

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources
520 Lafayette Road North
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

In the Matter of the review of the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Blue Earth River Planning Partnership, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801.

**ORDER
APPROVING
COMPREHENSIVE
WATERSHED
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Whereas, the Policy Committee of the Blue Earth River Planning Partnership submitted a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan) to the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (Board) on December 23, 2025, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #23-50, and;

Whereas, the Board has completed its review of the Plan;

Now Therefore, the Board hereby makes the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Order:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. **Partnership Establishment.** The Blue Earth River Planning Partnership (Partnership) was established on September 26, 2023, through adoption of a Memorandum of Agreement for the purposes of developing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The membership of the Partnership includes Blue Earth County, Blue Earth County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Faribault County, Faribault County SWCD, Freeborn County, Freeborn SWCD, Jackson County, Jackson SWCD, Martin County, Martin SWCD, and the City of Fairmont. Per the BWSR Operating Procedures, if less than 10% of the jurisdictional land area of the local government is within the watershed planning boundary, participation by that local government is optional. Cottonwood County, Cottonwood SWCD, Watonwan County, and Watonwan SWCD opted out of the planning process.
2. **Authority to Plan.** Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subdivision 14 allows the Board to adopt resolutions, policies or orders that allow a comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D to serve as substitutes for one another or be replaced with a comprehensive watershed management plan. Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.801 established the Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning Program; also known as One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P). Board Decision #23-50 adopted the revised versions of the *One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures version 3.0* and the *One Watershed, One Plan - Plan Content Requirements version 3.0*.

3. **Nature of the Watershed.** The Blue Earth River Watershed lies on the Minnesota – Iowa border. The Minnesota portion of the watershed encompasses a total of 777,243 acres in portions of Blue Earth, Cottonwood, Faribault, Freeborn, Jackson, Martin, and Watonwan counties. The Blue Earth River itself begins in Iowa and flows approximately 146 miles north with both the Watonwan and Le Sueur Rivers flowing into it before it outlets to the Minnesota River in Mankato. The miles of river and stream are joined by 69 lakes and approximately 360 miles of public open ditch and 1,400 miles of public subsurface tile drainage. Historically prairie, the current predominant land use is agriculture (86%), and the watershed is also home to 21 municipalities partially or wholly within its boundaries. The majority of drinking water comes from wells but two municipalities pull drinking water from surface sources (Fairmont and Mankato).
4. **Plan Development.** The Blue Earth River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan is primarily a restoration-based Plan. The Plan focuses on restoring impaired waters and habitats, protecting high quality lakes, reducing peak flows through water storage, and protecting drinking water quality through resource management. The Plan focuses on prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation efforts and lays out specific actions to meet Plan goals. It was developed in coordination with local government units, state and Federal agencies, and interested stakeholders.
5. **Plan Review.** On December 23, 2025, the Board received the Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses pertaining to the Plan for final State review pursuant to Board #23-50. State agency representatives attended and provided input at advisory committee meetings during development of the Plan. The following State review comments were received during the comment period.
 - A. Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA): Expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review responses to their draft comments. “The MDA has no additional comments and recommends BWSR approval.”
 - B. Minnesota Department of Health (MDH): “The Minnesota Department of Health has received the final draft plan to review and does not have any further comments or suggestions. MDH recommends approval of the Blue Earth River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.”
 - C. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR): Thanked the partnership for the opportunity to participate in the process and reviewed the responses to their draft review comments. “The DNR is satisfied with the responses to issues raised during our review, has no additional comments, and recommends that BWSR approve the plan.”
 - D. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA): Appreciated the opportunity to participate and provide input throughout the development process. “Overall, the Plan is very well written, concise, and thorough. We have no comments as part of the official 90-day Review and Comment Period and recommend it for approval.”
 - E. Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB): Policy requires that EQB be notified of the final draft document. EQB confirmed receipt of the Plan but did not provide comments.
 - F. Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR): BWSR staff conducted a review of the final Plan and commended the Partnership for its diligent undertaking of the planning process. Staff find the Plan meets plan content requirements. BWSR staff recommend BWSR Board approval of the Plan.

6. Plan Summary and Highlights.

- The watershed is organized into five planning regions based on Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUC) 10 boundaries. This allows for a watershed-wide focus while allowing actions to be tailored to the planning region they will have the greatest impact on.
- The Plan has a total of 15 high and medium priority issues. High priority issues include: erosion and sedimentation; stream, ravine, and shoreline erosion; nutrient loading; protection of surface drinking water sources; altered hydrology and flood damage reduction; wetlands; maintenance/repair of drainage systems; and soil health. Medium priority issues include: bacteria loading; aquatic invasive species; stormwater runoff; groundwater contamination; groundwater supplies; aquatic connectivity; and wildlife habitat.
- The Partnership made a point to integrate climate resiliency, environmental justice, recreation, conservation action, and policy development when developing the issues and goals of the Plan.
- Key goals include:
 - Reducing both total phosphorus and total nitrogen by 4% to improve stream and lake conditions (53,600 lbs/year and 1,975,300 lbs/year, respectively)
 - Implement 30,000 acres of soil health practices to aid in adding water storage while reducing nutrient sediment loss.
 - Water Storage short term goal of adding 1,200 acre-feet of water storage and a future condition goal of 71,895 acre-feet of water storage.
 - Stabilize or enhance 2,000 feet of priority lake shoreline.
 - Implement BMPs to treat 20 acres of urban runoff.
 - A focus on drinking water with the goals of:
 1. Reduce total phosphorus and total nitrogen contributions to the Fairmont surface water source, Budd Lake, by 20% (2,600 lbs/year and 12,700 lbs/year, respectively);
 2. Protect Mankato's surface water source through the previously mentioned 4% total phosphorus and total nitrogen load reductions;
 3. Sealing 100 unused wells; and
 4. Improve groundwater recharge by implementing 3,500 acres of recharge conservation practices (perennial land protection, cover crops, etc.).
- The estimated cost to meet the 10-year Plan's goals is approximately \$43.2 Million.
- An existing Joint Powers Entity, the Greater Blue Earth River Basin (GBERBA) will be utilized for implementation. GBERBA membership consists of both counties and SWCDs.

7. **Southern Regional Committee.** On February 19, 2026, the Southern Regional Committee met to review and discuss the Plan. Those in attendance from the Board's Committee were **Bd Comm Member Names**. Board staff in attendance were **Southern Regional Manager Ed Lenz and Board Conservationist Jill Sackett Eberhart**. The representatives from the Partnership were **List Partnership Attendees**. Board regional staff provided its recommendation of Plan approval to the Committee. **After discussion, the Committee's decision was to present a recommendation of approval of the Plan to the full Board.**

8. This Plan will be in effect for a ten-year period until **March 25, 2036.**

CONCLUSIONS

1. All relevant substantive and procedural requirements of law have been fulfilled.

2. The Board has proper jurisdiction in the matter of approving a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Blue Earth River Planning Partnership pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #23-50.
3. The Blue Earth River Planning Partnership Plan attached to this Order states water and water-related problems within the planning area; priority resource issues and possible solutions thereto; goals, objectives, and actions of the Partnership; and an implementation program.
4. The attached Plan is in conformance with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes Section 103B.101, Subd. 14 and 103B.801 and Board Decision #23-50.
5. The attached plan, when adopted through local resolution by the members of the Partnership, will serve as a replacement for the comprehensive plan, local water management plan, or watershed management plan, developed or amended, approved and adopted, according to Chapter 103B, 103C, or 103D, but only to the geographic area of the Plan.

ORDER

The Board hereby approves the attached Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan of the Blue Earth River, submitted December 23, 2025.

Dated at Saint Paul, Minnesota, this 25th day of March 2025.

MINNESOTA BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES

Todd Holman, Chair
Board of Water and Soil Resources

Date: _____