

Prioritized Issue Statements

October 11 Advisory Committee Workshop Outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

On October 11, 2018, the Advisory Committee engaged in a four hour workshop to prioritize the issues to be addressed by the Lower St. Croix One Watershed One Plan (LSC 1W1P). Producing these prioritized statements for review by the Policy Committee represents a significant milestone in the LSC 1W1P process, both in terms of the work leading up to it, as well as what having these statements allows to follow.

As Board of Water and Soil Resources guidance stipulates, the identification and prioritization of resources and issues is needed because, over the lifespan of the plan, not all of the identified issues can be addressed or addressed at the same time. Knowing what the group will be working to address allows for the development of measurable goals to address the issues, and ultimately for an implementation schedule that reflects the priorities established by the group.

This report contains an overview of the input collected that led to the identification of the issue statements and priority resources, the process used to prioritize, and the outcomes of the workshop.

PROCESS OF DEVELOPING ISSUE STATEMENTS

Over the course of several months, a significant amount of information on existing issues, priorities, and goals was reviewed and consolidated by the LSC 1W1P Data Consolidators, the Plan Writer, and the Meeting Facilitator. The sources for this data included:

- Previously completed local plans
- Comment letters from governmental agencies
 - Board of Water and Soil Resources
 - Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
 - Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
 - Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)
 - Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)
 - Metropolitan Council
- Lower St. Croix Watershed Groundwater Resource and Protection Plan
- Priority Scoping Document submissions from each local entity
- Three stakeholder meetings and an online survey

Initial review of all the information resulted in a list of resource categories, uses of those resources that are threatened, and the issues creating those threats. In total, the data consolidation led to a list of nearly 100 issues that could be addressed by the LSC 1W1P. This list was shared with the Planning Team for initial revisions before being distributed to the full Advisory Committee in advance of the October 11 meeting. Before beginning the prioritization of the issues, the Advisory Committee had the opportunity to add issues they considered important that were not already addressed by the compiled statements.

PRIORITIZATION OF ISSUE STATEMENTS

All participants received the issues statements drafted by the consultants with the guidance of the Planning Team one week in advance of the meeting. They were asked to look for gaps or anything that might be missing, as well as begin to consider how they would rank the issues within each of the resource categories.

At the beginning of the workshop, participants were asked to offer any issues they did not believe were adequately reflected in the statements. Each resource area was reviewed one at a time, and once all areas were discussed, the list of issue statements was considered final. At that time, all participants were asked to rank the issue statements individually, working in one resource area at a time. Responses were aggregated and averaged, resulting in the collective group's prioritization of the issues.

The group prioritization was reviewed as a part of a large group discussion using "Fist to Five", where participants had the opportunity to reflect on the outcome and, as needed, advocate for a lower ranked issue to move higher. The purpose of Fist to Five is "to validate group consensus, take inventory of how individuals feel about the ranking, or engage those who are not yet onboard in vocalizing their concerns"¹. Participants are asked to, all at the same time, use their hand to indicate how comfortable or confident they feel about something being discussed, with a fist (or zero) signifying complete opposition and a 5 signifying complete support. The goal is not to get everyone to a five, but to get those below a three to above a three. In order to do so, those showing below a three are asked what they need to get them to feel comfortable with the ranking, allowing for a frank and honest conversation to take place.

Using this method, consensus was reached on the ordering of the issue statements within each category. On the whole, the group accepted the outcome of the averaged rankings, though there was some movement. However, at multiple points in the previous weeks as well as in the workshop, concern about how local priorities fit in (especially for those entities that are adopting the LSC 1W1P as their county water plan) came into the conversation. Through discussion with participants (including BWSR staff), it was decided that regional priorities should be the focus, but that local priorities could be called out separately to account for locally significant issues.

One thing important for this group was the recognition that even if an issue is not considered a high priority for this plan, it could very well be addressed in projects or programs that have multiple benefits. For that reason, desire was expressed to keep all issues on the table throughout the planning process. In order to accommodate that desire, the ranked issues were then separated into tiers A, B, and C so as to reflect their relative priority.

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| A | Issues in Tier A are those issues which must be addressed in the LSC 1W1P |
| B | Issues in Tier B are considered important to pursue as secondary priorities |
| C | Issues in Tier C will be addressed primarily through multiple benefits, or as funding and time allow |

Using the group-prioritized issues statements, participants worked in small groups to discuss where they felt the line should be drawn between the tiers. Each group had a chance to provide input on the tiered breakdown of each resource area, and the final group reviewed the input from the previous groups to propose the official delineation. Once again, Fist to Five was used to settle any discomfort with the proposed tiers and produce the recommendations in the remainder of this document.

¹ 2017. Meeting Facilitation to Meet Needs: Fist to Five. © Authentic Edge, LLC.

PRIORITY ISSUES BY RESOURCE AREA

Groundwater

Threatened Uses: Drinking water, irrigation, resource base flows for habitat and recreation

Groundwater is an important resource throughout the Lower St. Croix River Watershed. It accounts for 100% of the region's drinking water and many natural resources rely on groundwater to supply base flows including wetlands, trout streams, lakes, and some non-trout streams. Contamination of groundwater from various pollution sources is a growing concern as a large area of pollution sensitivity extends through the middle portion of the watershed in Anoka, Isanti and Chisago Counties, and much of Washington County is considered sensitive to groundwater pollution. Further, groundwater consumption is on the rise with a 50% increase in pumping for consumption since 1990.

A	Groundwater quality is impacted by degraded soil health and agricultural practices including overuse or misuse of nitrates and pesticides
	Groundwater quantity is impacted by consumption, irrigation, and overuse
	Groundwater quality is impacted by chemical contaminants including VOC/TCE, PFASs, etc.
	Additional groundwater monitoring is needed to better understand quantity and quality issues.
	Groundwater quality is impacted by leaking or non-conforming SSTS
B	Recharge areas are reduced by urban and agricultural development
	Groundwater-dependent natural resources are threatened by reduced surficial aquifer levels
	Surface water - groundwater interactions aren't well understood
C	All sources of and vulnerability to pollution are not known
	Strength or availability of local ordinances or rules are not adequate to protect groundwater quality and quantity

Lakes

Threatened Uses: Aesthetics, recreation, habitat, fishing, property values

Lakes are the most significant water features throughout the watershed - providing recreation, habitat, and natural beauty to the area. There are 127 lakes in the Lower St. Croix Watershed, covering over 40,000 acres. Unfortunately, 52 of these lakes are considered impaired due to high nutrient levels coming from sources such as stormwater runoff, agricultural runoff, poor shoreline practices, failing septic systems, and from within the lake itself. High levels of nutrients increase algal growth, decrease water clarity, negatively impact recreation, and can reduce habitat quality. Some lakes are experiencing pressures from new development or redevelopment. Further, some of these lakes have significant infestations of aquatic invasive species (AIS) which impact habitats, recreation, and property values and which can be easily spread to uninfested lakes.

A	Degraded soil health, as well as runoff and erosion from agricultural lands, threaten lake water quality
	Stormwater runoff threatens lake water quality
	Development pressure threatens lakes as natural landscapes turn to residential within sensitive lakesheds and shorelines
	Poor shoreline practices disrupt/degrade habitats, increase erosion, contribute nutrients and other contaminants
	Invasive species threaten lake habitats, biota, recreation, and property values.
	Failing/nonconforming SSTS threaten lake water quality
B	Internal pollutants degrade water quality
	Climate change impacts water levels, water temperature, water chemistry, biota
	Variable lake levels can negatively impact shoreland and homes (*Chisago Lakes LID)
C	Additional monitoring, modeling, assessment is needed to determine pollutant sources and track changes to lake water quality and quantity (*Isanti SWCD)
	Some recreational uses have negative impacts on biota and water quality and may transfer AIS.
	Local ordinances or rules are lacking in some areas to help protect lakes. (*Isanti SWCD)

Rivers and Streams

Threatened Uses: Aesthetics, recreation, habitat, fishing, drainage

There are over 1,000 miles of rivers, streams, and judicial ditches draining through the Lower St. Croix Watershed on their way to the St. Croix River itself. Of the stream segments with enough monitoring data, 146 miles are considered impaired for pollutants or stressors including bacteria, low dissolved oxygen, pH, or significantly low numbers of key aquatic species. Some streams run through deep ravines, offering cool environments and harboring trout. Others drain through lake systems, offering recreation and habitat, and the ability to keep water levels stable. Many streams and ditches drain agricultural lands, helping to support the cropping infrastructure while also providing critical and sensitive habitats.

A	Degraded soil health, as well as runoff and erosion from agricultural lands, threaten stream water quality
	Stormwater runoff threatens stream water quality
	Riparian areas, streambanks, and stream stability are degraded resulting in poor habitats and increased erosion (altered hydrology upstream, channeling, poor maintenance, lack of buffers, terrestrial invasive species, unstable banks)
	Development pressure threatens streams as natural landscapes turn urban/suburban within sensitive watersheds and riparian areas
	Erosion in gullies and ravines leads to pollution, habitat degradation, and land loss
	Failing/nonconforming SSTS threaten stream water quality
	Ditch maintenance methods (or improper methods) may negatively impact water quality
B	Improperly sized or placed culverts negatively impact drainage and water quality
	Climate change and extreme events impact water levels, water temperature, water chemistry, biota. Infrastructure standards are not keeping up with new rainfall patterns, negatively impacting water quality and quantity.
C	Invasive species threaten stream habitats and biota. (* Chisago Lakes LID)
	Source water depletion impacts trout streams and other spring-fed streams
	Variable water levels in channels can negatively impact shoreland and homes (*Chisago Lakes LID)
	Additional monitoring, modeling, assessment is needed to determine pollutant sources and track changes to stream water quality and quantity (*Isanti SWCD)
	Local ordinances or rules are lacking in some areas to help protect streams.

Wetlands

Threatened Uses: Habitat, flood control, filtration, aesthetics, recreation, wild rice production

According to the National Wetland Inventory, there are over 152,000 acres of wetlands in the Lower St. Croix Watershed providing a variety of functions including habitat, flood control, filtration, recreation, and natural beauty. Unfortunately, thousands of acres of wetlands have been converted or drained for agriculture or developed for urban and suburban uses. Continued fragmentation, disappearing recharge areas, and invasive species are a few of issues facing wetland health.

A	Agricultural runoff, erosion and ditching threaten wetland health
	Development pressure threatens to fragment and degrade wetlands and wetland complexes.
	Stormwater runoff and illegal dumping threatens wetland health
	Invasive species and loss of biodiversity threaten ecology
	Reduction of recharge areas threatens hydrology
B	A lack of adequate buffers threaten wetland health
	Efforts to restore wetlands are not adequate
	Climate change and extreme events impact water levels, water temperature, water chemistry, biota
C	Habitat protection lacks consistent funding
	Local ordinances or rules are lacking in some areas to help protect wetlands.
	Wetland banking doesn't necessarily balance hydrologic needs
	Additional monitoring is needed to properly map wetlands and document wetland functions and values and restoration needs/potential (*Isanti SWCD)

Upland Habitat

Threatened Uses: Habitat, aesthetics, recreation, filtration

Approximately 26% of the land in the Lower St. Croix Watershed is covered by forests, shrubland, and prairies. Many large tracts of forests and other uplands are in public ownership including wildlife management areas, scientific and natural areas, State parks, etc. Other significant uplands are privately owned. Fragmentation and proper maintenance of high quality uplands is a growing concern as the region's population expands.

A	Development pressure and conversion to ag land threatens to fragment and degrade natural areas.
	Marginal agricultural land is rarely converted to natural habitats.
	Invasive species threaten ecology
	A lack of proper maintenance or poor maintenance practices threaten integrity of natural lands
B	Local ordinances or rules are lacking in some areas to help protect natural areas.
	Additional monitoring or inventory is needed to understand and map natural areas
C	Habitat protection lacks consistent funding
	Climate change impacts biodiversity and natural communities

St. Croix River & Lake St. Croix

Threatened Uses: Flyway, recreation, habitat, economic viability

There are 97 miles of shoreline along the St. Croix River, including Lake St. Croix which comprises the lower 25 miles of the river from Stillwater, MN to Prescott, WI. Combined, the St. Croix River and Lake St. Croix provide a regionally significant big river with a Wild and Scenic River designation above Taylors Falls. Recreation, transportation, habitat, and migratory flyway are among the more important uses of the river.

A	Degraded soil health, as well as runoff and erosion from agricultural lands, threaten lake water quality.
	Development and redevelopment pressures lead to land use changes that impact the river and its corridor
	Stormwater runoff impacts water quality and quantity
	Proper management of bluffs and ravines is lacking
	Invasive species threaten habitats and overall ecology
B	Local ordinances or rules are lacking in some areas to help protect the St. Croix River and Lake St. Croix.
	Climate change and extreme events impact water levels, water temperature, water chemistry, biota
	Aging stormwater management infrastructure threatens water quality
C	Additional monitoring, modeling, assessment is needed to determine pollutant sources and track changes in river water quality, quantity, biota

Social Capacity

Threatened Uses: Ability to address issues, ability to fund projects, relationships, political will, historic knowledge

With 37 cities, 23 townships, 6 counties and more than 150,000 residents in the Lower St. Croix River Watershed, there is a challenge both in understanding and being able to address all the barriers and challenges facing improved natural resources in the area. Personal and political responsibility for making better choices for the environment is nothing new and will continue. However, the development and implementation of the Lower St. Croix 1W1P offers an opportunity to work together on the most difficult challenges with the goal of realizing significant change over the life of the plan.

A	Behavioral change among individuals is needed
	Knowledge of personal connections to water and ecological health is lacking
	Landowners willing to install or maintain BMPs are needed.
	Long term, stable funding for many programs is needed.
B	Community support and political will is sometimes lacking; short term gains are valued over long term solutions
	Stronger relationships, trust, and collaboration among LGUs, residents, and state agencies is needed
	Engagement of local officials and residents is sometimes lacking
	It is difficult to balance natural resource protection with economic viability
	Decision makers sometimes lack environmental awareness
C	Knowledge of or studies on economics of various practices is lacking
	Distributed and overlapping jurisdictions make collaboration difficult