

Rum River Watershed Partnership Board Meeting Minutes

June 26th, 2025 4:30PM – 6:30PM

In-Person & Virtual Meeting

Mille Lacs Historic Courthouse
Lower Level, Conference Room D



Coming together to identify shared goals.
Planning together to leverage unique capacity. **Working together** to achieve results.

Note taker: Molly Clyne, Mille Lacs SWCD

Voting Members Present:
Laurie Westerlund, Aitkin County
Bob Janzen, Aitkin SWCD
Danielle Holder, Anoka CD
Ed Popp, Benton County
Mike Winkleman, Benton SWCD (*virtual*)
Al Koczur, Isanti SWCD
Kim Johnson, Kanabec SWCD
Jake Janski, Mille Lacs SWCD
Bobby Kasper, Morrison County
Dale Scholl, Morrison SWCD
Brad Schmacher, Sherburne County
Chris Jurek, Sherburne SWCD

Alternates Present:

Partners and Staff Present:
Jamie Schurbon, Anoka CD
Emily Forbord, Benton SWCD (*virtual*)
Tiffany Determan, Isanti SWCD
Lydia Godfrey, Isanti SWCD
Doug Page, Isanti SWCD
Molly Clyne, Mille Lacs SWCD
Susan Shaw, Mille Lacs SWCD
Francine Larson, Sherburne SWCD (*virtual*)

Voting Members Absent:
Alan Duff, Isanti County

Zach Guttormson, BWSR

Others:

1. Meeting called to order by Janski 4:30pm.
2. Approve Agenda

Motion by Westerlund to approve the agenda; second by Kasper. Affirmative: All. Opposed: None. **The Motion passed.**

The motion passed on a roll call vote with all in favor

3. Approve March 27th, 2025 minutes

Motion by Johnson to approve the March 27th, 2025 minutes; second by Janzen. Affirmative: All. Opposed: None. **The Motion passed.**

The motion passed on a roll call vote with all in favor

4. Administrative reports/updates

Financials: The partnership's bank account currently holds approximately \$180,000 in grant funds and \$25,000 in unrestricted funds (from CDs and interest earnings).

FY23 grant: We recently completed the reconciliation process for the initial 50% payout with BWSR, which was approved. We've now requested the next 40% disbursement. This grant is nearing its end and is set to expire on December 31, 2025. With tonight's proposed project amendments included, the partnership has about \$584,000 remaining to be spent. Our match commitments are in good standing and currently overcommitted.

FY25 grant: Activity on this grant has been minimal so far. 32% of the funds are encumbered, primarily for staff time, but only 2.5% has been spent to date.

Progress updates: The meeting packet included existing SOW updates. No questions or comments were raised.

5. Education/Outreach

Type A outreach: In April, we held a nitrate clinic where offices across the watershed hosted nitrate testing for water samples. A total of 131 people participated, with only 4 results reaching a level of concern. Staff provided individualized recommendations to those with elevated levels, and some data was shared with the Department of Agriculture. Looking ahead, a Forestry Open House is scheduled for July 10th at Sunken Ship Brewery in Princeton. The event will focus on tree care, species selection, forest management, and landowner Q&A. We are also in the early

planning stages for a county-level event aimed at local officials, focusing on groundwater education and decision-making. The event is tentatively planned for 2026. We're seeking feedback on what topics, timing, or formats would be most useful—feel free to share your ideas or bring this back to your boards. This was Godfrey's final meeting with us, as she is leaving her position. The position has been posted.

Discussion: Johnson asked whether any nitrate trends were observed. Staff noted that this was the first coordinated, watershed-wide effort, though some partners have previously done more localized work. This effort provides a baseline moving forward.

Type B outreach: We recently hosted a Local Forestry Team meeting to revisit our shared goals and explore how we can collaborate more effectively on forestry across the watershed. Topics included policy alignment, funding opportunities, and buckthorn management. In addition, Agriculture Technical Team meetings were held to discuss grazing cover crops and nutrient management. We've been finalizing the budget for project signage and should be ready to move forward with purchasing signs soon.

6. Approve 2nd Quarter Agreements and Statements of Work(s)

All of the 2nd quarter agreements and SOWs were recommended by the IPC.

FY23 WBIF – Morrison SWCD

Amendment to add cover crop projects: \$8,000 grant / \$0 match.

FY25 WBIF – Morrison SWCD

Amendment to add:

- Forest Stewardship Plans: \$1,500 grant / \$500 match
- Cover crop projects: \$7,500 grant / \$0 match

FY25 WBIF – Isanti SWCD

Amendment to add technical/engineering assistance for land protection staff:
\$202,500 grant / \$0 match

FY23 WBIF – Aitkin SWCD

Amendment to add:

- Technical/engineering for Mille Lacs Lake shoreline projects: \$10,000 grant / \$0 match
- Installation of Mille Lacs Lake shoreline projects: \$4,500 grant / \$1,500 match
- Prioritizing studies: \$1,897.05 grant/match (*previously approved, but inadvertently left off the original SOW*)

FY23 WBIF – Sherburne SWCD

Amendment to unencumber/return unused funds:

- Soil health projects: \$3,560 grant / \$0 match
- Project development: \$299.19 grant / \$0 match
- Administration: \$3.16 grant / \$0 match

FY23 WBIF – Mille Lacs SWCD

- New SOW to add the Schafer rural project: \$60,000 grant / \$15,000 match
(Note: This project was previously assigned to Benton SWCD; not a new funding request)
- Amendment to unencumber/return the following unused funds:
 - Rodriguez gully project: \$18,299
 - Kuelbs Mille Lacs shoreline project: \$4,875.99
 - Other incomplete projects: \$5,020.51
 - Total returned: \$28,195.00

FY23 WBIF – Benton SWCD

Amendment to unencumber/return funds for the Schafer rural project:

\$75,000 grant / \$18,750 match

(Project implementation is being shifted to Mille Lacs SWCD; no new funding requested.)

Motion by Kasper to approve the 2nd quarter project funding requests and amended SOWs as presented; second by Duff. Affirmative: All. Opposed: None. **The Motion passed.**

The motion passed on a roll call vote with all in favor

7. FY23 WBIF 1-year extension request

Determan requested authorization to submit a one-year grant extension request to BWSR for the FY23 WBIF grant. She also requested approval for the Chair (Janski) to sign the amended grant agreement, if the extension is approved.

Discussion: Janski asked whether other boards have submitted similar extension requests. Determan noted that it's not uncommon and would be beneficial to have the extension available as the partnership continues to build momentum and capacity.

Motion by Duff to approve the FY23 WBIF 1-year extension request being submitted by the Coordinator and subsequent approval and signature upon approval by the Chair; second by Schmacher. Affirmative: All. Opposed: None. **The Motion passed.**

The motion passed on a roll call vote with all in favor

8. Proposed Policy Updates

- a. **New Project Funding Requests:** Determan explained that the proposed updates are intended to give the partnership greater flexibility in the final six months of the FY23 WBIF grant, and could serve as a model for future grants as well. If the requested one-year extension is approved, these policies would be postponed and only apply during the final six months of the revised grant timeline. Because the board meets quarterly and the grant currently expires in December, waiting until the September meeting could leave partners with insufficient time to implement projects. There are proactive steps being taken so that we do not need to use this policy. We are 1. Submitting a one year extension request to BWSR and 2. Revising the language in the new SOWs to allow funding to be drawn from either FY23 or FY25 depending on availability and timing. Determan presented the two options, noting that the blue text in the board packet is a draft and final language will be worked out with the attorney.

Option 1) Delegate Implementation Planning Committee the authority to approve new funding requests. Authorize the Fiscal Agent and Watershed Coordinator staff make grant work plan revisions

Option 2) Authorize the establishment of a subcommittee to meet as needed to approve new funding requests and budget revisions. This committee will be subject to Open Meeting Law.

Discussion: Johnson asked if this would apply only to projects meeting the existing criteria, and Janski confirmed that yes, project selection would follow the current criteria. Johnson expressed a preference for option 1, and the group agreed, noting that the IPC is already thorough and this approach would streamline the process during the short time window. Janski emphasized that this would only apply to the final six months of the grant and assumes funds are still available.

Motion by Westerlund to approve option one with the language approved by the attorney; second by Koczur. Affirmative: All. Opposed: None. **The Motion passed.**

The motion passed on a roll call vote with all in favor

- b. **>10% changes to Statements of Work:** Determan then presented on changes for SOWs that are already in progress. Looking to add verbiage to the projects policy: during the final six months of the grant, >10% changes to Statements of Work will follow the same procedure as is used for new requests during that period.

Motion by Koczur to approve the added verbiage to the projects policy; second by Holder. Affirmative: All. Opposed: None. **The Motion passed.**

The motion passed on a roll call vote with all in favor

- c. OTHER: In the event that a grand funding source's expiration is extended, the Fiscal Agent staff may extend statement of work expiration dates by email notice to the Partner.

Motion by Duff to approve the Fiscal Agent to extend SOW expiration dates by email notice to the Partner; second by Holder. Affirmative: All. Opposed: None. **The Motion passed.**

The motion passed on a roll call vote with all in favor

9. Proposed Policy Updates

Clyne presented on the proposed forestry practices policy updates. This conversation began due to a tree planting project put forth by Morrison SWCD, which began a broader conversation about how the current policy's structure of itemized flat rates for each individual practice is time-consuming and results in lower payments to landowners versus other forestry cost-share programs that are available. To address these issues, we are proposing a 75% cost-share model and allowing for lump-sum allocations.

Motion by Westerlund to approve the forestry policy amendment; second by Johnson. Affirmative: All. Opposed: None. **The Motion passed.**

The motion passed on a roll call vote with all in favor

10. Board Training: Conservation Easement programs and accomplishments

Page provided a primer on conservation easements. Easements are permanent restrictions recorded on the property title of private lands. They limit or prohibit activities like agriculture, development, and timber harvest, depending on the easement holder and funding source. Participation is completely voluntary. Landowners are essentially selling a portion of their rights to the land. Compensation can come in the form of payment or as a donation. Donated easements might be tax deductible, while paid easements are considered taxable income.

The overall goal of many of our easements in the Rum River Watershed is to protect surface water. Page provided a map of current projects, showing active and completed work. He noted that these projects have ebb and flow, with 52 inquiries since he started working at Isanti SWCD just a year ago. Red stars on the map indicate recorded easements.

He noted that the process is lengthy, often taking a year to a year and a half, particularly with the RIM (Reinvest in Minnesota) program, and sometimes even longer with other programs. Factors like land access, family dynamics, and eligibility can impact the progress.

Some of the primary easement programs used in our area are RIM Critical Shorelands and RIM Reforestation. In addition, CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) has become available in Isanti County, which combines CRP with RIM easements. So far, three applications have been submitted.

Other efforts include supporting Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) easements in the Mille Lacs area, particularly in forested regions.

Discussion: Partners raised questions on the timeline, in which Page described how the initial application stage is often the quickest part, but the approval can take a long time. The question of if groups or associations can apply was raised, to which Page confirmed yes, LCCs, trusts, and associations are eligible. Johnson asked whether RIM funding is guaranteed by the legislature, to which Page noted that there has been a reduction, though not substantial. There was also a good discussion about how counties do not have to recognize the reduction in land value due to easements, which may be a con for people.

11. Communication & announcements

Determan shared a change to Minnesota's Open Meeting Law that allows members to attend remotely without needing to post their remote location or make it accessible to the public. While remote participation is now an option, in-person attendance is still strongly encouraged.

Jurek asked about the required notice for remote participation. Determan clarified that it's not necessary to give three day's notice as long as the meeting notice includes a statement that some members may attend remotely. She recommended including this language in default in future meeting postings to stay compliant.

12. Next Meeting Date:

The next meeting is scheduled for September 25th from 4:30-6:30 PM at the Mille Lacs Historic Courthouse, lower level Conference Room D.

13. Adjourn:

Janski adjourned the meeting at 5:34 PM.