

# Public Listening Session Transcript – Part 1

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 00:40**

Welcome everyone. Thank you for braving the cold and taking some time out of your lives or away from your day jobs to share your perspectives with the board of the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District. This board is uncommonly interested in hearing public perspectives. They really want to hear what you see as some of the issues out here. And why are they doing this session, this listening session, because they're very interested in amplifying the concerns that you have, but also amplifying some of the possible solutions and opportunities that are out there for the river. Today is a listening session for the board with a few questions they may toss back to get clarifications or explore presenters perspectives a little bit more, but mostly they're using their ears today. And in spite of having just said that we're going to start by using their mouths, because we're going to have them self introduce here and I'm going to turn that over right now to their esteemed chair.

**Joseph Barisonzi 02:12**

Hello everybody, thank you. me. It's good to see all of you. Lots of familiar faces, some new faces. I'm really glad you're here. I'm looking forward to learning my name is Joseph Barisonzi. I'm the representative, one of two representatives from Hennepin County on the Lower Minnesota River Watershed board, and I have the honor of also serving as the board president.

**Apollo Lammers 02:35**

Hello, everyone. My name is Apollo Lammers. I am the Representative Scott County.

**Theresa Kuplic 02:42**

Hi everybody. Theresa Kuplic and I'm the representative from Dakota County.

**Lauren Salvato 02:49**

Good afternoon. Lauren Salvato, I'm the Carver County representative, and I've been on this board for four and a half years because I would love for my children to be able to recreate and really interact with the Minnesota River.

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 03:01**

Thank you, Lauren, next up, we're going to hear a few words from the administrator, Linda Loomis, who's going to give us some much needed background. Linda, the floor is yours.

**Linda Loomis 03:14**

So I want to thank everybody for coming, just to give you a little bit of where the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District, this watershed district begins just a little bit upstream from the city of Carver, and we're basically between the bluff lines of the Minnesota River and then all the way downstream to the confluence with the Mississippi River.

About 80 square miles. We've got the two airports, two wastewater treatment plants, electrical generation power plant in our district, and we're responsible for maintaining the water quality for water that most of which does not originate within our boundaries. It all comes from upstream, either by tributary or from the Minnesota River itself. So today we're going to have our listening session. We've got people that have submitted testimony to us ahead of time. They're going to talk about their presentations. We're going to take a brief recess at 2:15 then resume at three o'clock, and then we're going to try to get out of here by four o'clock and just some logistical things we haven't already found out, the bathrooms are out the door and down the hallway by the entrance and there to the left, there's a water fountain around the corner to the right, and I think that's it for the logistics. And then let's see where we go.

So this is some of what we do, and you can see most of this on our district website. And why the listening session? Well, we wanted to pull together people that interact with the Minnesota River, and it kind of originated with the flooding that we all saw in 2024 we couldn't pull this format fast enough to make this all about flooding. So we thought, since we're inviting people in, let's ask them what their thoughts are on the Minnesota River, how the flooding and how the community might impact their communities. And here it talks about some of the things that is at the bottom of the funnel. We call our Watershed District, and we manage the navigation channel on the Minnesota River. And these are our thematic talk topics that we're hoping to address or have our presenters and speakers today talk about, and we're going to use these in our legislative agenda. We lobby at the legislature because of we manage the dredge material. We are always looking for funding because the navigation channel benefits more than just our watershed district. So we feel it's important for the state to have a stake in the management of the dredge material, and we're also looking for information to use when we develop our next generation watershed management plans. So these are some of the topics that we're interested in, and we're not asking you to address each of these individually, but we'll tease that out at the end.

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 07:09**

Thank you, Linda. As Linda mentioned, over the past several weeks, they've received some written testimony from folks. A handful of those people are here today to kind of reinforce the comments that they had. And that's who we've got queued up here for our first speakers.

They've all been coached or threatened, depending upon your perspective, to keep their presentations on the short side. First up will be Holly. After we hear these short presentations from those first five we've got through the registration process, we've identified another handful of people who are in the room today that would also like to make a few comments. We'll be calling them up based upon the order that they've signed in. We have a third audience, those who are out there in the streaming world, and we will go out on that limb later in our afternoon, and we are equipped. Suzy, who did all the registration, will be able to unmute individuals who are on the streaming side and take some comments from them. You're invited to stay for the entire duration. If you want to present and take off. That's fine. We understand. It's a potentially a long session. You're free to come and go as you see fit. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Holly, who is with LeSueur County, but is here representing a larger consortium of a bunch of people whose day jobs involve things that can make the river better. It's all yours. All right. Thank you.

**Holly Bushman:**

So Holly Bushman and I work with LeSueur County, and I'm here on behalf of the Lower Minnesota River East watershed partnership, and I'm going to talk about all through the hydrology, flooding and then funding watershed initiatives. So I just wanted to give a little background about the Lower Minnesota River watershed. I thought that was important. So you can see the picture on the right, that boundary with the blue outline that is the Lower Minnesota River watershed. It is almost 1.2 million acres. So very, very large. This is just one of the major watersheds that's in the Minnesota River Basin. So the Minnesota River Basin is really, really big. And then this watershed particular, it has a bunch of different land use, but agriculture and urban practices are predominant the main land use activities. It also contains about 50 miles of the Minnesota River, almost 2,500 miles of additional flowing water, like streams, rivers, Creek stitches, and then the elevation varies from 1,200 feet down all the way to 800 or 682 feet. So you can see it's a really diverse watershed. There's a lot of different things going on, topography, land use. I just thought that was really important to point out. And my partnership in particular is that shaded pink area, and the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District is actually a part of that boundary. And so we just continue to want to look for support from the Watershed District in our plan, but also the new initiatives that we do within that plan and our goals and our priority. So that's why I'm here today.

10:10

So our biggest concerns are at least two of our biggest concerns are sediment and then also altered hydrology. So we go a lot off of state reports, and specifically I'm referencing here the lower Minnesota River watershed restoration, protection and strategies report. And in that report, it was developed in 2020 by the way, sediment is an impairment for 58% of streams within this watershed, and most of that sediment loading that's happening is due to in and near channel erosion. So your ravines, your bluffs, your streams, that's where it's coming from and then additionally altered hydrology. About 65% of those streams are altered, so it's a huge portion. And you can see from the figures below, the one on the left is the sediment loading, and they're color coded based off of tons per acres per year. So a lot of it's concentrated in the upper part of the watershed, which definitely has impact for, you know, everyone downstream. We always say that what happens upstream impacts downstream. And then all of those streams in red on the right, those are all the altered water courses. So a lot of different things going on. And this is something that's been happening for a while in this watershed, but because of the increased weather patterns that are changing all the time, and the intensification of land use, it has made these problems way more difficult, much larger, and it's taken a toll, and so the next few slides, I'm just going to show you some pictures of what this looks like. So this is at a township road. It's in Tyrone Township, which is near Henderson. And the bottom figure is just a tool lighter that we can use to kind of give us more 3D kind of version and really understand what the landscapes like. But you can see their sloughing occurring, and it goes on the road itself, and then the township has to manage it. Well, typically, that stuff doesn't, kind of gets pushed over to the side. A lot of times, this ends up in our ravines and our streams, and we don't, we don't want that. This is some severe erosion, and, you know, it's expensive to fix that. That's mean, the picture. This is actually just north of the city of LeSueur. It's huge, right? That that is a huge bluff that's sloughing that in the list River. It's dry there that year, but I'm standing where the LeSueur Creek would be so and this is just in that LeSueur Creek is about a half a

mile away from the Minnesota River, so ultimately that sediment is going to end up in the river. And this is just some of the examples that we see with within our watershed. And this is just, again, we're using our LIDAR images. We use a lot of tools and models when we talk about this stuff. This is in where the red is. That's where I was standing. But you can see, the farther you go up the road, it just continues as a triple it's just a constant effect that keeps happening. If you don't do something, it's just going to get worse. So those are just some examples. I thought that was important to share. As far as long term precipitation patterns, this has definitely had a huge has taken a huge toll in how we manage our resources, and, like I said, made these issues worse. So the graph on the left, and this is all from the state climatology office, is just indicating that within the last 30 years or so, we were 10% wetter than we were historically. And then on the graph on the right, it's saying, overall the trend within the last 100 years, we have become have higher frequency and more intensity of rainfall events. So that just equals a recipe for disaster, right? We have more water on the landscape, and it has nowhere to go. So it's we have to figure out now, as resource managers, how we're going to address this. And that's where projects and practices are really important, and some of the work that I do in my cohorts do and trying to navigate this as things are changing, how do we fix this? And I before we get into projects and practices, I thought this was really important to really important to show you as an example what this looks like on the landscape when altered hydrology and water levels fluctuate. So it's pretty wet at the site, it's a wet meadow about in 2023 you can see in May of 2024 it's a bit drier. And then with this last flooding event, it is super wet now, wetter than it was before in 2023 and so just because the site is not wet one year doesn't mean it won't be the next year. So that's really important. We have to track this over time to see what the changes are and really understand what is going on in the landscape. As far as projects and practices. There's a ton of different options, and we have the science and data that supports that, but we really want to look at reducing peak flows sediment, providing water storage and definitely reducing volumes as well. And so we'll use models to help develop goals that will help with for each project in practice, and give us an idea on the water quality, quality benefits that we're going to receive. And then we pick our priority areas based off of what has happened is there flooding events? Is there high precipitation that's causing erosion or sediment deposits? Those are really important things to look at. And just keep in mind, there might be a lot of tools in the toolbox, but we have to also look at what the water quality benefits are depending on the project and practice that we choose what the landowner schools are in.

15:00

How willing they are to do something, and then additionally, what funding is available. So it's really complex. When we try to figure out these projects and practices, they're usually large, they're time consuming, they're expensive. So there's a lot of things that go into it before we do a project, and project development is really important in building those relationships. So we always keep that in mind when we're trying to figure out what to install. This is an example of a wetland restoration site that we did in the store County. I'm just going through these really quick wetland bank site. Again, this is mostly providing water storage, but it will have some other water quality benefits as well.

15:34

A grade stabilization project WASCOP (water and sediment control basin). So these are just examples of things that we can do. They aren't the only things. And again, it's going to depend on landowner goals, project site, all of those fun things. So from a financial resource standpoint, right now, we have a

reoccurring cost share with our watershed based implementation funding. And then each SWCD has their own local cost share. Traditionally, in greater Minnesota, we've only been able to rely on competitive funding, so we've had a really limited amount of funding available. We haven't had comprehensive management plans like the Metro has for decades. We are actually in our only, our first version right now, so we are really behind the eight ball. We're trying to catch up, right? We're trying to prioritize better within these watersheds, and to no surprise, outside of the metro, we have a smaller population, so we have a smaller tax base, too, and we also don't have a lot of watershed districts, so we're really limited on financial resources. So it's great we have watershed based implementation funding, but we definitely need more, and the sur County is a little bit different. We did take initiative to create a water storage fund and start setting aside levy dollars to help us with some projects, which is was took a while to develop, but is really important for locally what we need. I'm almost done. I'm going to try to make this really fast. This is our lower Minnesota River East watershed budget. Now keep in mind, this is one budget of one plan. There's still 11 major watersheds, and there's the seven county metro area, \$17.4 million this is just for one plan. So as you can see, the costs are really, really expensive, and finances are no surprises, a barrier. So that's something that we're always looking at, trying to find those resources. Lastly, policy changes. We have some existing policies that support watershed programs like One Watershed, One Plan, water storage, climate resiliency. But we need we need more right? We want more policies that protect our resources, promote our practices, help build resiliency and then provide some long term funding. I know that was a lot of information. That's what I have, and I'm happy to answer any questions,

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 17:44**

And this is where we open it up to the board, and we'll let you we'll let you inhale.

**Lauren Salvato 17:47**

Do you I'd like to think about holistically. If there's sort of a lever, something that you could tweak, policy, administrative, etc. You talked a lot about financial and but is there another sort of lever that you just thinking of If that change, it would make your job easier it would put more projects and practice on the ground like, what rises to the top for you?

**Holly Bushman:**

Besides financial resources, we need more staff to honestly we, I mean, there, there we have, we have staff, right? But we don't have enough of it. If we really want to make these projects work, we have to, like I said, develop those relationships, have boots on the ground, have those conversations. Sometimes it takes 2, 3, 5, 10 years to even get someone willing to do that. And so that's another piece that we could really use some help with. And just help, having assistance, talking to people, getting this word out and trying to trying to make change, right? Changing that norm that it's not okay for this to happen, and we need to implement something that's going to help, help the watershed, the river.

**Joseph Barisonzi 18:53**

I have two questions. Holly. The first is, you guys, we were part of recently adopted a One Watershed, One Plan, pretend it was fully funded. Do you think that the full implementation of that plan would offset the implications of the altered hydrology, or is it, in and of itself, not enough.

**Holly Bushman:**

It's not enough. Honestly, I honestly, it's the whole basin we everybody has to do their part. I hate, hate to say this, this is one piece of the puzzle, right? And so it's really good that we're all if we don't all do our part, nothing's going to change. It's change. You know, impacts to these resources didn't happen overnight either, right? So it's going to probably even take longer to fix it. It's always, always cheaper to prevent things than manage them. So that's always our goal. It's not enough, but it's a good start, right? It's more than what we had before, and I think that's a positive direction that we're at least looking for. Everyone's at least trying to do something on the same page, which is better than not.

**Joseph Barisonzi 20:00**

For sure. So in your written testimony, there was a sentence that I wanted to highlight, and I wanted to have you have an opportunity to be a little more specific about it. All right. The sentence was, the existing policies do not consider the drastic changes that the Minnesota State of Minnesota is experiencing recent years when it comes to changes in weather patterns and land uses, so very focused on a policy aspect. And when I look at a lot of the One Watershed one plans, they're a really good list of projects, but don't have this policy element to it, right? And that's one of the things that we're hoping to tease out and figure out, what role can we play? Do we need to play in that policy side? And I think that's a little bit of what Lauren's question was. So could you expound on what you think those the existing policies that are getting in the way are that need to be addressed, both for you and for the watershed as a whole.

**Holly Bushman:**

So what's I guess, the most complicated part for me is we are now partnering with a bunch of different LGUs and we all have different goals and priorities, right? So we don't have a, yes, there's state statute and we have to follow certain rules and regulations, but there's not a comprehensive watershed statute. I mean, there's policies and programs, but there's not a statute that we're collectively working towards the same goals and priorities, and we really are kind of doing all that already, but there's nothing that says, I guess, in set in stone that we're doing that. My biggest thing with that statement was we, you know, we set rules, regulations, and it's based off of what happened that day, right? And look at how much has changed, and even in the last 5 to 10, years, we're not catching up with those with what's changing, and trying to make sure policies and regulations are accommodating that. And I know no one likes more rules and regulations. I certainly don't either. But like, sometimes they're necessary, and even just having a policy that supports what we're doing, like our practices, like the water storage grants, that's really new, but we know that's really important. And so if we can at least have support from legislators or anyone, for that matter, that says these are important things and re emphasize that, I think that's what we're looking for, even if it doesn't amount to rule changes, we just want something that says, hey, we're supportive of this. We understand the science behind it and the data and why, why this is needed, and rather collectively, instead of random acts of conservation, I'd rather us all kind of work towards, we hear that term a lot, I'd rather work towards the same goal and try to get move that needle right, because we talk about, well, one plan is not going to do anything. It probably won't, but if we all do have the same objective, we can really move that needle, and that's what's important.

**Theresa Kuplic** 22:40

So can I ask you one more thing? Is there one type of project or one certain thing that you would put it more of a top priority about the rest of things, like water storage order?

**Holly Bushman:**

Yeah, I think stabilization. It depends on the what the water quality benefit goals are. If we're talking about acre feet of storage, I would say definitely some kind of wetland restoration, something that's gonna those tend to be your biggest bang for your buck, because you're getting the storage and the water quality benefits. If we're talking about sediment, it's going to be the stabilization the ravines or stream bakes, because that's at least going to fix that loading. But then again, that's where that water storage is, the upland part and controls. We're looking at upland and on the actual channel of a ravine or a stream. So you kind of need both in order to be really effective. If that makes sense. They both are related to each other. So those would be the two I would go for. But again, those are really expensive, time consuming, hard to get people to want to do those too. So it's always a challenge.

**Joseph Barisonzi** 23:44

From the board. Thank you so much. Thank you. I appreciate it.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 23:50

Our next speaker that we have is norm Senjem, who is representing the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance and is no stranger to a microphone. Good luck. Norm,

**Norm Senjem** 24:01

Okay, well, good to be here today. Norman Senjem, I'm a member of the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance. I kind of re-engaged in this business about a year ago as a volunteer.

24:26

My profession before that was with Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and one of my major projects had to do with sediment and phosphorus pollution coming from the Minnesota River, affecting the lake pepper and the Mississippi. So this is kind of I've been a little out of circulation for the past 12 years, so I won't be aware of all the ins and outs, but I have some perspective, and they asked me to take a look at the last 20 years or so of data to see how we're doing with respect to the goals that were set in the Total Maximum Daily Load studies that I worked on. So that's kind of where I started on this. And I will tend to focus on part of the piece of the puzzle. Start out very broadly, but focus in on what I see is some opportunities to focus. So you're familiar with these kind of pictures from last June, when we had those back to back six inch rain falls that caused the Rapidan dam to partially collapse and streets to get flooded, and there was quite a bit of alarm at the time about what to do about that. And to me, it says it kind of reminded us of how the changing climate is affecting things we're having just from the state DNR website, the six inch rain falls that precipitated this event are four times more likely today than they were before 1990 and the as Holly indicated, the annual rainfall is increased by three and a half inches, 10% so all of that is putting A lot of pressure on the existing stream system, we're seeing a roughly a doubling of flow as you measure it at Jordan. And these slides kind of, you know, scavenged

them from my own pen drive when I was back working there, a little bit shorter. But I've seen other data. I think we're still have a doubling of flow in the Minnesota River, that's a lot of new, lot of additional pressure on the stream, and widening of 50% near Jordan due to that pressure.

26:52

And what the Lake Pepin people are mostly concerned about, I would say, is all the sediment that's coming from the Minnesota River, it's over 75% of the sediment filling in that lake is coming from here. And so you see, especially 2016 to 2020 there was an unprecedented period of high sediment loading, a million metric tons, year after year after year after year, when the TMDL was calling for a 60% reduction, and then this is what nature gives us. So yeah, we do have to catch up with the changing climate. And as we look at policies, I think it's important to realize, and this is a Carrie Jennings slide here, geologist who has been around this issue a lot. This landscape in the Minnesota River is primed to erode. We have 12,000 years ago or so, the catastrophic drainage after the glacier started to melt from the glacial Lake Agassiz forming over hundreds of years this Minnesota River Valley, which they called the glacial river Warren, after a geologist at the time, and that created this huge channel, 250, feet deep or so, couple, 345, miles wide in some places. And after it all kind of drained away. After that event was over, we have this little, as you see, this kind of little slit called the Minnesota River there. And so from then on, the river, just the force of gravity has caused erosion coming down the tributaries year after year after year. And if you add twice as much water to the system, you just get twice as much erosion, etc. I don't know if it's a linear relationship, but you get the point, and you get a landscape like this downstream of or just south of Mankato, showing you all the kind of the network of ravines where a lot of erosion is coming from. And as Holly said, a lot of the concern is with the near channel sources, the bluffs, the as you see in a smaller tributary, there the stream bank erosion, falling in, and then the ravines, which start small at the edge of a field and then grow to sometimes vast proportions, and carry a lot of sediment with them. And I'm going to focus on ravines, just as a way of focusing on something that's kind of hidden away at the edge of fields and under the trees, under the you know, that maybe isn't getting enough attention.

And you get some of the, some of the causes are, you know, tile outlets, tile drainage outlets that are not protected. They can become the sources of ravines. You get just erosion, runoff from the edge of a field. It starts small and it gets bigger, as you see on the right hand side there. The University, John Nieber estimated, kind of the locations of concentrations of some of these ravines, and you see them kind of hugging the main stem, quite a long way up and in the Blue Earth River Basin, also along the coteau and the western edge of the basin as well.

30:20

So it's a widespread problem, and the approach that I'm suggesting today kind of was triggered by reading a report of the US Army Corps of Engineers, something I didn't know existed until recently, on the Seven Mile Creek watershed, about 20,000 23,000 acres between St. Peter and Mankato. That's not this watershed. I took this one for its aerial perspective to be able to label it like this.

30:53

But they did an intensive, gridded watershed model, and just tested some of the some of the approaches, and how effective they would be. And to get a, you know, kind of doing an anatomy of the

ravine, you have the ravine head. That's kind of what's back cutting all the time, getting bigger as storm events erode at the edge. And then you have the ravine catchment. And I just use that as a catchy phrase, excuse the pun. But you know, we say big watershed, small watershed, minor watershed, you know, basin.

31:33

And there you see the WASCOD watershed. What is it? Water and sediment control basin. That is the traditional solution that's designed for a storm event of once in 10 years, and today, that doesn't quite cut the mustard. So what more could be done? The Army Corps study estimated the best solution for that watershed, the most effective one would be cover crops in combination with that WASCOD. And so the cover crop has to be so the legislative agenda would include activities support for cover crops and wetlands in in that catchment. And if you think about it, the wetland would be offering storage that keeps water from getting to the stream, but also prevents that immediate sediment. So you kind of get a two for one. The ravine head make the WASCOD kind of a priority area in the ravine head, crop, plant interface, the people at the this is all way back in the 2000s early 2000s the Kevin Keener and his group at the watershed, they came up with a buffer strip that they actually got converted into a NFSA number. So it's a practice that can be done to control erosion there. And the concluding slide, I think I'm just in time, is, you know, I think this, when you go, if you're going to go after something like a specific problem, ravines, say, just to focus attention on a major problem. It may have been a little bit hidden. You want to start with a publicity and education campaign so people come to understand why this is an important issue. You need the landowner incentives, which can be juiced a little bit. There are some out there already, quite a bit technical assistance. We have the technical Soil and Water Conservation District, regional Joint Powers boards can be staffed to provide people across watershed boundaries and county boundaries, and that all ends up to the three legged stool. And Steve, as a alumnus of the Board of Water And Soil Resources, I was always reminded by your colleagues, that's what an effective program needs, the three legged stool. So for that, I'll pause and take any questions.

### **Steve Woods (Moderator)**

We could have skipped all those years of university if they just shown us a picture of a stool way back when. All right, board members, any questions or things that you'd like clarified before we release Norman.

**Lauren Salvato** 34:26

Could you speak more to how you think just holistically in this basin, how we would sort of approach this big problem of identifying ravines and other opportunities for restoration and prioritizing them? Do you have any thoughts there that you could expound on.

### **Norm Senjem**

Well, you can, you can look at some watersheds that have done a lot of emphasis on this. And, you know, I checked with the Nicollet County people, and they've done a lot of wetland or WASCOD implementation in the Seven Mile Creek. So that could be a looked upon as, how did you get water? How did you get landowners interested in this? What kind of incentives and education did it take?

I guess you know. And then, Goodhue County, right on the Minnesota right on Lake Pepin, they've done a lot of work similarly, and have plans to go further. So kind of talk to people who have already done a lot of work on it, and they can get you some on the ground experience. Otherwise, I think just education incentives and you know, keep talking about it and talking it up and providing some priority type incentives that if you locate a PMP here, you'll be eligible for this additional bit of incentive.

**Joseph Barisonzi 35:52**

So I find the story of I think all of us have found the story of Lake Pepin to be a compelling canary in the coal mine of the overall issues, right that we can look at the sedimentation. And folks have done the, you know, the DNA analysis of the sediment to tell you exactly where it's coming from and what percentage of it's coming from the Minnesota River. And the seems to me that the core of the story that I hear from Lake Pepin is we get the impact, and you, you folks upstream, need to start addressing the issues, right? And that's been a lot of what we've experienced as the final mile Watershed District, but we are still struggling with what's the narrative, what's the story, what's the compelling way to engage folks outside of the watershed in the importance of this when it's such an immediate issue for us in the area. So I'm curious if you could speak a little to both A, the experience and B, the proposed strategy for the Lake Pepin Alliance of engaging folks outside of you know, the immediate basin in being part of the solution for the basin.

**Norm Senjem 37:32**

Yeah, well, understand, I'm a kind of a newbie, kind of an old, even a newbie, but so I'm not into the deep strategy of the organization, but I think, you know, there's a, you know, the Army Corps of Engineers has spent something like almost 40 to \$50 million on dredging in the Upper Lake Pepin to restore some of its ecological quality. And that's because a lot of the sediment that's been deposited there over the years, Bay City was pretty much, you know, you couldn't take a canoe from Bay City out to the main stem almost. But I think we're in the process of looking at, what do you call them, town hall meetings, based on some of the research I pulled together, and we're looking at evaluating what's the speed and at which and the pathway of which the Lake Pepin is filling in. You know, for years, we've heard from the St. Anthony, St. Croix research station that it's filling in at 10 times the natural rate. And 300 years it'll be largely filled in, there will be a ribbon of water with wetlands around it, kind of like the Lower Minnesota and we're have a conversation with the other research station at the St. Anthony Falls hydraulics laboratory to look at another kind of sedimentation, which is the sand that's kind of moving in from the bottom up. And so if we can look at that, we'll have a better understanding of how this lake is going to change its morphology over time, but I don't know. I worked on this for decades in the public sphere, and I don't know if there's any magic answer. I think things are going better than I was surprised taking a look, 12 years later, there have been some improvements in farming practices and stuff. And it hasn't been enough to cope with these, with this changing climate, though, and so to get there, to have a, you know, farmland is worth 10,000 acres so and so, the cost of restore. Bring that to that cropland to water storage is quite high, whether it's a public storage paid for private and so that's why I brought up ravines as kind of a more kind of it doesn't take as much land out of production. I don't know if it does exactly the same amount of water storage, probably not, but it's at least an alternative that you can start working on. So if that answers.

**Joseph Barisonzi** 40:27

I was just going to add that the Lower Minnesota has, over the last three years, done a pretty comprehensive study and research on the ravines in the Lower Minnesota and highlighting which ones are contributing most to the sedimentation from within our scope, and pivoting towards what are the unique solutions that each of those ravines need because they're not all the same as Holly mentioned. And I think, unfortunately, that's been one of the areas that we've had to decrease funding for, as our funding limits, you know, kind of hit some caps, and figuring out how that can be a potential basin wide strategy. I'm intrigued to think about that and work with you guys on that more. Thank you.

**Norm Senjem**

I think you know another advantage of the ravine approach is you can approach it as part of a working what the NRCS used to call a working lands approach. Instead of taking land out of production, you're just using it differently. And these WASCObS, you they take very little land out of production and also, you're dealing with a landowner from the standpoint of a problem that's obvious. It's not well down to Lake Pepin. You got this problem down in the Lower Minnesota, you got this problem. It's no right on the edge of your field. It's eating away at your field. Wouldn't you like to do something about that? Wouldn't you like to square off that border and prevent more erosion.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 42:04

All right. Thank you, Norman, very much appreciate it. I'll just point out one connecting point between Holly's talk and what norm saying. When Holly had mentioned, you know, money which pays for staff, and Norm was talking about putting these water and sediment control basins in it's not your first visit to a farmer that he says, Oh, sure, I'll sign up. Let's do it now. It's three or four or five visits. So keeping that staff there is a connecting point between those first two talks. So Mr. Scott Sparlin, I met in 1999 working on the Minnesota River Conservation Reserve enhancement program that was a previous century. Nowadays, Scott is the coordinator and facilitated Minnesota River Congress, and the floor is yours, sir. Thank you.

**Scott Sparlin** 42:53

Thank you for the opportunity. Board of Managers, and this is a great event.

43:00

My name is Scott Sparlin. I live in the heart of the Minnesota River Valley in New Ulm, Brown County. The organizations I work for, Coalition for Clean Minnesota River and the Minnesota River Congress have been advocating on behalf of clean water in our state's namesake river watershed for the past 36 years. We are recommending two critical actions for consideration by the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District that, when accomplished, will improve multiple natural scientific conditions in the river for both the short term and the long term.

43:38

The first of the two recommendations is to join with others who are currently legislating, legislatively, advocating for appropriations for our new state water quality and storage program. We ask that you urge your legislative advisor to seek out and work with others who have engaged in this effort already, also the legislative advisor should aggressively work on behalf of the Watershed District, specifically

emphasizing the role the district plays in keeping the lower 25 miles of the river open to barge traffic related businesses via dredging responsibilities and expenditures. The Board of Water and Soil Resources will be recommending \$50 million over the next biennium, and that is the current amount others are initially working with.

44:29

The second of the two recommendations is for the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District to join efforts currently underway in creating a Minnesota River Basin Commission management board. We advise the board to support the effort in every way appropriate, including directing your legislative advisor to collaborate with those supporting entities and organizations who seek to see this action come to fruition. Since the disillusion of the former Minnesota River board in 2014 we, along with a growing group of others, feel this has become a very apparent missing component needed in order to address the multiplicity of systemic issues that affects the river's general conditions. The following testimony lays out how this initiative to create the entity we are recommending you become part of came to be in 1988 an extensive study of the Minnesota River began at the direction of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. It was called the Minnesota River assessment project. After two years of comprehensive scientific study, it revealed what firsthand observers had already intuitively anticipated a severely polluted river system. Subsequently, in 1990 Minnesota Governor Arnie Carlson directed the MPCA to begin a two-year planning process called the Minnesota River implementation project. This process was designed to create and develop actions which would result in the improvement of water quality conditions in the main stem and 13 tributary watersheds. Those assembled by the MPCA represented a diverse cross section of stakeholders and citizens called the Citizens Advisory Committee, after two years of scientific presentations, an extensive debate, the committee produced a set of 10 recommendations for action. One of the 10 recommends, the recommendations was to establish a Minnesota River Commission whose charge it would be to ensure government accountability and citizen participation in meeting Minnesota River Cleanup goals. The first charge. I'm sorry, the first charge of the new commission would be to establish goals for the cleanup effort. Here's the actual wording from the report. It is hoped that this report and the work of the Minnesota River assessment project will guide and expedite the planning efforts of the Commission. The board would also provide a broad oversight of major agency activities related to the Minnesota River and facilitate an interagency cooperation further, the board would evaluate the effectiveness of expenditures. They would also advocate for and educate people about the river and the restoration effort. Another responsibility would be to hold an annual event on the state of the river. The commission would not be involved in the day to day operation of agencies, but would have access to information and the decision makers within those agencies. In addition to being accountable to the citizens of Minnesota, the commission would also report to the governor and the legislature in 1994 then Senator Dennis Frederickson introduced a bill in the Minnesota Legislature, which I testified on behalf of to establish the Minnesota River Commission the court. The components of that bill are reflected in the citizens advisory committee recommendation which accompanies this document. Although it has been 30 years since that time, many of the elements and components from that Bill need to be options under consideration today. During that same session of the legislature of which that bill was introduced, another bill had been introduced to create a different entity, which of which membership consisted exclusively of one county commissioner from each of the 36 counties in the Minnesota River Basin. The state was quite willing, at the time to turn the responsibility over to counties to see what they could do

about the pollution challenges the river had at that time. Subsequently, the county entity structure idea passed and the Minnesota River Commission bill failed. Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers board was then created and signed into law. Fast forward to 2014 after 20 years of existence, two years of planning and even providing a way forward with funding options, the counties decided to call it quits and turn the responsibility of reducing pollution and damages caused in the minutes Minnesota River Watershed over to the state of Minnesota. Since that time, there's been no attempt by the state of Minnesota to comprehensively and collectively address the complicated diversity of issues that are associated with the watershed. That brings us to today. We have reached a water management crisis in Minnesota, in the Minnesota River watershed, due to land use practices, both urban and rural, we continue to experience increased losses to infrastructure, businesses, recreation and a host of other societal costs, which are at an unacceptable rate and putting minimum many Minnesotans at varying degrees of risk. Exacerbating this condition is the climatic trend and the future prediction of increased rainfalls in short periods of time. Flood rates from summer rainfall contribute more to flooding than normal spring snowmelt, the combination.

50:00

Of all of these factors leads to a small and medium sized tributary stream, bank erosion, then the dislodged sediments, combined with the increased rate flows enable even more sediments and nutrients to be delivered to our lakes, major tributaries and main stems, where they then flow downstream to the Mississippi River, Lake Pepin, and ultimately, the Gulf of Mexico. The time to get serious at this, about this at a state level, is long past due. That is why we feel it is time to create a Minnesota River management board that reflects a true cross section of greater public representation than was attempted prior. The makeup of the management board is certainly up for discussion and debate. However, our framework and voting membership strongly that feels strongly that citizen membership should make up at least half of the voting memberships, and this is clearly reflected in feedback we received from our 16th Minnesota River Congress held in June of this last year. I will close my testimony today by adding that the water quality and storage program, which was administered by the Board of Water and Soil resources, is receiving high levels of interest from landowners in the Minnesota basin, and is asking for \$50 million per biennium appropriations from the legislature, our network urges the lower Minnesota River Watershed District to advocate for support of the program and the request to the fullest extent possible. And with that, I'll take any questions you may have.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 51:59

Questions from the board clarifications on anything?

**Apollo Lammers**

Yeah, I do have one quick question for you, Scott, sure. I'm wondering what you think the benefits of a Minnesota River Commission would have over maybe the pursuit of statutory requirements for goals instead.

**Scott Sparlin** 52:20

Well, first of all, the clarification regarding that is right here, and I'll speak to it, the idea that agencies, state agencies, will be held accountable to each other, because they have to participate under this plan,

under this structure, okay, so that that clarification is in my initial thing here. Well, to put the put that into a perspective of when, when you're in the room, and you have to be there, and your state agency has to be represented, and it has to be represented at a high level, those responsibilities are clearly identified, and then, an action has to come out of that, because it's now public that I hope that answers your question.

**Lauren Salvato** 53:40

Scott, so thank you for your remarks. You started talking about what I would consider sort of lessons learned for this 2.0 version, if you will. And one is the makeup of the board. Are there other sort of lessons learned that you would then carry forward with this sort of new makeup?

**Scott Sparlin**

Yes, specifically, the original Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers board, as I said, was 36 county commissioners. Okay? They came together. And, you know, some things were accomplished along the way. I have to point to the CREP program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, hugely successful program, and it was because of the money and the backing of that board that helped to push it over the top at the end, because most of the commissioners on that board had serious connection to counties, as far as county land owners, rural population, people, okay? And once again, it's intuitively known right now by everyone in the basin, not everyone, most people in the basin, that we have drained our basin, and we need to reverse that through the technologies we have today, and we have that we just don't have the money, and we need the money. Because CREP was successful, because they were paying up to \$3,000 an acre for land that was worth a couple 100, 200, \$300 an acre. And so we're going to have to do some of that. And I think that's the hard sell that's going to take from state agencies to work together, to put that all together in something that is amenable to the rural population. Because we're not going to solve that up here in the metro. You guys are getting all the water. We're the ones sending it to you.

**Theresa Kuplic** 55:46

So there were 36 commissioners, yes, this board that you're talking about, how big are you thinking of it being? Because you have a list of different people that can be on it too. What's a good working board?

**Scott Sparlin**

A good working board, I I can't really say that. I think we have to, I think we have to form a consensus. I think it's going to take some time to put the actual components and pieces together. Legislatively, we've got a straw man already, the old the old board has good language in it. It just needs inclusivity and some changes in membership. I want us to be focused on the not "I", I say "we" the people that I'm representing want it to be focused on the idea that it the diversity of the of the board itself is well represented, and it's not dominated by any one particular entity,

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 56:58

Thank you very much. Yes, thank you, Scott. We've got one more speak we're going to do before our break, and that is Tom Crawford. But your some of your comments, Scott reminded me of one of the selling points of that program back then, which I think Pheasants Forever helped come up with, was "farm the best buffer the rest", keep the productive land in production, help the landowners out and the

stuff that was getting flooded all the time. Let's get that buffered. Our next speaker is Tom Crawford, who may have some comments on up and downstream. He's with the River Watch program and coordinator for the Friends of Minnesota Valley. The time is yours up until our break.

**Tom Crawford 57:56**

Awesome. Thank you. Hello. Okay, so thank you to all the people that spoke provided a lot of, you know, sort of scientific grounding for all of the emotional stuff I'm going to talk about here, which is nice.

I'm here. My main role in clean water is as an educator and as a concerned citizen. And we are, you know, we have this incredible protected resource out here in the Minnesota Wildlife Refuge, and it's just it needs stronger advocacy. And I know you guys are, you know, have a number of initiatives, and that's great and we just need more of it ultimately. So I'm here to address the idea that we need a downstream advocate.

**58:37**

Obviously, we've talked about a number of the issues. I you know, flooding as a result of climate change, and you know this polluted watershed. Now, the causes that I note there, one of the sort of lesser known or insidious ones, is landscape scale drainage. Right? Our water isn't held on the land. It, it, it hits, for instance, the farm fields in the other 280 miles of upstream watershed, and it makes its way into the river within a day. So not only are we getting more extreme rains, that water isn't staying on the land at all. It's filling up our rivers. It's causing this erosion and that land, you know, I'm not here to call out agriculture as the only issue, but in the Minnesota River Basin, that's what one of the main pollutants sources is. It's not regulated by the Water Quality Act and so, oh boy. All right, here we go.

**59:47**

What I'm trying to say is that as a Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board, one of the things that you could do is get involved in advocating for downstream communities by taking on some of these projects. For instance, landscape scale drainage. Drainage projects that increase the flow into our watershed. They are, you know, clear sources of nitrate pollution, as demonstrated in this graph, cooked up by the MPCA. You see cropland, tile drainage. This is as of 2013 it's estimated 37% of statewide nitrogen sources to water. It also, there have been a number of studies that suggest that this artificial drainage is a major driver of increased river flow. So there's this whole sort of instance of structure around private drainage that we are fighting against. It increases property value. There are tax incentives. However, it is just the tile drainage as it exists now. Is bad for our river. It is bad for our watershed, and there are alternatives. But when it comes to these projects, the local government units, county boards often made up of people who have an interest in and neighbors who have an interest in this.

**1:01:12**

We need an advocate in the room to say what, what is environmentally responsible. How can we judge these not by the profits that we can make what we need clean water to be the standard by which these projects are judged, as we live in this, you know, impaired watershed. Also one of the my main concerns is the sort of regulatory capture of our regulatory agencies. BWSR for instance, prefers voluntary compliance. And so last year in Lyon County, when wetland was trenched by a landowner,

there were no consequences that were meted out to this landowner and so we have these agencies that are responsible for regulating our water and keeping our water clean, and they are not doing so necessarily as effectively as they could, in large part because of moneyed interests that you know can that hold sway over on these organizations. All right, so I'm just going to move on to the thing I know more about, which is education. Oh, well, speaking of drainage, I guess this. This is a map here of the intensity of subsurface drainage style. You'll notice that, particularly in the Minnesota River Basin, over 11 counties in the Minnesota River Watershed have over 45% of their land drained by subsurface tile. These flooding, this flooding this past summer is not simply a function of climate change. It is a function of how we train our land. So that's one of my big concerns.

1:03:01

And as it relates to the Lower Minnesota River Watershed mission, organizational management, coordinating with upstream counties and watershed districts to reduce the impacts of artificial drainage and promote sustainable agricultural best management practices that fits right under that. And by addressing these, you will also meet surface water management goals, floodplain and flood management goals and erosion and sediment control goals, because all of these are related to how much water is making its way into the system.

1:03:37

So again, we need, we need these organizations or governmental entities like you to represent us the environmental interests and pressure our regulatory agencies to actually regulate and bring consequences to those who are polluting, because as a downstream community, we are the ones that are currently, you know, eating all their impacts in our it would be a shame to see our river be totally destroyed in in as a tragedy of the commons. So the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District is also positioned well as a watershed, a watershed education hub. One of the things that I find when I work with schools is one of the main barriers is transportation. You recently, this year, had the mini grant program in which schools could apply. That was awesome. I sent a number of teachers you. I really appreciate that. That is a great start, but as an organization that commands you know the resources that you do, we need this next generation to get out there, and that's going to require funding. That's going to require a hub for opportunities, right bringing we have so many wonderful education organizations in in this watershed, but they are also disconnected in the sense that collaboration isn't uniform, so having an entity that brings them together and can connect them, and by doing so, you'll create sort of a sustainable, collaborative ecosystem of water stewardship.

1:05:26

Secondarily, one of the things that I was here to talk about is chloride pollution, which is another it's really an education issue. It makes me grind my teeth when I'm driving. I see a pile of salt on a place that no one is walking right? Our snow is melting faster because of our warm temperatures, right? But people are relentlessly salting, and I think in large part because there isn't sort of the education around it, right, the idea that we put salt on the ground and it doesn't impact our water, or rather, that connection isn't made. And so I think, as a as a governmental entity, you know, holding awareness workshop certifications around salting, particularly with business owners and businesses in general, would be a huge boon to our current freshwater resources, because our rivers continue to get saltier and saltier with each passing season.

1:06:33

Okay, cool. Let me wrap this up all right, so as a community funded water resource organization, I feel that you're perfectly positioned to be an advocate for us as a downstream community that are reaping the impacts of our Upstream neighbors. I feel that you are also the perfect place to in the perfect position to act as a hub for organizational networking and collective action, and as a benefactor for water education in the region. Thank you.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 1:07:06

Any questions or clarifications the board would like?

**Lauren Salvato** 1:07:10

You know, urban, rural divide is a huge problem. Totally, yeah, so maybe you could expand upon Lower Minn as a downstream advocate without further divide?

**Tom Crawford**

Yeah, well, that's it's not, that's not how it's really going to work, right? I mean, we're as a as a downstream entity. Our argument is the things that you're doing are harmful to us, right? We don't want your livelihoods to suffer, but we also our suffering as a result of what you're doing. We need to come up with a way, many of which solutions to these problems already exist. We need to figure out how to make the sense of this and implement these solutions, like bioreactors and, you know, the etc. I'm not totally the expert on that. So ultimately, yes, how do you approach this? It's going to be tough, but we need to realize that their status quo, what they're continuing to do is harmful, period. And so we need to figure out how to come to a change, and it doesn't have to be "You're hurting me" sort of thing. It's more of a "this current practice, this land use, is really, really detrimental". How can we improve this so that we both walk out of this with what we're looking for?

**Theresa Kuplic**

I was going to say, too, it might be a really good part of your educational things to be able I mean, as we tell the younger generation the things that are harmful as they go into their professions and the things that they go into, it could be really beneficial for them to know this, so that they make it a part of their practice, whatever they're doing, if it's a business or anything. So I appreciate what you're doing.

**Joseph Barisonzi** 1:09:16

So knowing you, Tom, I would just like to say I really appreciate you stepping out of your comfort zone, which is normally a group of, you know, eighth, you know, fifth to eighth graders. And while we act like that, I'm sure we're a little more intimidating than that group. Yeah, I want to appreciate that you there's several really awesome things that you mentioned and, and I want to highlight two of them, and, and have you go a little bit deeper on them. Okay, one of them is you use of the term a "legal advocate" for downstream communities. And I saw that you immediately tried to connect that to our existing watershed plan, to show how that fit into what we do, I'd like you to expound a little bit more on what you see as the functional responsibilities, or the functional role if we were to take on this hat of legal advocate for downstream communities.

**Tom Crawford**

Yeah, so there are simple versions of this. So for instance, in the example of agricultural drainage, the DNR released comments and concerns about a particular engineering project. It is incredibly helpful when these the DNR's comments and concerns are echoed by other entities with sway. So, you know, even submitting something to drainage proceedings to be set in the record, you know, this project will increase the cumulative impacts on our downstream community, as detailed by, you know, whatever. And so even just standing up, raising your hand and saying, "worse, we see this and this will harm us" is, is in a great first step, we don't have enough of that as it is.

**Joseph Barisonzi 1:11:20**

The other thing is, too often I think that, and I'm appreciating your comment, education is kind of focused on the young. And could you talk a little bit, and like for salt, a lot of the education is not necessarily the young. It's on applicators. Could you talk a little bit about how you see an education the role of an education hub that is not focused on the next generation, but is focused on the policy makers of the current generation?

**Tom Crawford 1:11:53**

Yeah, wow. Well, so you know that's it's interesting, because when I look at where the issues are, it's in the sort of haphazard nature, for instance, in the in the issue of salt. It's the haphazard nature by which the whole community treats it, right. So the Jimmy John's on France, not to call them out. I just noticed that it, you know, everywhere I walk, it sounds like I'm on Pop Rocks. You know, that's one business that is sort of, trying to protect those sidewalk by de icing, but is using an incredible amount of salt. How do we approach these businesses? Well, I mean, there's a lot of them, so that's tough. I don't really, I don't have a total idea on that, but we need to reach the people that make decisions over private land, over, you know, our sidewalks or the shopping malls, right? How we go about doing that is tricky. But the nice thing about, for instance, salt training is you could run that in 30 minutes, right? It's, "this is why salt is bad. Here's how much you really need to use, go forth and don't pollute", right? Like it's so the actual education portion is easy. It's the collecting of it, which is what you asked about. And I don't have a great idea for that, but...

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 1:15:00**

All right, thank you for your comments. We are, we are, surprisingly on time. We're scheduled to take about 15 minute break here to let people need to take off, to take off, and we've got one more of our advanced speakers to go, but they'll start at 2:30 not 2:31 we'll start at 2:30 because that's my job, all right, so take 15 minutes. Everybody. All right, welcome back, everybody, or most everybody. It is 2:30 and we are with our last speaker that we knew ahead of time that wanted to come in and elaborate on the written comments as they submitted. All right.

# Listening Session Transcript – Part 2

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 1:30:00**

Welcome back everybody, or most everybody. It is 2:30 and we are with our last speaker that we knew ahead of time that wanted to come in and elaborate on the written comments as they submitted a couple weeks back. The floor is yours Tom.

**Tom Worthington 1:30:45**

Great. Thank you. I'm Tom Worthington, and I'm with the Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends Group, which is a different Friends group than friends of Minnesota Valley. It's complicated. They work on watershed issues, important, huge, critical. Our friends group focuses on the National Wildlife Refuge. We work to help improve the visitor services, experiences, the educational programs and the wildlife and fish habitat improvement projects right here on the refuge, we raise money, and one of the ways we do that is through operating the nature store. So quick plug, there's great shopping to be had right next door, and be know that all of the proceeds go directly back to help pay for school transportation out here. It's \$1,000 a bus. Believe it or not, it's expensive. The Friends group pays for all that. We also pay for habitat improvement projects, and you're going to be hearing about one of those very shortly. My co-speaker Vicki Sherry, long term refuge biologist here with the Fish and Wildlife Service. I worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service too for about 40 years before I retired five years ago, I worked in refuges, and in fact, I worked right here on Minnesota Valley, 1983 before this building was built, I worked for the man named Ed Crozier, for whom this auditorium is named. Ed hired me and one of the first places we went to. And it's important for us to know y'all are doing important work, and I thank you for that, and you love the outdoors, and it's probably because of a place that you experienced as a kid with your family. There's a place about a mile and a half from here, right below the Mall of America. It's a trout stream here in the heart of the Twin Cities, and that was one of the very first places Crozier took me to, and it is an amazing spot. The problems we've been hearing about today are vast, the solutions incredibly complex, but we're going to, in the next five minutes, focus on a small place and some small problems maybe, but the impacts can be immeasurable to those who go visit the bass ponds. The bass ponds is fed by Ike's Creek, and that flows right out of the ground, an amazing spot. Take a look at it in the fall or early spring. It's clear cold water, and it's an amazing habitat. It's the top birding spot in the metro area, one of the top birding spots, and we have a plan to make it even better. And Vicki Sherry, the wildlife biologist, will explain this plan and how the watershed district can help us achieve this plan. And thank you all for listening. Vicki?

**Vicki Sherry 1:33:43**

Thank you, Tom. Like Tom said, my name is Vicky Sherry. I'm the wildlife biologist here at the refuge. I've been here, I think 30 plus years, something like that. My, how time flies! So Ike's Creek, like Tom said, is kind of a cool, unique resource. My background is actually, I started out as a fishery biologist in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. First four years of my career, I walked streams treating for sea lamprey, doing assessments of sea lamprey walked a lot of streams my career. Then I came to Minnesota Valley, became the wildlife biologist and did a lot of different projects, but fast ponds has always been a cool place to just go down to that valley and you feel like you're in another place. Like

Tom said, top birding spot. Birders go there, but this stream always kind of intrigued me. I don't know why, maybe because I walk so many streams, but I really didn't pay much attention to it. I'm going to show you where it's located here. Just kind of knew it was there was part of our bass ponds unit. It's actually located right kitty corner from the Mall of America, you walk across the street where the how many people have seen the big yellow gold finch right down from there is like this pool of water, and it looks like a stagnant pool of water, but what flows out of it is all the spring water that flows through city of Bloomington property, a private landowner, and eventually deposits into the refuge on our long metal Lake unit between these two bass ponds.

Back in 2006, I think me and a fishery biologist from our La Crosse office, we were doing a demonstration for kids on how to do electro fishing. We were walking it. We got to talking, and we're like, I'm like, Scott, this looks like it could be a trout stream. Look at this gravel that's in the bottom. I'm like, yeah, it looks like it could be. It can't be. We're right across from the mall. How could this be a trout stream? But I called the Minnesota DNR trout specialist. I called Trout Unlimited, and I said, "I think I have a trout stream". They're like, "where?" And I'm like, "across the street from Mall of America". They go "really, like, we'll come out and look". So we did, kind of walked it. And they said, "Yeah, you're right, this looks pretty great for being in a metro area like this". So the DNR went and did some initial fish surveys. We didn't find any trout at that time, very few fish, actually. But they go, Wow, the habitat looks great. So we said, well, maybe we should try putting some trout in here. So I just did some more digging around, and I found, like one of our park rangers that was here had interviewed the caretaker son from the Isaac Walton League, because the Isaac Walton League used to have this property, and interviewed this caretaker, and he said, "nine to 10 inch brook trout thrived in the stream in the 30s and 40s". That, to me, was like, this is meant to be there used to be trout in here. We have no idea why they disappeared, but there was some evidence there were trout in here in the past.

So I called up the DNR, and they started to do some measurements, just to see if the if all the habitat requirements could be there. So this is a graph. The bottom line is precipitation, and the blue line is temperatures. So even in August, hot, July, August, when air temperatures are 90 degrees, we're getting some precipitation. The temperatures are very consistent, it stays under 70 degrees, which brook trout love, cold water and high oxygen. And the stream had both those things, never fluctuates more than below 70 degrees and has very high oxygen content. And like I said, it's all spring fed. You can go touch the creek and it's ice-cold water anytime of the year.

So we talked to the DNR, they go, "you know what we think this is, let's just try to put some trout in it". See how they do. So, in 2007 we got 1,400 Minnesota wild strain brook trout, and about two to three inches long, and we put them in with lots of partners. There was a lot of people there putting fish in. We weren't sure how they were going to do, but that first year, if you look on the other side of the slide, that's a fish within the first year, they grew to six to eight inches, and they spawned the first year in Ike's Creek, which is pretty remarkable, going from two inches till after the next year we had spawning brook trout.

This is kind of a population estimate. We always work with the DNR on doing a population estimate the first year was every year, and now we do it every other year. It really fluctuates. Brook trout are very young lived fish. They live about three years or so, and but if, as you see, as we get later here, the

population has been pretty, you know, in the two hundreds, three hundreds, we were shooting for about 500 fish per mile. The stream is only 0.8 miles long. So in 2017 we pretty we're close to that goal. I think what's amazing about this is this was from one year class of fish stocked in 2007. These fish have been naturally reproducing on their own from one year class of fish. We intended to do a lot more stockings initially, to have a little more diversity, but in late, 2007 2008 there was a massive flood in southeast Minnesota, wiped out the hatchery, and now those fish, we're not really wanting to add those fish because it might have some different disease or different strains. So right now, our fish are doing well, so we haven't added any other fish at that time.

This is one of the pretty little trout. They're not trophy trout by any means, but beautiful trout that you can tell by looking at their picture, they have really good food in Ike's Creek. We've had a lot of university studies done on the invertebrate component of Ike's Creek too. That shows there's a really good population of invertebrates for them, and they're nice, beautiful, healthy fish that are coming out of Ike's Creek. What makes this stream unique is that it's the only trout stream in Hennepin County, the only known trout stream. It's only one of a few in the whole area that can support brook trout. Brook trout are very one of the most sensitive fish. They need that high oxygen, low temperatures, and to have that in a metro area, I think is pretty fantastic. We can walk across from the mall and have a trout stream, which is kind of amazing.

I think what also is unique about this is the amount of partners that we have on this, like the refuge friends, Lower Minnesota River watershed, which has been a partner since the beginning, since 2006 we have the Minnesota DNR Trout Unlimited, the Minnesota Valley trust has been a big partner of us, and there's been several other partners along the way. It's kind of a fun project to call up somebody like you want to be a partner on a trout stream, and pretty people are pretty excited about it. Of course, it's not without its problems, right, or issues. It's kind of nice that I got to listen to everybody else's presentations, because I go, "Yeah, this is some of the same stuff I'm dealing with". One of the issues there was, before we owned the property, there were, there was a lot of infrastructure that was put in these areas for these fish ponds that were there, and then some infrastructure that the refuge did you know long time ago when he first established it. One is an old water control structure that was used to divert water to different ponds. These ponds have a history of fish management. In fact, a lot of these fish ponds raised fish that were taken all over the state of Minnesota. So there's some history here of raising fish, but this is it's not functioning anymore, and it's kind of causing a barrier to fish movement. A lot of the spawning ground is up upstream of this barrier, and it does form a constriction point. The other constriction point is a culvert that is just downstream of this, and this often is an old metal culvert that silts in, collects debris, and often, several times a year, it backs up the stream, instead of going in the channel, starts going down our trails. So it's not functioning as a creek. There's also very little fish habitat on this lower portion, and most of the fish we find in population surveys are upstream at this point.

Okay, so another thing was the erosion which, I think we've heard enough about that, but there is an erosion point on the creek, which this was about four times my height, probably about 10 years ago. And this is basically what we're proposing to do in the project. That green area up there is where there's a large ravine that I just showed you. We're going to be we basically the Minnesota Valley Trust got a grant through Outdoor Heritage Funds, we got enough money to do a plan for the entire creek, that's

what we figured we needed was an entire plan. We hired interfluvists who are really known for their hydrology, and their expertise will be doing some erosion control, putting in check dams to help with the erosion and the sediment flow, also removing the water control structure and culvert, and then this lower purple portion is we want to restore the floodplain and the natural historic hydrology and morphology of the stream, and letting the stream naturally meander and then empty out into long middle lake. So it'll deal with sediment, improve flow, improve water quality, but also provide additional habitat for fish. That's just another picture of Ike's Creek, so it's just a quick summary of what we're proposing to do. We are hoping we've been working on this. We have a plan. We're waiting for some permits, but our timeline is to hopefully start this project this spring and finish it by the end of the year. It is critical, because we do have our first part of funding that does expire in June, so kind of on a quick timeline, but we're hoping right now, everything's on schedule. We're just waiting sort of some final, final permits, and we'll be ready to go.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 1:44:43

All right, you know the drill. Any questions or clarifications needed from the board?

**Lauren Salvato**

I see, you know two sides of this being, you know, we're in an urban area, you have the benefit of having a lot of education, outreach, opportunities. It's, on the other hand, you have urban influences, and you almost want to tuck away this precious stream, right? How do you think about this as a wildlife biologist and someone that's really connected to this place?

**Vicki Sherry** 1:15:12

So I like the presentations that we've had about education, that has been another part of it. One thing I didn't touch on is there are high chlorides in this stream, too. So you do have to balance, like, how much you want to tell people about it? We don't, we know it's not a trophy fishery, right? But we also want to educate people on protecting it. So I have been working with nearby businesses like to work on their salt. Like, how can you protect the stream? Here we have a beautiful stream. Here's some pictures of trout. And then also, here is what you can do to help, like, just move your snow away from the creek and not push it down. So it's that kind of thing. But education is still a part of it. And I think people, people love the trout. They love. We get groups in to do garbage cleanups. I think we still have to tell people our story, and it's a good, fun one of those things that people like, and it can get them excited about water quality.

**Joseph Barisonzi** 1:16:12

Two quick things. First, thank you very much for the presentation about the project. I'm the current caretaker for the Isaac Walton property up-creek. So it's, it's a deeply emotional connection for me as well, to the space, I appreciate that. So the Minnesota Valley Trust and the US Fish and Wildlife Service are really the largest single property owner in our watershed district. So a lot of what we're talking about as it relates to gullies are on your property. A lot of what we're talking about on the projects that we have the ability to do direct impact on are largely on Valley property or/and property under management by the US Fish and Wildlife. So when we talk about addressing the issues that others have brought up, about being an advocate and being an advocate for the downstream communities, one of the largest downstream communities that we need to be that voice for is actually

the wildlife, the nature, the fish in the Wildlife Refuge. So rather than a question, kind of a challenge back, which is, what role do you see yourself as US Fish and Wildlife playing in addressing kind of these larger issues? How do we get that voice? How do we bring your voice to the table about the impact of these larger issues on the wildlife refuge and, you know, projects like this?

**Vicki Sherry** 1:17:59

Of course, I'm not a manager, so I can't commit to anything. But I think we all know like it's affecting the refuge, but sometimes it's not on our land, where it's coming from. I think every speaker has talked about that. I think we just got to continue working with numerous partners. I mean, there could be neighboring city land, it could be private land. It's just working, getting everybody at the table of how we can best come up with these solutions, because it's just going to keep the whole it's not just Minnesota Valley, but the whole Minnesota River Valley that has this issue. So we just got to work together on what we can light off and what we can improve, and that is going to improve the whole valley for everything,

**Tom Worthington** 1:18:52

We have very robust partners in the Fish and Wildlife Program, where we have biologists that work with landowners, primarily who work on habitat improvement projects on private land, whether it's wetland restoration, whether it's green buffers, putting grassland in strip protections. So there is a very robust Partners Program, and they do focus on areas of critical area for the service. So that is one,

**Vicki Sherry**

Yeah, that is a good point that we've talked about internally, is how our private lands program could help with some of these inputs.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 1:19:27

Thank you very much. And love the photos. I got to do some mucking around down there. All right, that kind of concludes the people that had submitted written testimony and had wanted to come in and reinforce their message. Then, in addition, the district had received comments from cities of Shakopee and Eagan. They did not want to appear here today to reinforce their messages more, it is pretty clear what they had written down. So now we're moving on to the portion of people who registered and are in the audience today. And first up that we've got is Greg and. Judy, you're on deck, and we've got you in about a five minute time clock on this one.

**Greg Genz** 1:20:07

That isn't going to be enough! It isn't enough when I'm sitting in the Turner hall with Scott Sparlin drinking Schells beer, but I'll give you a quick background of my mind. I started being involved in the river in 1971 working with tow boats and barges. Was a deck hand. Moved into that now I'm pretty much dealing with nonprofits. I'm a board member of the Friends of Minnesota Valley. I'm a member of the Minnesota River Congress and board member of Friends of Pool Two, and we'll stop there few others. I'm gonna give you some anecdotes about this river that I've noticed over the years. When you talk about the river, what it's contributing to, like, say, the Mississippi. When I was a young deckhand the mid-70s, we had a major rain event in the west suburbs that would be west Bloomington and Eden Prairie. It took two days for that surge of water to reach St. Paul. It's now there overnight. One of the

things that I've been involved over the years is, you go out to the country and the farmers, you know, they're not real happy with what's happening, people pushing back on them. And then you come to the city, and everybody's all those damn farmers. You know what? It's everybody's problem. And why I use that example of the Minnesota River from the west suburbs, is there's no farms left in Eden Prairie. There sure is a lot of impervious surface. Quite a few years ago, we had to go replace a pipe for the Seneca sewage plant in Burnsville. And I asked the engineer, I said, because we hit it with a barge. I said, "Why would you put your pipe out into the river?" He said, "10 years ago, was on the bank the river is the river bank has moved 20 feet in" so we had to cut it off again. Doing a permit one time for barge fleeting in way of the 35W area. And I was arguing with the Corps over it. I said the "river is a lot wider". And we did a research. The river had gained over 100 feet of width at the 35W since the mid-1960s so then you look at where's all that going.

A few years ago, I had to take a tow boat and a barge down from lock three to Davenport area, and I had not been out on the river in 30 years. And I asked the pilot I'm working with, I went, "what has happened to this river?" He said "if you get below here, it is closed in so bad you wouldn't believe places you could pass you can't pass anymore". So where is it going? It's going down river now, as President, Friends of Pool Two, we are really mad about the Rapidan Dam failure that happened in June 24 of this year. September 10, the Minnesota River was closed to navigation. That sediment had gone down to mile 14.2 and closed the river. The Corps over the last 50 years, has averaged 18,000 cubic yards of dredging in that area. They did almost 60,000 for that incident. Now it's going to come down to Pool Two where I live. I live in the riverbank, and I usually end up having two feet of mud on my riverbank every year now, since I moved into the property. Who pays for that? Dakota County spent \$47 million flood-proofing the Byllesby Dam, which is the same design as Rapidan. They got 26 million out of the feds, 6 million out of the state. Where was Blue Earth County when they knew in 2019, Byllesby knew that there was a problem with the 2019 flood. Same problem at Rapidan, because they lost their powerhouse because of the flood waters. Where were they then and now? Who's going to pay for what damage it's doing below there? I remember telling Riley Maine when she got to be Executive Director of the Lake Pepin Legacy, I said, "your biggest problem is that people drive down Highway 35 on the Wisconsin side, highway 61 on the Minnesota and they look out at Lake Pepin and it looks just like it did when they were kids. It hasn't changed to them". How do you tell people what's happening under the water? And that is because we're a visual society now, somehow we've got to be able to show people what this is all doing. Okay, any questions?

**Joseph Barisonzi** 1:24:59

I could talk to Greg forever. So, Greg, I want to highlight a word that you said, okay, and I want you to I'm digging to it a little bit deeper. And the word that you said was "negligence". So the that folks that are operating, for example, the dam or the owner...

**Greg Genz**

The owner was Blue Earth County, right?

**Joseph Barisonzi** 1:25:19

Yes. See the data that we see, see the documentation we see. If they don't take action, we end up with a disproportionate impact of that.

**Greg Genz** 1:25:32

Yes, if they're, they're saying it could be 12 million cubic yards that came out. That's 10 years of dredging, core dredging in the whole Saint Paul district,

**Joseph Barisonzi** :25:41

And that's not even looking at the issues related to the wildlife in the area, or the bird life in the area, and what that ramification. You've been doing this a long time, and how to get people To how, how do we communicate the shared responsibility that can result that, if not address results in negligence, and then have a carrot or have a stick that goes with that.

**Greg Genz** 1:26:13

Back to education, everything's education, get people out. That's one of my goals. I try and get people out on the river, and I do that quite a bit. The other thing is the stick; the Corps of Engineers ought to sue Blue Earth County for the increase on their budget. Back in the 80s, the state of Wisconsin sued the Metro Met Council to fix Pigs Eye. I don't understand why more entities aren't doing that. We had zero oxygen in the river from Pigs Eye sewage plant five miles down river until the state of Wisconsin sued. Met Council to fix Pigs Eye. Why aren't more people doing that? You know, find out who the impact, who it's impacting, and get them together and go, you know what I asked one time, why than the Corps of Engineers sue every Soil and Water Conservation District and Watershed District upriver to pay for their dredging. I don't know.

**Joseph Barisonzi**

Thank you.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 1:27:26

All right, our next speaker is Judy over here. Okay, great, and on deck is Michael.

**Judy Berglund** 1:27:37

Hi, I'm Judy Berglund, and I'm a member of the CAC for the Lower Minnesota River Valley watershed. I live in a homeowner association in Eden prairie, and our homeowner association overlooks the Minnesota River. At the time our homes were built, we were required to put in a large holding pond to collect all of the what rain water runoff of my neighbors, many or few of them have little knowledge of why that would have been required. I feel that it's very imperative that we continue to educate our neighbors as to what they personally are able to do to control stormwater runoff, to control flooding and erosion. Most are concerned about the damage or the inconvenience of the flooding costs to all of us, but have little knowledge as to what they personally can do to keep stormwater on their property.

There are things like rain gardens, rain barrels, and I have become aware that there are some research suggesting that adding organic matter to our soil allows it to hold more of the rain water. Things that the water from our rain barrels can be used to water our planters, our favorite perennials. I have during tabling with being on the CAC, I talked to people about what they personally can do. And I had one lady say to me, "all those rain barrels do is collect stinky water". Well, I shared with her that how with my rain barrel, I use the water to water my favorite perennials and my roses, and they're much healthier than

when I water them with the chlorinated water. And it's if we used, you know, if she had used that wonderful rain water to water her favorite plants, they would be thriving rather than using the chlorinated water, and her rain barrel wouldn't stink.

I find that the young people that I talk to are really concerned about our lakes and streams, keeping them pollution free. I talk with them about creating rain gardens that keep the chemicals from our yards out of our lakes and streams, adopting a storm drain so that the leaves and grass clippings from the yards and the streets don't end up on our beaches. They are also concerned about salt or chloride in the waters and the lakes and streams and how they are killing fish and aquatic life. We discuss things like shoveling our sidewalks before the snow becomes compacted, and so we don't need to use salt. I share with them how on our street, when the snow plow stops at the end of the block, there's often a big pile of sand or salt, I take my bucket down and pick up the salt so that it doesn't go into that storm drains, and then I can use a little of that salt very sparingly if I have ice on my own sidewalk. So that simple things that they can do to keep the salt out of our lakes and streams.

I believe that the sharing or educating our neighbors as to what they as individuals can do to help control stormwater and preserve water quality for our lakes and streams are a real motivator to get everyone included in making a real difference. As a former teacher, I believe that the watershed grant program to schools is very important in helping young people and even some of us older ones, to understand what we do has consequences to the environment, and that the grants to residents to establish things like rain gardens, native plantings along streams, in the or in their yards, rain barrels and such are important ways to get young and all to think about what they can do, personally, to protect and even maybe improve our environment. I think a lot of it is showing them what's in it for them, what can they do and what's in it for them? Questions?

**Steve Woods (Moderator)**

Wow. Our first Ovation of the day.

**Lauren Salvato 1:32:47**

I just want to say thank you for being a CAC member. Very much appreciate it.

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 1:32:54**

All right. Michael, who may not be here, next on the list was Nayere, who also had not checked in, up and down quickly. Victoria, you're up.

**Victoria Ranua 1:33:13**

Hello. I'm Victoria Ranua. I'm a resident in Shakopee and living in Scott County. I have a water storage idea that I think is a low-cost way to maybe add 122 to 60 acre feet of water storage within the watershed district. It doesn't require any land acquisition or that's not highly engineered. So, I've been a resident of on Dean's Lake Since 2011 the ordinary high-water mark on the edge of my property to where the water is. There's a consistent gap between this and so I also want to point out by neighbors the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community are here. They're my neighbors on the lake too. So they've also noticed this same thing. But I'm not an engineer, I'm not a government entity. I'm just an observer of the world around me, and I listened to the history. So my neighbors, who have lived on the

lake since the 70s, say that the water used to be higher. And so looking at the studies that have been done, I think in 1975 it said that there was no outlet in in Dean's lake. Then in 1982 the Prior Lake outlet channel was constructed, and there was an outlet channel that was made. So this outlet channel takes water from upstream of the watershed district. So the Prior Lake Spring Lake Watershed District is allowed to bring some of their water through our watershed district. And, you know, so it eventually goes to the Minnesota River. So there's an outlet structure on Dean's Lake that in one of these reports, it says that the ordinary high water mark was set at 747 feet, and the outlet structures at 746 feet. So we lost one foot of storage within Dean's lake from that change.

So this was something that occurred in 1982 I know the outlet channel has been kind of reevaluated over the time, but I think we should just re evaluate our relationship with this, this outlet channel agreement, to see if we can store more water on the landscape, and you can, you know, have outlet structures where, you know, if we're we need less storage, and we need to move the water. We can pull, uh, I don't know what they're called, to let more water out, but I think that we can store more water on the landscape, and it, it won't cost that much money. It's just, really just working on those relationships.

And I want to say that just the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community as my neighbors, they have really showed me how to be a good neighbor. And one thing that they have done, they have a lot of land that could go into that outlet channel, but they choose to keep all of their water on their own land. And so they've been a good just stewards of the stormwater that they generate, they keep it on their own land. How can we, you know, model our neighbors' behavior and keep our water? So here in the Lower Minnesota River and in our neighbors upstream the Prior Lake outlet or Prior Lake Spring Lake people, how can they keep their water, you know, more local and not just send it downstream on the landscape level? So the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community is doing that landscape level, keeping it on their area, and not sending it downstream. So they're just a good neighbor to look at. Thank you.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 1:36:33

As before, any questions or clarifications before I call up Lee Peterson as our next speaker? Lee Peterson on deck will be Mr. Len Kramer.

**Lee Peterson** 1:37:02

Yeah, I'm Lee Peterson, and I'm on the Citizens Advisory Group for the Lower Minnesota River, and I'm also on the board for the Friends of the Minnesota Valley, and I also work with the Upper Minnesota River initiative. But probably more importantly, I'm a I live in Burnsville, and we live right up the hill from Black Dog power plant, so we're right, right next to the river. A lot of things that come to mind have been mentioned before. You know the Minnesota River? Well, actually, I'm a transplant from Northeast Iowa, and we have a lot of really clean rivers and trout streams down there. And when I moved up here, I was kind of like, wow, what's going on so, but we need it. We really need to look at the downstream you know what's coming from above and how it's affecting us here, not only here, but down, like, at, Lake Pepin, like people have said, and the effect of this, what's coming down to us, on wildlife, on the fens that we have in the and in the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District and in the wetlands and how they're affected by these floodings and the bank erosion that's being caused by the increased

water and you know, we have the technology. You know, 40, 50, years ago, we didn't have the technology and the science to fix this, but we do have it now, and we just need to get everybody sat down at the table. And, you know, maybe we got to have lunch, but we got to sit down and talk and figure this out, and not as adversaries, but as collaborative.

So, I look at the river, and I think, Well, why is why can't the Minnesota River be as clean as the Mississippi River, and why can't the goal be to be as clean as the Saint Croix River in the long run? So I would say to the board, one of the things I think that the board could do would be, when projects are happening upstream, to have a voice to in the process say, Hey, this is going to affect us here. You know, we this. You need to, maybe you need to have a wetland, maybe you need to have more storage, but not being afraid to step into those situations and so thank you.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 1:39:47

Anything from the board? Len, your turn?

**Len Kramer** 1:40:01

I'm Len Kramer. I'm a retired Water Resources engineer. I worked with a private consulting company here in Bloomington for hate to admit it over 50 years. I work with the Isaac Walton League. I volunteer with the Isaac Walton League, and work with the Minnesota River Coalition to review drainage plans for agricultural projects, agricultural drainage projects, and we advocate to them to try to minimize the impacts that they have on both sediment loads and nitrate loads and storage volume or runoff volume. And I am lucky enough to work with five other engineers that work with me on these projects, and we've been successful on several getting additional storage built, getting other mitigation measures implemented.

In some cases, we've been able to convince the project advocates to modify their project significantly, so that it's just a repair and not an improvement, and so that it doesn't have any impact on increased nutrient loads or sediment loads or of volume. And so one of the things I'm going to ask the board is, is that we could use them to help us advocate with these proposers and with the drainage authorities that approve their plans to support things that we're recommending for these projects, and I want to go through. First of all, I was on the board of the Lower Minnesota, I live in Bloomington. I lived on the bluff of the Minnesota River for many years. I saw the river expand 50% during the time that I was there, while I was on the board, I saw the increased sediment load up to about half million tons a year. So one of the things that bothered me is, is that there were lots and lots of resources in the Minnesota River watershed that Bloomington residents and residents for the whole metropolitan area really benefit from. I'm going to go through some of those.

First the wildlife refuge that we talked about, 14,000 acres, is the wildlife refuge, plus they had the trout stream that was talked about earlier that potentially can be impacted by increased runoff, particularly increased runoff that occurs in the summer and the fall, limits the use of the refuge areas by wildlife. We got Fort Snelling State Park, which is almost 3,000 acres that's in the floodplain. Part of it is in the floodplain. Got the Minnesota Valley State Trail, which goes from Fort Snelling to a sewer. We have the Savage Fen wetland complex, which is 425 acres, Eagle Creek, which is another naturally reproducing trout stream, brown trout, beautiful brown trout that are, you know, two feet or two pounds. They're just

gorgeous fish. We've got Boiling Springs, which is at the headwaters of Eagle Creek. We have Nichols Fen. We have Courthouse Lake, which is a trout lake. In Carver, we have Assumption Creek, which was a naturally reproducing trout stream, but it's no longer trout stream. And then Seminary Fen, and then all of the floodplain lakes. The Seminary Fen is about 600 acres of wetland compost, and I remember as a young man, sorry, Steve, I've got one more story here, as a one man fishing on some of these floodplain lakes. And they were 20-25 feet deep, and now they're two feet deep, and that's all the sediment loading that's occurred. And so from a standpoint of eliminating fisheries habitat that spent had a significant impact, and it's continuing to have an impact.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 1:45:23

Yeah, I've known Len for a couple decades, and when you were fishing back there in the early 1800s I'm sure it was that deep.

**Joseph Barisonzi** 1:45:29

Hey, Len, come back up here, don't we're not letting you run away. One of the things that you're that you have previously and today, you're calling on the board to do is to join with the collaborative on their efforts to impact the drainage proposed drainage projects upriver. And I want to that one of the Resistance has been that the perception that that is a adversarial relationship, but how you talked about it today, implied that there was a lot more collaborative effort that was coming out of it that there was a lot more positive impact being brought to the table by collaborative members to what those projects end up looking like. Is there a way in which the this board's involvement as an advocate in those projects can best enhance the collaborative nature of those conversations while not necessarily feeding the inherent adversarial nature of them?

**Len Kramer**

That's a tough question.

**Joseph Barisonzi**

I know you could handle it.

**Len Kramer** 1:47:05

We find that working with staff from the drainage authorities in about maybe 50% of the cases where we go in and talk to them about a project, for example, that we're able to convince them, or they already are convinced that they want to mitigate their projects. The staff does. And so we either can convince them, or they are already convinced that they want those, those projects, mitigated, and so we've had several of our successes are, projects were the staff people are one of the principal advocates for those and if I think, when I was a member of the board, we did offer to help some of the upstream watersheds that wanted to do projects. For example, Renville County has staff that are very amenable to adding storage for both sediment removal and wetlands for nitrate removal, if they can, you know, they can get some financial help and so one of the things I think that a board like the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District could certainly help in that process of convincing people. We had several successful projects. If we can show those other counties, here's a very successful project. We've got partial funding so you didn't have the complete burden. It's doing what it's intended to do, an educational process, and certainly you advocating with them, I think would be maybe more successful

than a group like us advocating with them. We probably are creating many enemies as we talk to some of these people, but on the other hand, we've convinced a lot of them to do what we've asked them to do. It's not as if it's not a simple issue, that's for sure, but the more people we have. Doing it, I think the more successful we'd be.

**Lauren Salvato** 1:50:04

I can just ask one more question. Can you talk about the cases where you haven't been successful in changing these drainage plans, and why that is just for us?

**Len Kramer** 1:50:16

Well, it's the whole process of getting these projects approved is very complicated. They have to have a positive cost-benefit ratio, and so they have assessors that determine what the benefit to the landowners are over the project. And so they lay out what the benefits are, and then the cost has to be less than those benefits. And if, if our projects that we're proposing are high in cost, then the project is not feasible. To tell the proposers petitioners that, no, it can't be built if they can get the mitigation that we're talking about funded by a state agency, for example, then they don't necessarily have to include that cost in the cost blended benefit evaluation. And so the things that Scott talked about, the storage programs that are being proposed by BWSR, and they're proposing to go to the legislature this year for 50 or \$50 million for the next biennium, would help significantly, although I hate to say this, but 50 million is a pittance. What's really needed in order to solve this problem, but it's a good start. Thank you.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 1:52:09

Our last speaker that we've got signed up from the audience here is Ted, and shortly, I'll be asking whether or not there's any of the online things when Ted wraps up. So be ready for that, please.

**Ted Suss** 1:52:24

First of all, thank you for holding the event. I want to call you board members. I know your managers, but I have a tendency to refer to people as board members, because I work for school districts for about 30 years, and board members are always my boss. I want to thank the board for the contributions that you've made to the Friends of the Minnesota Valley for funding, helping to fund our River Watch Program, which is the program that Tom Carlson. Carlson has a different guy, Tom Crawford operates. My name is Ted Suss. I live in Rice County in the Cannon River watershed. But I am president of the Friends of the Minnesota Valley and Executive Director. And I want to tell you that's a high paid position. They double my salary every year from zero to zero. And I'm also president of the Minnesota Valley Chapter of the Isaak Walton League. I was state president of the Isaak Walton League at one time, long after the bass ponds were built and long after Ike's Creek was designated Ike's Creek. And there's Isaak Walton League. Was an author in the 1600s who wrote a book called *The Complete Angler*. And a friend of mine summarized that by saying, if you don't keep take care of the water, the fishing stinks. And I want to put to rest the rumor that Len Kramer fished with Isaak Walton. He is not grounded around that long ago, and I also am part of the Minnesota River Collaborative about seven or eight years ago, David Mingy approached a guy by the name of David Zentner in Duluth who was a former National President of the Isaak Walton League about what can we do about the problems of the Minnesota River. And if I had known, I could have submitted a picture, I would have put the slide up

there that you've all seen of the Mississippi River, which is not a it's not the epitome of the clean river, but the way the Minnesota comes into the Mississippi, it looks like you're dumping mud into pretty clear water, and David Mingy approached us about, was there anything the Isaak Walton League could do to address his concerns? When he was in Congress, he was largely responsible for passing the law that created the CREP program that took 100,000 acres of the floodplain tillable farmland on the floodplain out of production and put it into conservation. But David Mingy and I started having and Dave Zentner a call every Wednesday morning at nine o'clock, and that grew into one person at a time, Len Kramer was one of our first recruits to a group now that still meets every Wednesday morning via Zoom at nine o'clock, and it's that collaborative that Len was referring to that reviews these projects.

I want to talk mostly, and I'm going to ignore you and take more than two minutes, if you don't mind. I want to talk to you about what I think should be your role as a watershed district board. You're at the end of the Minnesota River Basin. Your face page of your website says, "protecting our water resources, that's your mission". And what I would like to ask the board to do is to use every bit of legal authority you have to not only protect the water resources in the Lower Minnesota River Basin, but all the way upstream. Because what happens upstream, as you know better than I, ends up in your district and ends up being paid for by taxpayers of Minnesota to be dredged and dumped and that dredge material handled, that dredge material is now starting to be considered toxic waste. And so one of the ways that I would encourage you to act to make that happen is join with our organizations and the effort that Scott Sparlin outlined, we do need to create a basin-wide entity that has some planning and some, I won't say, regulatory authority, but definitely some planning and some guidance to the 30 plus counties and the water other watershed districts we all know water doesn't represent, doesn't respect district lines, county lines.

The other thing I would encourage you to do is when an opportunity presents itself to speak out on a project, whether it may be an industrial development or gigantic housing development or agricultural drainage, to join us when we call for environmental review and join us when we ask those water management organizations upstream, whether it be a county board or a water district, to do whatever they can to mitigate the downstream damage. You saw that picture up there when Tom was presenting of that house that's falling in the river, in the LeSueur River, there used to be about 100 feet between that house and the river, and we've got to do something about the flashy flow. The last thing I would ask you to do is to exert as much leadership as you can, to develop a cooperative both feeling and philosophy amongst the various governmental districts, whether it be a county, a city, a township or a watershed district, all the way up to Big Stone Lake, so that we can go to the legislature jointly when we need things, or go to federal to Congress or to Army Corps of Engineers become the leader for protecting our water resource in the Minnesota River Basin. Thank you. Thank you, Ted.

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 1:58:49**

That concludes our speakers who are present, Suzy Lindberg, has been our capable jack of all trades with registration and keeping laptops working and the internet from collapsing. Is there anybody on online streaming that is connected to speak? Nobody's lined up to speak. So we've got the chance for the board to do any final I think we are okay with time. You guys good with that. One more speaker.

**Mike Schultz** 59:34

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Mike Schultz. I'm the Soil and Water manager for LeSueur County soil and water office. I actually tagged along today to listen in and kind of maybe give back up support to Holly as she spoke on the Lower Minnesota River East and our priorities. But after listening to everyone speak today, it got me thinking on a big lift that LeSueur County has been dealing with as like many of you are, folks in the watershed have been dealing with flooding. LeSueur County has been dealing with tons of opportunities, of issues that we run into with flooding, so much outside the Minnesota River watershed, we're dealing in the Cannon where we're looking at doing a major, wide watershed, wide flood study with FEMA. But with that being the case, we're learning that there are some roadblocks that I feel this group or organization could help us with and that's one that's kind of been bothering me for many years, as I've been in the conservation field for almost 20 years. As we look at water storage, and LeSueur County has implemented a handful of projects. And as you guys keep talking about the BWSR water storage program, if you look up on the funded projects, LeSueur County has had a handful of those funded. One major roadblock we're running into is as we look at projects in the watershed and areas that we need to initiate work, we run into a lot of DNR public waters that have been historically drained and have probably have drained ditches through them or heavily degraded, that are areas that we could look at for water storage. One big issue we run into is those have an ordinary high water elevation, and way statutes written and the rules are interpreted, there's a good chance that we're not manipulating those elevations. I can name three projects off the top of my head where we've pretty much put the project aside, as we don't have many options to continue to work on the OHWs or the ordinary high water elevations. So as this board looks to move forward and see what are opportunities, I know that manipulating Ordinary High Water elevations has rippling effects from the ecological to wildlife to so on and so forth, but I think we need tools in our toolbox to look at everything that's out there if we're trying to make a difference in the state of Minnesota and flood storage. So that's all I had applause.

**Steve Woods (Moderator)** 2:02:03

All right, we're at that point where the board gets some final comments, and we'll have Linda Loomis, the administrator, come up and say, what happens from this point forward? So all these balls are starting to land in your courts? Any final comments from board members?

**Lauren Salvato** 2:02:25

Well, maybe because Mike was one of the last people, maybe also left, I think, you know, for me, partnership resources, there's a lot of things, but also wanting to learn more from SWCDs that aren't in this room about what challenges they have and how we might partner together. You've given us all a lot to think about. I'm really appreciative of that.

**Theresa Kuplic** 2:02:52

Yeah, I guess I just want to say thank you for all your input. Really eye opening, and it's just good to see so many people turn out and come here and just share the things that are on their heart about our watersheds.

**Apollo Lammers 2:03:09**

I'd like to echo what Teresa said about thanking everybody for their input and I appreciate you all coming and also just kind of giving us a various ideas to consider as we move forward.

**Joseph Barisonzi 2:03:22**

So I wanted to, obviously, thank you all for coming. I wanted to kind of mirror back on what I saw as the themes, and then Linda's going to talk about what we're going to do as a board with this next it's kind of a big risk for this organization to think about opening up and saying, we'll do an open listening session. And people are like, "oh, there's going to be angry people in the room". So I just want to say thank you all for making it a really wonderful, positive experience. The big things that I am going to take away and try to learn from and see how it ends up and what we do is: one is the importance of making the water storage efforts and initiatives work, and from all its different angles, from individual projects that should be considered/could be considered, to how that financing flow. The second is the essential need for the board to play a different role in advocacy outside of its traditional geographic footprint. The third is looking at the financing of these projects. I know we can't afford to do all the projects that we want, and Holly can't afford to do all the projects that she wants, and even if there was funding for all of those that wouldn't get it done. And the final is this issue, which is in our work plan that we're still struggling to figure out how to move forward, which is, what does river wide basin governance look like? So I those are things I heard today, and I hope to be able to carry those forward in the conversation.

**Steve Woods (Moderator) 2:04:58**

That was incredibly well summarized, my head's still kind of spinning. You were you were coherent. I mean that in the best way. Linda, take us home.

**Linda Loomis 2:05:09**

I know my head's spinning too. I as I sit here and listen to everybody, and I kept thinking back to when Steve you were at Freshwater and Peggy Knapp did a study on farm-to-river or farm-to-stream, and in her presentation, she said one thing she learned is that the SWCDs, the farmers have "a guy", and every SWCD needed "the guy", and two of the guys just left the room, Mike and Holly, and I say it's been a pleasure to work with them on the Lower Minnesota River, East One Watershed, One Plan development, because we did have a hand in that. And I hope that young people like that stay in the business and learn to work with the landowners, because that's how we get the initiatives done by having folks like those out on the ground in the rural areas where a lot of this water storage is needed, and we can identify places.

So the board heard a lot, and we're going to take all of this into consideration, and our next board meeting will be January 15, which is like a week from today. So we're going to have a big load here to try to synthesize all of this into some kind of presentation where the board can have some meaningful discussion of where we go with all of this. I know we've got our legislative/our government relation consultants here in the room that heard all of this testimony, too, and it can help us develop our legislative agenda, which I know there's a lot of activity going on out there. And we'll decide what they take this testimony and consider what we can support as a watershed district and whether we develop initiatives of our own based on what we heard today. The other thing is, we're going to be starting our

next generation of watershed planning. So a lot of this material will come into play when we put together our goals and policies and strategies and objectives for that next watershed plan.

So our board meetings are on the third Wednesday of the month. We hold them at the Carver County Government Center in the city of Chaska. They're at seven o'clock, they are open to the public, and we invite anybody to attend. And I don't know if I have anything more to add so thank you.

**Joseph Barisonzi** 2:07:41

Thanks everybody!

*Applause.*