

Coon Creek Watershed District

2024 Annual Report

Overview

The Coon Creek Watershed District (CCWD), established in 1959, plays a crucial role in managing water resources across a 107-square-mile area in central Anoka County, focusing on water quality, flood prevention, groundwater, and wetland conservation. Governed by a Board of five Managers and serving approximately 164,500 people, CCWD operates under the Minnesota Watershed Act and the Metropolitan Water Management Act, requiring annual reporting to document conditions, trends, and financial health. As of December 31, 2024, the District reported total assets of \$5,274,052.21, with a budget for 2024 totaling \$5,606,769.00 and actual expenses of \$3,727,704.70. An audit is scheduled to commence in February 2025.

CCWD's mission emphasizes the balance between development and water resource conservation, aiming to improve water quality and achieve Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) reductions by 2045. The District's strategic priorities include flood prevention, resolution of water quality impairments, and engaging in multi-domain operations to transform land and water management conflicts into opportunities. The 2024-2033 Comprehensive Plan guides policy and investments, focusing on groundwater impacts, water quality impairments, and chloride pollution, while also addressing challenges such as PFAS contamination, aging infrastructure, and climate change.

Collaboration and conflict resolution are key themes, with the District working to enhance partner capacities, particularly among cities within the watershed, to achieve shared goals. Efforts include providing technical support and expertise as well as facilitating joint training opportunities for water quality and flood mitigation. The District also focuses on transforming conflict resolution by addressing historical, social, and economic factors, encouraging pre-application meetings, and developing Project Involvement Plans (PIPs) for all projects.

Significant progress has been made in subwatershed planning and implementation, with 22% of all subwatershed plans completed as of 2024. Projects aim to align with subwatershed goals, enhancing water management and environmental sustainability. Water quality management remains a priority, with the District stabilizing erosion, operating Iron Enhanced Sand Filters, and expanding monitoring programs. Efforts to manage groundwater cooperatively with cities and state agencies include conducting a GIS inventory and analysis of source waters and advocating for the inclusion of groundwater as a chloride source in future TMDLs.

Floodplain management and wetland conservation are also critical, with the District aiming to refine floodplain models, conduct sediment accumulation analysis, and control invasive species to ensure no net loss of wetland quantity, quality, and biological integrity. Public safety measures include reducing the number of habitable structures at risk of flooding and updating hazard mitigation plans.

Collaboration with local cities and stakeholders is essential to CCWD's strategy, aligning stormwater efforts with municipal plans to enhance resource protection and community engagement. Through publications, public service announcements, attending community events, and active participation in government affairs, CCWD ensures its initiatives address community and environmental needs effectively.

Detailed Summary

Reporting Requirements and Purpose

The Coon Creek Watershed District (CCWD) is mandated to report annually on its activities under the Minnesota Watershed Act and the Metropolitan Water Management Act. The Annual Report and Assessment serves two main purposes: documenting the current condition and trends in water management efforts and initiating the annual planning, programming, budgeting, and execution cycle. The report provides guidance on key planning issues to inform program development and investment decisions. The report includes an overview of the District, financial condition assessments, and progress on comprehensive watershed management. Established in 1959, the District manages water resources over a 107-square-mile area, including Coon Creek and other watersheds draining into the Mississippi River. It coordinates groundwater management, public ditches, drainage systems, water quality, flood prevention, and wetland conservation. The District operates through six programs: Operations and Maintenance, Planning, Public and Government Affairs, Water Quality, and Watershed Development and Regulation.

Mission, Vision, and Strategic Priorities

The mission of the Coon Creek Watershed District is to manage surface water and groundwater systems and contributing lands to provide for and balance the competing uses of development, drainage, flood prevention, and the protection and restoration of water quality and habitat for the benefit of our communities now and in the future. The vision focuses on conserving water resources within existing state and federal programs, with immediate priorities on flood prevention and resolving water quality impairments. The District aims to maintain public health, safety, and welfare, collaborate with local cities, engage in multi-domain operations, transform land and water management conflicts into opportunities, and build partner capacity. By 2033, the District hopes to slow water degradation, improve biogeochemical integrity, and achieve significant progress towards Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) reductions.

Organizational Structure and Governance

The District is governed by a Board of five Managers nominated by cities within the watershed and appointed by the Anoka County Board. The Board members serve overlapping three-year terms. Key staff includes Administrator Tim Kelly, Attorney Michelle Ulrich, and Director of Operations Jon Janke, among others. The District serves approximately 164,500 people, focusing on groundwater, water quality, and flooding. It collaborates with seven cities, including six Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s), to manage floodplains, restore impaired waters, and conserve wetlands.

Financial Condition and Audit Status

As of December 31, 2024, the District's financial condition shows total assets of \$5,274,052.21, with liabilities of \$1,785,923.07 and net assets of \$1,580,534.32. The District's budget for 2024 included revenues from property taxes, fees, charges, and grants, totaling \$5,606,769.00, with actual expenses of \$3,727,704.70. Anoka County performed the accounting for 2024, but the audit will commence in February 2025, with completion expected in spring 2025.

Opportunities, Risks, and Comprehensive Plan Implementation

The District faces opportunities such as increased awareness of clean drinking water, legislative interest in permitting efficiency, and a National Resilience Strategy. However, challenges include shifting natural hazard mitigation costs, source water protection, PFAS contamination, aging infrastructure, and climate change. The 2024-2033 Comprehensive Plan, approved in 2024, guides District policy and investments. The District is transitioning between plans, conducting continuous operations, and preparing for future challenges. Priorities include addressing groundwater impacts, water quality impairments, and chloride pollution. The District collaborates with local entities to achieve common understanding and unity of effort, engaging in multi-domain operations and transforming inherent conflicts in water management.

Collaborative Conflict Resolution and Institutional Change

In 2024, the Coon Creek Watershed District focused on transforming conflict resolution by addressing deeper historical, social, and economic factors, alongside physical, chemical, and biological elements. This approach aims to create a more collaborative and sustainable environment. The District encourages pre-application meetings in its Watershed Development Program and develops Project Involvement Plans (PIPs) for all projects. Community outreach events have been reformatted to foster better communication. Additionally, the District is working to modify institutional structures and policies that perpetuate conflict dynamics. Delays in stream restoration projects, crucial for achieving the 2045 load reduction target for Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), prompted the District to engage with agencies to improve the state permit application and review process. This engagement seeks to increase project success and certainty.

Building Partner Capacity and Capability

The Coon Creek Watershed District continues to enhance the abilities and resources of its partners, particularly cities within the District, to achieve shared goals in public safety, flood prevention, water quality improvement, and chloride reduction. In 2024, the District focused on providing funding to support the purchase of equipment like street sweepers and Jorma plow blades through its water quality grant program. Discussions began to facilitate joint training opportunities for District and public work staff, with technical assistance efforts focused on water quality and flood mitigation. The District also collaborated with Anoka County Highways on issues related to Threatened and Endangered species.

Strategic Priorities and Progress

The 2024-2033 Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, approved by the BWSR in October 2024, outlines four strategic actions for long-term success. These include seeking additional funding to achieve TMDL goals by 2045, differentiating impaired waters to justify public expenses, extending the 2045 TMDL deadline, and ensuring the Comprehensive Plan remains current. Despite initial legislative contacts yielding no promises, the District remains focused on these goals. The plan anticipates significant changes in the physical, social, and political environments over the next 10 to 20 years, with annual reviews and updates to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to address emerging needs.

Groundwater and Public Drainage Management

The District aims to manage groundwater cooperatively with cities and state agencies to maintain or restore groundwater systems. In 2024, a GIS inventory and analysis of source waters affecting public drinking supplies were conducted, with shape files made available to cities. The District also engaged with the US Geological Survey to evaluate chloride levels in shallow groundwater flows and advocated for including groundwater as a chloride source in future TMDLs. Public drainage goals include sustainable drainage management, with routine inspections and maintenance of drainage networks and assets. The District collaborates with cities to align stormwater efforts and reduce duplication.

Water Quality Management and Improvement

The District is committed to protecting and improving water quality in line with state and federal standards. In 2024, efforts included stabilizing erosion, operating Iron Enhanced Sand Filters, and conducting feasibility studies for creek restoration projects. The District also installed pet waste stations and managed compliance with MS4 permit requirements. Monitoring programs were expanded, with continuous conductivity sensors installed in newly designated impaired waters. The District secured significant grant funding for water quality projects, including the Bridgewater Regional Stormwater Filter Project and enhanced street sweeping initiatives. Collaboration with local partners leveraged additional funds for water quality improvements.

Subwatershed Planning and Implementation

The Coon Creek Watershed District (CCWD) has made significant progress in subwatershed planning and implementation. As of 2024, 22% of all subwatershed plans have been completed, with implementation underway for these plans. Notable achievements include the completion of the Ditch 39 subwatershed assessment and the initiation of its implementation plan. The Ditch 37 subwatershed assessment is nearing completion, with a focus on facilitating the Rural Reserve development. Additionally, the Ditch 60 subwatershed assessment has begun, aiming to identify projects that align with subwatershed goals. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to enhance water management and environmental sustainability within the district.

Water Quality, Asset Management and Modernization

CCWD is committed to maintaining water quality and managing its assets effectively. In 2024, the District conducted annual condition assessments of all hard assets supporting water quality, achieving excellent performance and effectiveness. The district responded to ten water quality issues, including harmful algae blooms and illicit discharges, through site inspections and resource sharing. The district's operations and maintenance efforts included inspecting and maintaining all stormwater assets, ensuring their optimal function. These actions underscore CCWD's dedication to preserving water quality and protecting public health and safety. Modernization efforts aim to increase land developed under current stormwater regulations, though progress is challenged by environmental and regulatory factors. These initiatives are vital for reducing flood risks and enhancing infrastructure resilience.

Floodplain Management and Public Safety

Floodplain management is a critical focus for CCWD, with efforts to refine the floodplain model for the entire watershed by 2033. As of 2024, five out of 18 subwatersheds have had their floodplain models reviewed and refined. The district completed sediment accumulation analysis and flood risk assessments in key areas, alongside feasibility studies for future flood mitigation projects. Public safety is also a priority, with actions initiated to reduce the number of habitable structures at risk of flooding. The District is involved in updating the Anoka County Hazard Mitigation Plan and encouraging FEMA's review of updated floodplain mapping. These efforts aim to protect natural resources and enhance community safety.

Wetland Conservation

CCWD is dedicated to wetland conservation, pursuing a no net loss of wetland quantity, quality, and biological integrity. The District is actively involved in redrafting Wetland Conservation Act Rules and implementing wetland regulations. Surveillance and control of invasive phragmites are ongoing, with a 98% control rate achieved.

Collaboration and Community Engagement

Collaboration with local cities and stakeholders is a cornerstone of CCWD's strategy. The district aligns stormwater efforts with municipal plans to reduce duplication and enhance resource protection. Public service announcements and technical assistance are provided to stakeholders, particularly during significant hydrologic events like record snow melts. Community engagement is furthered through publications on wetland conservation, attendance at community events, and active participation in government affairs. These collaborative efforts ensure that CCWD's initiatives are well-coordinated and effectively address the needs of the community and environment.