

OUTCOMES:

Rum River Watershed Comprehensive Management Plan – Implementation Planning Committee Meeting

Date: October 17th, 2022

Time: 12:30-2:30 PM

Location: Virtual Meeting **Zoom Meeting**

Meeting called by: Planning Partners

Type of meeting: Work Planning Meeting

Facilitator: Tiffany Determan

Note taker: Lydia Godfrey, Isanti SWCD

Attendees:

Jamie Schurbon, Anoka CD
Sierra Cotter, Benton County
Gerry Maciej, Benton SWCD
Perry Bunting, MLBO
Susan Shaw, Mille Lacs SWCD
Lance Chisholm, Morrison SWCD
Tiffany Determan, Isanti SWCD
Lydia Godfrey, Isanti SWCD
Dan Cibulka, Sherburne SWCD

Ex-Officio Members:

Micheal Wagner, Anoka County
Barb Peichel, BWSR
Darren Mayers, BWSR
Michelle Jordan, BWSR

Other:

Colleen Werdien, Anoka CD Board, JPE Board Representative

Welcome and Introductions led by Determan.

Updates

- The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe joined the partnership.

- The JPE Board accepted the proposal from Kennedy and Graven to make them the entity's attorney.
- JPE Board approved moving forward with getting insurance from Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust (MCIT).
- The board also approved moving the work plan into the 45-day courtesy review period. Partners should submit comments before November 14th, so Determan has time to compile the comments before taking them to the JPE board. As this is a courtesy review, it is ok if boards do not submit comments. The timeline is included in the agenda for today's meeting.

FY2023 WBIF Policy package review

Determan reviewed the draft of the FY2023 WBIF Policy package review which includes a word document outlining the policies and an excel document that is used to rank projects. The goal is to have a consistent process so partners are aware of how to apply for funding, how the contracting process will work and how ranking will work. The agenda contains links to both the FY23 WBIF Project Polices word document and the Excel Ranking Spreadsheet.

There are three sections to the word document: Project selection and approval process; Contracting process and policies; and Cost-share rates and policies.

Sections One and Two

The first section, project selection and approval process, determines if a project is eligible for funding. To be eligible a project must meet WBIF eligibility requirements, be a priority A item, and must be within a tier 1 or tier 2 priority drainage area or a priority geographic area. If a project meets all the criteria, the partner can fill out the Eligibility and Ranking Excel Sheet. Those submitting projects must submit at least the excel sheet but may submit additional information as well.

If a partner has a project to propose they should send it to the coordinator, in this case, Determan, by the third Monday of the month. Determan will send submitted projects out to IPC members to review. Partners may also request funding for staff time if it makes progress toward priority plan goals.

It is unlikely the IPC will be able to approve projects, but they will make recommendations to the board and therefore still will need to meet regularly. The proposed review periods are March, June, September, and December. The JPE board meets on the fourth Thursday of the month, so the review would be at the end of each month. If no projects are submitted in a quarter that review period will be skipped. Funds cannot be requested until the partnership has them. The policy also dictates that the IPC can revise the ranking sheet, since in practice changes may be needed. Members will be notified if changes are made to the ranking sheet.

Section two outlines the contract process and policies. Members with projects will have a contract with the landowner as well as the JPE board. Contracts should have easement agreements and deed restrictions for projects above a certain value. The current proposed value is \$5,000. Schurbon went over the policies to receive payment from the fiscal agent. Payments can happen after the Fiscal Agent has approved the project contract for funding and the JPE board has approved the project. Progress payments are allowed so projects do not need to be completely done before receiving payment. Plan to have 10% withheld in payment from each project that will be reimbursed at the end of the grant. When submitting projects partners should include the requested payment and a contingency. If a change is larger than 10% or no longer the same scope of work, it will need to go to the JPE board for reapproval.

Discussion for Sections One and Two:

Cibulka asked to discuss the current batching periods for project approval. Quarterly batches are preferred but may want to choose months where the partnership would anticipate last-minute projects to appear. The proposed review periods are March, June, September, and December. Members can provide input.

There was a discussion about the IPC approving projects under \$25,000. Schurbon relayed that the lawyers believe the board should approve all projects. In that case, the board would have to meet quarterly, and the IPC would provide recommendations on project approvals. Colleen questioned the types of projects that would be under \$25,000. Schurbon clarified it would be small projects such as a single rain garden, or possibly staff time. The document will be changed before going to the board to reflect that the JPE board will approve all projects regardless of cost.

Maciej questioned how specific the project submission should be, and if it can be a group of high-ranking items. Determan stated that some project types would make sense to be submitted as a group, such as cover crops. Maciej then added that quarterly approval would work better when project types could be lumped together so partners could move things around logistically.

Peichel questioned if the FY2023 WBIF Policy package would need board approval to make anticipated changes. Determan reassured that the items that would be changed would be small items such as grammar and equations in the eligibility ranking sheet which would not need approval. Peichel also asked the group what would be done if partners didn't respond and if they would go with majority approval or a deadline. A discussion followed and it was decided that a deadline of two weeks would be set for partners to vote.

Deed restrictions were discussed. Without deed restrictions, members would need to find an equivalent project or pay back the grant funds used. Maciej questioned who would be responsible from a BWSR perspective if a project was removed. Peichel said BWSR would first contact the entity. Mayers added that if there was a deed agreement in place the landowner would be at fault. Jordan clarified that BWSR would put the responsibility on the entity who would then decide how they would work with members. Maciej asked to consult his staff to get their input about deed restrictions. Determan added deed restrictions may not make sense for non-structural projects, and it would not apply for staff time. The \$5,000 limit for deed restrictions is up for discussion as well. Maciej added that many relatively small activities can be done over \$5,000 so the current threshold may be too low. The policy surrounding deed restrictions and easement agreements will continue to be discussed.

Colleen asked if the Fiscal Agent will need to create a new bank account to handle WBIF. Schurbon explained that a new bank account would not be needed and instead the money would be tracked separately in QuickBooks.

There was a discussion about withholding 10% of each project for reimbursement. Maciej asked for people's thoughts on paying 100% of each project until the final 10% of the grant. Schurbon warned under that scenario those doing projects during the last 10% of the grant would have to fully fund the project until reimbursement which may be a large burden.

Peichel asked about advanced payment for projects. Schurbon clarified those approving the project could also approve advanced payments. An example of projects that could be paid upfront are expensive projects like alum treatments. Shaw questioned if staff time could be requested as an advanced payment. Schurbon said that staff time could be paid in advance but hopefully members can avoid that.

Section Three and Excel Ranking Spreadsheet

Section three, Cost Share Policies, describes the rates at which projects will be funded using WBIF and match rates. Determan reviewed the section and reminded the group about WBIF policy. Under some circumstances partners may request 100% of project funding, however, the group must ensure there is enough match overall. A few actions will be able to be fully funded but otherwise would ask for a 25% match from projects except for forestry actions. Non-structural projects will need to adopt the non-structural policy, and therefore will be required for 3 years and need to be a newly adopted project. The partnership is currently proposing paying for these three-year projects with one lump sum at the beginning to avoid running out of WBIF.

The goal is to have the policies approved by January. The next steps will be to make the suggested updates and send it back to IPC for more comments by November 14th.

The Excel Ranking Spreadsheet has many tabs so all the information can be in one place. When the excel form is completed a score will be calculated. If a project meets a certain threshold, then the project is eligible to receive funding. The threshold is currently set at 40. There is one row for each funding request. Columns B, C, D, and F will automatically label themselves as yes or no. Any no would indicate the project would not receive funding. Conservation practice categories are scored based on values another watershed district is using and adjusted based on the priority work plan. Members should go through conservation practice scoring and provide their comments about the values assigned.

Discussion for Section Three and Excel Ranking Sheet

There was a discussion about grant match policies. Maciej questioned if everyone's cost-share policy would need to be the same. Determan stressed the most important thing was getting a trackable match that fits WBIF policy. How individual partners get that match is up to them. The group can discuss adjusting cost share rates more but for now, the

policy will be used as a starting point. Schurbon warned that if adjusting cost-share rates the group must be mindful of achieving the overall WBIF grant match.

Maciej wondered if projects would be ranked the same if they are in different areas. Schurbon responded that the ranking sheet has a spot to designate the waterbody which will change the ranking depending on the tier the waterbody is in. However, the score for individual practices does not change for each area.

Education and Outreach Work Plan Subcommittee

An education and outreach work plan will be made to define larger goals and must be done before outreach work starts. Shaw will organize a meeting with those on the committee. An email will be sent to JPE board meetings to see if members would like to join. The goal is to have the plan done in December since BWSR would like to view it.

Discussion:

Colleen noted she is interested in joining the subcommittee.

Next meeting:

December 19th 12:30pm – 2:30pm via Zoom.