

Snake River Watershed Plan Partnership – Steering Committee

Meeting Minutes

Sept 2, 2025, 2:00pm-4:00 pm



Steering Committee (*Indicates Voting Members):

- *Jody Grund, Aitkin County
- *Janet Smude, Aitkin County SWCD
- Barb Peichel, BWSR
- Zach Guttormson, BWSR
- *Ryan Carda, Kanabec County
- Emily Larsen, Kanabec SWCD
- *Jaren Peplinski, Kanabec SWCD
- Mary Poelman, Kanabec SWCD
- *Siena Storm, Mille Lacs SWCD
- Susan Shaw, Mille Lacs SWCD
- *Kelly Schroeder, Pine County
- Erin Hoxsie, Pine County SWCD
- Heather Donoho, Pine County SWCD
- Krista Arne, Pine County SWCD
- Nick Foss, Pine County SWCD/Kanabec SWCD
- *Paul Swanson, Pine County SWCD

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>

Attendance:

Jaren Peplinski*(Kanabec SWCD), Emily Larsen **(Kanabec SWCD), Janet Smude*(Aitkin SWCD), Erin Hoxsie**(Pine SWCD), Eddie Johnson *(Pine SWCD), Siena Storm*(Mille Lacs SWCD), Mary Poelman, Zach Guttormson , Barb Peichel ,

(*=voting member, ** voting member when primary was absent)

Purpose:

Review and Finalization of Grant Budget, [Policy Recommendations](#), Projects proposals, Work Plan 2026-2027

	Topics	Assigned	Time
A	Approve Agenda/Minutes/Introductions a. Minutes	Mary Poelman	5 min

	<p>Link to Minutes Approved: 4 yes , 3 absent</p> <p>b. Agenda Link to Agenda Approved: 4 yes, 3 absent</p>		
1	<p>Budget Review</p> <p>1. Grant Agreement Amendment Proposal and Finalization Link to proposal</p> <p>Outcome: The steering committee decided to postpone a final decision on the budget reallocation until the next meeting (SC), opting to explore options to keep the fund movement below the \$200,000 threshold to avoid a grant agreement amendment. Ongoing communication with the Joint Powers Entity Board was emphasized regarding these discussions.</p>	Erin Hoxsie Mary Poelman	45 min
2	<p>1. Policy Change : Recommend the Snake River Watershed Planning Partnership increase the threshold of projects to be reviewed by the JPE Policy Board from \$20,000 to \$50,000.</p> <p>Link to Document Action: Recommend Policy to JPE Board Approved 4 yes, 3 absent</p> <p>2. Discussion: WSP Plan funding for Participants already enrolled in a Protection Plan (aka RIM)</p> <p>Outcome: A WSP plan on a property enrolled in RIM would likely not be eligible for WBIF funding, as the water quality benefit has already been met.</p>	Paul Swanson Jaren Peplinski	10 min
3	<p>Projects</p> <p>1. Manure Pit Closure (20 min) SOW Ranking Sheet Total Project Cost: \$64,554.11 Requesting: \$48,415.58 Non-State Match: \$16,138.53</p> <p>Action: Recommend the Manure Pit Closure for funding to the JPE Board Approved: 4 yes , 3 absent</p> <p>2. Septic Replacement (10 min) SOW Ranking Sheet Total Project Cost: \$19,943.95</p>	<p>1. Emily Larsen 2. Mary Poelman 3. Eddie Johnson 4. Mary Poelman</p>	50 min

	<p>Requesting: \$19,943.95 Non-State Match: \$0</p> <p>Action: Steering Committee voted to fund Septic Replacement*With the contingency of ensuring all requirements for the low income septic program have been met: Especially the confirmation of filing with the County of a non-compliant septic that meets program requirements(i.e. imminent threat to public health, or failing to protect groundwater).</p> <p>Approved: 4 yes, 3 absent</p> <p>3. Pine SWCD Tree Planting SOW Ranking Sheet</p> <p>Total Project Cost: \$1324.00 Requesting: \$993.00 Non-State Match: \$331.00</p> <p>Action: no vote was made. Project considered ineligible for WBIF funding.</p> <p>4. Cover Crops- KSWC (10 min) SOW</p> <p>Total Project Cost: \$15,000 *Pending Budgeting allocation Requesting: \$15,000; updated to \$5000 Non-State Match: \$0</p> <p>Action: Approved the funding of “Non-Structural Practices” SOW at \$5,000 Approved: 4 yes , 3 absent</p>		
4	<p>Work Plan 2026-2027</p> <p>1. Project-Forecasting 2026-2027</p> <p>Purpose: Survey Sent Due Oct 1 (Link Forthcoming)</p> <p>A survey request will be sent to partners regarding anticipated projects for the 2026-2027 Work Plan, categorized to facilitate budgeting.</p> <p>Link to Mid-Year Progress Report</p>	Mary Poelman	5 min
5	<p>Future Meeting Times</p> <p>JPE Do we want a September 22, 2025 meeting? SC Oct 6 (TAC Meeting), Nov 3 TAC Oct 6 during Steering Committee Meeting</p>	Mary Poelman	5 min

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Meeting Notes:

A. The meeting started ~ 5 min late due to technical issues with the links and arrival of a quorum of members.

1. **Budget Review and Fund Reallocation Proposals** Mary Poelman introduced the main topic of budget review, noting that some categories were over encumbered . Erin Hoxsie presented a detailed proposal for reallocating approximately \$212,000 across various categories to address over encumbrances and prepare for potential projects. Jaren Peplinski suggested reallocating an additional \$4,300 from non-structural to shoreline practices to fully fund potential projects. Jaren Peplinski also noted that the proposed livestock waste management project was more certain to proceed compared to several budgeted speculative projects.

Zach Guttormson advised the group that moving over \$200,000 would require a grant agreement amendment, a more involved process than a work plan revision. He suggested considering if larger projects could be shifted to the upcoming FY 26 grant to avoid exceeding the \$200,000 threshold and the associated complexities. Zach Guttormson also clarified that for grants issued after July 1, 2025, a 10% discretion on fund movement would be allowed before a work plan revision is needed.

Pollution Reduction Goals and Project Prioritization: Zach Guttormson inquired whether proposed reallocations would still meet original pollution reduction goals. Mary Poelman confirmed that the mid-year report indicated that phosphorus and TSS goals had been met, while septic and subwatershed analyses were still areas for improvement. Jaren Peplinski noted that septic projects were most lagging in meeting their goals.

Decision on Budget Reallocation and Future Steps: The steering committee decided to postpone a final decision on the budget reallocation until the next meeting, opting to explore options to keep the fund movement below the \$200,000 threshold to avoid a grant agreement amendment. Mary Poelman emphasized the importance of ongoing communication with the JDE (Joint Powers Executive Committee) regarding these discussions.

2. Policy Recommendations

2.1

Proposed Increase in Project Threshold Erin Hoxsie presented a request from the Pine SWCD board to raise the joint powers policy committee project threshold from \$20,000 to \$50,000. Mary Poelman highlighted that this change would affect three sections of the current SRWPP WBIF policy. Emily Larsen reminded the group of the last JPE meeting, where some board members didn't know what the steering committee was and why we had a \$20,000 threshold and there was even a mention of getting rid of that. Jaren Peplinski noted that the Kanabec SWCD board expressed support for the increase. Janet Smude expressed that while \$50,000 seemed high, she supported it if it made sense for larger projects, emphasizing the fact that local soil and water boards still need to approve projects and provide a check and balance in this capacity. It was noted (not verified) that the Rum River policy was a \$20,000 limit, Kettle Upper Saint Croix is \$50,000, and Lower Saint Croix is also \$50,000.

The steering committee voted to recommend this change to the Joint Powers Entity Board for adoption. (4 yes, 3 absent)

2.2

Land Protection Program and Woodland Stewardship Plans Jaren Peplinski raised a question from Kanabic Soil and Water regarding the eligibility of woodland stewardship plans for land already enrolled in protection programs like RIM, specifically concerning funding from the WBIF Zach Guttormson noted that forest stewardship plans are mentioned in the implementation action table related to increasing protection, suggesting that performing such planning for already protected properties might not contribute to the goal. Mary Poelman agreed, emphasizing that the water quality benefit comes from the land's existing protection rather than further management efforts. General consensus was that this would not be an eligible plan. No policy changes or recommendations were made.

3. Projects

3.1

Manure Pit Closure Project Emily Larsen introduced a proposed manure pit closure project, requesting \$48,415.8 and noting its location in a priority area directly across from a previous project. Zach Guttormson (BWSR) and Barb Peichel (BWSR) affirmed that manure pit closures are considered protection practices and would not change the project's ranking, which was already high. Zach Guttormson confirmed the project's eligibility, stating it addresses a stated implementation action item, reduces E.coli, contributes to the 10% E.coli reduction goal, is in the work plan, and primarily benefits water quality. The steering committee voted to recommend funding this project to the Joint Powers Entity Board. 4 yes, 3 absent

3.2

Septic Replacement Project Mary Poelman presented a septic replacement project, noting it would be 100% funded without match, with bids ranging from \$15,000 to just under \$20,000. She highlighted that the project requires significant tree removal, including buckthorn, for the mound system. Zach Guttormson inquired about the project's location in a priority area and if a compliance certification had been done to confirm it was an imminent public health threat, to which Mary Poelman confirmed the latter was pending. The project's location was verified to be within the Snake River Huc12 priority area, and Mary Poelman verified it was a low-income project, with approval contingent on the septic certification of non-compliance being filed. The Steering Committee voted to fund Septic Replacement*With the contingency of ensuring all requirements for the low income septic program have been met: Especially the confirmation of filing with the County of a non-compliant septic that meets program requirements(i.e. imminent threat to public health, or failing to protect groundwater). Approved: 4 yes, 3 absent

3.3

Zach Guttormson (BWSR) immediately raised concerns about project eligibility based on four key questions.

*Zach noted in chat: -Does the practice address the stated implementation action item? -Does it make progress towards the implementation action goal?-Is it in the work plan?-Does it have a primary benefit to water quality?

He explained that the project, intended to increase perennial vegetation to protect against nitrates in groundwater, would not meet the criteria because the site already has perennial vegetation, meaning it would not "increase" it but rather diversify it, and its primary benefit appeared to be habitat rather than water quality.

Eddie Johnson clarified that while the site is currently wet with some open soil, it is not 100% perennial. Barb Peichel (BWSR) reinforced the importance of aligning projects with plan goals, questioning if this BMP truly served the objective of nitrate reduction. Mary Poelman suggested tabling the vote on the Pine SWCD tree planting project due to eligibility concerns raised by BWSR, but Barb Peichel questioned tabling an ineligible project. Mary Poelman made the decision to move on to the next agenda item, emphasizing that ineligible projects cannot be funded with WBIF funds. She expressed a desire to continue the discussion with Pine SWCD to clarify eligibility criteria before projects are placed on the agenda. No vote was taken.

*for future reference a vote to "Postpone Indefinitely" should be used to remove motion from consideration without a vote.

3.4

Cover Crop Statement of Work Mary Poelman proposed a cover crop statement of work, reducing the requested amount from \$15,000 to \$5,000. She explained that the intent is to create a bin of funds for Kanabec SWCD to implement non-structural practices without needing individual steering committee approval, encouraging other SWCDs to consider a similar approach. Janet Smude supported the proposal, noting it would reduce review time and allow partners to be trusted to manage good projects. The Steering Committee approved the funding of "Non-Structural Practices" SOW at \$5,000. 4 yes , 3 absent

4.1

Work Planning for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Mary Poelman reminded the Steering Committee of the need for a new work plan by the end of the year and the eligibility to begin the process for receiving fiscal year 2026 grant funds. She extended an invitation to partners to meet individually to assist with the work planning survey, due by September 26th, with a summary to be provided by October 1st .

Barb Peichel suggested (regarding 3.3) improving the clarity of the eligibility review process, proposing that staff bringing projects forward should be more proactive in reviewing the WBF policy and work plan

5.

Future Meeting Times Mary Poelman confirmed the Joint Powers Entity (JPE) meeting for September 22nd, necessary for approving the manure pit project which exceeds the \$20,000 threshold and for the policy resolution from Pine. She also reminded attendees that the October meeting would be an in-person TAC meeting in Mora, with a virtual option available, and the next steering committee meeting after that is scheduled for November 3rd.