



# LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

## Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting

Wednesday, August 17, 2022

### **Agenda Item**

#### **Item 4. F. – Authorize Payment to Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River Water Storage Initiative**

### **Prepared By**

Linda Loomis, Administrator

### **Summary**

In 2019 and 2020, the LMRWD supported efforts by the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River to lobby the Minnesota Legislature to support efforts to manage the flow of stormwater in the Minnesota River by establishing a program aimed at storing more water on the landscape. The LMRWD supported this effort financially by providing up to \$5,000 in matching funds each year for two years.

At the September 15, 2021 Board of Managers meeting, the Board of Managers approved a request to provide a matching grant again for \$5,000 over two years. The focus this time will be to seek a federal program with funding to establish water storage initiative. Mr. Sparlin is requesting distribution of the first half of the grant. He has provided information regarding expenses and matching funds received. He has also provided testimony given before the MN Senate Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee in March 2022.

A report from the 14<sup>th</sup> Minnesota River Congress held June 15, 2022 is attached for the Board's information.

### **Attachments**

Excerpt from September 2021 LMRWD Board of Manager meeting approving grant

Statement for Match Funding to The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District From The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR)

Testimony to State Senate 3-8-2022

14<sup>th</sup> Minnesota River Congress Summary

### **Recommended Action**

Motion to accept report from Mr. Scott Sparlin and authorize distribution of grant funds in the amount of \$5,000.

**B. Request from Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River**

Administrator Loomis reminded the Board that Scott Sparlin requested \$10,000 over the course of two years to help get legislation passed at the State level for funding of water storage projects in the Upper Minnesota River Basin. Mr. Sparlin was successful this legislative session, but the legislature diluted it as it is not just specific to the Minnesota River and the amount of funding allocated was not what had been hoped for. Now Mr. Sparlin would like to ask the federal government for assistance with the same task because much of the sediment and nutrients from the erosion in the Minnesota River are contributing to the anoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

Manager Raby would like to know what the overall effort over the next two years will be and the funding effort for that.

Mr. Sparlin clarified they got the program established, it is for the Minnesota River basin and the Upper Mississippi River. The legislature did not include the kinds of funds needed to bring this to scale which is what they will be working on over the next couple of years. The money he is asking the LMRWD for is to continue down the path of seeking a federal partnership. The overall budget is dependent upon the work that other organizations are doing so he cannot give a good answer to the question at this time. They are looking at a \$30,000 per year (total of \$60,000) overall budget and will seek a match for the funds.

**President Hartmann made a motion to approve the fund request as a match per the previous time. The motion was seconded by Manager Mraz. Upon a vote being taken the motion carried unanimously.**

**C. Appletree Condominium Cost Share Application**

Administrator Loomis stated this is a condominium building in Bloomington; they are in a steep slope overlay zone and have been having issues with erosion behind the building. They have done quite a bit of work to put in drain tile and drain water away from the building to the City storm water system and are looking at landscaping to further ameliorate the erosion issues. They sent in an application for a cost-share project and Young Environmental reviewed the application and made some recommendations.

Ms. Schall-Young noted it is a good application and they are recommending approval. The Board should keep in mind that the project will need a permit so perhaps a portion of the money should go towards that permit application to ensure that they come back and do due diligence.

Administrator Loomis noted \$7,500 is the maximum amount for a condominium-type of request.

**Manager Raby made a motion to approve the cost-share application subject to the applicant applying for and obtaining a permit from the LMRWD. The motion was seconded by Manager Mraz. Upon a vote being taken the motion carried unanimously.**

**D. Modification to LMRWD Board of Managers meeting schedule**

Administrator Loomis noted in April, Staff asked that the Board consider adding a second meeting every month to the schedule to make it a regular meeting and eliminate emergency meeting notices, and now that Ms. Schall-Young's team has a better handle on applications they no longer feel they need the second meeting. They are asking to modify that meeting schedule and eliminate the first Wednesday meeting.

Statement for Match Funding to The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District  
 From The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR)  
 By Scott Sparlin Coordinator/Facilitator Minnesota River Congress/ Ex. Dir. CCMR

Hours specific to **Water Storage Initiative** for Minnesota River Congress @ \$45 hr.

**2021**

October	38 hrs.	<b>2022</b> January	50 hrs.
November	40 hrs.	February	45 hrs.
December	32 hrs.	March	30 hrs.
		April	48 hrs.
		May	16 hrs.
		June	24 hrs.

**Total Hours 323 = \$14,535**

**In person meetings**

Mileage @ \$.54 (Mankato 4) 280, (St. Paul 2) 440, (Nicollet 2) 140, (Henderson 2) 180

**Total Mileage 1040 miles = \$562**

Ballroom Rental \$1200

Coffee, soft drinks, brownies, cookies, \$200

**Total event cost \$1400**

**Total WSI expenses from 10-1-21 to 7-1-22 \$16,497**

Money secured and designated for **Water Storage Initiative** to date

Nicollet Conservation Club	\$6000
Izaak Walton League MN	\$750
Darby and Geri Nelson	\$500
New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen	\$750
Friends of Pool 2	\$100
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance	\$100
Crystal Waters Project	\$100
CCMR	\$1500
Rahr Malting Co.	\$1000
Jim Sheman	\$1000
Lac qui Parle Lake Assn.	\$100
Pioneer Public TV	\$250
Earth day fund raiser	\$160
Individual donor appeal total	\$1055

**Total Matching dollars raised \$13,365**

Minnesota State Senate 3-8-22  
Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee  
Testimony on behalf of **S.F. 3044**

Chair Senator Ingebrigtsen and Committee Members,

My name is Scott Sparlin, I am the Coordinator/Facilitator for the Minnesota River Congress and the Executive Director of the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River. This is my 33<sup>rd</sup> year working on Minnesota River Watershed issues.

We have reached a water management crisis in Minnesota, certainly not limited to anywhere in the state, but especially evident in the Minnesota River Watershed. Due to land use practices both urban and rural we have now reached the point that if we do not begin to both temporarily and permanently store more water, we will continue to experience increased collective, infrastructural, societal, and business losses at an unacceptable rate putting many Minnesotans at risk. Exacerbating this condition is the climatic trend and future prediction of increased rainfalls in short periods of time. The combination of all these factors leads first to small and medium sized tributary streambank 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.

We are a water blessed state and the time to invest in a major water storage initiative is upon us. The compelling data concerning the need, especially in the Minnesota River Basin, has been thoroughly studied and is well documented. The fact is, most of society has observed and intuitively known this for a long time. We have engineered ourselves into this condition and we also have the technical knowhow to mitigate it. We now need the commitment, and the significant financial resources, to accomplish the goal. In many cases our government (all of us) paid to create the challenges we are faced with. The time is now for all of us to come together for the greater good of future generations of Minnesotans and those downstream. This is not an investment we can ignore, or we will pay much higher prices in short years to come.

It is our belief that we need specifically targeted temporary and permanent water storage funds to be directed to the implementors such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Watershed Districts and participating willing landowners.

### **Scientific Background**

Extensive scientific data collected over decades shows clearly that we need to put more water storage on the landscape. Additional water storage will protect infrastructure and improve water quality. Diverse water storage practices, such as replacing historically drained lakes and

wetlands and increasing soil health, will all help to achieve this goal. The climatic trend and future prediction of increased rainfalls in short periods of time will only exacerbate the issue.

The Minnesota River Congress is using the Collaborative for Sediment Source Reduction (CSSR) and Management Options Simulation Model (MOSM) study recommendations in conjunction with the rich datasets available through state agency monitoring, assessment and conservation targeting (WRAPS, TMDLS, 1W1P) to support the case for the need for more water storage. We have enlisted researchers at state agencies and elsewhere who have completed studies to help provide data and documentation (e.g. Patrick Belmont, Karen Gran, Chris Lenhart, Peter Wilcock and numerous others).

After over 3 years and 25 basin-wide meetings attended by a diverse cross section of the population, it has become very apparent that any way water storage in any form can be accomplished is of the utmost priority. Over and over from every part of the basin we heard water storage has to be addressed if we are going to be serious about protecting our infrastructure and improving our surface water. The good news is it can be achieved without adversely affecting agri-business or community development. We simply need it to be realistically funded to the degree it needs to be effective. It already has been prioritized by the implementers. We have written support from numerous entities supporting our efforts to see this come to fruition. Here is a daily growing list of support.

City of Henderson (signed endorsement and resolution)  
City of Granite Falls (signed endorsement and resolution)  
City of Eden Prairie (signed resolution)  
City of Arlington (signed endorsement)  
City of Amboy (signed endorsement)  
City of New Ulm (signed resolution)  
City of Mankato (signed resolution)  
City of Olivia (signed endorsement)  
City of Nicollet (signed endorsement and resolution)  
City of Redwood Falls (signed resolution)  
City of Springfield (signed resolution and indorsement)  
City of St. Peter (signed endorsement)  
City of Winthrop (signed resolution and endorsement)  
City of LeSueur (signed resolution and endorsement)  
Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (resolution passed and signed)  
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (resolution passed and signed)  
Izaak Walton League MN State Chapter (resolution passed)  
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance (signed endorsement and resolution)  
Brown County SWCD (signed endorsement)  
Blue Earth County SWCD (signed endorsement)  
Martin County SWCD (signed endorsement)  
Faribault County SWCD (signed resolution)  
Cottonwood County SWCD (signed endorsement)  
McCloud County SWCD (verbal endorsement)

Nicollet Conservation Club (signed endorsement)  
MASWCD (relative resolution)  
Area 6 SWCD (11 Counties) (in principle)  
Area 5 SWCD (10 Counties) (in principle)  
Friends of Pool 2 (signed endorsement)  
Crystal Waters Project (signed endorsement)  
Minnesota River Congress (signed endorsement)  
New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen (signed endorsement)  
Rural Advantage (signed endorsement)  
Clean Up the River Environment-CURE (signed endorsement)  
The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (signed endorsement and resolution)  
Redwood Country Farmers Union (resolution passed and signed) (State Pending)  
Friends of the Minnesota Valley (signed endorsement)  
Izaak Walton League MN Valley Chapter (signed resolution)  
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (signed endorsement)  
Anglers for Habitat (signed endorsement)  
Minnesota Conservation Federation (signed endorsement)  
Fish and Wildlife Legislative Alliance (signed endorsement)  
Blue Earth Project (signed endorsement)  
Save the Kasota Prairie (signed endorsement)

Thank you for this opportunity and I will gladly answer any questions you may have.

**For More Information**

Contact Scott Sparlin, Coordinator/Facilitator, Minnesota River Congress  
[sesparlin@gmail.com](mailto:sesparlin@gmail.com) (507 276 2280)  
<https://www.mnrivercongress.org/>

## **14<sup>th</sup> Minnesota River Congress Summary**

157 participants signed in at the 14<sup>th</sup> Minnesota River Congress session held in Mankato at the Kato Ballroom on Wednesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022 .

**The event was co-hosted by the Izaak Walton League Upper Mississippi River Initiative.**

Opening remarks were offered by the Minnesota River Congress Coordinator/Facilitator Scott Sparllin. He provided a brief history on the congress and reviewed how the Water Storage Initiative was voted on as the current primary focus of our efforts. He shared that now that we have been successful at establishing the Water Storage Program in state statute, our collective work on it is only in the beginning demonstration phase. He stated that in order for the program to have a significant impact on the watershed it would need to be brought to scale with a considerable increase in funding for the program. He continued that accomplishing that goal would be the primary focus of the Minnesota River Congress until the sufficient funding for program success was in place. A list of all entities that have passed resolutions and signed letters of support for the Minnesota River Congress Water Storage Initiative was read aloud. It includes 14 basin cities along with 30 groups and entities. He went on to state that the Board of Water and Soil Resources had a pending Natural Resources Conservation Service RCPP grant of 8 million dollars for the new Water Storage Program. He then reported that he testified at the legislature this year and that two other bills were introduced to fund the Water Storage Program. One was a new state-wide bill and was for \$100 million with half going to urban storm water issues and the other was specific for appropriation of 5 million to the Minnesota River/Upper Mississippi program. He also stated that the Governor had \$15 million in his supplemental budget targeted for the basin.

**Izaak Walton League past National and State President Dave Zentner**, followed with additional opening remarks. He spoke to the importance of collaboration of groups and on a large inclusive scale. He also talked about how important and effective individual activism was. Mr. Zentner pointed out that the sediment coming from the Minnesota River was filling in Lake Pepin. He said it was also the primary source of other pollutants such a nitrogen, phosphorus, and e-coli

bacteria for the Upper Mississippi River. He then shared that a consortium of regional groups and individuals has been meeting regularly to monitor drainage projects currently being proposed in the Minnesota Basin. This was being done as an on-going effort to eliminate or mitigate negative impacts the projects may have on tributaries and the main stem. He highlighted the affect that cumulative impacts of more water coming from upstream has on the basin. One point he said was critical is that healthy food production, clean water, and healthy soil should be in harmony with our communities. Lastly, he emphasized that we need to support the good works of the state agencies, SWCD's and reach out to those we sometimes view as adversaries.

**Former U.S. Congressman and Judge David Minge** gave remarks next. He is currently the Minnesota River team leader of the Izaak Walton League's Upper Mississippi River Initiative. Mr. Minge alluded to the fact that we are all from different parts of the river system, but we are all working towards the collective goal of clean water. He mentioned that he was living and working in Montevideo back in the 1990's and became acutely aware of the flooding and water quality conditions which the river was experiencing. He then brought up that in 2015 he began looking into drainage improvement projects as a setting in which he and others could make a difference in conditions of the river. He explained that the IWLA Upper Mississippi River Initiative welcomed and encouraged this activity. So, with the blessing and support they assembled a diverse and talented team made up of professional water quality experts, lawyers, and other advocates to obtain, review and submit comment on preliminary and final engineer reports on proposed drainage improvement projects within the basin. Subsequently several projects were and are in the process of being challenged on the basis of design and potential increased outflow.

**Next, Governor Tim Walz** gave pre-recorded introductory remarks and mentioned that he included 15 Million dollars in his supplemental budget for the Water Storage Program. He stated further that he was in full support of our efforts and understood the need for more water storage capabilities on the land and that he would work with the 2 houses to see more funding and an environment bill be passed. He also said he was disappointed that the legislature did not pass a spending bill which would have advanced water storage along with a multitude of other critical environmental needs.



**Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Commissioner Katrina Kessler** gave remarks following the previous speakers. Congratulating all the attendees and positive remarks on the venue for our congress session opened her initial statements. She emphasized that the Walz administration was committed to increasing water storage for all its benefits. She explained the primary role of the MPCA was to assure that everyone has healthy air, soil, and water to live in the State of Minnesota. In fulfilling that role, they monitor, review, and enforce rules, laws, and activities that affect those conditions. They also take pro-active steps to assure clean water goals are met. She spoke of adaptation such as more water storage and need for it in accomplishing goals for clean water. She pointed to the added runoff coming from weather and landscape changes which need to be addressed more pro-actively. She spoke about the complexities surrounding water storage and the need to address them as we pick the best opportunities for that increase. She also spoke about what might be right for the Red River might not be right for the Minnesota River and that we have very diversified landscape. She mentioned that by 2030 the goal of a 50% reduction in sediment has been set by the MPCA. She also stated that we don't have all the answers, but we do have all the science to assist us. We need to recognize that this is an investment that will result in multiple positive by-products such as carbon sequestration, water quality improvements and less flooding just to name a few.

The next speaker to talk about water storage was **the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Sarah Strommen**. She stated that the Walz administration was in concurrence that water storage was and is a priority and that we were on the same wave link with our initiative. Multiple benefits of water storage were emphasized like wildlife, natural diversity, reducing flooding, lessening the risks of infrastructure damages and more. She also emphasized how we need to look at the entire watershed approach to water storage and how we need to think long term when implementing projects. She offered that the upper reaches of the watershed need to be included in storage, not just the lower ends where the water ends up. The need to put back and enhance wetlands was also an area she and the MNDNR staff felt were critical to focus on. Ms. Strommen also said soil health had a big role to play in storing water in the soil profile that had multiple benefits. She pointed out that drainage projects should have a water storage component included before

construction begins. Having everyone at the table expressing their goals she felt was critical in moving forward and that DNR staff wants to make sure that happens.

**John Jaschke, the Executive Director for the Board of Water and Soil Resources** was the next speaker to talk about the new Water Storage Program and water storage in general. He stated that they were in the process of considering where and how to maximize the results of project dollars and demonstrate the many benefits of various types and sizes of projects. Other state agencies have provided analysis to them to help assist project selection. What we do for water storage needs to co-exist with what we have on the landscape. He said we are not going back to the days of Bison roaming the wild landscape. Agriculture is here and will always be here and we need to work with that to accomplish our goals. He brought up that the CREP program took those lands that were not desirable for agriculture and took them out of production accomplishing a benefit to society which affected ag production little. He talked about how we need to design projects that hold water and have a timed release. He also talked about lengthening the time water is delivered to an outlet by lengthening the distance it needs to go before arriving there. Another way he said water could be held back is through infiltration and that takes increased organic matter in soils. Cover crops can also slow water intake by evaporation and intake at the roots he said. John also mentioned a treatment train for clean water where different connected systems do complimentary improvements to the water before moving down stream. He closed by thanking all the participants of the Minnesota River Congress for not just pointing out the problems but offering solutions.

The next presentation from **Rita Weaver, Chief Engineer for the Board of Water and Soil Resources**. She gave an overview of the new Water Storage Program and how selection of projects would be done for now. In order to meet the requirements of state statute, flow reductions would have to be the cornerstone of the program. She said there are many and complex conditions to consider when scoring a project such as site history and topography. She displayed a talked about a number of scenarios where water storage can happen. However, for now, picking those which will demonstrate a significant reduction in outflow and have multiple resource and economic benefits would be the most eligible. BWSR held listening sessions to assist in development the components for the

program and incorporated much of the input into the program. Her presentation was detailed, comprehensive and thorough.

The next speaker of the evening was **Mark Dittrich Ag Marketing and Development Specialist with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture**. He opened saying it was an honor to be with the Minnesota River Congress. He stated that after the 1997 flood he helped put together a group to address flooding and learned of the complexities of the drainage system in the Minnesota River Watershed. He spoke about early projects from the 1990's involving ditch design meant to impede water but still drain it in a timely manner for the producer. Wetlands were also designed at the Lamberton station to hold water and purify it as well. Mr. Dittrich also spoke about how the climate has changed and how we need to adapt. He said one of those ways was with additional water storage. He stated that moving forward was going to have to include improving the trust among all of us especially towards the farmers and care takers of this earth. Then we can truly work together for a more sustainable set of communities. We will be able then to respect our differences and live with our compromises, because we need each other to accomplish what we need to continue producing food. And at the same time have a healthy environment that we can all live in and be proud of.

The last speaker was **Mark Schnobrich, Area 6 SWCD President**. He pointed out that SWCD's are the front-line implementers of conservation throughout Minnesota. He identified that water storage is a top priority of Area 6 and as well as at the state level and especially in the greater Minnesota River Watershed. He said that SWCD's work directly with landowners on a number of practices that benefit water quality that also address water quantity issues such as wetland creation and enhancement of existing ones. They also have soil health identified as a priority and can get landowners assistance to implement practices that ultimately lead to better soils. He stated that SWCD's need to start with smaller projects and work their way up to the bigger ones. The one watershed one plan is a good starting point he said. Some plans have been approved and are in the implementation process. Mark stated that finding willing landowners to participate will be a challenge, but one that they are able to meet. SWCD's are also working with private business to spread the word on practices and available funding assistance for landowners. Mark cited a 1943 Soil Conservation Service

publication that emphasized how important it was to work on the watershed scale and not just on single farms. It stated that if everyone adopted a practice in the entire watershed goals could be easily met compared to if only some participated. He stated that SWCD's are communicating about water storage among each other and highlighting success stories. He also said that upcoming meetings planned have water storage as the primary topic of information sharing.