

Memorandum

Date: February 19, 2026

To: Southern Regional Committee

From: Jill Sackett Eberhart, Board Conservationist

Review of the Blue Earth River Comprehensive Watershed Management

PlanThe following memo outlines the BWSR staff review and recommendations for the Blue Earth River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan), developed through the One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program.

The Blue Earth River Watershed Planning Partnership (Partnership) was approved as a 1W1P planning grant awardee on August 24, 2023, and established a Memorandum of Agreement between the planning partners for the purposes of writing a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan on September 26, 2023. The partners include 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.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY:

- The Partnership held its first Policy Committee meeting on November 29, 2023. The Bylaws were reviewed and adopted at that time. The Policy Committee was an active and engaged group. Meetings generally occurred monthly, but were occasionally postponed due to holidays, lack of agenda items, etc.
- Notification of Plan development and invitation to submit priority issues and Plan expectations was held January 4, 2024 - March 8, 2024. Response letters were received from BWSR, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).
- The 1W1P Planning Grant agreement was executed January 10, 2024, with Martin SWCD acting as the fiscal agent. In addition, both Martin SWCD and Faribault SWCD staff acted as leads for planning administration/coordination.
- The search for a consultant was conducted via a Request for Qualifications and interviews. Houston Engineering Incorporated (HEI) was awarded the contract March 11, 2024.
- The required Public Kick-off Meeting was held May 23, 2024, from 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM at the Chain of Lakes Yacht Club on the shores of Hall Lake in Fairmont, Minnesota. This was an opportunity for

stakeholders to learn about the watershed planning process and discuss issues and ideas. Participation options included the in-person meeting or an online survey (open May 8 – June 7). Approximately 75 stakeholders were in attendance. Survey results consisted of 21 paper responses and 276 online responses for a total of 297 responses.

- The Advisory Committee was established by the Policy Committee on June 17, 2024, and they held their first meeting July 1, 2024. Members included: Partnership staff; local State agency representatives from BWSR, MDA, DNR, MDH and MPCA; local Federal agency staff; and citizen stakeholders (lake association, municipalities, township board, farmer, etc.). The Advisory Committee played a particularly important role in development of primary resource concerns, issues statements, and goals. They also assisted in the internal review of the draft Plan ahead of the 60-day review process by the Plan review authorities.
- An internal review of the draft Plan was provided to the Advisory Committee and Policy Committee on May 21, 2025. Internal comments were due June 12, 2025.
- The Partnership submitted the updated Draft Plan for 60-day review to the plan review authorities on July 29, 2025, with a deadline to submit comments by September 26, 2025. BWSR provided its comments to the Partnership on September 25, 2025. Other comments were received from Faribault County Drainage, MDA, DNR, MDH, and MPCA. The Partnership and its consultant provided responses to all comments received.
- The Partnership held the required Public Hearing on November 17, 2025, at 9:00 AM in Blue Earth, Minnesota, at the Blue Earth Ag Center. No members of the public attended for the purpose of discussion and/or comment.
- The Partnership submitted the final draft of the Blue Earth River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses to BWSR and the other required State review agencies on December 23, 2025.

WATERSHED PLAN SUMMARY:

- *Section 1. Executive Summary* provides a high-level overview of the watershed and the planning partners, an explanation of the planning committees, and a description of community engagement efforts during planning. In addition, it includes a summary of the priority issues and measurable goals, an explanation of the planning regions, and a summary of the implementation actions, programs, and estimated cost to meet Plan goals. Plan content requirements were met.
- *Section 2. Land and Water Resources Summary* provides a summary of watershed characteristics and issues. Information was included on watershed history, geology and topography, land use, habitat, climate, stormwater and drainage, surface water (lakes, streams, wetlands), groundwater and drinking water, and the people (demographics, environmental justice). Plan content requirements were met.
- *Section 3. Priority Issues* provides an explanation of how multiple sources of information, including public engagement, were used to develop a list of priority issues for the watershed and goes on to include a list of resource concerns and issue statements for this 10-year Plan. 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. This section also includes information on the lower

priority issues not addressed in this 10-year Plan and a summary of planning lenses. Plan content requirements were met.

- *Section 4. Measurable Goals* addresses the goals developed for the high and medium priority issues. Each of the 15 goal “factsheets” includes short term goals, desired future conditions, stacked benefits of meeting the goal, a focus area map, and planning region milestones. Prioritize-Target-Measure Application (PTMApp) pollution reduction estimates were used when applicable. The WRAPS, GRAPS, TMDLs, existing water plans, other management plans, studies and reports, and local expertise were also used to develop the goals. For the Altered Hydrology and Flood Damage Reduction resource issue, PTMApp as well as Watershed Health Assessment Framework (WHAF) were used to develop the goals and focus areas. Plan content requirements were met.
- *Section 5. Targeted Implementation* details specific implementation actions planned for the 10-year period and goal achievement. Watershed-wide implementation tables provide an overview (projects and practices, public participation and engagement, research and data gaps, capital improvements). However, each planning region has its own projects and practices table that shows actions and cost. A subsection on ‘targeting work’ helps to show how each planning region will provide progress towards watershed goals. Plan content requirements were met.
- *Section 6. Implementation Programs* describes the five implementation programs that will be used to fund and implement the Plan. These programs lay the foundation for how the Partnership will provide cost-share funds to landowners, host education and outreach efforts, measure pace of progress of the Plan, and lays out Partnership roles and responsibilities for such things as current regulatory administration and operation and maintenance. Plan content requirements were met.
- *Section 7. Plan Administration and Coordination* describes how the Partnership will work together to administer, implement, fund, and monitor the Plan. The Partnership will utilize an existing Joint Powers Entity to implement this 10-year Plan. The Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA) is a Joint Powers Organization consisting of county and SWCD membership in the Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Watonwan River Watersheds. Funds for implementing the Plan will come from numerous sources (local, State, Federal, etc.). The Partnership estimates that to meet Plan goals, the watershed will need approximately \$43.2 Million of funding. Lastly, this section includes information on how the Partnership intends to assess and evaluate Plan and Partnership progress and the process they will use for amendments. Plan content requirements were met for this section.

The Partnership held a 60-day review process that ended on September 26, 2025, and the required public hearing on November 17, 2025. The final draft of the updated Plan, a record of the public hearing, and copies of all written comments and responses were submitted on December 23, 2025, to the State review agencies. The Partnership has incorporated the majority of the agency and public comments received throughout the Plan development process.

The following state agency comments were received by BWSR during the 30-day review of the final draft Plan:

- 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.
- 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.”

- 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.”
- 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.”
- 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.”
- 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.

Enclosure

- Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan Executive Summary
- Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan Implementation Summary and Map
- Draft Board Order