

Shared services, shared goals



The Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership expanded upon what worked well for some of its 16 local government partners; adding a second staff member to deliver region-wide education and outreach is a key strategy in attaining goals set in its comprehensive watershed management plan



Watershed-Based Implementation Funding, which the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership is using to hire shared-services staff, comes from the Clean Water Fund.

As members of the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership implement a comprehensive watershed management plan, they're expanding upon shared services, a staffing strategy that has worked well in Washington County, to achieve some of those shared goals.

The [Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership](#) comprises 16 local government units in east-central Minnesota, spanning most of Chisago County, more than half of Washington County, parts of Anoka, Isanti and Pine counties, and a small piece of Ramsey County.

The group identified outreach, education, and conservation marketing as key drivers behind many of the plan's goals. It chose a collaborative approach to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

"Like any aspect of conservation, outreach and associated activities require specialized skills. We want



Above: Barbara Heitkamp, third from left, and Angie Hong, in light green, with son, Charlie, in front, join Pine County and Pine SWCD staff on a tour of newly installed conservation practices on Jerry and Joe Sausen's farm. Working with landowners on agricultural and residential lands is a key strategy for shared implementation of the Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. **Top:** The St. Croix River will benefit from the group's work. **Photos Courtesy of Angie Hong**

to make sure our outreach efforts are well-designed and executed with our resource goals in mind," said Washington Conservation District Manager Jay Riggs. "We opted

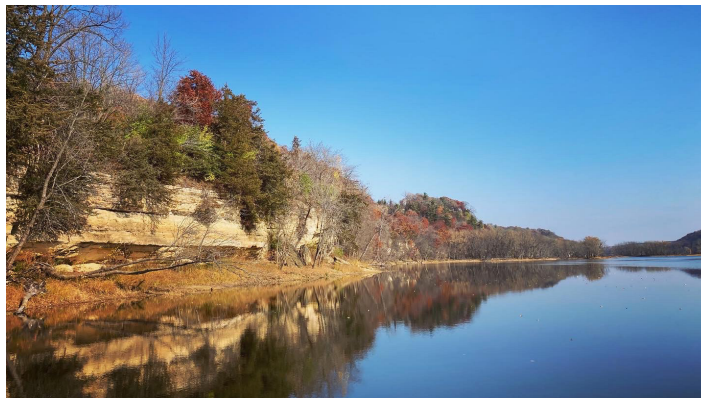
for shared services to ensure we have highly skilled people who have backgrounds and experience building programs that engage the community in our conservation work.”

Sharing services was among the Local Government Water Roundtable’s key goals when it developed the One Watershed, One Plan concept in its 2010 policy paper. It was not always practical for each local government to hire and retain deeply experienced staff. Conservation professionals often must be generalists who learn skills on the job.

One alternative: Local governments can pool resources to hire specialists who serve a larger region.

That was the basis for creating the East Metro Water Resources Education Program (EMWREP). In 2006, seven local governments in Washington County pooled their resources to hire a shared water coordinator, Angie Hong, who is hosted by the Washington Conservation District. Hong develops educational materials and implements programming to help partners meet education requirements for their stormwater permits and water management plans.

The EMWREP program has grown to include 25



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partners who jointly oversee program activities through a leadership steering committee.

Over the past 15 years, EMWREP programming has led to nearly 2,000 water-quality improvement projects on public and private land; 751 storm drains adopted in Washington County; 20 volunteers trained as Minnesota Water Stewards; 14 volunteers trained as Aquatic Invasive Species Detectors; 780 articles about water in weekly newspapers; and more than 1,000 people educated at workshops each year.

Seeing that program’s success, other members of the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership agreed to expand EMWREP north into Anoka, Chisago, Isanti and Pine counties. By leveraging local funds with state Watershed-Based Implementation

Funds (WBIF) from BWSR, the partnership in May created a second full-time position, hiring Barbara Heitkamp. The Washington Conservation District provides office space and administrative support for both positions.

The group is currently working on a partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension Service to hire an agronomist to work with agricultural landowners in the lower St. Croix watershed.

“Both the agronomist and the additional EMWREP programming are priorities in our work plan for Watershed-Based Implementation Funding from BWSR,” said Chisago Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Manager Craig Mell.

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— Craig Mell,
Chisago SWCD manager

on private lands will require effective outreach and community engagement programming. And hiring an agronomist who has the credibility and knowledge about farms and farm economies will expand our reach on the lands most important to achieving our plan’s pollution reduction goals for the St. Croix River,” Mell said.

Both positions are overseen by a subcommittee made up of members of the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership’s policy committee and local staff. The committee sets the priorities and direction for the shared staff, based on the Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.