

Big Fork River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan

Formal Review Comments



#	Commenter	Section	Page #	Comment	Material	Editorial	Note	Change Needed (Y/N)	Response
1	Tom & Tami Neer	Forest Protection		Our property falls within one of the plan's Forest Protection priority areas. We support the plan's overall goal of maintaining forest cover and preventing conversion, and we would welcome the chance to participate in forest stewardship planning or protection programs as they become available to us.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
2	Tom & Tami Neer	Small-parcel Forestry		We were glad to see the plan directly acknowledge that parcels under 20 acres — like ours — are generally too small to qualify for existing forestry cost-share and stewardship programs, and that it proposes exploring a small-tract parcel management program to address this gap. We would strongly encourage the plan's partners to prioritize developing this program during implementation. Smaller landowners are still land stewards, and we look forward to programs that give small parcel owners like us the same real opportunity to be good stewards of our land that larger property owners already have. Owning fewer acres shouldn't mean having fewer tools to take care of them well.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
3	Tom & Tami Neer	Wetland/Peatland Protection		Our property includes a tamarack bog/wetland zone, so we support the plan's goals around maintaining wetland extent and restoring hydrological connectivity where it has been altered. We have no plans to disturb this area and appreciate the plan's broader commitment to protecting wetlands like ours across the watershed.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
4	Tom & Tami Neer	Lakes		We're glad to see Round Lake included among the watershed's higher-protection-status lakes. As new residents drawn in part to the area's water quality, we support the plan's continued monitoring and protection efforts and want to see that status maintained.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
5	Tom & Tami Neer	Groundwater Protection		We rely on a private well for our household water, and we support the plan's attention to groundwater quality, including its focus on arsenic, manganese, and iron in the watershed's glacial drift aquifers. We had our own well tested in 2025 and 2026, and we were glad to see our results for arsenic and manganese both come back well below reporting limits — a good outcome that we think reflects why watershed-wide attention to groundwater quality is worth investing in, not just something we should assume will continue on its own. We take water quality seriously on our own property and support the plan's goals around well sealing and ongoing monitoring.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
6	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	Lakes and Streams		The MPCA staff recognize the issues and practices outlined in the Big Fork 1W1P Priority Concerns Letter sent to Itasca SWCD on July 29, 2025, have been incorporated – Thank you.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
7	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	Streams	21	Thank you for adding the newly proposed impaired stream, Bear River (09030006-516) to the impairment map on Page 21. Bear River was opt-ed in for the 2026 assessment process due to the additional stream monitoring in 2024 and will be added to the draft MPCA Impaired Waters List in 2028.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
8	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	Executive Summary	10	On Page 10, Bear River is missing from the priority map.		x		Y	Map revision to add Bear River to Overall Goals Map
9	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	LWRN	21	On Page 21, Bear River is miss labeled on the map as Bear Creek.		x		Y	Map revision to update Bear Creek to Bear River on Impairments map

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10	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	Streams	44	On Page 44, thank you for adding Bear River to the Big Fork River Watershed priority streams map. The MPCA suggests adding a statement in the text explaining Bear River was assessed in 2026 as impaired for E. coli and will be on the draft 2028 MPCA Impaired Waters List.		x		Y	Added text explaining that Bear River was assessed in 2026 as impaired for E. coli and will be on the draft 2028 MPCA Impaired Waters List.
11	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	Streams	74	On Page 74, thank you for adding Bear River to the priority farms goal.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
12	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	Streams	21 & 44	Thank you for making color changes to the impaired streams mapped on Page 21 and 44 to show the impaired streams differentiating from impaired streams in category 4c, which are impaired but not caused by a pollutant and impaired streams caused by natural causes.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
13	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	Lakes	32/33	The MPCA staff supports the use of the Minnesota 2024 Impaired Waters List for identifying impairments in the Plan. The impaired waters included in the various sections of the plan are correctly identified. However, the impaired lake, Little Spring Lake (31-0797-00), is not listed as one of the priority lakes on pages 32 and 33, which MPCA understands is due to local priority preference. Under the vigilance restore category, it states there are two lakes impaired for nutrients; however, there is only one lake listed (perhaps Little Spring used to be listed here in a previous draft and now the '2' is a typo and should be '1'). In the future, if Little Spring becomes more developed or there are landuse changes, possibly consider amending the Plan to add Little Spring as a priority lake.	x			N	Each category has the number of lakes that fit under that category but only list the lakes from each category that were chosen to focus on. Example Vigilance (Unimpaired, Fully protected) has 307 lake stated but only 11 lakes listed under focus. Protect (unimpaired, Good Quality) has 31 lakes stated but only 7 lakes listed under focus.
14	Lindsey Krumrie, MPCA	Plan Implementation Programs	96	On Page 96, there is a small typo in the table. The 'f' is missing in Sulfate.		x		Y	Something must have happened when exporting. Word has been deleted and reinserted.
15	Reid Christianson, MDA			Thanks for the opportunity to review the draft plan. I don't have any comments or concerns at this time – I enjoyed being part of the plan development. In addition, there is very little agriculture in the watershed, so nothing to add from MDA's perspective.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
16	Whitney Sims, Koochiching County Environmental Services		2, 8, Farms and Groundwater Topic Meeting	My name is spelled incorrectly on the second page under Topic Meeting Participants, on page 8 in the back under Meeting Attendees, and under Meeting Attendees (no page number) for the Farms and Groundwater topic meeting. Sims had one s, not two.		x		Y	Name has been updated to reflect "Whitney Sims"
17	Whitney Sims, Koochiching County Environmental Services		4	Koochiching County logo is not clear		x		Y	Logo revised for clarity
18	Whitney Sims, Koochiching County Environmental Services		64	More of a funding question on WCA, why is so much money allocated?			x	N	Estimate based on local budget expenses
19	Whitney Sims, Koochiching County Environmental Services		89	top paragraph bullet point looks like it has a typo		x		Y	Deleted "l" and added a space.
20	Clarissa Spicer, DNR	Executive Summary	1	The second paragraph states "A portion of Leech Lake Reservation extends into the BFRW with roughly 161 miles falling inside of the watershed." This should state "161 square miles."		x		Y	added "161 square miles"
21	Clarissa Spicer, DNR	Land and Water Resources Narrative	18, 71, 78	In the second paragraph the text describes "Granite outcropping..." in the watershed. While a few granitic intrusions occur in this area, the majority of bedrock is composed of various metamorphic rocks. It would be more accurate to state, "Bedrock outcropping...." A similar statement regarding granite outcropping is also found on page 71 and 78.		x		Y	Changed "Granite" to "Bedrock" in the three locations.
22	Clarissa Spicer, DNR	Land and Water Resources Narrative	20	The first paragraph states "It stretches 165 miles through Koochiching County to the Rainy River and drains 2,063 miles (BFRB, 2005)." This should state, "2,063 square miles."		x		Y	Changed to "2,063 square miles"

#	Commenter	Section	Page #	Comment	Material	Editorial	Note	Change Needed (Y/N)	Response
23	Clarissa Spicer, DNR	Land and Water Resources Narrative	24	The first paragraph under Land Ownership on page 24 states "... and Smokey Bear States Forests are also present in the watershed..." The ending "s" should be deleted from "States".		x		Y	Deleted "s" on "States"
24	Clarissa Spicer, DNR	Forests	53	The discussion of School Trust Lands is incorrect and implies that School Trust Lands are maintained in a protective state. School Trust Lands are managed by the DNR under constitutional and statutory mandates to generate revenue for Minnesota public schools while complying with the same environmental laws, permitting requirements, and resource protection standards that apply to other public lands. The DNR recommends placing the section on School Trust Land Conversion with a section titled Public Lands as follows: "Public lands in the region include a mix of ownership and managements types, each carrying different protective or operational mandates. County Tax-Forfeit lands are typically managed for multiple uses, including timber production, habitat, and public recreation. State-managed lands, such as Forestry-administered parcels and School Trust lands, are guided by statutory obligations that may prioritize revenue generation, long-term sustainability, or resource protection. Federal lands, including national forests and other federally administered areas, follow their own management frameworks and planning requirements. Maintaining healthy forestlands on the landscape is integral to maintaining a healthy watershed. Public land sales, transfers, and exchanges could potentially pose risks for the BFRW if lands are converted from forest or other natural cover to less permeable cover. These changes can alter watershed function and ecological integrity by fragmenting forests, increasing erosion risk, and disrupting hydrologic processes essential for protecting water quality. Monitoring and assessing high priority lands near sensitive or priority waters can help identify areas most vulnerable to conversion as real estate pressures increase. Protecting these lands-- when consistent with statutory obligations-- supports long-term ecological function, water quality, and resilient resource management."		x		Y	Updated "School Trust Land Conversion" to "Public Land Conversion" and added text suggested which maintains the same overall concern but gives more details and explanation of the School Trust Land Conversion and other public land's management. Separate descriptions added to forest fragmentation and riparian / shoreline development Revised "less permeable cover" to "loss of forest" Statement revised to: "Monitoring and assessment all lands near..."
25	Clarissa Spicer, DNR	Groundwater	78	At the end of the Introduction paragraph it is stated "Levels of arsenic higher than the DWSMA standard have been found in 9% of the 681 samples taken from wells." DWSMA's do not define or require any particular standards. Standards for drinking water, including the arsenic standard, are defined in Federal Regulations by the EPA and incorporated by reference by the MDH and apply to drinking water delivery systems. It would be more appropriate to replace "DWSMA standrd" with "drinking water standard."		x		Y	Updated to "Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) standards"
26	Clarissa Spicer, DNR	Lakes	31	A recent 2026 statewide evaluation of clean water implementation projects by DNR and BWSR staff (anticipated to be published this fall) found that water clarity increases were about 2 times more likely in lakes that exceeded a 5% phosphorous load reduction compared to lakes that did not. Water clarity increases were also more likely in deep lakes and in lakes where higher (i.e., 15%) phosphorus load reductions occurred. If you would like more information regarding this evaluation and how it can improve your efforts in the Big Fork River Watershed the DNR would gladly provide this to you.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
27	Clarissa Spicer, DNR	Lakes	31	The WHAF tool is also a valuable assessment approach to help understand watersheds as interconnected systems. Please look within the Explorer, Lakes, and Land Cover applications as well as other products as you work toward prioritization and meeting watershed management goals.			x	N	Thank you for your feedback and support.
28	Matt Gutzmann	Lakes	32	List of priority lakes, Ranier is not an LLBO priority and does not need to be blue.		x		Y	Made Ranier black in the list of priorities

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29	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	Executive Summary	8	Consider adding a sentence to relate this groundwater priority to the source of drinking water in the planning area and noting the necessity of protecting private and public well settings for supporting thriving communities.		x		Y	Statement revised to "Groundwater quality and sustainability need safeguarding for purposes of ecological benefits and human health, including protection of private and public wells for thriving communities"
30	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	Groundwater	78	The groundwater introduction references arsenic sample test results for drinking water wells at the time of construction (page 78). A DWSMA standard is referenced, but this should be revised to reference Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) standards. Our initial priorities letter identifies 8.5% of 681 samples exceed this standard, which is consistent with the 9% reference used in the plan narrative. The Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategies Report (GRAPS) available for the watershed notes that over 8% of 331 tested drinking water wells had arsenic levels exceeding the SDWA standard.		x		Y	Updated to "Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) standards"
31	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	LWRN	22	Bigfork should also be identified as having a delineated DWSMA. Added narrative should be considered to support the targeting of sensitive areas near the community of Big Falls for groundwater protection projects due to known impacts from past forest products treatment and storage operations.	x			Y	Added Bigfork DWSMA and added a paragraph explaining sensitive areas near Big Falls and prioritizing groundwater protection projects within the Big Falls area.
32	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	Groundwater	78	The Northome DWSMA should also be included as a protection priority with an assessed vulnerability of Moderate. This DWSMA straddles watersheds, with the majority being in the Upper and Lower Red Lake planning area, but a significant portion of the groundwater drinking water supply for this community has been found to come from the planning area. There are currently three DWSMAs in the planning area instead of the two referenced.		x		Y	Northome DWSMA added.
33	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	Groundwater	82	Consider adding DWSMA shapes and locations to this figure. If color highlighting of the community's name for the DWSMA is intended for identification, Big Falls should be included with the format selected for Northome and Bigfork.		X		Y	Map revised as recommended
34	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	Groundwater	83	The reference to two DWSMAs should be modified to identify three DWSMAs in the planning area, with Northome included with Big Falls and Bigfork.		x		Y	Corrected.
35	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	Groundwater	84	In addition to the actions identified in the WRAPS report, the GRAPS report was made available and presented during the planning process and will be relevant to the groundwater goals and issues. Consider referencing the GRAPS report for groundwater protection actions.		x		Y	GRAPS report was referenced
36	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	Plan Administration	104	In addition to referencing WRAPS and city wellhead protection planning as watershed-wide government collaborations, consider noting the GRAPS work. When GRAPS is added, consider adding it to the acronyms reference list.		x		Y	Added GRAPS to examples of collaborative programs in the watershed. GRAPS was added to Acronyms references
37	Daniel L. Disrud - MDH	Forests	51-57	Consider including logging operation water-safe BMPs in the Forests section themes and issues narrative. Secondary benefits to drinking water protection through managed land use dominated by forest conservation and harvest planning with industry partner engagement, should be acknowledged.				Y	"Extensive forest cover and harvest BMPs" added to intro paragraph
38	BWSR	Roles-paragraph below graphic	4	Nit--Jakob is not an elected official--appointed by Tribal Council-Might need two sentences.	x			Y	Added sentence clarifying Leech Lake representative is appointed by Tribal Council
39	BWSR	PC description	5	Same as above	x			Y	"An elected official or appointed representative"
40	BWSR	PC label	5	Decision mis-spelled		x		Y	Corrected
41	BWSR	Lakes Expert affiliations	6	Who is the TSA 8 staff?			x	N	TSA 8 staff is Mitch Brinks
42	BWSR	Forest resource topic	8	Water quality should be listed as a benefit of forest management		x		Y	Added Lakes and Streams icons to indicate water quality

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43	BWSR	paragraphs below "manage>know" graphic	11	Change non-competitive to formula based grants in the first sentence of the 2nd and 3rd paragraph		x		Y	Changed non-competitive to formula based grants
44	BWSR	Last Paragraph	11	First use of JPC--spell out			x	N	JPC is first used on page 4 and is spelled out.
45	BWSR	funding	12	~2M annual is about \$1.50 per acre per year. Don't need to put that anywhere but might be useful			x	N	Information noted.
46	BWSR	paragraph -first sentence	12	If Big Falls opted out, it's not the same group for implementation as it was for planning.				Y	Text revised: "Itasca County, Itasca SWCD, Koochiching County, Koochiching SWCD, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and City of Big Falls will adopt the plan after BWSR approval. Implementation will occur through a Joint Powers Collaborative (JPC) with Itasca County and SWCD, Koochiching County and SWCD and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe as members. Should other entities wish to join the implementation agreement and all parties agree, the implementation agreement can be revised at that time."
47	BWSR	2nd paragraph	13	Canadian Border-not Boarder		x		Y	Corrected.
48	BWSR	Tribal Reservation Lands and Management	15	Leech Lake not Leach Lake		x		Y	Corrected.
49	BWSR	1st paragraph under the maps-- 2nd sentence	21	should be "a" few impairments		x		Y	Corrected.
50	BWSR	First sentence	22	Could be "an effort" instead of "in efforts"--Nit		x		Y	Corrected.
51	BWSR	2nd paragraph alongside maps 2nd sentence	23	"species" not "specific"		x		Y	Corrected.
52	BWSR	Socioeconomic Information	23	Why use 2013 for the population estimate and 2020 census data further down?		x		Y	There wasn't watershed population data from the 2020 census, that number came from the 2013 MPCA Monitoring and Assessment Report as cited.
53	BWSR	Land ownership 2n sentence	24	"State Forest" instead of "States Forest"--also fewer acres not less acres		x		Y	Updated to "State Forest" and "fewer acres"
54	BWSR		26	Potentially useful factoid--"DNR classifies 82% of the lakes as outstanding"			x	N	Thank you for the information.
55	BWSR	Resource Prioritization- "Restore Lakes"	31	Maybe few projects rather than no projects. Erosion control keeps airborne-deposited mercury out of the system		x		Y	changed "no" to "few local projects that can be done to improve them."
56	BWSR	Lakes Implementation	37	Is there room to add an action item like "Explore implementing a shoreland program aimed at preventing degradation of shoreland vegetation to protect habitat and water quality" Or slide it into the ordinance category? Thinking ahead about leaving room for covenants. Or is that the shoreland protection initiative?				Y	Added as a new action item: "Explore implementing a voluntary shoreland program aimed at preventing degradation of shoreland vegetation to protect habitat and water quality through covenants, stewardship programs, etc." (Cost: \$10K, WBIF and Base)
57	BWSR	Table and header above photo- Forest Health	51	Add water quality				Y	Add "water quality" to forest health issue statement
58	BWSR	Table--Terrestrial Species Management	57	Do we need to think about how use of WBIF for this improves WQ? Seems like Baseline and Other is better. Any invasive species control using WBIF can come under Forest Health Management.				Y	Remove WBIF from TIS action as this is addressed in Forest Management action item
59	BWSR	Telling the Story- last sentence	62	..."involves block or back filling.....Blocking or a ditch block		x		Y	changed "block" to "blocking"
60	BWSR	DFC language	62	Change to "No net change in average annual discharge"		x		Y	Changed.
61	BWSR	Overlapping actions	64	Terrestrial species management--WBIF?		x		Y	Revised to "Baseline"

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62	BWSR	Introduction--3rd paragraph 2nd sentence	65	Consider removing the "things such as" wording.		x		Y	Removed.
63	BWSR	Priority Areas Map Label	67	2 colors on the map don't have a description		x		Y	Map revised as recommended
64	BWSR	Table-Stormwater Management Plans	70	Says Partner with Counties, but the cities are listed. Might need to delay the dots as well		x		Y	Updated to say "Partner with local LGUs for stormwater retrofit analysis and plans." Also added dots to extend timeline
65	BWSR	Construction Site BMPs	70	Not sure about listing WBIF for primarily a regulatory process				Y	Revised to "Baseline, Other"
66	BWSR	Last sentence on page	71	Review language. Not sure the two parts of the sentence match up.			x	N	Thank you for the comment.
67	BWSR	Priority Areas Map Label	82	2 colors on the map don't have a description		x		Y	Map revised as recommended
68	BWSR	Private Forest Management	87	2C Delegation?? Designation?		x		Y	Changed to "Classification"
69	BWSR	2nd paragraph 1st sentence	101	Big Falls?				Y	See Comment #46
70	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Acknowledgements		Misspelled name: Whitney Simms should be "Whitney Sims"		x		Y	Corrected to Sims
71	Koochiching SWCD- Madelyn Swanson	Acknowledgements		Incorrect organization: Dale Erickson is with "Koochiching County" not Koochiching SWCD		x		Y	Corrected to Koochiching County
72	Koochiching SWCD- Madelyn Swanson	Acknowledgements		Misspelled name: George Atchison should be "George Aitchison"		x		Y	Corrected spelling of Aitchison
73	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Acknowledgements		Alphabetize by last name?		x		Y	Alphabetized by last name
74	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Acknowledgements & Executive Summary	4	Group graphics different from page 4 group graphics		x		Y	Logos and graphics updated for consistency
75	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Acronyms		Alphabetize by acronym, switch order		x		Y	Alphabetized acronyms
76	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Executive Summary	5	Typo: Desicion should be "Decision"		x		Y	Changed to "Decision" in Figure 1.4
77	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Land & Water Resources Narrative	13	Typo: Canadian Boarder should be "Canadian Border"		x		Y	Changed to "Canadian Border"
78	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Land & Water Resources Narrative	15	Rearrange: wild rice lakes (manoomin) --> "wild rice (manoomin) lakes"		x		Y	changed to "wild rice (manoomin) lakes"
79	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Land & Water Resources Narrative	15	Typo: Leach Lake should be "Leech Lake"		x		Y	Changed "Leach" to "Leech"
80	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Land & Water Resources Narrative	18	Road labes (53 & 217) present without those roads visible in Figure 2.3		x		Y	Map revised as recommended
81	Koochiching SWCD- Madelyn Swanson	Land & Water Resources Narrative	23	Sought after specific in the watershed --> "sought after specifically ..."		x		Y	Changed to "species"
82	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Land & Water Resources Narrative	23	\$69,155 should be \$69,115 for Koochiching median income, and 66.2% should be 56.6% for unemployment rate		x		Y	Updated median income and unemployment rate for Koochiching County
83	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Forests	49/19	See land uses p. 19, different percentages		x		Y	Updated to calculated NLCD table from USGS so that both sections match.

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84	Koochiching SWCD- Mary-Jean Becker	Forests	49	Last two paragraphs repeated from p. 24	x			N	These two paragraphs summarize the paragraphs from p. 24 and are included so the section can operate independently for readers.
Public Hearing Comments									
	Jeff Hrubes, Board of Water and Soil Resources	General	N/A	Hrubes commented about his positive experience working with the planning group throughout this planning process noting the cohesiveness through the different committees as well as the public outreach and engagement that has contributed to the development of the plan. Hrubes thanked the policy committee, staff, and contributors to the planning efforts for their attention to detail, attention to the process and dedication for completing this comprehensive watershed management plan.			x	N	Comment noted with thanks.
	Cal Saari, Itasca SWCD and Policy Committee Chair	General	N/A	On behalf of the Policy Committee, expressed appreciation and gratitude to all who helped contribute and dedicate their efforts to developing this plan. Chair Saari noted Moriya Rufer and Rachel Olm from Houston Engineering, Inc as the consultants who organized and prepared the plan, Matt Gutzmann of Itasca SWCD for coordinating the planning efforts, and Chad Severt and Jeff Hrubes of BWRS for their dedication and guidance on the plan. Saari thanked everyone who contributed to the draft Big Fork River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.			x	N	Comment noted with thanks.



Big Fork River Watershed Policy Committee Meeting

September 23, 2026 | 10:00 a.m. | Marcell Family Center

Attendance

Policy Committee Members	Others in Attendance
Cal Saari, Itasca SWCD	Matt Gutzmann, Itasca SWCD
George Aitchison, Koochiching SWCD	*Andy Arens, Itasca SWCD
Dale Erickson, Koochiching County	Matt Picklo, Itasca SWCD
Jakob Sorensen, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	*Pam Tomevi, Koochiching SWCD
*Veronica Bistedeau, City of Big Falls	Jolen Simon, Koochiching SWCD
Tom Nelson, Itasca SWCD (Alternate)	James Aasen, Koochiching SWCD
	Whitney Sims, Koochiching County
	Josiah Johnson, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
	Rachel Olm, Houston Engineering, Inc
	Mitch Brinks, TSA8
	Lester Kachinske, Itasca WPIC
	Chad Severts, BWSR
	Jeff Hrubes, BWSR
	Richard Lacher, Citizen
	Sevon Simon, Citizen
	Rob Urish, Eagle Lake Assoc
	Karen Urish, Eagle Lake Assoc

* Virtual attendance

Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Chair Cal Saari. A quorum of five Policy Committee members was present.

1. Approval of Agenda

The Policy Committee reviewed the agenda. No additions were requested.

Motion: Dale Erickson moved to approve the agenda as presented.

Second: Jakob Sorensen.

Approved by all.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

The Committee reviewed the previous meeting minutes.



Motion: Jakob Sorensen moved to approve the minutes.

Second: Dale Erickson.

Approved by all.

3. Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan Overview

Rachel Olm of Houston Engineering provided an overview of the Big Fork River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, including:

- The planning process and community engagement.
- The role of the Policy, Steering, and Advisory Committees.
- Priority issues, goals, and actions identified for the watershed.
- Targeting of implementation efforts over the next 10 years.
- Formal review comments and revisions made to the draft plan.

The Committee also discussed previous Big Fork River monitoring and management work and the value of incorporating existing information into the watershed plan.

4. Public Hearing

Motion: Dale Erickson moved to open the public hearing.

Second: Jakob Sorensen.

Approved by all.

The public hearing was opened.

Jeff Hrubes, State of Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR): Hrubes commented about his positive experience working with the planning group throughout this planning process noting the cohesiveness through the different committees as well as the public outreach and engagement that has contributed to the development of the plan. Hrubes thanked the policy committee, staff, and contributors to the planning efforts for their attention to detail, attention to the process and dedication for completing this comprehensive watershed management plan.

Chair Cal Saari, on behalf of the Policy Committee, expressed appreciation and gratitude to all who helped contribute and dedicate their efforts to developing this plan. Chair Saari noted Moriya Rufer and Rachel Olm from Houston Engineering, Inc as the consultants who organized and prepared the plan, Matt Gutzmann of Itasca SWCD for coordinating the planning efforts, and Chad Severt and Jeff Hrubes of BWSR for their dedication and guidance on the plan. Saari thanked everyone who contributed to the draft Big Fork River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.



No members of the public provided formal comments.

5. Policy Committee Review of Draft Plan

The Committee discussed the revised draft plan and comments received during the formal review period. Gutzmann explained the Advisory Committee and Steering Committee reviewed the formal comments and the comment chart notes the responses for each comment. The current draft plan is supported by the Advisory Committee and the Steering Committee and includes the updates based on the formal comment review.

The Committee expressed support for moving the plan forward for local and tribal approval and subsequent state review.

Motion: Dale Erickson moved to approve the draft Big Fork River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan and move it forward for local and Tribal approval.

Second: Jakob Sorensen.

Roll Call Vote: George Aitchison – Yes; Jakob Sorensen – Yes; Dale Erickson – Yes; Veronica Bistodeau – Yes; Chair Cal Saari – Yes.

Approved unanimously.

6. Planning Grant Budget and Remaining Funds

The Committee reviewed the remaining planning grant funds and discussed potential uses to help prepare for implementation, including:

- City stormwater analysis.
- Improvements to the Forest Estimator for Runoff and Nutrients (FERN) forestry water-quality benefits tool.
- Drone imagery and hydrologic data collection.
- Lake action plans.
- Other information and data gathering to support future implementation.

These funds will be used for planning and information-gathering activities, as allowed by the planning grant, rather than on-the-ground implementation projects. The Itasca Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors will provide fiscal oversight and final approval.

Consensus: The Policy Committee supported moving forward with the proposed uses of the remaining planning funds within the identified funding limits.



7. Next Steps

The plan will proceed through local and Tribal approval in October, regional BWSR committee review in November, and state BWSR Board approval in December. Staff will continue developing the work plan and budget for implementation funding. Anticipated to receive first Biennium of Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) in spring 2027.

The next Policy Committee meeting was tentatively set for **Wednesday, February 24, 2027**, with the final location and time to be determined.

8. Adjournment

Motion: Dale Erickson moved to adjourn.

Approved by all.

The meeting adjourned at approximately **11:10 a.m.**