

Lower Minnesota River East One Watershed One Plan

Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

October 18th 2023

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

Welcome & Review Agenda

- The Lower Minnesota River East Meeting was held on Wednesday, October 18, 2023. The meeting was held virtually.

Advisory Committee Meeting Recap and Discussion

- Holly asked the Steering Committee how they thought the Advisory Committee went and if they had any questions on the internal review process?
 - The steering committee discussed that the excel spreadsheet was included to help track changes that individuals had.
 - There was some discussion on the required or preferred column within the excel table.
 - Barb suggested that the decision on whether or not to include the comments from the internal view process should be decided by the Steering Committee.
 - The suggestion was to have ISG send all of the comments from the review process over to the Steering Committee and we would go through them and review.
 - The Steering Committee decided we will meet on November 15th and decided that time for review and discussion of the plan. This meeting will be shifted to when the Advisory Committee meeting normally meets, (10am-1pm) to allow more time for review.
 - The meeting will be held virtually.

Continue Discussion of Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting, and Plan Amendments Sections

- Holly mentioned that there were a few sections remaining of the plan that needed some more discussion from the Steering Committee. At the moment, ISG has included some rough language, but it will need to be updated based off of today's discussion.

- We started with the amendment language for the plan. Holly did send out a draft word document of some proposed language for the amendment section. Some of the language was from BWSR's new operating procedures and some of the language was from other plans.
 - The language included within BWSR's operating procedures define minor amendments and full plan amendments.
 - Full Amendments
 - The amendment creates a new funding mechanism (e.g., water management district) or a new program that would have significant implications for local funding or taxing; and
 - The amendment changes overall plan priorities or goals.
 - Minor Amendments
 - Would include any amendments that are not listed above in the full amendments criteria.
 - Additional language was added about who can bring up an amendment, the process in which an amendment is submitted, and who will pay for the amendment process.
 - The Steering Committee thought that any person, agency, or local government can propose an amendment; however, members of the Steering Committee will be the ones providing a recommendation and presenting the proposed amendment to the Joint Powers Board.
 - There was additionally language added in this section that discusses how an amendment should be documented.
 - Lastly, the steering committee discussed items that don't require any plan amendment such as: formatting of the plan, revising the estimated cost for an individual project or program, altering the timeline for planned activities within the implementation schedule, and inclusion of additional data not requiring interpretation.
 - Barb asked where the most appropriate spot would be to discuss the amendment process? It should be included somewhere.
 - Steering Committee thought either the JPA or Bylaws. It would be easier to amend the bylaws if we wanted to change plan amendment language.
- The next sections we discussed were the assessment, reporting, and evaluation of the plan.
 - General language about annual reporting and assessing plan progress was already included within these sections.
 - The steering committee also discussed the Appendix and the more detailed table that divided activities within the watershed into subwatersheds would be utilized as a way to track progress within the plan (both funding and activities).

- The Steering Committee would provide a JPB update each year, assess progress towards plan goals every two years, and annually review the partnerships.
- There will be a major plan assessment at some point in time; however, for now, the partnership plans on having that major plan assessment occur during the 5-year mark. If additional amendments and assessments need to be made, the partnership has the flexibility to do so.
 - Part of the 5-year amendment will take a look at existing tools and data that we may change or strengthen for prioritizing and targeting efforts in the watershed. Currently the plan is using HSPF-SAM for most projects and practices in the watershed since that is what we have. However, other tools may work better and that is something the partnership will explore. Lastly, there is not a one size fits all approach with HSPF-SAM likely we will need to use other tools such as SSIE, LiDAR, PTMApp, etc. to help target, prioritize, and measure progress towards plan goals.

Workplanning Section

- The final section within the plan that must be included is workplanning.
- Barb mentioned that sending a draft of the workplan before approval to the JPB has worked well in other watersheds.
 - Staff agreed that the JPB should see a draft of the workplan for review and discussion before approving.
 - Holly also mentioned that including the Advisory Committee in the work planning process has been beneficial, at least in the Cannon. We discuss updates on where we are in planning efforts, decide what we want to focus on for 2 years, and see if there is opportunity to partner.
- Barb mentioned that many watersheds have some kind of spreadsheet to track progress with workplanning efforts. The Steering Committee hasn't discussed in detail how we want to track progress of projects within the workplan, but will need to do so soon.
- Holly asked about ranking and scoring projects. She mentioned that it is listed in this section, but how detailed do we need to be? That is another item that the Steering Committee will need to work on, likely during the formal review processes, to be ready to implement projects and practices as soon as possible.
 - Troy mentioned that Scott SWCD has a prioritization process and they look at cost-benefit.
 - Barb mentioned she also had some examples from other watersheds; including, the Lower Saint Croix and Rum.
- Troy suggested we discuss ranking and scoring projects, but stay generic with the criteria used for ranking and scoring. Maybe provide some examples of what could be used as criteria.

- Another point Barb wanted to bring up was as we develop this workplan we should discuss as a Steering Committee what is going to help us the most?
 - We have limited WBIF funds, and where are we going to allocate it?
 - She recommended having some guiding principles to assist with workplanning efforts.
 - Ex: half of the funding is dedicated to sediment reduction and storage.
- Barb thought a good approach to this would be to start at a high level. How much money do we want to dedicate to studies/assessments, BMPS, education, etc.
- Meghan had a question on whether we made a decision about staffing and their roles within this effort.
 - Holly said we discussed staffing needs, but never truly decided on what the Steering Committee would like to see.
 - Troy asked if WBIF funds can be utilized to pay for existing staff's time or new staff? Does this have to be mentioned in the plan?
 - Barb stated WBIF funds can be used to help with existing or new staff, but needs to be mentioned in the plan. As detailed as possible about what staffing we think will be needed to implement the plan.
 - Linda suggested putting language in the plan that we may hire new or utilize existing staff to help with implementation efforts.
 - Holly mentioned we could include contractors and consultants in this section as well.

Updates & Next Steps

- Plan Internal Review Process
 - Holly will send information discussed at this meeting for ISG to include within the Plan
- BWSR potentially will have a significant amount of funds for soil health grants; implementation and staff.
- Budget
 - Meghan just wanted to make sure it was okay to shift funds around that we are not using if needed for ISG to attend more meetings.
 - As long as there are enough funds for plan review it shouldn't be an issue.
- The next steering committee meeting will be held on **Wednesday, October 18th from 1:30pm-3:00pm.**
- The next policy committee meeting will be held **Thursday, October 19th from 3:00pm-5:00pm.**

- Next Advisory Committee Meeting will be held **Wednesday, October 18th** from **10:00am-1:00pm**.

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