

Minutes- Approved:4.15.2026
 Meeting Type: Board Meeting
 Time/Date: 7:00pm CST, March 18, 2026
 Location: County Board Room, Carver County Government Center, 602 East 4th Street, Chaska, MN 55318
 Virtual Location: [Teams Meeting](#) | [Transcript](#)



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER
 WATERSHED DISTRICT

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

President Barisonzi called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM CST.

Managers Present: Joseph Barisonzi, Vinatha Viswanathan, Kyle Bakkum

Staff Present: Will Lytle, Della Young, John Kolb, Damaris Canales

Others Present: Lori Cox, Nick Koktavy, Roger Clay, Joe Barten, Beverly Burnett, Lindsey Albright (Dakota SWCD), Shelby Roberts (Scott SWCD)

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| Action: Approval of the 3.18.26 Borad Meeting Agenda. | | | | | | | | | |
| 1st: | | 2nd: | | | | | | | |
| Vis. | Y | Bak. | Y | Bar. | Y | | | | |
| Motion Carried | | | | | | | | | |

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

During the public comment period of the meeting, after no online participants came forward, the chair invited Lori Cox to speak, a member of the BWSR board; though she emphasized that she was speaking strictly in her capacity as a resident and not as an official representative. She outlined her background in watershed and environmental governance, noting her prior six years on the Carver County WMO Citizen Advisory Group, her current role on the Clean Up the River Environment board, and her residence in Dahlgren Township in Carver County.

Cox explained that while reviewing the meeting agenda, she was unsettled by a letter dated March 2, 2026, that was embedded in the materials and addressed to BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke. The letter referenced three county commissioners, including one from her own county. Although Cox acknowledged that any citizen or official has the right to write to a public agency, she expressed concern that the letter appeared to touch on a matter squarely within BWSR’s authority potential watershed district boundary changes without following what she understood to be the appropriate process. She described the letter as notably vague, lacking any clear recommendation, explanation of hardship, or indication that circumstances had significantly changed for one or more of the involved counties.

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Drawing on her past service on the BWSR board, Cox said she would have expected documentation showing serious problems or failed efforts at resolution before such an issue was elevated to BWSR. She noted that Minnesota statute 103D.251 governs watershed district boundary changes and spells out a detailed, formal process. In her view, that process is lengthy, deliberate, and requires substantial justification, public involvement, and intergovernmental coordination. Because of this, the brevity and lack of specificity in the letter struck her as something unusual and troubling.

Cox also referenced the broader political and fiscal climate in Minnesota, particularly heightened sensitivity around the use of tax dollars. She suggested it would be difficult, controversial, and resource-intensive for three counties to attempt to redirect or restructure watershed governance without a compelling and well-documented reason. Such an effort, she noted, could involve reallocating staff, time, and funding, making transparency and clear justification essential. She concluded by saying that, as a resident and public member, the letter left her uneasy and prompted her to formally register her concern, while thanking the board for allowing her to speak.

Following her remarks, Barisonzi asked whether she was responding as a board member or a resident, and Cox reaffirmed that she was speaking only as a resident. He then asked whether, based on her experience in governance, she would normally expect there to be a documented history of communication and attempts at resolution between counties and the watershed district before escalating concerns to BWSR. Cox responded that this was precisely what she found missing from the letter; there was no indication of hardship or efforts that had failed. To close the discussion, staff noted that one commissioner does engage virtually, and Barisonzi then added that Scott County had been invited to attend the meeting to discuss its concerns but declined the invitation.

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS, PRESENTATIONS, COMMUNICATIONS

The discussion transitions into presentations, beginning with updates from partner Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). Barisonzi introduces the first presentation as the annual

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Scott County SWCD monitoring report, noting that while the board will later be asked to approve a proposed work plan tied to this effort, the purpose of the presentation at this point is informational. He emphasizes that the monitoring reflects a long-standing partnership and commitment between the watershed organization and the Scott County Soil and Water Conservation District to collect, analyze, and share water resource data over time.

The Scott County presentation is delivered by Shelby Roberts, who introduces herself as a seven-year employee of Scott County SWCD and the head of its water quality program for the past three years. She notes that this is her second time presenting to the board and initially assumes general familiarity with the Eagle Creek watershed. Barisonzi and other board members interject to clarify that the current board includes several new managers who were not present for earlier presentations, and they request that Roberts provide a more detailed background than usual. Roberts responds positively to this request, stating that she will spend additional time on the introductory slides and encourages board members to ask questions throughout, framing the presentation as a dialogue rather than a one-way report.

Roberts explains that the monitoring results she is presenting are approximately 95 percent complete. She notes that one data component stream discharge data for Eagle Creek is still pending from the Metropolitan Council and is expected within the next few weeks. She assures the board that once all data are received and reviewed internally, they will be compiled into a formal written report, which will be brought back to the board for review after approval from Scott County SWCD leadership, likely in April. This clarification sets expectations about data completeness and the timeline for final documentation.

She then provides a structured overview of the monitoring program, explaining that all results relate to the Eagle Creek watershed, located along the Shakopee–Savage boundary near Highway 13 and discharging into the Minnesota River within the northern portion of the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District. Roberts outlines three major areas of work: thermal monitoring of the stream, basic physical and chemical water quality monitoring, and groundwater well monitoring within the Savage Fen ecosystem. She notes that additional context will be given for newer board members, so they understand both the geographic setting and the ecological importance of the monitoring locations.

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Later in the meeting, discussion turns to coordination and follow-up related to Dakota County SWCD, presented by Lindsey Albright. She begins clarifying that her role with the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District focuses exclusively on fen monitoring through a federally supported monitoring program, and she thanks the board for the opportunity to provide an update.

Albright explains that Dakota County SWCD currently monitors 28 groundwater wells across three fen systems on behalf of the district. These include Quarry Island Fen (formerly Gun Club Lake North) with two wells, Fort Snelling Fen (formerly Gun Club Lake South) with thirteen wells, and Nichols Fen with thirteen wells. She provides historical context, noting that 2025 marked the 18th year of monitoring, which originally began in 2007, paused briefly in 2014, resumed in 2015, and has continued annually through 2026. Monitoring occurs monthly from March through December, approximately every 30 days, with adjustments made only for unsafe weather conditions such as lightning or blizzards.

She describes the purpose and consistency of the monitoring effort, emphasizing that while weather can affect scheduling, maintaining a regular data collection cycle is a priority. Albright provides geographical context for the fen locations and transitions into a discussion of monitoring trends. She reports that, compared to data from five or six years earlier, recent years are showing clearer patterns and stabilization. At Nichols Fen and Quarry Island Fen, trends are beginning to emerge, including increasing or decreasing but increasingly predictable water levels. At Fort Snelling Fen, water levels remain largely stable, which she characterizes as a positive outcome.

Albright summarizes key conclusions from the monitoring data, stating that continued long-term monitoring remains essential to strengthen the data record and improve understanding of fen hydrology. She outlines management considerations going forward, highlighting the importance of data sharing with partners such as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Metropolitan Council. She references a recent multi-partner meeting that brought together various agencies to review findings, exchange ideas, and coordinate efforts, noting that these collaborative discussions have increased frequency and value over the past several years.

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She further explains the complementary relationship between continuous monitoring conducted by partners and the discrete, field-based monitoring performed by Dakota County SWCD. Albright notes that Metropolitan Council staff often contact her to help verify or cross-check well data while she is already in the field, illustrating the strong, practical partnership between organizations. She emphasizes that this coordination allows data validation without duplicating effort or increasing costs, strengthening confidence in the monitoring results.

Albright concludes by reaffirming Dakota County SWCD's commitment to supporting the district's Fen Management Plan and related studies. She expresses her organization's willingness to continue collecting data, sharing expertise, and serving as a technical and advocacy partner for fen protection.

Staff emphasizes that while the board sees summarized results, much of the most valuable work happens behind the scenes, where monitoring data immediately informs hypotheses, discussions, and on-the-ground implementation decisions related to land use, septic systems, and water quality concerns such as E. coli. This also reflects how fen protection has evolved into a district priority over the past decade. Initially not central to the district's work, fens gained prominence through watershed management planning and increased coordination with the DNR and counties. Staff highlights growing public interest, including outreach from high school and college students eager to develop projects related to fen protection. This unexpected level of engagement is presented as a positive outcome of long-term planning, even as it introduces new challenges and conversations.

Albright mentions that she also has information on education initiatives conducted with the district; Barisonzi suggests postponing that discussion. The board expresses interest in revisiting education partnerships in a future session, particularly to explore how Dakota County's work could be leveraged across other counties. Albright agrees to follow up with staff to schedule a future presentation.

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4.CONSENT AGENDA

In this portion of the meeting, Barisonzi transitions the board to consideration of the consent agenda. He first requests that the Scott County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) work plan be removed from the consent agenda so it can be discussed independently. This action results in an amended consent agenda that excludes the Scott County SWCD work plan item.

Following the removal of that item, Barisonzi asks for a motion to act on the remaining items on the consent agenda, as amended. A motion is made to place the rest of the consent agenda before the board for approval. He states that there is unanimous support for the amended consent agenda, completing the consent agenda action while leaving the Scott County SWCD work plan to be addressed separately later in the meeting.

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| Action: Remove the Scott County SWCD Work Plan topic from section 4. Consent Agenda | | | | | | | | | |
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| Bak. | Y | Vis. | Y | Bar. | Y | | | | |
| Motion Carried | | | | | | | | | |

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| Action: Approve the remaining items on the amended section 4. Consent Agenda | | | | | | | | | |
| 1st: | | 2nd: | | | | | | | |
| Vis. | Y | Bak. | Y | Bar. | Y | | | | |
| Motion Carried | | | | | | | | | |

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5. ACTION ITEMS

The meeting proceeds into the action items portion of the meeting, beginning with approval of accounts payable. Barisonzi calls for a motion to approve the accounts payable as presented by staff for the month of March, thereby placing the action item squarely on the floor for consideration. Lytle clarifies that the accounts' payable review had already occurred at the Finance Committee level, but that committee did not formally vote to recommend approval, making this full board review necessary as more than a procedural formality.

Barisonzi then draws attention to a significant expenditure within the accounts payable specifically for a line item associated with Area 3, which represents a substantial portion of overall spending. Lytle then explains that the Area 3 project is nearing substantial completion, with the core physical infrastructure being finished. Remaining work has been delayed due to seasonal road restrictions and elevated river levels related to spring thaw, requiring a no-cost project extension. The remaining scope involves final site work such as chinking, planting, and cleanup, anticipated to resume in approximately one month.

He further explains the financial timing pressures associated with the project. Approval of the accounts payable is necessary to allow submission for state reimbursement tied to previously appropriated funds, which in turn is critical to meeting upcoming payment obligations. Although cash flow is tight, it is indicated that the state has expressed confidence that reimbursement will be received within the needed timeframe.

Following this action, the meeting moves to broader governance considerations. It is emphasized the importance of ensuring that all partners and levels of government fully understand the district's activities, suggesting that formal acknowledgments or signatures from commissioners may be necessary to maintain transparency and alignment. Barisonzi connects this comment to earlier public input in the meeting, noting that clear communication up and down the chain of command is especially important given heightened scrutiny and intergovernmental sensitivities.

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| Action: Conditional approval of the Minnesota Beaver Pond Repair Project may continue, subject to the receipt and subsequent review of the materials identified in the Technical Memorandum dated 3.11.26, which includes a comprehensive list of required documentation. | | | | | | | | | |
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| Bak. | Y | Vin. | Y | Bar. | Y | | | | |
| Motion Carried | | | | | | | | | |

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| Action: To approve the permit renewals for those identified in the technical Miranda for March 2026 permit renewals. | | | | | | | | | |
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| Bak. | Y | Vin. | Y | Bar. | Y | | | | |
| Motion Carried | | | | | | | | | |

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| Action: To approve the execution of this agreement, contingent upon notification to the Scott County Board of Commissioners. | | | | | | | | | |
| 1st: | | 2nd: | | | | | | | |
| Bak. | Y | Vin. | Y | Bar. | Y | | | | |
| Motion Carried | | | | | | | | | |

6. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

During this portion of the meeting, Barisonzi invites Lytle to provide updates covering the Treasurer’s report, permitting activity, and project reviews. The discussion quickly broadens into a higher-level update on recent inter-county discussions involving Scott, Dakota, and Carver counties. The initial conversations occurred without the district’s direct participation but centered on a shared belief among the counties that governance of the Minnesota River needs to be more comprehensive and rooted in basin-wide fundamentals. The group is informed that this perspective aligns strongly with priorities the district has been advocating for over more than a decade.

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Barisonzi emphasizes that while there is strong conceptual alignment around the need for basin-scale governance and planning, there are multiple ideas and differing viewpoints on how such governance should be structured and implemented. As a result, he suggests that the board would benefit from a dedicated learning session focused on the history of comprehensive planning and regional governance along the Minnesota River. The proposal includes inviting staff and commissioners from four to five counties, specifically asking that Ramsey County be included, to better understand why a unified river-basin governance structure does not currently exist. Barisonzi underscores that there are both historical and foundational reasons for this gap, as well as significant funding considerations that have shaped past decisions.

Lytle responds by explaining that the materials currently in the administrative packet represent only a portion of the broader information available. Additional communications and documentation began arriving recently from sources the staff had not initially anticipated, indicating that momentum around the governance discussion is building. Lytle agrees that the information needs to be organized and presented coherently, and the board expresses support for turning this into a structured project or learning initiative rather than allowing related information to remain fragmented.

The conversation turns towards the potential role of the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC). Barisonzi suggests that the CAC could help coordinate and support this broader governance discussion, given its advisory role and ability to reflect community perspectives. It is shared that the CAC is actively recruiting members from both upstream and downstream areas, reinforcing that the issues facing the Minnesota River extend well beyond the district's boundaries. Lytle adds that existing documents show the region is not starting from scratch, as numerous governance options and stakeholder perspectives have already been studied, and that this moment represents an opportunity to build on prior work rather than restart it.

He then provides several calendar updates and announcements. An upcoming CAC open house is scheduled for early April at the district's location, intended for new members or interested groups. Board members are encouraged to attend, bring guests, or nominate individuals who may be interested in civic engagement. It is clarified that CAC membership is not limited to district residents and has no age requirement, broadening opportunities for participation. He

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also notes that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) will be hosting a public webinar related to a major report, which is open for attendance by board members and the public.

Before closing the administrative reports, Barisonzi adds two additional items. First, the district and CAC are co-sponsoring an Envirothon event scheduled for that Saturday at the Minnesota Valley Chapter of the Isaac Walton League. The chair highlights that this is the first invitational Envirothon of its kind in the country, notes that a board manager will serve as a judge and extends an open invitation to attend. Second, he reminds the board that the district voted the previous month to support a Savage Bend–themed educational puzzle currently being promoted via Kickstarter. The situation was likened to a puzzle that includes interactive elements distinguishing native species from invasive ones and is intended as a creative outreach tool to broaden awareness of the Savage Bend ecosystem. Barisonzi encourages members to support the project as a way to share the ecological story with a wider audience.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM CST.