

2022 Mille Lacs  
Soil & Water  
Conservation  
District  
Annual Report

## 2022 Mille Lacs SWCD's Outstanding Conservationist

In December, Mille Lacs SWCD named Margaret Vos as their outstanding conservationist for 2022. She was recognized, along with others around the state, at the annual MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts conference held in Bloomington, MN. In 2019, Margaret worked with the Mille Lacs Soil and Water Conservation District and the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group (MLLWMG) to switch her shoreline from turf grass to native vegetation. Since then, she has become an active member of the MLLWMG's Compass program as well as become an active member with the MLLWMG. She continues to be a shining example of what hard work and determination can accomplish for conservation.



## Mille Lacs SWCD received the 2022 SWCD of the Year Award



Recognized for its extensive conservation work and leadership efforts, Mille Lacs Soil & Water Conservation District received the 2022 SWCD of the Year Award for Minnesota. During its 86th annual meeting, the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) honored Mille Lacs SWCD with the award in Bloomington. The award recognizes and inspires leadership within the SWCDs to go above and beyond the base capacity.

Mille Lacs SWCD was recognized for having an exceptionally engaged board; highly skilled technical and administrative staff; and an outstanding manager, all dedicated to delivering a wide range of conservation services geared toward their diverse base of land and water resources.

# Financial Information

Mille Lacs SWCD lacks levy authority and are reliant on external funding to meet operational needs. Funding may be sourced by county allocation, watershed-based implementation funds, competitive grants, and contracted services. We work very closely with other local governments including counties, townships, and cities to assist area people with soil and water resource management.

## 2022 Funding sources

### **County Funds:**

County Allocation - \$119,239

### **State Funds:**

BWSR Local Capacity - \$124,397.00

BWSR Buffer - \$8,500.00

BWSR Conservation Delivery - \$18,868.00

BWSR Cost Share - \$6,944.00

BWSR RIM - \$2,451.50

BWSR Snake River 1W1P Planning Grant - \$2,574.64

AIG competitive grant - \$5,333.00

MPCA WPLMN Contract - \$7,633.61

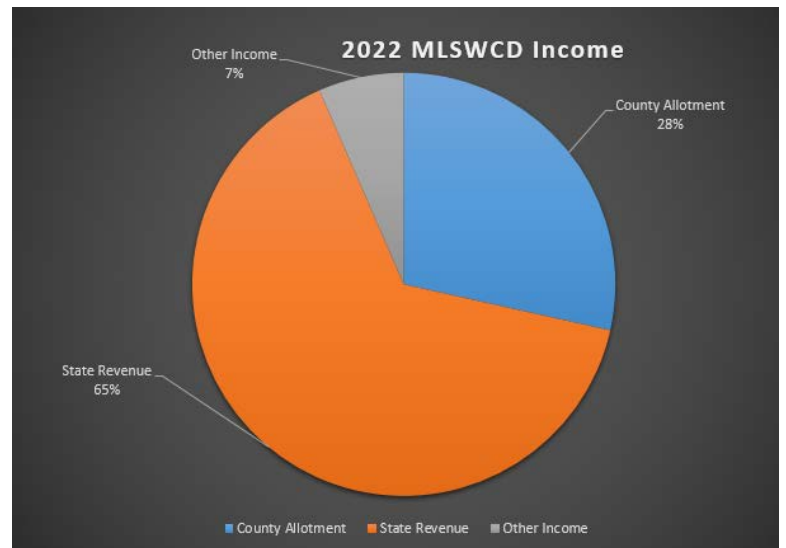
DNR Observation Wells Contract - \$1,920.00

MDH Groundwater Grant - \$21,055.05

### **SWCD Program Funds:**

Tree Sales: \$18,079.01

Rental Equipment Sales: \$5,662.36



## 2022 Expenses

Personnel - \$260,128.19

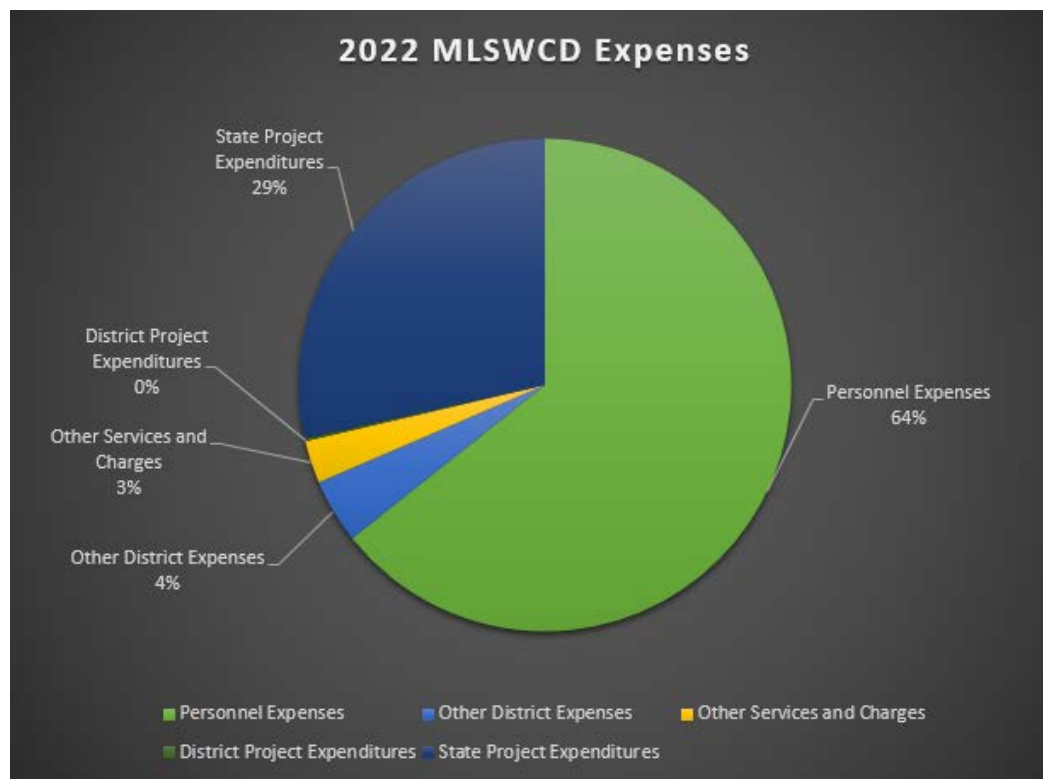
Professional Services - \$5,132.14

Professional Associations - \$6,186.89

Overhead (including rent, supplies, vehicle expenses, etc.) - \$17,209.89

District Project Expenses (Tree and Rental expenses) - \$584.69

State Project Expenses - \$115,291.21



# Civic Governance Framework Document

*MILLE LACS SWCD IDENTITY STATEMENT (our mission - who we are as an organization) Mille Lacs SWCD is applying a civic governance approach to SWCD actions and activities. The work of the SWCD and the outcomes of its activities will produce a base of active citizens with common interest in sustainable soil & water conservation. All stakeholders are committed to organize, educate, and apply policy according to principles and standards instituted in democracy.*

## **The Civic Governance Identity is grounded in the following Civic Principles:**

### *Human Capacity (to govern for the common good)*

- Every individual is a policy maker and has the capacity to know what is good, to grow in that knowledge, to govern for the common good, and to be a co-producer of justice in the world. Civic Leaders are obligated to organize the civic infrastructure to achieve this outcome.

### *Democracy (A system of governance that requires citizens to govern for the common good)*

- Rule by “the people” is the best system of human governance. All stakeholders organize a civic infrastructure to govern for the common good and produce justice in the tension between individual and diverse interests.

### *Active Citizenship (Civic Leadership) (Role that obligates all stakeholders to govern for the common good)*

- An active citizen is a governing member. In a democracy, citizens are obligated to govern for the good of the whole. In return for their contributions, citizens share in the rewards of a just society. Civic Leaders are obligated to organize the infrastructure needed for individuals to be active citizens in institutions of family, faith, community, work, learning and governance.

### *Political Competence (mindset and skill needed to carry out obligation of active citizenship)*

- Politics is the “work of the citizen”. All citizens are responsible to develop the political competence to define problems, produce solutions, and establish policies in light of civic principles and standards while achieving their particular goals. This mindset and the civic skills needed to carry out the role of active citizenship is dependent upon civic leaders who organize the capacity for key stakeholders in their jurisdiction to carry out the obligation of active citizenship.

### *Institutional Efficacy (Societal structure needed to sustain democracy and develop active citizenship)*

- In a democracy, institutions of family, faith, work, community, learning, and governance sustain the democratic values of our society and ensure the capacity to govern for the common good. Civic leaders and active citizens know they are obligated to produce the civic institutions and infrastructure necessary to sustain democracy as a just system of governance.

## **Civic Standards guide all decision-making**

- All those impacted by the problem are stakeholders and help define the problem in light of civic principles and the realities of their situation.
- All stakeholders are accountable for contributing resources (leadership/time, knowledge, constituencies & dollars) to solve the problem.
- All stakeholders are engaged in decision-making and policy-making that contributes to the common good. (Civic leaders take primary responsibility to organize transparency and accountability in the process of governance.)

- All stakeholders implement policies grounded in civic principles in the places where they have the authority to act.

*THE PURPOSE (or vision of the SWCD): To organize more sustainable partnerships between government and community, by developing and supporting an active role for all citizens in managing soil & water resources, that will ensure soil and water resources can meet the needs and the common good of all citizens.*

**Civic Organizing Disciplines and Political Skills are used to meet Standards while achieving goals.**

#### *Civic Organizing Disciplines*

- Civic Governance Policy Agenda-CG Governing Document policy documents
- Civic Leadership Development-Means for implementing Policy Document while achieving goals. (Civic Organizing Agency)
- Power Analysis-Guides Strategic Planning
- Work Plan-Implements agreements
- Used to advance work plan:
  - o Principle Driven Calendar
  - o Public Meeting
  - o Public Evaluation

#### *Political Skills*

- Civic Policy Making - Evidence supports Civic Governance Policy Agenda-calling for investment in civic leadership development.
- Critical thinking: Distinguishing objective reality (empirical facts) from subjective reality (interpretative) as both relate to achieving our principles and common goals.
- Open-ended questions to engage different perspectives within complexity.
- Strategic listening to determine and clarify self-interest as it relates to common goals.
- Suspending judgment to understand divergent points of view.
- Ability to negotiate and compromise while staying accountable to civic principles.
- Fostering constructive tension to work through values that are each good in their own right but often conflict (e.g. freedom and equality).
- Holding self and others accountable for following through on agreements.

This is the model or policy for what the MLSWCD needs to do and how we need to behave to achieve the purpose, to be able to organize citizen action. Adopted by the MLSWCD Board 12.09.2020

# Mille Lacs SWCD Compass 2022

The goal of Mille Lacs Compass work is to build long-lasting, on-going relationships with landowners that have a shared willingness to address shoreline erosion and stormwater runoff. We are working toward building trust with landowners who sincerely care about doing what they can do to protect Mille Lacs Lake. These landowners have shared their Compass values with neighboring landowners, allowing us to begin building a network of people interested in taking action to protect Mille Lacs Lake.

This year we have been visiting with people about what is happening on their shoreline and about what they would like to see happen on their shoreline. These visits answer questions like; "What are they able to contribute to making their shoreline the best it can be?" and "How can the SWCD help them?" Site visits with landowners revolve around Do-It-Yourself Best Management Practices (BMP) with on-going technical advice to establish no-mow buffers and other shoreline BMPs. Larger projects that may need engineering assistance are investigated and options are shared with the landowners.

Conversations with landowners in 2022 resulted in:

- Three site visits with new landowners, two were referred by active Compass members. Two of these landowners were already working to develop no-mow buffers on their shore. A site visit was conducted by Technical Service Area III engineers to advise on stormwater control solutions at one of these locations.
- Four new Shoreland Stewardship Plans were written. Two resulted in site visits with Technical Service Area III engineers to investigate complicated BMPs.
- Many return site visits with Compass members to develop new projects, provide technical assistance for on-going projects and receive referrals to neighbors who are interested in Compass.
- Attended Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group sponsored outreach events designed to bring Compass members together to share resources and talk about the work they are doing on their shorelines.
- Three landowners are working with neighbors to encourage them to install protective shoreline BMPs.
- An on-going relationship with a landowner has resulted in a referral that lead to a site visit, a no-mow buffer and a Shoreland Stewardship Plan. These neighbors will be working with other neighbors in 2023 to develop a neighborhood of continuous shoreline buffer.



*No-mow buffer on Mille Lacs Lake*



*Neighbors on Mille Lacs discussing their shoreline no-mow buffers*

# WPLMN: Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network

The *pollutant load* of a stream is the mass or amount of a pollutant that passed a monitoring station over the course of the monitoring period. This is a statewide project, which measures and compares pollutant load data from Minnesota's rivers and streams to track water quality trends. WPLMN data is used to assist with assessing impaired waters, watershed modeling, determining pollutant source contributions, developing watershed and water quality reports, and measuring the effectiveness of water quality restoration efforts.

## Description of work completed:

- Two invoices submitted during the reporting period to the MPCA Project Manager tracked expenditures, compiled and submitted invoice from beginning of the year through June 2022.
- The 2021 Interim Progress Report was posted on Mille Lacs SWCD's website.
- Participated in all one hour calls between January 1st and June 8th, 2022.
- Participated in Mid-Project meeting June 8th, 2022.
- Ice and distilled water were purchased throughout the season as needed.
- Contacted MVTL to request sample bottles, maintained current copy of Permit to Appropriate and Transport Water for Water Quality Sampling.
- Checked weather and forecasting sites in addition to the Cooperative Stream Gaging Websites routinely to determine when sampling should occur.
- Reviewed all sampling results from MVTL.
- Calibration of YSI weekly in sampling months, and now in storage over the winter or until a decision is made to replace before next sampling season or in next contract. Calibration logs scanned and sent to project manager.
- No replacement of probes were needed for YSI in spring of 2022 in preparation for the sampling season.
- Conducted Temperature sensor checks with NIST thermometer two times before June 7, 2022 and submitted meter calibration logs to project manager. (dates highlighted on calibration sheets)
- Collected 12 water samples and field measurements at Rum River and collected 16 samples at West Branch.
- All samples shipped via SpeeDee to MVTL.
- All submitted to GoCanvas by due dates. Also scanned and submitted field sheets by due date to project manager.
- Flux32 work for Rum River and submitted zip files to project manager on through June 10, 2022.

# MDH Groundwater Accelerated Implementation Grant progress report

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## Purpose

The purpose of this project is to increase citizen and decision maker awareness of the relationship between land use, groundwater and drinking water

## Goals

- 1) Increase understanding of groundwater vulnerabilities and the actions that can be taken to reduce the threat of groundwater risk in a targeted area.
- 2) Identify key individuals in the community that understand the need and agree to take an active role with the SWCD in communicating the need within the community.

## Tasks

- Postcards sent to targeted area to invite landowners to have water tested for nitrates.
- Week-long Nitrate Clinic to test drinking water and start conversations about groundwater risk knowledge.
- Develop partnerships with key stakeholders in the community willing to take on roles that make sense to them.

Outreach was sent to targeted area by informational postcards that advertised a free nitrate clinic. People dropping off water samples were engaged in conversation around risks to groundwater and actions that might be taken to protect their drinking water. Conversation notes and knowledge levels were tracked in a spreadsheet. Conversations were initiated with those in the community who are already involved in active roles around groundwater safety.

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**Deliverable:** Designed and mailed out 3300 postcards for nitrate clinic

**Deliverable:** 108 conversations/survey with landowners to determine knowledge of drinking water risks

**Deliverable:** Identified 3 key stakeholders.

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## Progress/Outcomes:

Over 3,330 landowners in our targeted area were invited to a week-long Nitrate Clinic to have their well water tested for nitrates. 63 people brought in a sample to be tested and each was engaged in conversation about possible risks to their drinking water source. Each conversation was evaluated as to the level of knowledge about possible risks to groundwater safety. These conversations revealed that 47% had no knowledge about groundwater risks and 41% had some knowledge. The remaining 12% were determined to be very knowledgeable. We learned that people are very interested in economical and convenient opportunities to test drinking water for further parameters such as arsenic and coliform bacteria.

After speaking to many community members who are interested and involved in groundwater quality, three key stakeholders have been identified. These three were identified as key stakeholders because they are knowledgeable about groundwater safety risks and have expressed an interest in partnering with the SWCD by engaging their networks in communications about drinking water protection. They all have resources to offer and are willing to take active roles to increase knowledge of risks to drinking water in our targeted area. One stakeholder is a Health Educator and Outreach Coordinator for Mille Lacs County Public Health, another is the Executive Director of the Princeton Public Utilities Commission and the third is the Public Works Supervisor for the City of Milaca.

## Next Steps:

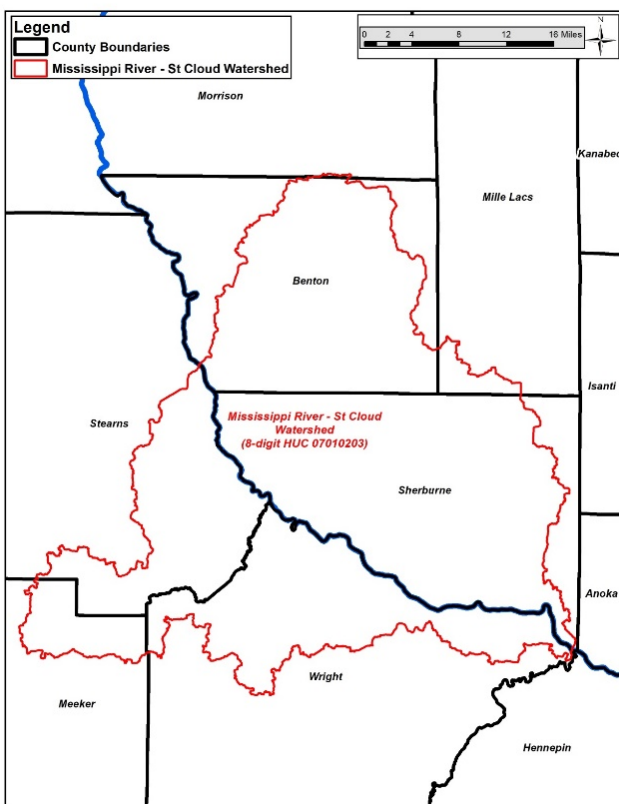
Further outreach will be done to send out post cards that inform the targeted area about the risks that abandoned wells create for drinking water.

We will call back those people we have spoken to who were interested in groundwater information to ask open ended questions to determine if their level of knowledge has increased. We will track what we learn from these conversations and share the information with our key stakeholders. We will then check in with our key stakeholders and interested landowners to achieve agreements on our next steps and then again to see what actions have been taken.

## One Watershed One Plan (1W1P)

- A voluntary program through BWSR designed to foster collaboration between upstream and downstream local governments to work where it's most important in the watershed, not limited to county or other jurisdictional boundaries. BWSR's vision for One Watershed, One Plan is to encourage a transition from local water planning along county boundaries, to instead align water planning on major watershed boundaries statewide by 2025. While water management planning is voluntary, local governments must have a state approved and locally adopted local water management plan to be eligible for many sources of funding.

Plans created through the 1W1P program are called comprehensive watershed management plans and are described in §103B.801. Plans need identify and prioritize resources and issues and set measurable goals. A targeted implementation schedule describes planned actions. Plans also describe programs and the future partnership that will implement the plan. Plans are comprehensive: they address water quality and quantity, groundwater, drinking water, habitat, recreation, and other issues.



**Mississippi River – St Cloud One Watershed One Plan** – This planning partnership is comprised of Benton SWCD, Benton County, Meeker SWCD, Meeker County, Mille Lacs SWCD, Sherburne SWCD, Sherburne County, Stearns SWCD, Stearns County, Wright SWCD, and Wright County. 2.5% of Mille Lacs SWCD/County jurisdictional land area is in the Mississippi – St. Cloud 1W1P area, making them an optional partner (10% and above is required).



**Specific SWCD Goal** – Our role will be small or passive involvement that may consist of being lightly active in the planning project, reviewing appropriate materials and participating in meeting of the process that apply to our portion of the watershed. MLSWCD is in charge of creating a website for the project and keeping that page updated with important information.



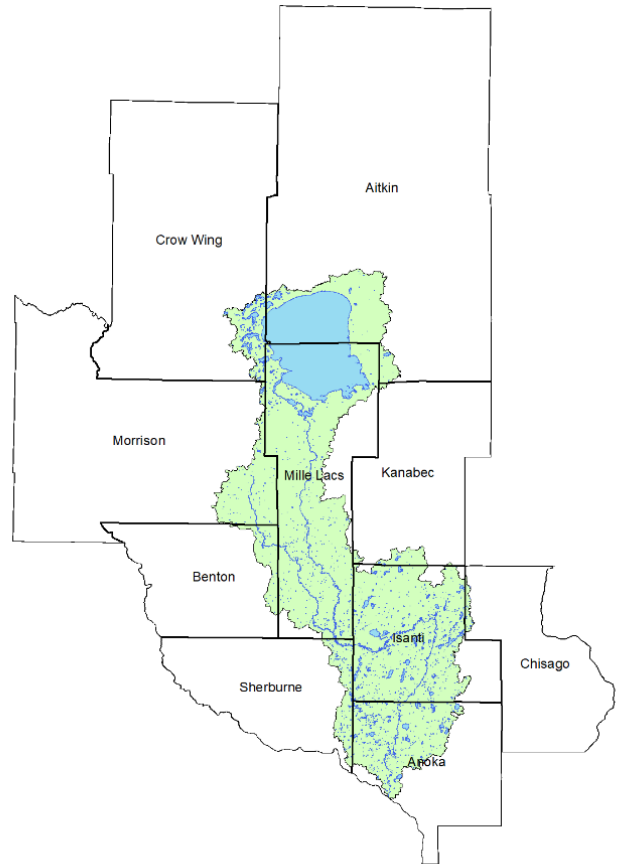
**Overall Status** – Mille Lacs SWCD Board passed a resolution that supports the application to BWSR for the planning grant and anticipates entering into a MOA with counties, SWCDs, Watershed Districts within the boundary to implement collaborative efforts and to be eligible for plan-based implementation funding from BWSR. BWSR has approved the planning boundaries and the application. The Policy Committee has met to discuss interim operating procedures, project updates, draft MOA, draft PC bylaws, and advisory committee structure. There has also been the created of a Technical Advisory Committee, and work in place for a Citizen Advisory Committee. There will be a kickoff meeting hosted by Sherburne in January 2023.

**Rum River 1W1P Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning** – This planning partnership is comprised of 18 participating local governments including 7 counties, 9 SWCDs and 2 WMOs. 83.1% of Mille Lacs SWCD/County jurisdictional land area is in the Rum River 1W1P area, making them a required partner (10% and above is required).



**Specific SWCD goal** – The MLSWCD plays a lead role in outreach during the planning process. An outreach plan was developed which identifies five key goals:

- 1) Inform – by developing common understanding of specific roles of equal value played by government, institutional and community partners.
- 2) Input - Diverse stakeholder perspectives will be linked to stakeholder contributions in the implementation of the plan.
- 3) Transparency that supports understanding of the purpose/goal for planning as it relates to the common need for sustainable water quality.
- 4) Buy-in built through participation in the process – create the ownership and understanding of roles needed for implementation.
- 5) Empowerment (decision-making in the hands of the public) - Achieved through a civic outreach process (Decision-making done by and including community members who will implement the plan.)



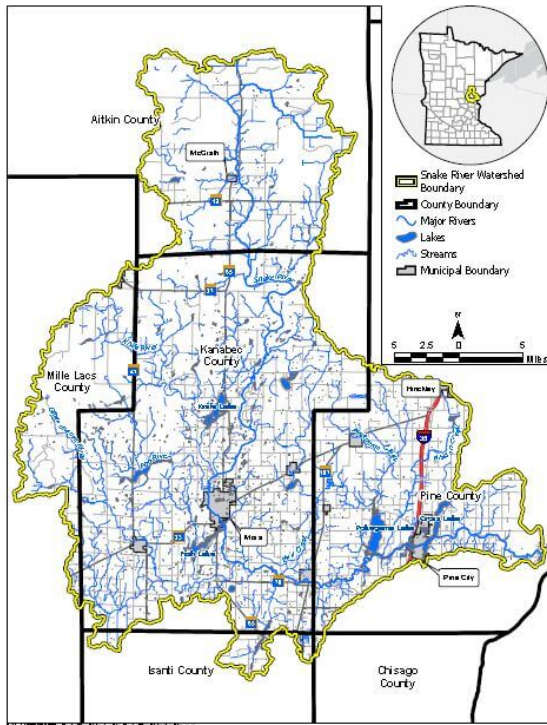
**Overall Status** - During Summer-Winter 2019/20 the public kickoff events, survey and analysis of existing studies were completed. Spring 2020 identified

management zones, issues and goals were refined. Summer 2020 switched to strategies development. Planning goals completed by late summer of 2021. Harmony Maslowki was participating in the technical advisory committee, updating the Rum 1W1P website, and had the role of note taker for the technical and policy committees. Maslowski and Susan Shaw have a shared role on the planning team. The Implementation Advisory Committee met three times, as planned, for this planning process. The Technical Advisory Committee finalized the implementation table and the planning team finalized the outreach and engagement plan which illustrates three types of outreach. Type A supports raising awareness and behavioral change, Type B supports community organizing and buy-in, Type C supports technical assistance and project development. The three types working together can aid in building trust with our stakeholders, LGUs (local government units), and landowners. The Planning Team has reviewed the draft narrative and has met to address staff capacity needs for the 10-year effort. The Technical Committee and Policy Committee has reviewed the full draft plan and provided comments. The state agency comments have been addressed after the 60-day review. The Pre-Public Hearing and Public Hearing comments and responses have been addressed. The MLBO has decided to join the JPE. The plan was approved by the Policy Committee to submit to BWSR on February 24<sup>th</sup>. The plan was approved by BWSR in May 2022. Work has been started to fine tune and implement the plan.

The link to the plan is located on our website:

<https://www.millelacsswcd.org/rum-river-one-watershed-one-plan/>

**Snake River One Watershed One Plan** – This planning partnership is comprised of 8 participating local governments including 4 counties and 4 SWCDs. 14.4% of Mille Lacs SWCD/County jurisdictional land area is in the Snake 1W1P area, making them a required partner (10% and above is required).



**Specific SWCD Goal** – Play an active role in the planning process with specific roles in fiscal administration of the planning grant and outreach. MLSWCD plans to strategically engage key stakeholders from the community in the process of identifying issues, goals and strategies. MLSWCD will host a webpage for the planning effort.



**Overall Status** – During the pre-planning phase the partnership has accomplished aggregated watershed information from existing plans, hosted two kickoff meetings and a kickoff survey, hosted three topic group meetings that included Agriculture, Forestry, and Lakes/Rivers community discussion and wrote the Land and resource Narrative by the Fall of 2020. The group then moved into the planning phase of drafting issues and the Policy Committee has approved the draft Land and Resource Narrative and issue statements. Over the last year, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) has worked to group, rank and reduce the 19 initial statements down to 7 focus areas. The TAC then worked through defining goals and priority areas for each issue. In September of 2021, a joint meeting of the SRWMB and 1W1P

Policy Committee supported working together through a merged structure and a Joint Powers Entity. A subcommittee was formed to move forward with developing the language of the JPA and Bylaws, which are anticipated to be brought back to the boards by the end of the year. A final draft of the plan was submitted to BWSR and is slated for acceptance in early 2023.

The link to the plan is located on our website:

<https://www.millelacsswcd.org/snake-river-one-watershed-one-plan/>