



**Steering Committee Meeting
Zoom
Wednesday, January 17th, 2024
1:00PM**

Attending: Craig Mell – Chisago SWCD, Jessica Collin-Pilarski – Washington County, Emily Heinz – CLFLWD, Michelle Jordan – BWSR, Becca Oldenburg-Downing – WCD, Matt Moore and Kyle Axtell – SWWD, Laura Jester – Keystone Waters LLC, Mike Isensee – CMSCWD, Karen Kill – BCWD, John Hanson – VBWD, Matt Oldenburg-Downing – MSCWMO, Todd Kulaf – Isanti SWCD, Jay Riggs and Angela Defenbaugh – WCD, Ben Elfelt – Chisago Lakes LID, Scott Soderman – Isanti County, Barbara Heitkamp – EMWREP/LSC, Mike Gainor – Pine County

Call to Order – 1:00PM

Becca Oldenburg-Downing started the meeting at 1:02PM. Becca shared that there was a request for an addition to the agenda, adding the St. Croix River as a priority waterbody in the LSC plan. This would be item 8c. Kyle Axtell motioned to accept the agenda as presented with this addition and Craig Mell seconded. All members who voted did so in favor and the motion carried with no one opposed.

Approval of Minutes

No changes were made to the December 14th, 2023 minutes.

Administrative updates

Craig Mell gave update and is waiting on one invoice from the Washington Conservation District (WCD). All payment checks will be sent out to partners shortly.

FY21 WBIF Review

100% of this grant has been encumbered, with 90% spent. The remainder is pending the completion of South Washington Watershed District's (SWWD) Trout Brook project. Craig Mell met with a new grant compliance specialist and Michelle Jordan to review this grant and the Lower Saint Croix (LSC) has passed the financial review.

FY23 WBIF Review

The FY23 grant only has one invoice so far and it's from the WCD. Craig Mell expects to do financial reconciliation in the next six months.

Project Proposals & Reports

There were no project proposals.

Anoka Soil and Water Conservation District - Brown's Creek Watershed District - Chisago County
Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District - Chisago Soil and Water Conservation District
Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District - Isanti County - Isanti Soil and Water Conservation District
Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization - Pine County - Pine Soil and Water Conservation District
South Washington Watershed District - Valley Branch Watershed District - Washington County
Washington Conservation District

Old Business

Laura Jester provided an update on 2023 Reporting Deadline for watershed based implementation funding (WBIF) and Non-WBIF activities. All reporting will go to the April Policy Committee meeting. Non-WBIF activity reporting is due March 22nd. John Hanson made the reporting document shareable for all LSC partners to access and edit collectively through an online file share. Partners are asked to identify themselves in the reporting document by putting their organization name in each accomplishment box they fill out.

Craig Mell suggested all partners give brief introductions since there are a few new members. Introductions of all attending members were given.

The WBIF Supplemental Funds allocated amount was discussed. Craig Mell shared that the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) received 25 applications and that the LSC was awarded \$167,615. A memo will be presented at the January Policy Committee meeting for the recommended approval of adding the supplemental funds to the total LSC WBIF funds and allowing the Steering Committee to decide how to spend the supplemental funds. If the Policy Committee agrees then this item will need to go to all LSC partners' local boards for approval. Karen Kill asked what was needed of each partner. Craig Mell explained that Angie Hong will send a summary with next steps after the Policy Committee meeting. Jessica Collin-Pilarski asked if plan amendments will need to go to partners' boards as well. Craig Mell shared the VBWD Plan Amendment has already been to partners' boards.

New Business

Barbara Heitkamp gave an update as the LSC Educator. She shared that the 2023 East Metro Water Resource Education Program (EMWREP) report was sent out and will be presented to the Policy Committee. Barbara will be reducing her hours to work 60% starting March 1st, and only carry her workload for the LSC. She will no longer have hours to do work for EMWREP. A job posting is currently open for a new educator.

John Hanson gave an update on the VBWD Plan Amendment. This item is on the agenda for the January Policy Committee meeting and serves as a public hearing. If no comments and/or only positive comments are received, then the plan amendment will move forward. If negative comments are presented, then the plan amendment will go back to BWSR. Matt Moore thanked John for bringing this forward.

Jay Riggs brought forward adding the St. Croix River as a priority waterbody to the LSC plan. Currently, the St. Croix River is not listed as a priority waterbody and a plan amendment would be required to add it to tables 5.2 and 5.3. At this stage there isn't a redlined document ready to go for the amendment process. Karen Kill suggested waiting until another plan amendment was occurring to ease the burden of the process and Mike Isensee pointed out that projects can still be funded currently that benefit the St. Croix River without the amendment. Matt Moore and Kyle Axtell shared some insight having a current proposed project that is a direct drainage to the St. Croix River. This project was not awarded Clean Water Funds (CWF) in part due to not being able to directly reference the St. Croix River as a priority in any plan. Craig Mell highlighted that this is important since the LSC WP asks partners to try to seek outside funding before applying for WBIF funding. Michelle Jordan responded to this that a local plan amendment may be the best way to solve this issue for future grant applications. Laura Jester asked if it matters if the waterbody is named the St. Croix River or Lake St. Croix and if this would mean the entire basin is now a priority. Mike Isensee shared a map of CMSCWD and the areas that drain to the St. Croix River as an example of how there can be landlocked areas within a drainage region and thus the whole

basin would not be considered a priority. Craig Mell stated that a watershed wide map like this would be beneficial and asked if this data was available from Emmons and Olivier Resources' previous work. Emily Heinz said that the St. Croix River is huge with hundreds of miles of shoreline so that's why the land was written and prioritized as is. Karen Kill pointed out that the current plan does reference the St. Croix River in table 5.1 part c, number 26 and that the plan also lists direct drainages. Matt Oldenburg-Downing inquired what adding the St. Croix River as a priority waterbody seeks to accomplish and what is the partnership limited by without it being listed. He also asked if there is an impact is the cost-benefit worth it to go through a plan amendment process. John Hanson and Michelle Jordan both stated that a local plan amendment would be an easier route. Craig Mell asked if there would be any issues funding SWWD's direct drainage project with the plan as is and Michelle Jordan recommended that the LSC approach it like they did with SWWD's previous WBIF funded direct drainage project. Matt Oldenburg-Downing asked if partners can reference each other's plans in grant applications and Karen Kill stated they cannot. Matt Moore shared that SWWD's plan is programmatic so making an amendment to their plan wouldn't be as simple. Craig Mell motioned to move forward with the plan amendment to add the St. Croix River as a priority waterbody so partners can reference it and hopefully receive grant funding, Jay Riggs seconded. Eight partners voted in favor (SWWD, Isanti SWCD, Washington County, WCD, CSWCD, CMSCWD, Pine County, and Isanti County). Three partners did not vote in favor (VBWD, CLFLWD, and MSCWMO). All other partners abstained from voting. Matt Moore inquired why John Hanson voted no and John responded saying he agreed with doing the work Karen Kill mentioned first. Jay Riggs will take the lead on this task with Kyle Axtell offering assistance.

Other

There were no other items.

Adjourn

Becca Oldenburg-Downing called to adjourn at 2:06PM.