

Snake River Watershed Plan Partnership – Steering Committee

Meeting [Minutes \(Approved 9.2.2025\)](#)

[August 4, 2025, 2:00pm-4:00 pm](#)



Steering Committee (*Indicates Voting Members):

- *Jody Grund, Aitkin County- **not present**
- *Janet Smude, Aitkin County SWCD- **present**
- Barb Peichel, BWSR-**present**
- Zach Guttormson, BWSR-**present**
- *Ryan Carda, Kanabec County-**not present**
- Emily Larsen, Kanabec SWCD-**present**
- *Jaren Peplinski, Kanabec SWCD-**present**
- Mary Poelman (**Coordinator**), Kanabec SWCD-**present**
- *Siena Storm, Mille Lacs SWCD-**present**
- Susan Shaw, Mille Lacs SWCD-**not present**
- *Kelly Schroeder, Pine County-**present**
- Erin Hoxsie, Pine County SWCD-**present**
- Heather Donoho, Pine County SWCD-**not present**
- Krista Arne, Pine County SWCD-**present**
- Nick Foss, Pine County SWCD/Kanabec SWCD-**present**
- *Paul Swanson, Pine County SWCD-**present**

Other Invitees:

Kate MacDonald, MPCA- **present**

Location:

In-person meeting at Kanabec SWCD office: 2008 Mahogany St, Ste 3, Mora, MN 55051

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/bam-qgik-hjw>

Or dial: (US) +1 502-667-4238 PIN: 479 537 515#

More phone numbers: <https://meet.google.com/tel/bam-qgik-hjw?pin=2761399208395&hs=1>

Purpose:

Review of Q2 Budget, Review Project Funding, Review Policy, Presentation on TMDL/WRAPS process,

	Topics	Assigned	Time
A	Approve Agenda/Minutes/Introductions a. Minutes June 2, 2025- approved July 7, 2025- approved	Mary Poelman	5 min

	<p>b. Agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amended: Paul Swanson- Discussion on raising the project approval limit from \$20,000 to \$50,000 by the Pine SWCD Board of Supervisors 		
1	<p>Budget Review</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of Q2 Budget https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ox4RSFeHUNsjr3P_tblp-9sZ6sCTPt3e/view?usp=drive_link Reviewed 2. Assignment of Category Overages Discussed possibly moving funds from Shoreline, Ag Practices, and Septics. Mary and Erin will finalize recommendations for the September 2 Steering Committee Meeting to be brought to the JPE board at the September 22 meeting. 	Erin Hoxsie, Mary Poelman	10 min
2	<p>Projects</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. KSWCD_SouthForkBrushManagement_WBIF_2025 Total Project Cost: \$4316.67 Requesting: \$3237.50 (75%) Non-State Match: \$1079.17 (25%) Link to Project Documents (updated) Approved for funding 2. PSWCD_Wetland Restoration_MissionCreek21_WBIF_2025 Total Project Cost: \$11,535 Requesting:\$1,750(15.2%) Non-State Match:\$9,785(84.8%) Link To Project Documents Approved for funding 3. Request to purchase a Canva subscription for the Watershed Coordinator to use for outreach \$120/year (\$10/month) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No objections by Steering Committee 4. Request to purchase an Adobe subscription for the Watershed Coordinator to use for administrative purposes \$239.88/year (\$19.99/month) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No objections by Steering Committee 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nick Foss 2. Krista Arne 3. Mary Poelman 4. Mary Poelman 	30 min

3	<p>Presentation from MPCA MPCA TMDL WRAPS Snake River Watershed</p> <p>Goal: To provide the Snake River Watershed Partnership staff with an update on the TMDL/WRAPS progress and get early input before it goes on public notice</p> <p>Presentation and Discussion</p>	Kate MacDonald	35 min
4	<p>Policy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (Continued Discussion) Cost-Share for Pasture and Hay Planting https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zaPVvLL4N9ID8jWLBqb-l3BAueAojjIM/edit?usp=sharing&oid=115886762896760527439&rtpof=true&sd=true Recommended by the Steering Committee for Board Approval (Continued Discussion) WSP Policy Update (Recommend to Board) https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cYNWSfU04xK_j2e4kogTQoHsYlZlsdEJ/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=115886762896760527439&rtpof=true&sd=true Recommended by the Steering Committee for Board Approval 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Jaren Peplinski Nick Foss 	10 min
5	<p>Work Plan 2026-2027</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Project-Forecasting 2026-2027 <p>Purpose: A survey request will be sent to partners regarding anticipated projects for the 2026-2027 Work Plan, categorized to facilitate budgeting.</p> <p>No discussion - brief note to watch for upcoming emails</p>	Mary Poelman	5 min
6	<p>Discussion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Review of Work Plan progress to date Link to Mid-Year Progress Report Link to Watershed Priority Area Maps No discussion due to running out of time. Well Head Protection Training Well and Drinking Water Focus Group Opportunity - discussion Event Aug 12, 1-3pm at the Mora History Center 805 Forest Ave W, Mora, MN 55051 Amended: Paul Swanson- Discussion on raising the project approval limit from \$20,000 to \$50,000 by the Pine SWCD board Information on potential direction from Pine SWCD Board 	<p>Discussion: All Steering Committee Members</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mary Poelman Jaren Peplinski Paul Swanson 	20 min
7	<p>Future Meeting Times</p> <p>JPE Do we want an Aug 25, 2025 meeting? Yes</p> <p>SC Sept 1 (Holiday); proposed reschedule: Tues Sept 2 2pm-4pm</p>	Mary Poelman	5 min

	(Approved) Oct 6- TAC/Steering Committee Combined Meeting		
TAC	TBD October, tentatively during our Steering Committee Meeting		

***Amendments to Agenda marked in Red**

- Erin Hoxsie led a budget review, highlighting category overages and discussing fund reallocations, particularly from stream and shoreline practices, ag practices, and SSTS, to cover actual and upcoming potential overages. Paul Swanson suggested moving \$100,000 from one category rather than multiple categories. BWSR reviewed the process for work plan revision and need for specific category values for entering into Elink, noting a \$200,000 limit before a grant agreement amendment would be required. Partners will update Erin with upcoming potential project costs so this can be taken into consideration for finalization of work plan revision. Mary and Erin will finalize work plan revision numbers for the Sep 2 Steering Committee meeting.
- 2.1 Nick Foss presented a South Fork Brush Management Project, which focuses on buckthorn removal using a chemical-free "critical period cutting" technique, involving stripping leaves multiple times a year to deplete the plant's resources. Kanabec SWCD requested for (75%) \$3,237.50 in cost share. Zach Guttormson requested "before" pictures of the site for future projects and raised concerns about the project's location within a priority area, as outlined in the statement of work. Barb Peichel reminded partners that BWSR has flexibility, allowing projects outside priority areas, but emphasizes that most projects should ideally be within these areas. BWSR questioned whether the project's primary benefit was water quality, as it did not appear to be directly in the riparian area. Mary Poelman clarified that while the project might not be within a priority conservation opportunity area (COA) for LC2, it was in the riparian area of the North Fork of the Groundhouse River, a priority water body. Mary Poelman noted ELink language for the forestry priority areas, including LC1, LC2, and "additional priority areas". Nick Foss requested a vote on the South Fork brush management project noting concerns about its priority area classification. Mary Poelman confirmed that the project would be considered outside a forestry priority COA zone by BWSR. After discussion, the Steering Committee voted to fund the project, with approval from: Smude, Peplinski, Swanson, Storm, Schroeder

Recommendations for Future Planning :

- Paul Swanson (PSWCD) recommended clarification of forestry priority areas with suggested update to the Landscape Stewardship Plan

2. Barb Peichel (BWSR) recommended a review of RAQ- riparian adjacency quality scores to use data to prioritize parcels for priority area amendments in the future, and to touch base with the mapping consultant for the plan, Mitch Brinks.

2.2 Krista Arne presented the Pine SWCD wetland restoration project, which aims to restore a wetland and implement water storage BMPs, through a partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to protect and preserve wetlands. The project is located north of Cross Lake, near Mission Creek, which is a priority water body. TNC developed plans for the project. Pine SWCD is requesting \$1,750 in cost-share funding. Zach Guttormson suggested referencing Cross Lake (aka Lower Snake River HUC 10) as the priority water for SWQual rather than Pokegama. After discussion, the Steering Committee voted to fund the project, with approval from: Smude, Peplinski, Swanson, Storm, Schroeder

2.3,2.4 Mary Poelman requested approval for a Canva subscription for outreach coordination and an Adobe subscription for administrative purposes, which would be covered by existing project funds. Zach Guttormson confirmed that Mary Poelman's team could proceed with the purchases, but that he would verify with the Grants Compliance Specialist (GCS) to ensure everything was acceptable and meets the requirement that the software must be used specifically for watershed work.

3. WRAPS Presentation: Kate MacDonald, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), introduced several preliminary components of a new WRAPS report for the Snake River Watershed, noting the last report was completed in 2013 and the upcoming report is projected to be published in 2026. She highlighted that the new report would focus more on E.coli, unlike the previous one, which focused primarily on phosphorus, to align with the upcoming monitoring and assessment cycle in 2028. Kate noted that the MPCA is also responsible for TMDL reports, which will be published in conjunction with the WRAPS report. Kate noted that within the Snake River Watershed, 14 of the total impairments were impaired for E.coli or Fecal Coliform. She presented findings from the 2021 Microbial Source Tracking (MST) study, which found that human sources were the largest contributor to fecal matter across sampled locations, followed by cow sources, with a map illustrating the sample locations and identified species.

MPCA opened the floor to discussion on local government and SWCD efforts in implementing SSTS or BMP practices. Mary Poelman noted that Pine County is doing a much better job than Kanabec County in dealing with SSTS and securing grants for upgrades. Kelly Schroeder from Pine County shared their success in replacing over 150 failing septic systems since 2016 through clean water partnership loans and low-income septic grants, with demand consistently high for these programs. Managing Septic System Programs - Kelly Schroeder explained that Pine County's success in septic system replacement is largely due to their relationship with septic

contractors, who guide homeowners through the process and available funding options. She also noted that the programs require approximately two hours of staff time per system, with about 20 systems currently in progress this year. Paul Swanson from Pine SWCD affirmed Kelly Schroeder's team's excellent work and stated that their office refers eligible individuals to the county, as they rely on the county for SSTS services.

MPCA opened the floor to discussion about the changes in animal units in the watershed since 2013, noting a potential decrease from registered or permitted animal units within the Watershed. Paul Swanson explained that older farmers are aging out and selling their animals, partly due to fluctuating beef prices making it less profitable, especially for cow-calf pairs. Mary Poelman added that many people have converted from dairy farming to corn and soybean production, reducing dairy cow populations. Paul Swanson also mentioned that drought conditions in 2022-2023 led many livestock owners to sell off animals due to high costs and lack of food and water sources. Jaren Peplinski questioned the change in the smallest animal unit category from 100 in the 2013 WRAPS report to 250 in the proposed 2025 TMDL, suggesting that a finer scale (e.g., 50 animal units to align with the MPCA threshold for feedlot registration requirements) would be more beneficial given the parcelled land ownership and smaller acreages in the area. Kate MacDonald (MPCA) agreed to propose a new map reflecting animal units on a smaller scale to aid in funding decisions and determining effective BMP placements. Mary Poelman noted that a challenge in implementing practices is justifying water quality benefits for WBIF funds, and suggested that the WRAPS report could help by clearly outlining how each action, such as manure pit closures, provides a water quality benefit. Kate acknowledged this feedback and stated they would consider identifying human and cattle contributions in the report to help address these barriers. Barbie Peiche (BWSR) commended the MPCA for the microbial source tracking study, stating it provides a significant advantage in understanding E.coli listings and helps identify effective solutions more quickly than in other watersheds.

4. 4.1 Pasture and Hay Planting Cost Share Policy: Jaren Peplinski presented policy updates which involved extending the contract length from three to five years. The proposed changes were approved by the Steering Committee and will be added to the next JPE meeting agenda for adoption by the policy committee.

4.2 Woodland Stewardship Plan Policy: Nick Foss presented a proposed policy change for woodland stewardship plan cost share eligibility, which would require landowners to either enroll their land in a protection program (e.g., RIM, SFIA, 2C) or implement a WSP-recommended practice with water quality benefits. Nick Foss clarified that the policy aims to promote cost-sharing for landowners who will follow through on the purpose of getting these plans, ensuring public funds are utilized properly to achieve environmental goals. Paul Swanson expressed strong support for the policy, noting its potential to ensure water quality benefits and expand forestry promotion within the partnership. Barb Peichel (BWSR) raised concerns by the Snake River Watershed Plan Partnership Board members about potential loss of interest from landowners, but Nick Foss noted that the SWCDs are having

no issue finding interested landowners, citing recent outreach campaigns that garnered multiple responses. The proposed changes were approved by the Steering Committee and will be added to the next JPE meeting agenda for adoption by the JPE Board (aka policy committee) .

6.2 Well and Drinking Water Focus Group Opportunity: Jaren Peplinski noted that invitations to the event had been sent out and encouraged partners to RSVP. Event to be held on Aug 12 from 1pm-3pm at the History Center in Mora.

6.3 Paul Swanson informed the group that the Pine SWCD board would discuss increasing the \$20,000 funding threshold for Snake River projects to \$50,000, aligning it with other watershed thresholds. He noted that the current \$20,000 threshold leads to numerous projects being brought to the policy committee. Paul agreed to bring the Pine SWCD board's recommendation to the steering committee for discussion once a decision has been reached.

7. The Steering Committee decided Aug 25 JPE meeting would be held according to schedule, and recommended including a forestry presentation and possibly a presentation from BWSR on CWMP basics.

The September steering committee meeting was moved to Sep 2 from 2-4 pm to account for the Labor Day Holiday.

The yearly TAC meeting will be held in conjunction with the October 6th Steering Committee Meeting with a focus on the draft work plan and any updates from partners.