

Lower Minnesota River East Watershed

Steering Team Meeting Minutes

Date & Time: 2:00pm-3:30pm, Thursday, July 17th 2025

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees at meeting: Holly Bushman (Le Sueur County), Trevor Rudenick (Le Sueur County), Mike Schultz (Le Sueur SWCD), Kourtney Spitzack (Le Sueur SWCD), Meghan Darley (Scott SWCD), Karl Schmidtke (Le Sueur SWCD), Steve Pahs (Rice SWCD), Brad Behrens (Rice County), Barb Peichel (BWSR), and Anne Sawyer (BWSR)

Welcome & Review Agenda

- The Lower Minnesota River East Meeting was held on Thursday, April 3rd 2025. The meeting was held virtually.
- The agenda covers general updates, education and outreach campaign updates, a request for a workplan amendment, CRP Incentive Update, Project Database discussion, and updates/next steps.

Recap Last Meeting

- The ST have not met since April 3, 2025. In April, the partnership was just starting to ramp up efforts. The Education and Outreach Campaign (Plan and Website) had been completed in its final first draft mode. A workplan revision request was being finalized to accommodate some projects that popped up and remove ones that were not going to be completed. Additionally, funds were shifted around to accommodate these changes. Lastly, the ST discussed and reviewed the April JPB Meeting Agenda Items.

General Updates

- LoMRE 2025 Q2 reporting is due July 10th.
 - A friendly reminder to submit the required information that is needed for reimbursement if ST members have not already done so already.

Education and Outreach Campaign Update

- Kourtney has developed a rough draft of the Education and Outreach Cost-Share Rate Flyers.
 - Her goal was to create cost-share flyers for the ST that can be used to promote projects and practices and WBIF for the LoMRE.
 - Meghan stated that Scott SWCD's cost-share rates are really complicated, and it is difficult to list the rates in a simple manner.

- They have tried this in the past, but it didn't work out.
 - There was discussion about just mentioning that folks should reach out to each of their Local LGU for cost-share rates. Maybe create a more generic flyer. If folks want specific rates listed, Kourtney would be able to do that as well.
 - She stated that she would like to have something ready within the next two weeks.
- Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance
 - Holly mentioned that the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance had reached out to discuss what the LoMRE partnership has been working on, our priorities, and what partnership opportunities would be available. She met with a few folks from this organization and we had conversations that at this point in time education/outreach efforts would be a good place to start. This organization has had experience working with other LGUs to help host and set up events.
 - Kourtney had met with this organization to discuss in more detail potential future partnership opportunities.
 - She stated that the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance has had a primary goal/mission of reducing sediment. Over the years they have somewhat diverted from this goal and want to focus on sediment reduction.
 - Right now the organization was curious if we wanted to apply for a CWF grant that focuses on partnerships between nonprofits and tribal nations with LGUs.
 - Rice SWCD is working with CRP right now with this grant funding source. Steve mentioned as far as the work goes nothing has changed, just a new funding source.
 - Staff discussed and we welcome the new partnership and would like to work with the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance; however, we are not in a place right now that we can pursue grant funds.
 - Holly will email the President of the Alliance and let him know.
 - We would like the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance to present at a ST or JPB meeting in the future to discuss future opportunities and partnerships
- GIS storymap/GIS files
 - Something of interest still and Holly would like to have this ready by the end of this year
 - Need to determine which in house staff would work on this
 - Right now the primary focus is creating a map that will show Staff and the Public where priority areas and projects/practices are going.

Project Database

- This discussion was bumped up on the agenda to make sure that BWSR staff would be able to discuss prior to having to leave the meeting.
- Holly wanted ask staff members how the project database form was working for them? Additionally, she wanted to see if we should be changing the way we enter projects into the database or if there was a better way to notify Meghan and Holly about projects.
 - The ST decided that the most appropriate time to enter a project into the database is when there is a willing landowner and the intent is to put a project on the next available board meeting. Once the project is entered into the database, staff should let Meghan and Holly know. The intent of this is to double check and make sure everything looks good prior to board approval.
 - We discussed preference about who should enter in project information in the “red section.”
 - Information in this section includes: Contract Number, board approval date, anticipated start date, project completion date, etc.
 - We decided that each staff member can do this on their own and once this section is completed to let Meghan and Holly know.
 - Pollutant reductions should also be filled out prior to completing the project, but do not necessarily need to be filled prior to approval of WBIF funds.
 - Barb and Anne wanted to bring up things to consider for the ST when reporting models/goals/pollutant loads.
 - The biggest thing is to make sure when we are reporting pollutant loading that we are using the small scale and reference (comparing apples to apples).
 - This will vary based on different practices which models and tools are used.
 - Appendix F in our LoMRE Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan listed the BMP Practice Model (references practices and what tools to use for pollutant reductions)
 - Barb and Anne stated that staff should reach out if we have questions about what tools/models to use if they don’t fall neatly within existing tools/models that are available.
 - Barb and Anne also wanted to have Holly reach out to ISG to confirm with ISG how we read Appendix F is for each subwatershed (again making sure we are comparing apples to apples).

- Not all tools and models are supported by BWSR. Double check to make sure existing list is good and verify if new tools/models should be added.
 - Have option to select “other”.
 - The BEET Tool is relatively new and is being used for soil health practices.
 - WRAT tool for wetland restorations.

2nd Workplan Revision FY’24-26 WBIF Funds

- Le Sueur SWCD have some storage/wetland restoration projects come up and would like to amend the existing FY’24-26 Workplan.
 - Water Storage/Altered Hydrology is one of the top goals for the partnership.
 - Mike had reached out to Scott and Rice SWCDs prior to this meeting to let them know.
 - The ST is supportive of shifting funds around; however, we just need to come up with a plan in doing so.
 - The SWCD will need \$50,000 to complete the projects and \$10,000 for TA (SWCD is trying to get JAA for wetland restorations).
 - The ST had some discussions about activities and funds.
 - The ST agreed to remove the Urban BMP Activity (free up \$8,000)
 - Meghan stated that she should the funding allocated for Ag BMPs and Grade Stabilization Practices for Scott SWCD could be shifted over to Le Sueur SWCD (would need to confirm with Troy)
 - We will follow up with this prior to the next ST meeting
 - The ST agreed that the remaining funding that would be needed to cover the expenses could be taken from the Ed& Outreach TSA/Contract Budget.
 - The timeframe on when these projects would start construction would be within the next 2 months (Fall 2025)
 - This workplan revision request would need to be ready for the August JPB meeting.
- There was some discussion amongst the ST about billing TSA time to WBIF. I think at this point in time the partnership has not had discussions about this but likely will need to in the future. It sounds like TSAs are trying to fill in some of the budget gaps and likely will be billing their time to WBIF in the future.
 - Want to be prepared and should continue to have these conversations down the road. Shouldn’t be an issue necessarily for 2025.

CRP Incentive Update

- Le Sueur SWCD has taken the lead on the CRP Incentive Program for the LoMRE. Karl shared with the ST that we had a total of 37 landowners eligible for the program and would encumber \$38,000 of the \$45,000 that is available. \$5,000 was set aside for TA.
 - Most of the contracts would be in Le Sueur County, but there are some contracts for Scott and Rice County as well.
 - Landowners can enroll their CRP at any office. The other closest local office would be in Carver County-Waconia (Scott County residents) and Rice County-Faribault.
 - More difficult to access information from other offices. Would need release forms.
 - The ST agreed to move forward with the landowners that enrolled in Le Sueur County.
 - Scott SWCD has their own CRP Incentive Funds.
 - Rice SWCD would look into their local office to see if anyone else would qualify for the CRP Incentive.
 - Karl will work with FAS and make the 37 landowners are still committed to the CRP program. If so, he will create separate contracts for each landowner that will need to sign along with a release form.
- Holly asked Karl what he thought about the CRP Incentive program that we set up for the LoMRE? Did the policy work out okay?
 - Karl stated initially we was worried about spending the funding, but he thought this worked out pretty well.
 - The only improvement he would like to see is new enrollments.
 - This might partially be due to timing on when we received the CRP Incentive Funds and when landowners had to sign up. There just wasn't enough time to promote this program. He thinks in future years this should be an issue.
- CRP Incentive Approval
 - Approve the incentive locally and ask for reimbursement to the partnership.
 - For the Le Sueur SWCD Board meeting, go through each contract and total amount, but make one motion to approve all contracts and associated amounts listed.
 - To ensure the timing is right for CRP sign up and to limit the amount of times a landowner comes in, the SWCD may ask for preapproval for all contracts pending the CRP sign up.

Updates & Next Steps

- Updates

- Bluff Stabilization Tour Poll had went out
 - ST discussed the options of dates that worked the best for JPB members and staff.
 - Thursday, September 4th from 9am-12pm worked the best. Holly would send out an invite after the meeting.
- AC meeting will be scheduled sometime this fall. If the ST hasn't filled out the when2meet poll, I would do so as soon as possible.
- Next Steering Team Meeting: **Thursday, August 7th 10am-12pm**
- Next JPB Meeting: **Thursday, August 21st, 3:00pm-5:00pm**