opportunities to increase staff capacity to provide more assistance to organizations with organizational effectiveness needs.
- Complete up to 12 PRAP onboarding training opportunities for new organization administrators to help them prepare for future organizational assessments.
- Complete up to six PRAP onboarding opportunities for watershed partnerships to help them prepare for 2026 watershed-based assessments.

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# What is the Performance Review & Assistance Program?

## Supporting Local Delivery of Conservation Services

PRAP is primarily a performance assessment activity conducted by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). The subjects of the assessments are the local governmental units (LGUs) that deliver BWSR's water and land conservation programs, and the process is designed to evaluate how well LGUs are implementing their long-range plans. The LGUs reviewed include soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), watershed districts (WDs), watershed management organizations (WMOs), and the water management function of counties—a total of 238 distinct organizations. PRAP, authorized in 2007 (see Appendix A, pages 16-17), is coordinated by one BWSR staff member, with assistance from BWSR's Board Conservationists, Clean Water Specialists, Wetland Specialists, and Regional Managers, who routinely work with these LGUs.

## Guiding Principles

PRAP is based on and uses the following principles adopted by the BWSR Board.

- Pre-emptive
- Systematic
- Constructive
- Includes consequences
- Provides recognition for high performance
- Transparent
- Retains local ownership and autonomy
- Maintains proportionate expectations
- Preserves the state/local partnership
- Results in effective on-the-ground conservation

The principles set parameters for the program's purpose of helping LGUs to be the best they can be in their operational effectiveness. Of note is the principle of proportionate expectations. This means that LGUs are rated on the accomplishment of their own plan's objectives. Moreover, BWSR rates operational performance using both basic and high-performance standards specific to each type of LGU. (For more detail see <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/prap>)

## Current Multi-level Structure

PRAP has three operational components:

- performance review
- assistance
- reporting

The **performance review** structure for 2024 includes an Annual Statewide Summary and three types of assessment.

**Statewide Summary** review is an annual tabulation of required plans and reports for all 238 LGUs. The Statewide Summary review is conducted entirely by BWSR staff and does not require additional input from LGUs.

**Organizational Assessment** is a routine, interactive review intended to cover all LGUs at least once every 10 years. An Organizational Assessment evaluates progress on plan implementation, operational effectiveness, and partner relationships. This review includes assessing compliance with Level II performance standards. Thirteen organizational assessments were completed in 2024. Organizations were assessed through the Watershed-based Assessment process.

**Watershed-based Assessment** is a routine review conducted with partnerships of local governments working together to implement comprehensive watershed management plans (CWMPs) developed through the One Watershed, One Plan Program. This review occurs at roughly the five-year plan adoption point, evaluates progress on plan implementation and analyzes partners working relationships. Three watershed-based assessments were completed in 2024 and involved a total of 34 LGUs.

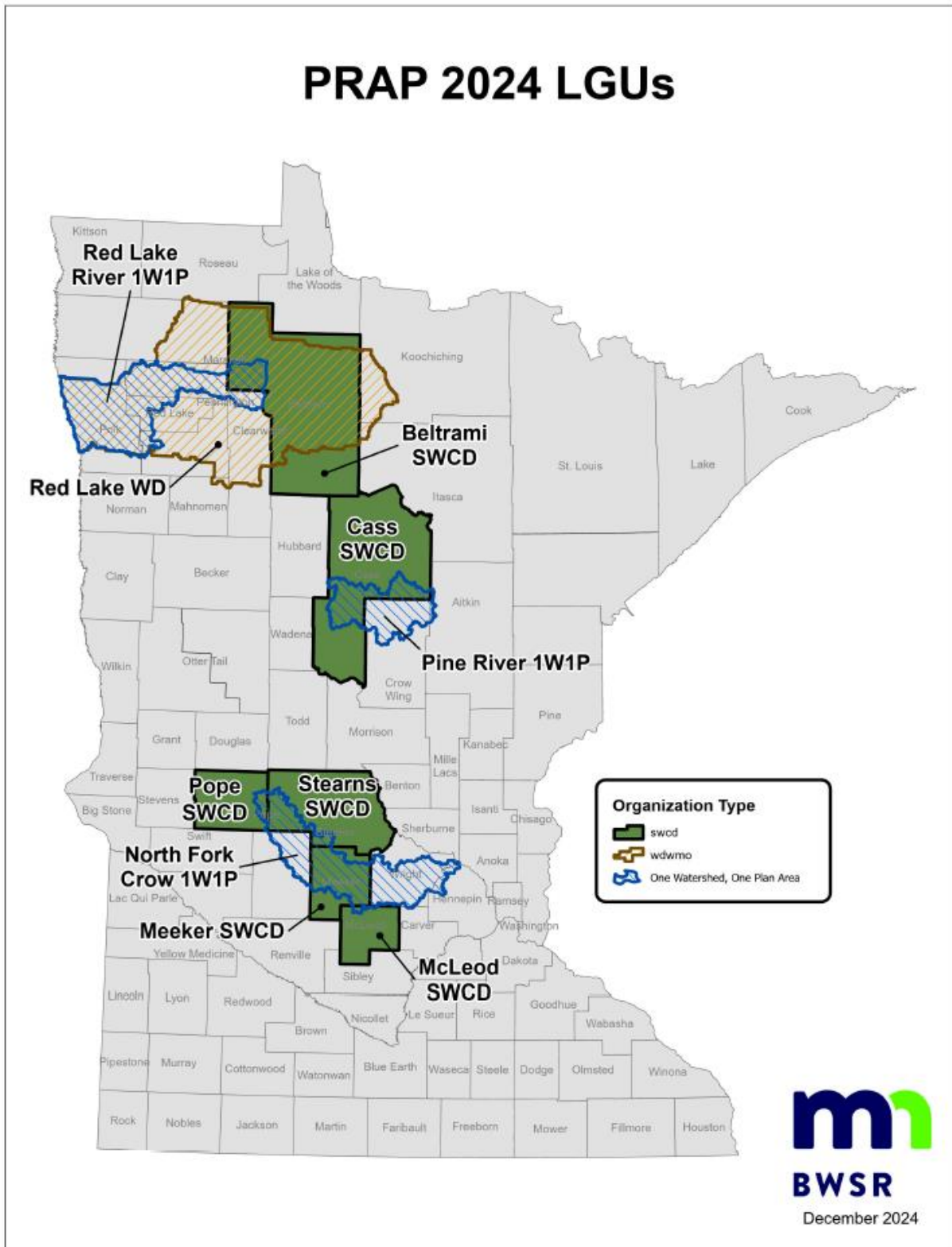
**Special Assessment** is an in-depth assessment of an LGU faced with performance challenges. A Special Assessment is initiated by BWSR or the LGU and usually involves targeted assistance to address specific performance needs. BWSR regularly monitors all LGUs for challenges that would necessitate a Special Assessment. No Special Assessments were completed in 2024.

**Assistance** (pages 11-12). In 2012, BWSR began awarding PRAP assistance grants to assist LGUs in obtaining practical and financial assistance for organizational improvements or to address performance issues. The grants are typically used for consultant services for activities identified by the LGU or recommended by BWSR in a performance review. In 2024 BWSR awarded nine PRAP assistance grants to LGUs.

**Reporting** (pages 13-14) makes information about LGU performance accessible to the LGUs' stakeholders and constituents. Reporting methods specific to PRAP include links to performance review summaries and this annual report to the Legislature, which can be accessed via the PRAP page on BWSR's website <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/prap-legislative-reports>. In addition, the PRAP Coordinator presents results from Organizational and Watershed-based Assessment performance reviews to LGU boards at the completion of the review, and to additional boards/committees upon request.

### **Accountability: From Measuring Effort to Tracking Results**

The administration of government programs necessitates a high degree of accountability. PRAP was developed, in part, to deliver on that demand by providing systematic local government performance review and then reporting results. In 2017, BWSR added review of LGUs' implementation of the WCA program.



# Report on PRAP Performance

## BWSR’s Accountability

BWSR continues to hold itself accountable for the objectives of the PRAP program. In consideration of that commitment, this section lists 2024 program activities with the corresponding objectives from the 2023 PRAP legislative report.

### PERFORMANCE REVIEW OBJECTIVES

What We Proposed	What We Did
Track 238 LGU performance via Statewide Summary	All LGUs were tracked for basic plan and reporting compliance. Overall, Level I performance in 2024 was 94% compliance, the same as 2023. Overdue long-range water management plans totaled one in 2023.
Continue efforts to improve reporting of all LGUs through cooperation and persistent follow up by BWSR staff.	WD compliance increased to 87% in 2024 as compared to 82% in 2023. In 2024, 100% of Watershed Management Organizations met reporting or auditing requirements, as compared to 94% in 2023. SWCD compliance decreased to 97% as compared to 98% in 2023, and Counties remained the same at 95%.
Complete up to 18 performance reviews.	Completed three watershed-based and 13 organizational assessments.
Evaluate PRAP Program and make changes to processes and materials based on findings.	Worked with 1W1P Program Coordinator, Wetland Specialists, Regional Managers, Board Conservationists and Chief Financial Officer to identify areas for improvement and efficiencies. Also, met with Easement Programs Coordinator to consider a future process to measure organizational performance.
Survey LGUs from 2021 organizational assessment PRAP reviews to track LGU implementation of PRAP recommendations.	In 2021, 17 LGUs were reviewed. Of the 17, two LGUs received a total of four action items, each of which was implemented within 18 months.
Continue monitoring and reviewing compliance with action items identified during an organization or watershed-based review to measure progress toward the goal of 100% compliance withing 18 months for required action items.	<p>All action items identified during the 2021 were completed within the 18-month timeline.</p> <p>All action items identified during the 2023 watershed-based and organizational assessments were assigned an 18-month timeline for completion.</p>

### ASSISTANCE OBJECTIVES

What We Proposed	What We Did
<p>Continue the promotion and use of PRAP Assistance Grants to enhance LGU organizational effectiveness.</p>	<p>The PRAP assistance grant program was updated in 2021 to acknowledge the need for partnerships, newly formed or existing to access adequate assistance funding for their development. Beginning in 2021 partnerships are eligible for up to \$20,000 in assistance funds, while individual LGUs remain eligible for up to \$10,000. A total of nine LGUs received funding in 2024. These included Comfort Lake-Forest Lake WD (strategic planning), SW Prairie Technical Service Area (strategic workload analysis and staffing needs), Isanti SWCD (strategic planning and staffing plan), Morrison SWCD (workload analysis), Swift SWCD (updated policies/employee job descriptions), Wilkin SWCD (workload analysis), Wright SWCD (update position descriptions/pay scale), Lake of the Woods (update policies), and Wabasha SWCD (update position descriptions/pay scale). Total grant funds awarded in 2024 is \$92,500.</p>

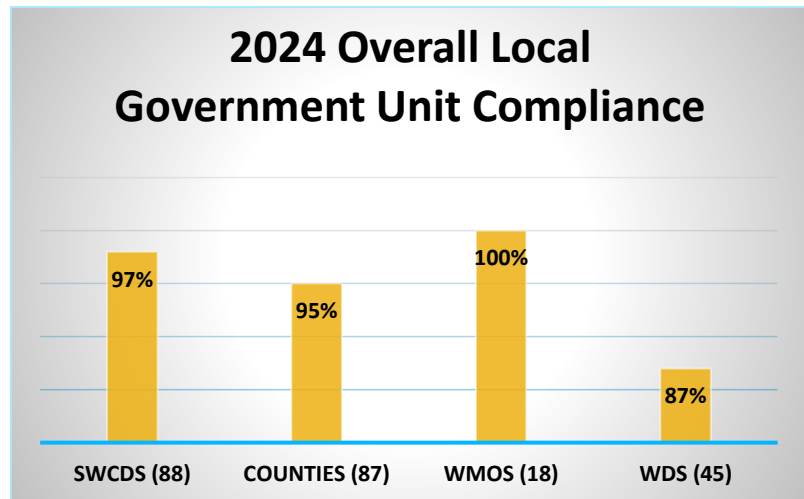
### REPORTING OBJECTIVES

What We Proposed	What We Did
<p>Provide leadership in communicating the importance of measuring outcomes in Watershed-based Assessments (One Watershed One Plan) and Organizational Assessment performance reviews, ways of demonstrating resource outcomes resulting from plan implementation, and set specific expectations for reporting resource outcomes by LGUs.</p>	<p>In 2024, three Watershed-based Assessments were completed with watershed partners in the Red Lake River, North Fork Crow River, and Pine River Watersheds. These Watershed-based Assessments measured the watershed partners progress towards their plan goals and whether assurance measures for Watershed-based Implementation funding are being met. Monitoring plan progress and compliance with assurance measures will continue to be a requirement of the comprehensive watershed management plans developed via the One Watershed One Plan program.</p> <p>A total of 13 Organizational Assessments were also completed in 2024, in conjunction with the Watershed-based Assessments above.</p> <p>PRAP coordinator completed seven watershed-based and two organizational onboarding (training) sessions to help partnerships and organizations prepare for future PRAP assessments.</p>

## 2024 LGU Performance Review Results

### Statewide Summary Results

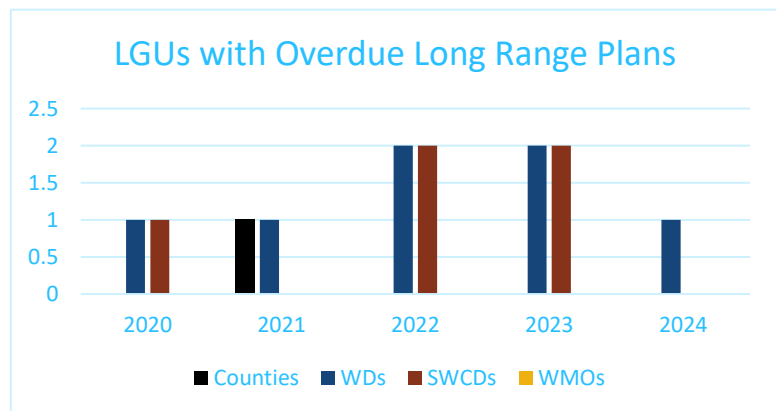
The Annual Statewide Summary monitors and tabulates all 238 LGUs’ long-range plan updates and their annual reporting of activities, ditch buffer reports, grants, and finances. BWSR tracks these performance measures each year to provide oversight of legal and policy mandates, but also to screen LGUs for indications of potential problems. Chronic lateness in financial or grant reporting, for example, may be a symptom of operational issues that require BWSR assistance.



**Overall, LGU compliance with Level I standards remained the same at 94% in 2024. BWSR began tightening Level I compliance tracking in 2013, and compliance percentages have remained high from 2018 - 2024, as seen above.**

### Long-range plans

BWSR’s legislative mandate for PRAP includes a specific emphasis on evaluating progress in LGU plan implementation. Therefore, helping LGUs keep their plans current is basic to that review. The Annual Statewide Summary tracks whether LGUs are meeting their plan revision due dates. For this review, LGUs that have been granted an extension for their plan revision are not considered to have an overdue plan.



Many Local Water Management plans were operating under extensions granted by the BWSR as LGUs continue transitioning to development of One Watershed One Plans. The number of overdue in 2024 has decreased from 2023. Just one WD water management plan is overdue at the end of 2023. No county local water plan and watershed management organization plans have expired as of December 31, 2024. LGUs without an approved water management plan are not eligible for Clean Water grant funds awarded by BWSR.

Appendix D (page 21) lists the LGUs whose plans are overdue for a plan revision.

### Annual activity and grant report



LGU annual reports are an important means of providing citizens and BWSR with information about LGU activities and grants expenditures. The Annual Statewide Summary review tracks both missing and late reports.

In 2024, there was complete on-time submittal of drainage system buffer strip reports by both County and WD drainage authorities. Of the 96 LGUs that must submit annual buffer reports, 100% met the February 1, 2024, deadline, maintaining the 100% reporting compliance achieved from 2015 through 2024. This continued compliance is attributed to persistent efforts by BWSR staff to contact LGUs with missing reports before the due date.

On-time submittal of grant status reports via BWSR's on-line eLINK system is slightly lower in 2024 with 97% of LGUs reporting on time compared with 99% in 2023, 2022, and 2021, and 98% in 2020.

Watershed district compliance with the annual activity report requirements increased in 2024 with 87% compliance, this compared to 84% in 2023, 89% in 2022, 91% in 2021, 89% in 2020, and 87% in 2019. Continued improvement in reporting will continue to be an objective of BWSR staff in 2025, with a goal of reaching 100% compliance.

Appendix E (page 22) contains more details about reporting.

### Annual financial reports and audits

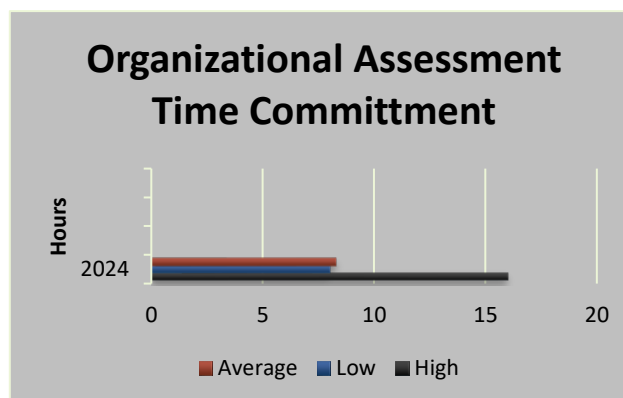
Starting in 2020, all SWCDs were required to prepare annual audits of their financial record and submit audited financial statements to BWSR. In 2024, 100% of SWCD completed financial reports and audits. A reminder was sent out to SWCDs regarding the due date for audit report submissions to BWSR.

WDs and WMOs are also required to prepare annual audits. In, 2024 91% of WDs met the audit performance standard, compared to 82% in 2023. In 2024, 100% of WMOs met this standard, as compared to 94% in 2023. See Appendix F (page 23) for financial report and audit details.

BWSR does not track county audits because counties are accountable to the Office of the State Auditor.

### Organizational Reviews

Organizational reviews are designed to give both BWSR and the individual LGUs an overall assessment of the LGU's effectiveness in their delivery of conservation efforts. The review looks at the LGU's compliance with BWSR's operational performance standards and includes surveys of board members, staff, and partners to assess the LGU's effectiveness and existing relationships with other organizations. In 2024, LGU staff spent an average of about 8.3 hours on Organizational Assessments while BWSR staff spent an average of about 40 hours for each assessment.



BWSR conducted organizational review for 13 LGUs in 2024: **Beltrami County, Beltrami SWCD, Cass County, Cass SWCD, McLeod County, McLeod SWCD, Meeker County, Meeker SWCD, Pope County, Pope SWCD, Red Lake Watershed District, Stearns County, and Stearns SWCD.** Appendix G (pages 24-40) contain summaries of the 2024 Organizational Assessments reports. Full reports are available from BWSR by request.

### Common Organizational Assessment Recommendations in 2024

While none of the findings or conclusions from these reviews apply to all LGUs, there were general observations and commonly used recommendations to improve LGU performance worth noting.

1. **Develop and enhance communication and outreach strategies to improve communications with the public and partners.**
2. **Develop a public information and education strategy to track measures and determine their effectiveness in meeting plan objectives.**
3. **Develop orientation and continued education plans for both board and staff.**
4. **Develop and use short-term strategic planning to set priorities for annual workplans and budgets.**
5. **Utilize water quality information to report progress and trends made in achieving resource goals.**

### Watershed-based Performance (One Watershed One Plan) Review Results

There have been significant changes in the way that Minnesota approaches water management since PRAP started in 2008. In particular, the transition to watershed-based management plans have changed the way water planning is occurring at a local level. In 2023, BWSR determined that an evaluation of the PRAP program was needed to review the effectiveness of the program and to identify any areas for improvement or efficiencies.

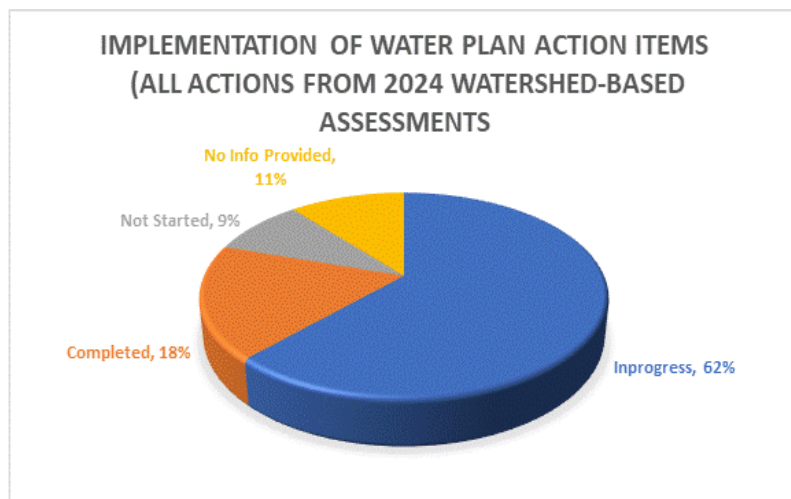
Program evaluation continued to occur after a new PRAP coordinator was hired in October of 2023. This work, in conjunction with necessary onboarding and training for a new coordinator resulted in three watershed-based reviews scheduled for 2024 being completed.

In 2024, BWSR conducted Watershed-based PRAP Assessments for three Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans: **Red Lake River, North Fork Crow River, and Pine River Watersheds.**

Appendix G (pages 24-40) contains summaries of the 2024 performance review reports. Full reports are available from BWSR by request.

### Implementation of Water Plan Action Items

Three Watershed-based Assessments were completed in 2024 to review progress made towards their One Watershed, One Plans (Red Lake River, North Fork Crow River, and Pine River Watersheds). Those plans identified a combined 153 action items. Of those action items, 95 (62%) had at least some progress made, with 28 (18%) actions being completed, and 14 (9%) action items that were not started or dropped. Eighty percent of the total actions were implemented to some extent (either completed or ongoing).



**Common Watershed-based Recommendations in 2024**

While none of the findings or conclusions from these reviews apply to all LGUs, there were general observations and commonly used recommendations to improve LGU performance worth noting.

- 1. Increase engagement with Advisory Committee (including stakeholders).**
- 2. Annually Conduct Work Planning Exercise.**
- 3. Improve Plan Progress Tracking and Consider Articulating Goals in Concrete/Measurable Fashion in Future Plan Amendments.**

**Action Items**

During Performance Review Assessments, an LGU’s compliance with performance standards is reviewed. Action items are based on the LGU’s lack of compliance with BWSR’s basic practice performance standards. LGU’s are given an Action Item in the PRAP Report to address lack of compliance with one or more basic standards.

All Action Items identified during the 2024 PRAP Assessment reviews will be verified within 18 months to ensure completion. A PRAP follow-up survey demonstrated that all four of the action items assigned for 2021 LGUs were implemented within 18 months.

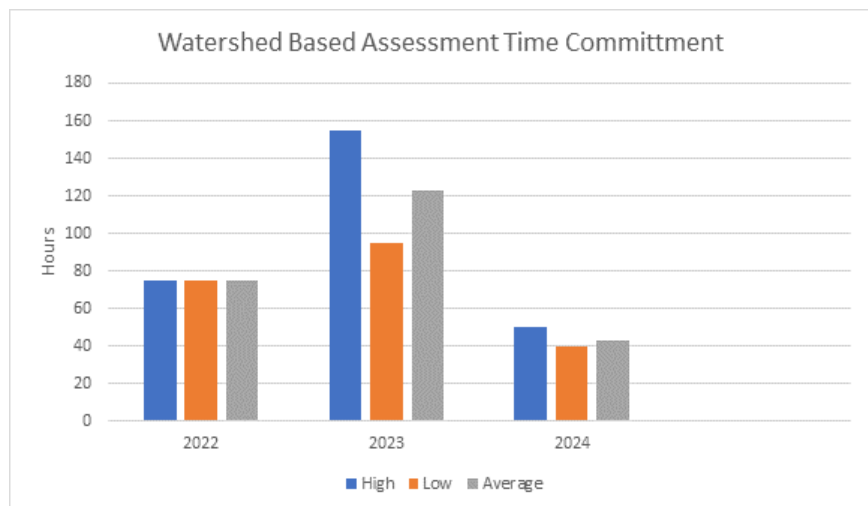
**Special Assessment Results**

No Special Assessment reviews were completed in 2024 as there was no expressed desire by BCs or regional supervisors to conduct this level of review on any LGUs.

**Performance Review Time**

BWSR tracks the time spent by LGUs in a performance review as a substitute for accounting their financial costs. Factors affecting an LGU’s time include the number of action items in their long-range plan, the number of staff who help with data collection, and the ready availability of performance data.

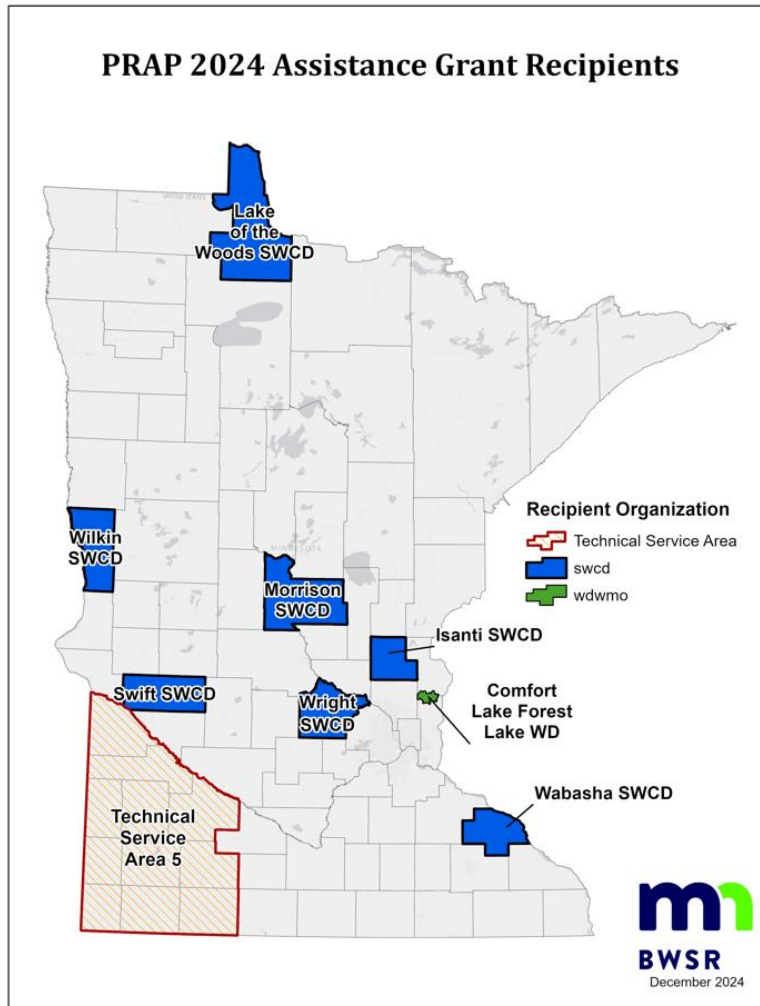
In 2024, LGU staff within each partnership, spent an average of about 43 hours on their Watershed-based Assessment. This is lower than the previous year’s 123-hour average. The amount of LGU staff time to conduct the Watershed-based Assessment is trending higher than an Organizational Assessment because it includes time from several partners as compared to a single LGU. Not including overall performance review administration and process development, BWSR staff spent an average of 80 hours for each Watershed-based Assessment.



BWSR seeks to maintain a balance between getting good information and minimizing the LGU time required to provide it. Our goal is to gather as much pertinent information as needed to assess the performance of the LGU and offer realistic and useful recommendations for improving performance.

# Assistance Services to Local Governments

## PRAP Assistance Program



In 2012, BWSR developed the PRAP Assistance program to provide financial assistance to LGUs for improving operating performance and executing planned goals and objectives. Since the program started, more than \$382,000 has been awarded to LGUs around Minnesota. Priority is given to applicants submitting projects related to eligible PRAP Organizational Assessment or Special Assessment recommendations, but other organizations are also eligible. The grants are made on a cost-share, reimbursement basis with a cap of \$10,000 per single LGU or \$20,000 for partnerships applying as a group. The application process requires basic information about the need, the proposed use of funds, a timeline, and the source of match dollars. BWSR staff assess the LGU need as part of the application review process, and grants are awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis if funds are available.

In 2015, the BWSR Board delegated authority to the Executive Director to award grants or contracts for the purpose of assisting LGUs in making organizational improvements (see resolution in Appendix B (page 17)). The Executive Director regularly informs Board members of assistance grant status.

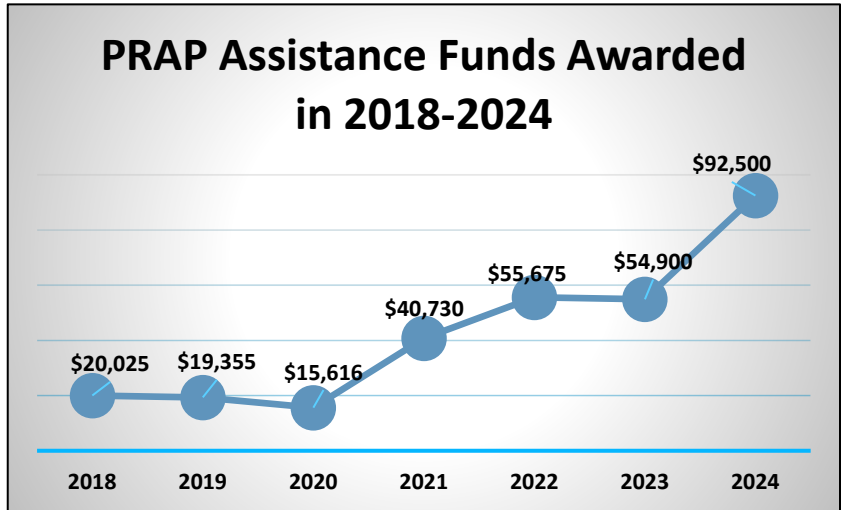
In calendar year 2024, nine PRAP Assistance Grants, totaling \$92,500, were provided for Comfort Lake-Forest Lake WD, Isanti SWCD, Lake of the Woods SWCD, Morrison SWCD, Swift SWCD, Southwest Prairie SWCD,

Wabasha SWCD, Wilkin SWCD, and Wright SWCD. Board Conservationists were encouraged to work with LGUs who could benefit from PRAP Assistance grants. LGUs undergoing an Organizational Assessment were also notified of PRAP assistance funding when recommendations were made for activities that would be eligible for PRAP funds.

The awarded funds will be used for the development of operating policies, organizational assessments, strategic planning, and goal setting.

The application information for PRAP assistance grants can be found in Appendix C (pg. 19-20).

Potential applicants can find information on the BWSR website <http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/PRAP/index.html>.



# Reporting

## Purpose of Reporting

BWSR reports on LGU performance to:

- meet the legislative mandate (M.S. 103B.102) to provide the public with information about the performance of their local water management entities, and
- provide information that will encourage LGUs to learn from one another about methods and programs that produce the most effective results.

## Report Types

PRAP either relies on or generates different types of reports to achieve the purposes listed above.

## LGU-Generated

These include information posted on the LGU websites and the required or voluntary reports submitted to BWSR, other units of government, and the public about fiscal status, plans, programs, and activities. These all serve as a means of communicating what each LGU is achieving and allow stakeholders to make their own evaluations of LGU performance. PRAP tracks submittal of required, self-generated LGU reports in the Statewide Summary review process.

## BWSR Website

The BWSR website contains a webpage devoted to PRAP information. The site provides background information on the program including:

- Guiding principles for the program
- A description of the three types of assessments (Organization, Watershed-Based and Special Assessment)
- Application information for PRAP grants
- Background on the PRAP Legislative Report
- Description of the Annual Statewide Summary

For more information see: <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/prap>

The BWSR website also includes regularly updated maps of long-range plan status by LGU type. Visitors to the PRAP webpage can find general program information, tables of current performance standards by LGU type, summaries of Organizational Assessment performance review reports, and copies of annual legislative reports.

## Performance Review Reports

BWSR prepares a report containing findings, conclusions, and recommendations for each LGU subject of an Organizational Assessment performance review. The LGU lead staff and board, or water plan task force members receive a draft of the report to which they are invited to submit comments. BWSR then sends a final report to the LGU. A summary from each review is included in the annual legislative report (see Appendices G and H, pages 24-46).

## Annual Legislative Report

As required by statute (M.S. 103B.102, Subd. 3), BWSR prepares an annual report for the legislature containing the results of the previous year's program activities and a general assessment of the performance of the LGUs providing land and water conservation services and programs. These reports are reviewed and approved by the BWSR board and then sent to the chairpersons of the senate and house environmental policy committees, to statewide LGU associations and to the office of the legislative auditor.

**Recognition for Exemplary Performance**

The PRAP Guiding Principles include a provision for recognizing exemplary LGU performance. Each year this legislative report highlights those LGUs that are recognized by their peers or other organizations for their contribution to Minnesota's resource management and protection, as well as service to their local clientele. (See Appendix I, page 47).

For those LGUs that undergo an Organizational or Watershed-based Assessment, their report lists "commendations" for compliance with each high-performance standard, demonstrating practices over and above basic requirements. The following are common commendations shared by LGUs in 2024:

- Active partner/participant in at least one 1W1P planning or implementation process.
- Received competitive Clean Water Grants within the past two years.
- Water management ordinances are on county website.
- Annual report to water plan advisory committee on plan progress.
- Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, watershed district, non-government organizations.



## Program Conclusions and Future Direction

### Conclusions from 2024 Reviews

**All Action Items identified during 2024 Watershed-based Assessment PRAP were assigned an 18-month timeline for completion.** In 2024, BWSR completed follow up of all Organizational Assessment (previously Level II review) PRAPs for the year 2021.

**Action Items from previous Organizational Assessment PRAP are being implemented.** In 2021, two organizations received a total of four action items, each of which were implemented within 18 months.

**Common recommendations for watershed partners in 2024 was to:** annually conduct a work planning exercise; improve plan progress tracking; and consider articulating goals in a concrete/measurable fashion in future amendments.

**Reminders and incentives contribute significantly to on-time reporting by LGUs.** Overall LGU reporting performance and non-expired plans improved in 2024. Buffer strip reporting was maintained at full LGU compliance after reaching 100% compliance in 2015 through 2024 which can be attributed to close attention from BWSR staff. Overall compliance was 94% in 2024, the same as 2023.

### PRAP Program Evaluation

In January 2023, the BWSR contracted with Management Analysis and Development (MAD) to evaluate the core components of the PRAP and make recommendations for internal process improvements. Information for the evaluation was gathered through a series of interviews with BWSR staff, and with LGU partner staff that had been part of the PRAP review within the last two years, document review and process mapping.

Feedback about the program was generally positive, and it appears that BWSR and LGU partners find value in the reviews. The report also provided recommendations on how to improve the program moving forward. In 2024 BWSR prioritized the recommendations and began to integrate changes into the program implementation. In 2024, the PRAP Coordinator worked with BWSR's 1W1P Program Coordinator, Wetland Specialists, Regional Managers, Board Conservationists and Chief Financial Officer to reinforce the importance of utilizing existing reporting tools to track LGU level one reporting requirements and to implement internal process to conduct assessments more efficiently. The PRAP coordinator also met with BWSR's Easement Programs Coordinator to consider a process to measure organizational performance.

## PRAP Program Objectives for 2025

- Track 238 LGUs' performance via Statewide Summary.
- Continue efforts to improve Statewide Summary performance review reporting of all LGUs through LGU cooperation and persistent follow-up by BWSR staff.
- Complete up to seven watershed-based reviews and 22 organizational reviews.
- Continue to evaluate PRAP Program and make changes to processes and materials based on findings.
- Emphasize the importance of measuring outcomes in PRAP reviews, ways of demonstrating resource outcomes resulting from plan implementation, and set specific expectations for reporting resource outcomes by LGUs.
- Survey 16 LGUs and one Watershed Partnership from 2022 Organizational and Watershed-based PRAP reviews to track LGU implementation of PRAP recommendations.
- Continue monitoring and reviewing compliance with Action Items identified during Organizational and Watershed-based Assessments to measure progress toward the goal of 100% compliance within 18 months for required Action Items.
- Continue the promotion and use of PRAP Assistance Grants to enhance LGU organizational effectiveness.
- Explore opportunities to secure stable funding source for PRAP assistance grants.
- Explore opportunities to increase staff capacity to provide more assistance to organizations with organizational effectiveness needs.
- Complete up to 12 PRAP onboarding training opportunities for new organization administrators to help them prepare for future organizational assessments.
- Complete up to six PRAP onboarding opportunities for watershed partnerships to help them prepare for 2026 watershed-based assessments.

# Appendix A

## PRAP Authorizing Legislation

### 103B.102, Minnesota Statutes 2013

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#### **103B.102 LOCAL WATER MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT.**

##### **Subd. 1. Findings; improving accountability and oversight.**

The legislature finds that a process is needed to monitor the performance and activities of local water management entities. The process should be preemptive so that problems can be identified early and systematically. Underperforming entities should be provided assistance and direction for improving performance in a reasonable time frame.

##### **Subd. 2. Definitions.**

For the purposes of this section, "local water management entities" means watershed districts, soil and water conservation districts, metropolitan water management organizations, and counties operating separately or jointly in their role as local water management authorities under chapter 103B, 103C, 103D, or 103G and chapter 114D.

##### **Subd. 3. Evaluation and report.**

The Board of Water and Soil Resources shall evaluate performance, financial, and activity information for each local water management entity. The board shall evaluate the entities' progress in accomplishing their adopted plans on a regular basis as determined by the board based on budget and operations of the local water management entity, but not less than once every ten years. The board shall maintain a summary of local water management entity performance on the board's Web site. Beginning February 1, 2008, and annually thereafter, the board shall provide an analysis of local water management entity performance to the chairs of the house of representatives and senate committees having jurisdiction over environment and natural resources policy.

##### **Subd. 4. Corrective actions.**

(a) In addition to other authorities, the Board of Water and Soil Resources may, based on its evaluation in subdivision 3, reduce, withhold, or redirect grants and other funding if the local water management entity has not corrected deficiencies as prescribed in a notice from the board within one year from the date of the notice.

(b) The board may defer a decision on a termination petition filed under section [103B.221](#), [103C.225](#), or [103D.271](#) for up to one year to conduct or update the evaluation under subdivision 3 or to communicate the results of the evaluation to petitioners or to local and state government agencies.

##### **History:**

*[2007 c 57 art 1 s 104](#); [2013 c 143 art 4 s 1](#)*

# Appendix B

## Board Authorization of Delegation for PRAP Assistance Grants



BOARD DECISION # 21-22

### BOARD ORDER

#### Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) Assistance Service Grants

##### PURPOSE

Authorize PRAP Assistance services and delegate approval of payment to the Executive Director.

##### FINDINGS OF FACT / RECITALS

1. The Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) regularly monitors and evaluates the performance and activities of local water management entities and provides assistance in improving performance under the authorities and requirements of Minnesota Statutes §103B.102.
2. In December 2018, the Board through Resolution #18-71 "approved the allocation of designated or available funds to eligible local water management entities and reconfirmed the delegation of authority to the Executive Director to approve individual PRAP Assistance grants up to \$10,000 requires that program awards are reported to the Board at least once per year."
3. The Board continues to receive requests for PRAP assistance services to address operational or service delivery needs identified through a PRAP assessment or specialized assistance request noting an increase in requests from multiple entities or partnerships.
4. The Board has authorities under Minnesota Statutes §103B.3369 and 103B.101 to award grants and contracts to accomplish water and related land resources management.
5. The Grants Program and Policy Committee, at their August 11, 2021 meeting, reviewed this request and recommended the Board approve this order.

##### ORDER

The Board hereby:

1. Approves the allocation of designated or available funds, consistent with the appropriation of the designated or available funds, to eligible local government water management entities for fulfilling the provisions of Minnesota Statutes §103B.102.
2. Confirms the delegation of authority to the Executive Director to approve PRAP Assistance grants or contracts up to \$10,000 per contract for single entity requests and \$20,000 for projects that involve multiple entities or partnerships and requires that program awards are reported to the Board at least once per year.
3. Establishes that all PRAP Assistance awards be cost shared by the grantee at a percentage determined by the Executive Director.
4. Authorizes staff to enter into grant agreements or contracts for these purposes.
5. Establishes that this order replaces previous Board resolution #18-71.

Dated at Austin, Minnesota, this August 26, 2021.

MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES

  
 Gerald Van Amburg, Chair  
 Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: August 26, 2021

## Appendix C

### PRAP Assistance Grant Application Information

The PRAP Assistance program provides financial assistance to LGUs to improve operating performance and execution of planned goals and objectives. Funding priority is given to activities recommended as part of an Organizational Assessment, Watershed-based Assessment or Special Assessment.

**Examples of eligible activities:** facilitation, mediation or consulting services related to organizational improvement such as reorganizations/mergers, strategic planning, organizational development, assessments for shared services, benchmarking, non-routine audits, and staff and board capacity assessments.

**Activities that are not eligible for grant funds, or to be used as LGU match:** Technology upgrades (computer equipment, software, smartphones, etc.), infrastructure improvements (vehicles, office remodel, furniture), staff performance incentives (bonuses, rewards program), basic staff training (BWSR Academy fees and expenses; Wetland Delineator Certification, subjects offered at BWSR Academy, training for promotion, basic computer training), water planning, conservation practices design or installation, publication or publicity materials, food & refreshments, (other than costs associated with meetings and conferences where the primary purpose is an approved, eligible grant activity) lodging, staff salaries, and regular board member per diems.

**Note:** Board member per diems and associated expenses outside of regular meetings, and associated with an approved, eligible activity are eligible for grant funds or can be used as match.

**Grant Limit:** \$10,000 for individual LGUs, \$20,000 for LGU partnerships. In most cases a 50 percent cash match will be required.

**Who May Apply:** County water management/environmental services; SWCDs; watershed districts; watershed management organizations. In some cases, LGU joint powers associations or boards, or other types of LGU water management partnerships will be eligible for grants. Priority is given to applicants submitting projects related to eligible Organizational Assessment, Watershed-based Assessment, or Special Assessment recommendations.

**Terms:** BWSR pays its share of the LGU's eligible expenditures as reimbursement for expenses incurred by the LGU after the execution date of the grant agreement. Reporting and reimbursement requirements are also described in the agreement. Grant agreements are processed through BWSR's eLINK system.

**How to Apply:** Submit an email request to the PRAP Coordinator with the following information:

- 1) Description, purpose, and scope of work for the proposed activity (If the activity or services will be contracted, do you have a contracting procedure in by-laws or operating guidelines?)
- 2) Expected products or deliverables.
- 3) Desired outcome or result

- 4) Does this activity address any recommendations associated with a recent Level II, III or IV PRAP Assessment? If so, describe how.
- 5) How has your Board indicated support for this project? How will they be kept involved?
- 6) Duration of activity: proposed start and end dates
- 7) Itemized Project Budget including
  - a. Amount of request
  - b. Source of funds to be used for match (cannot be state money nor in-kind)
  - c. Total project budget
- 8) Have you submitted other funding requests for this activity? If yes, to whom and when?
- 9) Provide name and contact information for the person who will be managing the grant agreement and providing evidence of expenditures for reimbursement.

## **Appendix D**

### **Annual Statewide Summary: 2024 LGU Long-Range Plan Status as of December 31, 2024**

#### **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

(Districts have a choice of option A or B)

**A. Current Resolution Adopting County Local Water Management Plan**

All resolutions are current.

**B. Current District Comprehensive Plan**

All comprehensive plans are current.

#### **Counties**

**Local Water Management Plan Revision Overdue: Plan Revision in Progress**

- All plans are current.

#### **Watershed Districts**

**10-Year Watershed Management Plan Revision Overdue: Plan Revision in Progress**

- Two Rivers Watershed District

#### **Watershed Management Organizations**

- All plans are current

# Appendix E

## Annual Statewide Summary: Status of Annual Reports for 2023 as of December 31, 2024

### **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

#### **eLINK Status Reports of Grant Expenditures**

##### **Late Reports:**

- Winona SWCD
- Rice SWCD
- West Polk SWCD

### **Counties**

#### **Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Reports**

All reports submitted on time.

#### **eLINK Status Reports of Grant Expenditures**

##### **Late Reports:**

- Clay County
- McLeod County
- Isanti County
- Lac qui Parle County

### **Watershed Districts**

#### **Drainage Authority Buffer Strip Reports**

All reports submitted on time.

#### **Annual Activity Reports Not Submitted (or submitted late):**

- Joe River WD
- Middle Fork Crow River WD
- Stockton Rollingstone WD

### **Metro Joint Powers Watershed Management Organizations**

#### **Annual Activity Reports not submitted (or submitted late):**

All reports submitted on time.



## Appendix F

### Annual Statewide Summary: Status of Financial Reports and Audits for 2023 as of December 31, 2024

#### Soil and Water Conservation Districts

##### Annual Audits

##### Annual Audits Not Submitted (or submitted late)

- All audits submitted

#### Watershed Districts

##### Annual Audits Not Completed (or submitted late):

- Joe River
- Heron Lake
- Lower Minnesota River \*

#### Metro Joint Powers Watershed Management Organizations

##### Annual Audits Not Submitted (or submitted late):

- All audits submitted

*\* dropped by auditor, complete in 2025*

## Appendix G

### Watershed-based Assessment Performance Review Final Report Summaries

#### Red Lake River Partnership (Watershed-based PRAP)

##### Key Findings and Conclusions

The Red Lake River Partnership is commended for their work in implementing activities identified within their Comprehensive Watershed Plan. In general, Advisory Committee members feel the partnership is doing an effective job in implementing projects on the ground to meet plan priorities.

Increasing communication within the partnership will help improve conservation delivery in the watershed.

The partnership is commended for meeting nine of 11 applicable best standards/practices, including reviewing the committee membership and updating annually, having current operational guidelines for fiscal procedures, and updating agency partners on accomplishments regularly.

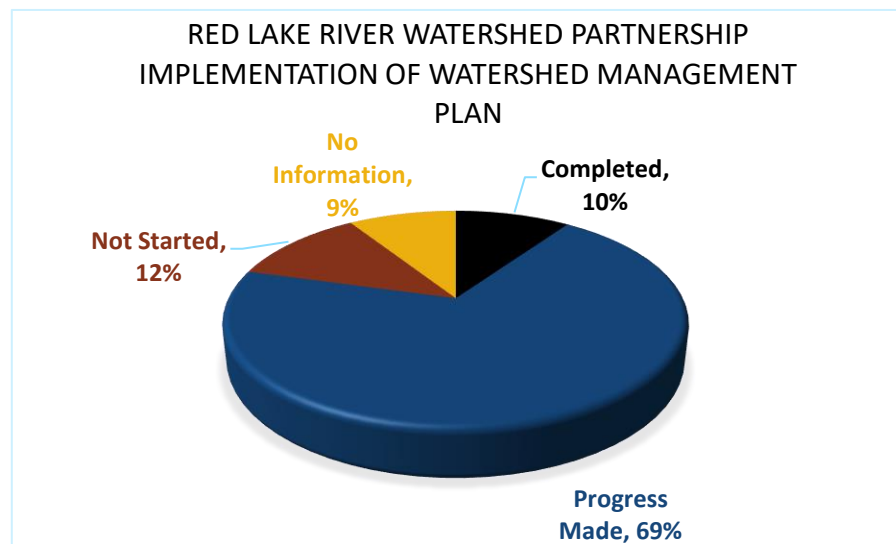
The partnership is also commended for meeting four of six high priority performance standards, a testament to the efforts made by the Red Lake River Partnership.



**Resource Outcomes** The Red Lake River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was approved in 2017 and runs through 2027. For planning purposes, the plan is divided into three planning zones. Each zone is a sub watershed located upstream of a targeted resource concern. A total of 23 management areas were defined within the greater watershed to target implementation efforts. Measurable goals were developed to address issues on a resource-by-resource basis and partners used the Prioritize, Target, and Measure

Application (PTMapp) to define goals related to implementation of best management practices and to develop potential costs for various strategies. Best management practices were identified for each planning zone and management area to address planning strategies such as protection, source reduction, storage, filtration, and flood damage reduction. The plan contains 52 action items. Of those, 36 (69.3%) were identified as *In Progress/Ongoing*, six (11.5%) were identified as *Not Started*, five (9.6%) were identified as *Completed*, and the remaining five (9.6%) had no information provided to make a determination.

The Red Lake River Partnership is commended for making progress on over 69% of the action items/activities identified within the implementation section of the plan.



### Summary of Partnership Recommendations

Based on an analysis of the information and data collected during this review, BWSR staff developed several recommendations for the Partnership. BWSR relies heavily on our relationships with staff as well as the input of partners, staff, and board members to make sure recommendations provided are relevant, timely, and helpful for the partnership to implement and improve their operations.

- **Recommendation 1:** Consider Updating the Plan to Simplify Priority Concerns, Management Areas, and Goals.
- **Recommendation 2:** Develop a Unified Strategy for Tracking Progress.
- **Recommendation 3:** Increase Transparency on Progress Toward Plan Goals.
- **Recommendation 4:** Increase Communication Between Staff and Partners.
- **Recommendation 5:** Develop an Orientation/Training Program on Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans.
- **Recommendation 6:** Review Governing Documents such as bylaws and formal agreements once every 5 years (minimum).

### North Fork Crow River Watershed Partnership (Watershed-based PRAP)

#### Key Findings and Conclusions

The North Fork Crow River Water Planning Partnership is commended for their work in implementing activities identified within their Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. In general, Advisory Committee members feel the partnership is doing an effective job in implementing projects on the ground to meet plan priorities.

Increasing communication with both the Policy and Advisory Committees will help improve conservation delivery in the watershed. Focused implementation can also be increased through targeted marketing campaigns. 7.14% of Plan Work Group members stated that the partnership *rarely or sometimes* provided direct outreach to specific landowners.



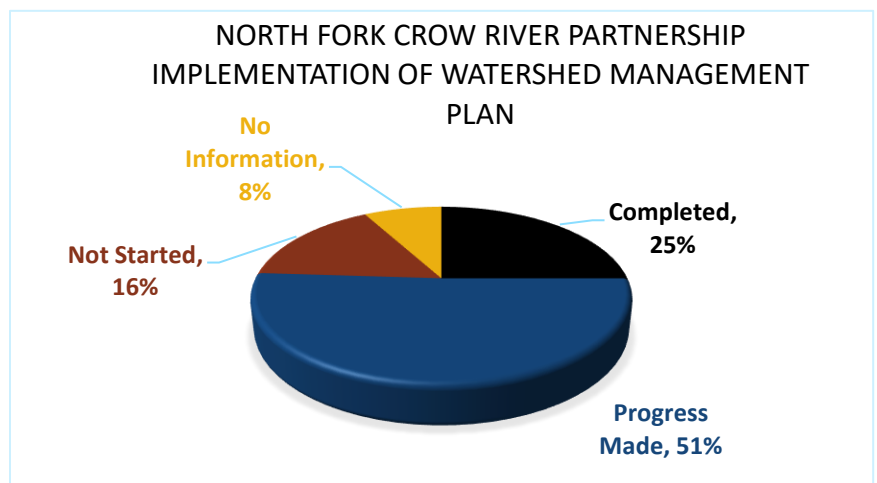
The Partnership is commended for meeting 11 of 12 applicable best standards/practices, including reviewing the committee membership and updating annually, having current operational guidelines for fiscal procedures, and updating agency partners on accomplishments regularly.

The Partnership is also commended for meeting five of eight high performance standards, a testament to the efforts made by the North Fork Crow River Watershed Planning Partnership.

#### Resource Outcomes:

The North Fork of the Crow River Partnership includes six counties, six soil and water conservation districts, two watershed districts and a joint powers board. This partnership has been working together since 2016 to develop a comprehensive watershed management plan.

For planning and implementation purposes the partnership developed a list of priority concerns. These concerns are Level A (Highest Priority), Level B (Second



Highest Priority) and Level C (Third Highest Priority).

The plan contains a total of 37 action items related to short-term/plan goals and objectives were provided to BWSR. Of those, 19 (51%), were identified as *In Progress/Ongoing*, six (16%), were identified as *Not Started*, nine (25%), were identified as *Completed*, and the remaining three (8%) had *no information* provided to make a determination.

The North Fork Crow River Partnership is commended for making significant progress on activities identified within the implementation section of the plan and for utilizing prioritized, targeted, and measurable approaches to achieving clean water goals. A total of 40% of the completed items were targeted towards the highest priority concerns (level A), 30% in the second highest priority concerns (level B), and 30% in the third highest priority concerns (level C). For those activities that are in-progress, 58% are targeted towards highest priority concerns (level A), 32% in the second highest priority concerns (level B), and 10% in the third highest priority concerns (level C).

**Summary of Recommendations** Based on an analysis of the information and data collected during this review, BWSR staff developed several recommendations for the Partnership. We rely heavily on our relationships with staff as well as the input of partners, staff, and board members to make sure we provide recommendations that are relevant, timely, and helpful for the partnership to implement and improve their operations.

- **Recommendation 1:** Annually Conduct a Work Planning Exercise
- **Recommendation 2:** Improve Plan Progress Tracking
- **Recommendation 3:** Develop a Conflict-of-Interest Policy
- **Recommendation 4:** Training and Orientation on Comprehensive Water Management Plan
- **Recommendation 5:** Increase Communication Between All Partners
- **Recommendation 6:** Increase Transparency in Progress Towards Goals
- **Recommendation 7:** Conduct a Workload Assessment to Evaluate Staff Capacity for the Partnership

## Pine River Watershed Partnership (Watershed-based PRAP)

### Key Findings and Conclusions

The Pine River Watershed Partnership is commended for their work in implementing activities identified within their Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. In general, Advisory Committee members feel the partnership is doing an effective job in implementing projects on the ground to meet plan priorities.

Increasing communication between all partners will help improve conservation delivery in the watershed. Evaluating the staffing needs of the partners to ensure workload and reporting needs are met should be conducted on a regular basis to ensure workload and reporting needs are met. Consideration should be given to updating the plan to simplify project tracking and reports.



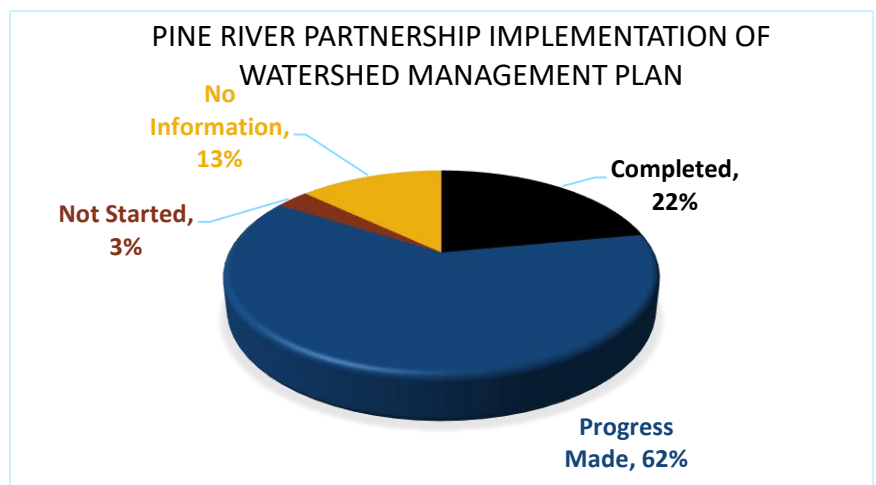
The Partnership is commended for meeting 12 of 12 applicable best standards/practices, including reviewing the committee membership and updating annually, having current operational guidelines for fiscal procedures, and updating agency partners on accomplishments regularly.

The Partnership is also commended for meeting six of eight high performance standards, a testament to the efforts made by the Pine River Watershed Partnership.

### Resource Outcomes

The Pine River Partnership includes two counties and two soil and water conservation districts. This partnership is working together through a Memorandum of Understanding between Cass County, Cass SWCD, Crow Wing County, and Crow Wing SWCD.

For planning purposes, the Pine River Watershed is divided into six planning regions based sub-watershed (HUC10). Each watershed has a different makeup of land use, lake quality and risk and has an overall management focus assigned for it.



Management focus priorities fall into three categories which include: *Vigilance* (efforts focus on protecting resources where protection goals are already met), *Protection* (management focus is to maintain and increase protection levels) and *Enhance/Protect* (management focus on resources with declining trends).

The Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan contains eleven goal statements and 64 planned actions or activities. Of those, 14 (22%) were identified as being completed, 40 (62%) as *In Progress/Ongoing*, two (3%) were identified as *Not Started*, and the remaining eight (13%) had no information provided to make a determination.

The Pine River Partnership is commended for making progress on over 62% of the action items/activities identified within the implementation section of the plan.

## Summary of Recommendations

Based on an analysis of the information and data collected during this review, BWSR staff developed several recommendations for the Partnership. We rely heavily on our relationships with staff as well as the input of partners, staff, and board members to make sure we provide recommendations that are relevant, timely, and helpful for the partnership to implement and improve their operations.

- **Recommendation 1:** Continue to annually conduct a work planning exercise.
- **Recommendation 2:** Provide training opportunities to inform committee members and partners on watershed related topics.
- **Recommendation 3:** Increase transparency in progress toward plan goals.
- **Recommendation 4:** Increase communication between all partners.
- **Recommendation 5:** Continue to evaluate staffing needs within the partnership to ensure workload and reporting needs are met.
- **Recommendation 6:** Consider updating the plan to simplify project tracking and reporting.

## Organizational Assessment Performance Review Final Summaries

### Beltrami County and Beltrami Soil and Water Conservation District



#### Key Findings and Conclusions

Beltrami SWCD and Beltrami County are commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, and for participating in planning and implementation activities in several One Watershed, One Plans. Workload emphasis is targeted in the Mississippi and Upper/Lower Red Lake watersheds. The LGUs are also active in implementation activities in the Thief River and Clearwater River plans, and assist with activities in the Leech Lake River, Rainy/Rapid River, and Roseau plans as requested. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners which aids in the planning and implementation of activities identified within their One Watershed, One Plans.

Developing strong working relationships/communication with partners will help in weathering challenges, and further assist in addressing local water management issues and improving conservation delivery in Beltrami County.

Beltrami County is commended for meeting seven of eight applicable basic performance standards, including completion of eLINK reporting and buffer strip reporting on time, as well as having current local water management plans.

Beltrami SWCD is commended for meeting 13 of 15 basic standards, including reviewing of personnel policy within the last five years, completion of eLINK reporting on time, and completing WCA reporting on time.

Both the SWCD and County are commended for meeting several high-performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

#### Commendations

*Beltrami SWCD and County are commended for:*

- Active partner/participant in at least one 1W1P planning or implementation process.
- Prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria used for goals, objectives and actions in LWMP.
- Received competitive Clean Water Fund Grants within the past two years.
- Water quality data and trend information collected for planning and to measure progress towards plan goals.
- Water management ordinances on county website.
- Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives.
- Communication piece sent within the last 12 months.
- Annual report to water plan advisory committees on plan progress.
- Communication piece sent within the last 12 months.
- Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives.
- Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff.
- Job Approval Authority: reviewed and reported annually.
- Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, watershed districts, non-governmental organizations.

#### Recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1-Joint Recommendation:** Develop and enhance communication and outreach strategies to improve connections with the public and partners.

- **Recommendation 2-Joint Recommendation:** Develop a public information and education strategy to track measures and determine their effectiveness in meeting plan objectives.
- **Recommendation 3-Joint Recommendation:** Develop orientation and continued education plan for both board and staff and keep records of trainings attended.
- **Recommendation 4-Joint Recommendation:** Develop and use short-term strategic planning efforts with local boards and staff to set priorities for annual budgets and workplans based on local and state priorities.
- **Recommendation 5-Joint Recommendation:** Include copies of comprehensive watershed management plans on websites.
- **Recommendation 6-SWCD Recommendation:** Review existing operational guidelines and policies and establish new guidelines and policies as necessary.
- **Recommendation 7-SWCD Recommendation:** Conduct strategic planning assessment to review the districts mission statement, district priorities, and staff capacity to address those priorities.

#### **WCA Administrative**

- **Recommendation 1:** BWSR recommends that the Beltrami WCA staff become a certified under the MN Wetland Professional.

#### **WCA Performance Standard**

##### **Recommendation 1**

- 1) The LGU should consider writing more detailed notices. Information that should be included: key relevant facts, short description of the activity, TEP findings/recommendations, and Rule citation.
- 2) Consider integrating WCA application and enforcement cases into the County permit software.
- 3) Consider reviewing internal processes in handling applications upon submittal such as using date stamps to document the date received.

##### **Recommendation 2**

- 1) Consider expanding the use of formal documentation such as the TEP Findings of Fact to better document LGU site visits and TEP recommendations resulting from site visits. This should include both formal and informal documentation even when just one TEP member conducts a site visit.

##### **Recommendation 3**

- 1) The County should continue to work with BWSR, DNR, and TEP to refine WCA enforcement procedures outlined in MN Rule 8420.0900 and make use of the Enforcement Procedures Checklist.

#### **Action Items**

- Beltrami County: Update websites to include all website requirements.
- Beltrami SWCD is required to update/review its data practices policy.



## Cass County and Cass Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Cass SWCD and ES are commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, and for participating in planning and implementation activities in five comprehensive watershed management plans. These include the Mississippi River Headwaters, Leech Lake, Crow Wing River, Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids, and Pine River comprehensive watershed management plans. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners which aids in the planning and implementation of activities identified within their One Watershed, One Plans.

Developing strong working relationships/communication with partners will help in weathering challenges, and further assist in addressing local water

management issues and improving conservation delivery in Cass County.

Cass County ES is commended for meeting seven of seven applicable basic performance standards, including completion of buffer strip reports on time, posting BWSR grant reports on county website, and as well as having current local water management plans.

Cass SWCD is commended for meeting 15 of 17 basic standards, including reviewing of personnel policy within the last five years, completion of eLINK reporting on time, and targeting state grant funds in high priority areas.

Both the SWCD and ES are commended for meeting several high-performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Commendations

*Cass SWCD and Cass County are commended for:*

- Active partner/participant in at least one 1W1P planning or implementation process.
- Prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria used for goals, objectives and actions in LWMP.
- Received competitive Clean Water Fund Grants within the past 2 years.
- Water management ordinances on county website.
- Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives.
- Communication piece sent within the last 12 months.
- Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff.
- Job Approval Authority: reviewed and reported annually.
- Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, watershed districts, non-governmental organizations.

### Recommendations

- **Joint Recommendation 1:** Utilize water quality information to report progress and trends made in achieving resource outcome goals for priority concerns and priority water bodies.
- **Joint Recommendation 2:** Meet annually to review annual accomplishments and set priorities for the next year.
- **Recommendation 3 - SWCD:** Develop and review a data practices policy.
- **Recommendation 4 - SWCD:** Develop an orientation and education plan for board and staff.
- **Recommendation 5 - SWCD:** Obtain stakeholder input.
- **Recommendation 6 - County:** Track Information and education objectives in the plan.
- **Recommendation 7 – Joint Recommendation:** Tribal relations and outreach.

**Action Items:** There are no actions items.

## McLeod County and McLeod Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

McLeod County SWCD and ES are commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, and for participating in planning and implementation activities in three comprehensive watershed management plans. These include South Fork Crow River, Lower Minnesota River West, and North Fork Crow River. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners which aids in the planning and implementation of activities identified within their One Watershed, One Plans.

Developing strong working relationships/communication with partners will help in weathering challenges, and further assist in addressing local water management issues and improving conservation delivery in McLeod County.

McLeod County ES is commended for meeting three of four applicable basic performance standards, including completion of buffer strip reports on time, posting BWSR grant reports on county website, and as well as having current local water management plans.

McLeod County SWCD is commended for meeting 14 of 15 basic standards, including reviewing of personnel policy within the last five years, completion of eLINK reporting on time, and targeting state grant funds in high priority areas.

Both the SWCD and ES are commended for meeting several high-performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Commendations

*McLeod SWCD and McLeod County are commended for:*

- Active partner/participant in at least one 1W1P planning or implementation process.
- Prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria used for goals, objectives, and actions in LWMP.
- Received competitive Clean Water Fund Grants within the past 2 years.
- Water management ordinances on county website.
- Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives.
- Communication piece sent within the last 12 months.
- Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff.
- Job Approval Authority: reviewed and reported annually.
- Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, watershed districts, non-governmental organizations.

### Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1 - Joint Recommendation:** Work to maintain a consistent level of communication between partners to build upon the strong working relationships you have with them.
- **Recommendation 2- Joint Recommendation:** Develop and use short-term coordinated planning with local boards and staff to set priorities for annual budgets and workplans based on local and state priorities.
- **Recommendation 3- Joint Recommendation:** Develop individual development plans for new staff and boards.
- **Recommendation 4- Joint Recommendation:** Conduct a strategic planning assessment to review whether your existing mission, goals, and staff capacity are sufficient to meet organizational priorities and the needs for conservation and watershed management.

- **Recommendation 5 – Joint Recommendation:** Utilize water quality information and data to track outcomes for priority concerns.
- **Recommendation 6 – Joint Recommendation:** Develop a public information and education strategy to track measures and to determine their effectiveness in meeting plan objectives.
- **Recommendation 7 – McLeod County ES:** Look for ways to incorporate comprehensive watershed management plan priorities into land use planning efforts, ordinances, and decisions.

**The following recommendations are specific to the WCA review.**

**WCA Performance Standard Recommendations:**

- Update the County Resolution 17-CB-08 to align with current practices.
- Execute new delegation and acceptance resolutions between each city and the SWCD.
- Recommend including a file tracking sheet for all projects.
- Recommend including a copy of the email when an application is submitted electronically in the project file.
- Recommend adding detail to the NOD documents within the TEP findings and LGU findings section(s) when TEP discussion/feedback has occurred, even if official TEP findings are not drafted.
- Recommend Ryan attend MWPCP training followed by obtaining certification if feasible.
- Recommend increasing documentation of the nature and extent of the violation, even if voluntary is used.
- Recommend adding the details of any conversations/emails with DNR Enforcement staff to demonstrate coordination has occurred.

**Action Items**

- **Action Item – McLeod ES:** All eLINK grant reports must be submitted on time as required by grant agreements.
- **Action item - McLeod SWCD:** Website must include Clean Water Land and Legacy Logo with link to Clean Water Land and Legacy Website (<https://www.legacy.mn.gov>)

## Meeker County and Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Meeker County SWCD and PZ are commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, and for participating in planning and implementation activities in four comprehensive watershed management plans. These include North Fork Crow River, South Fork Crow River, Mississippi River St Cloud, and Sauk River comprehensive watershed management plans. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners which aids in the planning and implementation of activities identified within their One Watershed, One Plans.

Developing strong working relationships/communication with partners will help in weathering challenges and further assist in addressing local water

management issues and improving conservation delivery in Meeker County.

Meeker County PZ is commended for meeting three of four applicable basic performance standards, including completion of buffer strip reports on time, posting BWSR grant reports on county website, and as well as having current local water management plans.

Meeker County SWCD is commended for meeting 16 of 17 basic standards, including reviewing of personnel policy within the last five years, completion of eLINK reporting on time, and targeting state grant funds in high priority areas. Both the SWCD and ES are commended for meeting several high-performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Commendations

*Meeker SWCD and Meeker County are commended for:*

- Active partner/participant in at least one 1W1P planning or implementation process.
- Prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria used for goals, objectives and actions in LWMP.
- Water management ordinances on county website.
- Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives.
- Communication piece sent within the last 12 months.
- Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff.
- Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, watershed districts, non-governmental organizations.

### Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1-Joint Recommendation:** Work to maintain a consistent level of communication between partners to build upon the working relationships you have with them.
- **Recommendation 2- Joint Recommendation:** Develop and use short-term coordinated planning with local boards and staff to set priorities for annual budgets and workplans based on local and state priorities.
- **Recommendation 3- Joint Recommendation:** Develop individual development plans for new staff and boards.
- **Recommendation 4 – Joint Recommendation:** Utilize water quality information and data to track outcomes for priority concerns.
- **Recommendation 5 – Joint Recommendation:** Develop a public information and education strategy to track measures and to determine their effectiveness in meeting plan objectives.
- **Recommendation 6 – Joint Recommendation:** Look for ways to seek broad-based public input to help with priority setting and implementation related planning efforts.
- **Recommendation 7 – Joint Recommendation:** Increase Transparency on progress toward plan goals.

- **Recommendation 8 – Meeker County PZ:** Look for ways to incorporate comprehensive watershed management plan priorities into land use planning efforts, ordinances, and decisions.

**The following recommendations are specific to the WCA review.**

- Consider modifications to the staff decision making authority resolution to all other staff to make WCA decision if necessary.
- Update the City of Cedar Mills resolution accepting WCA and the delegation agreement with the SWCD.
- Recommend including the date an application is determined complete or incomplete within the tracking log of each file.
- Recommend adding detail to the NOD documents within the TEP findings and LGU findings section(s) when TEP discussion/feedback has occurred, even if official TEP findings were not drafted.
- Recommend that all staff involved in WCA implementation attend additional MWPCP training followed by obtaining certification.
- Recommend increasing documentation of the nature and extend of the violation through TEP findings of fact or the LGU determination form even if a voluntary approach is used.
- Recommend adding the details of any conversations/emails with DNR enforcement staff to demonstrate the coordination occurring.

**Action Items**

- **Required Action (Meeker SWCD):** Website must include Clean Water Land and Legacy Logo with link to Clean Water Land and Legacy Website (<https://www.legacy.mn.gov>)
- **Required Action (Meeker County PZ):** BWSR grant reports must be posted on county website.

There is one required action related to the WCA review.

- Clarify that appeals of WCA decisions be directed to BWSR.

## Red Lake Watershed District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

The Red Lake Watershed District is commended for participating in the Red Lake River, Thief River, Clearwater River, and Upper/Lower Red Lakes One Watershed, One Plan watershed planning efforts and is doing an excellent job partnering with others to implement plan goals. The organization is getting important work done within the watershed district and needs to look for more ways to share their success stories.

The Red Lake Watershed District is commended for meeting 14 of 14 basic performance standards including completing and submitting financial audits on time, submitting engineer reports for DNR/BWSR review, and having manager appointments current/reported. They are also commended for

meeting 11 of 15 high-performance standards.

The Watershed District needs to continue to build upon the strong working relationships that are in-place and look for opportunities to develop new partnerships.

The Red Lake Watershed District shows excellent compliance with BWSR's basic and high-performance standards.

The partners who responded to the PRAP survey provided strong to acceptable ratings in their judgement of the performance of the Watershed District.

The WD is commended for meeting several high-performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Commendations

*Red Lake Watershed District is commended for:*

- Participating in four 1W1P planning and implementation efforts.
- Retaining an administrator on staff.
- Participate and coordinate in the watershed-based initiatives.
- Meeting high performance standards outlined on the BWSR checklist.
- Coordinating with County, SWCD, City/Township partners.

### Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Develop orientation and continued education plan for both board managers and staff and keep records of trainings attended.
- **Recommendation 2:** Conduct a strategic planning assessment to review the districts mission statement, district priorities, and staff capacity to address those priorities.
- **Recommendation 3:** Develop and use a short-term strategic plan to set priorities for annual budgets and work plans based on local and state priorities.
- **Recommendation 4:** Develop a public information and education strategy and track measures and to determine their effectiveness in meeting plan objectives.
- **Recommendation 5:** Conduct a survey of watershed residents to determine whether Watershed District is meeting public needs.
- **Recommendation 6:** Structure website information to report and share success stories.

**Action Items:** There are no actions items.

## Pope County and Pope Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Pope County SWCD and Land and Resource Management Department (LRMD) are commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, and for participating in planning and implementation activities in three comprehensive watershed management plans. These include Sauk River, North Fork Crow River, and Chippewa River. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners which aids in the planning and implementation of activities identified within their One Watershed, One Plans.

Developing strong working relationships/communication with partners will help in weathering challenges, and further assist in addressing local water

management issues and improving conservation delivery in Pope County.

Pope County LRMD is commended for meeting nine of nine applicable basic performance standards, including completion of eLINK reporting and buffer strip reporting on time, as well as having current local water management plans.

Pope County SWCD is commended for meeting 12 of 12 basic standards, including reviewing of personnel policy within the last five years, completion of eLINK reporting on time, and targeting state grant funds in high priority areas.

Both the SWCD and LRWD are commended for meeting several high-performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Commendations

*Pope SWCD and Pope County are commended for:*

- Active partner/participant in at least one 1W1P planning or implementation process.
- Prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria used for goals, objectives and actions in LWMP.
- Received competitive Clean Water Fund Grants within the past 2 years.
- Water management ordinances on county website.
- Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives.
- Communication piece sent within the last 12 months.
- Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff.
- Job Approval Authority: reviewed and reported annually.
- Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, watershed districts, non-governmental organizations.

### Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1-Joint Recommendation:** Work to maintain a consistent level of communications between partners to build upon the strong working relationships you have with them.
- **Recommendation 2- Joint Recommendation:** Develop and use short-term coordinated planning with local boards and staff to set priorities for annual budgets and workplans based on local and state priorities.
- **Recommendation 3- Joint Recommendation:** Develop individual development plans for new staff and boards.
- **Recommendation 4 – Pope County LRMD:** Conduct a strategic planning assessment to review whether your existing mission, goals, and staff capacity are sufficient to meet organizational priorities and the needs for conservation and watershed management.
- **Recommendation 5 - Pope County LRMD:** Look for ways to seek broad-based public input to help with priority setting and implementation related to planning efforts.

- **Recommendation 6 – Pope County LRMD:** Develop a public information and education strategy to track measures and to determine their effectiveness in meeting plan objectives.
- **Recommendation 7 – Pope County LRMD:** Look for ways to incorporate plan priorities into land use planning efforts, ordinances, and decisions.
- **Recommendation 8 – Pope County SWCD:** Continue to develop the strategic planning assessment to review whether your existing mission, goals, and staff capacity are sufficient to meet organizational priorities and the needs for conservation and watershed management.

**The following recommendations are specific to the WCA review.**

**WCA Performance Standard Recommendations (Pope County LRMD):**

- BWSR recommends lead staff person attend MWPCP trainings to the extent possible.
- Consider adding additional detail to the NOD LGU Findings such as TEP discussion.
- Consider tracking important 15.99 events such as why an application was incomplete, when an application was deemed complete, and when the NOA/NOD was sent.

**WCA Performance Standard Recommendations (Joint Recommendation):**

- Recommend SWCD and/or LGU coordinate/communicate with DNR enforcement to discuss extensions when appropriate and process extensions prior to deadlines if feasible.

**Action Items:** There are no actions items.



## Stearns County and Stearns Soil and Water Conservation District



### Key Findings and Conclusions

Stearns County SWCD and Stearns County Environmental Services (ES) are commended for their work in implementing core programs, the Wetlands Conservation Act, and for participating in planning and implementation activities in four One Watershed, One Plans. These include Sauk River, North Fork Crow River, Mississippi River St Cloud and soon to come, Mississippi River Sartell. The board and staff of both local governments are viewed favorably by their partners which aids in the planning and implementation of activities identified within their One Watershed, One Plans.

Developing strong working relationships/communication with partners will help in weathering challenges, and further assist in addressing local water management issues and improving conservation delivery in Stearns County.

Stearns County ES is commended for meeting nine of nine applicable basic performance standards, including completion of eLINK reporting and buffer strip reporting on time, as well as having current local water management plans.

Stearns County SWCD is commended for meeting 12 of 12 basic standards, including reviewing of personnel policy within the last five years, completion of eLINK reporting on time, and targeting state grant funds in high priority areas.

Both the SWCD and ES are commended for meeting several high-performance standards, a testament to the quality of work they are recognized for by their partners.

### Commendations

*Stearns SWCD and Stearns County are commended for:*

- Active partner/participant in at least one 1W1P planning or implementation process.
- Prioritized, targeted, and measurable criteria used for goals, objectives and actions in LWMP.
- Received competitive Clean Water Fund Grants within the past two years.
- Water quality data and trend information collected for planning and to measure progress towards plan goals.
- Water management ordinances on county website.
- Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives.
- Communication piece sent within the last 12 months.
- Annual report to water plan advisory committees on plan progress.
- Communication piece sent within the last 12 months.
- Coordination with County Board by supervisors or staff.
- Job Approval Authority: reviewed and reported annually.
- Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, watershed districts, non-governmental organizations.

### Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1-Joint Recommendation:** Work to maintain a consistent level of communications between partners to build upon the strong working relationships you have with them.
- **Recommendation 2- Joint Recommendation:** Conduct a strategic planning assessment of the Stearns County Environmental Services and Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District to determine whether their existing mission, goals, and staff capacity is sufficient to meet organizational priorities and the needs for conservation and watershed management.

- **Recommendation 3- Joint Recommendation:** Develop and use short-term strategic planning efforts with local boards and staff to set priorities for annual budgets and workplans based on local and state priorities.
- **Recommendation 4 – Joint Recommendation:** Consider expanding education and outreach efforts to connect with a broader cross-section of the public.
- **Recommendation 5 - Stearns County ES:** Develop a public information and education strategy to track measures and determine their effectiveness in meeting plan objectives.
- **Recommendation 6 -Stearns County ES:** Look for ways to incorporate comprehensive watershed management plan priorities into land use planning efforts, ordinances, and decisions.
- **Recommendation 7 – Stearns County SWCD:** Develop a continued education plan for board and keep records of trainings attended.

**The following recommendations are specific to the WCA review. See Appendix D for complete details.**

**WCA Performance Standard Recommendations (Stearns County):**

- Consider fully certifying all staff involved with WCA.
- Consider attending trainings when available.
- Consider adding additional detail to the NOD LGU findings.
- If TEP provides a recommendation, confirm the TEP recommendation box is checked.
- Consider adding basic conditions of approval to NODs when applicable.

**WCA Performance Standard Recommendations (Stearns SWCD):**

- Consider fully certifying all staff involved in WCA.
- Recommend SWCD and/or LGU coordinate/communicate with DNR enforcement to discuss extensions when appropriate and work toward extensions prior to deadlines if feasible.

**Action Items:** There are no actions items.

# Appendix H

## Performance Standards Checklists used in Organizational Assessments

Organizational Assessment- PRAP

Performance Standards

2024

### COUNTY LOCAL WATER MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

LGU Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Area	Performance Standard		Level of Review		Rating		
	■ Basic practice or statutory requirement ★ High Performance standard (see instructions for explanation of standards)	(see instructions for explanation of standards)	I	Annual Compliance	Yes, No, or Value		
			II	BWSR Staff Review & Assessment (1/10 yrs.)	YES	NO	
<b>Administration</b>	■	eLINK Grant Report(s): submitted on time		I			
	■	County has resolution assuming WCA responsibilities and delegation resolutions (if needed).		II			
	■	County has knowledgeable and trained staff to manage WCA program or secured a qualified delegate.		II			
	■	WCA Annual Reporting requirements met (if WCA LGU)		II			
	■	Drainage authority buffer strip report submitted on time		I			
	★	Public drainage records: meet modernization guidelines		II			
<b>Planning</b>	■	Local water mgmt. plan: current		I			
	★	Metro counties: groundwater plan up-to-date		I			
	★	Prioritized, Targeted & Measurable criteria are used for Goals, Objectives and Actions in local water management plan		II			
	★	Water quality trend data used for short- and long-range plan priorities		II			
<b>Execution</b>	■	WCA decisions and determinations are made in conformance with WCA requirements.		II			
	■	WCA TEP reviews and recommendations are appropriately coordinated.		II			
	★	Certified wetland delineator on staff or retainer		II			
	★	WCA Communication and Coordination		II			
	★	Water quality data collected to track outcomes for each priority concern		II			
	★	Water quality trends tracked for priority water bodies and/or groundwater		II			
<b>Communication &amp; Coordination</b>	■	BWSR grant report(s) posted on county website		I			
	★	Communication piece sent within last 12 months: indicate target audience below		II			
	Communication Target Audience:						
	★	Obtain stakeholder input: within last 12 months		II			
	★	Partnerships: liaison with SWCDs/WDs and cooperative projects/tasks done (in addition to 1W1P)		II			
	★	Annual report to water plan advisory committee on plan progress		II			
	★	Track progress for I & E objectives in Plan		II			
	★	Coordination with state watershed-based initiatives		II			
	★	County local water plan on county website		II			
	★	Water management ordinances on county website		II			



**METRO WATERSHED DISTRICT and WMO PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

LGU Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Area	Performance Standard	Level of Review	Rating		
			YES	NO	
	★ High Performance standard	I Annual Compliance	Yes, No, or Value		
	■ Basic practice or statutory requirement (see instructions for explanation of standards)	II BWSR Staff Review & Assessment (1/10 yrs.)			
Administration	■ Activity report: annual, on-time	I			
	■ Financial report & audit completed on time	I			
	■ Drainage authority buffer strip report submitted on time	I			
	■ eLINK Grant Report(s): submitted on time	I			
	■ Rules: date of last revision or review	II	mo./yr.		
	■ <u>Personnel policy</u> : exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 years	II			
	■ Data practices <u>policy</u> : exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 years	II			
	■ Manager appointments: current and reported	II			
	■ Consultant RFP: within 2 yrs. for professional services	II			
	■ WD/WMO has resolution assuming WCA responsibilities and appropriate delegation resolutions as warranted (N/A if not LGU)	II			
	■ WD/WMO has knowledgeable & trained staff that manages WCA program or has secured qualified delegate. (N/A if not LGU)	II			
	★ Administrator on staff	II			
	★ Board training: orientation and continuing education plan, record for each board member	II			
	★ Staff training: orientation and continuing education plan and record for each staff	II			
	★ Operational guidelines for fiscal procedures and conflicts of interest exist and current	II			
★ Public drainage records: meet modernization guidelines	II				
Planning	■ Watershed management plan: <u>up-to-date</u>	I			
	■ City/twp. local water plans not yet approved	II			
	■ Capital Improvement Program: reviewed every 2 years	II			
	■ Maintains an active advisory committee during plan development	I			
	★ Strategic plan or self-assessment completed in last 5 years	II			
	★ Strategic plan identifies short-term priorities	II			
Execution	■ Engineer Reports: submitted for DNR & BWSR review	II			
	■ WCA decisions and determinations are made in conformance with all WCA requirements. (if delegated WCA LGU)	II			
	■ WCA TEP reviews & recommendations appropriately coordinated. (if delegated WCA LGU)	II			
	★ Certified wetland delineator on staff or retainer	II			
	■ Total expenditures per year (past 10 yrs.)	II	see below		
	★ Water quality trends tracked for key water bodies	II			
Communication & Coordination	★ Watershed hydrologic trends monitored / reported	II			
	■ Website: contains information as required by MR 8410.0150 Subpart 3a, i.e. as board meeting, contact information, water plan, etc.	II			
	★ Maintains a functioning advisory committee that meets a minimum of once per year	II			
	■ Communication piece: sent within last 12 months	II			
	<b>Communication Target Audience:</b>				
	★ Track progress for Information and Education objectives in Plan	II			
★ Coordination with County Board, SWCD Board, City/Township officials	II				
★ Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring organizations, such as counties, SWCDs, WDs, tribal governments, Non-Government Organizations	II				
Year					
Expenditures					

**GREATER MN WATERSHED DISTRICT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

LGU Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Area	Performance Standard	Level of Review	Rating	
			YES	NO
Administration	★ High Performance standard	I Annual Compliance	Yes, No, or Value	
	■ Basic practice or Statutory requirement <i>(see instructions for explanation of standards)</i>	II BWSR Staff Review & Assessment (1/10 yrs.)		
	■ Annual report: submitted on time	I		
	■ Financial audit: completed on time	I		
	■ Drainage authority buffer strip report submitted on time	I		
	■ eLINK Grant Report(s): submitted on time	I		
	■ Rules: date of last revision or review – Please enter month/year (i.e., 01/20)	II		
	■ Personnel policy: exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 years	II		
	■ Data practices policy: exists and reviewed/updated within last 5 years	II		
	■ Manager appointments: current and reported	II		
	■ WD has resolution assuming WCA responsibilities & appropriate delegation resolutions as warranted. (N/A if not LGU)	II		
	■ WD has knowledgeable & trained staff that manages WCA program or has secured a qualified delegate. (N/A if not WCA LGU)	II		
	★ Administrator on staff	II		
	★ Board training: orientation and continuing education plan and record for board members	II		
★ Staff training: orientation and continuing education plan/record for each staff	II			
★ Operational guidelines exist and current	II			
★ Public drainage records: meet modernization guidelines	II			
Planning	■ Watershed management plan: up-to-date	I		
	★ Prioritized, Targeted, Measurable criteria used in WD Plan	II		
	★ Strategic plan identifies short-term activities & budgets based on state and local watershed priorities	II		
	★ Member of County Water Plan Advisory Committee(s)	II		
Execution	■ Engineer Reports: submitted for DNR & BWSR review	II		
	■ WCA decisions and determinations made in conformance with all WCA requirements. (N/A if not LGU)	II		
	■ WCA TEP reviews/recommendations coordinated (N/A if not LGU)	II		
	★ Certified wetland delineator on staff or retainer	II		
	■ Total expenditures per year for past 10 years	II		attach
	★ Water quality trends tracked for key water bodies	II		
	★ Watershed hydrologic trends monitored / reported	II		
Communication & Coordination	■ Functioning advisory committee: recommendations on projects, reports, maintains 2-way communication with Board	II		
	■ Communication piece sent within last 12 months	II		
	■ Website: contains annual report, financial statement, board members, contact info, grant report(s), watershed management plan, meeting notices, agendas & minutes, updated after each board meeting	II		
	★ Obtain stakeholder input: within last 12 months	II		
	★ Coordination with watershed based initiatives	II		
	★ Track progress for I & E objectives in Plan	II		
	★ Coordination with County Board, SWCD Board, City/Township officials	II		
	★ Partnerships: cooperative projects/tasks with neighboring districts, counties, soil and water districts, non-governmental organizations	II		
Year Expenditures				

**Watershed-Based Performance Standards**

Watershed Partnership Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Area	Performance Standard	Level of Review	Rating		
			Yes, No, Unsure or N/A		
			YES	NO	Unsure or N/A
General Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ High Performance standard</li> <li>■ Best Standard/practice</li> <li>● Basic Requirement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I Annual Compliance</li> <li>II BWSR Staff Review &amp; Assessment</li> </ul>			
	● Each participating member has adopted the comprehensive watershed management plan	I			
	● Coordinator or lead staff person(s) identified for the partnership	II			
	■ Operational guidelines for fiscal procedures exist and are current	II			
	■ Financial Reports provided to Policy Committee on annual basis	II			
	● <del>Grant</del> Grant Report(s): submitted on <u>time</u> (annual or biannual if funds exceed \$500,000)	I			
	● Assurance Measure 1: Prioritized, targeted, and measurable work is making progress toward achieving clean water goals	II			
	● Assurance Measure 2: Programs, projects, and practices are being implemented in priority areas	II			
	● Assurance Measure 3: Grant work is on-schedule and on-budget	II			
	● Assurance Measure 4: Leverage of non-state funds	II			
	★ Project tracking system is used by watershed partnership to track all work that contributes to plan goals	II			
★ Shared service opportunities are leveraged between partners	II				
Policy Committee	● Conflict of Interest policy exists and is reviewed/signed by the JPE or fiscal agent	II			
	● The policy committee or board is involved in project funding discussions or decision making, as defined by an implementation agreement	II			
	● Committee membership is reviewed/updated annually	II			
	■ Training: Orientation on comprehensive watershed management plans is provided to new policy committee members	II			
	★ Training: efforts are made to inform on watershed related topics	II			
	■ Reviewed governing documents (bylaws, formal agreements) within the last 5 years (if applicable)	II			
Advisory Committee	● Technical advisory committee participates in plan development, implementation, and amendments	I			
	■ Advisory committee members meet at least once annually	II			
	■ Water quality, hydrologic, and monitoring trends are used to evaluate progress towards plan/resource goals	II			
	★ Technical advisory committee reviews members	II			
	★ Agency members provide updates on agency initiatives, projects, and other information related to the watershed	II			
	★ Water quality trends tracked for priority water bodies	II			
Steering Committee	● Steering committee meets at least four times a year and reviews plan goals and actions	II			
	● Staff has open (2-way) communication about comprehensive watershed management plan activities with policy committee and local boards/councils	II			
	● Steering committee coordinates a mid-plan review to evaluate progress toward plan goals	I			
	■ Watershed partners solicit stakeholder input within the last year	II			
	■ An annual work plan (outside of WBIF grant) is developed and implemented	II			
	■ Individual partner governing boards/councils are updated on annual workplan activities	II			

	★	Partnership annually reviews progress towards water quality goals identified in the CWMP	II			
Communication & Coordination	●	Partnership website(s): contain board meeting information, partner contact information, committee membership, and annual <del>ELINK</del> reports – also prominently displays the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Logo and a link to the Legislative Coordinating Commission website	I			
	●	Partnership website(s) host a current copy of the plan and is maintained and updated regularly	I			
	■	Communication pieces sent that highlights work and program opportunities	II			
	■	Public education materials are watershed focused and reinforce high priority issues and actions to address plan goals	II			
	★	Watershed partners have developed new partnerships with partners outside of the planning/implementation partnership	II			



# Appendix I

## 2024 Local Government Performance Awards and Recognition\*

(Awarding agency listed in parentheses.)

### **SWCD Administrator Award (SWCD) Employee**

(Board of Water and Soil Resources)

**Kay Gross, District Administrator Cottonwood Soil and Water Conservation District**

### **SWCD Field Staff Award (SWCD) Employee**

(Natural Resource Conservation Service)

**Chester Powell, Program Tech/Water Plan Coordinator**

### **SWCD Outstanding SWCD (Supervisor) Award**

(Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts)

**Jim Birkholz, Chisago SWCD**

### **Soil and Water Conservation District of the Year**

(Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts)

**East Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District**

### **Outstanding Administrator of the Year**

(Minnesota Association of Watershed Administrators)

**James Wisker, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District**

### **Outstanding Watershed District Employee**

(Board of Water and Soil Resources)

**Emily Dick, Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District**

### **Watershed District of the Year Award**

(Department of Natural Resources)

**Roseau River Watershed District**

### **WD Project of the Year**

(Minnesota Watersheds)

**Capitol Region Watershed District, Highland Bridge District Stormwater System**

**County Conservation Awards**

(Association of Minnesota Counties and Board of Water and Soil Resources)

**Goodhue County, Mighty Mississippi Cleanup Challenge**

**Kandiyohi County, Monarch Butterfly Habitat**

## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Northern Region Committee***

1. Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – Tom Schulz, Ryan Hughes, and Darren Mayers – ***DECISION ITEM***
2. Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – Ryan Hughes and Darren Mayers – ***DECISION ITEM***
3. Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan – LeRoy Ose and Ryan Hughes – ***DECISION ITEM***

## BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

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**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**     Committee Recommendation     New Business     Old Business

**Item Type:**             Decision                                     Discussion             Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

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**Section/Region:** Regional Operations/Northern Region

**Contact:** Ryan Hughes

**Prepared by:** Darren Mayers

**Reviewed by:** Northern Region                                    Committee(s)  
Tom Schulz, Ryan Hughes and

**Presented by:** Darren Mayers

**Time requested:** 5 minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**     Resolution     Order     Map     Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None          | <input type="checkbox"/> General Fund Budget          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amended Policy Requested | <input type="checkbox"/> Capital Budget               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Policy Requested     | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Water Fund Budget      |

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Approval of the Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan as recommended by the Northern Regional Committee.

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

<https://crow-wing-river-one-watershed-one-plan-hcswcd.hub.arcgis.com/>

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

The Crow Wing River Watershed (CWRW) is located in north-central Minnesota, where it drains nearly 2,000 square miles with numerous rivers, lakes, and forests. About two-thirds of the watershed is covered in forests or wetlands, which provides water storage, protects surface and groundwater quality, and provides habitat. The other third is productive land used for agriculture. The CWRW has over 400 lakes and 1,600 miles of streams, and many of these support aquatic life and recreation. The watershed includes Becker, Cass, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Morrison, Otter Tail, Todd, and Wadena Counties along with a portion of the White Earth Nation on the northeast corner.

The planning partnership received a grant through the One Watershed, One Plan program in 2021 to begin the process of developing a comprehensive watershed management plan. On December 3, 2024, BWSR received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses pertaining to the Plan for final State review. The planning partnership has responded to all comments received during the 60-day review period and incorporated appropriate revisions to the final plan.

BWSR staff completed its review and subsequently found the Plan meets the requirements of Minnesota Statutes and BWSR Policy.

On January 6, 2025, the Northern Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. The Committee's decision was to recommend approval of the Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan as submitted to the full Board per the attached draft Order.

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources  
520 Lafayette Road North  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

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**In the Matter** of the review of the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Crow Wing River Watershed Partnership, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801.

---

**ORDER  
APPROVING  
COMPREHENSIVE  
WATERSHED  
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**Whereas** the Policy Committee of the Crow Wing River Watershed Partnership submitted a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) on December 3, 2024, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #21-08, and;

**Whereas** the Board has completed its review of the Plan.

**Now Therefore** the Board hereby makes the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Order:

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

- **Partnership Establishment.** The Crow Wing River Watershed Partnership was established on January 28, 2023, through adoption of a Memorandum of Agreement for the purposes of developing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The members of the Partnership include Becker County, Becker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Cass County, Cass SWCD, Crow Wing County, Crow Wing SWCD, Hubbard County, Hubbard SWCD, Otter Tail County, East Otter Tail SWCD, Todd County, Todd SWCD, Wadena County and the Wadena SWCD.
- **Authority to Plan.** Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 allows the Board to adopt resolutions, policies or orders that allow a comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D to serve as substitutes for one another or be replaced with a comprehensive watershed management plan. Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.801 established the Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning Program; also known as One Watershed, One Plan and Board Decision #21-08 adopted the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures Version 2.1 and Board Decision #19-41 adopting the One Watershed, One Plan Plan Content Requirements Version 2.1 policies.
- **Nature of the Watershed.**  
The Crow Wing River Watershed (CWRW) is located in north-central Minnesota, where it drains nearly 2,000 square miles with numerous rivers, lakes, and forests. About two-thirds of the watershed is covered in forests or wetlands, which provides water storage, protects surface and groundwater quality, and provides habitat. The other third is productive land used for agriculture. The CWRW has over 400 lakes and 1,600 miles of streams, and many of these support aquatic life

and recreation. The watershed includes Becker, Cass, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Morrison, Otter Tail, Todd, and Wadena Counties along with a portion of the White Earth Nation on the northeast corner. Historically the Chippewa established themselves in north and central Minnesota, including the CWRW. Between 1837 and 1867 a series of treaties were signed by Chippewa bands in Minnesota ceding vast tribal territories to the United States, but reserved the right to hunt, fish, and gather on the ceded lands.

- **Plan Development.** The Plan was developed as a single, concise, coordinated approach to watershed management. The Plan consolidates policies, programs, and implementation strategies from existing data, studies, and plans, and incorporates input from multiple planning partners and stakeholders to provide a single plan for management of the watershed. The Plan focuses on prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation efforts and lays out specific actions to improve surface water quality and soil health of agricultural lands, improve groundwater quality and soil health of drinking water protection areas, protect water quality and habitat thru land protection programs, manage healthy forest that protect water quality and are resilient to climate variability and invasive species, improve water quality and shoreland habitat and to improve and protect water quality thru nutrient reduction.
- **Plan Review.** On December 3, 2024, the Board received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses pertaining to the Plan for final State review pursuant to Board Decision #21-08. State agency representatives attended and provided input at advisory committee meetings during development of the Plan. The following state review comments were received during the comment period.
  - A. Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA): MDA appreciates the opportunity to work with BWSR and local staff on the development and review of this plan. As written, we believe this plan sufficiently addresses the resource concerns present in this watershed. The MDA recommends the approval of this plan.
  - B. Minnesota Department of Health (MDH): Recommend approval of the Crow Wing River Watershed Plan. I feel the Plan is written in a manner that satisfactorily incorporates MDH's priority concerns pertaining to groundwater and drinking water, while reflecting the priorities of residents of the watershed and the capacities of the local entities that will implement the Plan.
  - C. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR): The DNR is satisfied with the responses, has no additional comments, and recommends that BWSR approve the plan. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this process. We look forward to working with watershed partners to help implement the plan.
  - D. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA): The MPCA appreciates the opportunity to participate and provide input throughout your Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) development process. Overall, the Plan is very well written, concise, and thorough. We have no comments as part of the official 90-day Review and Comment Period and recommend it for approval.
  - E. Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB): Policy requires that EQB be notified of the final draft document. EQB confirmed receipt of the Plan and did not provide comments on the 90-day final draft Plan.

- F. Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR): BWSR staff provided comments throughout the planning process and had no suggested or required changes to the Plan submitted for the 60-day review. The partnership worked well considering the size and vastness of the watershed. They were also inclusive of the tribal nations during the planning process. We commend the partners for listing the stacked benefits in each of the measurable goals section. The entire report is very well-written, easy to understand and is visually appealing.
- **Plan Summary and Highlights.** The highlights of the Plan include:
    - The Policy and Advisory Committees sought extensive community engagement during the early stages of the planning process including public input from two public kick-off meetings and met three times with a Citizen Advisory Committee that was comprised of local stakeholders from a variety of different resource concerns including agriculture, lakes, and habitat. The comments were used during plan development to inform issues, goals and actions and provided an opportunity for public input on the implementation actions.
    - The Advisory Committee identified 10 priority issues; that were then broken down into 4 different focus areas (Groundwater, Surface Water, Habitat/Forestry and Overall Focus Areas: combination of the first three priority resources to determine overall watershed priorities.)
    - The partnership identified 8 measurable goals with a quantifiable desired change. Each goal is described with a short-term goal, what has already been accomplished, the desired future condition, and the big picture story. Each goal also included the following supporting information.
      - A description of the goal and why it matters in the watershed.
      - A map showing priority areas in the watershed.
      - Additional tacked benefits of working towards the goal.
    - For ease of future action of the issues, separate targeted implementation tables and maps were organized by four planning regions. The tables detail an action, the specific focus area for the action, the measurable outcome, who will lead and support the action, timing and estimated costs.
  - **Northern Regional Committee.** On January 6, 2025, the Northern Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. Those in attendance were Committee Chair Rich Sve, Neil Peterson, Ron Staples, LeRoy Ose, Tom Schulz, Jeff Berg, Ben Bergey, and Chad Anderson. BWSR staff in attendance were Ryan Hughes, Northern Region Manager; Darren Mayers, Board Conservationist; Jeff Hrubes, Clean Water Specialist; and Carrie Moline-Rust, Office & Administrative Specialist. The representatives from the Partnership were Dana Gutzmann, Cass SWCD; Darren Newville, East Otter Tail/Wadena SWCD; JoAnn Weaver, Crow Wing SWCD Supervisor; Heide Anderson-Thomas, Hubbard SWCD Supervisor; Moriya Rufer, Houston Engineering; and Jake Shaughnessy, Hubbard SWCD, presented the Plan on behalf of the partnership. Board regional staff provided its recommendation of Plan approval to the Committee. After discussion, the Committee’s decision was to present a recommendation of approval of the Plan to the full Board.
  - This Plan will be in effect for a ten-year period until January 22, 2035.



**CONCLUSIONS**

1. All relevant substantive and procedural requirements of law have been fulfilled.
2. The Board has proper jurisdiction in the matter of approving a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Crow Wing River Watershed pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #21-08.
3. The Crow Wing River Watershed Partnership Plan attached to this Order states priority water and natural resource issues within the planning area and possible solutions thereto; goals, objectives, and actions of the Partnership; and an implementation program.
4. The attached Plan is in conformance with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes Section 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #21-08.
5. The attached plan when adopted through local resolution by the members of the Partnership will serve as a replacement for the comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D, but only to the geographic area of the Plan.

**ORDER**

The Board hereby approves the attached Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan of the Crow Wing River Watershed Partnership, submitted December 3, 2024.

Dated in Saint Paul, Minnesota, this twenty-second of January 2025.

**MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

January 22, 2025

Crow Wing Watershed Planning Partnership  
c/o Jake Shaughnessy – Hubbard SWCD  
603 North Central Ave, Suite 100  
Park Rapids, MN 56470

**RE: Approval of the Crow Wing Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan**

Dear Crow Wing Planning Partnership:

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is pleased to inform you the Crow Wing Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) was approved at its regular meeting held on January 22, 2025. Attached is the signed Board Order that documents approval of the Plan and indicates the Plan meets all relevant requirements of law, rule, and policy.

This Plan is effective for a ten-year period until January 22, 2035. Please be advised, the partners must adopt and begin implementing the plan within 120 days of the date of the Order in accordance with Minnesota Statutes §103B.101, Subd. 14, and the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures. Per the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures please provide a copy of resolutions to adopt the Plan to your Board Conservationist to be eligible for grants.

The members of the partnership and participants in the plan development process are to be commended for writing a plan that clearly presents water management goals, actions, and priorities of the Partnership, and for participating in the One Watershed, One Plan program. The BWSR looks forward to working with you as you implement this Plan and document its outcomes.

Please contact Board Conservationist Darren Mayers of our staff at 218-290-8384 or [darren.mayers@state.mn.us](mailto:darren.mayers@state.mn.us) for further assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Todd Holman, Chair  
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Enclosure: BWSR Board Order

CC: Listed on next page.

Bemidji

Brainerd

Detroit Lakes

Duluth

Mankato

Marshall

Rochester

St. Cloud

St. Paul

St. Paul HQ

520 Lafayette Road North

St. Paul, MN 55155

Phone: (651) 296-3767

CC: Jake Shaughnessy, Hubbard SWCD (via email)  
Reid Christianson, MDA (via email)  
Ryan Perish, MDA (via email)  
Carrie Raber, MDH (via email)  
Chad Anderson, MDH (via email)  
Danica Derks, DNR (via email)  
Nathan Kestner, DNR (via email)  
Barbara Weisman, DNR (via email)  
Bonnie Goshey, MPCA (via email)  
Jeff Risberg, MPCA (via email)  
Catherine Neushler, EQB (via email)  
Ryan Hughes, BWSR (via email)  
Darren Mayers, BWSR (via email)  
Julie Westerlund, BWSR (via email)  
Rachel Mueller, BWSR (file copy)

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TTY: (800) 627-3529

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# CROW WING RIVER WATERSHED

Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan  
2025-2035





# Acknowledgements

## Project Partners



## Contributors

Dain Erickson, Technical Service Area 8, Graphic Design  
Mitch Brinks, Technical Service Area 8, Maps and Data  
Candace Zimmerman, Region Five Development Commission, Facilitator

## Prepared by

Moriya Rufer  
Houston Engineering  
7550 Meridian Circle North, Suite 120  
Maple Grove, MN 55369

Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan  
2025 - 2035

## Funded By





## Steering Committee

Jake Shaughnessy, Hubbard SWCD  
Nicole Lundeen, East Otter Tail/Wadena SWCD  
Darren Newville, East Otter Tail/Wadena SWCD  
Darren Mayers, BWSR  
Jeff Hrubes, BWSR  
Candace Zimmerman, Region Five Development Commission  
Moriya Rufer, Houston Engineering

## Technical Advisory Committee

Bryan Malone, Becker SWCD  
Kyle Vareberg, Becker County  
Mitch Lundeen, Becker Parks and Recreation  
Dana Gutzmann, Cass SWCD  
Ryan Carlson, Cass SWCD  
Adam Maleski, Crow Wing SWCD  
Melissa Barrick, Crow Wing SWCD  
Nicole Lundeen, East Otter Tail/Wadena SWCD  
Darren Newville, East Otter Tail/Wadena SWCD  
Jake Shaughnessy, Hubbard SWCD  
Deja Anton, Todd SWCD  
Adam Ossefoort, Todd County  
Deana Malone, Wadena County  
Anne Oldakowski, Wadena SWCD  
Darren Mayers, BWSR  
Jeff Hrubes, BWSR  
Chris Parthun, MDH  
Chad Anderson, MDH  
Rodger Hemphill, DNR  
Bonnie Goshey, MPCA  
Zoe Keezer, White Earth Department of Natural Resources  
Amy Moore, White Earth Department of Natural Resources  
Ryan Perish, Department of Agriculture  
Moriya Rufer, Houston Engineering  
Candace Zimmerman, Region Five Development Commission

## Policy Committee

Erica Jepson, Becker County  
Tony Beck, Becker SWCD  
Bob Kangas, Cass County  
Ken Laporte, Cass SWCD  
Jon Lubke, Crow Wing County  
JoAnn Weaver, Crow Wing SWCD  
Tom Krueger, Hubbard County  
Don Sells, Hubbard SWCD  
Mike Weyer, Wadena County  
Ken Berg, Wadena SWCD  
Tim Denny, Todd County  
Wayne Wendel, Todd SWCD

## Acronyms

Term	Abbreviation
Army Compatible Use Buffer	ACUB
Aquatic Invasive Species	AIS
Board of Water and Soil Resources	BWSR
Central Lakes College	CLC
Central Minnesota Irrigators	CMI
Citizens Advisory Committee	CAC
Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan	CWMP
Conservation Reserve Program	CRP
Contaminants of Emerging Concern	CEC
Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan	CWMP
Crow Wing River Watershed	CWRW
Department of Natural Resources	DNR
Drinking Water Supply Management Area	DWSMA
Environmental Quality Incentive Program	EQIP
Evaluation of Hydrologic Change	EHC
Farm Service Agency	FSA
Federal Emergency Management Agency	FEMA
Household Hazardous Waste	HHW
Joint Powers Agreement	JPA
Landscape Stewardship Plan	LSP
Local Government Units	LGUs
Memorandum of Agreement	MOA
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	MPCA
Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System	MS4
National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System	NPDES
No date	n. d. (used for references without a year)
One Watershed, One Plan	1W1P
Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances	PFAS
Perfluorooctane Sulfonic Acid	PFOS
Prioritize, Target, and Measure Application	PTMApp
Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration	REPI
Riparian Adjacency Quality	RAQ
Solid Waste Management Plan	SWMP
Subsurface Sewage Treatment System	SSTS
Sustainable Forest Incentive Act	SFIA
Soil and Water Conservation District	SWCD
Technical Advisory Committee	TAC
The Nature Conservancy	TNC
Total Maximum Daily Load	TMDL
United States Department of Agriculture	USDA
United States Fish and Wildlife Service	USFWS
United States Geological Survey	USGS
Watershed Based Implementation Funding	WBIF
Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network	WPLMN
Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies	WRAPS
Wildlife Management Areas	WMAs
Wetland Conservation Act	WCA



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# Executive Summary



# Section 1.

## Executive Summary

### Introduction to the Watershed

The Crow Wing River Watershed (CWRW) is located in north-central Minnesota, where it drains nearly 2,000 square miles with numerous rivers, lakes, and forests. The Crow Wing River eventually joins the Mississippi River at Crow Wing State Park, meaning that improving and protecting water quality in the Crow Wing River will influence the quality of downstream waters. The watershed includes Becker, Cass, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Morrison, Otter Tail, Todd, and Wadena Counties along with a portion of the White Earth Nation. Cities with a population over 1,000 include Lake Shore, Menahga, Park Rapids, Pequot Lakes, Nisswa, and Staples (Figure 1.1).

The Crow Wing River headwaters pass through the Crow Wing Lake Chain, after which several rivers drain into the Crow Wing River, including the Fishhook, Straight, Shell, and Blueberry Rivers. The City of Park Rapids is nestled between these rivers and several major regional lakes, including Big and Little Sand, Long, and Belle Taine. At the southeastern corner of the CWRW, the Gull Chain of Lakes drain into the Crow Wing River. The protection of watershed natural resources is a priority for watershed planning and is apparent in the watershed vision statement below.



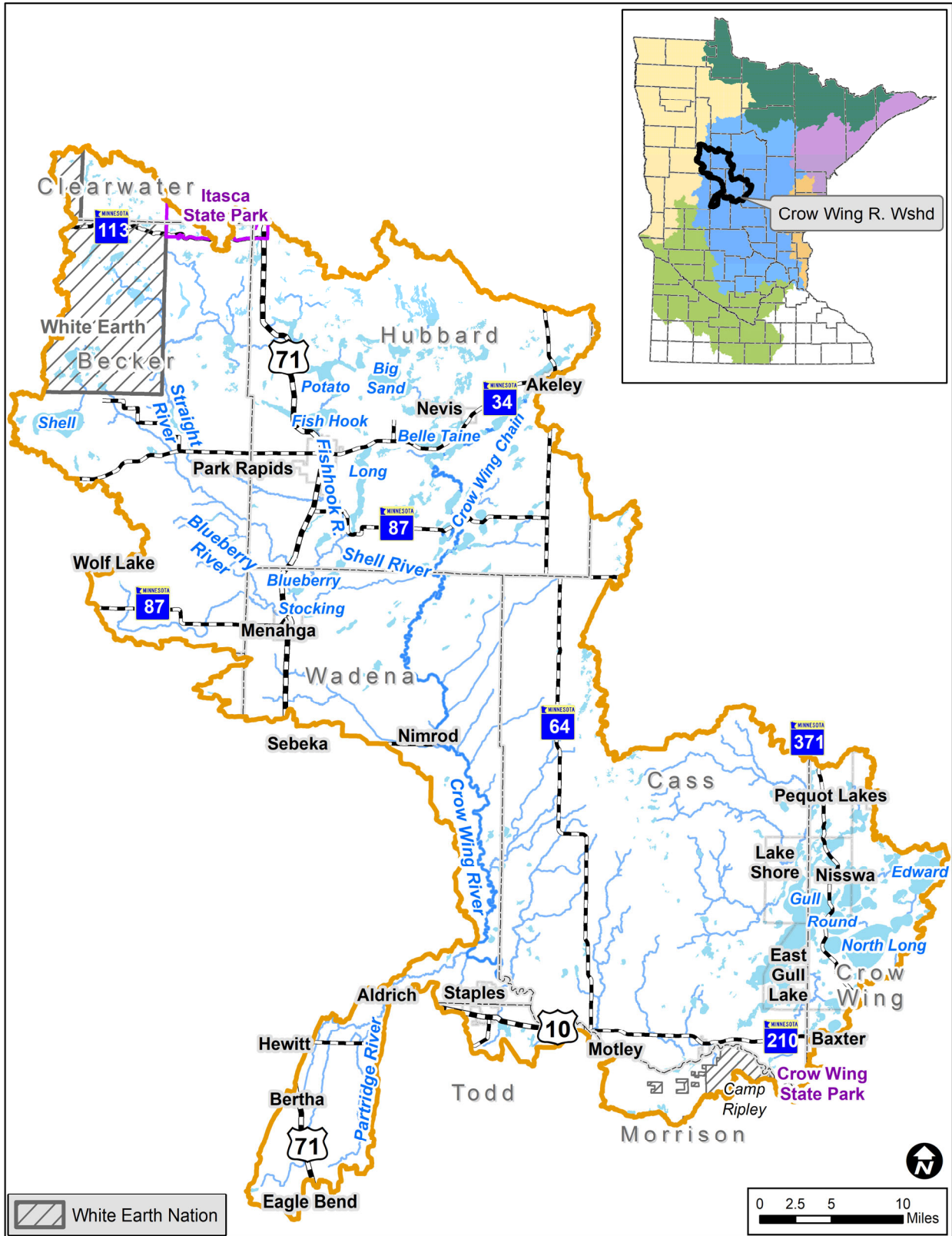


Figure 1.1. Location and general watershed descriptive map.

About two-thirds of the watershed is covered in forests or wetlands, which provides water storage, protects surface and groundwater quality, and provides habitat. The other third is productive land used for agriculture. The CWRW has over 400 lakes and 1,600 miles of streams, and many of these support aquatic life and recreation. A summary of some of the notable lakes and rivers in outstanding condition is shown in Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2. Summary of outstanding resources in CWRW. For a list of which lakes are in each category, see Appendix D.

## Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

The CWRW planning partners developed the Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWRW CWMP) 2023-2024, through the One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program. 1W1P is an effort to do watershed planning in the state of Minnesota along watershed boundaries rather than jurisdictional ones. It is administered by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) through MN Statute §103B.801. Prior to approval of this plan, each county had its own Local Water Management Plan. Now, local government units (LGUs) within the CWRW will collaborate to achieve the goals set out in this plan.

## Roles and Responsibilities

The CWRW CWMP began with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the partners highlighted in Figure 1.3. A representative from each governmental unit participating in the MOA was appointed by each county and Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) board to serve on the Policy Committee, which is the decision-making body for this plan. Clearwater and Morrison Counties cover less than 5% of the watershed, so they decided not to join the formal agreement. The White Earth Nation was invited to join the planning process and opted to sit on the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

The plan content was shaped by the TAC, which consisted of the counties and SWCDs in the watershed, State Agencies, Federal Agencies, the White Earth Department of Natural Resources, and other local stakeholders.

The Steering Committee guided the planning process, produced the plan content, and developed the details for implementation such as what will be tracked and by whom. The Steering Committee will be the primary implementors of the plan. The TAC are partners in plan implementation.



Figure 1.3. Members of the CWRW Partnership.

## Community Engagement

### Public Kickoff

In June 2023, the CWRW Partnership held two public kickoff meetings, one in Park Rapids, and one in Nisswa, to inform Crow Wing River Watershed residents on the 1W1P program and receive public feedback on issues in the watershed. In all, approximately 30 people attended the meetings. Participants offered input through spending pennies on watershed issues and completing a survey. For a full report of the survey results, see Appendix B.



The top five concerns from the public were:



### Citizen Advisory Committee

The Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was comprised of local stakeholders from a variety of different resource concerns including agriculture, lakes, and habitat. They met three times throughout the planning process to provide input to plan content (Figure 1.4). For a full report of their input, see Appendix C.

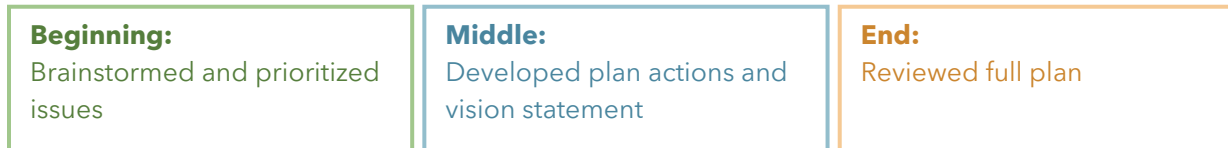


Figure 1.4. Citizen Advisory Committee input throughout the planning process.

## Priority Issues











The public and CAC responses, along with issues discussed in watershed reports from Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and committee input, led to prioritization of issues facing the watershed that will be addressed through implementation of this plan.

Priority issues that will be the focus of implementation efforts in the 10-year plan are listed in Table 1.1. The main theme of the issue statement is shown in bold text. In Section 3, these issues were prioritized for further targeting of implementation.

Issues are assigned one or more resource categories that describe where protection or enhancement is needed. Resource categories include soil, groundwater, surface water, and forestry & habitat.



Table 1.1. Priority Issues Table.

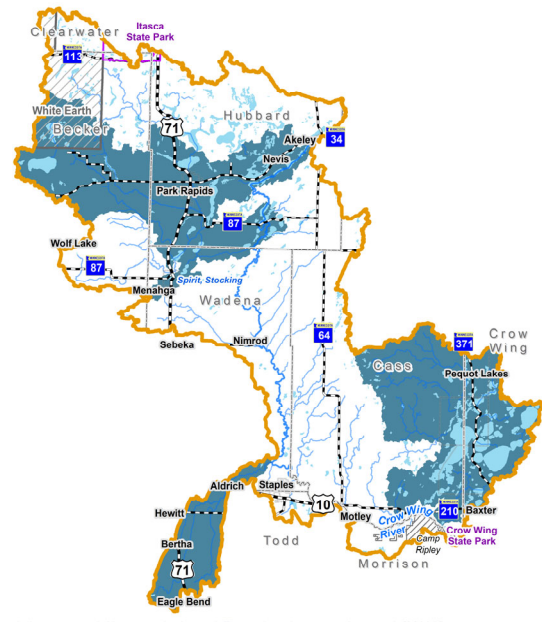
Resource Category	Issue Statement
	<p><b>Changes in land use</b> impact surface and groundwater quality and fragment habitat.</p>
	<p><b>Lakeshore and riparian alteration</b> impact water quality and shoreland habitat.</p>
	<p><b>Nutrient and bacteria runoff</b> into lakes and streams impacts aquatic recreation and human health.</p>
	<p><b>Plant and forest health</b> is vulnerable to climate variability, pests, and terrestrial invasive species, which can affect habitat and water quality.</p>
	<p><b>Soil health</b> is important for agricultural productivity, water quality, and climate resilience.</p>
	<p><b>Drinking water quality</b> is highly vulnerable to contamination from land practices.</p>
	<p><b>Groundwater quantity</b> can impact sustainability, stream temperature, and surface/groundwater connections.</p>
	<p><b>Sufficient protection</b> is needed for outstanding resources and sensitive species to maintain water and habitat quality.</p>
	<p><b>Alterations to natural drainage</b> such as tiling, ditching, and culvert placement increases the flow of water, streambank erosion, and impacts fish and other aquatic species.</p>
	<p><b>Aquatic Invasive species</b> (AIS) impact lake health, water quality, and recreation.</p>

## Focus Resources

The CWRW has 466 lakes over 10 acres in size, 1,600 river miles, vast forests and wetlands, and an abundance of deep and shallow groundwater. In a perfect world, there would be enough time and funding to work on all the resources in the watershed. In reality, both staffing capacity and funding are limited. Therefore, this planning process aimed to prioritize resources and determine where to focus the most time and funding in the next ten years. Focus areas were developed for Groundwater, Surface Water, Habitat & Forestry, and Overall (darker colors are higher priority). Data used for decisions is shown in Section 4.



**Groundwater Focus Areas**



**Surface Water Focus Areas**



**Habitat & Forestry Focus Areas**



**Overall Focus Areas**



## Measurable Goals

Short-term (10-year) goals were set to address plan issues. Part of the 1W1P requirements is to create measurable goals that have a metric through which progress can be clearly tracked. Planning partners set eight goals that will address the priority issues in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Measurable Goals.

<b>Agricultural Land Management</b>
Implement <b>27,100 acres</b> of agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs).
<b>Drinking Water Protection</b>
Implement <b>13,400 acres</b> of groundwater protection agricultural BMPs, and seal 150 wells.
<b>Protection</b>
Permanently protect <b>23,800 acres</b> (i.e. Sustainable Forest Incentive Act [SFIA], easements, and acquisitions).
<b>Forest &amp; Plant Health</b>
Implement <b>95,000 acres</b> of forestry management and <b>500 forest management plans</b> .
<b>Shoreland Management</b>
Implement <b>two miles</b> of lakeshore/riparian enhancement.
<b>Nutrient Reduction</b>
<b>Reduce phosphorus</b> in lakes and protect them from degradation. For individual lake goals, see Table 5.2.
<b>Connectivity Enhancement</b>
Replace <b>10 barriers</b> to fish passage (dams, road crossings, culverts).
<b>Resiliency</b>
<b>Build resiliency</b> into all projects implemented where possible (cover crops, stormwater management, forest protection).

Each goal in Section 5 includes a description of why it matters, which issues it addresses, work that has been already accomplished, a desired future condition, a map of goal focus areas, and the additional benefits that will be made if the goal is reached.

## Implementation

Plan implementation activities and associated information is described in targeted implementation schedules in Section 6. Each implementation schedule (one for each planning region, along with a watershed-wide table) includes actions to address issues and make progress towards the measurable goals, the focus area to target, a measurable outcome, who is responsible for implementation, a timeline, and the estimated cost. Actions that will occur in each planning region include:

- Agricultural land management practices
- Groundwater agricultural practices
- Bacteria reduction projects
- Forest stewardship plans
- Forest health management
- Forest & Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA) protection
- Shoreline and riparian management
- Urban stormwater management
- Chloride management, and
- Barrier modifications

All plan actions are voluntary and will be implemented through local, state, and federal programs. To implement all plan actions, a large amount of funding is needed. Planning Partners estimated that currently (Level 1), they are spending approximately \$1.4 million on conservation programs in the watershed. Approval of the CWRW CWMP comes with Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) from the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment, which are additional non-competitive funds that can be used for plan actions. This plan will operate at Level 2 (Table 1.2). Some actions require funds beyond these sources or are implemented by other agencies and partners. These are estimated in Level 3 funding (Table 1.2). Actions planned to be funding through partner funding are indicated in the targeted implementation schedule.










Table 1.2. Funding needed to implement the CWRW CWMP.

Funding Level	Description	Estimated Annual Total	Estimated 10-Year Total
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>The amount of funding needed to fully implement this plan</b> <i>Level 1 funding=\$1,400,000/year</i> <i>2025-2026 WBIF Allocation=\$848,600/year</i> <i>Additional needed=\$751,400/year</i>	\$3,000,000	\$30,000,000
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Other/Partner funding</b> <i>(SFIA, Lessard Sams, TNC, CRSL, NRCS)</i>	\$2,257,000	\$22,570,000
Total Level 2+3*		\$5,257,000	\$52,570,000

Plan implementation will have numerous benefits to surface water, habitat, and climate resiliency. These are summarized in Table 1.3. Benefits are translated into equivalent examples that are more understandable to the lay person than the typical units. For example, this plan will reduce sediment by 16,760 tons/year. That is translated into the amount of sediment that would fill over 1,670 dump trucks.

Table 1.3. Overall benefits from implementing this 10-year plan.

	<b>Benefit Description</b>	<b>Real World Equivalent</b>
<b>Surface Water Quality Benefits</b>	<b>Phosphorus:</b> the pounds of phosphorus reduced by implementing all plan goals.	<b>8,700 pounds/year; equivalent to:</b>  <b>4.4 million pounds of algae</b>
	<b>Sediment:</b> the tons of sediment reduced by implementing all plan goals.	<b>16,760 tons/year; equivalent to:</b>  <b>1,670 dump trucks of sediment</b>
	<b>Nitrogen:</b> the pounds of nitrogen reduced by implementing all plan goals.	<b>132,700 lbs/year; equivalent to:</b>  <b>3,317 bags of nitrogen fertilizer</b>
<b>Habitat Benefits</b>	<b>Habitat:</b> acres of forest protected by implementing all plan goals.	<b>23,800 acres; equivalent to:</b>  <b>the area covered by 1 township</b>
	<b>Habitat:</b> length of shoreland and riparian land enhanced by implementing all plan goals.	<b>2 miles; equivalent to:</b>  <b>the length of 30 football fields.</b>
<b>Climate Resiliency Benefits</b>	<b>Storage:</b> the amount of new water storage on the landscape or in the soil by implementing agricultural best management practices.	<b>5,500 acre-feet; equivalent to:</b>  <b>5,500 football fields covered in 1 foot of water</b>
	<b>Carbon:</b> the amount of carbon stored and sequestered by implementing plan goals.	<b>7,501,290 tons; equivalent to:</b>  <b>Removing 5,997,249 gas vehicles driven for one year</b>

Implementation partners are shown in Figure 1.3. These LGUs have entered into an MOA for implementation of this plan and will work collaboratively to implement plan actions and evaluate progress. Plan implementation will require LGUs to increase staffing and coordination. Fiscal and administrative duties will be the responsibility of the local Fiscal Agent, who will prepare the annual workplan and submit funding requests. The Policy Committee, consisting of one board member from each MOA entity, will review funding and recommend approval of the annual work plan. The Steering Committee will implement the targeted implementation schedule. The Advisory Committee will meet annually to provide input on the annual work plan, report on partner projects, and make recommendations. The CWRW CWMP has a ten-year lifespan (2025-2035), after which it will be reevaluated. Annual updates on plan progress will occur along with a midpoint assessment.



**Family Fun on Roy Lake**

## BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**  Committee Recommendation     New Business     Old Business

**Item Type:**  Decision     Discussion     Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

**Section/Region:** Regional Operations/Northern Region

**Contact:** Ryan Hughes

**Prepared by:** Darren Mayers

**Reviewed by:** Northern Region    Committee(s)

**Presented by:** Ryan Hughes and Darren Mayers

**Time requested:** 5 minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**     Resolution     Order     Map     Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None          | <input type="checkbox"/> General Fund Budget          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amended Policy Requested | <input type="checkbox"/> Capital Budget               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Policy Requested     | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Water Fund Budget      |

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Approval of the Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan as recommended by the Northern Regional Committee.

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

<https://itascaswcd.org/programs/1w1p>

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

The Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Watershed (UM-GR) is in north-central Minnesota, where it covers 1.3 million acres with numerous rivers, lakes, and forests. It has almost 2,000 miles of rivers and streams, vast amounts of peatlands and wetlands, 625 lakes larger than 10 acres, 79 designated wild rice lakes, and 48 cold water fishery lakes that support fish, like trout and cisco - truly the land of sky-blue waters. It spans five counties: Aitkin, Carlton, Cass, Itasca, and St. Louis. The planning group received a grant through the One Watershed, One Plan

program in 2021 to begin the process of developing a comprehensive watershed management plan. On December 2, 2024, BWSR received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses pertaining to the Plan for final State review. The planning partnership has responded to all comments received during the 60-day review period and incorporated appropriate revisions to the final plan.

BWSR staff completed its review and subsequently found the Plan meets the requirements of Minnesota Statutes and BWSR Policy.

On January 6, 2025, the Northern Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. The Committee's decision was to recommend approval of the Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Watershed Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan as submitted to the full Board per the attached draft Order.

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources  
520 Lafayette Road North  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

---

**In the Matter** of the review of the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Upper Mississippi - Grand Rapids Watershed, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801.

---

**ORDER  
APPROVING  
COMPREHENSIVE  
WATERSHED  
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**Whereas** the Policy Committee of the Upper Mississippi - Grand Rapids Watershed Partnership submitted a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) on December 2, 2024, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #21-08, and;

**Whereas** the Board has completed its review of the Plan.

**Now Therefore** the Board hereby makes the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Order:

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

- **Partnership Establishment.** The Upper Mississippi - Grand Rapids Watershed Partnership was established on June 28 of 2023 through adoption of a Memorandum of Agreement for the purposes of developing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The membership of the Partnership includes Aitkin County, Aitkin Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Carlton County, Carlton SWCD, Cass SWCD, Itasca County, Itasca SWCD, Salo Township and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe.
- **Authority to Plan.** Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 allows the Board to adopt resolutions, policies or orders that allow a comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D to serve as substitutes for one another or be replaced with a comprehensive watershed management plan. Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.801 established the Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning Program; also known as One Watershed, One Plan and Board Decision #21-08 adopted the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures Version 2.1 and Board Decision #19-41 adopting the One Watershed, One Plan Content Requirements Version 2.1 policies.
- **Nature of the Watershed.** The Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Watershed (UM-GR) is in north-central Minnesota, where it covers 1.3 million acres with numerous rivers, lakes, and forests. It has almost 2,000 miles of rivers and streams, vast amounts of peatlands and wetlands, 625 lakes larger than 10 acres, 79 designated wild rice lakes, and 48 cold water fishery lakes that support fish, like trout and cisco - truly the land of sky-blue waters. It spans five counties: Aitkin, Carlton, Cass, Itasca, and St. Louis. The watershed also includes portions of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Reservation, and a number of communities including Grand Rapids, Colerain, Cromwell, Hill City, McGregor, and Remer.

Historically the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe established themselves in north and central Minnesota, including the UM-GR. Between 1837 and 1867 a series of treaties were signed by Ojibwe Bands in Minnesota ceding vast tribal territories to the United States, but reserved the right to hunt, fish, and gather on the ceded lands.

- **Plan Development.** The Plan was developed as a single, concise, coordinated approach to watershed management. The Plan consolidates policies, programs, and implementation strategies from existing data, studies, and plans, and incorporates input from multiple planning partners and stakeholders to provide a single plan for management of the watershed. The Plan focuses on prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation efforts and lays out specific actions to manage water quantity, protect and restore water quality, natural habitat, recreational uses and drinking water sources in the watershed.
- **Plan Review.** On December 3, 2024, the Board received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses pertaining to the Plan for final State review pursuant to Board Decision #21-08. State agency representatives attended and provided input at advisory committee meetings during development of the Plan. The following state review comments were received during the comment period.
  - A. Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA): MDA recommends approval of the Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. Thank you for the opportunity to review.
  - B. Minnesota Department of Health (MDH): The entire WS planning process has been very transparent with ample opportunity to provide comment at many places in the timeline. The concerns I expressed, and data I provided, for addressing source (drinking) water protection were well received and thoughtfully incorporated. Staff have been very accessible throughout the process and have been prompt in their replies to any questions or suggestions I posed. The MDH has appreciated the opportunity to participate and looks forward to continuing in this partnership by assisting with implementation of the approved plan.
  - C. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR): DNR has received the final Mississippi River Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan and reviewed responses to comments submitted under the 60-day review of the draft plan. The DNR appreciates the inclusion of our comments to topics raised during our review, has no additional comments, and recommends that BWSR approve the plan. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this process. We look forward to working with watershed partners to help implement the plan.
  - D. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA): MPCA appreciates the opportunity to participate and provide input throughout the Mississippi River - Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) development process. Overall, the Plan is very well written, concise, and thorough. We have no comments as part of the official 90-day Review and Comment Period and recommend it for approval.



- E. Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB): Policy requires that EQB be notified of the final draft document. EQB confirmed receipt of the Plan and did not provide comments on the 90-day final draft Plan.
- F. Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR): BWSR staff provided comments throughout the planning process and had no suggested or required changes to the Plan submitted for the 60-day review. The entire report is very well-written, easy to understand and is visually appealing. The partnership responded well to stakeholder input at the topic meetings by creating issue statements for each section of the plan. They also were inclusive of tribal nations during the planning process. We commend the partners for their trust level and commitment to the resources of the Plan area.
- **Plan Summary and Highlights.** The highlights of the plan include:
  - The Policy and Advisory Committees sought extensive community engagement during the early stages of the planning process including public input from two public kick-off meetings and six topic meetings of expert and local stakeholders on the topics of Lakes, forests, wetlands/ditching, rivers/streams, stormwater and farms/groundwater. The comments were used during plan development to inform issues, goals and actions and provided an opportunity for public input on the implementation actions.
  - The Advisory Committee identified 7 priority Issues (Lakes, Rivers/Streams, Forests, Farms, Groundwater/Drinking Water, Stormwater, Wetlands); each priority issue has measurable goals and an action option of either Fix it, Manage it, Keep it or Know it.
  - The partnership identified ten measurable goals for the seven topics. Each topic has a short-term goal, a long-term goal and a desired condition. The short-term (10 year) measurable goals are what this plan will focus on.
  - For ease of future action of the issues, separate targeted implementation tables and maps were organized by four planning regions. The tables detail an action, the specific focus area for the action, the measurable outcome, who will lead and support the action, timing and estimated costs.
- **Northern Regional Committee.** On January 6, 2025, the Northern Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. Those in attendance were Committee Chair Rich Sve, Ron Staples, LeRoy Ose, Tom Schulz, Jeff Berg, Ben Bergey, and Chad Anderson. BWSR staff in attendance were Ryan Hughes, Northern Region Manager; Darren Mayers, Board Conservationist; Jeff Hrubes, Clean Water Specialist; Melanie Bomier, Board Conservationist; and Carrie Moline-Rust, Office & Administrative Specialist. The representatives from the Partnership were Dana Gutzmann, Cass SWCD; Cal Saari, Itasca SWCD Supervisor; Mitch Brinks, TSA 8; Janet Smude, Aitkin SWCD; Moriya Rufer, Houston Engineering; and Matt Gutzmann, Itasca SWCD, presented the Plan on behalf of the partnership. Board regional staff provided its recommendation of Plan approval to the Committee. After discussion, the Committee's decision was to present a recommendation of approval of the Plan to the full Board.
- This Plan will be in effect for a ten-year period until January 22, 2035.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

1. All relevant substantive and procedural requirements of law have been fulfilled.
2. The Board has proper jurisdiction in the matter of approving a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Watershed pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #21-08.
3. The Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan attached to this Order states priority water and natural resource issues within the planning area and possible solutions thereto; goals, objectives, and actions of the Partnership; and an implementation program.
4. The attached Plan is in conformance with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes Section 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #21-08.
5. The attached plan when adopted through local resolution by the members of the Partnership will serve as a replacement for the comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D, but only to the geographic area of the Plan.

## **ORDER**

The Board hereby approves the attached Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan of the Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Watershed Partnership, submitted December 3, 2024.

Dated in Saint Paul, Minnesota, this twenty-second of January 2025.

## **MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

January 22, 2025

Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Watershed Planning Partnership  
c/o Matt Gutzmann  
1895 W. US Hwy 2.  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

**RE: Approval of the Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan**

Dear Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Planning Partnership:

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is pleased to inform you the Upper Mississippi-Grand Rapids Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) was approved at its regular meeting held on January 22, 2025. Attached is the signed Board Order that documents approval of the Plan and indicates the Plan meets all relevant requirements of law, rule, and policy.

This Plan is effective for a ten-year period until January 22, 2035. Please be advised, the partners must adopt and begin implementing the plan within 120 days of the date of the Order in accordance with Minnesota Statutes §103B.101, Subd. 14, and the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures. Per the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures please provide a copy of resolutions to adopt the Plan to your Board Conservationist to be eligible for grants.

The members of the partnership and participants in the plan development process are to be commended for writing a plan that clearly presents water management goals, actions, and priorities of the Partnership, and for participating in the One Watershed, One Plan program. The BWSR looks forward to working with you as you implement this Plan and document its outcomes.

Please contact Board Conservationist Darren Mayers of our staff at 218-290-8384 or [darren.mayers@state.mn.us](mailto:darren.mayers@state.mn.us) for further assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Todd Holman, Chair  
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Enclosure: BWSR Board Order

CC: Listed on next page.

Bemidji      Brainerd      Detroit Lakes      Duluth      Mankato      Marshall      Rochester      St. Cloud      St. Paul

St. Paul HQ      520 Lafayette Road North      St. Paul, MN 55155      Phone: (651) 296-3767

CC: Matt Gutzmann, Itasca SWCD (via email)  
Reid Christianson, MDA (via email)  
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Carrie Raber, MDH (via email)  
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Rian Reed, DNR (via email)  
Nathan Kestner, DNR (via email)  
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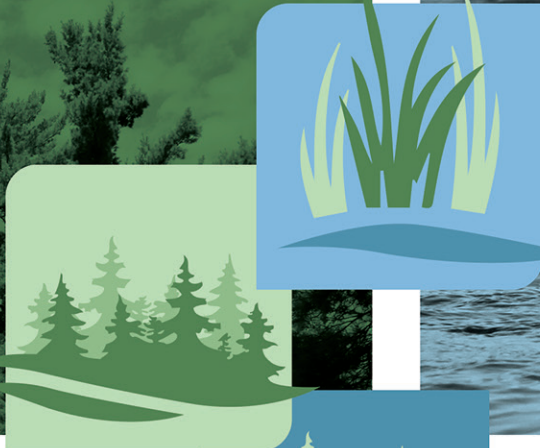
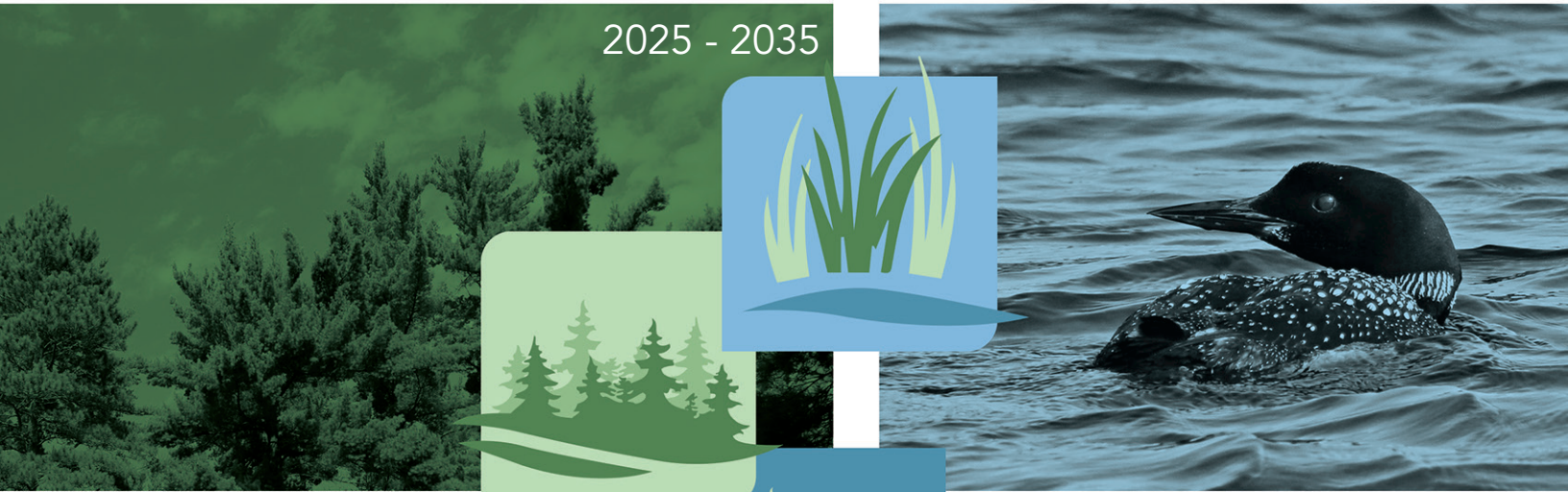


UPPER MISSISSIPPI

# Grand Rapids Watershed

## Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

2025 - 2035



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



## Project Partners



**Salo Township**

## Steering Committee

Andy Arens, Itasca SWCD  
Austin Steere, Itasca SWCD  
Cameron Gustafson, Carlton SWCD  
Dana Gutzmann, Cass SWCD  
Darren Mayers, BWSR  
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Jeff Hrubes, BWSR  
Matt Gutzmann, Itasca SWCD  
Moriya Rufer, HEI  
Ryan Carlson, Cass SWCD  
Sam Seybold, Aitkin SWCD

## Policy Committee

*(Appointed Officials)*

Barb Dahl, Carlton SWCD Supervisor  
Bob Marcum, Salo Township Supervisor  
Cal Saari, Itasca SWCD Supervisor  
Dave Peterson, Cass SWCD Supervisor  
Gary Peterson, Carlton County Commissioner  
Kelly Applegate, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe  
Michael Kearney, Aitkin County Commissioner  
Terry Snyder, Itasca County Commissioner  
Tom Fasteland, Aitkin SWCD Supervisor

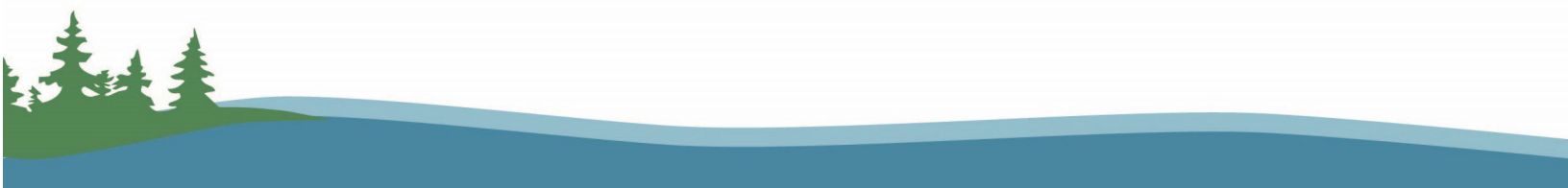
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## Prepared By

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Sam Seybold, Aitkin SWCD



# ACRONYMS

Aquatic Invasive Species	AIS
Aquatic Management Area	AMA
Best Management Practices	BMPs
Board of Water and Soil Resources	BWSR
Capital Improvement Project	CIP
Coalition of Lake Associations	COLA
Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan	CWMP
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	CREP
Conservation Reserve Program	CRP
Cooperative Stream Gaging	CSG
Drinking Water Supply Management Area	DWSMA
Emerald Ash Borer	EAB
Environmental Protection Agency	EPA
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	EQIP
Farm Services Agency	FSA
Federal Highway Administration	FHWA
Hydrologic Unit Code (watershed size on maps)	HUC
Joint Powers Agreement	JPA
Land Stewardship Plan	LSP
Local Government Units	LGUs
Memorandum of Agreement	MOA
Minnesota Agriculture Water Quality Certification Program	MAWQCP
Minnesota Department of Agriculture	MDA
Minnesota Department of Health	MDH
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	DNR
Minnesota Department of Transportation	MnDOT
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	MLBO
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	MPCA
Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System	MS4
National Resource Conservation Service	NRCS
National Weather Service	NWS
One Watershed, One Plan	1W1P
Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances	PFAS
Perfluorooctanesulfonic Acid	PFOS
Reinvest in Minnesota	RIM
Scenic Natural Areas	SNA
Soil and Water Conservation District	SWCD
Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems	SSTS
Sustainable Forest Incentive Act	SFIA
The Nature Conservancy	TNC

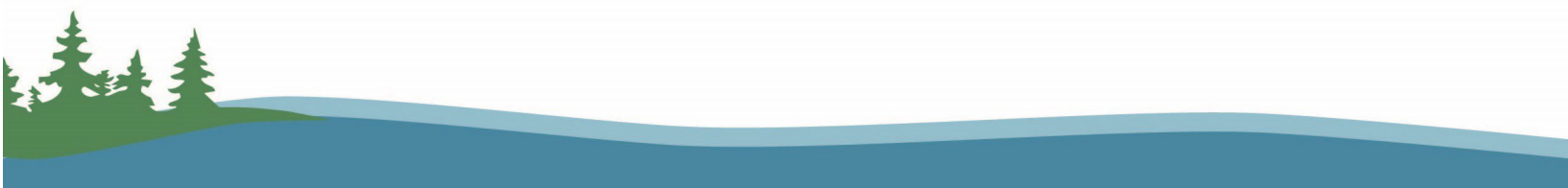






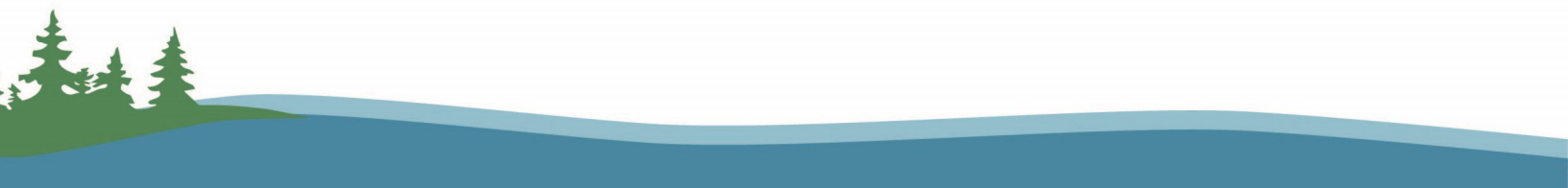
# ACRONYMS

Total Suspended Solids	TSS
United States Army Corps of Engineers	USACE
United States Department of Agriculture	USDA
United States Fish and Wildlife Service	USFWS
United States Forest Service	USFS
United States Geological Survey	USGS
University of Minnesota	UMN
Upper Mississippi - Grand Rapids	UM-GR
Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network	WPMLN
Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy	WRAPS
Watershed-Based Implementation Funding	WBIF
Wetland Conservation Act	WCA
Wildlife Management Area	WMA



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# SECTION 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Upper Mississippi - Grand Rapids (UM-GR) Watershed collects the water that topography and gravity provide from the borders of 3 adjacent watersheds (Figure 1.1):

- ❖ Laurentian Divide, flowing to the north via Rainy to Hudson's Bay;
- ❖ The St. Lawrence, to the east through the Great Lakes;
- ❖ The St. Croix, to the south joining the Mississippi's journey near Prescott, south-east of the Metro Area.

The Mississippi River itself enters the UM-GR at the Pokegama Dam in Cohasset, just to the north-west of Grand Rapids. From there it flows into the Mississippi-Brainerd Watershed just south of Palisade at the confluence with the Willow River. Along the way two principal arteries provide cumulative input to the UM-GR (Figure 1.2):

- ❖ Prairie River, from the north-east quadrant of lakes and highland;
- ❖ Willow River from the south-west lowlands with wetland drainage.

The UM-GR also has the somewhat unique feature of the east end of the Mesabi Iron Range - an extensive development stretching north-east from Grand Rapids to Keewatin, bordering the Lake Superior/St. Lawrence watershed. This area is characterized by an industrial landscape with large open pits, many of which are now filled with water, surrounded by immense tailing basins and stockpiles.

The UM-GR drains over 1.3 million acres and contains almost 2,000 miles of streams and 625 lakes greater than 10 acres. It spans five counties: Aitkin, Carlton, Cass, Itasca, and St. Louis (Figure 1.2). The watershed also includes portions of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Reservation, and a number of communities including Grand Rapids, Colerain, Cromwell, Hill City, McGregor, and Remer. This watershed has an abundance of beautiful lakes that make it an important recreational destination. It is also home to unique plant and animal species such as wild rice, peatlands, and trout, along with an abundance of healthy forests.

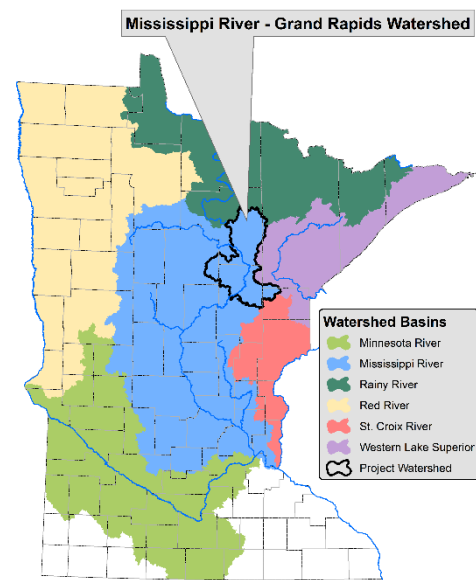


Figure 1.1. UM-GR watershed and Minnesota River Basins.

This Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP) was developed in 2023-2024 as a part of the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) One Watershed, One Plan Program (1W1P). This program seeks to align watershed planning along hydrologic boundaries rather than jurisdictional ones, making partnerships between local government units within the watershed essential during planning and implementation. With very few water quality impairments and 37% public land ownership, the UM-GR CWMP focuses on **nondegredation**, as evidenced by the vision statement below.

## nondegredation

non.deg.ra.da.tion

noun

1. Prevention of a significant change that lowers the condition of high-quality land and waters.

### Watershed Vision:

*From the peatlands to the iron range, we work to protect our vibrant Northwoods lands and waters for vibrant communities.*



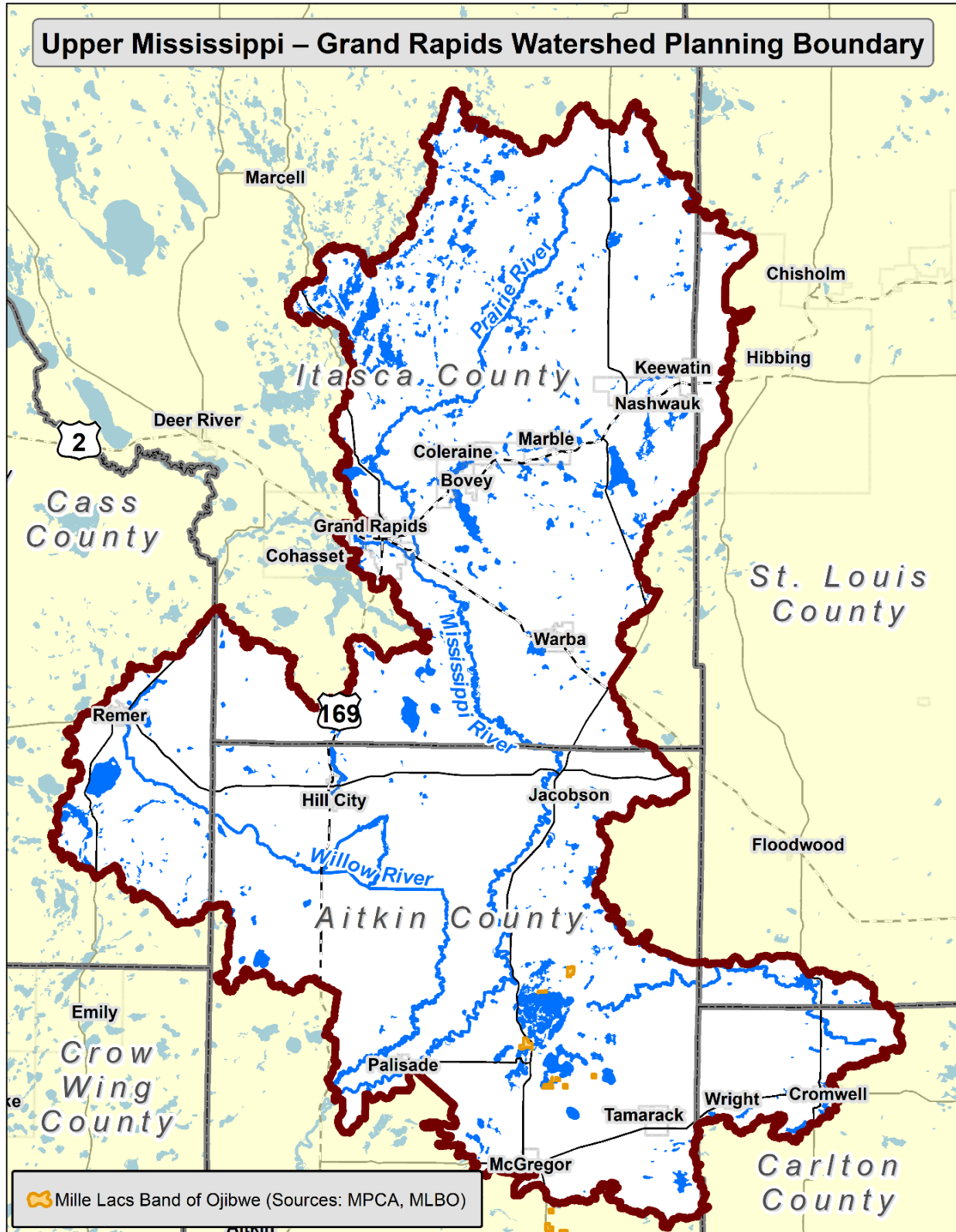


Figure 1.2. Location map for the UM-GR Watershed.

## Roles

The UM-GR Partnership is a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Aitkin County, Aitkin Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Carlton County, Carlton SWCD, Cass SWCD, Itasca County, Itasca SWCD, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and Salo Township (see Figure 1.3).

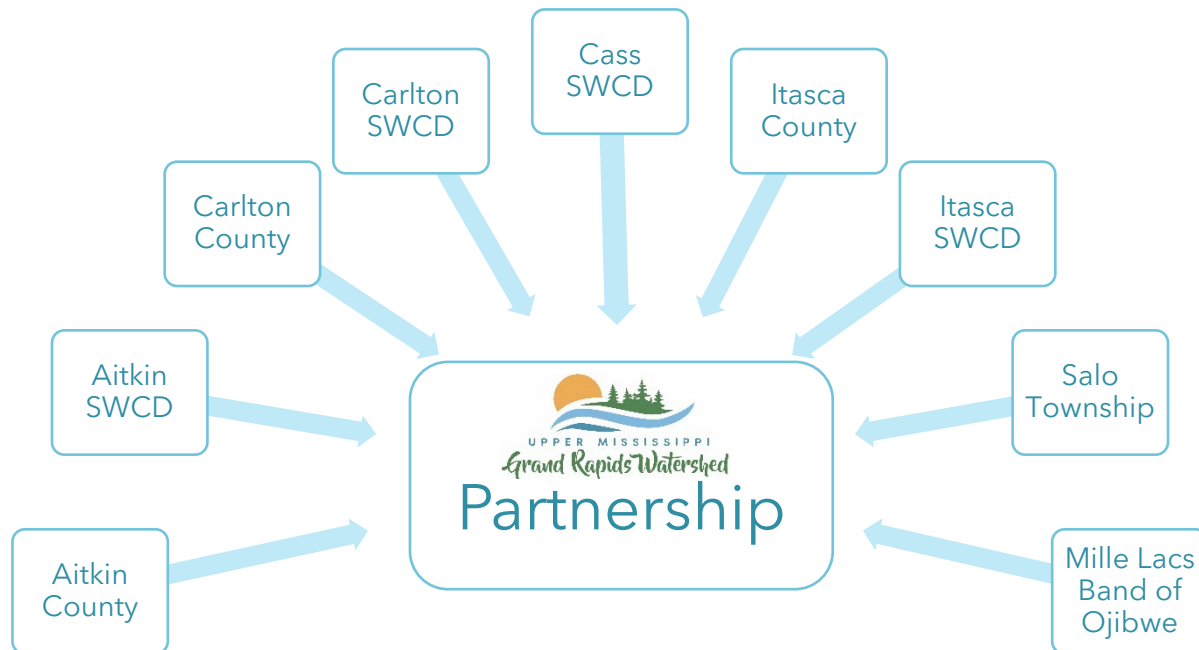


Figure 1.3. Planning Partners.

The CWMP development process is driven by three committees, the Policy, Steering, and Advisory Committees (Figure 1.4). The Steering Committee contains local government unit staff (LGUs), guided by an Advisory Committee made up of local stakeholders, federal and state agencies, and tribal entities. The decision-making body for the plan is a Policy Committee made up of elected officials from each entity in the MOA.

### Policy Committee

**Includes:** An elected official from each entity in Figure 1.1.

**Role:** Decision-making body for the CWMP.

### Steering Committee

**Includes:** One staff member from each LGU on the MOA, BWSR, and the consultant.

**Role:** Guides plan development and produces plan content.

### Advisory Committee

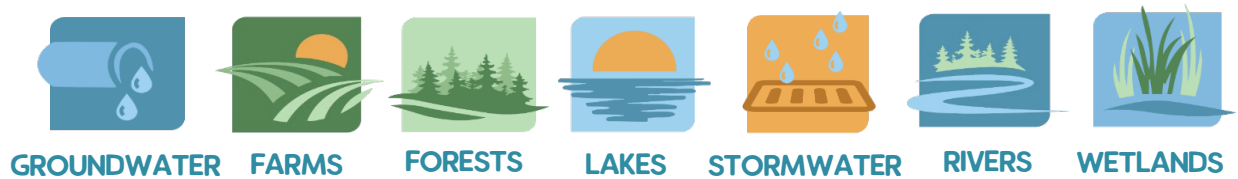
**Includes:** Local stakeholders such as state agency staff, watershed residents, and private businesses.

**Role:** Advises on plan content.

Figure 1.4. Roles of the Policy, Steering, and Advisory Committees involved in the development of the UM-GR CWMP.

## Plan Development

After establishing the committees, the planning process began with requesting letters from state agencies on watershed priorities and issues. A public kick-off event was held in June 2023 to solicit resident input on issues. See Appendix B for the public kickoff summary. The Steering Committee reviewed existing reports and data, agency letters, and the public kick-off feedback and categorized issues into seven resource categories, shown below:



## Topic Meetings

In the first step in the planning process, six topic meetings were held to solicit expert and stakeholder opinion when developing issues, measurable goals, and actions on each topic. The topic meetings were: 1) lakes, 2) forests, 3) wetlands & ditching 4) rivers & streams 5) stormwater and 6) farms & groundwater.

Table 1.1. Experts at topic meetings.

Topic	Expert Affiliations
 <b>Farms</b> <b>Groundwater</b>	City Staff, SWCD Staff, Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Feedlot Inspector, Mississippi Headwaters Board (MHB), MLBO
 <b>Forests</b>	SWCD Forester, County Land Commissioner, Conservation Center, Deer Hunters Association, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forester, DNR Wildlife Staff, Tamarack Water Alliance, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Staff, MHB, MLBO
 <b>Lakes</b>	County Highway Departments, Lakes and River Association/Advocates, Big Sandy Area Lake Watershed Management Project, Tamarack Water Alliance, City Staff, Lake Associations, SWCD Staff, Conservation Center, DNR Fisheries, DNR Wildlife Staff, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), MHB, MLBO
 <b>Stormwater</b>	County Highway Departments, County Transportation Department, DNR Fisheries, MnDOT, MPCA Staff, MHB, MLBO
 <b>Streams</b>	County Highway Departments, Lakes and River Association/Advocates, County Transportation Department, Big Sandy Area Lake Watershed Management Project, City Staff, Lake Associations, SWCD Staff, Conservation Center, DNR Fisheries, DNR Wildlife Staff, MnDOT, MPCA Staff, Tamarack Water Alliance, USFWS Staff, MHB, MLBO
 <b>Wetlands</b>	BWSR Wetland Specialists, MPCA Staff, USFWS Staff, MLBO



## Issues

To help understand what issues and opportunities affect each topic in the watershed, issues listed in previous plans, reports, state agency comment letters and public input were gathered and compiled into common themes, becoming the basis of creating the issues for the UM-GR Watershed. At each topic meeting, attendees brainstormed issues and settled on 1-6 issue statements. These were further prioritized into 1-3 statements, and then finalized at the January 2024 Advisory Committee meeting. The process for issue development is shown in Figure 1.5, and the final issue list is shown in Table 1.2.

Gather issues described in existing plans, state agency comment letters, and public kickoff meeting feedback.

Compile common themes within all sources.

Brainstorm issues at the topic meeting, edit and combine with issues gathered from existing sources.



Topic meeting participants prioritize issues by selecting their top two highest priority themes for the UM-GR Watershed.

Topic meeting participants discuss possible actions and measures to address priority issues.

Figure 1.5. Issue statement development process.



Table 1.2. Priority Issue Statements.








Resource Topic	Issue Statement
	<b>Sufficient protection</b> is needed for outstanding resources and sensitive species (i.e., trout, cisco, wild rice, forests) to maintain water quality, native species, wildlife, and plant communities.
 Lakes	<b>Lakeshore alteration</b> from development, conversion of cabins to year-round homes, removal of native vegetation, and wake boats impact water quality and shoreline habitat.
 Lakes	<b>Nutrients</b> from lakeshore development, septic systems, internal loading, and land use changes contribute to algal growth along with recreational impairments.
 Forests	<b>Forest health</b> is vulnerable to climate variability, pests, and invasive species which can affect forest diversity and productivity.
 Streams	<b>Riparian alteration and loss of connectivity</b> , from development and land use change increases streambank erosion and temperature of streams in the watershed.
 Wetlands	<b>Wetland health and function</b> is impacted by invasive species, ditching, recreation, and beavers.
 Wetlands	Historic <b>straightening of natural watercourses</b> impacts water quality, aquatic life, and flooding.
 Stormwater	<b>Stormwater runoff</b> from developed areas delivers sediment, nutrients, chloride, and bacteria to lakes, streams, and wetlands.
 Farms	<b>Agricultural runoff and livestock access</b> increases erosion, nutrients, sediment, and bacteria in streams and groundwater.
 Groundwater	<b>Groundwater quality and quantity needs protection</b> from contamination due to activities on the land and environmental conditions.
 Groundwater	More <b>testing and screening</b> are needed to track groundwater and drinking water safety and quality.

## Goals

Ten measurable goals were set to cover the seven topics. Goals were discussed during three Advisory Committee meetings and were further refined based on what is possible with available funding and staff capacity.

Each topic has a short-term goal (to be met within 10 years) and a long-term goal, a desired future condition. The short-term goals are the focus of this plan and are listed below:

Table 1.3. Short-term (10-year) measurable goals.

10-Year Goals for the UM-GR Watershed	
 <b>Lakes</b>	Reduce phosphorus in Priority Enhance and Restore lakes by <b>40lbs/yr</b> ; Restore <b>3 linear miles</b> of shoreline on priority lakes
	Protect or enhance <b>1 mile</b> of priority streams  <b>Streams</b>
 <b>Farms</b>	Implement <b>3,659 acres</b> of agricultural best management practices (BMPs)
	Implement <b>8,162 acres</b> of forest protection; Implement <b>36,000 acres</b> of forest management  <b>Forests</b>
 <b>Wetlands</b>	Maintain and enhance wetlands and peatlands at <b>current rate</b>
	Complete stormwater retrofit analysis for <b>3 communities</b> ; Implement <b>5 stormwater projects</b>  <b>Stormwater</b>
 <b>Groundwater</b>	Seal <b>50 unused wells</b> .

## Implementation

### Overall Priorities

To prioritize where to work first overall, the focus areas for the resource topics were stacked together to determine overall watershed priorities. The outcome is shown below in Figure 1.6 and indicates where outreach and funding will be focused in the first five years of plan implementation.

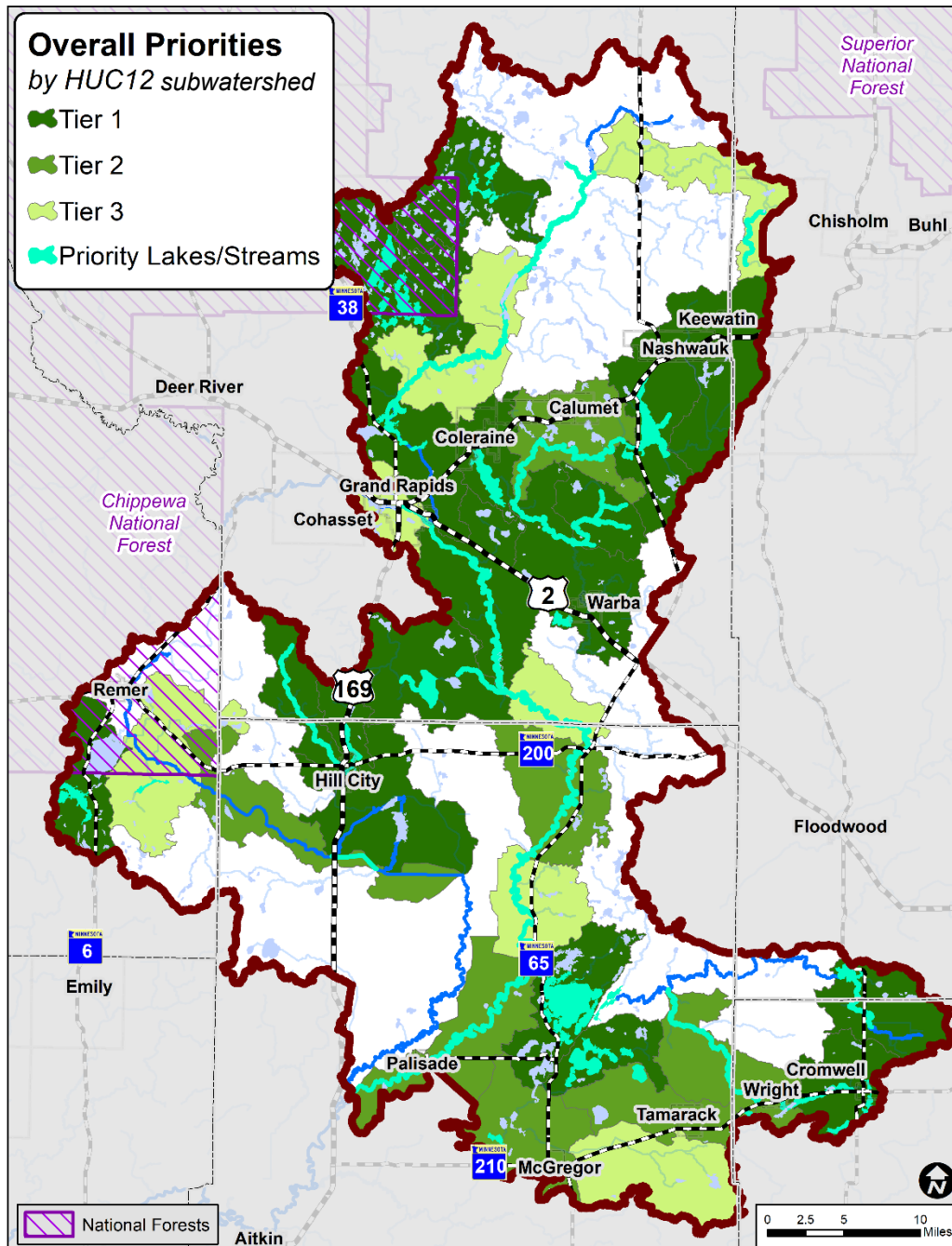


Figure 1.6. Overall priorities of where to work first in the UM-GR Watershed.

## Actions

The Advisory Committee and Topic Meeting Experts brainstormed a list of possible actions to address the priority issues and make progress towards the short-term goal. These actions are included in the targeted implementation schedule, at the end of each topic section. The targeted implementation schedule contains the ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘who’, ‘when’, and cost.

- ❖ What: Action name, outcome, and program.
  - For example, the first action in the groundwater table is ‘seal abandoned wells’ in the ‘Fix it’ program, with an output of 50 wells sealed (within the 10 years of plan implementation).
- ❖ Where: Rather than implementing the action anywhere in the watershed, a specific area or resources are targeted for more effective implementation.
- ❖ Who: Agencies that will be involved in the action are listed and the lead(s) are indicated.
- ❖ When: The estimated time of implementation is indicated. Many actions are annual and will continue throughout implementation. Others have a targeted biennium.
- ❖ Cost: The funding source and the estimated 10-year cost are given.

Implementation of actions will fall under one of four programs: Planned Landscape Management (“Manage It”), Constructed Environmental Enhancements (“Fix It”), Protected Lands Maintenance (“Keep It”), and Data Collection and Outreach (“Know It”).



Fix It

**Constructed Environmental Enhancements** are actions that involve installation or construction.



Manage It

**Planned Landscape Management** actions manage the soil, forest, cropland, and water resources.



Keep It

**Protected Lands Maintenance** actions include permanent landscape protection.



Know It

**Data Collection & Outreach** actions involve gathering information or education and outreach to the public.

Current programs and funding will not be enough to accomplish all the actions planned in the targeted implementation schedule. BWSR provides non-competitive Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) with this CWMP from the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment. This is estimated to be \$1,324,120 per biennium based on the 2025-2026 allocation. This plan will operate using baseline + WBIF funds, with additional partner funding/grants set aside as 'Other'.

The success of plan implementation will hinge on reliable non-competitive WBIF being available for plan implementation in addition to competitive state, federal, and private grant dollars. The CWMP's Steering Committee and Policy Committee acknowledge that additional staffing may be necessary to meet plan goals. Because implementation is occurring under a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA), staff will be hired by existing local government units in the watershed.



Table 1.4. Annual and 10-year funding summary.

Funding Level	Estimated Annual Average	Estimated Plan Total (10-year)
Baseline Funding	\$720,000	\$7,200,000
<b>Funding needed to fully implement this plan</b> <i>Baseline funding=\$720,000/year</i> <i>2025-2026 WBIF Allocation=\$662,000/year</i> <i>Additional needed=\$511,400/year</i>	<b>\$1,893,000</b>	<b>\$18,930,000</b>
<b>Other</b> <i>Partners and other agencies, including NRCS, USFWS, USFS, SFIA, LSOHF, MHB, DNR, MPCA, etc.</i>	\$1,485,237	\$14,852,371

The same partnership for planning will continue into plan implementation. The same committees shown in Figure 1.4 will continue to meet, but not as often as during plan development.

## BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

---

**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**  Committee Recommendation     New Business     Old Business

**Item Type:**  Decision     Discussion     Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

**Section/Region:** Regional Operations/Northern Region

**Contact:** Ryan Hughes

**Prepared by:** Ryan Hughes

**Reviewed by:** Northern Region    Committee(s)

**Presented by:** LeRoy Ose and Ryan Hughes

**Time requested:** 5 minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**     Resolution     Order     Map     Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None          | <input type="checkbox"/> General Fund Budget          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amended Policy Requested | <input type="checkbox"/> Capital Budget               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Policy Requested     | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Water Fund Budget      |

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Approval of the Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan as recommended by the Northern Regional Committee.

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iQcAGm93ZvayxCAhNhgxBQnrnmnxMB6RO/view>

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

The Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed planning area was approved for a One Watershed, One Plan planning grant at the regularly scheduled meeting of the BWSR on August 16, 2022. The planning partners established a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the purposes of writing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The organizations signing the MOA included Beltrami County, Beltrami Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Red Lake Nation, and Red Lake Watershed District. Koochiching County and Koochiching SWCD, Itasca County and Itasca SWCD, and Clearwater County and Clearwater SWCD did not sign the Planning MOA due to the small area of their jurisdiction within the planning area.

The partnership held a 60-day plan review process that ended on September 20, 2024, and held the required public hearing on October 22, 2024. The final draft of the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments were submitted to the state review agencies on November 26, 2024. The partnership has addressed and documented agency and public comments received throughout the Plan review process.

On January 6, 2025, the Northern Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. The Committee's decision was to recommend approval of the Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan as submitted to the full Board per the attached draft Order.



Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources  
520 Lafayette Road North  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

---

**In the Matter** of the review of the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801.

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**ORDER  
APPROVING  
COMPREHENSIVE  
WATERSHED  
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**Whereas**, the Policy Committee of the Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed submitted a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) on November 26, 2024, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801 and Board Resolution #21-08, and;

**Whereas**, the Board has completed its review of the Plan;

**Now Therefore**, the Board hereby makes the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Order:

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

1. **Partnership Establishment.** The Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed Partnership (Partnership) was established through adoption of a Memorandum of Agreement for the purposes of developing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The membership of the Partnership includes Beltrami County, Beltrami Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Red Lake Nation, and Red Lake Watershed District.
2. **Authority to Plan.** Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 allows the Board to adopt resolutions, policies or orders that allow a comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D to serve as substitutes for one another or be replaced with a comprehensive watershed management plan. Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.801, established the Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning Program; also known as the One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program and Board Decision #21-08 adopted the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures Version 2.1 and Board Decision #19-41 adopted the One Watershed, One Plan Plan Content Requirements Version 2.1 policies.
3. **Nature of the Watershed.** The Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed (ULRLW) is, by both flow volume and surface area, the largest drainage basin of the Red River. The ULRLW covers 1,940 square miles (1,241,690 acres) primarily in Beltrami County but also small portions within Koochiching, Clearwater, and Itasca counties. Lower Red Lake and 60% of Upper Red Lake, over one third (483,246 acres) of the watershed, falls within the boundaries of the Red Lake Reservation. The Red Lake Peatland is partially contained in the watershed and it is the largest, most diverse patterned peatland in the conterminous United States. The watershed is 55% wetlands and 24% open water and contains approximately 214

lakes. Upper and Lower Red Lake combined is the largest body of water (288,800 acres) in Minnesota with its boundaries completely within the borders of Minnesota. They are significant lakes for walleye fishing for both the Minnesota tourism economy and the Red Lake Nation economy and traditions. All the drainage from within the smaller sub-watersheds ends up in the Red Lakes and eventually outlets into the Red Lake River at the Red Lake Dam.

4. **Plan Development.** The Plan was developed as a single, concise, and coordinated approach to watershed management. The Plan consolidates policies, programs, and implementation strategies from existing data, studies and plans, and incorporates input from multiple planning partners to provide a single plan for management of the watershed. The Plan focuses on prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation efforts and lays out specific actions to manage water quantity, protect and restore water quality, natural habitat, recreational uses and drinking water sources in the watershed.
5. **Plan Review.** On November 26, 2024, the Board received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments pertaining to the Plan for final State review pursuant to Board Resolution #21-08. During the development of the Plan, State agency representatives attended and provided input at advisory committee meetings. The following state review comments were received during the comment period.
  - A. Minnesota Department of Health (MDH): MDH staff thanked the partnership for addressing MDH's comments and noted that the plan was well written and thoughtful. MDH recommends approval of the plan.
  - B. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR): DNR staff is satisfied with the responses to issues raised during the 60-day review of the draft plan. DNR recommends approval of the plan.
  - C. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA): MPCA staff noted that they appreciated the opportunity to participate and provide input and that the plan is well written, concise, and thorough. MPCA recommends approval of the plan.
  - D. Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB): EQB acknowledged receipt of the plan.
  - E. Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA): MDA did not provide comments for the final plan.
  - F. Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources regional staff: BWSR staff provided comments throughout the planning process and had no suggested or required changes to the Plan submitted for the final review. We commend the partners for their trust level and commitment to the resources of the Plan area. BWSR staff recommend approval of the Plan and look forward to working with the Partnership during implementation.
6. **Plan Summary and Highlights.** The highlights of the Plan include:
  - Tribally owned or managed lands account for 38% of the area of the watershed, followed closely by State owned lands with 37%. About 23% of the land is privately owned with the remaining 2% being federal and county lands.
  - The watershed is within the larger 1863 Ceded Territory, and the Red Lake Reservation is within the watershed.
  - The Policy and Advisory Committees sought community engagement during the early stages of the planning process including public input from a public kick-off meetings and five topic meetings of expert and local stakeholders on the topics of lakes and streams, forests and habitat, land stewardship, groundwater, and hydrology. The comments were used during plan development to

inform issues, goals and actions and provided an opportunity for public input on the implementation actions.

- The Advisory Committee identified 11 issues covering those resource categories and created seven measurable goals. Each goal includes issues addressed, outcomes, priority map, short-term goals and a desired future condition.
7. **Northern Regional Committee.** On January 6, 2025, the Northern Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. Those in attendance were Committee Chair Rich Sve, Ron Staples, LeRoy Ose, Tom Schulz, Jeff Berg, Ben Bergey, and Chad Anderson. BWSR staff in attendance were Ryan Hughes, Northern Region Manager; Chad Severts, Board Conservationist; Henry Van Offelen, Clean Water Specialist; and Carrie Moline-Rust, Office & Administrative Specialist. The representatives from the Partnership were Brian Dwight, Red Lake Watershed District Manager; Shane Bowe, Red Lake Department of Natural Resources; Kayla Bowe, Red Lake Department of Natural Resources; Robyn Dwight, URLAA, Keep-it-Clean; Tammy Audette, Red Lake Watershed District; Tom Anderson, Red Lake Watershed District; Brent Rud, Beltrami County Environmental Services; Corey Hanson, Red Lake Watershed District; Moriya Rufer, Houston Engineering; and Katelyn Bergstrom, Beltrami SWCD, presented the Plan on behalf of the partnership. Board regional staff provided its recommendation of Plan approval to the Committee. After discussion, the Committee's decision was to present a recommendation of approval of the Plan to the full Board.
8. This Plan will be in effect for a ten-year period until January 22, 2035.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

1. All relevant substantive and procedural requirements of law have been fulfilled.
2. The Board has proper jurisdiction in the matter of approving a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Resolution #21-08.
3. The Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan attached to this Order states water and water-related problems within the planning area; priority resource issues and possible solutions thereto; goals, objectives, and actions of the Partnership; and an implementation program.
4. The attached Plan is in conformance with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes Section 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Resolution #21-08.
5. The attached Plan when adopted through local resolution by the members of the Partnership will replace the comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D, but only to the geographic area of the Plan.

**ORDER**

The Board hereby approves the attached Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan of the Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed, submitted November 26, 2024.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, this twenty-second day of January 2025.

**MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

January 22, 2025

Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed Planning Partnership  
c/o Katelyn Bergstrom  
Beltrami Soil and Water Conservation District  
701 Minnesota Ave., Suite 113  
Bemidji, MN 56601

**RE: Approval of the Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan**

Dear Upper/Lower Red Lake Planning Partnership:

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is pleased to inform you the Upper/Lower Red Lake Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) was approved at its regular meeting held on January 22, 2025. Attached is the signed Board Order that documents approval of the Plan and indicates the Plan meets all relevant requirements of law, rule, and policy.

This Plan is effective for a ten-year period until January 22, 2035. Please be advised, the partners must adopt and begin implementing the plan within 120 days of the date of the Order in accordance with Minnesota Statutes §103B.101, Subd. 14, and the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures. Per the One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures please provide a copy of resolutions to adopt the Plan to your Board Conservationist to be eligible for grants.

The members of the partnership and participants in the plan development process are to be commended for writing a plan that clearly presents water management goals, actions, and priorities of the Partnership, and for participating in the One Watershed, One Plan program. The BWSR looks forward to working with you as you implement this Plan and document its outcomes.

Please contact Board Conservationist Chad Severts of our staff at 651-539-2523 or [chad.severts@state.mn.us](mailto:chad.severts@state.mn.us) for further assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Todd Holman, Chair  
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Enclosure: BWSR Board Order

CC: Listed on next page.

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# UPPER / LOWER RED LAKE WATERSHED PLAN

2025-2035





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Project Partners



## Steering Committee

- Megan Fitzgerald, Beltrami SWCD
- Katelyn Bergstrom, Beltrami SWCD
- Brent Rud, Beltrami County
- Zach Gutknecht, Beltrami SWCD (moved to MPCA halfway through planning)
- Shane Bowe, Red Lake DNR
- Kayla Bowe, Red Lake DNR
- Corey Hanson, Red Lake Watershed District
- Chad Severts, BWSR
- Henry Van Offelen, BWSR
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- Zach Gutknecht, formerly Beltrami SWCD, Mapping

## Prepared By

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## Funded By





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Tim Sumner, Beltrami County

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Dave Elhard, Landowner  
Ross Rennemo, Landowner/farmer  
Jody Peek, NRCS



## ACRONYM LIST

**1W1P:** One Watershed, One Plan

**AMAs:** Aquatic Management Area

**AIQ:** Aquatic Invasive Species

**BCLARA:** Beltrami County Lakes and Rivers Association

**BMP:** Best Management Practice

**BWSR:** Board of Water and Soil Resources

**CIP:** Capital Improvement Project

**CREP:** Conservation Resource Enhancement Program

**CRP:** Conservation Reserve Program

**CSG:** Cooperative Stream Gaging

**CSP:** Conservation Stewardship Program

**CWF:** Clean Water Fund

**DNR:** Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

**DWSMA:** Drinking Water Supply Management Area

**EHC:** Evaluation of Hydrologic Change

**EQIP:** Environmental Quality Incentives Program

**EPA:** Environmental Protection Agency

**FEMA:** Federal Emergency Management Agency

**FSA:** Farm Service Agency

**FSI:** Forest Stand Improvement

**HSPF:** Hydrological Simulation Program - FORTTRAN

**GAM:** Grants Admission Manual

**LCCMR:** Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources

**LGU:** Local Government Unit

**LSOHC:** Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

**MDA:** Minnesota Department of Agriculture

**MDH:** Minnesota Department of Health

**MnDOT:** Minnesota Department of Transportation

**MOA:** Memorandum of Agreement

**MPCA:** Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

**MRWA:** Minnesota Rural Water Association

**NCCSA:** North Central Conservation Service Area

**NPDES:** National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System

**NRCS:** Natural Resources Conservation Service

**NWS:** National Weather Service

**PFA:** Public Facilities Authority

**PFAS:** Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances

**PPM:** parts per million

**RAQ:** Riparian, Adjacency, Quality

**RIM:** Reinvest in Minnesota

**RLDNR:** Red Lake Department of Natural Resources

**RLWD:** Red Lake Watershed District

**RRVSCA:** Red River Valley Conservation Service Area

**SDS:** State Disposal System



# ACRONYM LIST



**SFIA:** Sustainable Forest Incentive Act

**SNA:** Scientific and Natural Area

**SSS:** Soil Texture, Slope, Stream Proximity

**SSTS:** Subsurface Sewage Treatment System

**SWCD:** Soil and Water Conservation District

**TMDL:** Total Maximum Daily Load

**TNC:** The Nature Conservancy

**TSS:** Total Suspended Solids

**ULRLW:** Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed

**ULRLW CWMP:** Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

**USDA:** U.S. Department of Agriculture

**USACE:** U.S. Army Core of Engineers

**USGS:** U.S. Geological Survey

**USFS:** U.S. Forest Service

**USFWS:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**WBIF:** Watershed Based Implementation Funding

**WCA:** Wetland Conservation Act

**WMA:** Wildlife Management Area

**WMD:** Water Management District

**WRAPS:** Wetland Restoration and Protection Strategy

**WRP:** Wetland Reserve Program



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# SECTION 1.

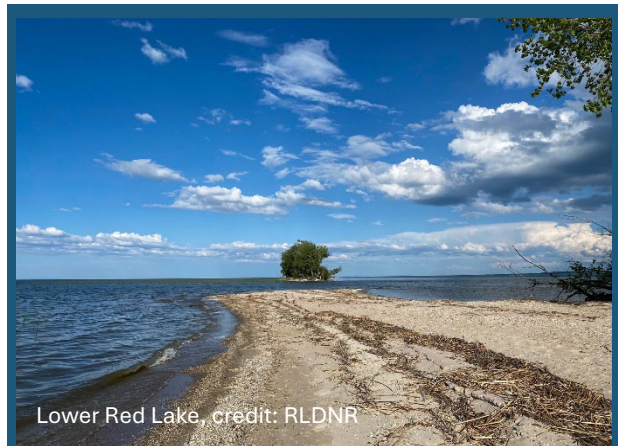
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The Upper/Lower Red Lake Watershed (ULRLW) spans 1,940 square miles. Three quarters of the ULRLW consists of open water or wetlands. The watershed is rich with natural resources and is a vast patchwork of peatlands, forests, and agricultural lands.

Upper and Lower Red Lakes combined is the largest body of water (288,800 acres) in Minnesota with its boundaries completely within the borders of Minnesota (MNDNR, 2013). They are significant lakes for walleye fishing for both the Minnesota tourism economy and the Red Lake Nation economy and traditions. All the drainage from within the smaller subwatersheds ends up in the Red Lakes and eventually outlets into the Red Lake River at the Red Lake Dam. The outflows at the dam are controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The dam's impact on the lakes water levels can take long periods of time due to its outlet capacity; however, it can have immediate impacts downstream when released.

The ULRLW planning partners have a long history of cooperation and working together. In 2023-2024, they built on these relationships to develop the ULRLW Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (ULRLW CWMP) through the One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program administered by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Minnesota Statutes §103B.801. The purpose of the plan is to guide the watershed managers (local counties, watershed districts, tribal governments, and soil and water conservation districts [SWCD]) as they work to manage the watershed's resources for the enjoyment of future generations and for maintaining a healthy local economy. The plan describes the watershed, a list of priority issues that will be addressed through the plan, measurable goals, and implementation actions that address the issues and make progress toward the goals.



Lower Red Lake, credit: RLDNR



Red Lake Peatlands

© MinnesotaSeasons.com



Pasture in the ULRLW



Planning Partners developed a Sense of Place and Vision Statement for the watershed during the planning process. This statement can be used to guide future work in the ULRW.

**SENSE OF PLACE**

*We are home to the largest lakes within Minnesota and the largest patterned peatlands in the nation.*

*We are the homeland of the Red Lake Nation.*

*We are home to residents and visitors who enjoy our lakes, rivers, and forests, and work our farmlands.*

**VISION**

*We envision a future of cooperation among residents, and tribal, state, and local agencies with shared goals of preserving our cultural and natural resources for future generations.*

**Planning Area**

The planning area spans four counties (Beltrami, Koochiching, Clearwater, and Itasca) and the Red Lake Nation (Figure 1.1). Major towns include Blackduck, Northome, Kelliher, Red Lake, and Redby, along with many other smaller communities such as Puposky and Funkley.

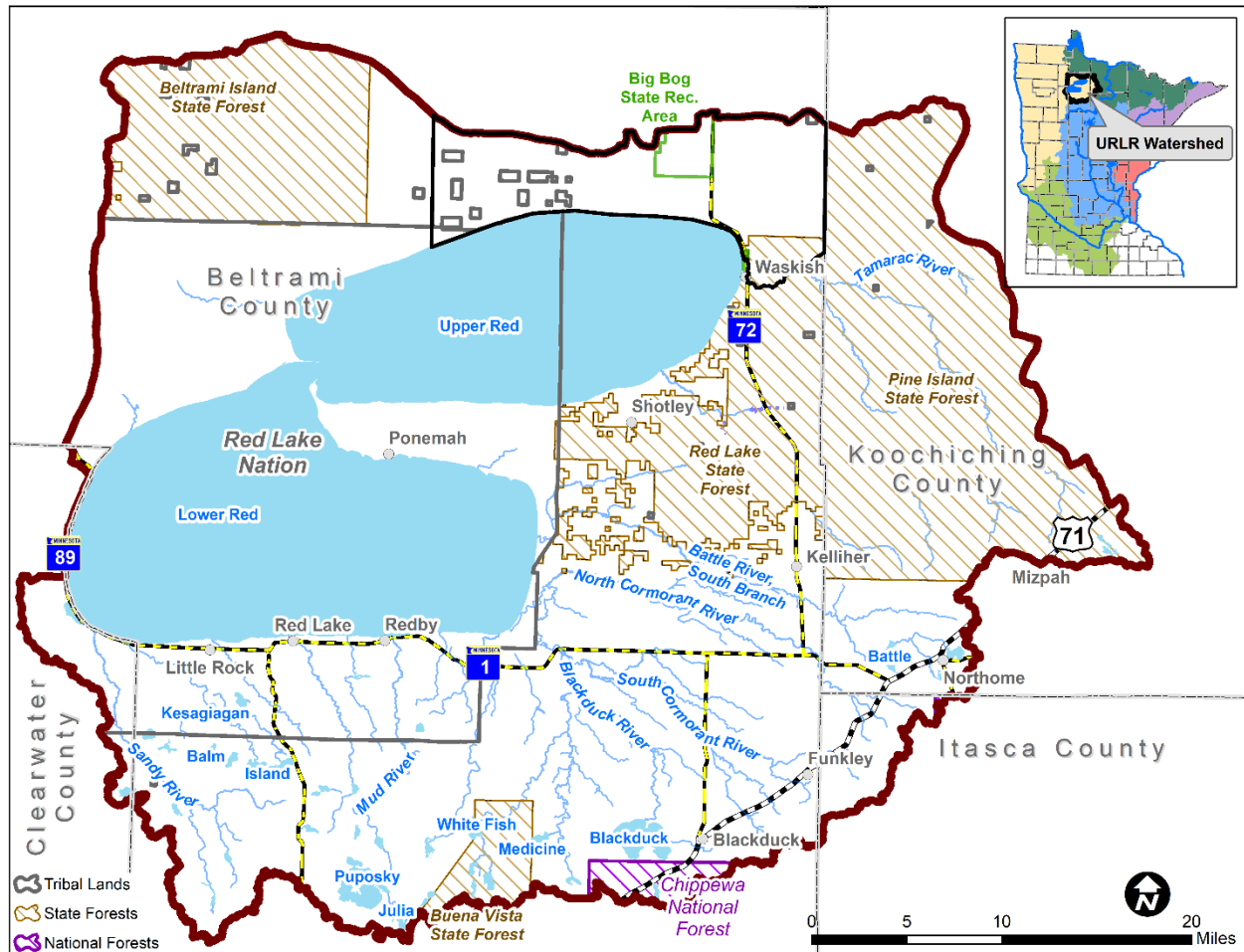


Figure 1.1. Location of the ULRW.

## Roles and Responsibilities

The ULRW CWMP was developed under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Beltrami County, Beltrami SWCD, Red Lake Watershed District (RLWD), and Red Lake Nation. Clearwater, Itasca, and Koochiching Counties declined to participate because their amount of land within the watershed boundary is so small.

The 1W1P process uses existing authorities, therefore a representative from each MOA member was appointed by their respective boards to serve on the Policy Committee, the decision-making body for this plan. Beltrami SWCD was the fiscal agent and the plan coordinator for this project.

The plan content was developed by the Advisory Committee made up of state agencies and local stakeholders. The Steering Committee, made of staff from the MOA governmental units, BWSR, and consultants, guided the planning process and timeline and produced the final plan.

## Community Engagement

### Public Kickoff

Public kickoff meetings were held in Kelliher in August of 2023 and Red Lake Nation in October 2023. Local participants learned about the planning effort and completed a survey providing input on their concerns to be addressed by the plan. Figure 1.2 shows results to the Penny Voting Prioritization, in which attendees were given three pennies to place on the station with the resources most important to them. To see the full results of the survey, see Appendix B.

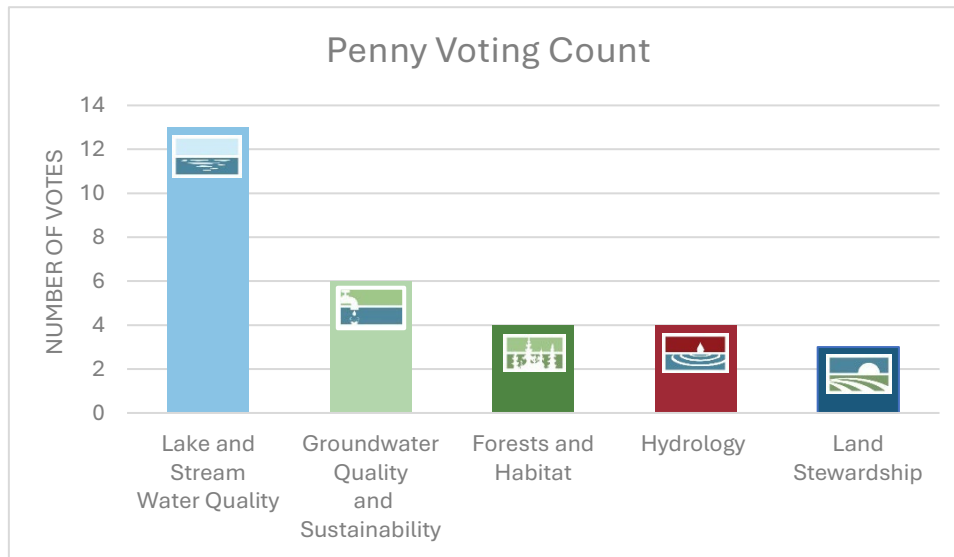


Figure 1.2. Results of penny voting prioritization at Kelliher public meeting

## Planning Process

The ULRW plan was developed by the planning committee throughout 2023-2024. In the fall of 2023, subject meetings were held with the Advisory Committee and subject matter experts to brainstorm and develop actions to address the issues within the watershed. The four subjects were: Forests & Habitat, Groundwater & Agriculture, Hydrology, and Surface Water. Over the winter of 2023-2024, the Steering Committee developed measurable goals based on the issues. In the spring of 2024, the goals and actions of the plan were further developed and reviewed. The Policy Committee approved the plan content along each step.





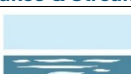










## Priority Issues

Input from the public, existing plans, studies, the Advisory Committee, and subject matter experts was used to develop issue statements. After the subject meetings, the Steering Committee met to finalize issue statements by combining similar issues for clarity and simplicity. The revised issues were then reviewed and approved by the Policy Committee. The priority issues that will be the focus of implementation efforts over the next 10 years are listed in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Priority issues in the ULRLW.








Resource	Issue Theme	Description
 Lakes & Streams	<b>Nutrients</b>	Excess nutrients contribute to excess algal growth along with recreational and biological impairments.
 Lakes & Streams	<b>Bacteria</b>	Bacteria runoff impacts aquatic recreation and human health.
 Lakes & Streams	<b>Protection</b>	Forest loss, fragmentation, and patchwork land ownership impacts water quality and habitat.
 Lakes & Streams	<b>Protection</b>	Changes to the definition of waters of the U.S. has potential to leave some wetlands with less protections.
 Lakes & Streams	<b>Eroding Watercourses</b>	Eroding watercourses and sedimentation contribute to impairments and reduced habitat quality.
 Hydrology	<b>Altered Hydrology</b>	Historical ditching, improperly sized culverts, and a dam alter the natural flow of water, increasing flashiness and erosion, and degrading habitat.
 Groundwater	<b>Groundwater</b>	Groundwater quality and quantity need ongoing testing and lacks an easy solution.
 Land Stewardship	<b>Soil Health</b>	Decreased soil health can reduce agricultural productivity, water holding capacity, and climate resiliency.
 Forests & Habitat	<b>Forest Health</b>	Forest health and habitat is vulnerable to climate variability, pests, invasive species, and lack of management, which can affect species composition and forest productivity.
 Forests & Habitat	<b>Aquatic Connectivity</b>	Aquatic connectivity barriers impact biological communities and stream morphology.
 Forests & Habitat	<b>Riparian Alteration</b>	Riparian and in-lake alteration from development impacts water quality, lake health, and fish communities.



## Measurable Goals

Seven measurable goals, listed in Table 1.2, were developed by the Steering and Advisory Committees to set a quantifiable expected change by the end of the 10-year plan. The goals are summarized below and are detailed in Section 4 of this plan.

Table 1.2. Measurable goals in the ULRW.

Goal Name	Goal Description
 <b>Agricultural Land Management</b>	Implement best management practices (BMPs) on <b>2,805 ACRES</b> of pastureland and <b>4,224 ACRES</b> of cropland.
 <b>Riparian Enhancement</b>	Implement <b>2 MILES</b> of riparian enhancement projects.
 <b>Lake Enhancement</b>	Reduce phosphorus loading to Bartlett Lake by <b>5 POUNDS/YEAR</b> and Blackduck Lake by <b>37 POUNDS/YEAR</b> .
 <b>Forest Management</b>	Implement <b>12,000 ACRES</b> of Forest Management Plans (100 plans), and plant <b>2,000 ACRES</b> of trees.
 <b>Protection</b>	Protect <b>9,170 ACRES</b> with Sustainable Forest Incentive Act (SFIA) or easements.
 <b>Drinking Water Protection</b>	Seal <b>100 UNUSED WELLS</b> .
 <b>Hydrologic Enhancement</b>	Explore opportunities for peatland restoration and complete <b>ONE FEASIBILITY STUDY</b> and <b>ONE PROJECT</b> .

## Implementation

Implementation activities and costs are presented in Section 4 of this plan. A variety of actions, including agricultural BMPs, stream stabilizations, conservation practices, and education and outreach actions, will take place in the watershed over the course of the 10-year plan. There are tables for each of the seven goals, which include actions to make progress toward goals, targeted resources, entities responsible for implementation, a timeline, and cost estimate. The estimated total funding currently available annually for implementation is \$1,426,500, plus any additional partner funding (Table 1.3). This includes current funding available in the watershed, plus watershed-based implementation funding (WBIF) from the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment available upon approval of the ULRW CWMP.



Table 1.3. Estimated annual funding for implementation.

Description	Annual Total	10 Year Plan Total
<b>Amount needed to implement this plan through MOA Planning Partners</b>	\$1,426,500	\$14,265,000
<b>Other/Partner Funding Sources</b> <i>SFIA, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Clean Water Fund (CWF), Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC)</i>	\$1,875,000	\$18,750,000

### Overall Prioritization

Five of the seven goals share identical, overlapping priority areas due to similar land use, land ownership, and water quality conditions. These goals can be summarized as Land Protection and Management in Figure 1.3 and include:

Land Protection and Management	Agricultural Land Management
	Riparian Enhancement
	Lake Enhancement
	Land Protection
	Forest Management

Drinking water is prioritized throughout the watershed, and hydrologic enhancement is prioritized in the northern portion of the watershed (Figure 1.3). Implementation partners will work together in these areas to achieve their measurable goals.

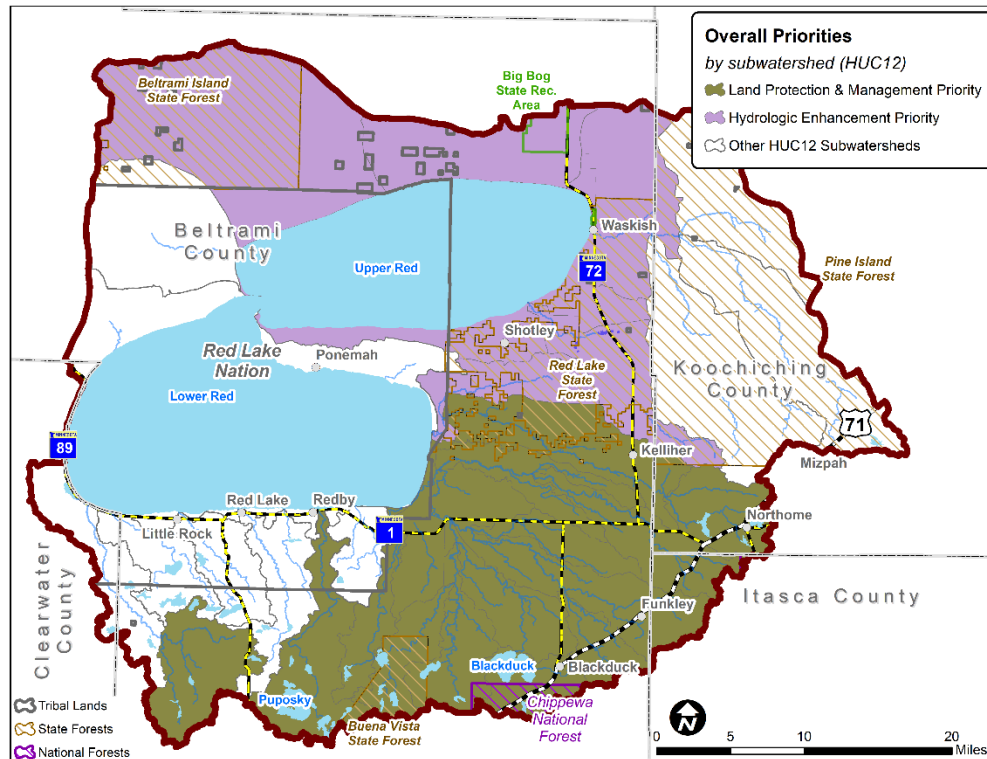


Figure 1.3. Overall implementation priorities in the ULRLW.

## Implementation Programs

This plan will be implemented through the programs listed below.



## Plan Administration and Coordination

Plan Administration describes how the plan will be implemented, how the watershed partners will work together, how the funding will move between them, and who will handle the administrative duties (Section 6). The ULRW CWMP will be implemented through an MOA between the planning partners, collectively referred to as the ULRW Partnership (Figure 1.4).

Committees that convened for planning are expected to continue into implementation in the same roles. Implementation strategies of the ULRW CWMP are voluntary, and outreach and incentives will be used to assist with implementation on private lands. Collaboration with local groups continued throughout the planning process and will be critical to the success of the plan.

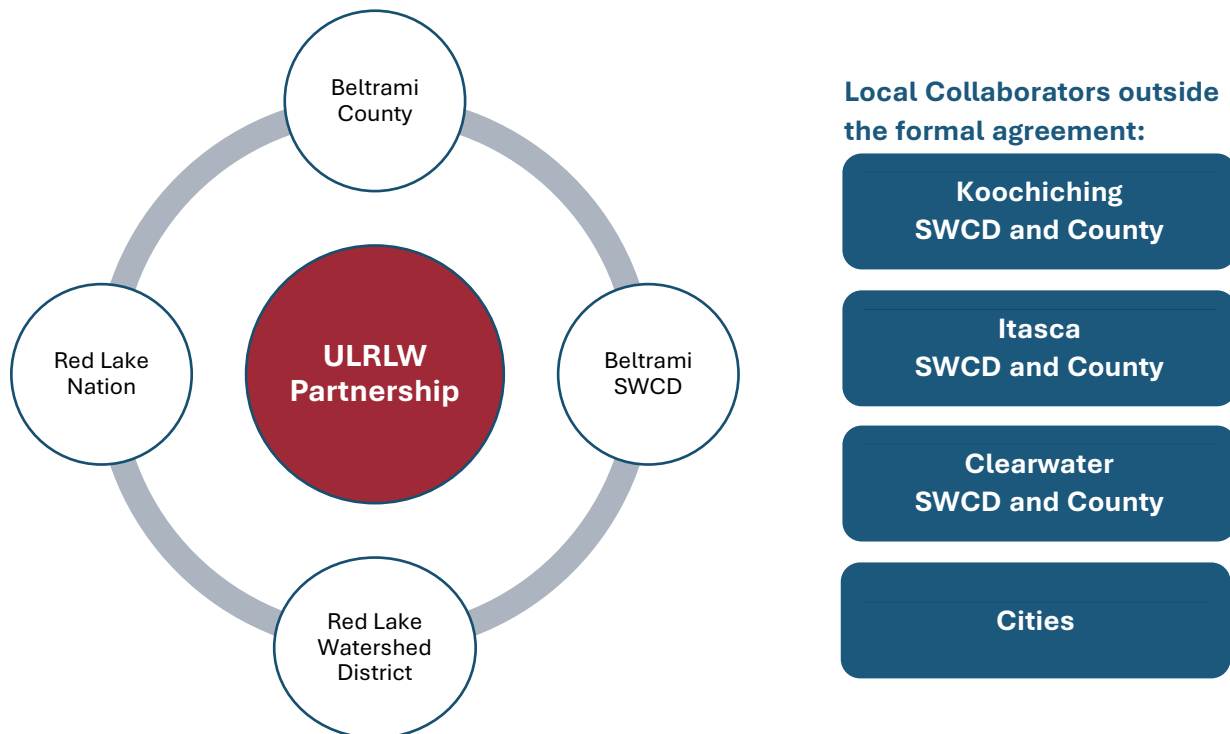


Figure 1.4. ULRW Partnership members.





# RESOURCE NARRATIVE



## SECTION 2. LAND & WATER RESOURCE NARRATIVE

### Introduction

The ULRW is, by both flow volume and surface area, the largest drainage basin of the Red River (Koochiching, 2018) (Figure 2.2). The ULRW covers 1,940 square miles (1,241,690 acres) primarily in Beltrami County but also small portions within Koochiching, Clearwater, and Itasca counties. Lower Red Lake and 60% of Upper Red Lake, over one third (483,246 acres) of the watershed, falls within the boundaries of the Red Lake Reservation (RLWD, 2006). With approximately 214 lakes, the ULRW is mostly wetlands and open water (MPCA, 2021). Upper and Lower Red Lake combined is the largest body of water (288,800 acres) in Minnesota with its boundaries completely within the borders of Minnesota (MNDNR, 2013). They are significant lakes for walleye fishing for both the Minnesota tourism economy and the Red Lake Nation economy and traditions (Figure 2.1). All the drainage from within the smaller subwatersheds ends up in the Red Lakes and eventually outlets into the Red Lake River at the Red Lake Dam. The outflows at the dam are controlled by the USACE.



Figure 2.1. Walleye, an important fish in Upper and Lower Red Lake.

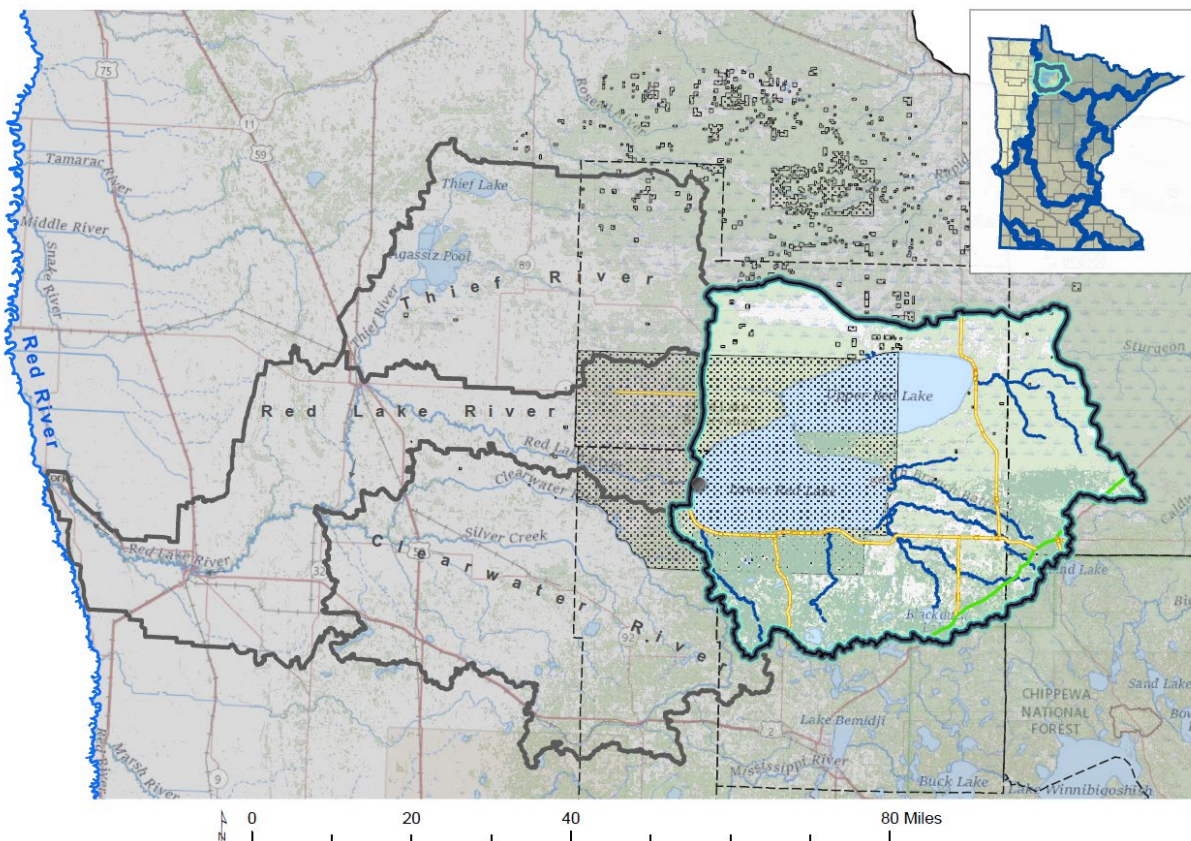


Figure 2.2. Location of the ULRW.



## PAST

### Glaciation

The area within the ULRW Watershed was formed nearly 12,000 years ago when the northern ice sheet melted, allowing water from Lake Agassiz, a glacial lake that covered most of northern Minnesota, to drain north into Hudson Bay. The sediments left behind by Lake Agassiz within the ULRW formed the Agassiz Lacustrine plain, Agassiz peatlands, Erskine Moraine, and Blackduck till plain. While there is some fall in topography from east to west, especially in the southern part of the watershed, the ULRW is relatively flat with vast wetlands and peatlands.

### Human History

Humans have occupied the Red Lake region since the glaciers retreated approximately 12,000 years ago.

#### Ojibwe Settlement

The Ojibwe migrated from the northern Great Lakes area to what is now Minnesota during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Beginning in the latter half of the 1800's, the Red Lake Band entered into a number of agreements and treaties with the U.S. governments including the 1863 "Treaty of old crossing" which ceded lands to the United States. Subsequent actions led to the 1904 Land Act that resulted in present day reservation boundaries known as the "Diminished Reservation". The Diminished Reservation is the area around Upper and Lower Red Lake, while the ceded lands stretch all the way to the Northwest Angle (Figure 2.3).

Later in the twentieth century, Red Lake began developing its infrastructure, like water and sewer, improved roads, and better housing.

The Red Lake Department of Natural Resources (RLDNR) manages the tribal natural resources throughout the 1863 Treaty area (Figure 2.3).

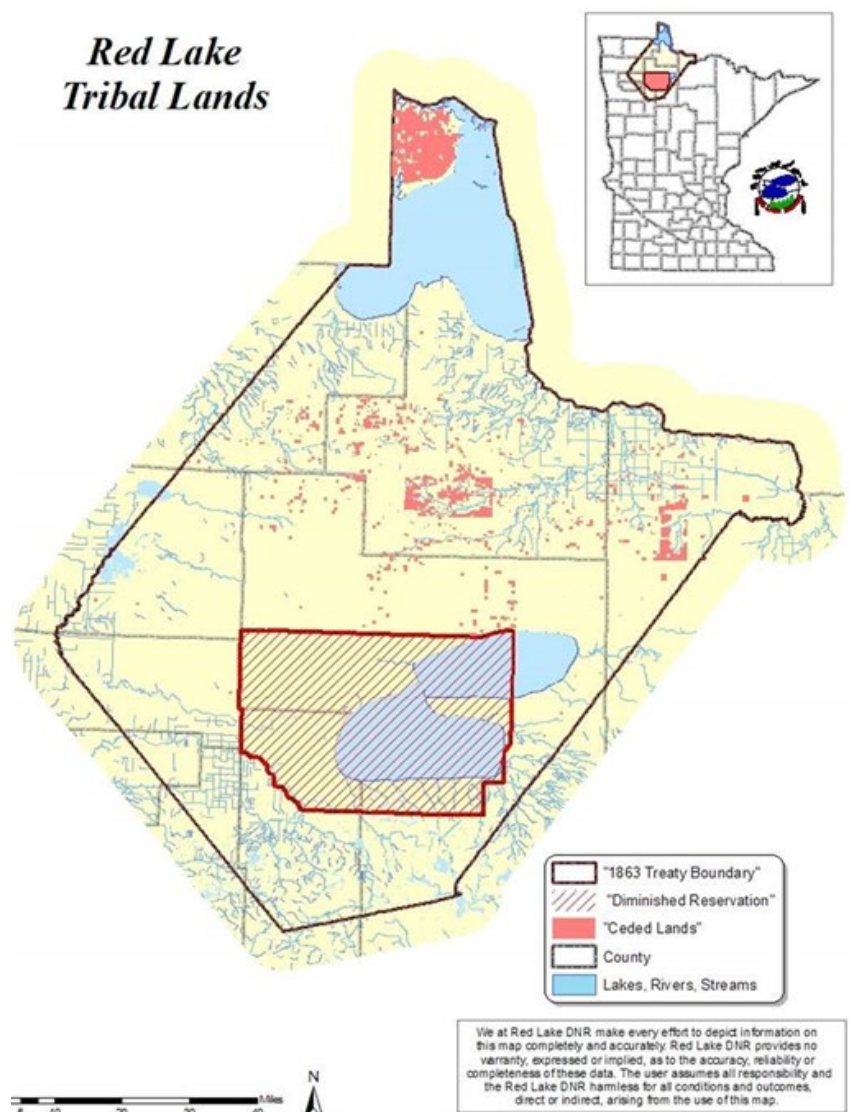


Figure 2.3. Red Lake Tribal Lands (RLDNR).

The Red Lake Reservation is the only reservation in Minnesota that is owned and occupied entirely by members of the Red Lake Band. For more information on the history of the Red Lake Nation, visit <https://www.redlakenation.org/tribal-history-historical-photos/>.

### European Settlement

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, fur traders came to the area and set up several trading posts. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century settlers became more permanent, and widespread logging occurred in the pine forests of the area. This cleared the way for agricultural practices. Southwest of Lower Red Lake proved fertile and farming flourished. Later, dairy farms gave way to commodity crops, due to high input costs and low commodity values.

In the northern part of the watershed, the wet peatlands were ditched to drain land for farming (Figure 2.4). However, the ditches did not drain the land adequately due to low slopes and the vast quantities of water, and much of the land was unsuitable for upland row-crop farming. Thus, the cost of ditching that could not be reassessed on profitable agricultural land caused a financial crisis in the region. Settlers paid for land that could not grow crops to support their households, and they would lose the land to the county. The county would then lose that tax revenue that had paid for the ditching and was left with large debts that could not be repaid (Alsop, 2009). This is the mechanism by which the state assumed ownership of much of the land in the region as state forest; the state would pay the ditch debt and receive a wildlife preserve in return. The state compensates counties for the loss of tax revenue from state-owned conservation land through payment in-lieu of taxes. The legacy of the ditches continues to this day, impacting the region's water resources and water quality, and the amount of state land located in Beltrami, Lake of the Woods, and Koochiching Counties.

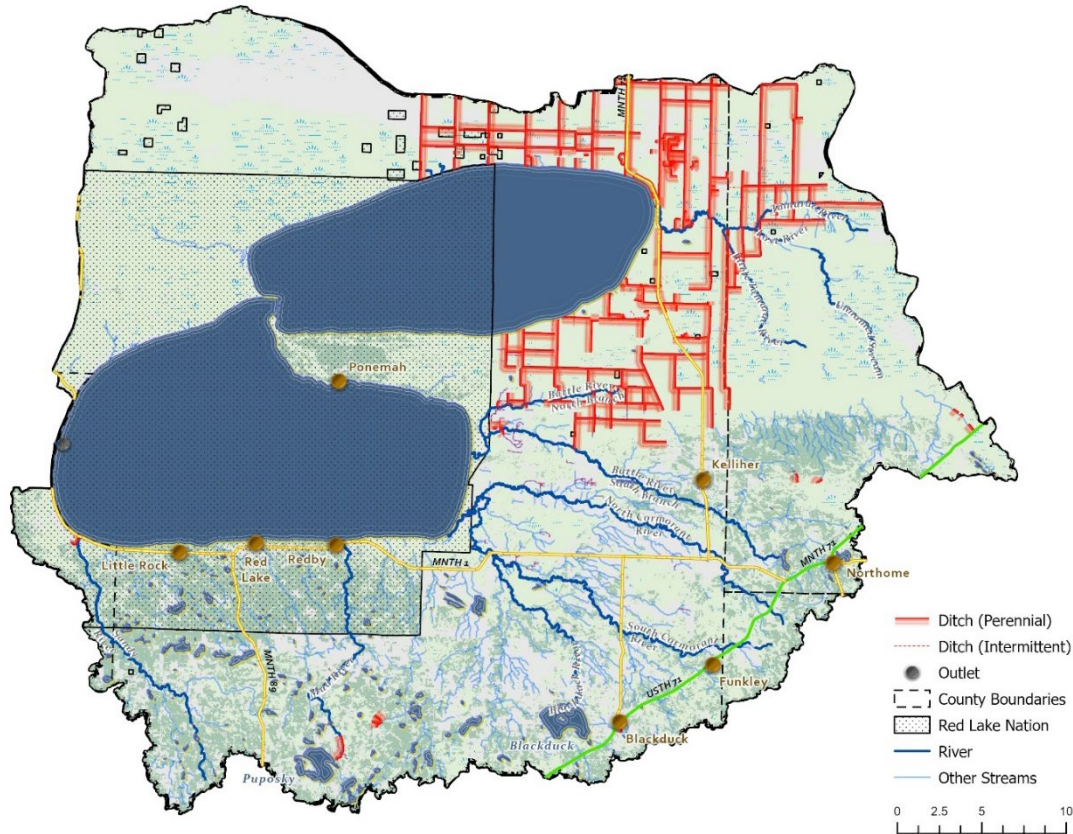


Figure 2.4. Drainage systems in the ULRLW. Red lines show the legacy of extensive ditching of the Red Lake peatlands.



# PRESENT

## Climate

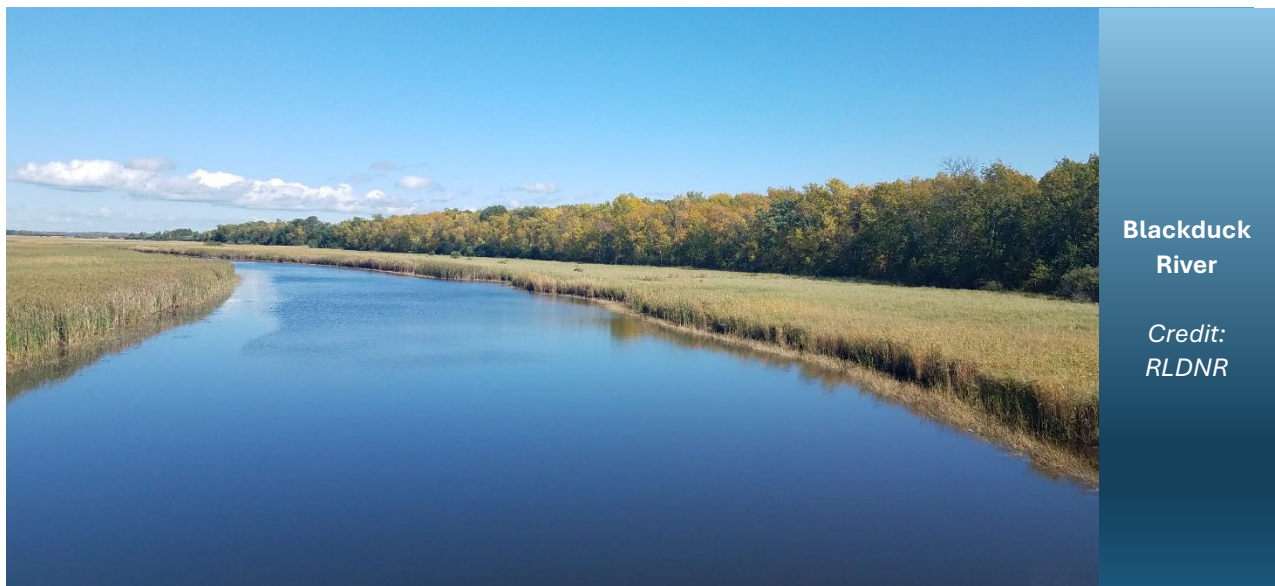
The climate of the ULRW is characterized by cold, arctic winters and short summers of moderate temperatures (RLWD, 2006). The growing season is typically May through September, dictating which crops are grown in the area.

The climate of Minnesota has been changing by becoming warmer and wetter. Table 2.1 shows these changes in the ULRW. Between the years 1895 and 2020, Minnesota has warmed by 3.0 degrees Fahrenheit, while annual precipitation increased by an average of 3.4 inches. While the temperatures and precipitation have been increasing since 1895, the most dramatic changes have come in the past several decades. Heavy rains are now more common and more intense than any time on record (MNDNRa, 2023).

With warming temperatures and warmer winters, ranges of plants and animals are likely to shift. The composition of Minnesota’s northern forests is likely to shift from paper birch, quaking aspen, balsam fir and black spruce to oak, hickory, and pine trees. Not only will it cause changes in the composition of the forests, but it will also affect ecosystems by changing the timing of natural processes such as flower blooming and bird migration. This can cause a disruption in the intricate web of relationships between animals and their food sources and between plants and pollinators. The food of one species may no longer be available when that species needs it due to it blooming earlier or later. Some animals may no longer be able to find enough food (EPA, 2016).

Table 2.1. Temperature and precipitation in the ULRW (MNDNR, 2023b).

Average Temp	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall	Annual Precip.
1895-2022	6.80°F	37.54°F	64.26°F	40.93°F	24.11”
Change per decade since 1895	+0.45°F	+0.26°F	+0.15°F	+0.18°F	+0.06”



Blackduck River

Credit: RLDNR



## Land Cover

Located largely within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Level III Northern Minnesota Wetlands Ecoregion, almost three-quarters of the watershed is wetland, peatland, or open water (Figure 2.5, Figure 2.6). The southern edge of the watershed is in the Northern Lakes and Forest Ecoregion and the North Central Hardwood Forest Ecoregion.

These peatlands are unique and are one of the most unusual landscapes in the United States. Minnesota has over six million acres of peatlands, and the Red Lake Peatland (partially located in ULRW) is the largest and most diversely patterned peatland in the conterminous United States. Like other types of wetlands, peatlands develop in relatively flat areas where there is sufficient slope for slow movement of water across the landscape acting as a giant filter improving water quality, controlling erosion, and capturing carbon.

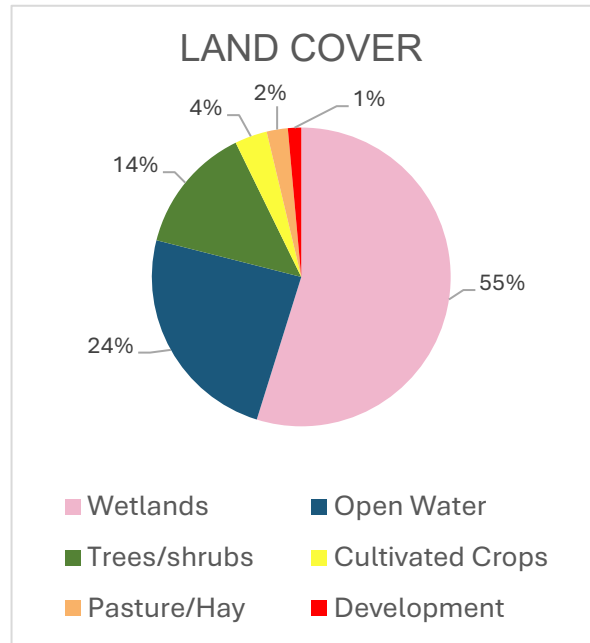


Figure 2.5. Land use percentages in the ULRW (National Land Cover Database, 2019).

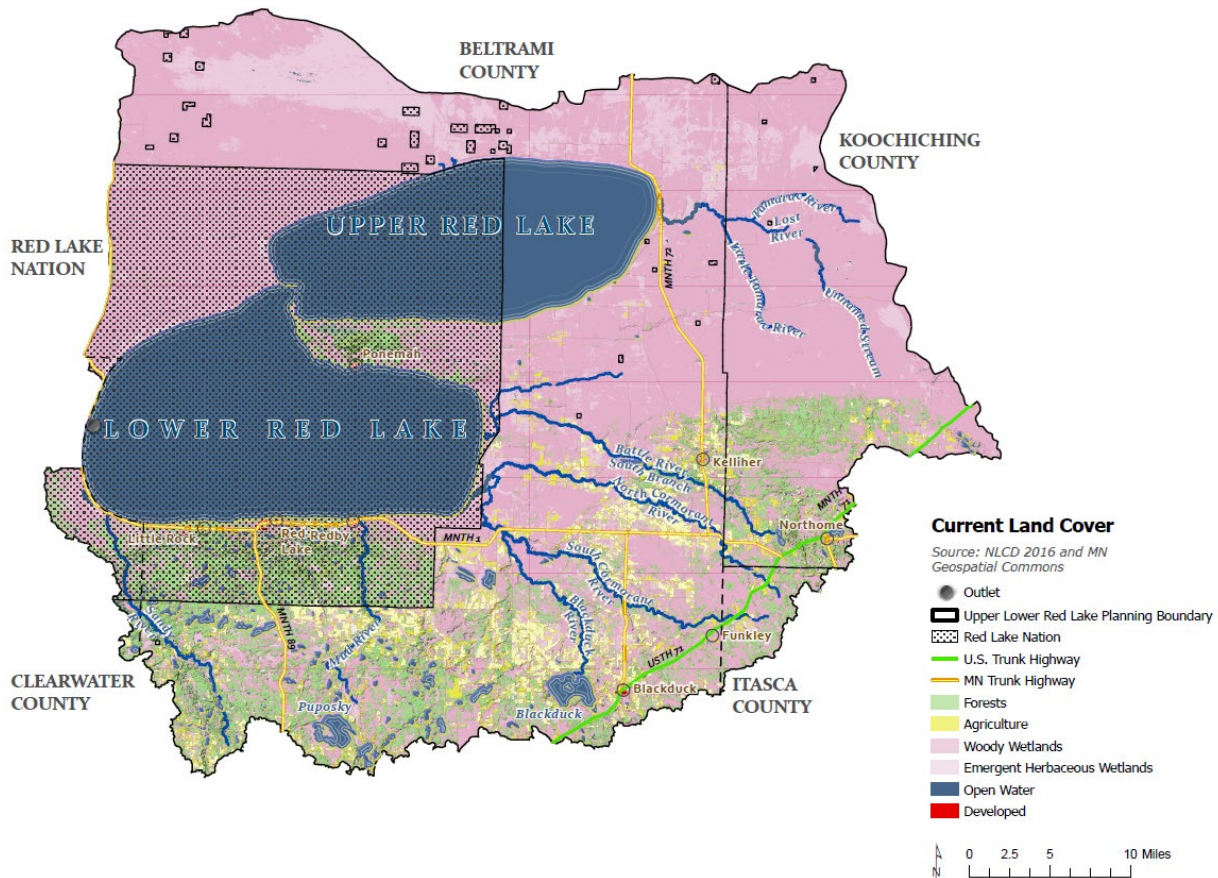


Figure 2.6. Land cover in the ULRW.

Unlike other wetland types, peatlands have the potential to accumulate dead organic matter called peat which consists of partially decayed vegetation, organic matter, and sphagnum moss. Peat accumulates very slowly; in Minnesota it has been measured at a rate of just 1.5 to 3 inches per century (MNDNR, 2008). The continuous saturation and mineral-poor conditions only allow a narrowly adapted and rare set of plants and animals to live, such as twig-rush, northern bog lemming, short-eared owl, yellow rail, and Wilson’s phalarope. Peatlands capture large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. They are estimated to store 20-30% of terrestrial carbon globally, an amount equivalent to roughly half of the earth’s atmospheric carbon (MNDNR, 2008). They also store large amounts of methane gas. The Red Lake Peatland is the southernmost of the boreal peatlands in North America, just at the edge of the climatic conditions that are conducive for development of boreal peatlands, making it a focal point for research on the impacts of climate change on the earth’s boreal peatlands.

The peatlands in the northern part of the watershed transition to forest, pasture, and cropland in the south. Most of the watershed is rural and undeveloped (RLWD, 2006). Cropland makes up 4% and pasture/hay just 2% of the watershed. Less than 2% of the watershed is considered developed (MPCA, 2021). The Red Lake Nation manages its lands predominantly for fish and wildlife habitat and timber production (RLWD, 2006).



## Water Resources

Surface water makes up 24% of the land cover in the ULRW (Figure 2.5). Most streams in the watershed are low gradient, with many flowing through large wetland complexes. Due to the close associations between wetlands and streams and easily mobilized wetland soils, some streams in this region are particularly sensitive to disturbance and will require protection if development expands northward in the state. The primary streams draining to Upper Red Lake are the Tamarac River, Shotley Brook, and Manomin Creek, and primary streams draining to Lower Red Lake include Blackduck River, Battle River, Hay Creek, Mud River, Pike Creek, and Sandy River. Tributaries also draining to the Upper and Lower Red Lake include Battle River North and South Branches, North and South Cormorant River, Darrigans Creek, O’Brien Creek, and Perry Creek.

Other than Upper and Lower Red Lake, notable lakes in the watershed are Blackduck Lake, Bartlett Lake, Battle Lake, Julia Lake, Loon Lake, Medicine Lake, Balm Lake, Dellwater Lake, Island Lake, and Whitefish Lake. These lakes are important for recreation in the area.



## Impairments

In general, most of the ULRW is in good condition due to the vast expanses of wetland and forest combined with light development and altered/channelized streams. There are 10 streams within the watershed impaired for Aquatic Life Uses (MPCA, 2021) (Figure 2.7). Many aquatic life impairments within the watershed are the result of lack of adequate habitat, low dissolved oxygen from natural wetland influence, and altered hydrology. Only a few of the aquatic life impairments were due to total suspended solids (TSS). Twelve streams within ULRW do not support aquatic recreation and are impaired due to bacteria (*E. coli*). These concentrations exceeded the aquatic recreation standards but through microbial source tracking, it was determined that nine of the impairments were linked to anthropogenic sources (human or ruminant). A linkage to human or ruminant sources could not be made for three *E. coli* impairments. Through Microbial Source Tracking results and aerial imagery, it was determined that these impairments are due to natural background wildlife sources (birds and beavers) (MPCA, 2021).

Five lakes are impaired for Aquatic Recreation Uses (MPCA, 2021). These impairments are a result of high total phosphorus, chlorophyll-*a*, and/or Secchi depth (Figure 2.7). The main phosphorus source for the impaired lakes is internal loading. In the case of Blackduck and Bartlett lakes, the cities of Blackduck and Northome used to discharge their sewage into the lakes. In the 1970s, new sanitary sewers were built, and the lakes have improved. However, they still carry the legacy nutrients in their sediments.

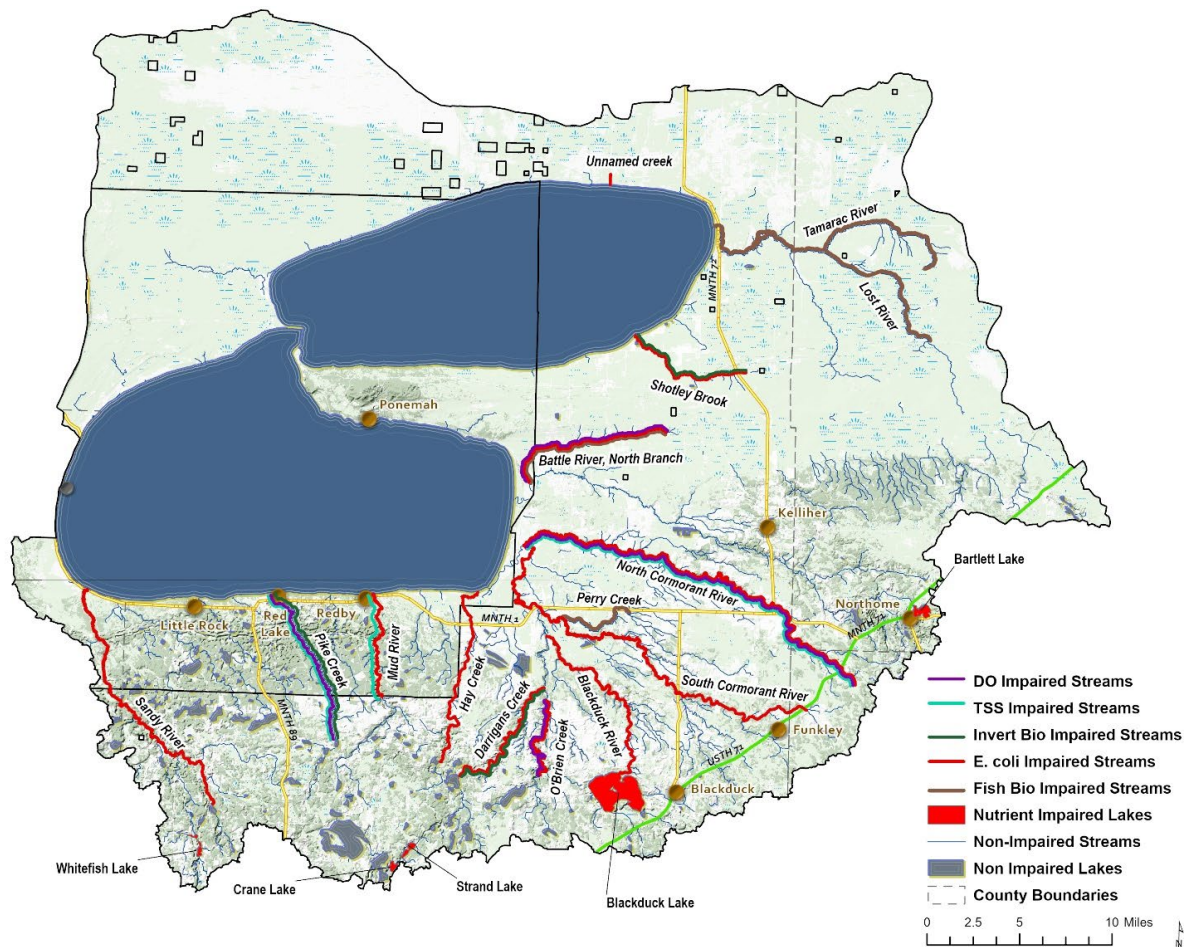
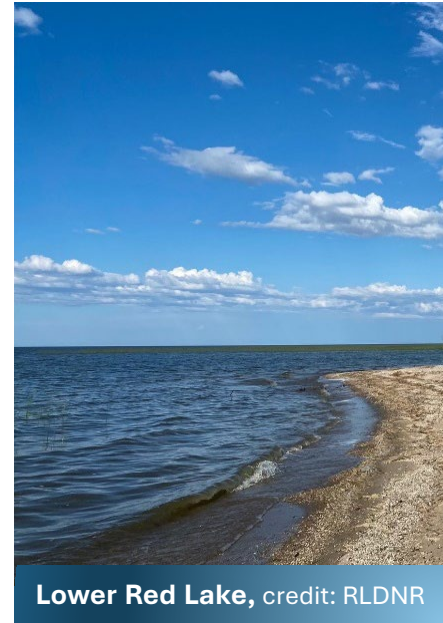


Figure 2.7. Impaired waters in the ULRW (MPCA, 2021).

Upper and Lower Red Lake are relatively shallow in comparison with their vast surface area. Due to its shallowness, nutrients in the lake bottom sediments are subject to becoming resuspended by wind and wave action. Because of their unique structure, the Upper and Lower Red Lake’s water quality assessment has been deferred to allow for a site-specific standard to be developed by the Red Lake Nation (MPCA, 2021). The new standard will allow for higher natural nutrient concentrations while still maintaining protection of water quality and prevention of harmful algal blooms.

The Red Lake Nation is a community that is highly dependent on fish as a source of food and an economic resource and is therefore very concerned about mercury and other bioaccumulative chemicals found in fish tissue. A study by the RLDNR and Bemidji State University found Upper Red Lake had higher mercury in walleye than Lower Red Lake and recommended consumption of Red Lake walleye under 15.7 inches in length to avoid very high mercury concentrations (Orgon *et al.*, 2023). Mercury traditionally has been tested by fish tissue, but a new project determined that testing dragonfly larva is just as informative. Red Lake Nation is currently studying mercury inputs from streams through water column measurements as well as dragonfly larva. While most mercury inputs are atmospheric, inputs coming through streams fed by historical ditching may provide an opportunity to impact inputs through special projects. The Blackduck River and eight lakes in the watershed were listed as impaired for mercury in fish tissues in 2016. With concentrations below the reporting limit, none of the waters tested for PCBs in the ULRWL are listed as impaired for PCBs in fish tissue (MPCA, 2017). The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has statewide fish consumption recommendations, and the RLDNR is updating their guidelines based on findings of Orgon *et al.* (2023).



Lower Red Lake, credit: RLDNR

## Groundwater

The ULRWL contains glacial sediment aquifers that provide moderate amounts of groundwater. The surficial geology of the area consists of mainly glacial tills in the southern region and glacial sands and peatlands surrounding Upper and Lower Red Lake to the north. The glacial till deposits consist of sandy, clay-silt loam with fine to medium gravel and a scattering of boulders.

Groundwater quality overall throughout Minnesota meets or is better than EPA water quality standards; however, there are concerns with naturally occurring arsenic as well as human generated contaminants such as nitrates, pesticides, fuel oils, and industrial chemicals. Beltrami County indicated that over 10% of private wells do not meet the arsenic drinking water standard (10 micrograms per liter). However, all the public wells are meeting the arsenic drinking water standard (Beltrami, 2017). Figure 2.8 shows nitrate concentrations in private wells are nearly all below the drinking water standard of 10 mg/L.

There are three Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs) located in Blackduck, Kelliher, and Northome (Figure 2.8). All DWSMAs have similar potential sources of contamination



identified within 200 feet of the system’s water sources such as: buried sewer lines, hazardous substance storage, and petroleum storage tanks. Blackduck and Kelliher’s sources have low vulnerability while Northome’s sources has moderate vulnerability (MDH, 2023).

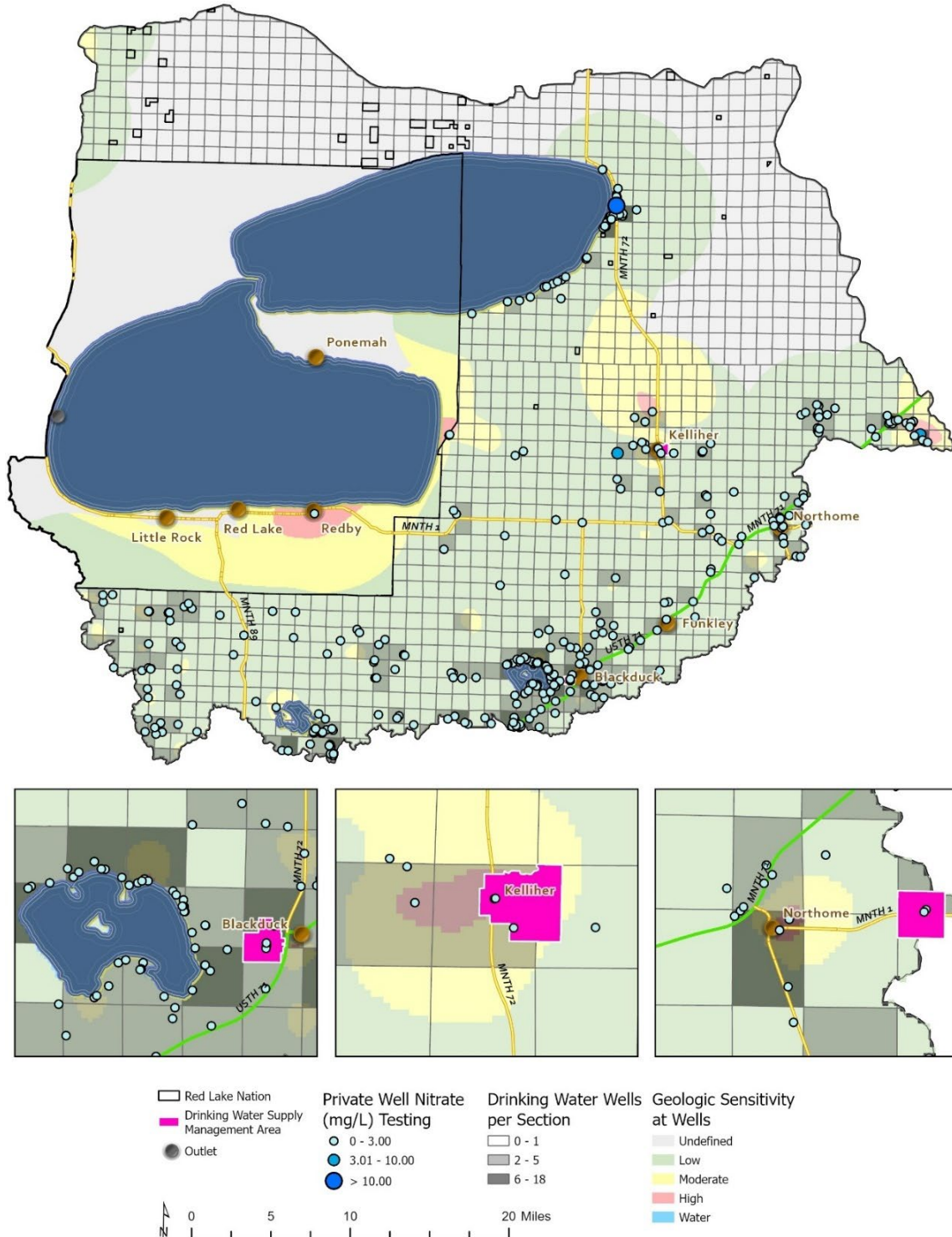


Figure 2.8. Groundwater wells, DWSMAs, and geologic sensitivity (low to high based on the time it takes contaminants at the surface to reach the aquifer).

The Red Lake Nation has its own public water system in their Public Works Division. Red Lake Water and Sewer is responsible for providing safe, adequate water for those connected to the main lines of the community water system. Their drinking water is sourced from groundwater and is regularly tested to ensure the safety of its people.

## Habitat

There are a variety of unique habitats in the watershed, many of which are protected and open to public recreation. There are two Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs) and parts of Pine Island, Red Lake, Buena Vista, and Beltrami Island State Forests are within the watershed. Not only are there large mammals such as moose, white-tailed deer, black bear, and bobcats, but also a range of unique species such as the burrowing owl, the great gray owl,



Big Bog  
State  
Recreation  
Area

and the Connecticut warbler. There is one area of critical habitat in the watershed for the federally threatened/endangered species — the gray wolf. The Big Bog State Recreation Area and SNAs are important areas and lie along a major flyway for migratory birds. The Big Bog State Recreation Area is also unique in its rare plant resources and has long been a source of medicinal plants for the Ojibwe People. Many native plants such as the yellow-eyed grass, bog rush, and two kinds of sundews are on Minnesota’s endangered or threatened species list (MNDNR, 2023c). There is a total of 21 federally endangered and threatened species in Minnesota and 15 state listed endangered and threatened species. Only one state threatened species, the Canada lynx, lies within the ULRLW (USFWS, 2008).

There are many sites in the watershed that are classified as “outstanding” or “moderate” biodiversity significance by the Minnesota Biological Survey. According to the MNDNR Watershed Context Report, “outstanding sites contain the best occurrences of the rarest species, the most outstanding examples of the rarest native plant communities, and/or the largest, most ecologically intact or functional landscapes (MNDNR, 2017).” Moderate sites slightly differ in that they contain occurrences of rare species, moderately disturbed native plant communities and have a strong potential for recovery (MNDNR, 2017). In addition, there are Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance, which meet at least one criteria for having an exceptional aquatic plant, waterbird, or amphibian species (Figure 2.9). These lakes include Upper and Lower Red, Blackduck, Bartlett, Medicine, Balm, Julia, Puposky, Sandy, and Medicine.



Bog Rush (MNDNR)



Sturgeon (Joyce Palm)



Sundew (MNDNR)



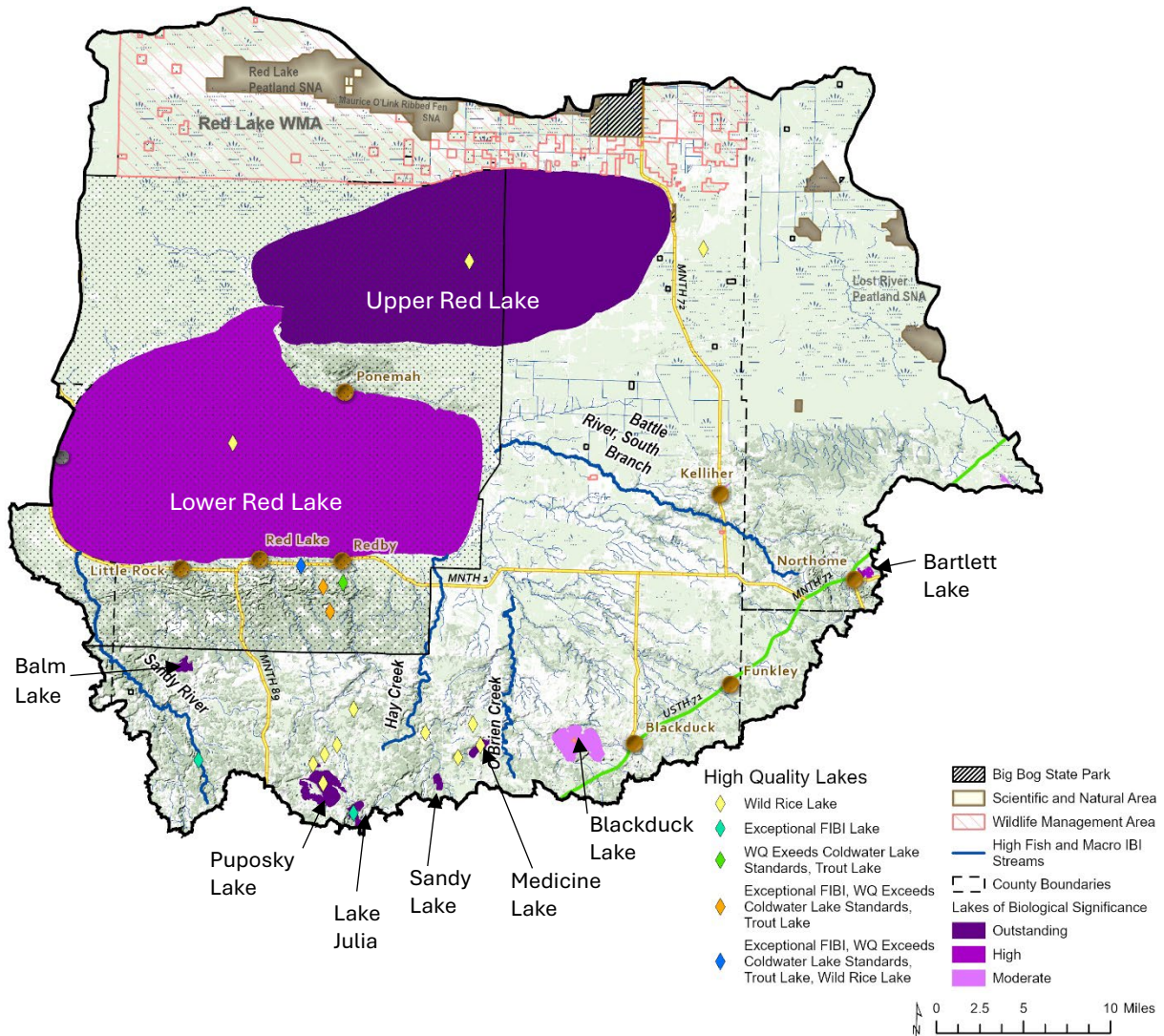


Figure 2.9. Outstanding resources in the ULRLW.

### Fisheries

For their size and history, Upper and Lower Red Lake have been identified as unique resources. They are the largest walleye lakes in the state of Minnesota. Besides walleye, species such as northern pike, crappie, bullhead, and native rough fish are all important recreational fisheries. All of Lower Red Lake and about two-thirds of Upper Red Lake is within the reservation with the remaining being State of Minnesota Waters. The lakes are jointly managed by MNDNR and RLDNR under a Memorandum of Understanding that was first signed in 1999 in the effort to restore the walleye fishery after it collapsed. As part of that agreement, the Red Lake Fisheries Technical Committee was formed with members from RLDNR, MNDNR, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the University of Minnesota.

Commercial fishery voluntarily suspended the fishing season in 1997 to assist in the recovery of walleye. By 2006, the walleye had rebounded to sustainable numbers, and the harvest of walleye was authorized again by both governments. Today, the lake remains healthy, and the annual safe harvest of walleye on the reservation is estimated to be over a million pounds. Smaller lakes are



stocked in cooperation with the USFWS to provide some unique opportunities on the reservation, including brook trout and lake trout. Lakes such as Island, Green, Kinney, and Squaw Smith are all managed for trout (MPCA, 2021). The tribe received a grant through USFWS in 2006 to re-introduce lake sturgeon, which was last reported in the Red Lakes in the 1950’s. About 10,000 six-to-eight-inch lake sturgeon are stocked in Lower Red Lake annually. Approximately 90,000 have been stocked since 2007 (RLDNR, 2023).

In addition to fisheries, wild rice is an important resource in the watershed. Wild rice (Manoomin in Ojibwe) is a cultural resource to many, particularly members of Minnesota’s Dakota and Ojibwe tribal communities, and is an important economic resource to those who harvest and market it (MPCA, 2023). Wild rice has been documented on many mid to small sized lakes, wetlands, and ponds in the southern portion of the watershed, as well as on tributaries to both Upper and Lower Red Lake (MPCA, 2021).

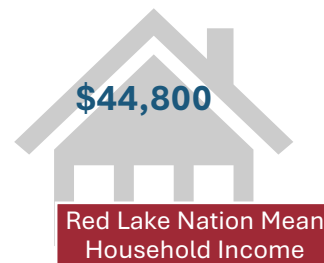
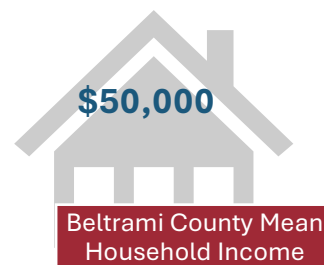
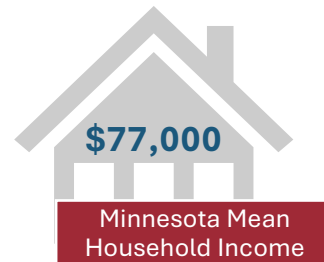
### Socioeconomics and population

The population of the watershed in 2010 was 10,784 (MPCA, 2021). The population saw little change between 2000 and 2010, and there are approximately 5.6 people per square mile (MNDNR, 2017). However, recreational properties continue to expand, especially at the southern end of the watershed. Populations are generally not expected to increase because of the publicly owned land, wetlands and peatlands, which are unable to be farmed and developed. The population of the Red Lake Reservation is approximately 5,506, although the entire Reservation is not within the boundary of the ULRWL (2020 census).

The most common job groups in the ULRWL are office & administrative support, sales & related occupations and management occupations. Historically within the Red Lake Nation, the two biggest industries of employment have been commercial fishing and logging (RLDNR, 2013). Today, management, business, sciences and art occupations provide the largest number of jobs within the Red Lake Nation (USCB, 2023b). The mean household income in Beltrami, Koochiching, Itasca, and Clearwater counties is around \$50,000, which is less than the Minnesota median of \$77,000 (USCB, 2023a). The mean income of households within the Red Lake Nation is \$44,800 (USBC, 2023b).

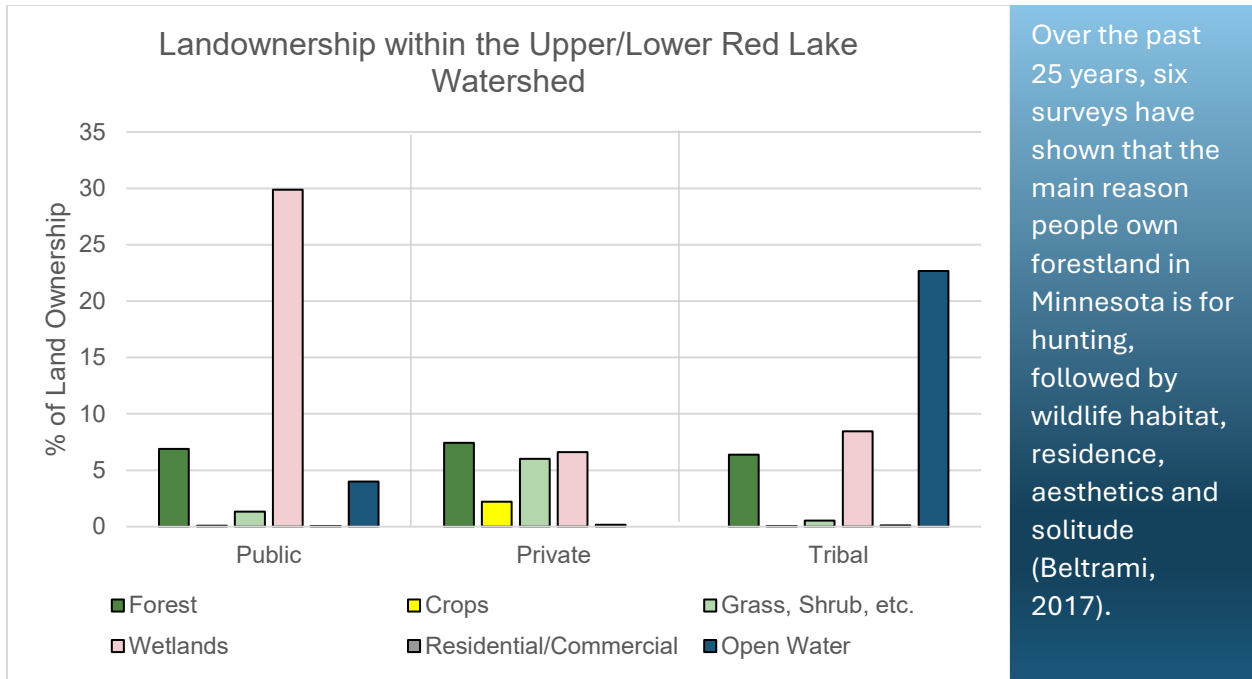
Watershed  
Population  10,784

Red Lake Nation  
Population  5,518



## Land Ownership

Tribally owned or managed lands account for 38% of the area of the watershed, followed closely by State owned lands with 37%. About 23% of the land is privately owned with the remaining 2% being federal and county lands (USDA/NRCS, n.d.). Land use by ownership type is represented in Figure 2.10.



Over the past 25 years, six surveys have shown that the main reason people own forestland in Minnesota is for hunting, followed by wildlife habitat, residence, aesthetics and solitude (Beltrami, 2017).

Figure 2.10. Land ownership within the ULRW (USDA/NRCS, n.d.).

## FUTURE

The ULRW continues to be a focal point for northwestern Minnesota for commerce, recreation, and tourism. The abundant opportunities for walleye fishing are important to the community as well as tourists. From past experiences, it is already known that this precious resource can become vulnerable quickly if not managed properly and if the water quality of the lakes diminishes. In the future, it is essential to continue to improve and protect our resources in the watershed so that the streams, rivers, and lakes can provide cultural, recreational, and habitat value that will allow for these successful industries to continue.

## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Buffers, Soils, and Drainage Committee***

1. Drainage Work Group Recommendation for Minnesota Public Drainage Manual Adoption and Maintenance Plan – Tom Gile – ***DECISION ITEM***
2. Drainage Work Group Recommendation for Repeal of 103E.067 (103E Ditch Buffer Annual Reporting) – Tom Gile – ***DECISION ITEM***

## BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM

**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** Drainage Work Group Recommendation for Minnesota Public Drainage Manual Adoption and Maintenance Plan

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**Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Agenda Category:**  Committee Recommendation     New Business     Old Business

**Item Type:**  Decision     Discussion     Information

**Keywords for Electronic Searchability:** Drainage Work Group Drainage Manual

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**Section/Region:** Resource Conservation Section

**Contact:** Tom Gile

**Prepared by:** Tom Gile

**Reviewed by:** Buffer Soils & Drainage    Committee(s)

**Presented by:** Tom Gile

**Time requested:** 25 Minutes

**Audio/Visual Equipment Needed for Agenda Item Presentation**

**Attachments:**     Resolution     Order     Map     Other Supporting Information

**Fiscal/Policy Impact**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None          | <input type="checkbox"/> General Fund Budget          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amended Policy Requested | <input type="checkbox"/> Capital Budget               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Policy Requested     | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Heritage Fund Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Water Fund Budget      |

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Board Adoption of Minnesota Public Drainage Manual and supporting Maintenance Plan.

**LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

[Minnesota Public Drainage Manual | MN Board of Water, Soil Resources](#)

**SUMMARY** *(Consider: history, reason for consideration now, alternatives evaluated, basis for recommendation)*

2024 Legislation amended 103B.101 Sub 13 to include BWSR adoption of the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual (MPDM). The original MPDM was created in 1991 and the current web-based version of the MPDM represents the current working version recommended by the Drainage Work Group (DWG) for use. The MPDM does not replace drainage law or create associated rules for public drainage authorities to follow. It does not have legal precedent or authority other than that provided by the drainage law and associated case law. It does attempt to capture current practice, case law, and helpful forms/templates and information that can be utilized by drainage

authorities, their key advisors and various stakeholders working with and interested in Chapter 103E public drainage systems. The DWG is a drainage stakeholder group facilitated by BWSR under 103B.101 Subd 13, which fosters mutual understanding and provide recommendations for drainage system management and related water management, including recommendations for updating the drainage law in chapter 103E, the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual, and other related provisions. In October of 2018 the DWG established a process summary which guides its decision-making process which was used to support this recommendation to the BWSR Board.



## BOARD ORDER

### Drainage Work Group Recommended adoption of Minnesota Public Drainage Manual and maintenance plan.

#### PURPOSE

Adopt the Minnesota Public Drainage Manual (MPDM) in its current form and adopt associated maintenance plan as recommended by the Drainage Work Group.

#### FINDINGS OF FACT / RECITALS

1. The Board has authorities under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B that include working with drainage stakeholders to foster mutual understanding and provide recommendations for drainage system management and related water management, including recommendations for updating the drainage law in chapter 103E and other related provisions.
2. The board convenes drainage stakeholders or work teams to develop information, education, and recommendations for these purposes known as the “Drainage Work Group” (DWG).
3. In 2024 the legislature amended Minnesota Statute Chapter 103B.101 Subd 13 to identify the MPDM as a publication that is prepared by and adopted by the board and that includes explanations, procedures, and guidance consistent with and supplementing the provisions of chapter 103E.
4. The DWG utilizes a Process Summary (adopted by the DWG on 10/11/2018) as a framework for developing and providing recommendations to the legislature and the BWSR Board on proposed amendments to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103E.
5. A key purpose for the MPDM continues to be to promote consistent implementation of Minn. Stat. Chapter 103E Drainage.
6. The MPDM was first published in September 1991 as a hard copy document in a 3-ring binder.
7. A 2016 legislative appropriation directed BWSR to update the MPDM which was done in coordination with a large stakeholder project advisory committee. In October 2016, the updated MPDM was published on the BWSR website in a Wiki format to better enable access, use, and periodic revision. The MPDM has been hosted on the BWSR website since 2022.
8. The MPDM as recommended for adoption in this order is the version currently posted on the BWSR website and previously vetted by the DWG.
9. The DWG recommended the attached MPDM maintenance plan as the framework for ongoing maintenance and potential revisions to the MPDM at its January 9, 2025 meeting.
10. This recommendation represents consensus of the participating DWG members consistent with the process summary adopted by the DWG.
11. The Buffers Soils and Drainage Committee at their January 17, 2025, meeting reviewed the DWG recommendation and recommend the Board approve this order.

**ORDER**

The Board hereby:

- A. Adopts the MPDM as currently posted on the BWSR website.
- B. Adopts the attached MPDM Maintenance Plan.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, this January 22, 2025.

**MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## DRAFT REVISIONS TO MPDM MAINTENANCE PLAN 1/9/25

### Summary of Pertinent Background Information

1. The Minnesota Public Drainage Manual (MPDM) was first published in September 1991 as a hard copy document in a 3-ring binder.
2. A key purpose for the MPDM continues to be to promote consistent implementation of Minn. Stat. Chapter 103E Drainage. The MPDM is a guidance document, not law or rule.
3. The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) received a legislative appropriation in 2014 to update the MPDM. The project team included Houston Engineering, Inc. and Rinke Noonan Attorneys at Law. A stakeholder Project Advisory Committee (PAC) assisted the MPDM update.
4. In October 2016, the updated MPDM was published on the BWSR website in a Wiki format to better enable access, use, and periodic revision. The Wiki format is no longer supported by Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) and the MPDM was moved to the BWSR website in 2022.
5. Several members of the stakeholder Drainage Work Group (DWG) served on the PAC for the MPDM update.
6. During the 2024 legislative session M.S. Chapter 103B.101, Subd. 13 was amended directing BWSR to work with drainage stakeholders to adopt and provide recommendations for updating the MPDM.

### Guiding Principles

- 1) Maintain the MPDM to keep it current.
- 2) Provide for timely revisions.
- 3) Utilize an efficient stakeholder advisory input process.

The following recommendations are provided by the DWG to the BWSR Board to achieve the guiding principles;

- The DWG will serve as a standing stakeholder advisory group for revisions of the MPDM.
- Consideration of potential changes to the MPDM at least annually via the DWG consensus process.
- Revisions proposed to the DWG will be provided with track change or some other similar method to allow review of proposed changes related to the prior language.
- The DWG may use committees, workgroups, or teams to review specific topics based on interest or areas of expertise.
- BWSR Staff will oversee resolution of any major revision content issues not resolved through DWG advisory review and discussion and make recommendations to the BWSR Board.



<b>Roles and Coordination Category of Revision</b>		
<b>Involved Entity and Role</b>	<b><i>Minor Revisions</i> including links, grammar, spelling, text clarity, or notes where future change may be prudent? etc.</b>	<b><i>Major Revisions</i> based on: changes in Chapter 103E, other statute, rule, case law, or policy; new information; major comments received in the MPDM Wiki; etc.</b>
<b><i>BWSR Drainage Staff:</i></b>  Lead revisions and coordination	✓	✓
<b><i>Drainage Work Group:</i></b>  Stakeholder advisory review and discussion	Informed	✓
<b><i>BWSR Staff:</i></b>  Oversee resolution of any content issues not resolved by advisory review and discussion and make recommendations to the BWSR Board.		✓
<b><i>BWSR Board</i></b>	Informed	Approve

*BWSR staff may add a footnote within the Drainage Manual to note enacted changes to statute, rule or published case law that may impact drainage practice. The Drainage Work Group will review the change and make a timely recommendation to BWSR concerning the ultimate revision, if any, in the Manual.*



**BOARD ORDER**

**Drainage Work Group (DWG) Policy Recommendation to repeal of §103E.067  
(Annual Ditch Buffer Strip Reporting)**

**PURPOSE**

Authorize BWSR Staff to work with DWG participants and the legislature to pursue a policy recommendation for the repeal of §103E.067. (Annual Ditch Buffer Strip Reporting)

**FINDINGS OF FACT / RECITALS**

1. The Board has authorities under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B that include working with drainage stakeholders to foster mutual understanding and provide recommendations for drainage system management and related water management, including recommendations for updating the drainage law in chapter 103E and other related provisions.
2. The board convenes drainage stakeholders or work teams to develop information, education, and recommendations for these purposes known as the “Drainage Work Group” (DWG).
3. The DWG utilizes a Process Summary (adopted by the DWG on 10/11/2018) as a framework for developing and providing recommendations to the legislature and the BWSR Board on proposed amendments to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103E.
4. Current §103E.067 includes language related to annual reporting requirements for 103E ditch buffer strip reporting.
5. At its January 9, 2025, meeting the DWG recommended the repeal of §103E.067.
6. This recommendation represents consensus of the participating DWG members consistent with the process summary adopted by the DWG.
7. The Buffer’s Soils and Drainage Committee at their January 17, 2025, meeting reviewed the DWG recommendations and the attached report and recommended the Board approve this order.

**ORDER**

The Board hereby:

- A. Authorizes staff to work with DWG participants and the Legislature to seek a repeal of §103E.067.

Dated at St. Paul, Minnesota, this January 22, 2025.

**MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Holman, Chair  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***NEW BUSINESS***

1. Minnesota River Collaborative – Ted Suss and Suzane Jiwani – ***INFORMATION ITEM***





Mississippi River

# Minnesota River Collaborative

*Presenters: Ted Suss and Suzanne Jiwani*  
*January 22, 2025*

Minnesota River



**Improving and protecting Minnesota's water  
& soil resources.**

[Learn about what we do](#)



# MN River Collaborative Actions

## BWSR Goals

- Review drainage improvement projects
  - Raise concerns for projects causing downstream impacts
  - Interpretation and analysis of project reports
  - Advocate for changes to state programs protecting natural resources
- 
- Work with Partners to improve and protect MN land and water resources ([BWSR](#))
  - Collab members - MN River Congress gathered input for Water Storage (\$2M and \$17M appropriation)
  - Collaborate with BWSR in Lyon County CD14 (Water Storage initiative)
  - Local and State levels

# Member Groups and Individuals

- Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA)
- Izaak Walton League
- Friend of the Minnesota Valley
- Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River
- CURE
- Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance
- Practicing & Retired Attorneys, Retired Judge
- Farmers, Landowners
- Hydrologists
- Conservationists
- Water Resources Engineers, Geotechnical Engineer
- Former MN Legislator, US Legislator
- Retired Economist
- Environmental Scientists
- Geographer
- Community Advocate
- Water Policy Specialist



# Economic Impacts Modeling Example

Apply model parameters to measured loadings

DNR name	acres	Watershed loading (land sources only)		Watershed damage via drainage		
		TSS T/yr	Total Nitrogen lbs/yr	TSS \$/yr	N \$/yr remediated	N \$/yr avoided
Minnesota River - Headwaters	645,000	6,000	943,000			
Pomme de Terre River	560,000	9,000	1,358,000			
Lac Qui Parle River	632,000	12,000	1,698,000			
Minnesota River - Yellow Medicine River	1,333,000	40,000	6,098,000			
Chippewa River	1,330,000	1,000	234,000			
Redwood River	448,000	5,000	4,121,000			
Minnesota River - Mankato	862,000	53,000	10,287,000			
Cottonwood River	841,000	21,000	9,858,000			
Blue Earth River	889,000	32,000	37,613,000			
Watonwan River	559,000	9,000	8,921,000			
Le Sueur River	711,000	63,000	17,731,000			
Lower Minnesota River	1,174,000	41,000	15,475,000			
<b>At mouth</b>	<b>9,984,000</b>	<b>292,000</b>	<b>114,337,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

# Drainage Effects, MN River Watershed Issues

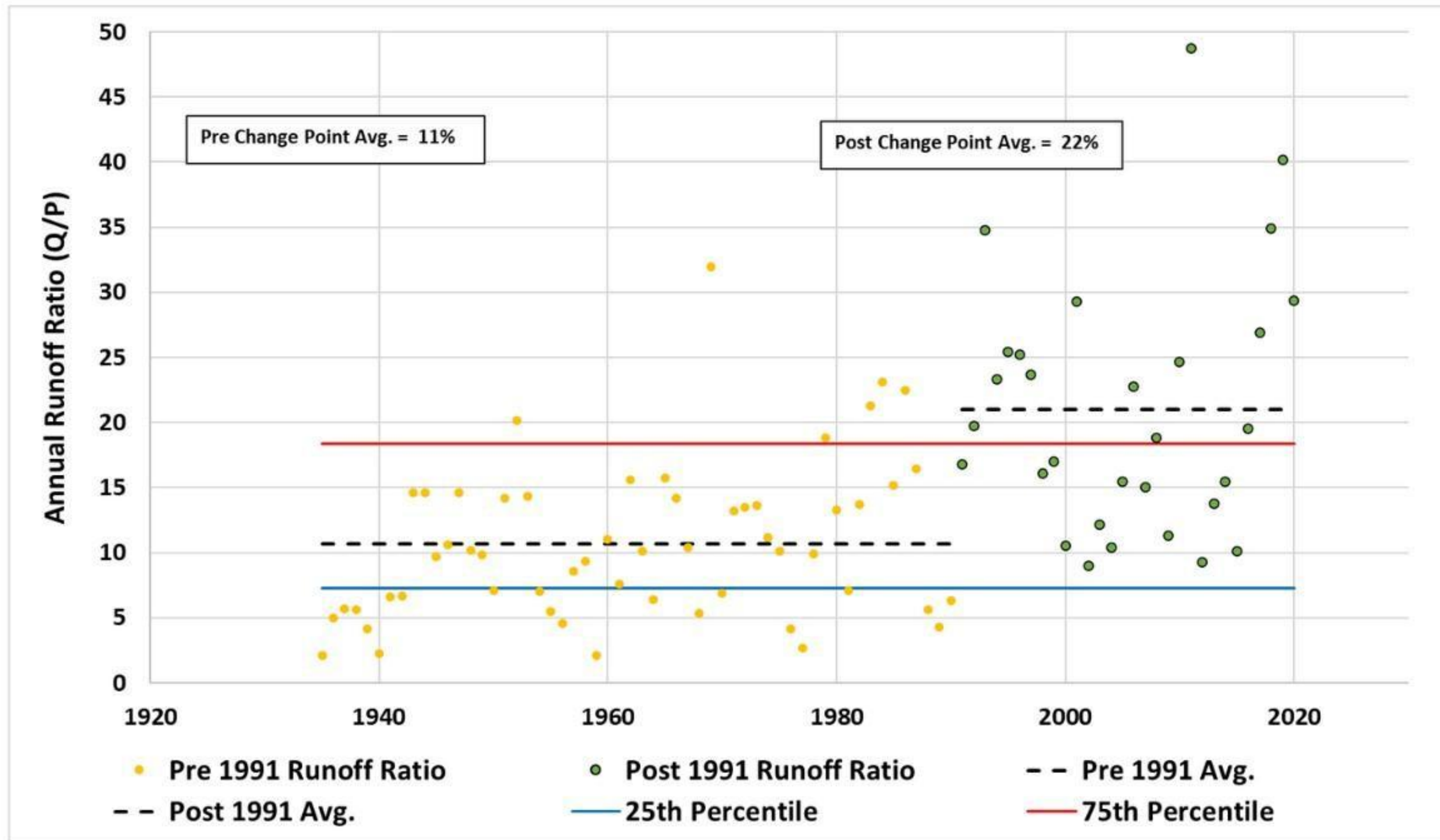
- Economic Impacts for local and regional government, businesses, individuals
- Flooding = Mean discharge doubled, more frequent extreme peak discharges, greater flow volume
- Channel instability
- Sedimentation causes increased dredging (\$)
- Nutrient + Pesticide Loads, Surface and Groundwater Contamination

# Summary Table for Lower MN River

Hydrologic Group	Metric	Magnitude Change (%)	Magnitude Impact	RVA Change (%)	RVA Impact
Annual Values	Annual Precipitation	15	Moderate	-27	Major
	Annual Discharge	122	Extreme	-47	Major
	Annual Peak Discharge	80	Extreme	-33	Major
	Annual Runoff Ratios	97	Extreme	-47	Major
Low Flows	7-Day Minimum	141	Extreme	-45	Major
	August Median Base Flow	126	Extreme	-3	Neutral
	90% Flow Duration	190	Extreme	-100	Extreme
Moderate Flows	May Median Flow	185	Extreme	-66	Extreme
	50% Flow Duration	205	Extreme	n/a	n/a
	1.5 Year Return Interval Flows	123	Extreme	n/a	n/a
	Annual Baseflow	126	Extreme	-47	Major
High Flows	10% Flow Duration	110	Extreme	189	Extreme
	5 Year Return Interval Flows	74	Extreme	n/a	n/a
	10 Year Return Interval Flows	60	Extreme	n/a	n/a
	3-Day Maximum	96	Extreme	-31	Major
Flow Timing	Julian Day Max Flow	42	Major	3	Neutral
	Julian Day Min Flow	92	Extreme	-10	Moderate
Flashiness	High Pulse Count	50	Major	24	Major
	Low Pulse Count	-100	Extreme	-17	Moderate
	Number of Reversals	-10	Moderate	31	Major
	Rise Rate	118	Extreme	-24	Major

Impact Concern Legend						
>50	20 to 50	10 to 20	10 to -10	-10 to -20	-20 to -50	< -50
Extreme	Major	Moderate	Neutral	Moderate	Major	Extreme

Table 1. EHC summary table for the Minnesota River near Jordan (05330000) (1991 Change Point)



Annual runoff ratios for the Minnesota River near Jordan (05330000)

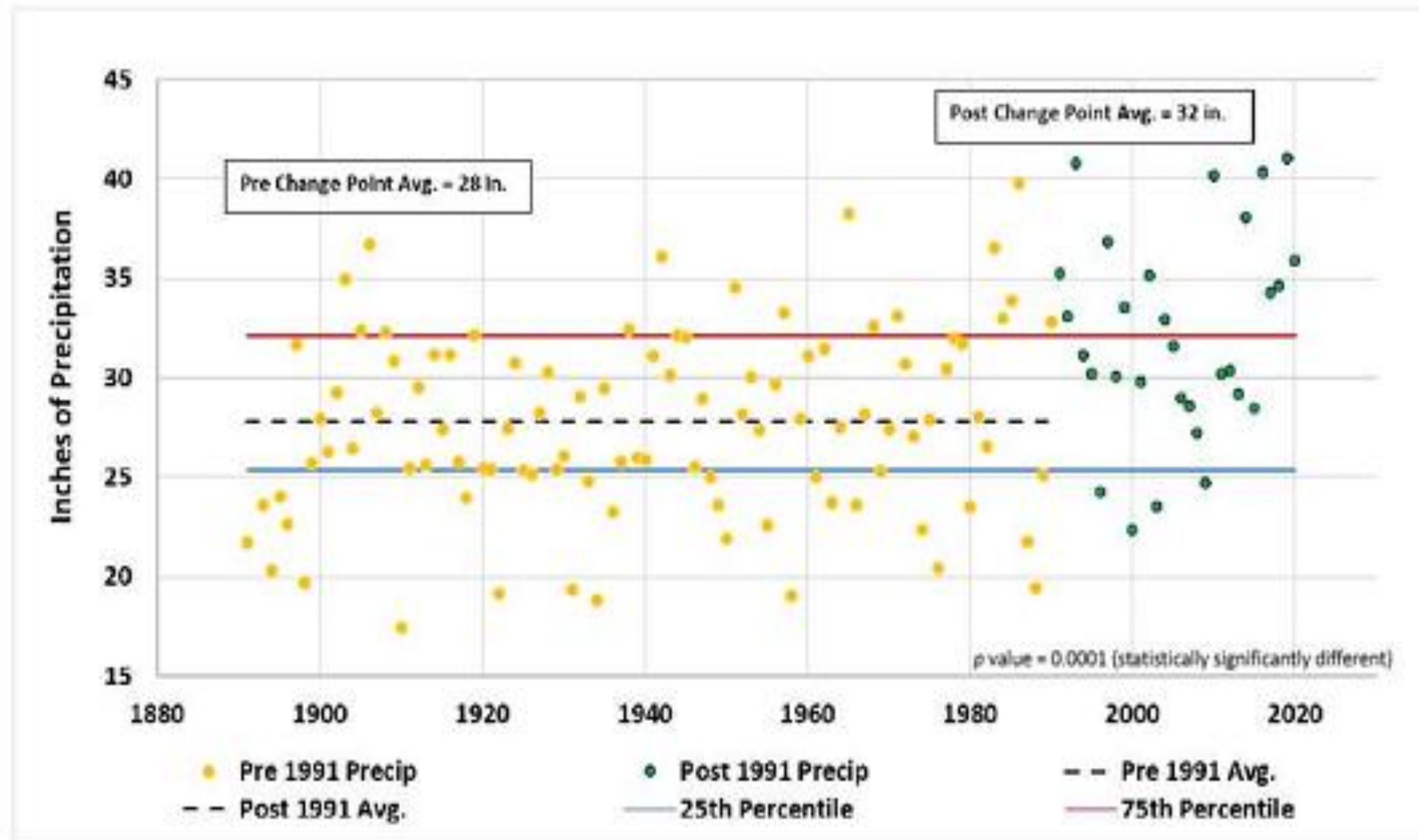
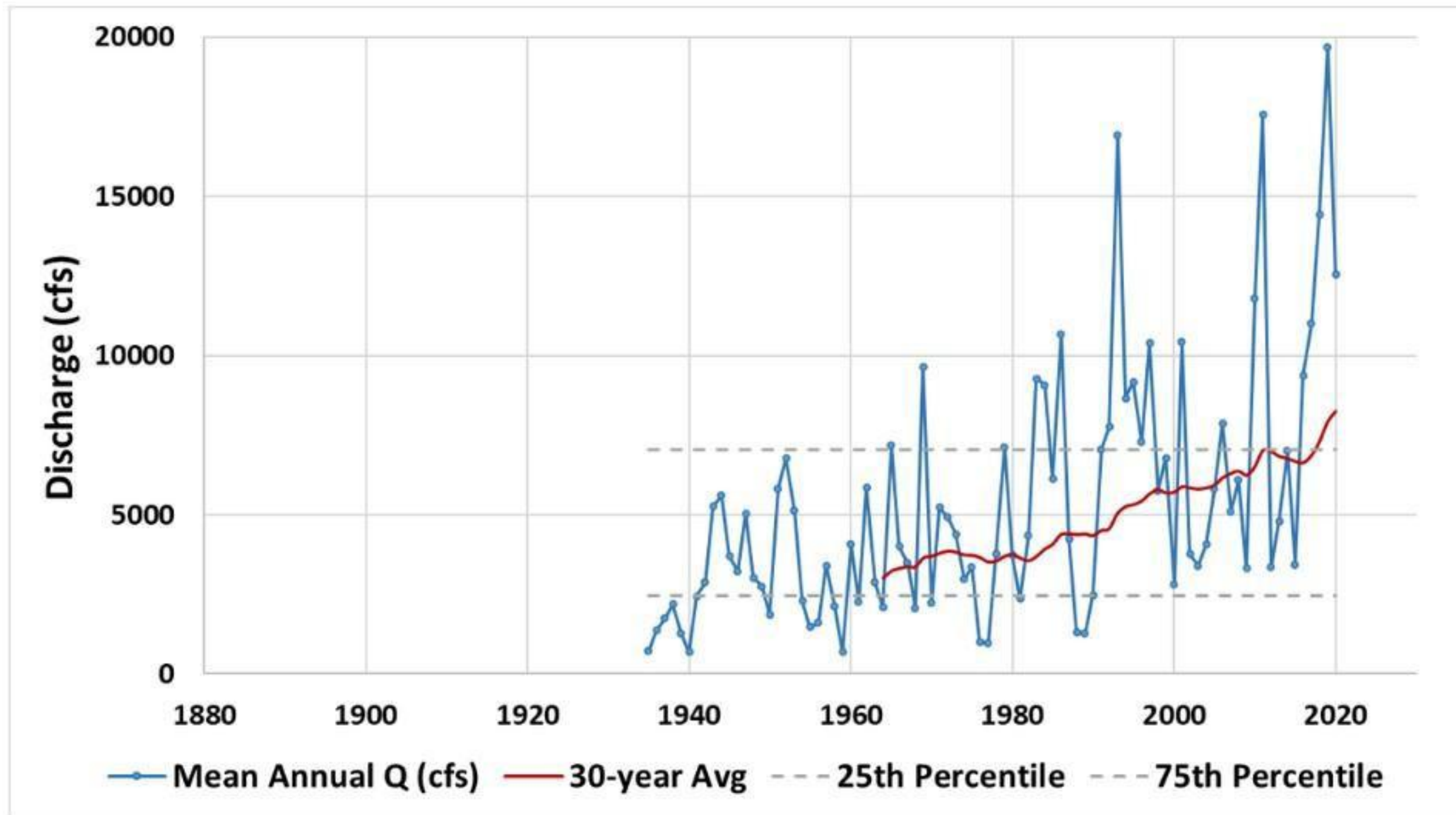


Figure 12. Averaged annual precipitation for the Lower Minnesota River Watershed



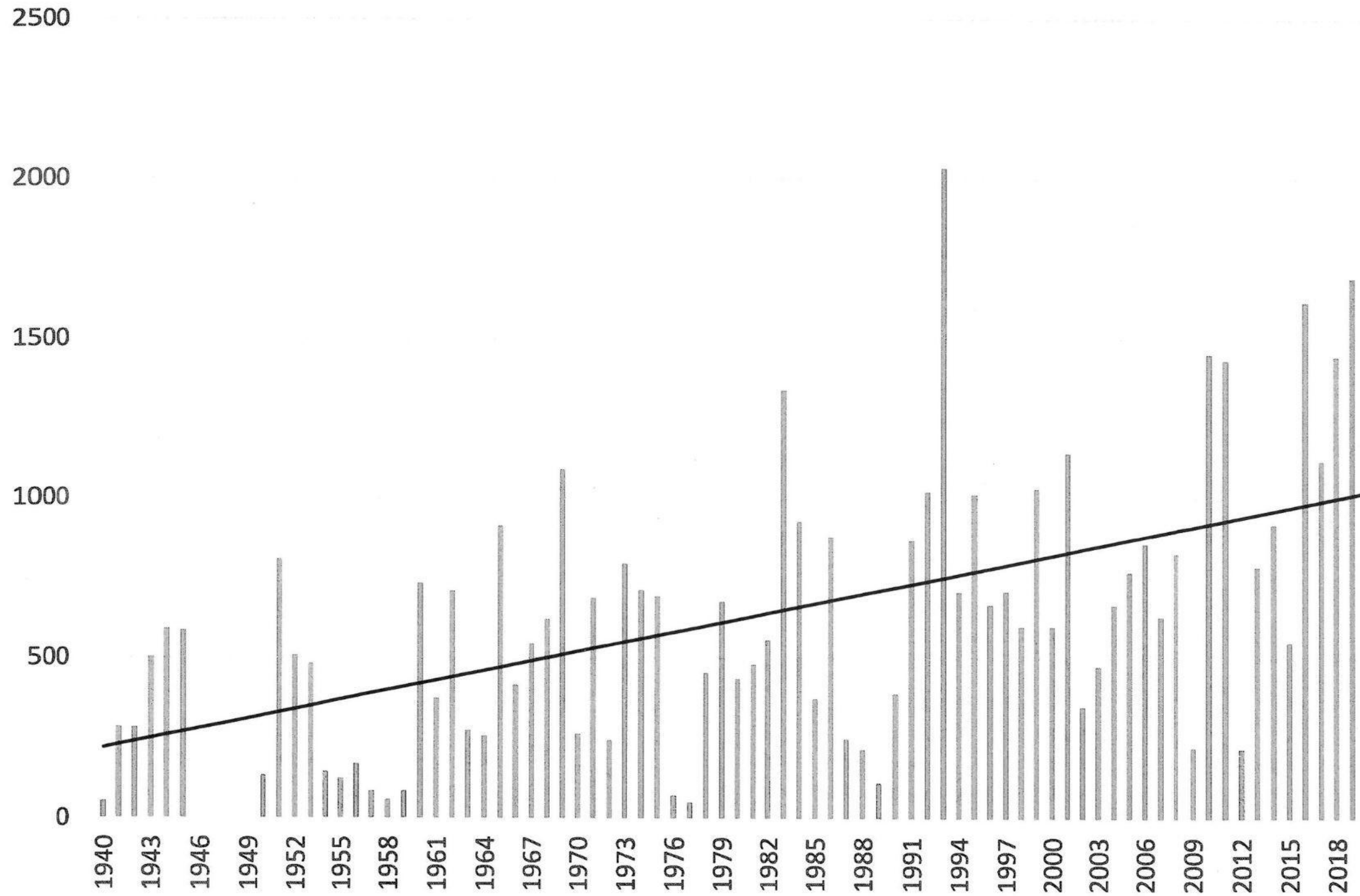
**Annual mean discharge for the Minnesota River near Jordan (05330000) (USGS 2020)**

# Le Sueur River Bank Erosion

Increased Runoff is Causing More River Bank Erosion




LeSueur River nr. Mankato Average Annual Flow 1940-2020 (cubic feet per second)





# BWSR Water Storage Programs

- Competitive grant program to control water volume and rates to protect infrastructure, improve water quality, mitigate climate change impacts
- MN Legislature appropriated \$17 Million in grant program funds (2023-2024)
- Recognition of issues related to drainage. \$50M next biennium [BWSR Awarded \\$21 Million in Federal Funds to Prioritize Water Storage | MN Board of Water, Soil Resources](#)
- BWSR Watershed Based Funding Grant Program (MN River Watershed) [Watershed Based Implementation Funding Grant Program | MN Board of Water, Soil Resources](#)
- *Collaborative-aligned efforts and work continue*

An aerial photograph showing the confluence of the Mississippi River and the Minnesota River. The Mississippi River is a dark, wide body of water on the left, while the Minnesota River is a lighter, brownish-tan body of water on the right. The two rivers meet at a point in the center. The surrounding land is green with trees and vegetation. In the bottom right corner, there are some buildings and structures, possibly a town or city.

Mississippi River

QUESTIONS?

Minnesota River

The Muddy  
Minnesota  
River