



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Agenda Item

Item 4. A. – Report from Scott Sparlin on Water Storage Activities

Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

Summary

At the February 21, 2024, meeting of the Lower Minnesota River Board of Managers, the Board agreed to authorize matching contributions to the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River. The Board authorized \$10,000 over 2024 and 2025 (\$5,000 per year) to the Coalition to continue its work to secure funding for water Storage projects in the Minnesota River Basin. The Board requested that the Coalition make periodic progress reports to the Board.

Mr. Scott Sparling from the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River will be at the October 9, 2024, Board of Managers meeting to make his report to the Board on progress so far. Mr. Sparlin has provided the following

An agreement between the LMRWD and the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River has been drafted and is currently under review by President Barisonzi.

As a side note, a basin-wide Minnesota River Water Management Organization is not a new idea. There is a long history of efforts to form a basin-wide water management organization, with the Minnesota River Basin Board being formed in 1995. This Board disbanded in 2013 and made recommendations to the legislature that were never addressed. LMRWD tried throughout several legislative sessions to persuade the legislature to act and address the recommendations made. The LMRWD carried legislation several sessions to reform a basin-wide Water Management Board. The recommendation of the MN River Board is attached. There was a significant amount of opposition to the basin-wide approach in the past.

Attachments

LMRWD Matching Funds Statement

Water Storage Initiative Actions

Invoice from Coalition for a Clean MN River

Water Storage Initiative signed endorsements

MN River Management Board Structure

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MN River Management Board Operations

Watershed Initiative Budget

Minnesota River Management Board (the need)

Minnesota River Board Recommendation on Future Basin-Level Coordination and Funding

Recommended Action

Motion to Receive and file report and to authorize payment as requested.

Matching Funds Statement

To: Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD)

From: The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR)

These funds were given specifically designated for our Water Storage Initiative only and were solicited as being matched and accepted under those circumstances.

Nicollet Conservation Club \$3000

New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen \$1000

CCMR membership matching appeal \$1750

Izaak Walton League Gopher State Chapter \$750

Geri Nelson \$500

Paul Davis \$500

Total matching funds raised as of 10/1/24 \$7500

Water Storage Initiative Related Activities, Actions, Results Report

Scott Sparlin, Ex. Dir. The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River, Facilitator/Coordinator,
The Minnesota River Congress

- Engage Minnesota's Congressional Delegation to obtain blocks of federal funding to add to the State's Water Storage Program. This strategy will be measured by the amount of federal dollars received.

I spoke in person to both Minnesota Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith who are both members of the U.S. Senate AG Committee. The focus was on our new Water Storage Program which both had been aware of and I hand delivered letters urging them to advocate for approval of a 22-million-dollar funding proposal from the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR) to USDA/USFWS Rural Conservation Partners (RCPP) Program. Both Senators staff were knowledgeable and aware of the program as well. I also spoke in person to U.S. Representatives from Minnesota Brad Finstad and Angie Craig about the Minnesota Water Storage Program and urged them to advocate for the same proposal and to speak with decision makers at USDA within the RCPP program. I followed up with both staffs and they said they made calls.

- Engage local officials, SWCDs, Watershed Districts, Cities, Landowners, and Joint Powers Organizations, to identify potential projects to be funded by the State's Water Storage Program. This strategy will be measured by the number of new projects identified and that apply for funds. Additionally, the number of landowners/producers who apply for and receive grants from the Water Storage Initiative and/or the Soil Health Program can be measured.

In FY 2023 there were a total of 6 applications to the storage program totaling 3.075 million dollars. 3 of the 6 applicants were totally funded.

In FY 2024 there has been a total of 18 applications to the storage program totaling 9 million dollars. 9 of the 18 applications were funded representing a 3-fold increase in interest and implementation. This represents a significant need for increased funding to meet the desire of landowners and producers who want to participate in the program. We/I feel the growing popularity of the program is due at least in part to our on-going awareness and education building efforts throughout the basin regarding what water storage is and how it benefits all of us. As an example, during 2024 we have brought in new cities and counties such as Sleepy Eye and Hennepin County to our initiative and network of water storage advocates. Articles have been written in newspapers and mentioned on radio every time we have added a city or county to our growing list of support for the initiative. As you will read in bullet point number 4 in this report, I have

engaged in numerous meetings and events that have had a focus of water and land management. At those I have shared information on the aspects of water storage and the availability of the program. I feel this has led to inquiries and project proposals as well. Being the driving force to establish the program in 2021 we remain committed to advocate for a substantial increase of appropriations of 50 million dollars per biennium to meet the demand for potential projects. I have met and will have multiple meetings to push for that dollar amount at the state level.

I have also had multiple and on-going contacts with BWSR Ex. Dir. John Jaschke and State Drainage Engineer Rita Weaver. The focus of those conversations were and continues to be on the various aspects of the program with regards to increasing desirability, interest and participation in it.

I created the following press release announcing the federal funding that is now available and sent it to all outlets and targeted all of our agricultural contacts as well as SWCD's and other soil management organizations.

For Immediate Release

Contact: Scott Sparlin

Ex. Dir. The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR)

507 276 2280 sesparlin@gmail.com

<http://mnrivercongress.org>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services Regional Conservation Partnership Program 2023 Awarded Projects

This year, more than \$1 billion is being invested to advance partner-driven solutions to conservation on agricultural land through 81 projects nationally.

Together with the 2023 allocation of 17 Million dollars to the newly created **Minnesota River and Upper Mississippi River in Minnesota Water Storage Program**, it creates a 42-million-dollar pot that begins to address water quantity and quality challenges that currently exist in the watersheds.

[Advancing Soil Health in Minnesota Agriculture](#)

Through this project the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil resource will focus on near-channel erosion, which is the largest source of sediment to the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, and upland erosion on tilled fields, which is the second largest source of sediment. This project will reduce pounds of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment that runoff into the watershed

Lead Partner: Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Project Type: AFA

Funding Pool: S/M

CCA (if Applicable): N/A

Lead State: MN

Total Funding Request Awarded: \$25,000,000.00

The Advancing Soil Health in Minnesota Agriculture project will provide financial assistance to producers for on-the-ground soil health management practices and systems.

I do not have figures from soil health initiatives at this time, but there are emerging strategies that are being implemented to increase adoption of cover crops, tillage practices and other soil health best management practices which will increase the biological integrity and water holding capacity of the top 6 to 12 inches of soil. Thus reducing the need for additional fertilization and other inputs to produce crops.

- Engage potential applicants to participate in other projects that have water storage potential as a by-product of non-specific water storage projects. This strategy would be measured by the number of non-specific water storage projects.

I attended the Sibley County Shallow Lakes tour on August 14th. On the tour which included landowners/producers, MNDNR Regional Director and regional staff, Sibley County SWCD, staff from Ducks Unlimited and High Island Watershed District Managers. The focus was on 5 county shallow lakes which have had actions taken or were in various degrees of water quality restoration activities. Two of the lakes were recently created where formerly persistent wet areas of production agriculture had previously existed. Both of the sites were being expanded this year and had been converted into continuous natural cover for wildlife habitat. Both were projects undertaken initially by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in partnership with Ducks Unlimited. I spoke with the group about the new water storage program and potential for partnering and it was noted and followed up on. I told the tour that by-product water storage projects could in the future make all the parties expenditures go much farther. I spoke to the coordinating benefits in shared responsibly as well. The three lakes were all in various phases of drawdowns and

intensive fish management for water quality improvements. Silver Lake, Clear Lake, and High Island Lake all drain to the Minnesota River and when each lake has improved water quality so do the streams that drain from them, delivering better water to the main stem of the Minnesota.

I am currently working with MNDNR Regional Manager Scott Roemhildt to compile the data from recently completed, (within a year) and projects that are underway which have water storage as a by-product but were not planned around it having it be the focus of the outcome. It may be such things as an increase in acreage of an existing wildlife management project or particular species-specific habitat project or similar. It could also be where they are in partnership with particular game species organizations in obtaining and maintaining public access to new hunting, fishing or other related outdoor activities.

- Engage in public outreach and person to person meetings to increase awareness of water storage and direct outcomes. This strategy will be measured by the number of in-person or electronic meetings with individuals and record any direct outcomes related to those meetings.

I participated in the Cottonwood Middle Minnesota River Watershed “One Watershed One Plan” process which involved key citizens and stakeholders from six counties. Many of the attendees were SWCD staff, agricultural organizations, producer/farmers, Redwood Cottonwood Rivers Control Area joint powers board, city staff, and several other organizations. I continually brought up and pushed for the inclusion of water storage as a high priority for inclusion, most in attendance agreed which then in turn was written into the plan as such.

CCMR Board Members and I interacted, engaged and raised awareness to a cross section of over 100 diverse Mankato area citizens who were concerned with Minnesota River water quality at an event called the “State of the River Town Hall” at the Kato Ballroom March 23rd. There I contacted 6 separate individuals who farm corn and soybeans. I urged them to look into any circumstance they may have to store water on their property and made them aware of the new Water Storage Program. I also spoke with them about soil health and BMP’s which would facilitate bio-integrity. Several of them were not aware of the connection between healthy soil and its ability to hold water and at the same time not affect crop production. I also made them aware of the soil health programs that assisted in helping them to pay for and implement the necessary changes needed to accomplish greater soil health.

Representing CCMR at Gustavus Adolphus Eco Day in St. Peter, I raised awareness by speaking individually with approximately 75 attendees about the benefits to water storage

and solicited them to participate in Minnesota River Congress. Five of those individuals did end up attending the Minnesota River Congress session in June. Two individuals were from local farm families and brought their parents to the Congress session.

I gave a presentation to the Minnesota Wastewater Operators Association annual meeting in New Ulm on May 1st at Turner Hall. The focus was on the Water Storage Program. There were 124 attendees who operate water treatment plants within cities in the Minnesota River Basin. I raised awareness of how cities were eligible and could apply for funding from the program to implement storage projects within their communities. Attention was high and several cities expressed interest knowing of opportunities that existed in their areas.

I helped to host and facilitate an event in New Auburn on April 6th for the Friends of High Island Watershed organization. There were 130 attendees with approximately 75 landowner/Ag-Producers in attendance. I focused on the Water Storage Program and urged landowners who had circumstances that would be present on their farms which were good areas to hold water on the landscape to contact the SWCD office and apply. After the event the SWCD received 4 inquiries then next week to view potential projects within the High Island Watershed.

On April 15th I attended a somewhat high-level invitation only MNDNR planning meeting to set priorities for funding the Southwest Region. At the meeting I continually expressed the need for state agency interaction and program cooperation and coordination regarding the Minnesota River System. I urged the MNDNR staff to not only focus on water storage but also to begin to compile current and future planned projects that have a by-product outcome of water storage. I told them this could have multiple advantages for coordinating and cooperative funding opportunities if compiled and articulated, not to mention the multiple benefits to natural resources involved.

On June 13th I was facilitator for the 16th Minnesota River Congress session held at the Kato Ballroom in Mankato. Prior to the event I developed the agenda and made all logistical arrangements based on the wishes of the participants from the prior years and in consultations with the CCMR Board of Directors and the MN River Collaborative. I coordinated with all groups associated with the Minnesota River Congress. During the event I compiled all input. Then I created a report based on all responses from participants and distributed that report to all attendees and made it available to the general public electronically. That report can be seen at MNRiverCongress.org

I networked at all 3 days of Farmfest on August 6-8 speaking one on one to producers at the Corn Producers and Soybean Producers booths. I raised awareness regarding the new Water Storage Program and engaged in discussions on how to successfully roll out the

new program among younger producers. The discussions revealed insights into motivational methods of peaking interest and were shared with program managers for potential additions and changes to the parameters of the program.

I also networked with soil health initiative advocates and producers there who were involved in some implementation of innovations of best management practices. Cover crops that could be harvested were of interest as well as innovations in specialization services to smaller amounts of acreage to get a foot in the door for producers showing interest but expressing lack of time to implement such practices.

In May I attended a public outreach meeting facilitated by former U.S. Congressman, Appellate Court Judge, and fellow MN Collaborative member David Minge in Henderson MN. The meeting was held to introduce the Collaborative to the community and to see if there were ways we could work together in the future. We suggested having a representative from Henderson on the Collaborative in order to keep us informed of issues related to the river that they had such as isolation due to flooding. A person was identified and has been participating.

On April 12th and 13th I attended the Southern Minnesota Lakes Conference at Mayo Civic Center in Mankato which was sponsored by ISG Engineering. They are a major engineering firm with an office in Mankato and are heavily involved in drainage projects. Even though it was a lake attention event the focus was on water quality and projects and methods for reducing pollution coming to Southern Minnesota lakes from overland runoff. Much of the discussion was on rural drainage as well as in-lake treatments. I raised awareness of the new water storage program and shared with attendees that most of our lakes drain to the Minnesota River and that their support and advocacy for water storage would be needed to improve our lakes, at the same time it would be improving our river.

On September 26th I attended the Environmental Quality Board's "Environmental Congress event in Mankato at South Central College. The focus of the event was "Tools and programs to scale up agricultural best management practices adoption" Building on past successes. I used every opportunity available to share aspects of water storage and the need for funding and inclusion for consideration in any drainage related project. I also shared successful ways that could lead to adoption of soil health practices and offered ways to remove barriers that exist limiting participation. The Commissioner of the MN Department of AG Thom Petersen, Senator Nick Frenz, State Rep. Jeff Brand were in attendance and I spoke directly to them about increased appropriations for Water Storage as well as the need for a MN River Mgmt. Board.

- Engage in direct involvement with Minnesota River Collaborative. This strategy will be measured by increases in protections implemented which result from collective actions.

In 2024 to date I have participated in 33 Minnesota River Collaborative meetings. Together we have been successful in altering several ill-advised, poorly engineered drainage projects, 4 of which were lowered from an improvement petition to a repair. We intervened in Lyon County on a drainage improvement project on ditch #14 and were successful in seeing it be reduced to a repair with additional water storage to reduce surface water runoff.

We currently have an extensive list of projects we are reviewing using our MN Collaborative engineers to determine downstream negative impacts and where water storage could and should be used. This is being done to not just mitigate but decrease the speed of delivery of the water from a planned, petitioned project.

Working with other collaborative partners I testified successfully to gain protection for all public waters in the State of Minnesota. This press release went out in May describing those protections. This was a significant step forward in state-wide policy which has a profound affect in the Minnesota River Watershed.

MAY 23, 2024

**Press Release: Minnesota Legislature Protects Public Waters Statewide
Clarifies public waters definition and funds comprehensive update to Public Waters
Inventory**

Minnesota Legislature Protects Public Waters Statewide

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA – A compromise that emerged in the final days of the Minnesota Legislature will protect public waters across Minnesota. The supplemental environment and natural resources budget bill (HF 3911) included clarification of the definition of public waters and eight years of funding to comprehensively update the Public Waters Inventory statewide.

This comes after a 2022 Minnesota Supreme Court decision in favor of Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) and Protecting Public Waters (PPW), a group of local residents who opposed a proposal to ditch the upper reach of Limbo Creek in Renville County. That decision affirmed that Limbo Creek is a “public water” because it meets the definition in Minnesota statute. But the Court asked the Minnesota Legislature to clarify whether our state’s statute or the Public Waters Inventory (PWI), a list created in the 1980s, should control when there is a discrepancy between the two. Limbo Creek, as well as many other waterways, were erroneously omitted from the PWI, which led to confusion about its legal status. The impact of the clarification is wide-reaching, affecting at least 640 miles of other waterways across the state

Rep. Kirsti Pursell (DFL-Northfield) and Sen. Mary Kunesh (DFL-New Brighton) introduced legislation (HF 3385 / SF 3558) to clarify that a public water that meets the definition in statute is protected, even if a waterway was erroneously left off the PWI. House Committee Chair Rep. Rick Hansen (DFL-South St. Paul) included the clarification in a bill passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Tim Walz last week.

The law also includes \$8 million in funding to comprehensively update the PWI over the next eight years. Some agricultural lobby groups argued that the PWI should be updated to provide certainty for farmers and landowners, instead of relying solely on the definition in statute. In response, legislative leaders and Governor Walz expanded the fiscal target for the budget bill and now the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will use that funding to update the forty-year-old PWI with up-to-date technology.

The compromise was lauded by **Carly Griffith, water director for MCEA**, which brought the Limbo Creek lawsuit targeting waters that were erroneously deprived of protections: “This compromise is a win-win. All Minnesotans can now rest assured that public waters, which belong to all of us by law, will have protections; and those folks whose industries are affected by the designation will get an updated inventory map showing exactly which waters are included.”

MCEA was grateful to work with leaders like Rep. Kristi Pursell (DFL-Northfield) to get these public water protections enshrined in state law.

“I’m incredibly proud of the change to the definition of public waters that made it over the finish line this Session,” said **Rep. Kristi Pursell (DFL-Northfield)**. “I fought for this provision to be included in the final environment bill and appreciate House Environment committee chair Rick Hansen, Speaker of the House Melissa Hortman, and Senate Majority Leader Erin Murphy for their dedication to following through on what the Minnesota Supreme Court told us we needed to do in order to make clear what waters belong to every Minnesotan.”

Local residents and Minnesota River advocates who were involved in the Limbo Creek lawsuit that brought this issue to the forefront of public attention are enthusiastic about this outcome as well.

“Public water in Minnesota belongs to all of us, it needs to be treated as if it were our gold,” stated Scott Sparlin, Executive Director of the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River. “The decision reached by the Minnesota Supreme Court in the Limbo Creek case along with the subsequent clarification of statutory language by the legislature this past session affirms why the scientific definition of public water is the most fail-safe, simplistic, commonsense way to guide the future management of all public water in our state.”

“This clarification is long overdue,” added **retired conservationist Tom Kalahar**. The Public Waters Inventory (PWI) update process will begin this summer.

Invoice

To: Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD)
112 East 5th Street, Suite 102, Chaska, MN 55318

From: The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR)
PO Box 488, New Ulm, MN 56073

For: Services undertaken and completed regarding CCMR/MN River
Congress Water Storage Initiative

Full initial report is included

Total amount due: \$5000

Water Storage Initiative signed secured endorsements/resolutions and cooperators list. as of 4-15-24

City of Henderson (signed endorsement and resolution)
City of Granite Falls (signed endorsement and resolution)
City of Eden Prairie (signed resolution)
City of Arlington (signed endorsement)
City of Amboy (signed endorsement)
City of New Ulm (signed resolution)
City of Mankato (signed resolution)
City of Olivia (signed endorsement)
City of Nicollet (signed endorsement and resolution)
City of Redwood Falls (signed resolution)
City of Springfield (signed resolution and indorsement)
City of St. Peter (signed endorsement)
City of Winthrop (signed resolution and endorsement)
City of LeSueur (signed resolution and endorsement)
City of Sleepy Eye (signed resolution)
Hennepin County (signed resolution)
Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (resolution passed and signed)
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (resolution passed and signed)
Izaak Walton League MN State Chapter (resolution passed)
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance (signed endorsement and resolution)
Brown County SWCD (signed endorsement)
Blue Earth County SWCD (signed endorsement)
Martin County SWCD (signed endorsement)
Faribault County SWCD (signed resolution)
Cottonwood County SWCD (signed endorsement)
McLeod County SWCD (verbal endorsement)
Nicollet Conservation Club (signed endorsement)
MASWCD (relative resolution)
Area 6 SWCD (11 Counties) (in principle)
Area 5 SWCD (10 Counties) (in principle)
Friends of Pool 2 (signed endorsement)
Crystal Waters Project (signed endorsement)
Minnesota River Congress (signed endorsement)
New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen (signed endorsement)
Rural Advantage (signed endorsement)
Minnesota River Drainage Collaborative (signed endorsement)
Clean Up the River Environment-CURE (signed endorsement)
The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (signed endorsement and resolution)
Redwood Country Farmers Union (resolution passed and signed) (State Pending)
Friends of the Minnesota Valley (signed endorsement)
Izaak Walton League MN Valley Chapter (signed resolution)
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (signed endorsement)
Anglers for Habitat (signed endorsement)
Minnesota Conservation Federation (signed endorsement)
Fish and Wildlife Legislative Alliance (signed endorsement)
Blue Earth Project (signed endorsement)
Save the Kasota Prairie (signed endorsement)

Potential Structure Makeup Considerations

These are the 1994 recommendations

The following structure is recommended.

Citizens-These members should be chosen to represent the diversity of interests in the river basin farmers, businesspeople, educators, and conservationists. These citizens should be knowledgeable about and actively interested in the Minnesota River. To convince the general public that the Commission is not just another government agency, it is essential that at least half the members of the Commission come from this group.

Local organizations

These members should be elected officials or agency staff who have already been working to clean up the river and who have been cooperating with other local organizations in that effort.

State agencies

These members should be the Commissioners or Deputies of agencies directly involved in Minnesota River issues, including MPCA, BWSR, MDA, and MDNR. In addition, one or more top representatives from Minnesota Extension Service (MES) or the University of Minnesota should be included.

Dakota communities

Members should include representatives of the Shakopee Mdewakanton, Lower Sioux, Upper Sioux, and Prairie Island Dakota communities.

Other potential member organizations to consider for inclusion

(A list for discussion on membership makeup and size)

Minnesota State University Mankato, Water Resources Center	Minnesota Watershed Dist. Mgrs.
Minnesota Farmers Union	County Commissioners
MN Corn Growers Assn.	US Fish and Wildlife Service
MN Soybean Growers Assn.	Area 2 Joint Powers Board
MN Cattlemen's Assn.	Redwood Cottonwood Rivers C A
Land Stewardship Project	US Army Corps of Engineers
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition	Conservation Minnesota
Izaak Walton League (UMRI)	MN Well Owners Assn.
Ducks Unlimited	MN Wastewater Operators Assn.
Pheasants Forever	Catholic leadership representation
MN Fish	Lutheran leadership representation
The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River	Faith Community representation
Clean Up our River Environment	Districts 5 and 6 SWCD Reps.
Friends of the Minnesota Valley	
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy	
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance	
MN Conservation Federation	
Anglers for Habitat	
Mankato Paddling and Outing Club	
Retired Land Engineers	

(Could these be categorized and specialized?)

Potential Operations Considerations for Minnesota River
Management Board
(what would/could it do/provide for?)

These are only first draft ideas

- A hearing communications setting and opportunity, to consider and identify basin specific systemic water management process changes needs. Subsequent policy change/modification considerations for recommendation to all accountable implementing state and/or local entities. A place to present high profile sets of circumstances as an example of what potential large scale actions need to be set in motion to affect a more desirable outcome.
- Coordination and up to date information sharing among all participants and provide for regular public outreach communications of all forms of public media.
- A potential for scale sized partnerships to accomplish basin-wide positive outcomes for multiple interests.
- The potential to collectively develop innovative basin-wide initiatives for needed major funding proposals.
- A chance for state agencies to show/report they can work together to accomplish a goal which has been a state focus of interest since 1988.
- A chance for innovations coming from the private sector to showcase outcomes related to water quality/quantity condition improvements.
- A place for the public to have truly relevant questions directed appropriately and answered.

Projected Water Storage Initiative (WSI) Budget FY 2024/25
From The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR)
By Scott Sparlin Coordinator/Facilitator Minnesota River Congress/ Ex. Dir. CCMR

Hours specific to **Water Storage Initiative** @ \$45 hr. Actual hours recorded until Oct. 1, after that the figures are projected hrs.

2024			
March	35 hrs.	September	41 hrs.
April	27 hrs.	October	35 hrs.
May	14 hrs.	November	40 hrs.
June	25 hrs.	December	28 hrs.
July	10 hrs.	2025 January	50 hrs.
August	23 hrs.	February	50 hrs.

Total Hours Logged 3/1/24 thru 9/30/24 175 = \$7,875

A similar projected set of budget circumstances
is expected for 3/1/25 thru 2/28/26

In person meetings, actual miles logged 3/1/24 thru 9/30/24

Mileage @ \$.54 (Mankato 10) 590, (St. Paul 5) 1,100, (Nicollet 2) 56, (Henderson 3) 270
(St. Peter 3) 210, (Gaylord 1) 60, (Morton 3) 180, (Sleepy Eye 2) 60, (Springfield 3) 150,
Total Mileage 2,666 miles = \$1,440

Ballroom rental \$1500
Coffee, soft drinks, cookies, \$300
Event printing \$36

Total event cost \$1836

Total WSI expenses from 3/1/24 to 9/30/24 \$11,151

A similar projected WSI total expenses is expected for 3/1/25 thru 2/28/26

Regular tasks include

- Weekly two-hour meetings with MN River collaborative partners
- Meetings with federal and state level elected representatives and their staffs.
- Meetings with state agency staff and commissioners
- Meetings with SWCD and Watershed District personnel and supervisors.
- Planning, marketing, and creating agenda and program for annual Minnesota River Congress
- Minnesota River Network data base management
- Meetings with key agricultural contacts

All facts and figures submitted are true and accurate

Signed: 

Executive Director CCMR

The need for a Minnesota River Management Board

In 1988 an extensive study of the Minnesota River began at the direction of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) called the Minnesota River Assessment Project. After 2 years of comprehensive scientific study, it revealed what firsthand observers had already intuitively anticipated, a severely polluted river system.

Subsequently in 1990 Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson directed the MPCA to begin a two-year planning process called the Minnesota River Implementation Project. This process was designed to create and develop actions which would result in the improvement of water quality conditions in the main stem and thirteen tributary watersheds. Those assembled by the MPCA represented a diverse cross section of stakeholders and citizens called the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). After 2 years of scientific presentations and extensive debate the committee produced a set of 10 recommendations for action.

One of the ten recommendations was to establish a Minnesota River Commission whose charge would be to ensure government accountability and citizen participation in meeting Minnesota River cleanup goals. The first charge of the new commission would be establishing goals for the cleanup effort. (It is hoped that this report and the work of the Minnesota River Assessment Project will guide and expedite the planning efforts of the Commission.) The board would also provide a broad oversight of major agency activities related to the Minnesota River and facilitate inter-agency cooperation. Further the board would evaluate the effectiveness of expenditures. They would also advocate for and educate people about the river and the restoration effort. Another responsibility would be to hold an annual event on the state of the river. The Commission would not be involved in the day-to-day operations of agencies but would have access to information and the decision-makers within those agencies. In addition to being accountable to the citizens of Minnesota the Commission would also report to the Governor and the Legislature.

In 1994 Senator Dennis Frederickson introduced a bill in the Minnesota Legislature of which I testified on behalf of to establish the Minnesota River Commission. The components of that bill are reflected in the Citizens Advisory Committee recommendation which are attached ([the full report can be found here](#)) with this document. Although it has been 30 years since that time, many of the elements and personnel included need to be options considered today.

During that same session of the Legislature of which that bill was introduced, another bill had been introduced to create a different entity which membership consisted exclusively of one County Commissioner from each of the 36 counties of the Minnesota River Basin.

The state was quite willing at the time to turn the responsibility over to counties to see what they would do about the pollution challenges the river had at the time. Subsequently

the county entity structure idea passed, and the Minnesota River Commission bill failed. The Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board then was created and signed into law.

Fast forward to 2014, after 20 years of existence, 2 years of planning and even providing a way forward with funding options, the counties decided to call it quits and turn the responsibility of reducing pollution and damages caused in the Minnesota River Watershed over to the State of Minnesota.

After that there was no collective response from the State of Minnesota to address the continuing decline of water quality and quantity conditions which remains today.

That brings us to now. We have reached a water management crisis in the Minnesota River Watershed. Due to land use practices both urban and rural we continue to experience increased losses to infrastructure, business, recreation and a host of other societal costs which are at an unacceptable rate putting many Minnesotans at various degrees of risk. Exacerbating this condition is the climatic trend and future prediction of increased rainfalls in short periods of time. Flood rates from Summer rainfall now contribute more to flooding than normal spring snowmelt. The combination of all these factors leads first to small and medium sized tributary streambank erosion. Then the dislodged sediments combined with the increased rate flows enable even more sediments and nutrients to be delivered to our lakes, major tributaries, and main stems where they then flow downstream to the Mississippi River, Lake Pepin and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. The time to get serious about this at a state level is long past due. That is why we feel it is time to create a Minnesota River Management Board that reflects a true cross-section of greater public representation than what was attempted prior. The makeup of the management board is certainly up for discussion/debate; however our network believes strongly that citizen membership should make up at least half of the voting membership. This was clearly reflected in feedback we received from our 16th Minnesota River Congress event held in June of this year.

ESTABLISH A MINNESOTA RIVER COMMISSION TO OVERSEE RESTORATION

Rationale

A new institutional structure is needed to ensure government accountability and citizen participation in meeting Minnesota River cleanup goals. The Citizens' Advisory Committee proposes the creation of the Minnesota River Commission.

Action Plan The functions of the Commission will include:

- Establishing goals for the cleanup effort. (It is hoped that this report and the work of the Minnesota River Assessment Project will guide and expedite the planning efforts of the Commission.)
- Providing broad oversight of major agency activities related to the Minnesota River and facilitating inter-agency cooperation.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of expenditures.
- Advocating for and educating people about the river and the cleanup effort.
- Holding an annual conference on the state of the river.
- The Commission will not be involved in the day-to-day operations of agencies, but will have access to information and the decision-makers within those agencies. In addition to being accountable to the citizens of Minnesota the Commission will report to the Governor and the Legislature.

The following structure is recommended.

Citizens—These members should be chosen to represent the diversity of interests in the river basin farmers, businesspeople, educators, and conservationists. These citizens should be knowledgeable about and actively interested in the Minnesota River. To convince the general public that the Commission is not just another government agency, it is essential that at least half the members of the Commission come from this group.

Local organizations

These members should be elected officials or agency staff who have already been working to clean up the river and who have been cooperating with other local organizations in that effort.

State agencies

These members should be the Commissioners or Deputies of agencies directly involved in Minnesota River issues, including MPCA, BWSR, MDA, and MDNR. In addition, one or more top representatives from Minnesota Extension Service (MES) or the University of Minnesota should be included.

Dakota communities

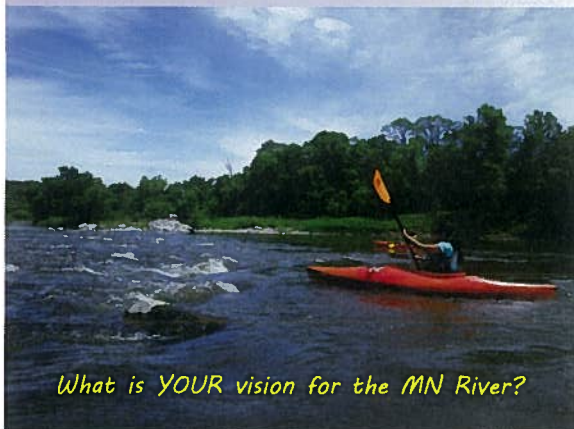
Members should include representatives of the Shakopee Mdewakanton, Lower Sioux, Upper Sioux, and Prairie Island Dakota communities.

Costs The costs, estimated at \$100,000 per year, will include staff and administrative support as well as per diem expenses for Commission members.



December 16, 2013: Be heard and be a part of history!

Minnesota River Board to Make Recommendation on Future Basin-Level Coordination and Funding



What is YOUR vision for the MN River?

1994: A call for collaboration...

In 1994, the Minnesota River Citizen's Advisory Committee (MRCAC) released "Working Together: A Plan to Restore the Minnesota River." The MRCAC recommended a coordinated effort to clean up the Minnesota River. As a result, the Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board (*aka*, Minnesota River Board; MRB) was legislatively formed in 1995 (MN Statute 103F.378).

The state's namesake river was in need of help, and 37 counties in the basin stepped up to form what is still the state's largest joint powers organization. The counties were joined by countless watershed, agency, private, and citizen partners and with great intentions, the MRB was born in 1996.

MN River Basin Coordination: Information YOU should know!

MRB Adds Reform to its Strategic Plan **2**

Bigger Associates Report Recommendations **2**

Assumptions and Guiding Principles for Change **3**

MRB to Make Basin Entity and Funding Recommendation **3**

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Be a Part of History: Basin Forum 12/16 **4**

MRB Mission

"To provide leadership, build partnerships, and support efforts to improve and protect water quality in the Minnesota River Basin"

MRB Vision

"Conservation and restoration of Minnesota River resources and our way of life can only be achieved by a cooperative effort between citizens and all levels of government and business."

2012: A call for change...

After nearly 20 years of initiatives, challenges, and calls for change from valued partners, the MRB delegates passed Resolution 12-01 in September 2012 to dedicate funds for a full external review of the MRB governance, mission, services, and funding.

A review process that included steering committee representation from SWCDs, Watershed Districts/projects, agricultural organizations, and citizen-based organizations held focus groups, gathered stakeholder information, and developed recommendations about future basin-level coordination (see Bigger Associates Report on page 2). The steering committee identified guiding principles that have shaped the future basin entity and funding discussion.

Change is coming and the MRB wants input!
This is about the future of Minnesota River LGUs and conservation partners, not just a basin entity!



Flathead catfish, just one of many MN River treasures!



FY13-17

MRB Strategic Plan Priorities

- 1) **Basin Board Structure and Management Modifications**
- 2) **Funding Stabilization and Support Mechanisms**
- 3) **Drainage System Redetermination of Benefits**
- 4) **Public Waters Buffers**
- 5) **Water Storage and Drainage Management**
- 6) **Threats to the MN River**



Minneopa Falls—A natural feature of the Minnesota River

MRB Adds Reform to its Strategic Plan

In 2011, the MRB initiated an internal process to identify mechanisms to better serve and support watershed partners.

The MRB collected data by asking our delegates and partners to address several critical questions:

- 1) What roles should a Basin-level entity have?
- 2) What river-related matters will be most challenging for you/your organization during the next decade?
- 3) How can a basin-level entity support and enhance local conservation efforts?
- 4) The MRB needs “big ideas” in our strategic plan that will have an impact and result in something that our delegates, staff, and partners can be proud of - what are some “big ideas” we should evaluate?

Partner Feedback

The responses clearly indicated that *change was needed!*

- ♦ To advance a basin-wide mission and provide effective support, resource deficiencies (both labor and funding) must be addressed.
- ♦ A basin entity must have innovative and aggressive strategic approaches with measurable results implemented by local on-the-ground partners.
- ♦ Basin wide efforts should be focused and higher profile.
- ♦ Basin-level governance must be more broadly represented to improve collaboration.

The MRB heard its constituents and the feedback was a driving force behind the FY13-17 MRB Strategic Plan. The plan called for Board structure modifications, funding stabilization plans to support the Minnesota River watersheds, and priority focus areas (see left sidebar).

“While there were several calls for the MRB to disband, there were many more voices that see a need for a basin entity.”

—Cindy Bigger,
External Review Lead

Bigger Associates Report Recommendations

January 2013 —

Minnesota River watershed professionals and citizens brought their concerns to the table and helped identify needed changes if a basin entity is to continue.

Bottom Line
Is the will there to move forward and do what needs to be done?

Primary Recommendations (summarized/paraphrased)

- ♦ A basin board needs to include diverse representation.
- ♦ Representation should be based on major watersheds.
- ♦ The mission must be clear, effective, and statutory.
- ♦ Board should be based on enabling legislation that clearly defines authorities, funding, and representation.
- ♦ Needs to be led by a full-time Director and staff.
- ♦ Commit to issue-based input strategies to set priorities.
- ♦ Change the dues structure to be more equitable.
- ♦ **Implement these recommendations or disband!**



Assumptions and Guiding Principles for Change

The external review committee (members listed on page 4), along with input from agency staff, MRB delegates, citizens, and other partners, established guiding principles and assumptions to shape discussions about a new basin entity and funding.

What would a new basin board do? What would it look like?

A new Minnesota River Basin entity shall....

- ♦ be based on integrity, transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness,
- ♦ advocate for processes that enhance organizational stability,
- ♦ strive to attract and retain a talented workforce in all the watersheds,
- ♦ support major watershed conservation plans and local implementation,
- ♦ recognize local relationships as critically important to resolving watershed issues,
- ♦ establish equitable collection, use, and distribution of resources,
- ♦ include complete basin coverage,
- ♦ be a strong advocate for targeted/prioritized practices with measurable outcomes,
- ♦ advocate for conservation that provides the greatest benefit to the basin,
- ♦ deliver rapid responses to legislative, legal, and funding actions, and
- ♦ establish a “living document” that is flexible and pro-active.

Furthermore, a new Minnesota River Basin entity will....

- ♦ be significantly different than the current model,
- ♦ be established and mandated in whole or in part by law,
- ♦ have a governing body based on major watershed representation,
- ♦ have inclusive governance of the basin conservation community,
- ♦ strive to implement a mechanism of locally-generated revenue,
- ♦ have local government revenue collection/controls, and
- ♦ anticipate major watershed organizations and plans for the entire basin.

“A new Minnesota River Basin entity will be significantly different than the current model.”

—MRB Executive Committee and Executive Director

It boils down to this...

- 1) Major Watershed Foundation
- 2) New Board Structure from #1
- 3) Major Watershed Water Plans
- 4) Defined Support for #3
- 5) Locally Generated Revenue

MRB to Make Basin Entity & Funding Recommendation

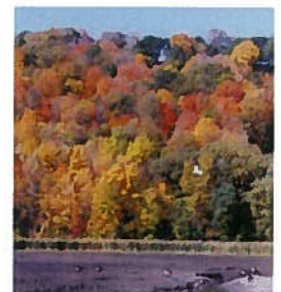
The MRB, at least as we know it, is coming to an end. Our job is to make a recommendation about how a new basin-level entity should be structured and funded. The over-arching duties and responsibilities of a new basin entity are outlined above. Over the past 18 months, various options have been brought forward for consideration.

The Four Key Options (outlined on page 4 of this report)

- Option A:** Bottom-up watershed-based planning w/local revenue generation (w/MRB outreach/legislative support)
Option B: Option A PLUS additional basin board revenue generation (w/MRB outreach/legislative support)
Option C: Recommendation to the State for Option A or B (no additional MRB involvement)
Option D: Recommendation of other alternative(s) or no recommendation (no additional MRB involvement)

Options A and B assume 1) that the current MRB will provide outreach and legislative support to advance the recommendation, 2) collection of the second half of the FY14 dues, 3) collection of any incurred costs associated with final task completion, and 4) postpones current MRB sunset/dormancy until at least June 30, 2014.

Options C and D assume 1) immediate provision of recommendation to the State with no additional MRB involvement, 2) collection of any incurred costs associated with final task completion, and 3) a sunset/dormancy of approximately March 15, 2014.



Fall on the MN River!



Options for Future Coordination and Funding

Option A Summary:

- ◆ Bottom up watershed-based planning and implementation scheme.
- ◆ Counties, SWCDs, WD/WMOs as the primary LGUs.
- ◆ Major watershed plans used to set new Basin Board priorities and functions.
- ◆ New Basin Board funded through a process of budgeting and certification.
- ◆ The new Basin Board would develop and adopt budget, counties would collect.
- ◆ Flexible Revenue collection options may include
 - water management fees (e.g., storm water utility),
 - fee based on per parcel/per acre charge sufficient to generate budget amount,
 - new fee authority for Basin counties, and/or
 - ad valorem* dedication.
- ◆ Requires major watershed organization via formal agreements.
- ◆ Two Basin Board delegates appointed/elected by each watershed entity.
- ◆ Three at-large delegates selected by basin-wide process to assure fair representation.
- ◆ New fiscal authorities to SWCDs/Counties to implement major watershed plans.
- ◆ Local revenue provides competitive match for state/federal funding for all basin partners.
- ◆ “Failure to implement provision” would be required and sets performance standards.
- ◆ Current MRB maintains support role for legislative/outreach needs through FY14.

Option B Summary:

Option B Includes all aspects of Option A plus the additional components listed below.

- ◆ Additional funding authority specifically for the Basin Entity (similar to Red River Model).
- ◆ Funds collected by the counties in addition to revenue identified in Option A.
- ◆ Allows more funds in Option A to remain local, rather than be re-distributed.
- ◆ Revenue would be subject to a legislative cap.
- ◆ Funds would target large capital improvement projects and basin-wide initiatives.
- ◆ A project selection process, with priorities and conditions, would be established.

Options C and D Summary:

- ◆ MRB would make a Basin Entity recommendation to the State of Minnesota.
- ◆ Beyond the recommendation, no additional involvement from the current MRB.
- ◆ MRB would immediately begin process of business closure (e.g., sunseting or dormancy).



Questions? Comments?
Director Fisher: 507.389.5491
or Shannon.fisher@mnsu.edu

All are invited to provide input on the options!

Email your comments, resolutions, etc... for the record to shannon.fisher@mnsu.edu (must be received by 1:00 pm, Dec. 13, 2013) or provide testimony in person (info below).

All are welcome!

December 16, 2013 @ 9:00 AM
Sheep Shedde Inn/Max's Grill
2425 W. Lincoln Ave.
Olivia, MN 56277

*A special **THANK YOU** to all the counties that have supported the MRB by remaining full members and to the delegates that have dedicated their time and energy to the effort!*

The MRB also extends our sincere appreciation to the External Review Team

Drew Campbell
Blue Earth Commissioner
and MRB Treasurer

Thomas Egan
Dakota Commissioner and
past MRB Vice Chair

Shannon J. Fisher
MRB Exec. Director

Warren Formo
Exec. Director, MN Ag.
Water Resources Center

Bill Groskreutz
Faribault Commissioner
and MRB Vice Chair

Kerry Netzke
Exec. Director, Area II MN
River Basin Projects, Inc.

Diane Radermacher
Administrator, Upper MN
River Watershed District

John Schueller
Redwood Commissioner
and MRB Chair

Paul Setzepfandt
Renville Commissioner
and MRB Secretary

Scott Sparlin
Exec. Director, Coalition for
a Clean MN River

Mark Zabel
Carver SWCD Supervisor
and MASWCD President

Thanks also to
Doug Thomas, BWSR,
for assistance with program
information and examples.

***THANK YOU** to our partners who have been at the table and contributed the MN River conversation over the past two decades!*