

Lower Minnesota River East 1W1P

Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Date & Time: 3:00-5:00pm, Thursday, September 21, 2023

Location:

Le Sueur County Soil and Water Conservation District Office
181 W Minnesota Street, Le Center, MN 56057

And

Virtual – Microsoft Teams

Attendees: Holly Bushman (Le Sueur County); Mike Schultz (Le Sueur SWCD); Greg Entinger (Le Sueur SWCD); Roger Bongers (Rice SWCD); Laura Amundson (LMRWD); Danny O'Keefe (Le Sueur County) (chair); Meghan Darley (Scott SWCD); Jeff Docken (Rice County); Doug Schoenecker (Scott SWCD), Linda Loomis (Lower MN River Watershed District); Steve Pahs (Rice SWCD); John King (Le Sueur County) (alternate); Bailey Griffin (ISG)

I. Welcome & Review Agenda - Policy Committee Chair

Chair O'Keefe called the meeting to order at 3:03 pm. Holly gave an introduction on the agenda and what will be covered in today's meeting.

II. Review and Approval of Agenda

There were no additions or amendments to the agenda.

Motioned by Schoenecker; Seconded by Entinger to approve the agenda.

The Motion carried unanimously for the agenda to be approved as presented.

III. Review and Approval of August 17th Meeting Minutes

Motioned by Entinger; Seconded by Bongers to approve the August 17th meeting minutes.

The Motion carried unanimously for the approval of the August 17th meeting minutes.

III. Implementation Table (Informational Item)

Bailey Griffin from ISG attended the meeting today to present to the Policy Committee a draft of the implementation table that covered best management practices.

First, Bailey provided a broad overview of the format of the implementation table and how it was developed. She mentioned that most of the information within the table is required such as the actual implementation activity, measurable goals, responsible party(s) for implementation,

timeline, and costs. Additionally, Bailey had brought up that as an AC and SC we prioritized which activities we would like to start with first. This will assist with work planning when the partnership starts implementing projects and practices after the plan is approved.

Before going over the implementation table, Bailey provided a friendly reminder about the different priority issues, priority areas, and measurable goals.

Today the partnership was just reviewing the implementation table that covered best management practices (ex: Ag BMPs, Urban BMPs, soil health, streambank stabilization, stream restorations, septic upgrades, well sealings, etc.) Bailey mentioned that we updated the implementation table measurable goals to reflect the withdrawal of the Scott County and WMO. Furthermore, Bailey demonstrated that the implementation table that is located within the plan itself is a more simplified version to keep it easier for tracking and reporting purposes. However, the SC and PC have an additional table that splits the BMPs into different HUC 12 watersheds to hold the LGUs accountable for number of BMPs and load reductions for each activity. This more detailed table will be in the appendices.

Lastly, Bailey went over the total costs to implement the comprehensive watershed management plan. In total to implement all the activities within the plan, it will cost roughly \$21 million dollars for the 10-year time frame. The current baseline funding of existing dollars we currently have through local, state, and federal funding, this total to around \$10.8 million dollars. The partnership needs about 50% more funds to implement all the activities listed within the plan. The baseline funding does not include watershed district/management organization funding, potential other grants that may come about, and additional nonprofit dollars.

There was some concern from the policy committee that there is a large deficit in funding to implement all the activities. Mike mentioned that we have seen this in other watersheds, and it takes time to build up these programs. Steven added most of these projects and practices are voluntary based and we need buy in from different landowners. Bailey also wanted to comment that none of the baseline funding includes landowner match which will undoubtedly be a part of the some of the costs for these activities.

Greg asked if the costs for easements and the measurable goals, for habitat priority issues, were reasonable? Mike mentioned that comparable to the costs of farmland and noncropland per acre, it seemed on par. The measurable goals for habitat were reflected as a 5 percent of the total acres that could be put into easements. We wanted to make sure we were putting in easement acres adjacent to existing land that is in protection.

Holly mentioned the next steps were to review the implementation table that includes data, studies, monitoring, policy, and regulation activities.

Laura mentioned that she was wondering out activities were meeting priority issues. She had seen this included within the table and thought that was great. Additionally, did not have any other concerns since we will have another section of the plan presented at the next meeting which will address other priority issues that may not have been addressed with the BMP section of the implementation table.

IV. Organizational Arrangement (Informational & Decision item)

Holly updated the Joint Powers Agreement based off comments that were made at the last meeting. Most of the revisions were minor, but still needed some discussion. The first decision for the PC to make was about the acronym that we want to use for the partnership.

After some discussion, the PC talked about using LoMRE. Motioned by Schoenecker; Seconded by Bongers to approve the partnership acronym to LoMRE.

The next suggested revision was the board term and vacancy. Holly asked what was the preference for a board term? The PC thought 2 years was appropriate.

There are numerous paragraphs within the JPA that reference a supermajority. Holly mentioned the percent for a supermajority will vary depending on the amount of partners that signed into the agreement. 5 members a supermajority is 60%, 6 members a supermajority is 66%, and 8 members a supermajority is 75%. Depending on members that want to participate in the JPA will determine the supermajority percentage.

The last item of the JPA that was discussed was dues. There are a million different ways to set up the dues. Holly recommended keeping the dues a flat fee, so it makes it easier for setting budgets. The PC thought making the dues payable by January 31st was reasonable. After some discussion, the PC thought the tiered approach based of percent of land within the watershed planning boundary was best. There will be 2 tiers to the watershed. Any partner that has 8% or more of their land within the watershed is in tier 1 and the total dues are not to exceed \$4,000. Any partner that has less than 8% of their land within the watershed is in tier 2 and the total dues are not to exceed \$2,000.

V. Reviewing Plan Content: Plan Administration & Coordination, Decision Making & Staffing and Organizational Structures or Formal Agreement Sections

Holly provided a handout to the PC on decision items that needed to be made for ISG to finish writing different sections of the plan. Holly mentioned the SC discussed these items yesterday and have recommendations to the policy committee. The first item is about Staffing and the different roles that need/could be filled. At minimum, the day to day, fiscal, and legal roles need

to be filled. Staff discussed they would have the capacity to fill the minimum roles of day to day and fiscal. It is preferred by the partnership that legal council be contracted out and the amount of time needed for legal services is minimal. There are additional roles that could be filled and have been utilized in other partnerships such as: project tracking/reporting role, education and outreach, and agronomist. Holly showed the PC a few different options on how the budget would work out if we added or did not add certain roles. There were some conversations about existing capacity and ability to take on more roles. Some partners can do some, and others are willing to share services, but can't necessarily take on additional new roles.

Building off sharing services, the partnership discussed sharing expertise, JAA, equipment, programs (smart salting, education and outreach, soil health field days) to help implement activities within the plan. We have a history of partnering in past efforts and would like to continue to do so while also strengthening our partnering efforts.

Another item that needed discussion was committees. The PC will become a JPB and the JPB will have final approvals of a workplan, budget, plan amendments, etc. Essentially, the JPB makes the final decisions for implementation efforts and directs staff. The JPB will meet at least twice a year, but likely will need to meet quarterly. Additionally, staff recommended having the existing SC as the "implementation" committee that helps move efforts along. The SC will continue to meet monthly. Lastly, the Technical Advisory Committee will assist with developing a draft work plan and providing expertise and opportunities to partner with different implementation activities. This committee will likely only meet 1-2 times per year.

Another time that was up for discussion was the decision-making ability. The steering committee wanted to know what the preference was for making decisions on project approvals and what are statutory requirements. The PC discussed that if that reviewing every project is not necessary but would like updates on projects that were approved by staff and the local level. The PC mentioned setting a dollar threshold of \$100,000 that requires board approval.

The last item that needed discussion was about Capital Improvement Projects. Existing CIPs are required to be mentioned, but the partnership needs to decide if they want their own program. The SC recommended keeping this door open, but mentioned these need to involve numerous partners, high costs, and large project (wetlands, storage, ravines, and streams) to qualify to be a CIP. The PC concurred with this.

VI. Planning Effort Timeline & Policy Committee Meeting Schedule (Informational Item)

Holly provided a handout of the plan timeline. The second part of the implementation table will be provided to the PC in October. Staff will ask for a 60-day review in January. The PC will see a

draft plan in October. ISG will start giving us sections of the plan to review. In November ISG will have a revised plan, so there will likely be no PC meeting. The official 60-day review will begin in January. Holly's goal is to have a draft JPA ready for attorney in December to give them a few months to review. Changes will be made and updated to the JPA based off comments from the attorneys. We just want to make sure the JPA is ready by the time the plan is ready.

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VIII. Updates & Next Steps

Updates & Next Steps

- Next Steering Team Meeting: **Wednesday, October 18th 1:30pm-3:00pm**
- Next Policy Committee Meeting: **Thursday, October 19th 3:00pm-5:00pm**
- Advisory Committee Meeting: **Wednesday, October 18th 10:00am-1:00pm**

IX. Meeting Adjourn

Motioned by Entinger, Seconded by Bongers at 5:00 pm

The Motion carried unanimously for the approval to adjourn at 5:00pm.

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