Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Policy Committee Meeting Agenda

Date / Time: Wednesday, October 8 8:30am - 10:00am

Location: Watab Town Hall
660 75th St NW, Sauk Rapids, MN 56379

Invitees:

Organization	Policy Member	Staff
Benton County	Primary: Ed Popp Alternate: Scott Johnson	Roxanne Achman, Luke Edlund
Benton SWCD	Primary: Chuck Rau Alternate: Wade Bastian	Mike McMillin
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	Primary: Kelly Applegate Alternate: Susan Klapel	Perry Bunting, Robert Wall
Morrison County	Primary: Randy Winscher Alternate: TBD	Amy Kowalzek
Morrison SWCD	Primary: Scott Saehr Alternate: Dave Hubner	Shannon Wettstein, Destiny McDonald
Stearns County	Primary: Joe Perske Alternate: Tarryl Clark	Emily Forbord, Becky Schlorf
Stearns SWCD	Primary: Arlyn Lawrenz Alternate: Tom Gregory	Kyle Weimann, Stephanie Hatzenbihler
BWSR	N/A	Zach Guttormson, Brad Wozney

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Policy Committee Meeting Agenda

Agenda Topic	Action	Time
Call to order 1. Introductions: Name, Title, Organization	Discussion	8:30 - 8:35am 5 minutes
2. Approve Meeting Minutes from 9.10.2025	Decision	8:35 - 8:37am 2 minutes
3. Meeting Expectations: Open Meeting Law, Robert's Rules, Public Comment Period	Information	8:37 - 8:40am 3 minutes
4. Public Comment Period (limit 3 minutes per person, up to 5 persons)	As Needed	8:40 - 8:55am 15 minutes
5. Fiscal Agent Report on Planning Grant and Landscape Stewardship Plan	Information	8:55 - 9:00am 5 minutes
6. Recent Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Summary	Information	9:00 - 9:05am 5 minutes
7. Technical Advisory Committee - consider new members	Decision	9:05 - 9:10am 5 minutes
8. Technical Advisory Committee - Ex Officio Member	Discussion, Decision	9:10 - 9:15am 5 minutes
9. Community Advisory Committee Update	Information	9:15 - 9:20am 5 minutes
10. Timeline for Plan Development	Information	9:20 - 9:25am 5 minutes
11. Land and Water Resources Narrative - consider approval	Decision	9:25 - 9:35am 10 minutes
12. Opportunity Statements Concept	Information	9:35 - 9:50am 15 minutes
Adjourn		10:00am

A healthy and accessible Mississippi River Sartell Watershed,
ensuring sustainable natural resources for our community's future.

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Date / Time: Wednesday, September 10 8:30am - 10:00am
Location: Royalton City Hall
12 N Birch St N, Royalton, MN 56373

Invitees:

Organization	Policy Member	Staff
Benton County	Primary: Ed Popp Alternate: Scott Johnson	Roxanne Achman, Luke Edlund
Benton SWCD	Primary: Chuck Rau Alternate: Wade Bastian	Mike McMillin
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	Primary: Kelly Applegate Alternate: Susan Klapel	Perry Bunting, Robert Wall
Morrison County	Primary: Randy Winscher Alternate: TBD	Amy Kowalzek
Morrison SWCD	Primary: Scott Saehr Alternate: Dave Hubner	Shannon Wettstein, Destiny McDonald
Stearns County	Primary: Joe Perske Alternate: Tarryl Clark	Emily Forbord, Becky Schlorf
Stearns SWCD	Primary: Arlyn Lawrenz Alternate: Tom Gregory	Kyle Weimann, Stephanie Hatzenbihler
BWSR	N/A	Zach Guttormson, Brad Wozney

Attendance:

Policy Committee Members: Joe Perske (Stearns Co), Ed Popp (Benton Co), Chuck Rau (BSWCD), Scott Saehr (MSWCD), Randy Winscher (Morrison Co)

Staff and Guests: Stephanie Hatzenbihler (SCD), Rachel Olm (HEI), Emily Forbord (Stearns Co), Mike McMillin (BSWCD), Destiny McDonald (MSWCD), Robert Wall (MLBO), Duane Kroll (Corn Growers), , Paul Anez (Anez consulting), Kyle Weinmann (SCD), Shannon Wettstein (MSWCD). Online: Becky Schlorf (Stearns Co), Dan Whitney (Consultant from Wadena), Chad Anderson

Agenda Topic	Time	Minutes
Call to order Introductions: Name, Title, Organization	8:30 - 8:40am 10 minutes	Meeting was called to order at 8:35am
Approve Meeting Minutes from 6.13.2025	8:40 - 8:45am 5 minutes	● Minutes approved from previous meeting: ○ Rau made a motion to approve the 6.13.2025 Policy Committee Meeting Minutes as presented, Perske seconded the motion, all in favor. Motion carried.
Public Kickoff Summary and Results	8:45 - 9:00am 15 minutes	● Discussion on the public kickoff event participation, challenges, and recommendations for additional community engagement efforts.

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Technical Advisory Committee & Community Advisory Committee Membership	9:00 - 9:30am 30 minutes	● Committee representation was described and involvement. ● There was discussion on who could be members of each committee. ● Decision on TAC representative of ag organizations: ○ Rau made a motion to add up to 3 representatives from agriculture organizations to serve on the Technical Advisory Committee, Winscher seconded the motion, all were in favor. Motion carried. ● CAC membership decision: ○ Rau made a motion that membership of the Community Advisory Committee will be up to 3 representatives appointed by each MOA member, second byPerske, all were in favor. Motion carried.
Timeline for Plan Development	9:30 - 9:35am 5 minutes	tabled until next meeting
Consider approval of the Land and Water Resources Narrative	9:35 - 9:40am 5 minutes	Tabled until next meeting
Review opportunity statements concept & example drafts	9:40 - 9:55am 15 minutes	Tabled until next meeting
Adjourn	9:55 - 10:00am 5 minutes	Adjourned at 10:05 by Popp

Minutes prepared by Emily Forbord, Stearns County Environmental Services.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

This agreement (Agreement) is made and entered into by and among:

> The Counties of Benton, Morrison, and Stearns by and through their respective County Board of Commissioners, and the Non-Removable Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (MLBO), a federally recognized American Indian Tribal government. The Benton, Morrison, and Stearns Soil and Water Conservation Districts, by and through their respective Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors, and MLBO by and through its Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, are collectively referred to as the "Parties" and individually each is referred to as a "Party."

WHEREAS, the Counties of this Agreement are political subdivisions of the State of Minnesota, with authority to carry out environmental programs and land use controls, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 375 and as otherwise provided by law; and

WHEREAS, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) of this Agreement are political subdivisions of the State of Minnesota, with statutory authority to carry out erosion control and other soil and water conservation programs, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103C and as otherwise provided by law; and

WHEREAS, MLBO is a local governmental unit of the State of Minnesota pursuant to Minnesota Statute §471.59, subdivision 1. (a) & (b) and as that definition is incorporated into Minnesota Statute §103B; and the MLBO Department of Natural Resources has the authority to manage its natural resources pursuant to Mille Lacs Band Statute Title 11; and portions of the MLBO Reservation is situated within the Mississippi River-Sartell Watershed area and there are contiguous MLBO lands affected by Watershed flow as depicted on Attachment A; and

WHEREAS, MLBO strives to work cooperatively and collaboratively with other governmental agencies with which it shares an interest in maintaining, managing and protecting natural resources and desires to join in this Agreement with the other Parties. For this purpose and within this Agreement MLBO is also identified or referred to as a "Party" or "Parties," "County" or "SWCD"; and

WHEREAS, the Parties to this Agreement have a common interest and statutory authority to prepare, adopt, and assure implementation of a comprehensive watershed management plan in the Mississippi River Sartell Watershed to conserve soil and water resources through the implementation of practices, programs, and regulatory controls that effectively control or prevent erosion, sedimentation, siltation and related pollution in order to preserve natural resources, ensure continued soil productivity, protect water quality, reduce damages caused by floods, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, and protect public lands and waters; and

WHEREAS, with matters that relate to coordination of water management authorities pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapters 103B, 103C, and 103D with public drainage systems pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103E, this Agreement does not change the rights or obligations of the public drainage system authorities~~.~~; and

WHEREAS, the Parties have formed this Agreement for the specific goal of developing a plan pursuant to Minnesota Statutes § 103B.801, Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning, also known as *One Watershed, One Plan* and pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 471.59 to cooperatively exercise powers and protections.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Parties hereto agree as follows:

1. **Purpose:** The Parties to this Agreement recognize the importance of a collaborative effort to plan and implement protection and restoration efforts for the Mississippi River Sartell Watershed (depicted on Attachment A). The purpose of this Agreement is to collectively develop and adopt, as local government units, a coordinated watershed management plan for implementation per the provisions of the Plan. Parties signing this Agreement will be collectively referred to as the Mississippi River Sartell Watershed Collaborative. The Parties have formed this Agreement for the specific goal of developing a plan pursuant to Minnesota Statutes § 103B.801, Comprehensive Watershed Management Planning, also known as *One Watershed, One Plan* and pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 471.59 to cooperatively exercise powers and protections.

1. **Term:** This Agreement is effective upon signature of all Parties in consideration of the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Operating Procedures for One Watershed, One Plan (version 3.0, August 24, 2023); and will remain in effect until 1-year after the term of the BWSR One Watershed, One Plan Planning Grant Agreement, unless the Agreement is terminated earlier by agreement of the required parties, or if earlier terminated by law.

2. **Adding Additional Parties:** Other political subdivisions within the Mississippi River Sartell Watershed may become a party to the Agreement by indicating its qualifications and intent in a resolution adopted by its governing board to become a Party to this Agreement, said governing board must execute the current version of this Agreement.

3. **Withdrawal of Parties:** A Party desiring to leave the membership of this Agreement shall indicate its intent in writing to the Parties in the form of a governing board resolution. Notice must be made at least 30 days in advance of leaving the Agreement. If one of the required Parties withdraws from this Agreement, it does not make this Agreement null and void. If the remaining Parties determine an adverse impact will occur, the remaining Parties will hold discussions with BWSR regarding reallocation of duties, funds, and responsibilities of the project as a whole.

4. **General Provisions**:

    a. **Funding:** Individual Parties will not be required to contribute funds to this collaboration except as stated below. The expectation is that the BWSR grant will fully fund developing a *One Watershed, One Plan* pursuant to Minnesota Statutes § 103B.801.

    b. **Compliance with Laws/Standards:** The Parties agree to abide by all federal, state, and local laws; statutes, ordinances, rules, and regulations now in effect or hereafter adopted pertaining to this Agreement or to the facilities, programs, and staff for which the Agreement is responsible.

    c. **Liability of the Parties:** Each Party to this Agreement shall be liable for the acts of its officers, employees or agents and the results thereof to the extent authorized or limited by law and shall not be responsible for the acts of any other Party, its officers, employees, or agents. The provisions of the Municipal Tort Claims Act, Minnesota Statute Chapter 466 and other applicable laws govern liability of the Parties. To the full extent permitted by law, actions by the Parties, their

respective officers, employees, and agents pursuant to this Agreement are intended to be and shall be construed as a "cooperative activity." It is the intent of the Parties that they shall be deemed a "single governmental unit" for the purposes of liability, as set forth in Minnesota Statutes § 471.59, subd. 1a(b). For purposes of Minnesota Statutes § 471.59, subd. 1a(a), no Party agrees to be responsible for the acts or omissions of another Party, and it is the intent of each Party that this Agreement does not create any liability or exposure of one Party for the acts or omissions of any other Party. The Parties acknowledge that MLBO is not subject to the protections or provisions of Minnesota Statutes referenced within this subsection(d) above but rather MLBO employees may be protected from personal liability under the Federal Torts Claims Act (28 U.S.C. Part VI, Chapter 171 and 28 U.S.C. Section1346) and indemnification provisions under MLBO statutes.

d. Records Retention and Data Practices: The Parties agree that the records created pursuant to the terms of this Agreement will be retained by the fiscal agent in a manner that meets its records retention schedule that has been reviewed and approved by the State in accordance with Minnesota Statutes § 138.17. The Parties further agree that each will manage its records prepared or maintained in furtherance of the Agreement in accordance with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. At the time this agreement expires, copies of all records will be turned over to the project fiscal agent Morrison Soil and Water Conservation District for continued retention.

e. Timeliness: The Parties agree to perform obligations under this Agreement in a timely manner and keep each other informed about any delays that may occur.

f. Extension: The Parties may extend the termination date of this Agreement upon agreement by all Parties.

g. Entire Agreement: This Agreement, including any and all attachments referenced herein, contains the entire understanding and agreement of the Parties and there have been no other promises, representations, agreements, warranties, or undertakings by any of the Parties, either oral or written, of any character or nature.

h. Amendments: This Agreement may be altered, amended, or modified only by an instrument in writing executed by the Parties to this Agreement and by no other means.

i. This is a collaborative effort by the Parties and as such, no employees shall be hired as part of this project.

j. Open Meeting Law: All committees established under this Agreement shall comply with the Minnesota Open Meeting law, if applicable, as set forth in Minnesota Statute Chapter 13D.

k. Contracts: As the fiscal agent, the fiscal agent will enter into an agreement with the State and a consultant to assist in the development of the plan.

5. **Administration:**

a. **Establishment of Committees for Development of the Plan.** The Parties to this Agreement may establish committees as follows. Each Party will designate one representative, who must be an elected or appointed member of its governing board, to a Policy Committee for development of the watershed-based plan and may appoint one or more technical representatives to the Technical Advisory Committee for development of the plan in consideration of the BWSR Operating Procedures for One Watershed, One Plan.

i. The Policy Committee (PC)

1. The Policy Committee will meet as needed to propose the content of the plan, serve as a liaison to their respective governing boards, and make recommendations to their respective governing board regarding the plan. Each representative shall have one vote during the planning process. A representative may only represent one party.

2. Each governing board may choose one alternate to serve on the Policy Committee as needed in the absence of the designated member.

ii. The Steering Committee (SC)

1. The Steering Committee will be composed of staff from local agencies formally participating in 1W1P by signing the Agreement and BWSR staff acting as advisors. The Steering Committee will provide the logistical organization of the planning process and associated meetings. They may make recommendations to the Technical Advisory Committee and to the Policy Committee.

iii. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

1. The Technical Advisory Committee will meet monthly or as needed to assist and provide technical support and make recommendations to the Policy Committee on the development and content of the plan. Members of the Technical Advisory Committee may not be a current board member of any of the Parties.

2. TAC is responsible for guiding the major elements of the project, working with consultants on plan content, making plan recommendations to the Policy Committee, evaluating technical information, and ensuring integration of additional Advisory Committee(s) that may be formed by the Parties.

3. TAC will consist of LGU technical representatives, state agency representatives, and representatives of organizations, agencies, and stakeholder groups as determined by the Parties.

4. TAC will make decisions by vote of a simple majority of the members present. The decision-making process will include a minimum advance notice on an agenda for decisions at a meeting.

iv. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

1. The Parties may form an optional Community Advisory Committee that will be composed of community stakeholders selected by the Parties. The CAC will meet for a frequency and length determined by the Parties. The CAC will make recommendations to the Technical Advisory Committee and Policy Committee on the development and content of the plan.

b. **Submittal of the Plan.** The Policy Committee will recommend the plan to the Parties of this Agreement. The Parties will be responsible for initiating a formal review process for the watershed-based plan conforming to Minnesota Statutes Chapters 103B and 103D, including public hearings if required. Upon completion of local review and comment, and approval of the plan for submission by each Party, the Policy Committee will submit the watershed-based plan jointly to BWSR for review and approval.

c. **Adoption of the Plan.** The Parties agree to adopt and begin implementation of the plan within 120 days of receiving notice of state approval. Each Party upon approval of the plan will provide notice of plan adoption pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapters 103B and 103D.

6. **Fiscal Agent:** Morrison SWCD will act as the fiscal agent for the purposes of this Agreement and agrees to:

a. Accept all responsibilities associated with the implementation of the BWSR grant agreement for developing a watershed-based plan.

b. Perform financial transactions as part of grant agreement and contract implementation.

c. Annually provide a full and complete audit report to the Parties

d. Provide the Policy Committee and Parties with the records necessary to describe the financial condition of the BWSR grant agreement.

e. Retain fiscal records consistent with the fiscal agent's records retention schedule. All records created pursuant to this Agreement will be retained by Morrison SWCD per its adopted record retention schedule.

7. **Grant Administration**: Morrison SWCD will act as the grant administrator for the purposes of this Agreement and agrees to provide the following services:

a. Accept all day-to-day responsibilities associated with the implementation of the BWSR grant agreement for developing a watershed-based plan, including being the primary BWSR contact for the *One Watershed, One Plan* Grant Agreement and being responsible for BWSR reporting requirements associated with the grant agreement.

b. Provide the Policy Committee and Parties with the records necessary to describe the planning condition of the BWSR grant agreement.

8. **Project Coordination**: Stearns SWCD staff will coordinate, schedule, send notifications, prepare agendas for committees, and perform related tasks to keep the project moving as scheduled. Staff will act as the point of contact with consultants for the Collaborative.

9. **The following Parties agree to provide the following services:**

    a. Grant Administration/Fiscal Agent: Morrison SWCD

    b. Policy and Advisory Committee Coordination: Stearns SWCD

    c. Outreach Coordinator: Stearns SWCD

    d. Public Notice Requirements: Morrison SWCD

    In the event of a vacancy in the above-listed roles, the Party responsible for the role will determine if there is adequate capacity within the organization to fulfill the listed role. If the respective Party determines it no longer has capacity and would like to relinquish its duties, they must inform the other Parties. The Parties to this Agreement will then reassign the service to another Party with the capacity to fulfill the grant agreement.

10. Counterparts and Electronic Signatures: This Memorandum of Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original and all of which when taken together shall constitute one and the same Agreement. Any counterpart signature may be adhered hereto electronically and transmitted digitally or by sending a scanned copy by electronic mail or similar electronic transmission shall be deemed an original signature.

11. **Authorized Representatives:** The following persons will be the primary contacts for all matters concerning this Agreement:

Benton County
Roxanne Achman or successor
Land Services Director
531 Dewey St., P.O. Box 129
Foley, MN 56329
Telephone: 320-968-5069

Benton SWCD
Gerry Maciej or successor
District Manager
14 2nd Ave W.
Foley, MN 56329
Telephone: 320-968-5300

Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
Perry Bunting or successor
Director of Environmental Programs
Robert Wall or successor
Watershed Coordinator
43408 Oodena Drive

Onamia, MN 56359
Telephone: 320-532-4772

Morrison County
Amy Kowalzek or successor
Director of Land Services
213 1st Ave. SE
Little Falls, MN 56345
Telephone: 320-632-0170

Morrison SWCD
Shannon Wettstein or successor
District Manager
16776 Heron Road
Little Falls, MN 56345
Telephone: 320-631-3551

Stearns County
Rebecca Schlorf or successor
Environmental Services Supervisor
3301 County Road 138
Waite Park, MN 56387
Telephone: 320-656-3613

Stearns SWCD
Dennis Fuchs or successor
District Administrator
110 2nd St S. Suite 128
Waite Park, MN 56387
Telephone: 320-251-7800

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF the Parties have duly executed this Memorandum of Agreement by their duly authorized officers. *(Repeat this page for each participant)*

PARTY: _____

APPROVED:

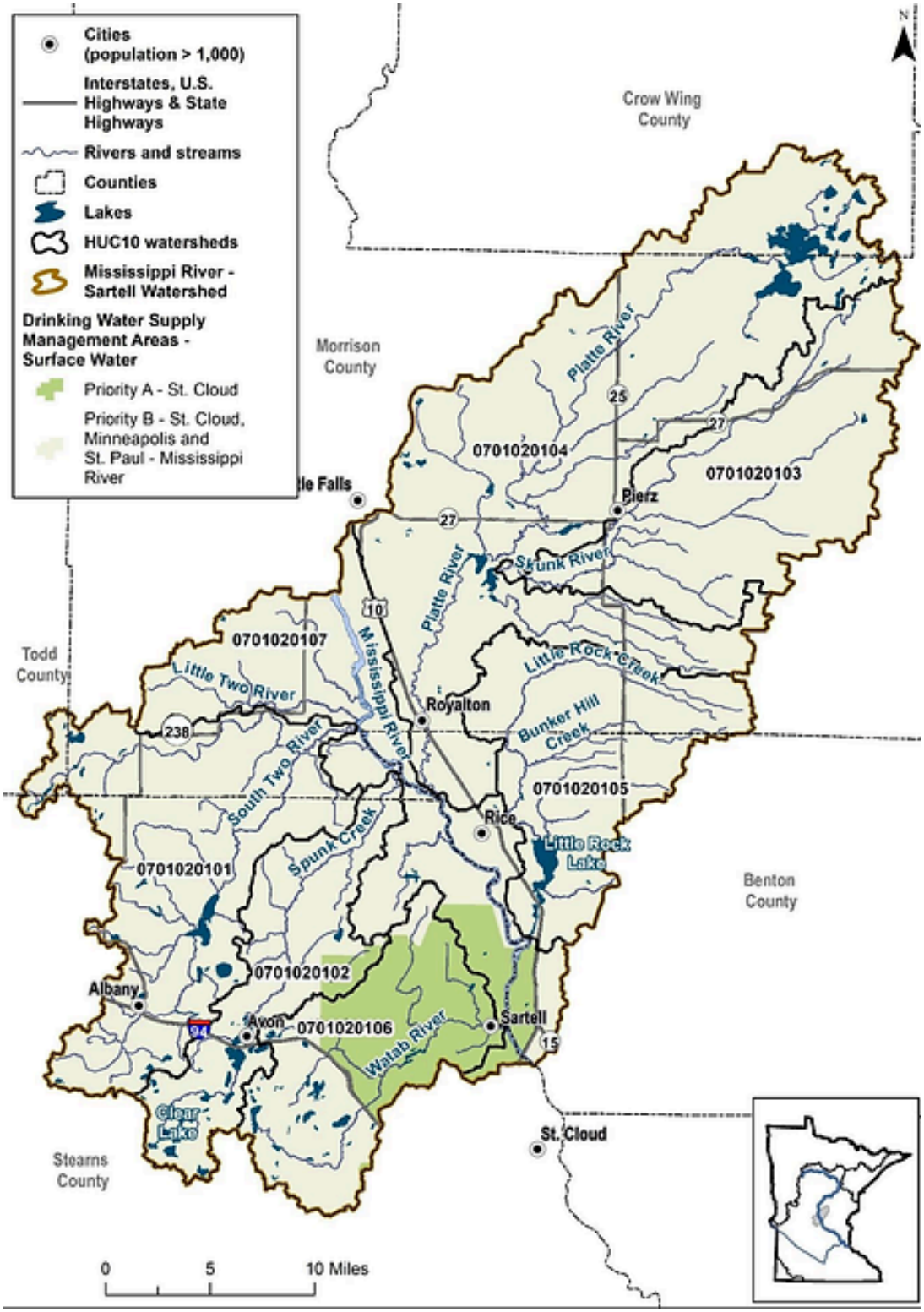
BY: _____
Board Chair Date

BY: _____
District Manager/Administrator/Technician Date

APPROVED AS TO FORM *(use if necessary)*

BY: _____
Attorney

Attachment A



Mississippi River Sartell One Watershed, One Plan

TAC Meeting Report • September 10, 2025

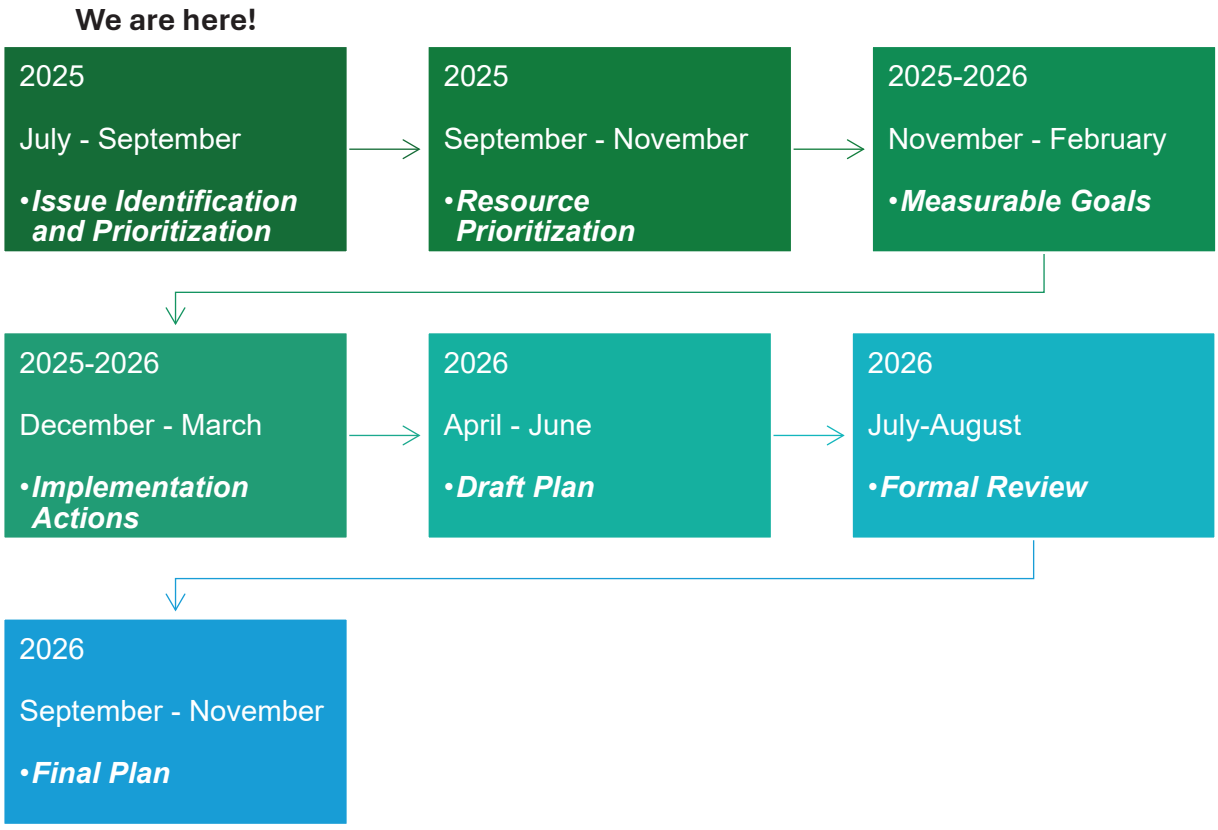
Attendees

In-person: Stephanie Hatzenbihler (SCD), Rachel Olm (HEI), Tim Terrel (MHB), Phil Votruba (MPCA), Duane Kroll (CG), Paul Anez (Anez Consulting), Nikki Blake-Bradley (MNDNR), Luke Edlund (Benton Co), Robert Wall (MLBO), Kyle Weinmann (SCD), Steve Commerford (Ag), Destiny McDonald (MSWCD), Mike McMillin (BSWD), Emily Forbord (Stearns Co)

Online: Moriya Rufer (HEI), Becky Schlorf (Stearns Co), Dan Whitney (Ag)

Planning Timeline

This graphic is a simplified version of the overall timeline. This timeline is a general guide, and can be adapted to fit group needs as we go.



Meeting Summary

Community Engagement Regroup

The TAC discussed the process for determining Community Advisory Committee involvement and representation. The direction is to have local Boards decide involvement by the end of October. The TAC also discussed ways to bolster community engagement, including "waterside chats" and a newsletter of planning milestones.

Opportunity Statements

During the August TAC meeting, the TAC recommended transitioning "issue statements" to "opportunity statements." This change was recommended based on community and TAC feedback. The revised Opportunity Statements were distributed as part of TAC meeting packet material. During the meeting, members of the TAC provided feedback on how to characterize each Opportunity Statement, with the intent of arriving at an "80%" draft.

Next: As an outcome of the discussion, HEI will revise all Opportunity Statements and distribute to the TAC for wordsmithing and revisions. HEI will then revise the Opportunity Statements one more time and present the final draft in October TAC meeting packet materials. Statements will also be prioritized during the October TAC meeting.

Resource Prioritization

HEI provided an introduction to resource prioritization, with some draft examples of prioritization outcomes. Resource prioritization will occur for lakes, streams, groundwater, and lands. Feedback was received from the group on what data to use and editorial revisions to the process flowchart.

Next: HEI will present a draft resource priorities for October TAC meeting packet materials. During the October meeting, the TAC will recommend feedback to arrive at a list of priority resources.

2025 Meeting Timeline and Milestones

Below is a timeline that summarizes the anticipated Steering, TAC, and Policy committee meetings and meeting milestones for the Mississippi River Sartell 1W1P process. Timeline is subject to change based on meeting discussions.

	Committee	Milestones
OCT	Policy	Approve LWRN, Overview of issue/ opportunity statement direction
	TAC	Finalize priority opportunity statements, finalize resource prioritization, Introduce goals
	Steering	Monthly coordination
NOV	Policy	Approve opportunity statements, Approve resource prioritization
	TAC	Review Priority Issues and Resource Prioritization plan sections, continue goals
	Steering	Monthly coordination
DEC	TAC	No meeting: Assignment to review draft goals and plan sections
	Steering	Monthly coordination

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed (MRSW)
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

2025-2026

Agriculture Candidates for TAC

1. Paul Anez, Independent Agriculture Consultant
2. Randy Klaphake, Upper Mississippi Irrigators Association
3. Duane Kroll, Corn & Soybean Growers Association of Morrison & Crow Wing

Purpose:

The purpose of an advisory committee is to make recommendations on the MRSW Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan content and plan implementation to the policy committee. The committee will assist and provide technical support and make recommendations to the Policy Committee on the development and content of the plan. This is a required committee in BWSR's Operating Procedures in order to meet public and stakeholder participation goals and requirements identified in rule and statute for existing local water plans.

Meeting Information:

- Monthly from May 2025 - June 2026, then as needed until local plan adoption.
- Plan for 3 hour meetings, but may be able to shift to 2 hours later in the process.
- Second Wednesdays at 10am - 1pm
- Meetings will mostly be held in person at a location in the watershed; however, an online attendance option will be offered to accommodate members as needed. Meeting locations:
    - Watab Township Hall (primary)
    - Royalton City Hall (backup)

Primary Contact Person:
Stephanie Hatzenbihler, Water Plan Coordinator,
Stearns Conservation District
Stephanie.hatzenbihler@mn.nacdnet.net
office: 320-345-6492
cell: 320-293-9311

Backup Contact Person:
Shannon Wettstein, District Manager,
Morrison Soil and Water
shannon.wettstein@morrisonswcd.org
office: 320-631-3553
cell: 320-547-1651

Membership:

- **Must** - state agency representatives
- **Should** - tribal representatives, federal agency representatives, MRSW steering committee, drainage authority representatives, county highway staff, planning & zoning staff.
- **May** - LGU technical representatives, representations of organizations, and representatives of stakeholder groups.
- **Ineligible** - Current board member of any of the Parties in the MOA

The following groups will be included in the planning through community engagement efforts:

- City representatives
- Township representatives

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed (MRSW)
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

2025-2026

- Wildlife organization representatives
- Lake Association representatives
- Agriculture organization representatives
- Environmental non-profit representatives

Organization	#	Organization	#
Department of Natural Resources	1	Todd SWCD	17
Pollution Control Agency	2	Crow Wing County	18
Department of Agriculture	3	Crow Wing SWCD	19
Department of Health	4	Mille Lacs County	20
Environmental Quality Board	5	Mille Lacs SWCD	21
Board of Water and Soil Resources	6	Mississippi Headwaters Board	22
NRCS	7	LegacyWorks Group - Sentinel Landscapes	23
US FWS - Crane Meadows	8		
Department of Transportation	9	Agriculture Organizations - up to 3 positions	24
Benton County	10		
Benton SWCD	11		
Morrison County	12		
Morrison SWCD	13		
Stearns County	14		
Stearns SWCD	15		
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	16		

Membership History

1. TAC was formed by the Policy Committee in April 2025
2. First TAC meeting was held on May 14, 2025
3. Request received by MOA partners to consider adding LegacyWorks Group - Sentinel Landscapes representative to TAC as there was a staff transition earlier in the year and it was not included in original TAC membership.
4. PC approved addition of LegacyWorks Group - Sentinel Landscapes during June 2025
5. TAC meetings have been held in June & July
6. Public Kickoff Event held July 30 and feedback received that more agriculture representatives are needed.
7. TAC had an August meeting and invited two agriculture representatives to join as guests.
8. PC votes to add up to 3 position on the TAC for agriculture organization in September 2025

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

Selecting Members Guide
MOA members should aim to appoint representatives to the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) by October 31, 2025.

The first CAC meeting will occur the week of November 17th. Representatives will choose ONE time slot that works best for them for an in-person meeting located within the watershed.

- Tuesday, November 18th 2pm - 4pm
- Thursday, November 20th 6pm - 8pm

It's strongly encouraged to ensure that representatives are available for one of these time slots.

Process steps for selecting members:

1. Invite fellow MOA staff from your organization to brainstorm a list of individuals within your jurisdiction and within the watershed that would be able to serve on the CAC.
2. Consult with the list of MRSW stakeholder groups to determine the perspectives represented by the individuals on the consideration list.
3. Two approach options to explore
    a. Present the full list of candidates to LGU Board, select top candidates, then call candidates in order of preference until 3 representatives have agreed to serve on CAC. Next LGU board meeting appoint CAC members
    b. Internal LGU staff vet candidates on a brainstormed list and select top candidates, then call candidates in order of preferences until at least 3 representatives have expressed interest and ability to serve on CAC. Present vetted list to LGU Board for final selection and appoint CAC members.
4. For the final list of appointed CAC members, send CAC member names, emails, and phone numbers to Stephanie for addition to the CAC membership list by October 31, 2025.

Upcoming MOA member LGU Board Meetings

Benton County - September 23, October 7 & 21
Benton SWCD - September 24 & October 22
MLBO - weekly on Wednesdays
Morrison County - October 7 & 21
Morrison SWCD - September 26 & October 24
Stearns County - September 23, October 7 & 21
Stearns SWCD - October 14

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

Purpose:
The purpose of an advisory committee is to make recommendations on the plan content and plan implementation to the policy committee. The committee will assist and provide community input and make recommendations to the Policy Committee on the development and content of the plan. This is an optional committee in BWSR's Operating Procedures in order to meet public and stakeholder participation goals and requirements identified in rule and statute for existing local water plans.

Participation Level: Involve on IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Objective: Creating opportunities for the target audiences to provide input and ideas to develop the plan. Stakeholders are involved early in the process and are part of developing the ideas. The MRSW Collaborative will make a final determination of how to move forward but commits to considering input and ideas from stakeholders in the final decisions.

Promise to the public: We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the resources and issues that are developed. We will provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

Meeting Frequency and Goals:

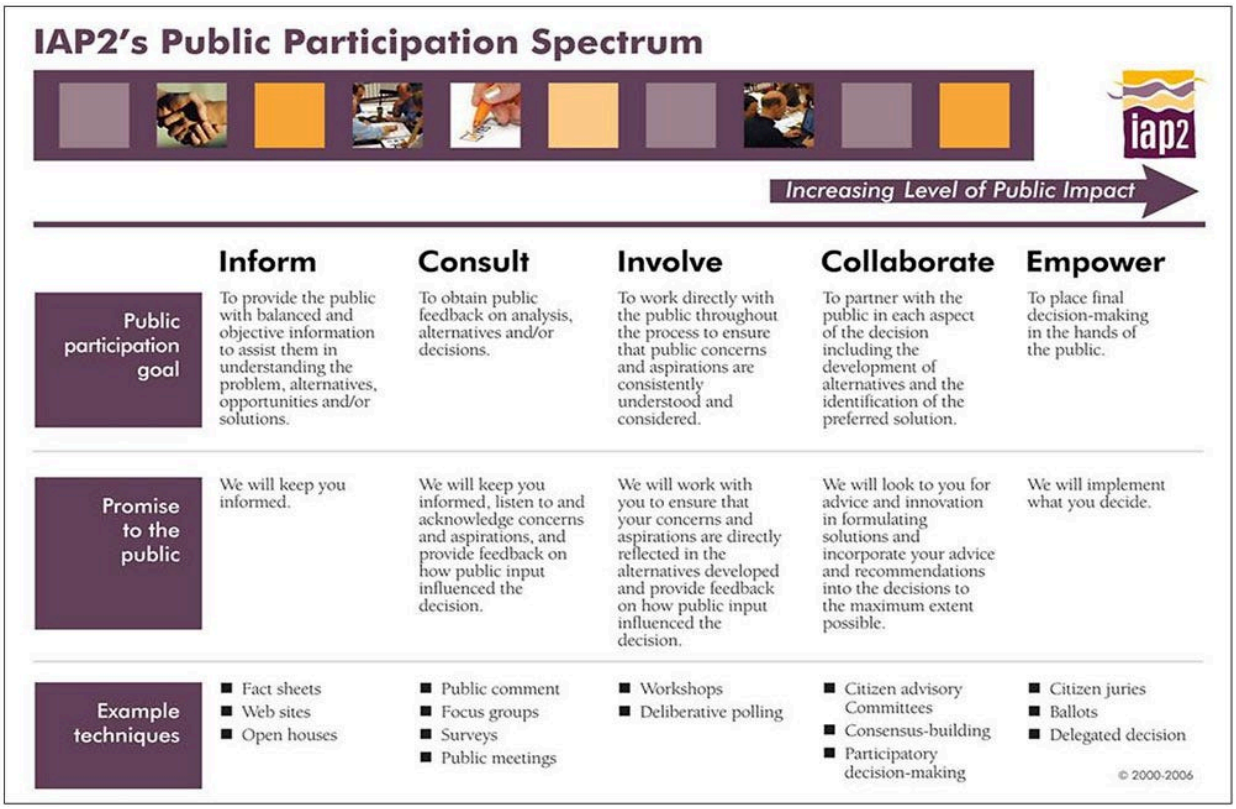
- Fall 2025 - Spring 2026, Meets at critical phases during planning
- 1st meeting goals: aiming for October/November
    - Provide input and feedback on priority issue statements, priority resources lists, and desired future conditions
    - Brainstorm ideas for measurable goals
- 2nd meeting goals: aiming for January/February
    - Provide input and feedback on measurable goals, targeting criteria, and additional review from 1st meeting if needed
    - Brainstorm ideas for implementation strategies and programs (public participation & engagement, data collection & monitoring, regulation & enforcement, financial assistance programs)
- 3rd meeting goals: aiming for March/April
    - Provide input and feedback on priority areas, implementation table format, implementation program frameworks, and additional review from prior meetings if needed
    - Discuss process for draft plan review
- 4th & 5th meetings - draft plan review or additional items as needed.

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

Target Audiences:

- Residents: Homeowners, renters, and individuals living within the watershed boundaries.
- Landowners: Private property owners, including agricultural and forested land.
- Businesses: Commercial and industrial operations within the watershed.
- Agricultural Producers: Farmers and other agricultural operators.
- Recreational Users: Anglers, boaters, hikers, and others who enjoy the watershed's natural resources.
- Local Organizations: Environmental groups, civic associations, lake associations, and other community-based organizations.
- Local Government Officials and Staff: City and county representatives involved in planning, zoning, and natural resource management.
- Educational Institutions: Schools, colleges, and universities within or near the watershed.

Due to constraints with time and the large geographic region, we aim to utilize these levels from IAP2: Involve, Consult, Inform



Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

Membership:

Representatives appointed by each MOA member
3 individuals appointed by Benton County, Benton SWCD, MLBO, Morrison County, Morrison SWCD, Stearns County, Stearns SWCD
Pros ● equal # of representatives from each MOA member for a total of 21 members ● MOA members can choose representatives directly
Cons ● May not represent all identified stakeholder groups/target audiences ● No representatives from non-MOA members (Todd, Crow Wing, Mille Lacs counties and SWCDs)
Membership Summary ● 3 representatives from Stearns County ● 3 representatives from Stearns SWCD ● 3 representatives from Morrison County ● 3 representatives from Morrison SWCD ● 3 representatives from Benton County ● 3 representatives from Benton SWCD ● 3 representatives from MLBO **Membership total = 21 CAC members**

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

Stakeholder Groups List

**This is not a complete list of possible stakeholder groups. This list was brainstormed by local LGU staff during We are Water MN hosting and the 1W1P pre-planning process.*

Wildlife organizations	Pheasants Forever
	Ducks Unlimited
	Trout unlimited
	Minnesota National Wild Turkey Federation
Sportsman's Club	St. Stephen Sportsman's Club
	Royalton Sportsman's Club
	Albany Sportsmen's Club
	Rice Sportsmen's Club
	Eastern Morrison County Sportsmen’s Club
Lake Associations	Little Rock Lake Association
	Two Rivers Lake Association
	Platte Lake Property Owners Association
	Lake Sullivan Association
Agriculture Organizations	Farm Bureau
	Farmers Union
	Corn Growers Association
	Soybean Growers Association
	Irrigators Association
	Dairy Association
	Cattlemans
	Prairie Farms
Agriculture Co-ops & Retailers	Centra Sota Co-op
Environmental Non-profits	Avon Hills Folk School
	Avon Hills Initiative
	Friends of Crane Meadows
	The Nature Conservancy
	Northern Waters Land Trust
	Great River Greening
Education	St. John's University
	College of St. Ben's

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

	University of Minnesota
Cities	Sartell
	Albany
	Avon
	Holdingford
	St. Stephen
	St. Joseph
	Rice
	Sauk Rapids
	Upsala
	Elmdale
	Bowlus
	Royalton
	Buckman
	Genola
	Pierz
	Hillman
	Lastrup
	Little Falls
	Harding
	St. Cloud (drinking water)
Dam Operators	Blanchard Dam operated by MN Power
	Sartell Dam (aka Champion Dam) operated by Eagle Creek Renewable Energy
	Sartell WMA - DNR Dam
Townships	Grey Eagle (Todd)
	Millwood (Stearns)
	Krain (Stearns)
	Holding (Stearns)
	Brockway (Stearns)
	Albany (Stearns)
	Farming (Stearns)
	Collegeville (Stearns)
	Avon (Stearns)

Mississippi River Sartell Watershed
Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

	St. Joseph (Stearns)
	St. Wendel (Stearns)
	Le Sauk (Stearns)
	Sauk Rapids (Benton)
	Watab (Benton)
	Langola (Benton)
	Graham (Benton)
	Mayhew Lake (Benton)
	Elmdate (Morrison)
	Two Rivers (Morrison)
	Swan River (Morrison)
	Bellevue (Morrison)
	Buckman (Morrison)
	Morrill (Morrison)
	Little Falls (Morrison)
	Agram (Morrison)
	Pierz (Morrison)
	Hillman (Morrison)
	Mount Morris (Morrison)
	Leigh (Morrison)
	Granite (Morrison)
	Buh (Morrison)
	Belle Prairie (Morrison)
	Richardson (Morrison)
	Pulaski (Morrison)
	Platte (Morrison)
	Kathio (Mille Lacs)
	Roosevelt (Crow Wing)
	Platte Lake (Crow Wing)
Residents/landowners	Lake shore
	Agriculture
	Urban

Milestone	RFP	HEI Recommendation	CAC Meetings	BWSR Deadlines
Identify and Prioritize Resources and Issues/Opportunities	Jul 2025 - Oct 2025	May 2025 - Oct 2025		
1st CAC Meeting			Oct-Nov 2025	
Establish Measurable Goals	Aug 2025 - May 2026	Aug 2025 - Mar 2026		
2nd CAC Meeting			Jan-Feb 2026	
Develop Implementation Schedule	Aug 2025 - May 2026	Aug 2025 - May 2026		
3rd CAC Meeting			Mar-Apr 2026	
Describe Implementation Programs & Plan Admin	Feb 2026 - May 2026	Feb 2026 - May 2026		
4th & 5th CAC Meeting			As needed for draft plan review	
Finalize Plan & Informal Review	May 2026 - Oct 2026	May 2026 - July 2026		
Formal Review, Public Hearing, Approval *see detail below*	Oct 2026 - July 2027	July 2026 - Jan 2027		
Adopt Plan Locally	Aug 2027 - Nov 2027	Jan 2027 - Apr 2027		
Submit FY2027 WBIF request and work plan			FY27 WBIF Allocation for MRSW is $1,252,807	30-Apr-27
Final FY2027 WBIF work plan submission date				30-Jun-27
***Formal Review & Approval Detail**				
Policy Committee approves for public comment		July 2026		
Public comment period (2 months)		July 2026 - Sept 2026		
Respond to public comments (3 months)		Sept 2026 - Nov 2026		
Public Hearing		Nov/Dec 2026		
Submit to BWSR		December 2026		
BWSR Review (3 months)		Dec 2026 - Mar 2026		
Central Region Committee Review		January 2027		
BWSR Board Meeting with plan approval		January 2027		

Section 2: Land and Water Resources Narrative

Introduction

The Mississippi River Sartell Watershed (MRSW) surrounds the Mississippi River as it flows past Little Falls to Sauk Rapids. The 656,800-acre **watershed*** is largely within Morrison, Benton, Stearns, and Crow Wing Counties, with a small amount of land in Todd and Mille Lacs Counties (Figure 2-1). The watershed is on land that is the traditional homelands of indigenous people, who were stewards of the land long before European settlement. The watershed contains hundreds of miles of streams and thousands of acres of lakes and protected land, making it home for the many residents who enjoy canoeing down the rivers, fishing in lakes, hiking in the woods, or hunting.

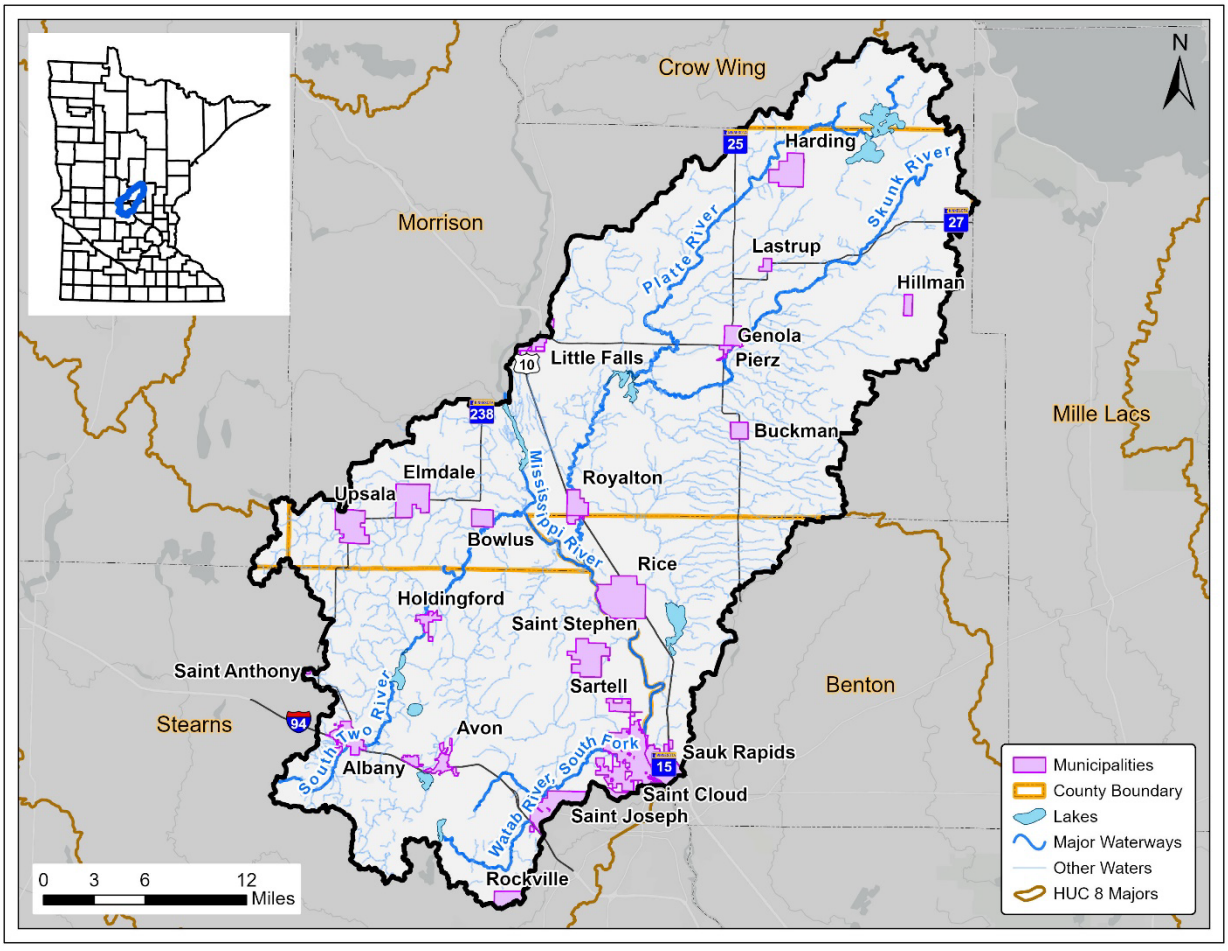


Figure 2-1. Location of the Mississippi River Sartell Watershed (MRSW).

**see Glossary for definitions of bolded terms*

The MRSW is located in the Upper Mississippi River Basin (Figure 2-2). The **headwaters** of the Mississippi River start in Itasca State Park. From there, the river flows through the Mississippi River Headwaters Watershed into the Mississippi River – Grand Rapids Watershed, then through the Mississippi River – Brainerd Watershed before it reaches the MRSW. Once the Mississippi River leaves the MRSW, it enters the Mississippi River – St. Cloud Watershed. Effective water quality management in the MRSW is vital both for protecting and restoring local natural resources, but also for downstream communities, as the Mississippi River is used as a drinking water source downstream.

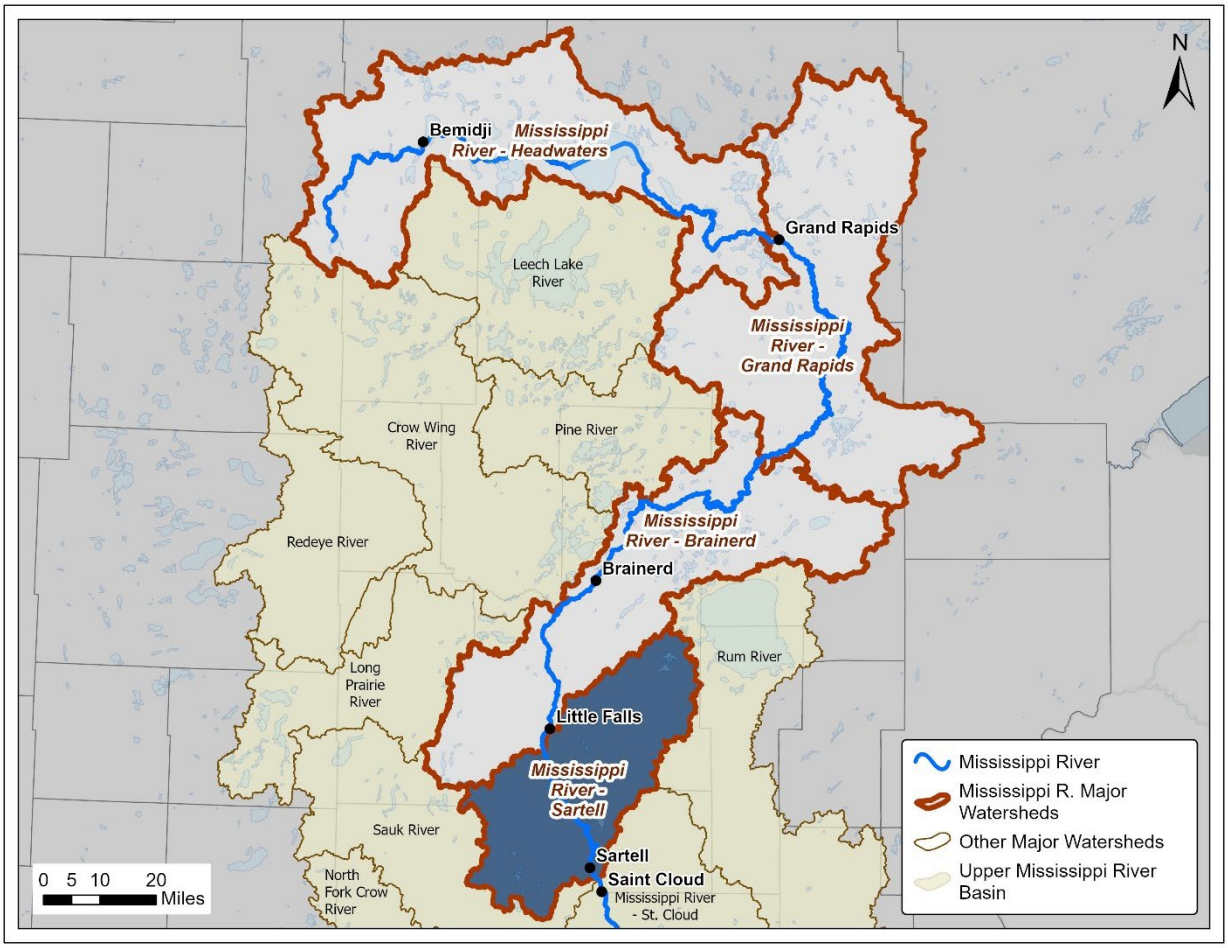


Figure 2-2. Location of the MRSW within the Upper Mississippi River Basin.

Past

Glaciation and Soils

Glaciation in the last ice age advanced across the watershed making the landscape what it is today. Near the close of the **Wisconsin stage** of glaciation, about 12,000 years ago, the waning Superior lobe retreated, leaving a complex **moraine** system in the northeast section of the watershed. The retreat of the Des Moines lobe is characterized by steep slopes, high hills and lakes formed in glacial end moraines and outwash plains. Glacial lakes associated with this last glacial advance contributed large volumes of meltwater to the Mississippi River Valley.

The northern portion of the MRSW has glacial soils, sandy outwash plains, and **lacustrine** basins. The southern area of the watershed differs with gently rolling till plains and moraines, outwash plains, and lacustrine basins (MPCA 2020). The sandy soils located around the Mississippi River have a high **infiltration** rate and are well suited for growing crops.

St. Wendel Tamarack Bog SNA (DNR)

The Mississippi River is the main body of water in the MRSW, flowing through the center of the watershed. Due to the rolling topography, many tributaries to the Mississippi River are classified as flowing streams. The Mississippi River itself undergoes one of its largest changes in topography in the state of Minnesota. From entering the watershed (northwest of Royalton) to where it exits the watershed (near Sauk Rapids) the Mississippi River drops six and a half feet per river mile (MPCA, 2020).

People

People have been living along the Mississippi River area for over 10,000 years, likely moving north as glaciers retreated and a boreal forest emerged. Early Paleoindian people were nomadic and hunted large animals. The Woodland Tradition, beginning approximately 2,500 years ago, brought the use of pottery and earthen burial mounds. The area is the homelands of the Dakota people, who placed great value on the Mississippi River. It is known as Haha Wakpa or Wakpa Tanka, which mean “River of the Falls’ and ‘Great River’. The Ojibwe people settled in what we now call Minnesota around 1400 AD, influenced by the abundancy of manoomin, or wild rice.

In the late 17th and early 18th century, French fur traders arrived in Minnesota. Along with settlers to the area, this brought logging of the dense pine forest which fueled the local economy. In the 1800s, treaties were signed between the United States and bands in Minnesota ceding vast tribal territories to the United States, but reserved the right to hunt, fish, and gather on the ceded lands.

Sartell began as a small river town, based upon its lumber and a paper company (City of Sartell, 2025). The French fur traders gave the name Sartell, meaning “the third rapids” because it was along the third “rapids” they would encounter as they traveled north up the Mississippi River from St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis. The economy then transitioned to agriculture in the 1900s as timber was removed through logging (DNR, 2025a). This transition resulted in the straightening of streams and large losses of soil that was carried down the Mississippi in a sediment load that is still elevated today.

Present

Land Use

The landscape of Minnesota is very different than it was a few hundred years ago. Francis Marschner created a pre-settlement vegetation map of Minnesota based on historic public land surveys. The historical vegetation in the MRSW is broken down on the left in Figure 2-3. Presently, the United States Geological Survey has developed a nation-wide map of land cover using satellite imagery. This more current data is shown on the right in Figure 2-3, as well is on a more detailed map in Figure 2-4.

While the MRSW has comparatively experienced less land cover transformation than other areas in Minnesota (where nearly all the watershed is agricultural or developed land), a significant shift in land use has occurred. Marschner noted nearly 70% of the land was the woods and barrens. Presently, the predominant land cover is agricultural row crops, with 36% of the land cover as cropland. However, another 36% of the watershed remains as forest or wetlands which protects habitat and supports native vegetation and wildlife.

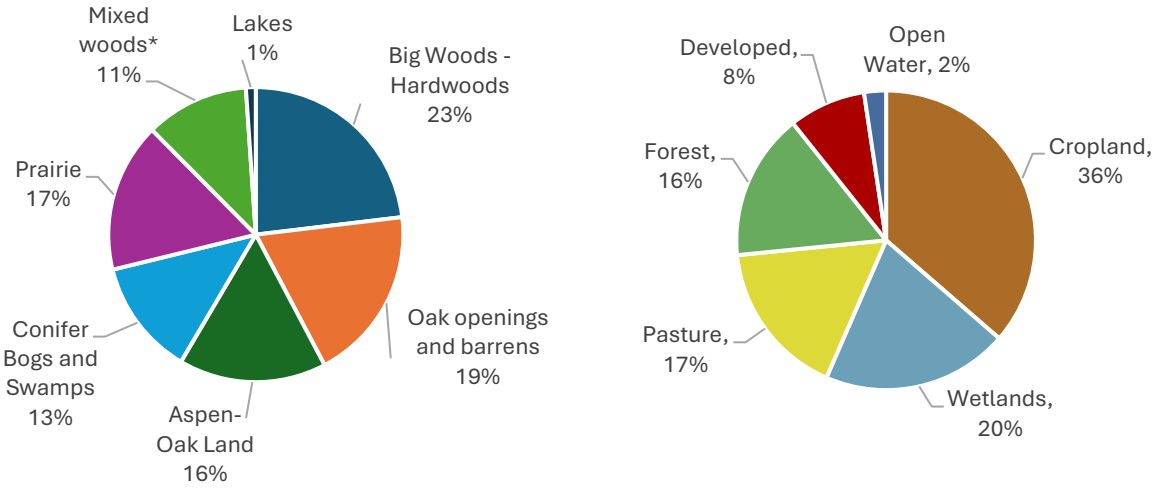


Figure 2-3. Left: Marschner historical land cover (DNR Division of Forestry, 2022); Right: National Land Cover Database (USGS, 2023)

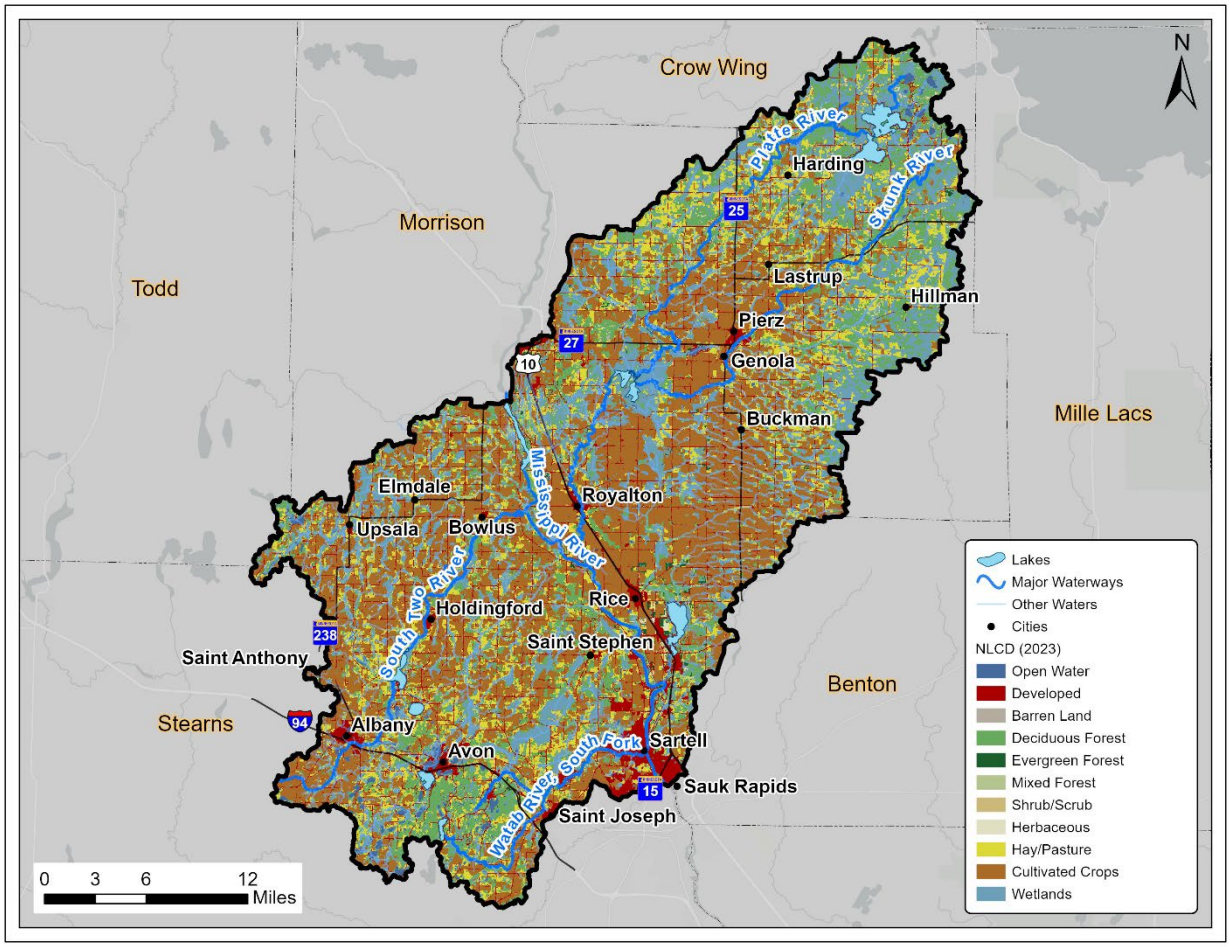


Figure 2-4. Land cover in the MRSW.

Climate

The climate of the MRSW changed through the seasons. Summers are hot, ideal for lake recreation while winters are cold and snowy, ideal for ice fishing and cross-country skiing. The 30-year average annual temperature is 43 degrees F, and the 30-year average annual precipitation is 29 inches (DNR, 2025b). The climate has been changing, as both temperature and precipitation have an increasing trend within the period that data is available (1895 through 2024). Temperature is increasing an average of 0.3 degrees per decade and precipitation is increasing an average of 0.5 inches per decade.

The DNR developed Evaluation of Hydrologic Change reports for Minnesota watersheds. The MRSW report examines hydrologic data in the watershed over time and identifies 2001 as a point of hydrologic change. The watershed experiences an additional 4.8 inches (an 18% increase) of precipitation a year post-2001 compared to the 1890s-2001 (DNR, 2023).

While a slight increase in precipitation and temperature may not have an impact on the day-to-day weather, changes over time to the climate have cascading impacts on the vegetation that grows, native and invasive species present, crop productivity, and ice cover. As climate shifts, it is important for watershed managers to build a resilient watershed that can alleviate negative impacts on natural resources, the local economy, and recreation.

Agriculture

As previously mentioned, a little over one-third of the land in the MRSW is used as cropland, with another 17% of the watershed area used as pasture. Much of the cropland is concentrated around the Mississippi River Valley. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducts a census every 5 years. Weighing census county statistics based on the proportion of county in the watershed, the MRSW supports an estimated 1,800 farms with an average size of 220 acres (USDA, 2022). The main crops include corn, hay, soybeans, and vegetables. USDA also compared 2022 farm size with the 2017 census, and MRSW counties experienced an average of a 13% decline in the total number of farms, but a slightly lesser decrease in total farm acres (8%). Of remaining farms, the average farm size increased by 4%.

The MSRW supports an estimated 1,800 farms, averaging 220 acres in size. The main crops are corn, hay, soybeans, and vegetables.

Traditional **monoculture** row crops can be a source of pollutants. Modeling shows cropland is the largest source of nutrient and sediment pollution in the MRSW (WRAPS, 2020). Soil health practices and agricultural best management practices (BMPs) can be implemented by producers to cultivate fields that sequester carbon, restore soil health, and reduce nutrient application and runoff. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) runs the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, which supports producers in implementing these practices that improve water quality. As of 2025, MAWQCP has 60 producers enrolled in the MRSW that cultivate 37,008 acres (MDA, 2025).

In addition to crops, animal feedlots are scattered throughout the watershed. The MRSW contains over 1,200 active **feedlots**, including 34 that are concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) (MPCA, 2025a). Of these, 132 are within 300 feet of a stream or river, which makes these of special concern to properly manage manure runoff to prevent bacteria and nutrient runoff.

Drainage

Ditch System (Photo: Morrison SWCD)

Drainage of the watershed has undergone large changes with the initial drainage of wetlands in the early 1900s through the addition of subsurface tile drainage in the later half of the century. Over 50% of the watershed's streams and rivers have been fully or partially channelized (MPCA, 2020).

Today, DNR identifies 186 miles of permanent and intermittent drainage ditches in the watershed, and there are 4 public ditches / altered watercourses on the state's public watercourses map (DNR, 2025c). County Boards are the local drainage authority and are encouraged to engage in multipurpose drainage management criteria as outlined in Minnesota Statutes §103E.011, Subd. 1a and §103E.015, Subd. 1.

Urban

Stormwater

In undisturbed land areas, precipitation falls and infiltrates into the soil until infiltration capacity is reached, then precipitation flows as overland runoff. However, urbanization has altered how water drains. As it rains on **impervious** surfaces like pavement or roofs, water is directed into the storm sewer network where it is discharged into surface waters. On the way, stormwater picks up pollutants such as nutrients, sediment, heavy metals, trash, and bacteria.

The largest cities in the watershed are Sartell, Saint Joseph, Albany, and Pierz. St. Cloud and Sauk Rapids are just outside the southeastern boundary of the MRSW but some of the city boundary is within the watershed. MPCA requires a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit for large urban areas, which requires permitees to develop a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program. There are 13 MS4s with at least some portion of their jurisdiction within the MRSW. In order of greatest to least land area in the watershed, MRSW MS4s include:

Photo: MPCA

- Brockway Township
- Watab Township
- MnDOT
- Saint Joseph Township
- City of Sartell
- Stearns County
- Le Sauk Township
- Benton County
- Sauk Rapids Township
- City of Saint Joseph
- City of Sauk Rapids
- City of Little Falls
- City of Saint Cloud

Wastewater

Stormwater diversion berm, Photo: Morrison SWCD

Proper waste management is important for protecting water quality. In some cases, waste from watershed homes is directed into **subsurface sewage treatment systems** (SSTS), or septic systems. In others, waste from homes, businesses, or industries is treated at a wastewater treatment plant before being discharged into waterbodies. Wastewater treatment is excellent at removing **pathogens** and total suspended solids (TSS) from wastewater. However, contaminants such as chloride or 'contaminants of emerging concern' (CEC) such as **PFAS**, pesticides, and pharmaceuticals are largely untreated. Investigating the potential threat of these to human health and the environment is an area of investigation, as well as novel treatment technologies to remove CECs. In the MRSW, there are 24 wastewater facilities with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and / or State Disposal System (SDS) permits (MPCA, 2025b).

Habitat and Recreational Land

The northern section of the MRSW is within the Northern Lakes and Forests **Ecoregion** and the southern section of the MRSW is the Northern Central Hardwood Forest Ecoregion.

Englund Ecotone SNA

Natural spaces within the MRSW are often used for local and visitor recreation, including hunting, hiking, birdwatching, photography, cross-country skiing, and more. The MRSW has 22 Wildlife Management Areas (DNR, 2025d) that cover a total of 5,000 acres. There are also four Scientific and Natural Areas (DNR, 2025e) in the watershed: Englund Ecotone, Patch Woods, Avon Hills Forest, and St. Wendel Tamarack Bog (Figure 2-5). The Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, near Rice and Skunk Lakes, is a 2,150-acre U.S. Fish & Wildlife refuge that protects a large wetland complex made of sedge meadow, shallow lakes, oak savanna, prairie, shrubland, and forest. It provides habitat for many species, but especially sandhill cranes and other migratory birds.

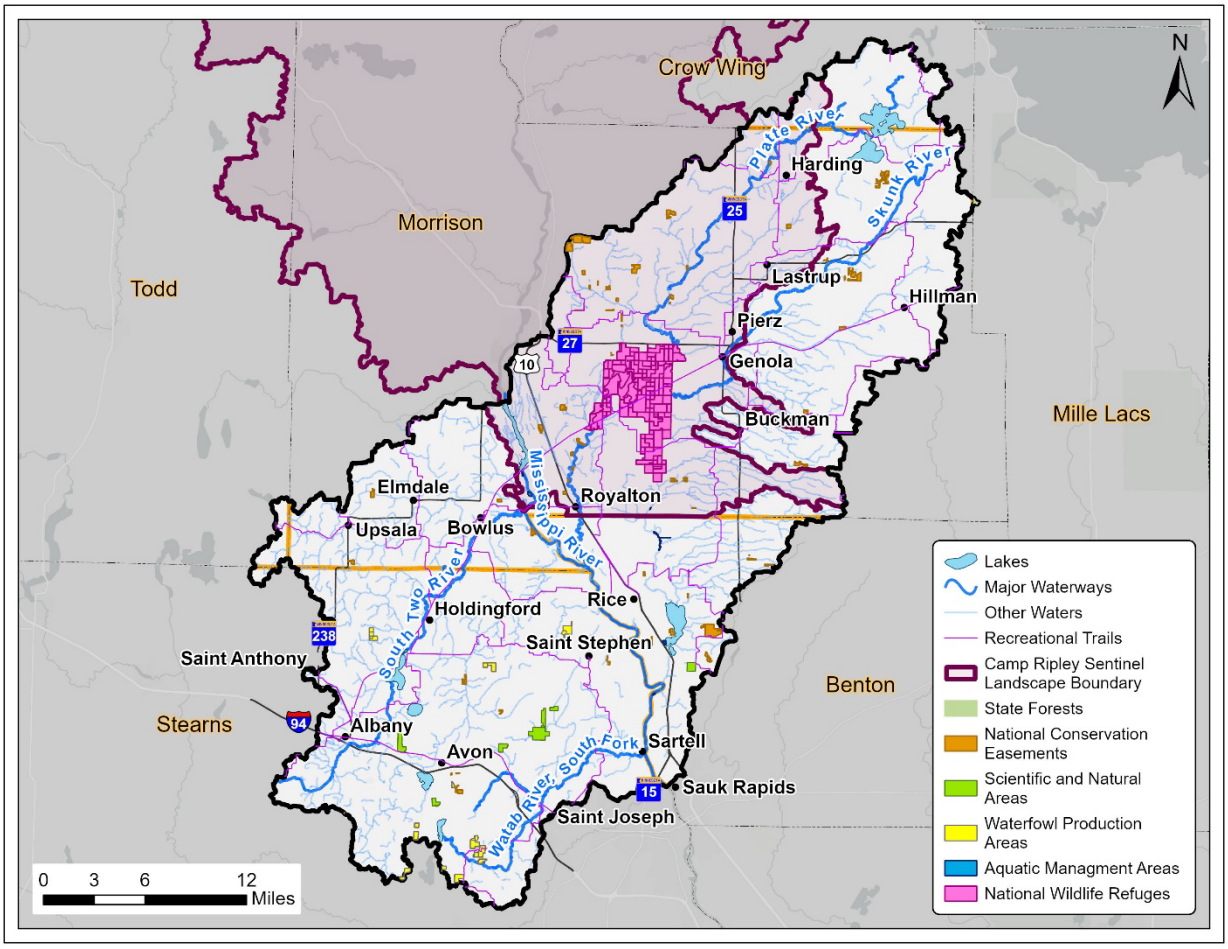


Figure 2-5. Protected lands in the MRSW

Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape (left) and Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (right)

Little Rock Creek, Bunker Hill Creek, and Smart's Creek are designated trout streams, which are highly valued by fishermen (Figure 2-6). The watershed also contains multiple shallow lakes and wild rice lakes. Platte, Little Rock, Middle Spunk, Cedar, Rice, and Skunk Lakes are designated by the DNR as lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance for the presence of unique and diverse plant or animal life (DNR, 2025f).

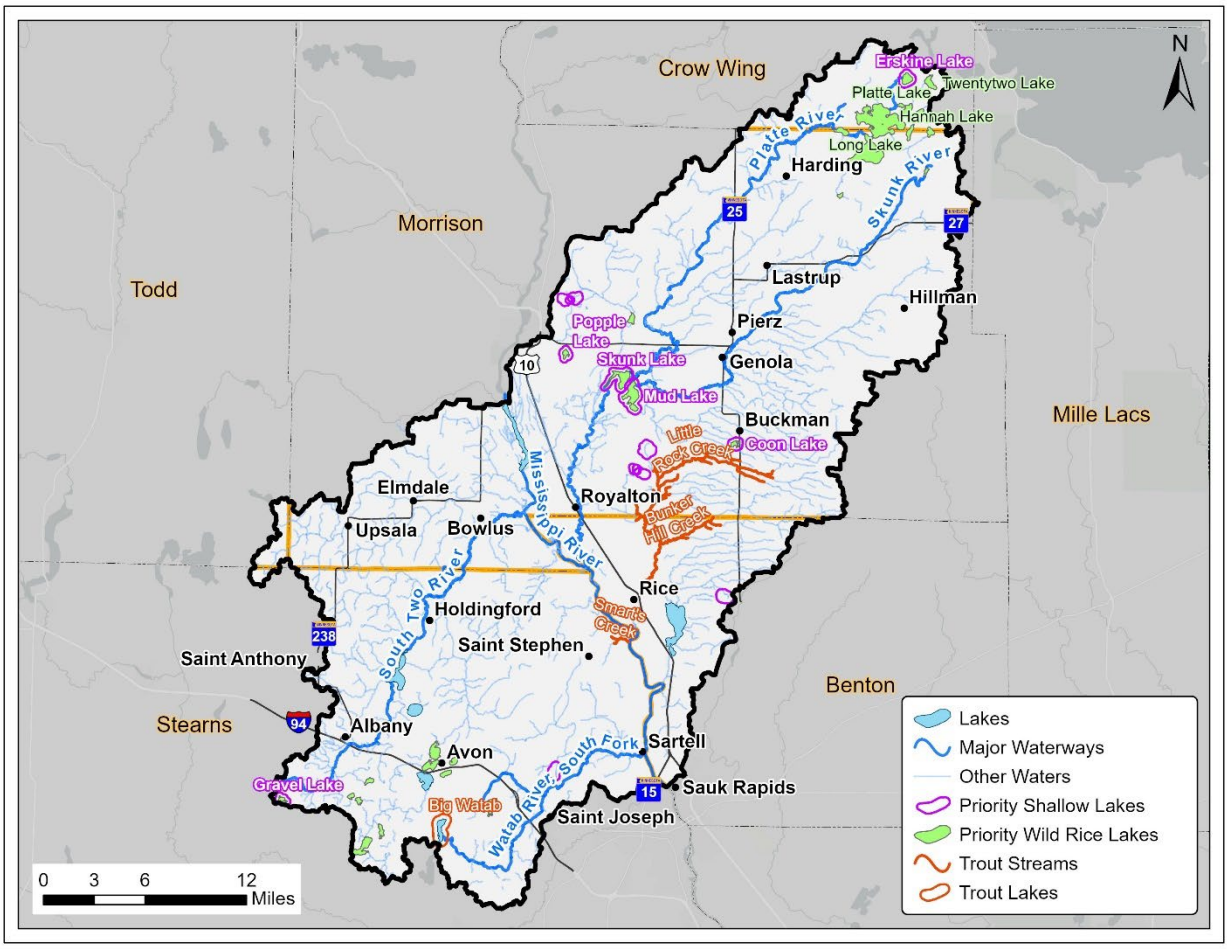


Figure 2-6. Trout lakes and streams, priority shallow lakes, and priority wild rice lakes.

Little Rock Creek, Photo: DNR

The MRSW supports many threatened or endangered species due to its abundant natural spaces. A list of state and federally listed species identified in the watershed is shown in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1. State (DNR, 2025f) and federal (USFWS, 2025) threatened and endangered species.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status
Federally Listed		
Canis lupus	Gray Wolf	Threatened
Lynx canadensis	Canada Lynx	Threatened
Bombus affinis	Rusty Patched Bumble Bee	Endangered
Myotis septentrionalis	Northern Long-eared Bat	Endangered
State Listed		
Botrychium angustisegmentum	Narrow Triangle Moonwort	Threatened
Carex sterilis	Sterile Sedge	Threatened
Cypripedium arietinum	Ram's Head Orchid	Threatened
Emydoidea blandingii	Blanding's Turtle	Threatened
Floerkea proserpinacoides	False Mermaid	Threatened
Hudsonia tomentosa	Beach Heather	Threatened
Notropis anogenus	Pugnose Shiner	Threatened
Phalaropus tricolor	Wilson's Phalarope	Threatened
Platanthera flava var. herbiola	Tubercled Rein Orchid	Threatened
Rubus semisetosus	Swamp Blackberry	Threatened
Trichophorum clintonii	Clinton's Bulrush	Threatened
Eleocharis wolfii	Wolf's Spikerush	Endangered
Juglans cinerea	Butternut	Endangered
Juncus marginatus	Marginated Rush	Endangered
Lanius ludovicianus	Loggerhead Shrike	Endangered
Rallus elegans	King Rail	Endangered

Blanding's Turtle, DNR

Wolf's Spikerush, DNR

Surface Water

Rivers

Photo: MPCA

The defining water feature of the MRSW is the Mississippi River. This major river bisects the watershed, entering in Morrison County and flowing approximately 31 miles to the watershed outlet at Sauk Rapids. A network of tributaries flow into the Mississippi throughout the watershed, with other major rivers including the Platte River, South Two River, Skunk River, and Watab River. The public water inventory (DNR, 2025h) includes 530 miles of public watercourses in the watershed.

The MRSW has flow data for 100 years, with USGS gauge #05267000 at Royalton measuring **discharge** since 1924. In the past 10 years, the mean discharge has been 4,990 cubic feet per second, and the all-time peak flow has been 37,400 cubic feet per second. As discussed in the context of climate, the watershed is receiving more precipitation than in the past. This, combined with decreased **water storage**, can increase the risk of flooding. Annual peak discharge has increased in the 21st century but the 5- and 10-year flood levels have not significantly changed. The large drainage area contributing to the Mississippi River along with the Blanchard hydropower dam just upstream of the gauge may alleviate flooding (DNR, 2023).

Lakes and Wetlands

In addition to streams and rivers, there are numerous lakes that support aquatic life and public recreation. Fishing, boating, and swimming are popular activities for residents and visitors. The watershed's numerous fishing opportunities for walleye, crappie, trout, and more bring in tourism and fishing tournaments. The three largest lakes in the watershed (Platte, Little Rock, and Sullivan) are noted by DNR for their healthy fish populations.

The MSRW contains 15,000 acres of lakes and nearly 5,000 acres of wetlands

Boating is supported through the presence of public access sites: there are 30 trailer boat launches and 8 carry-in launches in the watershed (DNR, 2025i). Lakes are common in the northeast and southwestern portions of the watershed. In total, the **public water inventory** includes 88 public water basins and 179 public water wetlands, which covers 15,000 acres of lakes and nearly 5,000 acres of wetlands (DNR, 2025h). Forty-three of these basins are over 100 acres. Some of these

lakes were enhanced by water control features. In example, Little Rock Lake is the largest lake in Benton County, and is fed by three creeks. Little Rock Lake was enhanced in 1911 when the Watab Pulp and Paper Company constructed a dam along the Mississippi River in Sartell (Little Rock Lake Association, 2025).

While the MRSW still has many wetlands, some have been lost due to drainage for cropland or development. Now, the benefits of wetlands in ecosystems and for storing water are well understood and wetland protection and restoration is occurring throughout Minnesota.

Impairments

Watershed management in the MRSW is a balancing act between protecting resources that are currently not impaired and restoring impaired resources. In the watershed, there are 51 stream impairments (over 27 streams and 4 ditches) and 5 lake impairments (MPCA, 2024). Stream impairments include mercury in fish tissue, macroinvertebrate and fish assessments, dissolved oxygen, bacteria, and nitrate. Lakes are impaired due to mercury in fish tissue, fish bioassessments, and nutrients (Figure 2-7).

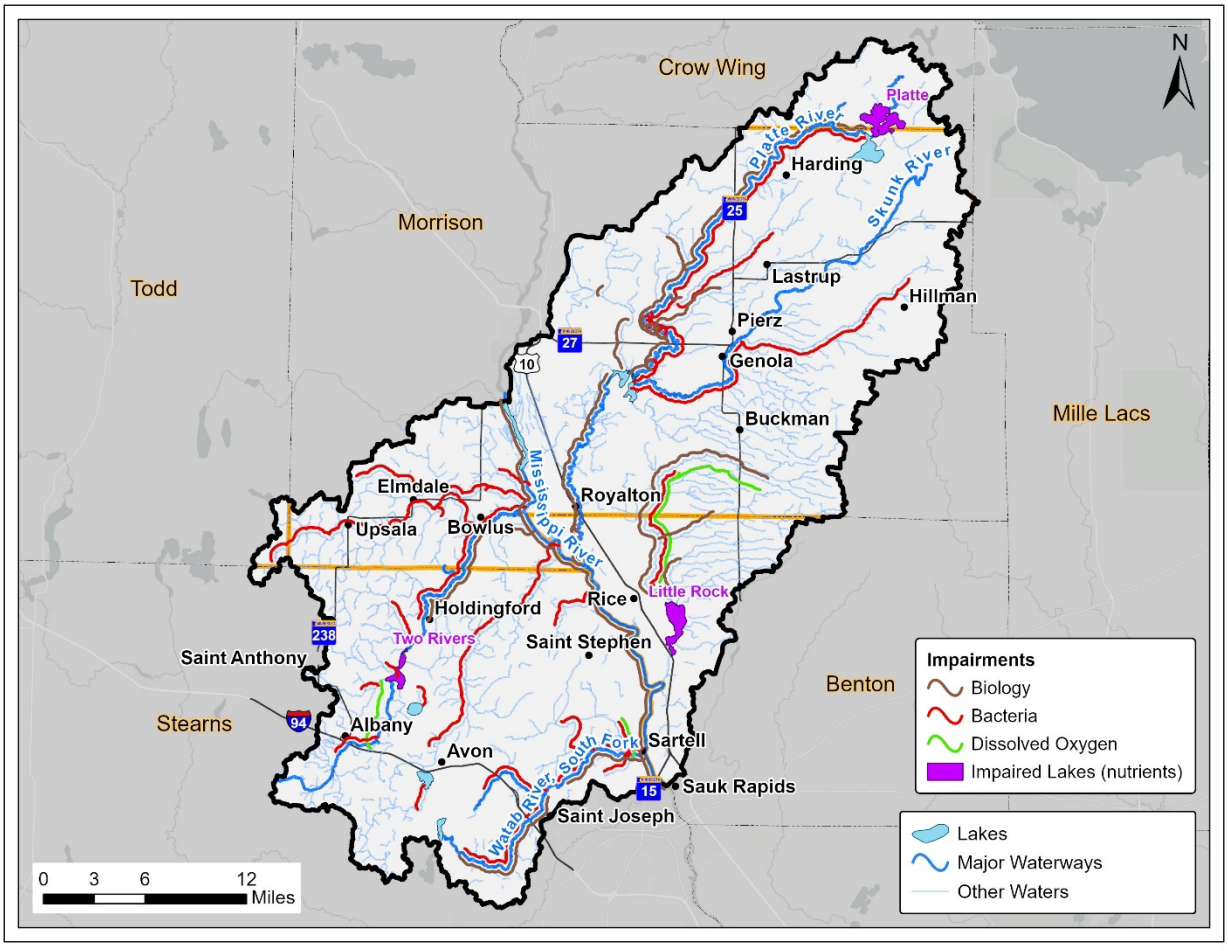


Figure 2-7. Impaired waters as of 2024.

Groundwater

Quality

Aside from residents in the southeastern border that are connected to the St. Cloud drinking water system, all MRSW residents obtain their drinking water from groundwater (MDH, 2025). The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) reports nearly 5,500 private wells are known in the watershed (MDH, 2025). MDH has delineated Drinking Water Surface Management Areas (DWSMAs) which are land areas that provide **recharge** to drinking water aquifers. DWSMAs are rated based on their vulnerability to contamination from the surface reaching groundwater supplies. In the MRSW, one DWSMA (part of St. Joseph) has very high vulnerability to contamination. Another 18 DWSMAs have high vulnerability to contamination (Figure 2-8). Much of the watershed has low to moderate **pollution sensitivity** of near-surface materials, but the Mississippi River corridor has high pollution sensitivity.

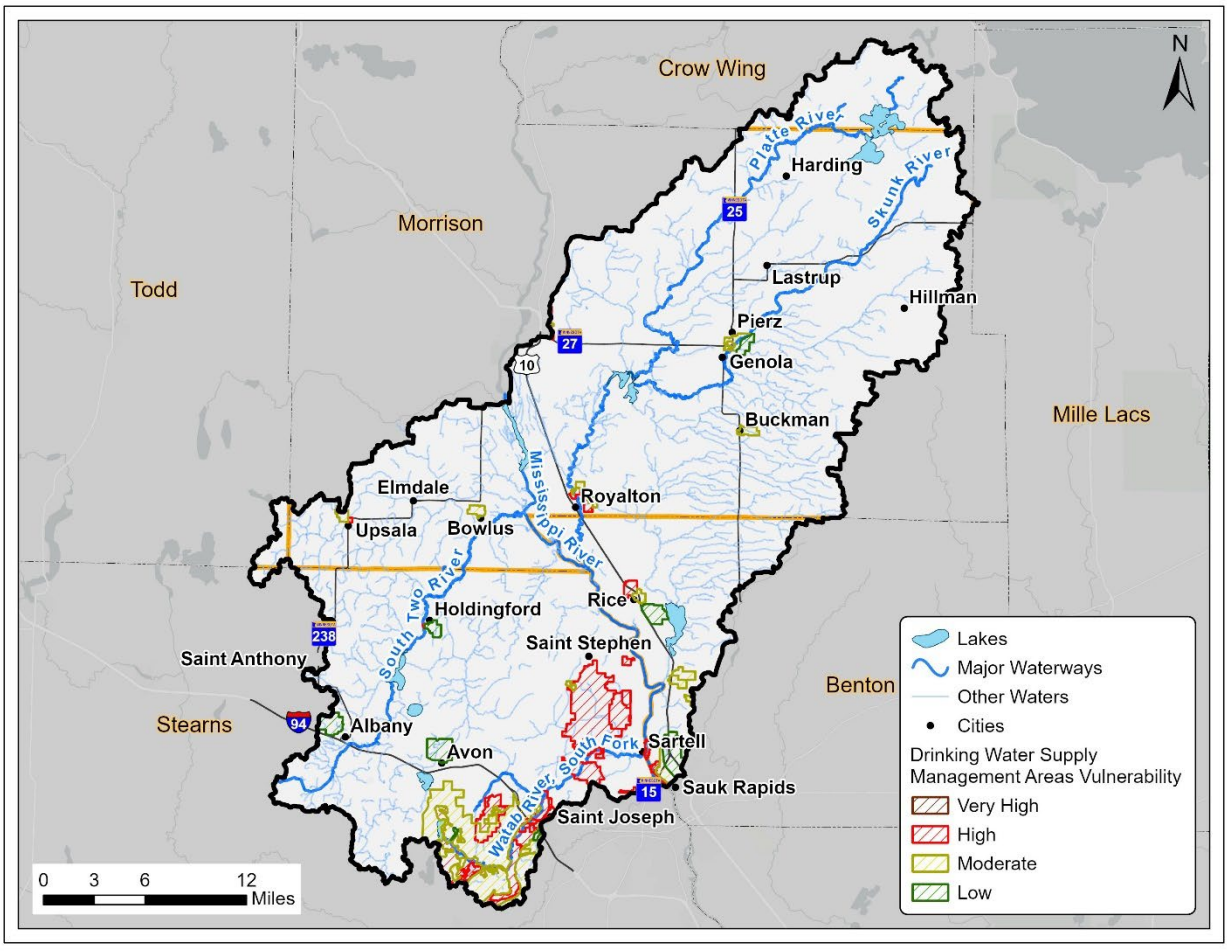


Figure 2-8. DWSMA vulnerability.

While residents in the MRSW rely on groundwater for drinking water, downstream watersheds use the Mississippi as a drinking water source. The intake for the city of St. Cloud is just outside the watershed. Part of the MRSW is in the Emergency Response and Spill Management Areas for the City of St. Cloud, and the entire watershed is within the Source Water Assessment Area of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Preventing contamination of the Mississippi River is important to protect drinking water downstream. Specific contaminants of concern include nutrients, sediment, ammonia, and CECs.

MDH ensures public water supplies provide safe drinking water, but residents that get drinking water from private wells must independently test their water. Groundwater contaminants of concern include nitrate and arsenic, which pose health threats when consumed. Nitrate is a particular concern in the MRSW in agricultural areas with sandy soils, as fertilizer is applied and can reach groundwater supplies through infiltration. The MDA Township Testing Program reported that the average nitrate concentration in private wells is under 5 mg/L in each county, but 6% of samples from private wells exceeded the nitrate standard of 10 mg/L (MDA, 2025 and MDH, 2025). Many of the wells that exceeded the nitrate standard are shallow, suggesting shallow wells owners should take additional monitoring precautions and install a treatment system if necessary. Minnesota's Groundwater Protection Rule part 1 and 2 apply in parts of the watershed. Part 1 applies to about half the watershed and restricts fall application of nitrogen fertilizer. Part 2 of the rule applies to DWSMAs with elevated nitrate.

Arsenic is a naturally occurring heavy metal found in soils and rocks which can dissolve into groundwater. The arsenic standard is 10 mg/L, but no amount of arsenic is safe long term and treatment systems are available for private well owners. 2% of private wells in the watershed exceeded the arsenic standard, which is lower than the state average (MDH, 2025).

Quantity

Most groundwater withdrawals are for agricultural irrigation, with the next largest use being for water supply (Figure 2-9). Irrigation needs can be variable year-to-year depending on precipitation. Groundwater withdrawals have been increasing since the late 1990s (MPCA, 2020). Sustainable groundwater use is a topic of concern in the MRSW.

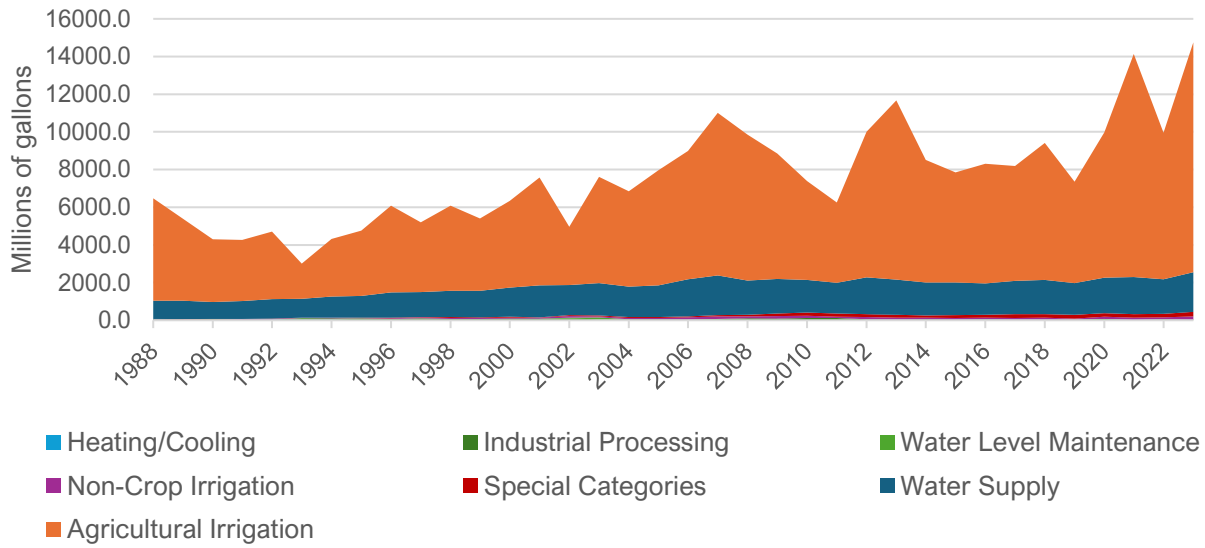


Figure 2-9. Groundwater use in MRSW (DNR, 2024).

People

This is a voluntary plan focusing on voluntary conservation, so an understanding of the watershed community is critical to informing effective implementation efforts. An understanding of the existing and projected population is also helpful, as population numbers impact resource management such as land use, groundwater demand, and infrastructure.

County profiles created from the 2022 census were used to gather data on Morrison, Stearns, and Benton Counties, which cover 56%, 31%, and 10% of the watershed. Census data from each county was averaged while weighing it to the proportion of land in the watershed to estimate watershed demographics (Figure 2-10 and 2-11). A total of 14,235 people are known

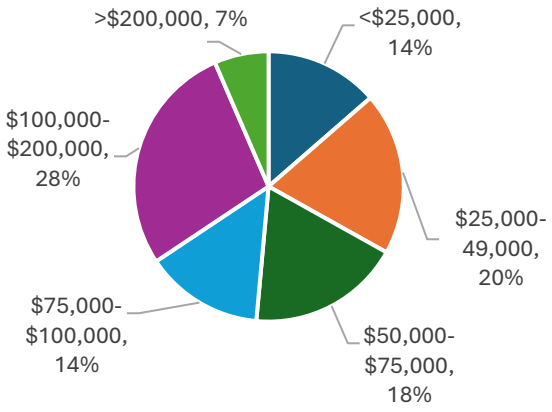


Figure 2-10. Median household income in MRSW

to reside in MSRW cities. This is likely an underestimate as it sums the population of cities within the MRSW; it does not include the outskirts of St. Cloud that stretches into the watershed or any rural residents outside a city. The median age is 37, and an estimated 89% of the population is White, 6% is Black, 3% is Hispanic, 1% is Indian/Alaskan, and 1% is Asian. The population has been growing more diverse and is expected to continue in that direction into the future. The population of Benton and Morrison Counties is expected to increase in population from 2025-2035, but the population of Stearns County is expected to decrease (DEED, 2025).

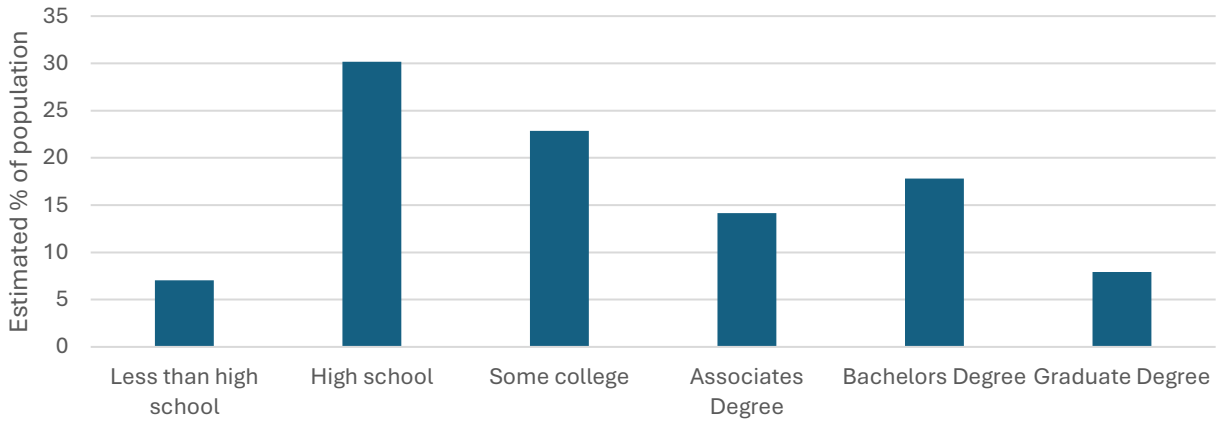


Figure 2-11. Education achieved in MRSW

Environmental Justice

The MPCA created a statewide map showing areas of concern for **environmental justice**. Environmental justice is the principle that all people have an equal right to healthy air, clean water, and recreational land access. MPCA areas of concern for environmental justice include tribal land, and high proportions of English as a second language, poverty, and people of color. In the MRSW, a small area of concern for poverty is along the northwestern watershed boundary near Little Falls and along the southeast boundary of the watershed in St. Joseph. MPCA considers tribal land to be an area of concern, and the Mille Lacs Reservation is just northeast of the watershed with a small sliver of tribal land overlapping the watershed boundary.

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Glossary

Definitions of key and technical terms

Discharge: the volume of water that flows through a river at a point in time. Typically given as cubic feet per second.

Ecoregion: a geographical area with similar land use, geology, plant communities, and soil

Environmental justice: the principle that all people have an equal right to healthy air, clean water, and recreational land access

Feedlots: a confined area for feeding and raising animals

Headwaters: the beginning of a river

Impervious: surfaces that significantly or fully stop the infiltration of precipitation, such as streets, roofs, sidewalks, etc.

Infiltration: process through which water moves from the surface through subsurface soil and rock

Lacustrine: sedimentary rock formations left behind from ancient lakes

Monoculture: agricultural practice of growing a single crop

Moraine: accumulation of debris deposited by a glacier

Pathogens: a bacteria or virus that causes disease

PFAS: Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances are a group of synthetic chemicals with thousands of household and industrial uses. They have been found throughout the environment and increasing concern is being brought to the potential for health and environmental impacts.

Pollution sensitivity: areas are assigned a sensitivity to pollution based on the travel time for surface contaminants to travel to a depth of 10 feet. Quicker travel time results in greater sensitivity to pollution.

Public water inventory: DNR maintains a public waters inventory based on the statutory definition of a public water. It includes basins, wetlands, and altered and natural watercourses.

Recharge: the hydrologic process where surface water resupplies groundwater aquifers through infiltration

Subsurface sewage treatment systems: SSTS are septic tanks that store and treat wastewater from individual sites.

Water storage: surface water that is stored in the landscape, whether in the soil, vegetation, wetlands, impoundments, or stormwater basins. Historic water storage has been lost through drainage of wetlands and land use changes.

Watershed: the area draining to an outlet point of a stream network. Watersheds can occur at different scales, with the smallest drainage areas referred to as catchments. Watersheds have USGS hydrologic unit codes (HUC) from 2 to 12 digits indicating their scale and identity. There are 81 major watersheds at the HUC8 scale in Minnesota, including the MRSW.

Wisconsin stage: the most recent glaciation that shaped the Midwest and ended around 11,000 years ago