



One Watershed, One Plan

Lessons Learned from Pilot Watersheds

May 2016



Purpose: The purpose of this document is to highlight the lessons learned through the One Watershed, One Plan pilot program.

Planning Boundaries

The One Watershed, One Plan Boundary Framework consists of three parts: the suggested boundary map which outlines planning boundaries; procedures for establishing, requesting variances on, and appealing these boundaries; and the criteria used to establish and consider requested variances from the suggested boundary map.

What Worked Well

- No specific issues with the planning boundaries were identified through the pilot watersheds.

What Needs Work

- The procedures for establishing and altering planning boundaries were not tested.

What Might Change

- The procedures may change in the future if specific issues are identified as more watersheds throughout Minnesota implement One Watershed, One Plan.

Forming Partnerships and Agreements

Forming Partnerships

It is sometimes said that it is harder to work together than solo. Coming to consensus and agreement in a group can be challenging, and building trust in a partnership takes time. Through the pilot process, we learned that: time and patience are needed in developing a partnership for creating a watershed-based management plan, taking time on the front end helps to rest of the plan development process to run more smoothly, the process will have ups and downs, and that skilled facilitators can be an important part of the process.

What Worked Well

- What worked best in partnership formation was having a designated person(s) to coordinate and ensure clear and consistent communication is used throughout the process.
- Splitting the coordination between multiple participants worked if roles were clearly defined.
- Those pilots that recognized the value of a broad range of participants and stakeholders in the partnership had higher levels of trust.
- Good facilitation skills are important to developing partnerships.

What Needs Work

- What could have been better for the pilots was a less aggressive timeline, and a general frustration with being a pilot in a process and program that is still developing.
- Engagement of county staff in departments that have a role in and an impact on watershed management, but are not typically involved in the water plan, was sometimes challenging.

What Might Change

- The One Watershed, One Plan timeline for plan development will not be as aggressive in the program as it was for the pilot watersheds.
- New methods for engaging county staff in departments not typically involved in the water plan may be implemented.

Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)

A template MOA for the purposes of developing a plan and providing a decision-making process was developed with support of county attorneys and the Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust. This template was used by the pilots and modified slightly based on the pilot's experiences and needs. The template MOA was successful and we anticipate it will continue to be used in the future with modifications to meet individual partnership needs.

What Worked Well

- A successful method for generating support was for local staff to go to the board of each participating local government and ask for a resolution to be passed supporting the One Watershed, One Plan effort before asking the board to sign an MOA.
- Asking for a resolution supporting the One Watershed, One Plan effort provided an opportunity for staff to inform the boards about the program before returning with the MOA a few months later for decision and signature.

What Needs Work

- Can the One Watershed, One Plan partnerships successfully transition from an MOA plan to a future agreement of an unknown format to collaboratively administer and implement the plan? This question won't be answered until the pilot watersheds have been implementing plans for at least a few years.

What Might Change

- Different approaches will be used for transitioning from an MOA to plan to a future agreement to collaboratively administer and implement the plan.

Consultant Selection and Participation

Selecting a consultant for planning services is an important part of the process. Minnesota has many skilled consultants to choose from. However, in a successful plan development process the plan writer and facilitator become part of the team or an ad hoc member of the partnership; therefore, making sure that personalities match and trust can be developed is as important as having skills to provide planning services.

The following are lessons learned from the pilots in selecting a planning consultant, and lessons learned by the consultants in the planning process. Here are some of their thoughts:

What Worked Well: Pilots

- A Request for Proposal or Qualifications for selecting a planning consultant is not required (plan writing is a professional service and not a construction project that would be required to follow the Uniform Municipal

Contracting laws); however, all the partners should be in agreement up front as to what process is going to be followed. It may be important to have an initial consultation with one or more of the partners' county attorneys/legal counsel on options and if there are established local selection processes.

- The primary plan writer, whether a consultant or the local government staff, should have at least 2 years of planning experience (2-5 years preferred). The consultant should provide a list of plans written by their firm, as well as plans written by individual staff involved in the writing. Local staff should review these examples and possibly contact the clients for whom these plans were written.
- Establishing a selection process and selection criteria before getting qualifications or bids is important to ensure an impartial selection. Some criteria to consider include: expertise and competence as demonstrated by the proposed approach and methodology to meet the project requirements; resources available to perform the work, including any specialized services within the timeframe; record of past performance, including but not limited to price and cost data from previous projects, quality of work, ability to meet schedules, cost control, and contract administration; availability to and familiarity with the watershed, other criteria as defined by the partnership.

What Worked Well: Consultants

- Strong project and contract management and frequent communications on the status of the contract are key – these planning partnerships have resources that are generally limited by a grant agreement.
- Developing a plan for a new partnership is not like developing a plan for a single entity – there is not one person or board that has final say on the plan, there are multiple people and boards that all have input.

What Needs Work: Pilots

- It can be challenging for local staff to facilitate and/or write the plan as well as fully participate in the process and be viewed as neutral.
- In addition to the criteria for consultant qualifications and assessment of past work, it is also important find the right personality to fit with the diverse personalities of the partnership. The typical opportunity for getting to know the individuals is to request presentations from the top candidates in front of large committees; however, this is a very formal process. Less formal options such as interviews in a small group setting may also be considered, recognizing each method has pros and cons and may or may not fit a specific situation.
- Strong project and contract management and frequent communications on the status of the contract between the planning partnerships and the consultant are extremely important to make sure everyone stays on task.

What Needs Work: Consultants

- Developing a plan for a newly-formed and complex partnership does take a significant number of meetings (estimates may seem high as compared to other planning efforts, but the meetings are needed).
- Plan development may very likely take additional steps and need additional supporting materials (in comparison to other planning efforts) for these diverse groups.
- Facilitation, problem-solving, and process skills (facilitation of groups, understanding of group dynamics, ability to handle conflict, etc. – skills beyond ability to organize and run a meeting) are critical in these efforts.

What Might Change

- A more structured approach for watersheds to take when selecting a consultant for the One Watershed, One Plan pilot may be designed.

Agency Participation

What Worked Well

- Existing, positive working relationships and commitment between agency staff and local staff and boards worked well.
- In some areas, the working relationship between agency staff and local staff and boards was developed more deeply through the planning process. Agencies brought unique and valued resources and ideas to the process.

What Needs Work

- The primary frustrations centered on not having information or understanding of the process, especially early on. Those who expressed this frustration also recognized this is typical for a pilot project.
- Local staff and consultants also need to recognize that agencies are providing primary contacts for each planning area and use these contacts.
- When requests go to an agency as part of the plan development process, this primary contact should generally be the first point of contact and should always be copied on requests to the given agency.

What Might Change

- Better understanding on the part of agency staff and local staff and boards of their respective roles in future One Watershed, One Plan planning processes is a likely outcome of lessons learned from the pilots.

Citizen Participation

With the large scale of the planning boundaries, ongoing and thorough citizen involvement can be challenging. However, many of the pilots leveraged existing citizen advisory and water plan committees of the individual partners. One pilot recognized the potential difficulties with the large size and divided the committee into separate Technical and Citizen Advisory Committees. And, those pilots with staff who had participated in the MPCA's Civic Engagement Cohorts leveraged this training for more successful public participation.

For the initial planning or kickoff meeting, radio ads, news releases, advertisements on cable access, direct mailings, and local TV station participation all contributed to good attendance at these meetings. A few of the more successful methods of engaging attendees at the meetings were to follow an open house format rather than a meeting format, engaging attendees in the Watershed Game (http://www.extension.umn.edu/environment/water/watershed-education/docs/the_watershed_game_flyer_eb.pdf), and providing a meal.

Plan Development

What Worked Well

- Recognition that the process used to develop a good plan as important as plan itself.
- Good Data, Constructive Process, Right People.
- Identification of roles early on: who leads, who facilitates, who mediates, who writes.

What are some specific elements needed in a good plan?

- Clear identification of gaps: what don't we know and what do we need to be successful
- Special areas and important things identified (priorities!)
- Roles and responsibilities of all players (in implementation) well-defined and discussed early and often in the plan development process.

- Actions and programs have multiple benefits, clear cost-benefit, targeted to threats.
- Threats are quantified; this shows greater understanding of the issues.

What Needs Work

- Lack of specifics on critical source areas of potential risk or highest contribution and lack of geographic targeting of implementation actions to best address these areas.
- Lack of the scope or scale of actions needed to achieve the load reductions.
- Lack a plan to monitor BMP adoption and/or monitor water quality response, or fill gaps in water quality monitoring needs.
- Lack of an implementation timeline and interim checkpoints or milestones.

What Might Change

- A number of planning tools were tested through the planning process, and all showed some level of benefit. More about these and other planning tools will be provided separately from these lessons learned.
- Planning efforts recognized that tools are not plans – they are there to complement the plan and provide decision support.

Plan Committees

Policy Committees

Policy Committees are comprised of the members of the partnership who review and make final decisions on drafts of the plan as well as expenditures of funds allocated for plan development. The Policy Committee is advised by the Advisory Committee about what to include as important plan content.

What Worked Well

- Policy Committees in the pilot watersheds have been engaged in the process.
- A few of the pilots invited policy committee members to observe advisory committees, which was beneficial but needs to be balanced with the size of the Advisory Committee as well as maintenance of roles.

What Needs Work

- Maintaining Policy Committee engagement can be challenging if meetings are spread too far apart or members do not feel they have enough involvement. Including an anticipated meeting schedule and frequency is recommended, for example “first meeting of the Policy Committee will be in.... The committee will meet approximately monthly through....”
- Also consider including a generalized outline of anticipated topics throughout the schedule to build interest and provide an anticipated pace of progress.
- In an initial cover letter and/or presentation to the boards of the respective parties, consider providing context and expectations for Policy Committee membership. An example used in one of the pilots is provided below:

Policy Committee Membership Expectations

1. Actively attend and participate in all scheduled meetings of the Policy Committee.
2. Actively engage in the decision-making process for watershed-based planning with the understanding that goals, objectives, and action items of the water plan must be prioritized, targeted, and measurable.
3. Initiate and/or assist with providing opportunities for constituents to be apprised of updated progress of the watershed-based planning process.

4. Regularly update their respective Boards on the progress of the watershed planning process.
 5. Utilize the technical resources of their respective entities to assist and inform their decisions in the water planning process.
- Ensuring that members of the policy committee have resources and skills to communicate back to the boards they represent is important. Having staff develop talking points and status updates can assist with this.

What Might Change

- A more comprehensive set of guidelines for policy and about their roles and expectations may result from the combined feedback and experiences of the pilot watershed planning committees.

Advisory Committees

Advisory committees are comprised of local and agency staff, members of the public, and other stakeholders. The advisory committee makes recommendations on the contents of the plan, including plan implementation, to the policy committee.

What Worked Well

- Advisory Committees have been engaged in the plan development process.
- One pilot split the Advisory Committee into citizen and technical committees, which addressed the large size of the committee as well as allowed for more focused information to be presented and discussed.

What Needs Work

- Need to consider how advisory committees are appointed and clarify that no board members from members of the partnership should be appointed.
- Need to establish ground rules and discuss decision-making of the advisory committee early-on. All members should have an equal weight in the decision-making.
- Need more consistent and broader involvement from county departments.
- Need to make sure meeting agendas are prepared and distributed in advance of the committee meeting (generally a week; including supporting materials).

Planning Work Groups

Planning work groups are smaller work group of local staff from participating local governments for the purpose of logistical and process decision-making. Planning work groups are not a required part of One Watershed, One Plan.

What Worked Well

- Planning work group were able to make decisions on plan format and logistics of plan development that allowed the Advisory and Policy Committees to focus on content.

What Needs Work

- Recommend appointing a chair (or having a rotating chair) of the planning work group.
- Balance between the roles of the Planning Work Group (logistics and process) and the Advisory Committee (recommendations to the Policy Committee) need to be maintained. Consider also the impacts to budget and number of meetings.
- One concern from some of the pilots was that the planning work group formed and made some key early decisions which should have been made by the policy committee.

Other Good Ideas

- Providing a three-ring binder of plan information to the advisory and policy committee members (just general good committee management).
- For the partnerships to continue successfully, it is important to bring up future administration and governance of the plan early in the plan development process with the Policy Committee. Knowing where these decision-makers stand on administering and implementing the future plan early in the process can help both with how the plan is developed and with later discussions and decisions on how the plan will be implemented.
- Keep reminding everyone of the basic tenant of the plan, every time the group meets. Try to put politics aside, air ideas at the beginning, and encourage honest conversations.
- Talk about terminology in the beginning.
- Stay on task. At some point you have to say we have enough information and we're done. Let's write.
- Have the WRAPS done before the planning starts. It will be beneficial to the prioritization, goals setting, and identifying measurable actions.
- Have meeting agendas prepared and distributed (with supporting materials) at least a week in advance of every Advisory and Policy Committee meeting.

Tips from the Pilot Watersheds

Lake Superior North

- *"Believe in the process. You have put a ton of work into the process, and that will yield positive results. There is no one right way to do this. Have a 'let's do it' attitude. Buy into the idea that one person in the office doesn't have the revelation that trumps, but rather it is the plan producing the action items."* Dan Schutte, Lake County SWCD Manager
- *"Stay engaged. Keep the conversation going. Talk to facilitators, and make sure that the advisory group is still meeting, and that the policy group is staying on the timeframe."* Rich Sve, Lake County Commissioner
- *"Work hard, take it easy, and work together. Do your best."* Don Goodell, Cook SWCD Board Chair
- *"Inclusivity is hugely important. Getting the right people to inform the process and identify objectives helps to ensure we will be better stewards of our watershed. I strongly recommend the structure of your meetings include both the advisory and policy committees. This too is consistent with the concept of inclusivity."* Garry Gamble, Cook County

Root River

- *"In southeast Minnesota, local County and SWCD staff have already been networking with each other on regional and state projects; this has helped during One Watershed, One Plan planning. It is very important to have as much transparency as possible in the process. Updates on the One Watershed, One Plan process are provided on the Fillmore SWCD website. We let the public and the advisory committee know that they could access the SWCD website to review the minutes of our meetings about the plan, and to access BWSR fact sheets about the program."* Sheila Harmes, Winona County Water Planner
- *"Be as involved as you can be. It is easy to want to tell yourself that someone else will take care of all the details. Be as engaged as you can be."* Jennifer Ronnenberg, Fillmore County Conservation Office.
- *"Slow down and take your time. Make sure that whatever you have in your plan is doable and meets your needs and priorities."* Donna Rasmussen, Fillmore SWCD Administrator

Red Lake River

- *“With more LGUs involved, you have to get all of the LGUs on the same page before you can communicate information to the consultant. You can’t have just one LGU working with the consultant. We find it works best to have the LGUs meet often and relay that information to the consultant.”* Peter Nelson, Pennington SWCD Water Plan Coordinator
- *“Ideally, start writing the plan after the WRAPS are done. There is a section in the WRAPS reports for listing restoration and protect strategies along with corresponding timelines, scale of adoption, entities of primary involvement, and interim goals. If there is a completed WRAPS report for the watershed, that section would be very helpful for developing the One Watershed, One Plan document for that watershed.”* Corey Hanson, Red Lake River Watershed

Yellow Medicine

- *“I’m learning it is important to be very familiar with the water planning process outline before you start, and what is supposed to be part of each step, so you don’t leave important decisions or data gathering until the last minute when you may not give a topic the thought it deserves.”* Terry Wittnebel, Laq qui Parle Watershed District Manager
- *“We all need to know we need to dedicate a lot of time. Be committed, and when you have meetings, have representation.”* Lou Ann Nagel, Yellow Medicine SWCD Manager
- *“Advisory committees are extremely important and include all sectors of the community representing every aspect, including agricultural producers and city/township governments. Be fully comprehensive and find good, dedicated volunteers to make up a solid, committed advisory committee who knows the watershed intimately.”* -Kerry Netzke, Executive Director of Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects, Inc.