|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership | | | |
| Policy Committee Meeting #14 - MINUTES | | **Vision**  The St. Croix River, groundwater, lakes, streams, rivers, wetlands, and upland habitat in the Lower St. Croix watershed sustain healthy ecosystems, recreation, public health, tourism, agriculture, the economy, and quality of life in our communities.  **Mission**  Guide protection and restoration of priority natural resources in the Lower St. Croix watershed over the next ten years through implementation of the Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. | |
| January 22, 2024  4:00-6:00 PM | |
| **Wyoming Area Library**  26855 Forest Blvd, Wyoming, MN 55092 | |
|  | **Facilitator:** Angie Hong | | **Note taker:** Jay Riggs & Barbara Heitkamp |
| Attendees: | **Policy Committee members attending:**  Anoka SWCD: Kate Luthner (virtual)  Brown's Creek WD: Klay Eckles  Chisago County: Dan Dahlberg, Lance Petersen and Mike Mergens  Chisago SWCD: Jim Birkholz  Comfort Lake Forest Lake WD: Jackie Anderson  Isanti SWCD: Tom Anderson  Pine County: Steve Hallan (virtual)  Pine SWCD: Doug Odegard  South Washington WD: Sharon Doucette  Valley Branch WD: Ed Marchan (virtual)  Washington County: Gary Kriesel (alternate)  **Policy Committee members absent:**  Carnelian Marine St Croix WD  Isanti County  Middle St. Croix WMO  Washington SWCD  **Alternates in attendance:** Brenda Green (Chisago Co), Dave Bakke (CLFLWD)  **Staff Members (in person):** Angie Hong (EMWREP); Paul Swanson (Pine SWCD); Jessica Colin-Pilarski (Washington Co), Ben Elfelt (Chisago Lakes LID); Jay Riggs (WCD), Craig Mell (Chisago SWCD); Michelle Jordan (BWSR)  **Staff Members (virtual):** Matt Moore (SWWD); Jamie Schurbon (ACD); Susanna Wilson-Witkowski (Chisago Co); Joel Larson (UMN-Extension); Scott Soderman (Isanti County); Tiffany Determan (Isanti SWCD); Emily Heinz (CLFLWD); John Hanson (VBWD); Laura Jester (Keystone Waters); Ben Effelt (Chisago LID) | | |
| Meeting packet: | [Available here.](https://www.lsc1w1p.org/s/1-22-24-Policy-Committee-agenda-and-materials.pdf) | | |

**MINUTES:**

The meeting was called to order at 4:04 pm by Vice Chair Jim Birkholz.

**Approve agenda**: Motion to approve agenda by Eckles. Second by J Anderson. All in favor. Agenda approved.

**Election of Officers:**

* Eckles nominates Fran Miron as Chair. Second by Dalberg. All in favor. Motion carries.
* Eckles nominates Jim Birkholz as Vice Chair. Second by Mergens. All in favor. Motion carries.
* Hallan nominates Kristin Tuenge as Secretary. Second by Odegard. All in favor. Motion carries.

**Approve meeting minutes from the October 23, 2023 meeting**

* J Anderson clarified some of the statements made in the Sunrise River presentation. Angie Hong adjusted the Oct. 2023 minutes accordingly.
* J Anderson motioned to approve the 10-23-23 meeting minutes, as amended. Second by Kreisel. All in favor. Minutes approved.

**Public hearing for VBWD amendment to the Lower St. Croix River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan**

* Hong referred to the memo in the Policy Committee packet for background information. The proposed amendment will add Valley Creek and Kelle’s Creek to the other regionally significant streams listed in Table 5-2 and Figure 5-2 and add completed subwatershed assessments and inventories to Table 7-1.
* The amendment was approved by the Policy Committee in 2022 and has gone through an official agency review and public comment process. No dissenting opinions were shared during this process. The purpose of today’s Public Hearing is to receive any final comments from the public. If there are none, the Policy Committee can vote to adopt the minor plan amendment.
* Jim Birkholz officially opened the public meeting and asked three times if there were any people who wished to speak on the issue. No comments were received.
* Eckles motioned to close the public hearing. Second by Kriesel. All in favor.
* Eckles motioned to adopt the minor plan amendment. Second by Birkholz. Motion carries.

**Updates on 2024 Lower St. Croix Watershed Plan Implementation**

* Craig Mell: Fiscal report
  + FY21 WBIF grant: 100% of the grant funds have been encumbered and 90% are spent. There is on remaining payment for the SWWD Trout Brook project that will be completed this spring.
  + BWSR has conducted two rounds of grant reconciliation and gave the Lower St. Croix Partnership high marks for managing a large and complicated grant accurately. Hong thanked Craig Mell for his attention to detail as a fiscal administrator for the group.
  + FY23 WBIF grant: 77% of the grant funds have been encumbered and 24% have been spent. There is two years left on this grant.
  + CWF Soil Health Grant: 82% of this grant has been spent on soil health projects.
* Joel Larson: Update on agronomist outreach specialist hiring process
  + The UMN Extension is excited to continue this collaboration. The position was posted open for six weeks but only received three applications, so they will be extending the opening for another three weeks in order to conduct additional promotions.
* Angie Hong: Project updates
  + Hong shared a list of [current and completed projects funded by the FY21 and FY23 WBIF grants](https://www.lsc1w1p.org/s/1-22-24-Lower-St-Croix-1w1p.pdf). She also shared a summary of education and outreach completed in 2023, though the Lower St. Croix and EMWREP shared education programs. Planning is underway for 2024, and many events are already scheduled.
  + Discussion:
    - Shoreline contractor workshop – Monday, March 4
      * Eckles – What’s the incentive to get people to come?
        + Hong – it’s really hard – we don’t have many carrots to offer other than inviting contractors to better work with partners to avoid confrontation or violating rules. We’ve discussed possibly adding trained contractors to a list given to landowners.
        + There are two training models in other regions we’d like to replicate, but it would require a change in state or local rules. In Stearns County, contractors are required to attend training every two years to operate in the county. There is also a Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership, which is a certification program offered as a collaboration between the state agency and university system.
      * Water Testing Clinics
        + J Anderson said these are a great idea and asked about plans for 2024. She’d like to see one possibly held in Wyoming since North Branch is pretty far away.
        + Hong said they are planning to offer one clinic in northern Washington County and one in Chisago County, at locations to be determined. We partner with Minnesota Groundwater Association and MN Well Owners Organization to run the events and they require a lot of volunteer support, so it probably won’t be possible to do more than two events.
      * Adopt a Drain program
        + J Anderson requested an Adopt a Ditch program to engage rural landowners and make them more aware of illegal dumping issues

**Project Highlight: Randy Hinze Farm**

Presented by Paul Swanson, District Manager for Pine SWCD

* Swanson talked about collaborative conservation projects Pine SWCD has been able to do with Randy Hinze, thanks to Lower St. Croix WBIF funding. Hinze was recognized as the Minnesota Outstanding Conservationist of the Year for 2023. [Presentation here.](https://www.lsc1w1p.org/s/Pine-SWCDs-Success-with-LSC-WBIF.pdf)
* Hallan expressed his pride and noted that Hinze lives just down the street from him.
* Audience applause!

**Update on FY23 supplemental funding request**

* Hong directed Policy Committee members to the memo that was sent out prior to the meeting for background information about the supplemental funding request.
* The LSCWP was awarded $167,615 of supplemental funding for projects, to be completed by the end of 2025.
* The steering committee requested the that the Policy Committee make a recommendation to accept these funds, allow the steering committee to determine which funding categories to increase, and update the 2023-25 grant work plan accordingly. This will require approval from two-thirds of partner boards to be approved.
* Discussion:
  + J Anderson: What process will the Steering Committee use to determine how the money will be allocated?
  + Craig Mell –The supplemental funds will be directed to grant activity categories, not specific projects. From there, the group will follow its usual project review and prioritization process to determine which projects receive funding. Projects that request more than >$50K in funding will come to the policy committee for review, per the usual process. The steering committee hopes to have the money approved to begin allocating in March.
* Motion by MErgens to recommend that LSCWP local boards approve the FY23 WBIF work plan amendment to include the $167,615 in supplemental grant funds in the overall work plan budget and authorize the LSCWP Steering Committee to determine the most effective Activities that the supplemental funds will be added to for implementing the Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. Second by Odegard. All in favor. Motion carries.

**Minor correction of plan language to clarify St. Croix River as a priority water body**

* Jay Riggs: Lower St Croix River is not specifically listed as a priority water body in the LSC Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. After much discussion within the steering committee and with BWSR, the group anticipates needing to do a minor plan amendment, similar to what was just approved for Valley Branch, in order to clarify that the St. Croix River is indeed a priority water body.

**2024-2025 Metro Convening Group will be meeting soon**

* Kyle Axtell from SWWD is helping to coordinate that meeting. Metro partners will discuss whether to pool their 2025 WBIF grant funds with the non-metro partners, as in previous years.

**Next Meeting Dates/Locations**

* The Policy Committee decided to continue meeting on the 4th Monday, every four months, from 4-6 at the Wyoming Public Library.
* The next three meetings in 2024 will be on April 22, July 22, and Oct. 28.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:34 pm.