

Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Board Meeting

October 26, 2022

Gerald Van Amburg called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. The agenda was adopted. The minutes of the September 28, 2022 Board meeting were approved. No one was present to address the Board in the Public Access Forum.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Central Region Committee

Black Dog Watershed Management Organization (BDWMO) Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan
Steve Christopher, BWSR gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding the BDWMO Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (Plan). The BDWMO was established in 1985 through a joint powers agreement. The vision of the BDWMO is that water resources and related ecosystems are managed to sustain their long-term health and aesthetic beauty to contribute to the well-being of the citizens within the watershed. The BDWMO encompasses approximately 26 square miles in northwestern Dakota County, covering parts of the cities of Apple Valley, Burnsville, Eagan, and Lakeville. The BDWMO is bound by Scott County to the west, the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District to the north, Eagan-Inver Grove Watershed Management Organization to the northeast, and the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization to the southeast. The majority of the watershed is fully developed and outlets through the Lower Minnesota Watershed District to the Minnesota River, with a small portion of the watershed that outlets towards the Credit River. The BDWMO Plan was unanimously approved.

Grants Program and Policy Committee

Habitat Enhancement Landscape Pilot (HELP)

Marcey Westrick, BWSR explained HELP. Declines of bees, butterflies, dragonflies, and other at-risk species that support ecosystems and food systems have raised significant alarm among scientists and conservation professionals both locally and globally. This cost-share grant program is made possible through an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). The program is focused on restoring and enhancing strategically located, diverse native habitat across Minnesota to benefit populations of pollinators and beneficial insects as well as overall plant and animal diversity. The Board approved the policy and authorized a request for proposals (RFP).

Clean Water Legacy Partners Grant Program Pilot: Policy and Request for Proposals Ranking Criteria

Annie Felix-Gerth and Shaina Keseley, BWSR explained the program, ranking criteria, and Board order. The Legislature appropriated \$400,000 in fiscal year 2022 and \$600,000 in fiscal year 2023 from the Clean Water Fund “for developing and implementing a water legacy grant program to expand partnerships for clean water.” The two fiscal year appropriations are combined for this RFP. The Grants Program and Policy Committee recommended the policy and RFP criteria at their meeting on October 24. Interest for this program came from the Clean Water Council. Eligible applicants are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and tribal governments.

Jill Crafton raised concerns about the RFP and ranking criteria. The Grants Program and Policy Committee reviewed this at two meetings and discussed the language regarding BWSR review of qualifications. Review could be done by SWCD staff, not just BWSR staff. Another concern was that three committee members were not present.

Time and energy have been put into One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) and the focus on doing projects on a watershed basis. It is important that this program meets watershed goals. There is no technical quality assurance. This program is set up not to be successful. Oversight is needed to make sure that what is done is done well. There is a requirement for inspection. The language has a lot of open pieces in it and should be required to fit within 1W1P and other comprehensive watershed plans.

Annie Felix-Gerth explained that this is a pilot program. This appropriation is separate from the effort to work in the watershed approach. This is a chance to reach out and gain new partners in conservation work. That is the intent – to expand groups we work with. Fitting within the watershed approach could happen long-term. For the first go at it, we want to reach out and form relationships with these groups.

Jill Crafton stated that she is not opposed to partnerships. She asked what would be done if a project causes a problem. John Jaschke responded that grant agreements exist for every grant. BWSR reviews the organizations credentials first and foremost. However, they need some discretion and be able to follow a practical approach. This needs to be as flexible as it can be, given the appropriation.

Gerry Van Amburg asked if the language regarding BWSR staff review was dependent upon circumstances. Annie Felix-Gerth explained that BWSR staff review is determined on a specific case by case decision. It depends on what the project is and whether there is a standard. BWSR does not want to spend staff time reviewing every application. It is specific to technical applications for on-the-ground projects.

John Jaschke stated that we do not know if the project will be technical, education, or management. We need to wait and see. There are too many different circumstances. BWSR staff review means that we must document every person that touches the grant which isn't feasible. The organization receiving the funds provides the assurances. BWSR's job is to make sure the grant is administered and the results are accomplished.

Jill Crafton asked if they could provide example agreements. John Jaschke replied that staff could provide existing grant agreements and work plans. This program would be working with different organizations other than local governments. BWSR doesn't have direct experience with NGOs and tribes. The grant agreements developed will have to be legal and practical.

Jill Crafton asked if NGOs would have biological scientists or sufficient technical staff. John Jaschke explained that working with NGOs is already done with other state agencies. He is most familiar with Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. What is developed will be like that grant agreement. Right now, we need to have the flexibility to see who applies. Jill Crafton stated that this is a slippery slope. Gerry Van Amburg said that getting other people as partners is something that will strengthen our whole process of dealing with clean water in Minnesota. This is a good pilot program to determine this.

Jill Crafton replied that the partnering opportunity already exists through the current application process. They can go to the SWCD or WD and do projects through the plans already in place. This isn't new. Gerry Van Amburg responded that this could reach other partners and get them involved that would not do it otherwise.

Jill Crafton said that there needs to be good communication with the 1W1P area. She is not against money going toward the effort but is worried about how effective it will be without more assurance.

Thom Peterson asked about the selection process. Annie Felix-Gerth explained that it will be like the competitive grant process. The application period will be announced. After it closes, the applications will be reviewed for eligibility. Eligible applications will go through an inner and external agency review and ranking. The recommendation will be provided to the Grants Program and Policy Committee and then to the Board.

The program was approved. Our watershed representatives voted as follows: Crafton – no; Ose – no; and Collins – yes. Jill Crafton stated that she would like the record to show that she was not opposed to the program, but as the language was written, she couldn't support it.

Northern Region Committee

Clearwater River Watershed Plan

Ryan Hughes gave an overview of the Clearwater River Plan. The planning area is in Northwest Minnesota encompassing portions of Clearwater, Pennington, Polk, and Red Lake counties. The Plan was developed as part of the 1W1P program. The Clearwater River Plan was unanimously approved.

Long Prairie River Plan

Ryan Hughes and Todd Holman explained the Long Prairie River Plan. The Long Prairie River Plan was unanimously approved.

John Jaschke encouraged the Board to review the day-of packet and reminded them about the application period for the open positions on the Board.

Discussion was held regarding virtual and in-person attendance at meetings. Board members were encouraged to attend in-person as much as possible.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- **Wetland Committee:** November 15 at 9:00 a.m.
- **BWSR Board:** December 15 at 9:00 a.m., by Microsoft Teams

The meeting adjourned at 12:28 p.m.

Notes submitted by Jan Voit