



Seven proposed delistings linked to BWSR Clean Water Fund-backed work



Clean Water Funds from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) supported conservation work that significantly contributed to four lakes, two river reaches and one creek’s proposed removal from the state’s impaired waters list.

The lakes are in or near the seven-county Twin Cities metro — where monitoring started years earlier and therefore more data exists to show improvement. A designated trout stream in Hubbard County, part of the Sand Hill River in Polk County that now supports redhorse species, and a segment of a Sauk River tributary in Stearns County round out that list.

“The delistings are encouraging, because they show that our investments and planning and projects and programs are definitely working,” Maggie Karschnia,

BWSR clean water coordinator, said of state and local governments. “The proposed delistings represent the payoff from sustained effort and collaboration over an extended period of time.”

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval finalizes the status.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is accepting comments through July 22 on its proposed 45 removals (22 of them resulting from known restoration work) and 46 additions to the [2026 draft impaired waters list](#). MPCA staff will then respond to all comments

Clockwise from left: *The Kabekona River is a designated trout stream. Photo Courtesy of Hubbard County SWCD Comfort Lake has met the deep-lake water quality standard for 10 years. Photo Courtesy of Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District Upper Prior Lake underwent a district-funded alum treatment in spring 2026. Photo Courtesy of Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District Lake Riley is a heavily used recreational lake spanning the Chanhassen-Eden Prairie border. Photo Courtesy of Riley Purgatory Bluff Watershed District*

“ We’re talking about decades of commitments, often 20 to 30 years of work. (Local partnerships) have spent a long time identifying these problems. Doing monitoring and implementing solutions, and then tracking the results. Everybody plays different roles to support this work, and they have to remain committed. And that’s why seeing these delistings is a great North Star. ”

— Maggie Karschnia, BWSR clean water coordinator



within 30 days. The EPA has another 30 days to respond.

“It is really exciting that we’re seeing more delistings,” said Leya Charles, MPCA water assessment and impaired waters list coordinator. “We’re expecting that trend to continue, being that there’s a lot of really good work and really good funding in Minnesota, a lot of really engaged watershed management organizations that are doing this work. It really does take that grassroots level.”

Landowners’ involvement is key to improving water quality.

“Clean Water Funds have been an important part of the equation because they help these communities, from planning to action,” Karschnia said. “Those dollars are leveraged with other local, state, federal and private funding, which then allows them to move forward with larger, more expensive projects that otherwise likely would not have happened. ... BWSR’s funding often is that tipping point to getting these waters where they need to be.”

Delistings are proposed when data show a solid trend in water-quality improvement and meet the state water quality standard.

The MPCA monitors about 26,000 water bodies — including 11,564 lakes, plus wetlands and stream reaches — in a 10-year cycle. Since the first impaired waters list

was released in 1994, about 2,250 water bodies have been added; about 125 have been removed.

“Forty-five delistings? Amazing. But there’s also so much other work that is happening behind the scenes in those trends and those improvements that just might not have quite triggered that it’s good enough for a delisting,” Charles said.

The following summarizes the BWSR Clean Water Fund-backed proposed delistings.

Chisago County

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District: Comfort Lake

A heavily used recreational lake with a public water access and a sandy shoreline, 212-acre Comfort Lake is ringed by houses and mature trees. With an average depth of 21 feet — 47 feet at its deepest — the lake contains 30-some fish species, including walleye, muskellunge, largemouth bass, Northern pike and panfish. Comfort Lake, just east of Wyoming, is the outlet of the watershed district. Water enters the lake from Little Comfort Lake and the Sunrise River, and then continues north via the Sunrise River to the St. Croix River.

Comfort Lake was listed as impaired for aquatic recreation in 2002, based on excessive nutrients.

For the past 10 years, Comfort

Lake has met the deep-lake water quality standard in all areas: phosphorus, clarity and Chlorophyll-a (a measure of algae and cyanobacteria).

“Every passing year as residential properties turn over — statistically it’s about 5% of our lake properties (that change hands) — more and more people won’t remember the lake as being impaired. They’re only going to know it as a clean, swimmable, fishable water body that they can enjoy. Tied to that are economic benefits to the community,” said Mike Kinney, Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District (CLFLWD) administrator.

Since 2013, BWSR has awarded the CLFLWD more than \$3.3 million in Clean Water Fund grants supporting nearly \$4.6 million in work directly affecting Comfort Lake. Those 11 grants include two 2025 awards tied to iron-enhanced sand filter and stormwater management projects slated for this year.

Previous Clean Water Fund-backed projects directly affecting Comfort Lake have included [an iron-enhanced sand filter and tree trenches](#) at the Forest Lake Target, a [wetland restoration](#) at Forest Lake’s Bixby Park, and enhanced street sweeping in Forest Lake and Wyoming. The most recent, a [wetland enhancement](#) at the Sunrise River and Highway 61, drew from Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF), EPA funds available

through the MPCA, and local dollars.

Comfort Lake benefits from the significant phosphorus-reduction projects on upstream lakes — including Bone Lake, [which was delisted in 2024](#) — identified through sequential diagnostic monitoring, which relies on water quality samples more than computer modeling.

“It is one of six impaired water bodies designated through the six-lake TMDL ([Total Maximum Daily Load](#)). Being able to take another one of those off of the list is a great sign of success for both the science and the partnership, and the funding derived from the Clean Water Fund grants,” Kinney said.

While the CLFLWD has prioritized lakes and maintaining installed practices, Kinney said the district’s watershed management plan has expanded the focus to include issues such as wetlands and groundwater.

Scott County

Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District: Upper Prior Lake

The city of Prior Lake touts its namesake — counting Upper and Lower Prior lakes as a single water body — as one of the 10 most popular recreational lakes in the state. Ringed by houses and a finger of Spring Lake Regional Park, Upper Prior Lake, the smaller of the two at 386 acres, averages 10 feet deep and

contains walleye, largemouth bass, Northern pike, panfish and common carp.

The previously abundant carp population, which contributed to turbidity of the lake — listed in 2002 as impaired for aquatic recreation because of excessive nutrients — by stirring up the lakebottom and uprooting aquatic plants, took a hit after a \$400,000 [removal, barrier and tracking project](#) between 2019 and 2021.

A \$185,000 Metro Area WBIF grant from BWSR in 2019 supported the work, which leveraged Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District (PLSLWD), EPA and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) funds, and removed nearly 27 tons of carp from Upper Prior and Spring lakes. (Water flows from Spring Lake to Upper Prior to Lower Prior lakes.) Annual phosphorus reduction estimates for both lakes totaled 908 pounds.

“As a very small local entity, we cannot accomplish all of these projects without the funding. So we’re very grateful for that support statewide and it’s evident in how much we’ve been able to accomplish,” said Emily Dick, PLSLWD water resources manager.

Since 2011, with partners including the Scott Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), the city of Prior Lake plus state and federal agencies, and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, the watershed has implemented nearly \$9.4 million in conservation work contributing to water quality improvements in Upper Prior Lake.

Among the BWSR Clean Water Fund-supported

“ I’m excited to see the changes the lake has had for the better over the last many years. ... Being a part of the hard work that was done to help manage carp and get it to a level that is shown to be less damaging to lakes is awesome. ”

— Jeff Anderson, PLSLWD water resources coordinator



projects: a \$404,270 wetland restoration and iron-enhanced sand filter installed in 2014 to reduce stormwater runoff and nutrient-loading.

A \$449,500 Clean Water Fund grant BWSR awarded to the PLSLWD in 2020 supported an alum treatment targeting in-lake phosphorus, which the MPCA had identified as the source of 50% of phosphorus affecting Upper Prior Lake. That treatment, along with a second, district-funded alum treatment this spring, were projected to reduce phosphorus by 571 pounds a year.

“That was the tipping point for the lake,” said Jeff Anderson, PLSLWD water resources coordinator.

Since 2020, the lake has consistently met MPCA shallow-lake water quality standards for phosphorus, Chlorophyll-a (a measure of algae and cyanobacteria), and water clarity, with the exception of elevated Chlorophyll-a in 2024 and 2025.

“The (proposed) delisting comes after decades of work. The lake was listed in 2002, and I’m just really proud that we’ve gotten to this point. It’s great to look back at the list of things that we’ve accomplished to get us here, and how varied they

are,” said Dick, who joined the watershed about four years ago.

While larger projects required watershed management, landowners took the lead on shoreline restorations, rain gardens and cover crops. The city of Prior Lake got involved in street-sweeping efforts.

“Big projects, small projects — all of it is really culminating here,” Dick said. “We’ve been seeing the fruits of those efforts in our water-quality on the lake.”

Hubbard County

Hubbard County SWCD: Kabekona River

A trout stream with a naturally reproducing brook trout population, the Kabekona River flows to Kabekona Lake, a deep, cold-water lake that is a cisco refuge. It lies within the Leech Lake River watershed, which has few impairments.

“Especially in the beginning of the trout season, about every place that the road crossed there’d be a truck or two parked, and people wading up and down the river,” said Jake Shaughnessy, Hubbard County SWCD co-administrator of projects and partnerships.

From the headwaters to the lake, an 18.5-mile-long

MPCA Details

IMPAIRED WATERS DEFINITION:

The MPCA defines an impaired water as a water body that fails to meet water-quality standards (which protect waters by defining how much of a pollutant can be present before the water is no longer considered drinkable, swimmable, fishable or usable in other defined ways) in one or more of seven areas: nutrients that grow algae, sediment that clouds water, bacteria that can make swimming unsafe, limited fish and insect diversity, mercury levels that limit safe fish consumption, PFAS in fish tissue, and sulfate that may affect wild rice production.

IMPAIRED WATERS LIST: Updated every other year, as required by the federal Clean Water Act

MEETING WATER-QUALITY

STANDARDS: Removal from the impaired waters list requires meeting the standard for phosphorus levels, and either Secchi disk readings, which measure clarity, or Chlorophyll-a levels, a measure of algae and cyanobacteria

MINNESOTA WATERS: Minnesota waters include more than 26,000 water body IDs. That includes 11,564 lakes, plus wetlands, stream segments and river reaches. The Mississippi River, for example, is broken into 19 river reaches.

‘UNKNOWN REASONS’

EXPLANATION: In 24 of the 46 proposed delistings, the reason is “unknown.” In some cases, the pollutant may have flushed out of the system naturally. Sometimes data cannot sufficiently pinpoint known restoration activities.

LINK: MPCA [Impaired Waters List](#) (includes a tab for proposed delistings)

Trends appearing in the 2026 list include an increase in [PFAS](#) impairments — not surprising, said Leya Charles, MPCA water assessment and impaired waters list coordinator, because related monitoring and funding also increased. Water bodies may have more than one impairment, and may gain new impairments.

“Keeping something off the impaired waters list is just as important as restoring it and having this delisting success story,” Charles said. “That’s one thing that the impaired waters list doesn’t show very well, is how many water bodies we have assessed that are meeting standards. ... There’s a lot of good work being done to keep (waters) from being impaired, to keep (them) protected.”

river reach was listed in 2016 as impaired for aquatic recreation due to E. coli. MPCA sampling in 2010 and 2011 showed spikes consistently 2.5 to three times the EPA standard. Source tracking, made possible in 2021 by an Itasca-Mantrap Co-op Operation Round Up grant, had identified a pasture west of Laporte as a primary source. Exclusion fencing had improved water quality but concentrated the cattle in one area.

The SWCD drew \$44,375 from a WBIF grant BWSR awarded to the Leech Lake River watershed partnership to fund a \$67,780 total cattle exclusion. The balance came from a BWSR buffer implementation supplemental grant, and local businesses and groups including the Kabekona Lake Foundation.

The project installed additional fencing, a gate and a solar-powered water tank, and stabilized the streambank. Minnesota Trout Unlimited Headwaters Chapter volunteers planted a 100-foot-wide buffer of native shrubs to filter runoff. Work finished by early summer 2023.

The project reduced the time cattle spent in the river from eight-plus hours a day, when it was a primary water source and a place to cool off, to a couple of hours a month, when cattle crossed from one paddock to another.

Two-year average concentrations dropped by well over half — from 261 colony-forming units (cfu) per 100 milliliters in 2010-11 to 99 cfu/100 ml in 2023-24. The water quality standard for lakes and streams: less than 126 cfu/100 ml.

Rivers and lakes are sampled for E. coli to ensure they're safe for fishing, paddling and



A stretch of the Sand Hill River is poised to shed an impairment for fish habitat. Photo Credit: Sand Hill Watershed District

swimming. E. coli is used to identify fecal contamination, which indicates the potential for pathogens.

"It was a project that had been identified way back when the Leech Lake One Watershed, One Plan was developed, and it took more than just one staff member and more than just one community member and board member to get this project going," Shaughnessy said. "Seeing a big group effort like this come to something successful and protect the trout stream that's popular with local anglers and people recreating and kayaking — just to bring that stream back to what it should be is pretty rewarding, and kind of why we're here as a district."

Project partners included Lakeport and Hendrickson townships.

Polk County

West Polk SWCD, Sand Hill River Watershed District: Sand Hill River

Redhorse species and other migratory fish returned to the Sand Hill River after rock riffles and rock arch rapids replaced four dams west of Fertile on the Sand Hill River, a Red River tributary.

The [\\$1.6 million project](#) — backed by a \$475,000 Clean Water Fund grant BWSR

awarded to the West Polk SWCD, a \$118,750 match from the Sand Hill River Watershed District (SHRWD), a \$933,000 DNR Outdoor Heritage Fund grant and a \$100,000 Enbridge Ecofootprint grant — restored fish passage and improved habitat while maintaining streambank stability. It followed 20 years of watershed-wide work by local, state and federal partners.

"Without the Clean Water Funds this wouldn't be possible. There isn't enough local tax base to be able to institute the type of projects that we've been able to put out there on the landscape. Those (funds) also support monitoring, planning and restoration efforts. They support implementation of conservation practices that would reduce sediment or runoff," said April Swenby, SHRWD administrator. "This delisting would highlight the value of the public investment in clean water, and it demonstrates that these investments can lead to measurable improvements on Minnesota's rivers and streams."

A 62-mile-long stretch was listed as impaired for fish habitat in 2014. Now, a 15-mile-long segment of that stretch — from Kittleson Creek to just east of Fertile — is poised to

shed that impairment.

"The proposed delisting of the Sand Hill River validates over a decade of collaborative conservation work aimed at reversing ecological damage, signifying the success of targeted watershed strategies," said Nicole Bernd, West Polk SWCD manager. She applied for the Clean Water Fund grant, facilitated the riffles project and facilitated One Watershed, One Plan planning for the Sand Hill River watershed.

Now, Bernd said Sand Hill River-related work is focused on comprehensive ecosystem restoration, flood mitigation and water-quality improvements. The [Sand Hill River Ecosystem Restoration Project Team](#) is designing a habitat and channel stabilization project centered on a 3-mile priority stretch of river east of Beltrami. WBIF-supported work aims to reduce turbidity and E. coli via targeted agricultural and structural best management practices.

"(The delisting) validates our public funding, drives community engagement and (sends) the message that keeping healthy waters clean is far more cost-effective than attempting to restore them," Bernd said.

Carver and Hennepin counties

Riley Purgatory Bluff Watershed District: Rice Marsh Lake, Lake Riley

A shallow lake that was a spawning area for common carp from Lake Riley until a barrier was installed, 83-acre Rice Marsh Lake lies within Chanhassen and Eden Prairie, surrounded by a park that shares its name. With an average depth of 5 feet, the lake attracts bird-

watchers and paddlers.

Anglers and water-skiers are among those drawn to Lake Riley, a heavily used recreational lake with public water access and a (temporarily closed) swimming beach in the adjacent park that shares its name. It, too, straddles the Chanhassen-Eden Prairie boundary. Residential development lines its shores to the south and west. The 297-acre lake's average depth is 23 feet.

Both lakes were listed as impaired for aquatic recreation because of excess nutrients — Rice Marsh Lake in 2018, Lake Riley in 2002.

"We've seen significant improvements in water clarity in both those lakes. We have seen a significant decline in total phosphorus and the typical chemical parameters," said Terry Jeffery, Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District (RPBCWD) administrator.

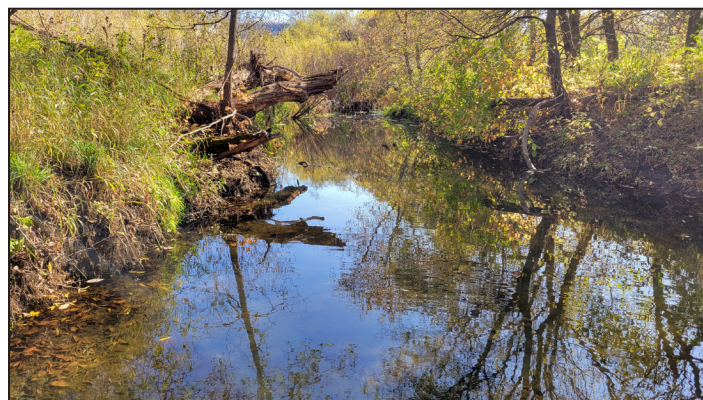
Clean Water Fund-supported projects upstream contributed to those water-quality improvements.

A \$283,000 stormwater retrofit at St. Hubert Catholic Church and School drew \$63,865 from a 2021 Metro Area WBIF award. Tree trenches, a rain garden and prairie plantings, impervious surface removal and gully repair were part of the work to treat stormwater that flowed to Rice Marsh Lake. The RPBCWD, Carver SWCD, the Metropolitan Council and St. Hubert's provided matching funds and in-kind donations.

"We were treating a directly contributing watershed to Rice Marsh Lake. In addition, there was the sediment deposition from the eroded



Rice Marsh Lake was a spawning area for common carp until a barrier was installed. Photo Courtesy of Riley Purgatory Bluff Watershed District



This unnamed creek flows directly into the Sauk River in Stearns County. Photo Courtesy of Sauk River Watershed District

gully that was addressed for water quality and water clarity improvements," Jeffery said.

Riley Creek connects Lake Susan, Rice Marsh Lake and Lake Riley. Upstream work affecting Lake Susan helped to improve water quality in the downstream lakes.

A \$233,400 competitive Clean Water Fund grant BWSR awarded to RPBCWD in 2015 supported \$574,000 in stormwater reuse enhancements and treatment within the Lake Susan watershed (excluding engineering costs). The watershed district provided the match. Previously, stormwater from the Chanhassen business district drained to an under-sized pond in Lake Susan Park. The project installed a two-stage pump to irrigate ballfields and pump water into an iron-enhanced sand filter before it

entered Lake Susan.

"They (Clean Water Funds) are imperative to us being able to do our work," Jeffery said. "Without it, the amount of work we can do is limited to what we can levy. As project costs (increase) and the political climate for levy increases declines, that means less and less that we can do without some type of financial assistance."

Rice Marsh Lake has met the shallow-lake water quality standard for clarity for the past 17 years. It has met the standard for phosphorus five of the past eight years. Alum treatments in 2018 and 2025 followed work to curb phosphorus-loading from the area draining to the lake. And it met the Chlorophyll-a standard for eight of the past 10 years.

Lake Riley has met the deep-lake standard for clarity for 12

years, phosphorus for 10 years (following alum treatments in 2016 and 2020), and Chlorophyll-a for seven of the past 10 years.

Stearns County

Stearns Conservation District: Unnamed creek

A direct Sauk River tributary north of Lake Henry, this 0.55-mile-long segment of an unnamed creek — impaired for aquatic life due to turbidity since 2008 — eventually flows to the Sauk River Chain of Lakes, which are impaired because of excess nutrients.

One of three Stearns Conservation District (SCD) manure storage projects within the subwatershed drew from a \$392,500 Clean Water Fund targeted feedlot grant BWSR awarded to the SCD (then known as the Stearns County SWCD). That [Spring Hill Township project](#) involved a 56-by-96-foot stacking slab designed to store 12 months of poultry litter.

Long-term storage allows producers to time manure application for when it's most beneficial to crops and less likely to run off. The other two manure storage projects were supported by assistance from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

From 2015 through 2024, the SCD worked with landowners on 38 projects within the subwatershed. Twenty-six involved installing buffer alternatives. In addition to manure storage projects, the rest involved the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, erosion control or cover crops.

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.