



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

Agenda Item

Item 4. A. – 4th Quarter Update on 2024 Workplan

Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

Summary

Della Young of Young Environmental Consulting Group will attend the meeting to provide the Board with an update on the 2024 Workplan activities.

The Workplan approved and adopted by the Board each year outlines how the LMRWD intends to implement its [Watershed Management Plan](#). The Workplans have been posted on the Watershed Management Plan webpage (accessible via the link provided above).

Attachments

Technical Memorandum – Lower Minnesota River Watershed District – Projects and Programs Quarter 4 Progress Report

Recommended Action

Motion to receive and file report

Technical Memorandum

To: Linda Loomis, Administrator
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD)

From: Della Schall Young, CTF, CPESC, PMP, Principal Scientist
Jennifer Mocol-Johnson, Water and Natural Resources Program Manager

Date: January 8, 2025

Re: Lower Minnesota River Watershed District—Projects and Programs Quarter 4
Progress Report

This report presents the fourth quarter status update of LMRWD projects and programs that Young Environmental Consulting Group, LLC (Young Environmental) completed in 2024. This report includes performance metrics or key performance indicators, which show the effectiveness of programs and the progress of projects against budget and timeline.

PROGRAMS

Individual Project Permit Program

The LMRWD reviews permit applications for individual projects in cities without their local government unit (LGU) permits, for Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) projects, and for LGUs that have opted to have the LMRWD maintain specific rules through 2024. This quarter, we have 33 active permits, issued two permits, and have successfully closed three projects.

Young Environmental revised the permit fee schedule, effective September 1, 2024, based on suggested changes by Rinke Noonan (LMRWD legal counsel) and LMRWD Board President Barisonzi. The new permit fee schedule, effective December 1, 2024 was approved at the November 2024 Board meeting. In addition to this approved schedule, cover sheets for each LMRWD rule were created to help applicants submit thorough and complete permit applications. All materials were posted to the LMRWD website in December 2024.

Performance metric and assessment: Young Environmental has two criteria for measuring its work:

1. finishing and suggesting the next step for permit applications that are complete within the legally mandated time frame, and
2. performing a yearly inspection of the permitted project.

We are completing reviews within the mandated time frame as well as performing inspections of project sites. Effective October 1, 2024, Young Environmental has transferred all active projects to a new system for tracking expenses by project and whether they are public or private entities.

LGU Permits

The LMRWD recognizes that LGUs are responsible for land use decisions and regulations. The LMRWD municipal permit empowers municipalities to issue permits and oversee activities as the primary permitting authority, provided they have adopted the necessary official controls to align local water management with the LMRWD's rules. The LGU must establish these official controls and request a municipal permit from the LMRWD. Municipal permits have a validity of five years from the approval date. Currently, there are two pending municipal permits: those from the cities of Chanhassen and Savage.

The Minneapolis Airports Commission (MAC) submitted an LGU permit application to the LMRWD in the second quarter. The application was deemed complete on September 23, 2024, and was conditionally approved by the Board of Managers on October 9, 2024. A municipal (LGU) permit was issued to the MAC in December 2024 following submittal of conditional approval items. The City of Chanhassen is updating its codes and aims to address municipal permits early in 2025. During the municipal coordination meeting with Chanhassen, city staff indicated a desire for the LMRWD to retain permitting authority. The LMRWD asked Chanhassen to provide a written request, describing the desired path forward. The City of Savage has indicated it is in the process of updating its codes and plans to submit ordinances to the LMRWD for review in spring 2025.

The municipal (LGU) coordination meetings began on December 10. A total of 13 meetings were held, with the final meeting occurring on January 15 with the MAC. The intent of the meetings is to continue the established collaboration and information sharing framework, review recent and upcoming LMRWD and City projects and programs, and assess resources and discuss opportunities for partnership.

The municipal (LGU) auditing process was initiated in December 2024, with the intention of hosting a kickoff meeting with the municipalities in Quarter 1 (January–March) of 2025. Municipalities to be audited include Burnsville, Carver, Lilydale, and the MAC. The auditing process will be completed by the end of Quarter 3 (July–September) of 2025.

Performance metric and assessment: Young Environmental has one criterion for measuring its work: permitting all LGUs or quasi-governmental organizations. Of the 10 entities eligible for LGU permits, Young Environmental has completed the permitting process for all but the two mentioned above.

Education and Outreach Program

In Quarter 4, Young Environmental focused on two core initiatives:

1. Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) onboarding and realignment
2. Public Listening Session event

In addition to these initiatives, we continued regular activities surrounding CAC meeting facilitation, social media posts and website updates, coordination for outreach tabling events, and recommendations for the fall mini-grants. For this quarterly update, we have focused our reporting on the two primary initiatives, both of which are nearing completion.

CAC Onboarding and Realignment

Following an active campaign in the summer of 2024 to increase the roster of the CAC, our team

focused Q4 efforts on onboarding new CAC members, team building and recognition, and aligning the CAC function with the direction of the Board of Managers. Each of these activities is introduced below:

- **CAC Onboarding:** Following an in-person October welcome event, monthly meetings have focused on onboarding through an orientation of the LMRWD's organization and mission, reintroduction of the CAC bylaws, a renewed focus on attendance and participation, and background information necessary to better understand the work of the District and the environmental issues faced. In Q4, we focused on electing officials (chair, vice-chair, and secretary) who will help the committee self-direct. We also discussed various structures, such as subcommittees, which could help members actively engage in priority work that interests them and aligns with their skills.
- **Team Building and Recognition:** To allow the committee to work well together, we have created space for getting to know other members and recognizing the contributions that volunteers are making to have an impact on water and natural resources in their community. We have regularly thanked members for their participation through opportunities such as an end-of-year holiday card.
- **CAC Function and Alignment with Board Direction:** Following the increased membership, our staff worked to align CAC functionality with the vision of the Board of Managers. This includes scheduling CAC members to attend Board meetings in 2025 to engage with the Board and give updates on priorities. It also includes contributing to meaningful work and actively engaging in tasks that support the LMRWD's mission. In Q4, CAC members reviewed and approved the fall educator mini-grants as well as identified improvements for outreach surrounding the grant. CAC members also volunteered to participate in the January 8 Public Listening Session, representing the public through testimony that helps meet the goal of the event.

Public Listening Session—Event Planning and Staffing (January 8, 2025)

Another primary focus for the Education and Outreach team in Q4 was the event planning for the Public Listening Session. Guided by the vision of the Board of Managers, our team helped execute the session by releasing a call for testimony, hosting a Q&A session for interested participants, promoting the event through both broad messaging and targeted outreach, designing the agenda and coordinating with speakers, and staffing the session in coordination with the District Administrator.

The Public Listening Session is designed to cover six key themes of interest for the LMRWD in 2025: (1) Scientific Causes of Flooding, (2) Climate Change, (3) Water Storage Along the Minnesota River, (4) Natural Mitigation Strategies, (5) Financial Costs of Flooding, and (6) Costs and Benefits of Proposed Solutions.

The event provides a platform for partners and the public to share solutions to known problems and build partnerships to address large-scale issues. It convened a combination of subject-matter experts, municipal partners, and community members focused on contributing to the LMRWD's mission. Input from the Public Listening Session will be summarized immediately after the event and used to shape the legislative agenda, inform the Watershed Management Plan update, and establish priorities for the LMRWD's direction in 2025.

Performance metric and assessment: The budget and timeline are the criteria for evaluating performance against how well the approved activities are completed after the comprehensive action plan is accepted. We have gone through four quarters of the year and used up around 95 percent of the budget. Working under the direction of the Board of Managers to focus on strategic priorities, Young Environmental made key progress on the education and outreach mission by facilitating CAC growth, retention, and expansion and planning a Public Listening Session event, envisioned by the Board of Managers.

Fen Stewardship Program

Fen Stewardship plans are completed for four fens. These plans include identified actions to protect and improve, such as collecting groundwater data, surveying vegetation, removing invasive plants, educating and reaching out to the public, and working with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) to acquire land around the fen. Priority action items are identified throughout the plans for each fen using a matrix document.

In October, Young Environmental completed and distributed calcareous fen groundwater recharge memos for Gun Club Lake, Nicols Meadow, and Savage fens. Each memo provides a description of location, site geology, hydrology, ground-water watershed, recharge, and groundwater use from permitted wells and dug pits, and general recommendations.

We actively organized and facilitated a fen working meeting on December 13. The meeting was attended by 26 individuals representing local, state, and federal government. Topics included fen stewardship, groundwater recharge, the Gun Club Lake incision, invasive species management, tile line inventories, land acquisition, and an agency and staff round robin to provide an opportunity for future collaboration and teamwork.

Young Environmental actively engaged with the MnDNR and is developing an acquisition memo for Seminary Fen. The memo includes a review of priority parcels and several options to consider to reduce the potential for development on parcels adjacent to the fen and protect the valuable resource.

In 2025, Young Environmental will provide additional assistance and focus on invasive species management. During the fen workshop, this item was identified as a high priority by both local and state government staff. Young Environmental will continue collaborating and working with partners to determine the best and most efficient methods to remove buckthorn in Savage Fen and Seminary Fen.

Performance metric and assessment: A total of 60 percent of the budget has been spent in 2024, leaving approximately 40 percent. The remainder of the budget was not spent due to the determination that Tasks 4-2 and 4-3 (related to the development of technical memorandums) were not needed.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS (CIPS)

Area 3 Minnesota Riverbank and Bluff Stabilization Project

The 106 Group completed the Phase 1 Archaeological Survey and provided the report to the LMRWD at the end of November. The additional survey resulted in negative shovel tests, and the associated bucket auger borings yielded no archaeological material. Therefore, the 106 Group recommends that no further archaeological work is necessary for the project. Young Environmental

submitted the report to the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on December 9, 2024, and we are awaiting a response. Bolton & Menk completed the boundary survey and are in the process of drawing up the legal survey documents.

Performance metric and assessment: We have used about 42 percent of the project budget for 40 percent of the project tasks. This is mainly because of complex permitting and helping with the property acquisitions process, which we did not anticipate. The project design is on hold at 60 percent until we receive approval from the USACE for Section 404.

Floodplain Modeling Project

In Quarter 4 we continued updating the effective FEMA model that was originally built in 2004. Updates include adjusting the geometrics of the model to reflect current land cover conditions and current elevations, adjusting the alignment of cross sections, and updating bridge structure information. These updates will help us better understand flooding along the Lower Minnesota River and make more informed decisions when it comes to evaluating and regulating the cumulative impacts of floodplain development. The updated model will be completed in January, followed by a review by the MnDNR in February. Based on feedback from LMRWD municipalities and the MnDNR, Young Environmental will develop recommendations for future modeling updates. The projected completion of this project is expected in Quarter 1 2025.

Performance metric and assessment: About 48 percent of the project budget has been spent on 60 percent of the tasks. This seems to be in line with the plan, but this project was supposed to be finished a year ago and has been postponed due to working with USACE and the availability of resources.

Gully Feasibility Study

For the 2023 Gully Inventory project, four gullies that needed further study in 2024 were evaluated to research the cause of erosion and find ways to stabilize, restore, or reduce further erosion. Three gullies are in Shakopee, and one is in Burnsville. The City of Shakopee has a planned riverbank stabilization project near Huber Park that will address two of the Shakopee gullies. Following discussions with the City of Burnsville and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the Burnsville gully, it became apparent that there was limited interest in restoration due to the gully system's size, complexity, and connection to Unnamed Creek 5/6—a designated trout stream.

In Quarter 4, using the engineering pool, Young Environmental brought on Geosyntec Consultants, Inc (Geosyntec) to complete the feasibility study for a gully in Shakopee (SHK16) near the Wills Riverview Campground. The focus of efforts will include evaluating alternatives for stabilizing the gully and repairing the asphalt bike path. The projected completion of this task is expected in Quarter 1 2025. Geosyntec has completed a team kickoff meeting, site inspection, and data review and anticipates completing conceptual design in early January 2025.

Performance metric and assessment: In Quarter 4, the project progressed to approximately 30 percent complete, and we spent 37 percent of the budget.

Spring Creek Site Stabilizations

The Spring Creek Site Stabilization project was awarded to Sunram Construction, Inc. with a base bid of \$91,443.00. Young Environmental and the LMRWD administrator worked together to obtain

all landowner agreements before the start of construction. A preconstruction meeting was held on-site with several landowners present. Construction began on November 20, 2024, and was completed on November 27, 2024. Young Environmental coordinated with the on-site engineer and landowners to ensure the project was completed to plan and would accomplish the proposed stabilization. Sunram Construction temporarily stabilized the site and will complete final restoration and vegetation in the spring. The final completion date is set for May 15, 2025.

Performance metric and assessment: The project is progressing as planned, with construction completed as of Q4 2024, and a final completion date in Q2 2025. The project is approximately 95 percent complete with about 15 percent of the project budget left.

Trout Stream Geomorphic Assessment

This project is effectively complete—the final report was submitted to the LMRWD administrator on September 18, 2024. This project provided valuable education and experiences to the interns and would not have been possible without the internship program. This collaboration not only benefits the next generation of water resource professionals but also allows the LMRWD to tackle large-scale projects that require extensive fieldwork and data analysis.

Performance metric and assessment: The project is 100 percent complete with 97 percent of the budget spent.

Vernon Avenue Road Improvement

Bids for the Vernon Avenue Road Improvement project were opened on October 24, 2024. The project was awarded to GMH Asphalt Corporation with a base bid of \$680,229.85. The signed contract documents from GMH Asphalt were received on December 17, 2024, and will be executed by the LMRWD at the January 2025 board meeting. GMH plans to begin construction once the ground thaws, depending on snow melt and flooding. The final completion date is set for June 28, 2025.

Performance metric and assessment: The project is 90 percent complete with nine percent of the budget left. The remaining budget will be used for construction administration tasks.