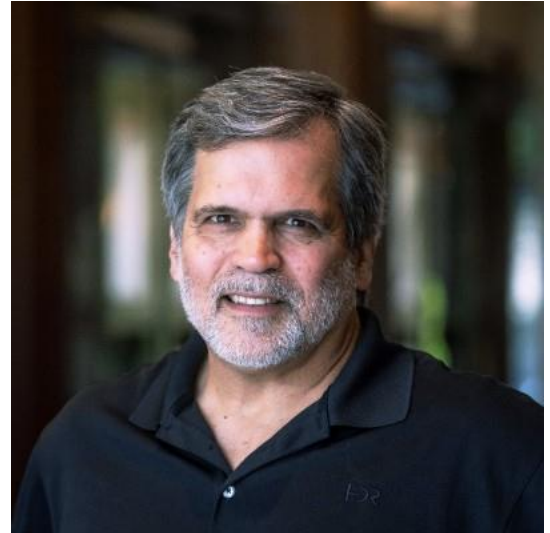




## Meet your Board Member – Don Pereira

**Valley Branch WD**  
**Region III / Term 2024**  
[dpereira@vbwd.org](mailto:dpereira@vbwd.org)  
**651-968-9788**



### **How long have you been involved in the watershed world?**

My direct watershed activity started in 1997. My indirect interest in watershed management and healthy aquatic habitats spans most of my professional career as a fisheries scientist and manager (read on for more detail).

**How long have you served on your local watershed board?** My formal watershed board activity began when I joined the Citizens' Advisory Committee of the South Washington Watershed District (SWWD) in 1997. I was then appointed to the Board of the SWWD in 2000, serving as its President during my last two years.

My family moved to Afton in 2020, and lucky me, I was allowed to tag along. While it was sad to leave my friends and colleagues at SWWD, I was delighted to learn of vacancies on the Board of the Valley Branch Watershed District (VBWD), to which I was appointed in early 2021.

Serving on two different watershed district boards was a great experience and taught me a few key characteristics of the State's watershed program. First, there is no single, best solution for tackling water issues, and thus two watershed districts could have fundamental differences in their structure that in turn may reflect the social institutions and human infrastructure within their respective districts. However, the bottom-line functions serve the same fundamental purpose, and different structures can be equally effective in protecting water resources. This is a very key observation that I feel is germane to how Minnesota Watersheds must operate. Given the large variety of ecotypes and supporting land use in Minnesota, the goals, objectives, and regulatory systems in the agricultural areas of the State will likely be very different from urban watersheds or watersheds in less developed parts of Minnesota. The Board of Minnesota Watersheds must acknowledge these differences and operate accordingly so that all watershed districts and watershed management organizations (WMOs) get the support and resources they need to operate effectively.

**What inspires you to continue doing the work you do?** Water is central to a sustainable and healthy world for both humans and the myriad organisms that we need to survive and thrive. Prior to retirement in 2018 (or semi-retirement, as I continue part time work in the private sector), I greatly enjoyed a 35-year career



with the Minnesota DNR, Section of Fisheries. During this career, I observed the fisheries profession developing more capacity to conserve and restore important aquatic habitats. Simply put, healthy aquatic ecosystems support Minnesota's most productive fisheries; and of course, we all know that healthy aquatic habitats start with clean and abundant water.

Based on the State of Minnesota's regulatory framework for managing water, a considerable responsibility falls on watershed districts and WMOs to do the work on the ground that provides the basis for healthy aquatic habitats, either to conserve and protect or to restore. My family's relocation to Afton in 2020 puts us close to the Saint Croix River with an inspiring viewshed. You probably know that the St. Croix River was one of the first to be included in this country's Wild and Scenic Rivers Program. I have greatly enjoyed the wonderful fishery that the Saint Croix offers, but I am also acutely aware that this great, local resource is not immune from degradation, including declining water quality. Is the work of the VBWD relevant to protecting the Saint Croix River? Without a doubt it certainly is, starting with the funding the VBWD approves for erosion control, particularly in the immediate watershed of Valley Creek, which is a thriving, "blue ribbon" trout stream less than 20 miles from downtown Saint Paul. You likely already know that many watershed districts within the Saint Croix basin, including SWWD's significant stream restoration just south of Afton, are marshalling efforts to protect the aquatic resources of the Saint Croix basin. Ultimately, unless you live at the top of a continental divide, the land practices of someone upstream could be impacting your quality of life. Conversely, watershed management is all about being a good neighbor to those living downstream.

**What was your impetus for joining the Minnesota Watersheds Board of Directors?** The Minnesota Watersheds Board was of general interest to me during my time serving on the SWWD. However, during the "working" phase of my life, I simply had a full plate. Now during semi-retirement, I have more time to help and support watershed efforts. When this vacancy recently came along, the timing was good. I consider watershed district work to be a form of community service and at the same time a good way to continue my keen interest in natural resource conservation.

**Tell us a fun fact about yourself.** If you want to see me "chill", get me out on the water and take my cell phone away. For me, spending time out in nature, whether on the water or in the woods, is both mentally and physically restorative. After returning home following a BWCAW trip, my wife once observed that I was in a completely relaxed state. One exception to "chill" may be my annual trip in early June to Upper Red Lake, where I am called upon to guide and chaperone up to four watershed district administrators. See photos, including a glimpse of a rare event during a recent Red Lake outing.