



Yellow Medicine Watershed: Planning for a new era in water management

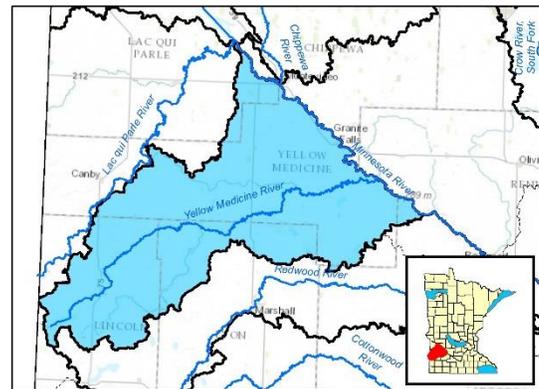
October 2015 Snapshots



Since submitting a nomination to be a part of *One Watershed, One Plan* in early 2014, Lyon, Lincoln, Yellow Medicine, and Lac qui Parle Counties and their Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), have been deeply engaged in making progress on the Yellow Medicine Watershed Plan.

One Watershed, One Plan has foundations in the Local Government Water Roundtable, in which the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASCWD), and the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD) committed to collaboration. The *One Watershed, One Plan* program, developed in 2013 and funded by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, offers grants and assistance to local governments charged with water management responsibility to help them make the transition to water planning on a watershed scale.

"I want to use this experience, being part of the Yellow Medicine River *One Watershed, One Plan* pilot, to develop a *One Watershed, One Plan* in the rest of my county's watersheds when the time comes," said Terry Wittnebel, Lac qui Parle Watershed District Manager. "I'm learning it is important to be very familiar with the water planning process outline before you start, and what is supposed to be part of each step, so you don't leave important decisions or data gathering until the last minute when you may not give a topic the thought it deserves."



Over the past thirteen months, the Yellow Medicine Watershed pilot project team has collaborated to determine watershed priorities. "We're reviewing goals and looking for gaps in the data," said Wittnebel. Since June 2014 when the BWSR Board approved the Yellow Medicine Watershed *One Watershed, One Plan* nomination, the Yellow Medicine pilot project team has worked hard to keep everyone—from farmers to elected officials—involved and engaged in the process.

"Advisory committees are extremely important and include all sectors of the community representing every aspect, including agricultural producers and city/township governments," said Kerry Netzke, Executive Director of Area II Minnesota River Basin Projects, Inc. "Be fully comprehensive and find good, dedicated volunteers to make up a solid, committed advisory committee who knows the watershed intimately."

The Yellow Medicine Watershed pilot project team will review the plan as sections are written, and start talking about what administrative components, such as formal agreements, staffing changes, or partnerships, should be included in the plan.

"It is exciting and scary at the same time," said Lou Ann Nagel, Yellow Medicine SWCD Manager. "We're working through the hurdles. It is a lot more complicated when you're working with more entities, but it is a learning process, and we're progressing."

Next steps for the Yellow Medicine Watershed include getting the plan written in its entirety. The planning work group began weekly check-ins with the consultant in October 2015 to help everyone stay on track with the project timeline.

“We’re just getting down to the nitty gritty with our priorities,” said Netzke. “We need to sit down and ask 1) How to reach these priorities? and 2) Who is going to do what? There are many partners involved and we need to explore sharing resources and staff for efficiency and to avoid duplication.”

More and more Minnesotans are starting to recognize the need to talk about water quality, quantity, and management. The Yellow Medicine *One Watershed, One Plan* pilot project is pioneering Minnesota’s water future, setting the groundwork to permanently improve water quality across Minnesota.