

# BWSR pilot tracks progress of watershed management plan



Clean Water  
Funds from BWSR  
support the One  
Watershed, One  
Plan program.

**T**he Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)'s pilot watershed-based assessment centered on the Yellow Medicine Partnership that wrapped up in December 2022 will help BWSR develop recommendations to enhance the delivery of conservation services.

Updates to BWSR's Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) added the pilot watershed-based assessment in March 2022.

Authorized by Statute 103B.102, PRAP was created to monitor and assess the performance of local water management entities responsible for the conservation of water and land resources. The pilot watershed-based

assessment was conducted with the local government partnership working together to implement comprehensive watershed management plans developed through the One Watershed, One Plan program.

Members of the Yellow Medicine Partnership include the counties and soil and water conservation districts of Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon and Yellow Medicine; the Yellow Medicine Watershed District; and the Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects. The Yellow Medicine Watershed District administers the partnership.

The pilot project evaluated 133 action items in the Yellow Medicine Comprehensive Watershed

*An early spring view of the Yellow Medicine River unfolded from Upper Sioux Agency State Park. Photos Courtesy of Yellow Medicine SWCD*

Management Plan. The local partners worked together to determine progress made on plan goals, and completed a performance standard checklist. Internal and external respondents completed anonymous surveys. That information helped BWSR staff tailor recommendations to the partnership and its needs.

The findings and recommendations are intended to give local government units constructive feedback they can use to enhance their joint and individual delivery of conservation services. BWSR staff members will check back in about two years.

“The PRAP process gave the local partners an opportunity to reflect on implementation efforts by providing feedback on what’s working and where improvements are needed. The process also showed elected and appointed officials that BWSR is committed to helping the local partners and the local partners are holding themselves to a high standard,” said BWSR Board Conservationist Jason Beckler, who assisted the partnership during the pilot watershed-based assessment process.

Yellow Medicine Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) District Manager Tyler Knutson said the questions asked during the process were valuable in reflecting on the partnership’s performance.

**“ Begin with the end in mind. Know your plan front to back and upside down, figure out your role, act where you are able, and celebrate success.”**

— Tyler Knutson, Yellow Medicine SWCD manager, on what he learned from the pilot project



for the partnership’s accomplishments.

After members received the PRAP document, Knutson said the partnership began to implement a web-based workflow and database tracking system to help manage contracts and aggregate progress data.

“Don’t be thinking about it, but actively track plan progress as you go,” Knutson said when asked what advice he might have for other partnerships. “Know and act on the fact that people are going to ask how implementation is going, and you need answers.”

With dedicated One Watershed, One Plan funds, Knutson said the Yellow Medicine Partnership is now completing previously prioritized projects.

“Next, we will begin to target and market more directly into the areas of the plan that haven’t got attention yet. This will require more active coordination among partners and finding creative ways to match the needs of residents and the goals of these plans adopted by local governments,” Knutson said.

The PRAP program will complete watershed-based assessments in 2023 for the Root River, North Fork Crow, Lake Superior North and Red Lake River partnerships. With the [Yellow Medicine Partnership](#), those watersheds were the original One Watershed, One Plan program pilots.



*A floodplain wetland restoration adjacent to the Yellow Medicine River was nearly fully established in 2019. The land was enrolled in the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Wetlands Reserve Program. The project contributed to restored wetland acre goals within the Yellow Medicine River watershed.*

## Watershed-based assessment

### BWSR’s four-part review:

- Evaluates progress made toward water management entities’ goals
- Reviews entities’ adherence to statutory requirements, best standards and practices, and high-performance standards
- Evaluates internal and external partners’ working relationship
- Reviews assurance measures, completed as part of the Watershed-Based Implementation Funding policy

They gave staff members the opportunity to evaluate where they had been, and what adjustments were needed to successfully implement the Yellow Medicine’s comprehensive

watershed management plan.

The watershed-based PRAP assessment provided both recommendations for improvement and commendations