

OUTCOMES:

Rum River Watershed Comprehensive Management Plan – Implementation Planning Committee Meeting

Date: March 13th, 2023

Time: 12:30-2:30 PM

Location: Hybrid Virtual Meeting ****Zoom Meeting**** and in-person at Mille Lacs Courthouse

Meeting called by: Planning Partners

Type of meeting: Work Planning Meeting

Facilitator: Tiffany Determan

Note taker: Lydia Godfrey, Isanti SWCD

Attendees:

Voting members:

Jamie Schurbon, Anoka SWCD
Sam Seybold, Aitkin SWCD
Tiffany Determan, Isanti SWCD
Lydia Godfrey, Isanti SWCD
Talisha Zimmerman, Isanti County – virtual
Susan Shaw, Mille Lacs SWCD
Dan Cibulka, Sherburne SWCD
Gerry Maciej, Benton SWCD
Emily Forbord, Benton SWCD

Ex-officio members: Darren Mayers, BWSR

Other: Jake Janski, Mille Lacs SWCD, JPE Board Representative – virtual
Laurie Westerlund, Aitkin County, JPE Board

Welcome and Introductions led by Determan.

Updates

- Determan sent the Statements of Work partners should be using to the IPC members.
- The Outreach and Education Draft Plan has not changed since last IPC meeting. It will go to the board for approval at the end of March.
- A copy of the Outreach and Education Draft Plan was posted to the website, so JPE board members could have earlier access to the plan.

Cibulka asked for clarification on when ex-officio members are invited to attend meetings. They are invited to the meetings used to develop the work plan, but otherwise should reach out when they want to be included.

1st Quarter Project Discussion and Recommendations

Before discussing project recommendations, Determan reminded the group there are guiding documents to help make decisions including the work plan, project policies, and the ranking sheet. The group reviewed the funding balance if all submitted projects got approved. A few categories are over budget, so decisions need to be made. Match is allowed to come from other sources besides structural projects, but the partnership must be mindful to reach the overall match requirement.

There were a few updates to the ranking spreadsheet. The Request ID column was added to help group requests together. Column AM "Project was specifically listed in WBIF grant work plan" was added as a way to rank project submitted when building the work plan higher, so those partners planning on receiving that money receive a boost. This column is mostly for BMP tasks rather than development. The pollutant reduction column was changed so not every project needs to list one, such as forestry and agricultural non-structural projects. However, after a discussion, agriculture non-structural projects will include a pollutant reduction in the future since the partnership wants to fund projects with good water quality benefit. The pollutant reduction does not impact a project's overall score, but is instead used to compare like projects.

Each project that had at least two votes for "discuss" and, just for this first meeting, projects that were voted not to fund were discussed. The first project discussed was Benton SWCD's agricultural non-structural project. Members voted to discuss this project because this project type is over budget, and this project was not listed in the work plan. IPC members decided to follow the project selection policy which states if funding is not available then projects will be scored against each other and those that are in the work plan will receive a higher score. Therefore, since this project was not in the work plan, it will be funded but at a lower rate than requested. During the discussion there was confusion about which waterbodies are targeted based on the work plan. The work plan lists specific waterbodies to receive priority funding, and then any tier 1 and tier 2 waterbodies may receive funding if money remains.

The Mille Lacs SWCD's Project Development Request for the Wahkon project was voted to discuss because partners were wondering why project development funds were needed if landowners are already on board. The project development request would cover technical staff time and a needed archeological survey for two stormwater control projects. There is a separate line requesting technical/engineering funds for the two projects as well. After discussing the distinction between project development and technical/engineering categories it was decided that the requests would be combined under technical/engineering and funded.

One of the projects Mille Lac SWCD's technical/ engineering request would cover was voted to discuss. Members had questions about the small pollutant reduction estimate and the high cost for the Wahkon project. Shaw provided details that the city of Wahkon has a Stormwater Management Plan that ranks specific BMP projects in the city, and this proposed project was ranked high. The project itself is 550ft from the lake, and after looking at a topographic map, it appeared the area drained into the lake. After hearing about its visibility and proximity to the lake, the majority of partners voted to fund with Anoka SWCD still having some reservations.

The next discussed projects were Mille Lacs SWCD's request for project development and technical/engineering for DIY Shoreline BMPs. Partners voted not to fund these due to their low score. Shaw explained the funding would be used to encourage landowners to do DIY shoreline projects by leveraging neighbors that have already completed projects. Partners also believed the cost was high for DIY projects. Shaw noted the amount of funding could be reduced and the targeted area could be increased to meet partner's desires. She also added DIY projects is often utilized by Mille Lacs SWCD since they have so many landowners. This project also brought up a discussion about how DIY plantings would be scored.

Partners had voted to discuss Mille Lacs SWCD's request for Education and Information, however Shaw answered questions in the comments of the ranking sheet, so partners decided to fund.

Mille Lacs SWCD's Feedlot project was discussed. It is named in the work plan, but at a lower cost than requested. It was decided the project would be funded if the requested amount was lowered.

The next item up for discussion was project development for Mille Lacs SWCD Soil Health Practices. This request was much higher than other requests in this category. This is targeting a larger area which helps explain the higher cost. Shaw is hoping this work would result in a list of landowners who are willing versus unwilling to do projects. It was decided the request would be lowered and funded, then after a year the item would be considered for additional funding.

Mille Lacs SWCD's request for project development for drainage management practices was voted not to fund due to its low score. The low score is due to it not being listed in the work plan and the practice type didn't score high. However, after a discussion the IPC decided the practice type score does not accurately reflect the project's benefit and a new project category should be made. The vote was changed to fund this project, since the score was originally inaccurate and this item corresponds with other work Mille Lacs SWCD is doing.

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe's Shakopee Lake Assessment will not be funded because it is a tier 3 waterbody which is not a priority in the work plan.

The only category over budget is technical/engineering, but 10% can be pulled from project development to cover those expenses.

Discussion on Eligibility and Ranking Sheet Changes

While discussing project recommendations a few suggested changes to the ranking sheet arose.

- Adding back in pollutant reductions for soil health projects, even if it is just an estimate. Members can put in a conservative estimate they know they will hit.
- There isn't anything that takes into account a project's proximity to a waterbody, which may be worth discussing in the future.
- Maciej suggested evaluating how DIY shore projects get scored, because they are unlikely to score high as is.
- When discussing Mille Lacs SWCD's project development request for drainage management practices into Mille Lacs Lake people felt the project type scored too low. The decision was to make a new project type category for buffers/ ditch buffers with numbers that better reflect the benefits.
- Maciej suggested projects listed in the work plan shouldn't get as much of a point benefit, but there wasn't agreement from other members.

Next Steps

The Statements of Work are due to Determan later this week. The JPE will meet to approve projects on March 23rd.

Next meeting:

Next meeting would be April 10th over Zoom. The meeting schedule is the 2nd Monday of each month from 12:30 – 2:30pm. Meetings can be canceled as needed.