

Lower Minnesota River East One Watershed One Plan

Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

March 20, 2024

Attendees at meeting: Holly Bushman (Le Sueur County), Mike Schultz (Le Sueur SWCD), Meghan Darley (Scott SWCD), Linda Loomis (Lower Minnesota River WD), Brad Behrens (Rice County), Steve Pahs (Rice SWCD), Anne Sawyer (BWSR), Barb Peichel (BWSR)

Welcome & Review Agenda

- The Lower Minnesota River East Meeting was held on Wednesday, March 20, 2024. The meeting was held virtually.

60 Day Comment Period Updates

- Holly provided an update on the 60-day comments that have been received so far. Many of the comments have come in within the last week.
- The Goal is to have all of these comments compiled and then sent out to the ST for review.
- The ST had some time to review the 60-day comments that have been submitted thus far and we started to develop responses.
 - Comments that were discussed came from MPCA, Met Council, BWSR, and DNR.
 - MPCA had a comment about fixing the bar graphs in Chapter 2 that show the importance of different topics in order to set plan priorities.
 - Met Council requested we consider adding a goal about reuse for stormwater and rainwater to offset groundwater supplies.
 - The ST discussed that we believe there are a significant unknowns about how to do this and who is already doing this. We will consider this as part of our 5-year amendment.
 - BWSR had a few different comments about spelling out what we will be assessing in the 5-year amendment mark within chapter 6. Additionally, BWSR suggested clarifying in more detail the Plan Administration and Coordination section.
- The DNR had comments about our Altered Hydrology/Sediment Reduction Goals being too low, culvert and dam inventories/replacement, and stream restorations.
 - The ST agreed that the goals set for altered hydrology and sediment seemed reasonable based off of numerous discussions about costs of projects, landowner willingness, and lack of data/knowledge about sediment loads in some subwatersheds.

- Culvert and Dam inventories/replacements the ST felt was more of a DNR priority; however, the partnership is open to partnering with the DNR if opportunities arise to address culverts and dams. Additionally, these projects are really expensive, and we have other priorities within the watershed we feel are more pressing.
- Linda mentioned that the Lower Minnesota River WD provided input about the plan.
- The Public Hearing had a few potential timeframes that would be available. Pending if comments can be reviewed and responded to.
 - We discussed that we would like some kind of quick presentation about the plan.
 - Provide handouts, posters, and factsheets.
 - If possible, have some kind of Q & A session before the public hearing starts.
 - We will need the PC to decide on a date, time, and location to host the public hearing.

Cost-Share Policies & Project Tracking

- Holly summarized the ST meeting in February. We had good discussions about cost-share policies; however, there were quite a few ST members absent from the discussion.
- The biggest talking point was whether we should have a watershed-wide cost-share policy or follow our own local policies.
 - There was good discussion about having too many different policies which may be confusing.
 - Some landowners may have land in numerous counties and the cost share policies rates likely would differ. We would need to be competitive and make sure rates are similar.
 - There was discussion about keeping the cost-share policy rates to cover at least 70%-90% of projects and practices.
- A suggestion was made not to put local policies in the LoMRE policy, but rather, just reference we will follow our own local policies.
- ST members will share all of their existing local policies to compare and contrast.
- The Cost-share Process and Approval would be the same watershed wide.
 - Need to think about batching requests.
 - Projects under \$75,000 would not require LoMRE JPB approval but may require local board approval.
- Do we need to have some kind of ranking and scoring of projects?
- Set a baseline amount of funds for each LGU that can be spent, however, if go over the baseline funds that are set aside then need to be a more competitive process.

- After the discussion, the ST thought it might be easiest to determine our workplan and what we want to work on first and then develop policies based off of the workplan.
 - Create a workplan that develops flexibility for the partnership.
 - Want to track efforts and funds.

Measurable Goals Ranking

- Meghan demonstrated what Scott SWCD uses to track projects and practices.
 - It was a database created that can track costs, notes, pollutant benefits, etc.
 - There is a cost to add users, but maybe we do not need to add everyone to use the database and only assign certain people. Meghan can look into it. About \$35/month/person.
- Barb asked if there would be an advantage to using this software?
 - Currently other watersheds use an excel spreadsheet and tell stories through maps and visuals.
- Meghan stated that the program can develop reports, letting you know how close you are to meeting your goals.
 - There is a separate tab in the program that tracks all of the funding sources.
 - Additionally, the database can create a contract and factsheet for each project/practice.
- Linda asked if the program tracks TA?
 - Meghan states it gives total hours work on and total staff time costs.
- Anne asked if we could export this to GIS?
 - Meghan stated it is not compatible with GIS.
- Anne also asked if we could include any ranking and scoring?
 - Meghan says yes currently set up as cost benefit.
 - Can use different scoring criteria.

Check in with Joint Powers Agreement

- Linda is still waiting to hear whether the Lower Minnesota River WD will join the JPB.
- Rice County attorney had a few comments.
 - One was about adding in a virtual option to vote.
 - Add in Exhibit A (which is referenced but not provided).
 - Stagger board terms to keep experienced board members on board at all times.

Updates & Next Steps

- The next steering committee meeting will be held on **Wednesday, April 17th from 1:30pm-3:30pm.**
- Next Policy Committee Meeting will be held **Thursday, April 18th from 3:00pm-5:00pm.**
- The next AC meeting will be held **Wednesday, April 17th from 10:00am-1:00pm.**