

# Minnesota Watersheds Board of Directors Meeting

June 22, 2023

Country Inn and Suites, Albert Lea, MN



## 1. CALL TO ORDER

President Vavra called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. A quorum was present.

Minnesota Watersheds Board (Board) members present: David Ziegler, Mary Texer, Linda Vavra, Brad Kramer, Peter Fjestad, Don Pereira, Wanda Holker, and Gene Tiedemann

Board member absent: Jeff Gertgen

Others present: Jill Crafton, LeRoy Ose, and Barb Radke, Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Tina Carstens, Minnesota Association of Watershed Administrators (MAWA)

## 2. GENERAL HOUSEKEEPING

### ***Agenda***

Director Fjestad made a motion to approve the agenda. This was seconded by Director Holker and carried unanimously.

### ***Member Comment Period***

No Minnesota Watersheds members were present to address the Board.

### ***Secretary's Report***

Director Ziegler made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 22 meeting. This was seconded by Director Texer and carried unanimously.

### ***Treasurer's Report***

Director Ziegler reported on the bills paid and the account balances as of June 19, 2023:

- Checking: \$56,355.03
- Savings: \$280,081.93
- Total: \$336,436.96

Director Ziegler moved to accept the treasurer's report. This was seconded by Director Texer and carried unanimously.

## 3. NEW BUSINESS

### ***Drainage Work Group (DWG) and Legal Fees***

The DWG is going to attempt to address many items that affect watershed district (WD) drainage authorities. Those include the drainage registry portal, outlet adequacy, and drainage authority powers in M.S. Chapter 103E. Having legal counsel representation for our WD drainage authorities is necessary. The estimated cost to have Louis Smith attend a minimum of seven meetings and possible committee work would be about \$15,000. If approved, the cost would be split evenly with the Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB).

Discussion was held regarding the difficulties that the drainage registry portal and outlet adequacy could cause for rural WDs and agriculture, working relationships with landowners, and concerns that these issues are supported by BWSR and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Legal counsel representation is especially important for the discussion about drainage authority powers in M.S. Chapter 103E.

Discussion was also held regarding the need for more personal relationships with BWSR and DNR leadership dealing with these topics, the use of drainage as a tool in watershed management, storm

sewers and their effects on flooding, environmental organizations appearing to want to do away with agricultural drainage, and having a better relationship with drainage authorities in the Minnesota River.

Director Ziegler made a motion to authorize up to \$7,500 for legal fees for Smith Partners to attend DWG meetings to represent WD drainage authorities contingent upon approval by the RRWMB. The motion was seconded by Director Fjestad and it carried unanimously.

#### ***Legislative Coordination and Communication Plan***

For years members of Minnesota Watersheds have requested a better communication process before, during, and after each legislative session. The newly adopted Minnesota Watersheds Communication Plan includes a summary of the communication process, but not the specificity that is included in the draft Legislative Coordination and Communication Plan. The Minnesota Watersheds Legislative Committee met on June 12 to review and revise the Plan. The revised version was sent to the Red River Watershed Management Board Legislative Committee for review and approval. The committee accepted the proposed changes and added a note at the end of the document to acknowledge that there may be times when both organizations do not agree in principle on a specific issue.

Director Ziegler made a motion to adopt the Legislative Coordination and Communication Plan. Director Tiedemann seconded the motion. Discussion was held regarding the plan and it being a good basis from which to work, as well as a tool for answering members' questions regarding how our legislative work is done. The motion carried unanimously.

## **4. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

### ***Associate Membership***

Our Bylaws state, *"The Board of Directors may from time to time extend associate membership to this corporation upon payment of dues as determined by the Board of Directors. An associate member shall not be entitled to submit resolutions, vote, or serve on the Board of Directors, but shall otherwise be afforded all the rights and privileges granted to members, their delegates and alternate delegates by law and by the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of this corporation."* Freshwater has asked about a reduced rate for non-profit membership in Minnesota Watersheds.

Discussion was held regarding potential associate members and their goals. Minnesota Watersheds does not currently have associate members, so at present, this has no fiscal impact. Associate members would need to be legitimate conservation organizations. If their actions don't align with our goals, there would also need to be a way to remove their membership. Director Fjestad made a motion to have the Bylaws Committee review associate membership and make a recommendation for the membership to consider at the annual conference. Director Ziegler seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

### ***Freshwater Education Proposal***

On June 7, Executive Director Voit met with Michelle Stockness, the new Executive Director for Freshwater. She had only been in the position for two weeks. The meeting was for introduction purposes. At some point, she would like to explore legislative coordination and pooling our education resources. She was not aware of the education proposal.

John Jaschke, BWSR was contacted regarding the education proposal from Freshwater that was developed in 2021. While he had been told about it, he had never seen the proposal. At present, this education proposal will not be pursued. We will continue to work with BWSR to get more WD/watershed management organization (WMO) training at BWSR Academy and we will continue to offer training at our events.

## 5. REPORTS

### ***President's Report***

President Vavra reported on responding to emails, writing letters, making phone calls to legislators, attending the DWG meetings, the general levy increase, working with the Executive Director, attending committee meetings, and encouraging membership renewal.

Director Pereira introduced himself and gave an update on his background. He was welcomed to the board.

### ***Executive Director***

Executive Director Voit provided an update on monthly meetings with BWSR leadership, the MAWA/Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) joint meeting, Communication Plan, Legislative Coordination and Communication Plan, handbook, statewide organization survey, MAWA committees, legislative accomplishments, and Summer Tour finances.

Discussion was held about lobbying and the value of the position. Director Pereira made a motion to direct the Executive Director to initiate discussion with the lobbyist about a succession plan. Director Fjestad seconded the motion. Discussion was held regarding the contract position, the need to have someone that is effective and communicative; the successor being paid through the current lobbyist's contract, not a separate contract; and if a contractor cannot fulfill the contract requirements, the person isn't serving the organization as required. The motion carried unanimously.

Discussion was held regarding how to add value without adding more cost, more networking opportunities on the buses, how to encourage more people to attend the Summer Tour, and using this event as a recruitment tool to entice people to serve on watershed boards. Barriers include distance and board meeting dates. Discussion was held regarding the Summer Tour budget, projected loss or breaking even, and how difficult it would be to determine how a discounted rate would be given.

### ***Partner Reports***

#### MAWA

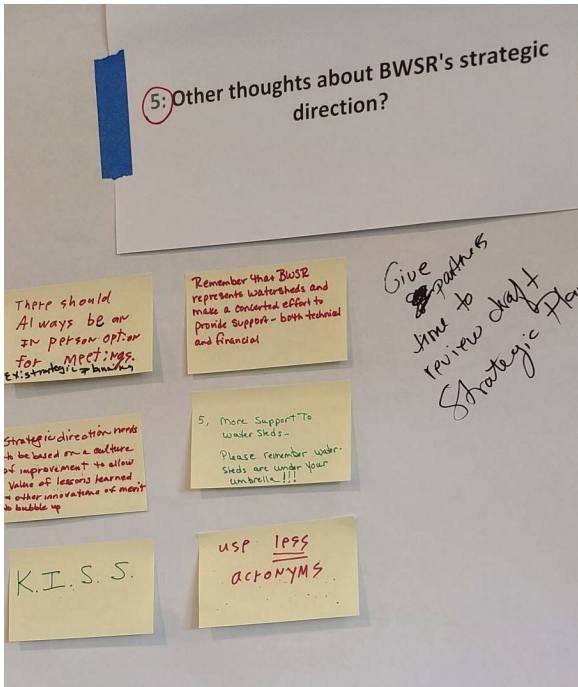
Tina Carstens provided an update on behalf of MAWA. She suggested one way to increase attendance would be for watersheds to offer the opportunity to attend to their advisory committee members and volunteers. She gave an update on the MAWA meeting held during the Summer Tour and the statewide organization survey results, changes to their bylaws to add a WMO member to the Executive Committee, partnership with SWCD managers and MAWA for training, and committee updates. They continue to work on partnering with Minnesota Watersheds as often as possible.

### ***BWSR Strategic Plan Engagement Session***

Barb Radke, Training Coordinator explained that BWSR is in the process of updating their strategic plan. She gathered responses from the Minnesota Watersheds board and staff and BWSR board members regarding these five questions: 1) as BWSR advances its statewide commitment to equity, who else should BWSR work with to improve and protect natural resources, 2) BWSR focuses on strengthening local capacity. What could BWSR do better or differently to further enhance local capacity and improve outcomes?, 3) What are some critical emerging issues that BWSR might be uniquely suited to address?, 4) As individuals, groups, and BWSR as a whole, what are more meaningful and relevant ways to measure the results of our collective work to improve and protect natural resources?, and 5) Other thoughts about BWSR's strategic direction?

The overarching response to the questions was to listen to the organizations that BWSR represents and use their input.





**Confirm Next Meeting Date**

There will not be a meeting in July.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

Director Fjestad made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:21 a.m. This was seconded by Director Ziegler and carried unanimously.

Wanda Holker  
Secretary