Rum River Watershed Comprehensive Management Plan – Implementation Planning Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: August 11th, 2025
Time: 12:30-2:30 PM
Location: Virtual
Meeting called by: Planning Partners
Type of meeting: Workshop
Facilitator: Samrah Khan, Isanti SWCD
Note taker: Molly Clyne, Mille Lacs SWCD

Attendees:

Voting members:
Ellie Joing, Aitkin SWCD
Jamie Schurbon, Anoka CD
Mike McMillin, Benton SWCD
Matthew Remer, Isanti SWCD
Doug Page, Isanti
Samrah Khan, Isanti SWCD
Jaren Peplinski, Kanabec SWCD
Lynn Gallice, Mille Lacs SWCD
Molly Clyne, Mille Lacs SWCD
Siena Storm, Mille Lacs SWCD
Perry Bunting, MLBO
Robert Wall, MLBO
Francine Larson, Sherburne SWCD

Advisory Members:
Zach Guttormson, BWSR
Barb Peichel, BWSR

Other:
Al Koczur, Isanti SWCD Supervisor

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions

Led by Samrah Khan, Isanti SWCD.

2. Planning Team Updates (Information)

a. Isanti SWCD shifted their shared files to a SharePoint system. Please use this link to access the members lounge for all shared documents including the funding request forms: Members Lounge

b. Please enter your 3rd Q funding requests to be considered at the September Board meeting by August 25th.

c. BWSR has approved the FY23 1-yr extension request. We now have until December 31st, 2026 to complete all planned activities.

2. Groundwater and Surface Water Connection Presentation by Anne Nelson, MN Department of Health (Watch recording here)

a. Importance of Groundwater vs. Surface Water

- Groundwater and surface water are equally important, but groundwater is less visible and harder to access.
- Surface water can be seen and touched; groundwater requires expensive and difficult extraction.
- Groundwater "residence times" (how long water stays in the system) vary greatly—can be decades or even centuries.

b. Groundwater Protection Context

- 1W1P (One Watershed, One Plan) began in 2016, integrating state and federal programs for water quality and quantity.
- Historically, groundwater (including drinking water) received far less funding than surface water, though Clean Water Funds are improving this.
- Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment is a major funding source.

c. Challenges & Gaps

- Monitoring Gaps:
  - Groundwater monitoring is a patchwork effort; Clean Water Funds typically don't fund monitoring.
  - Few efforts monitor at an aquifer scale—data sets are small and funding limited.
  - Groundwater responds slowly to change—improvements can take 30–100 years.
- Regulatory Complexity:
  - Multiple agencies with overlapping but distinct responsibilities.
  - Inconsistent frameworks, assessments, mitigation options,

and funding across groundwater and surface water issues.

d. Agency Roles in “Source to Tap” Collaboration
- DNR: Water quantity, ecosystem interactions
- BWSR: Conservation on private lands, water quality protection
- MDA: Pesticides, fertilizers, water monitoring
- MPCA: Water monitoring, standards, point-source cleanup
- MDH: Well code, guidance, public drinking water, private wells

e. Groundwater Basics & the Hydrologic Cycle
- Bedrock Aquifers: Water moves slowly through cracks or pores.
- Water Table: Level where groundwater naturally sits.
- Cone of Depression: High-capacity wells can lower water levels, affecting nearby wells without depleting the aquifer entirely.
- Water infiltrates from surface to saturated zone, through bedrock, into aquifers.

f. Non-Point Source Pollution
- Obvious examples: livestock in streams, feedlots near rivers.
- Less obvious: nitrates (soluble and mobile), failing septic systems, stormwater runoff, landfills.
- The Rum River watershed has vertical travel times ranging from hours to weeks—pollutants can move quickly into groundwater.

g. Conservation Practices
- Many practices benefit both surface and groundwater—healthy soils often improve both.
- Agricultural drinking water protection practices can be found in MDH and BWSR guidance.

h. Private Wells: Risks & Standards
- New wells: Wellhead 1 ft above ground, weatherproof cap with rubber gasket, well tag.
- Common aquifers: Sand & gravel (most common) and sandstone bedrock.
- Older wells: Piston pumps, dug/pit wells.
- Siting standards: Specific distances from storage tanks, pools, utilities, etc.
- Contamination risk: Shallow wells and wells near pollution sources are most vulnerable; nitrate is the most common human-caused contaminant.
- Protective factors: Soils can filter many contaminants; clay layers slow downward movement.

i. Private Well Concerns

- Key contaminants: Coliform bacteria, nitrate, arsenic, lead, manganese (cannot be detected by taste/smell/appearance).
- Testing is especially important for households with children.
- Common contamination points: groundwater itself, poor well construction, plumbing materials, cross-connections.

j. Data & Resources for Groundwater Management

- MDH grants for well testing kits.
- County geologic atlas.
- DWSMA GIS layers for RIM drinking water easements.
- WBIF funding for sealing abandoned wells.
- Wellhead Protection Plans, GRAPS reports.
- WHAF Tool (DNR): Map-based tool to explore water quality and drinking water well data.

k. Funding Programs

- BWSR Clean Water Fund – Projects & Practices (Drinking Water Sub-grant): BMPs for drinking water protection, now includes accredited private well testing.
- MDH Safe Drinking Water for Private Well Users Grant: Testing/admin only (no mitigation); more funding expected in fall 2025.
- Accelerated Implementation Grants (AIG – MDH):
    - Build capacity for groundwater projects (quality & quantity).
    - $250k total annually; $50k available with no match.
    - Capacity building, research/data collection, targeted nitrogen reduction, private well testing, gravel mining ordinances, well verification for CGA.
- Note: There is no centralized repository for well testing results; private well tests remain confidential between the owner and lab unless part of a specific state program.

8. Wrap-up & Next Meeting

Khan reminded the group that the next IPC meeting is September 8th, followed by the board meeting on September 25th.