

One Watershed, One Plan

Guiding Principles

From the Board of Water and Soil Resources, State of Minnesota

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Policy Statement

Vision: BWSR's vision for *One Watershed, One Plan* is to align local water planning on major watershed boundaries with state strategies towards prioritized, targeted and measurable implementation plans – the next logical step in the evolution of water planning in Minnesota.

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to further outline the *One Watershed, One Plan* vision through providing the guiding principles that will direct and influence the program's future policies and procedures.

Guiding Principles

One Watershed, One Plan will result in plans with prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation actions that meet or exceed current water plan content standards.

One Watershed, One Plan will set standards for plan content that will be consistent with or exceed the plan approval standards currently in place for local water plans. Most existing water management plans contain adequate inventories of resources and assessment of issues. One Watershed, One Plan will build from this point, with an expanded focus on prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation of restoration and protection activities. The intent is for these future water plans to use existing plans, local knowledge and other studies and planning documents—including Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies developed through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency—to establish plans with clear implementation timelines, milestones, and cost estimates that will address the largest threats and provide the greatest environmental benefit unique to each watershed.

One Watershed, One Plan is not an effort to change local governance.

Local governments have been at the forefront of water management dating back to 1937 with the formation of the State's first soil and water conservation district. One Watershed, One Plan is intended to utilize the existing structures of counties, soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts and Metropolitan watershed management organizations by increasing collaboration and cooperation across political boundaries.

One Watershed, One Plan will strive for a systematic, watershed-wide, science-based approach to watershed management; driven by the participating local governments.

It is important for all communities to take part in managing their watersheds through goal setting, monitoring, restoring and protecting water resources and local habitats and ensuring a good quality of life for all who live, work, and recreate in those spaces. A decided “bottom up” approach for water management—allowing the key discussions of major water resource issues, concerns, problems, goals and objectives and potential solutions to originate and be first fully vetted at the stakeholder level—is envisioned. Expanding involvement and collaboration at the ground-level creates greater buy-in and support at all levels of government.

One Watershed, One Plan will use the state’s delineated major watersheds (8-digit hydrologic unit codes or HUC8) as the starting point for defining the preferred scale for local watershed management planning.

The Local Government Water Roundtable (LGWR), a collaboration between the Association of Minnesota Counties, the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, and the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, determined it is in the public interest to manage ground and surface water resources from the perspective of watersheds and aquifers and to achieve protection, preservation, enhancement, and restoration of the state's valuable water resources. This determination is consistent with the state’s water management policy, furthered through legislation passed in 2012 that provided BWSR with: the authority to develop and implement a comprehensive watershed management plan approach and to establish a suggested watershed boundary framework for implementing this planning approach. One Watershed, One Plan will transform the current system of water plans, largely organized on political boundaries, to one where plans are coordinated and consolidated largely on a watershed basis.

One Watershed, One Plan must involve a broad range of stakeholders to ensure an integrated approach to watershed management.

The underlying principle of watershed management is that people, land, and water are connected. People use land in a variety of ways, and affect ecosystems and ultimately their own communities for better or worse. Managing and protecting the environment while providing a high quality of life for people is a complex process that is most successful when governing bodies, community members, and experts in various fields are true partners in the planning process. One Watershed, One Plan envisions an approach that will pull parties together in every aspect of the water arena in a way that goes beyond the interests of any one government agency or stakeholder and in a way that has never been done before.

Plans developed within One Watershed, One Plan should embrace the concept of multiple benefits in the development and prioritization of implementation strategies and actions.

Prioritized, multi-benefit projects provide benefits to more than one group or interest and address more than one environmental resource within a watershed. These types of projects are necessary to build the support of citizens and agencies, achieve water quality and quantity goals, and produce the environmental goods and benefits that a healthy watershed provides. Examples of multiple benefits might include a combination of any of the following: flood control, water quality benefits, ecological benefits, administrative efficiencies, economic benefits, or others. Identification of and action on multi-benefit projects should be a priority in One Watershed, One Plan strategies and actions.

One Watershed, One Plan implementation will be accomplished through formal agreements among participating local governments on how to manage and operate the watershed.

Decision-making that spans political boundaries is essential to fully implement watershed management and achieve established goals for the watershed; therefore, formal agreements outlining the means and method for this decision-making are also essential.

One Watershed, One Plan planning and implementation efforts will recognize local commitment and contribution.

History shows us that when local water management programs and projects rely almost entirely on outside funding, they are unable to sustain themselves over time. Locally supported and funded technical, administration, support, and outreach activities that leverage funding from the State will be key to ensuring sustainable local government capabilities and long-term success on both the local level and watershed scale.