Upper Minnesota River Partnership
One Watershed, One Plan

Big Stone County Courthouse, Commissioners Room

Policy Committee Meeting Minutes
October 30, 2023
8:30 am to 9:00 am

Policy Committee Members present: Wade with Big Stone Co.; Larry with Swift Co.; Lon with BS SWCD; Doug with Traverse SWCD.; Kayla with Traverse Co.; and Scott with Swift SWCD

No members of the public were in attendance.

A motion was made by Scott, seconded by Kayla to approve the July meeting minutes.
Motion carried unanimously.

Vice-Chair Wade called the public hearing to order. Amber Doschadis with UMRWD and Drew Kessler with HEI gave a presentation on the plan. After the presentation, general discussion took place on goals of the plan, state involvement and conservation easements. Tracking plan goals and scoring of future projects was also discussed and staff will work on this structure at future meetings.

Vice-Chair Wade asked if there were any additional comments, hearing none the public comment period was closed.

A motion was made by Lon, seconded by Scott to submit the Upper Minnesota River Partnership's One Watershed, One Plan to BWSR, with incorporated comments from the 60-day comment period and today's public hearing.
Motion carried unanimously.

Drew, Doug from BWSR, and Amber gave an overview of the upcoming timeline. Amber will attend the BWSR Regional Meeting to present the plan, other LGU staff will attend as able.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:00 am.

Upper MN

Comment and Response Table: 10/30/2023

KEY

Material	Comments represent changes in material and content of the plan.
Editorial	Comments represent spelling, grammatical, clarification, or visual issues with graphics.
Note	Generally consist of an statement expressing an perspective.

Commenter	Comment #	Section	Page #	Comment	Material	Editorial	Note	Change needed	Change Made	Response
DNR	1	E	48, 52, 56, 59	As specified in the tables on pages 4, 26, and 35 of the draft plan, soil health and agricultural surface flow and drainage are watershed-wide high priority issues. But they are still labeled as medium priority issues in the planning region specific issues tables. Additionally, agricultural surface flow and drainage is listed in the issue table for the Upper Big Stone Lake planning region, but it's shortened to agricultural surface flow in the issues tables for the other planning region. Please correct these oversights.		X		Y		Soil health and ag surface flow and drainage changed to high priority. 'and drainge' added to issue description
DNR	2	General		Hydrology in the planning area has been substantially altered by diverse factors—namely changes in climate, land cover, and land use—in ways that markedly affect the quantity and quality of water moving across the landscape. The DNR priority issues letter, dated 4/11/2022, identified the primary drivers of these changes and opportunities to address adverse impacts now and in the future. Principal among our recommendations was to increase water storage and attenuate the flow of water on the landscape by implementing a combination of: soil health practices for croplands; working lands and prairie restoration initiatives to increase perennial vegetation coverage, especially native species; stream restoration, culvert and dam modification projects to enhance lateral (floodplain) and longitudinal (upstream-downstream) connectivity, reducing stream bed and bank erosion and increasing connectivity for fish and wildlife passage; and water storage practices that mitigate increased flows from public and private agricultural drainage projects In a planning area where few assessed waters fully support water quality goals, it is imperative to vigorously pursue opportunities to restore lands and waters and strengthen the resiliency of the watershed in the face of a changing climate that will likely exacerbate existing water quality impairments.			X	N		These actions are included in the targeted implementation schedule. Your comment has been passed on to the implementation partners.
DNR	3	General		Abundant opportunities exist across the planning area to protect and restore lands and waters, and the draft plan identifies many of the critical issues necessary to address existing impairments and increase watershed-scale resiliency. The planning area is largely dominated by corn and soybeans at present, and facilitating the watershed-wide implementation of soil health practices is rightfully a high priority goal of the draft plan, as is preserving and increasing lands with continuous vegetation coverage, including through perennial conservation easements, both have vast potential to substantially enhance soil infiltration and water holding capacity, storing precipitation where it falls and benefitting groundwater recharge.			X	N		Thank you for your comment

DNR	4	General		Storing water is integral to remediating existing and preventing future water quality impairments while also reducing flooding. The draft plan includes quantitative short-term and long-term goals to support water storage, with a targeted emphasis in the Upper Big Stone Lake and Stony Run planning regions. The DNR highly encourages prioritizing water storage projects that leverage natural features processes and demonstrate multiple benefits not only to water quantity and quality but also to aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, fish and wildlife species, and public and private infrastructure/property. Temporary storage via channels with well-connected floodplains and restored natural wetlands for long-term retention are preferred methods to achieve those objectives, especially when located in the upper part of the watershed. The proposed Whetstone River Restoration project is a prime example of such a multi-benefit project, as is the potential restoration of the channelized Minnesota River reach directly downstream of Big Stone Lake dam; the DNR appreciates the inclusion of these projects in the draft plan's capital improvement section.			X	N		Your comment has been passed on to implementation partners
DNR	5	Implementation		Perched and/or hydraulically undersized culverts and dams often impede the movement of fish and other aquatic organisms, denying access to essential spawning, feeding, and refuge areas. The removal and/or modification of structures that restrict longitudinal connectivity is a crucial element of the draft plan that would increase fish and wildlife access to critical habitats while reducing negative impacts to adjacent infrastructure and property. As specified in the capital improvement section of the draft plan, removal and/or modification of known fish barrier culverts in Hoss and Fish creeks and modification of Big Stone Lake and Long Tom dams are projects that would restore longitudinal connectivity. Utilizing existing culvert inventories, knowledge of road authority and area natural resource management staff, and expanded road-stream crossing assessments (e.g., DNR River Ecology Unit culvert inventory) are also necessary to comprehensively identify and mitigate barriers to fish and aquatic organism passage.			X	N		Your comment has been passed on to implementation partners
DNR	6	Implementation		In-channel erosion above normal background levels is a widespread issue affecting nearly all natural and altered channels in the planning area. Increasing frequency and duration of bankfull-plus flows can lead to substantial widening and downcutting, particularly in entrenched channels with limited lateral (floodplain) connectivity. This disconnection is often exacerbated and accelerated when channels are excavated and/or shortened (channelized), increasing slope and entrenchment. In planning regions where streambank stabilization projects are specified in the draft plan, the DNR recommends using a targeted, prioritized approach to identifying projects focused primarily on the following features: (1) public roadways and associated infrastructure (culverts, bridges); (2) buildings on public and private property, particularly residences; (3) public lands. When stabilization is necessary, the use of bioengineering methods—e.g., root wads, j-hooks, toe wood-sod mats, etc.— should be considered in lieu of or in combination with hard-armoring practices, such as riprap, that can have an unintended consequence of exacerbating downstream bank erosion.			X	N		Your comment has been passed on to implementation partners
DNR	7	General		Water level control structure projects in the planning area often focus on artificially reducing the natural runout elevation of landlocked basins in response to higher water levels. Such projects have regularly generated controversy among stakeholders and have long-term implications for the hydrology and ecology of these natural water features. A more engaged, collaborative approach utilizing the knowledge of private landowners and local government units combined with the scientific expertise of area natural resource managers could address immediate concerns while facilitating a long-term prioritized, targeted strategy. Collaboratively designed water level management plans that include temporary drawdowns to mimic natural wet/dry cycles could result in multiple-benefit projects that address both the impacts of high-water levels (e.g., private land, public roadway infrastructure) while promoting water storage, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and economic activity from outdoor recreation. The DNR appreciates the inclusion of an item to this effect in the capital improvement section of the draft plan and looks forward to future opportunities for collaboration with key stakeholders.			X	N		Thank you for your comment
DNR	8	Implementation	64	In a planning area where 99% of water quality pollutants are derived from non-point sources, numerous issues and goals in the draft plan correctly state that most impairments are driven by excess runoff. Maintaining the status quo regarding agricultural drainage without due consideration for vital water quantity and quality mitigation will not help improve aquatic life and/or recreation impairments for nearly all fully assessed waters in the planning area. Additionally, an item in the watershed-wide capital improvement table seeking to "repair, maintain, and improve legal drainage systems" would exacerbate existing impairments. We ask that this item be removed from the draft plan and that the county drainage authority and watershed district, as regulators, work to ensure that agricultural drainage projects mitigate increased flows and water quality pollutants by requiring offsetting water storage practices when drainage projects are approved.	X			Y		Add language to expand CP-2. Connect language to broader benefits on legal drainage systems.

BWSR	9	Implementation		We appreciate that the group has identified a tiered implementation based on funding levels. Identifying efficiencies using known funds when compared to the total amount needed is valuable information in determining necessary funding allocations.			X	N		
BWSR	10	TOC		List Appendices in the Table of Contents and title the actual title pages of each appendix. (“Appendix A – MOA/Planning Agreement”, Appendix B – “Initial Comments”, Appendix C – “XXXXXXXX”, etc.)		X		Y		Appendices added to the TOC
BWSR	11	Executive Summary	3	Figure A-2 (page 3) – Outlines the priority issue categories and lists 9 separate issues to be addressed in the plan; three high priority issues and six medium-high priority issues. The “medium-high” Issues table (Table A-2; pgs. 5-6) has five issues listed – there appears to be some sort of consolidation? Or are we missing an issue? Make note of consolidation of issues in the narrative.		X		Y		Figure A2 edited to say 5 medium high priority issues and 5 low priority issues
BWSR	12	Executive Summary	6	Would be easier to compare issues and measurable goals if the measurable goal column in Table “A3” (pgs. 6-7) were ordered the same as the issue column of Tables A1 and A2; also, there appears to be another consolidation – now down to 7 measurable goals. Make note of the consolidation of issues in the narrative.		X		Y		Swapped the 2nd and 3rd row so that the goal order is the same as the order in the issue tables. There are 7 goals because water storage includes both agricultural surface flow and drainage and loss of water storage. Text on their combination is included in Section 4, and Table A3 shows their consolidation thorugh parentheses.
BWSR	13	Executive Summary	4	Relate the “Resource Category” column icon and description of Tables A1 and A2 and reference the narrative on page 22 for details of each category.	X			Y		Added text to page 3 that says 'Resource categories include groundwater, habitat, land stewardship, and surface water. Refer to Section C for details of each category.'
BWSR	14	Goals	37	Multiple places (Table A3 and Goals Section of plan, pgs. 37-43) where there was inconsistent labeling of watershed wide or planning region goals – either clarify if the goal is watershed wide or regional and list the specific name of sub-shed for all goals or don’t name them - no need to list both priority area goals as well as watershed wide goals. Some of the short-term goals specifically call out the planning region by name and others just say “both planning areas” – list them out.	X			Y		Additional column added to table A3 which says the goal is either watershed-wide or lists the planning regions for the goal. Name of planning regions specified in text for goals.
BWSR	15	LWRN	10	Page 10 – Figure B1 – May be worth noting the portion of the watershed area in Minnesota as a percentage of the whole and that the North Dakota and South Dakota portion, by and large, contribute independently to the Minnesota River than the portion this plan covers.	X			Y		784 sq miles of total watershed area' in paragraph 2 changed to percent of the total watershed area. Sentence added: 'The North and South Dakota portion of the HUC 08 watershed contributes water to the Minnesota River independently of the Minnesota portion of the watershed.'
BWSR	16	Issues	23	Page 23 – Committee Ranking Section – Reference Appendix “C” somewhere.		X		Y		Added: 'See Appendix C for the full ranking table.'
BWSR	17	Goals	6	Pages 35, 36 – Table D1 – Suggest: Goal Scale Column – Color scheme added to Table A3 as it is in D1	X			Y		Goal scale column added to table A3 and colored to match D1
BWSR	18	Goals	37-43	Pages 37-43 – Individual Goals – Specify planning region names where specific priority areas exist and split out goal values for each planning region where applicable.		X		Y		Planning regions named in each relevant goal. Goal value already the number per planning region, not the total.
BWSR	19	Goals	42	Pages 42 and 43 – “Groundwater Quantity Protection” Goal and “Groundwater Quality/Protection of Private Wells and Public Water Supplies” – Noting 1500 acres used for the GW quantity; (short term goal). Should this be the two priority areas listed or the Upper Big Stone Lake area only (the only planning area that references work to be done in the implementation section)? 1500 acres covering quality and quantity or 1500 acres for each?		X		Y		1500 acres of practices is the goal for Big Stone Lake- that applies to both quality and quantity goals. Groundwater goals should say 1 priority planning region, this is amended.
BWSR	20	Goals	42	Pages 42 and 43 - List practices used to accomplish groundwater goals specific to quantity and specific to quality	X			Y		Add list of practices in each description. A clarification will be added to make sure that it is clear that they are two separate goals.
BWSR	21	Goals	34	General Goal Comment – some sort of reference to phosphorus and nitrogen (nutrient) goals shall be incorporated in current goals sections given the Big Stone Lake reduction values in the TMDL/WRAPS – Perhaps a conversion factor from the acres treated as was done with the sediment (tons and pounds reductions)	X			Y		A short-term nutrient goal will be added for the erosion and sediment goals. This goal will be consistent with the sediment goal and alligned with information from the WRAPS/TMDL.
BWSR	22	Implementation	50	Page 50, 54 – Table E4, E7 – “Erosion and Sediment” row – “Indicator” column – expand on how goals translate into tracking implementation. “PTMapp used to estimate lbs. and tons based on acres treated to track pace of progress toward goal.	X			Y		Rephrased as suggested
BWSR	23	Implementation	50	Page 50, 54 – Table E4, E7 – “Streambank Erosion” row – “Indicator” column – Comment: Does number of restorations let us know acres treated or reduction rates for pace of project somehow? Afterall, these projects can vary so much in size.			X	N		The goal is to have 5 projects, so the number is what will be tracked for assessment purposes. However, implementation partners will be responsible for information on each project which would include any load redctions associated with the project.
BWSR	24	Implementation	51,55,56	Page 51, 55, 62 – Table E5, E8, E14 – “Progress Toward Goal” column – reference table E4, E7, E13 and relate indicators to acres in E4, E7, E13		X		Y		Added 'See indicator column in Table X' to the progress towards goal heading.
BWSR	25	Programs	75	Page 75 – Table F3 – Swift County – Fill in the blanks for the CLMP		X				Will update if found otherwise not available

BWSR	26	Admin	83	Page 83-84 – Water Management District – Eliminate the 8-step process to create an WMD and reference the external BWSR document. The process is separate from planning but certain actions of the plan are a part of the method to accomplish some of the procedure to create a Watershed Management District.	X			Y		Edited to align with comment
BWSR	27	Admin		Be more clear that this plan is establishing a WMD.	X			Y		Added the following: 'The watershed district will establish a WMD to help with plan implementation.'
BWSR	28	Admin		The plan language is inconsistent on amendments. Page 84 indicates the UMRWD may create different WMDs under future plan amendments. Page 87 indicates plan amendments may be proposed by any agency, person, local government, the plan amendment process shall be initiated by the Policy Committee. Please clarify the amendment process and be consistent in both locations	X			Y		Will Clarify language. After performing revisions to this section, BWSR staff will be consulted or consistency with plan content and guidance documents
MPCA	29	General		The planning effort was responsive to the MPCA's priorities, concerns, and comments throughout the planning process. The Steering Committee has already incorporated many of the MPCA's comments and revisions as part of the Plan. The MPCA is appreciative that the Watershed Approach documents (Monitoring and Assessment, Stressor Identification, Total Maximum Daily Loads [TMDLs] and Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy [WRAPS]) were utilized in this process.			X	N		Thanks for your comment
MPCA	30	General		The MPCA supports the Plan's efforts towards working to correct water quality impairments. Further understanding of water quality conditions will be forthcoming as the MPCA and its partners complete a second round of monitoring and assessment, stressor identification, and WRAPS report updates. The planning for these updates will start in 2024.			X	N		Thanks for your comment
MPCA	31	LWRN?	15	The MPCA appreciates the inclusion of environmental justice areas of concern. The map produced by the MPCA of environmental justice areas of concern has recently been updated and now includes more areas of the planning region for people in poverty. The MPCA recommends updating the language to include the additional areas as well as including a definition of the poverty level for these purposes. Information about these areas is found at https://mpca.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f5bf57c8dac24404b7f8ef1717f57d00	X			Y		EJ areas updated and a definition of the MPCA poverty level is included.
MDA	32	LWRN	18	second paragrph: The Milan Wellhead Protection Area, or Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA), is in the Chippewa River Watershed. Please remove Milan from the third sentence.		X		Y		Milan deleted.
MDA	33	LWRN	32	This section mentions agricultural irrigation in the watershed, noting 82 active agricultural irrigation permits in the watershed. If available, it could be useful to note if the amount of agricultural irrigation permits has been increasing, or staying the same, over time. Based on the results of research by the University of Minnesota, the irrigated acres could provide new outreach or education opportunities to implement other goals associated with this comprehensive watershed plan. (Soil health, Groundwater Quality/Protection of Private Wells and Public Water Supplies, and Groundwater Quantity protection) For reference, there is significant new irrigation-based research related to variable rate applications, reduced irrigation rates, cover crops, perennial cover, as well as nitrogen use and water quality impacts. Although this research is not being completed in the watershed, the information should be relevant and informative to share in areas where agriculture irrigation is active. See the links below for more information. o U of M Irrigation: https://extension.umn.edu/soil-and-water/irrigation o Pope county SWCD - Rosholt Farm: www.mda.state.mn.us/rosholtfarm	X			Y		Request information for DNR to see if comment can be satisfied.
MDA	34	Programs	82, Table G3	Implementation programs and related funding sources for the UMRW watershed. Next to MDA, please add: Soil Health Financial Assistance Program Grant. • This is a new program that could be a valuable option for supporting landowners in the watershed with financial assistance for soil health equipment and to help meet the Soil Health acreage goals. https://www.mda.state.mn.us/soil-health-grant	X			Y		Soil Health Grant added to the table
MDA	35			Research, demonstration, and monitoring results to assist in implementation: The MDA maintains a variety of water quality programs including research, demonstration, as well as ground and surface water monitoring. Our goal is to provide you with the data to help address resource concerns and further engage the agricultural community in watershed implementation efforts. Please refer to the MDA's priority concerns letter for more information on MDA's water quality, research, and on-farm programs that may be of assistance in the future.			X	N		Thank you, MDA priority concern letter included in the appendix so planning partners can reference it
MDH	36	Executive Summary	7, Table A3	Table A3, Page 7 lists short term groundwater goals acreage that does not match other sections in the plan.	X			Y		3000 changed to 1500

MDH	37	LWRN	18	delete Milan from list of wellhead protection areas in this watershed.		X		Y		Milan deleted.
MDH	38	Implementation	67	Table E19, Page 67 includes an action to hold workshops on private well testing. MDH recommends the following wording change to the action: Make information available to private well users about local drinking water quality and well testing. Host a well testing clinic or provide resources to well users to have their water tested for: ▪ Coliform Bacteria (every year) ▪ Nitrate (every other year) ▪ Arsenic (at least once) ▪ Lead (at least once) ▪ Manganese (at least once)		X		Y		Action edited as suggested.
Public Hearing	39	NA	NA	During the public hearing, a general discussion occurred around authorities for land aquisition during plan implementation. It was communicated that the plan itself doesn't change the authorities of local governments in this regard. In addition, there was discussion around the desire to be able to document the benefits of conservation practices that are adopted by landowners without utilizing cost-share dollars from 1W1P. No other comments on the plan were provided during the public hearing			x			