COON CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT
Request for Board Action

MEETING DATE: October 26, 2026
AGENDA NUMBER: 12
ITEM: MN Watersheds Annual Conference

AGENDA: Discussion

REQUEST
Review and discuss Board member attendance at the 2026 Minnesota Watersheds Annual Conference.

BACKGROUND
Minnesota Watersheds is the statewide member organization representing watershed districts and watershed management organizations. For CCWD, it provides a collective voice on legislative, regulatory, funding, and policy issues that affect watershed organizations statewide, while also supporting coordination, shared learning, and training among members.

The 2026 Annual Conference will be held December 2-4 at Grand View Lodge in Nisswa. Activities include Wednesday workshops and regional caucuses, Thursday technical and management sessions, trade show and awards banquet, and the annual business meeting on Friday. The conference schedule is attached.

ISSUES/CONCERNS
Board Attendance: Board members may attend all or part of the conference based on interest and availability. Identifying attendance will allow staff to coordinate registration, lodging, and transportation. If attendance creates a quorum, appropriate public notice will be provided.

Legislative Process: Earlier this year, the Board reviewed the 2026 Minnesota Watersheds resolutions process and elected not to submit a new District resolution. Member resolutions establish policy positions, and annual legislative priorities are considered through the association process, including the annual business meeting.

Project of the Year Finalist: The District nominated the Woodcrest Biochar Iron-Enhanced Sand Filter for the 2026 Minnesota Watersheds Project of the Year Award. The project has been selected as a finalist, with the award announced during the Thursday evening banquet.

RECOMMENDATION
None

Conference SCHEDULE

DEC 2-4, 2026 December

GRAND VIEW LODGE
Nisswa, Minnesota

Wednesday, Dec. 2 *Note: Shuttle Runs 6 am - 11 pm*

7 - 10 am	Breakfast Buffet	*Main Lodge — Heritage Room*
7:30 am	Registration and Welcome	*Gull Lake Center*
8 am	**Workshop Wednesday**	
8 am - 3 pm	Minnesota Watersheds Drainage Workshop	*Norway Center*
8 am - 2:30 pm	Watershed Management Workshop	*Gull Lake Center — Lake Margaret*
8 am - 2:30 pm	Staff Technical Training Workshop	*Gull Lake Center — Ballroom A*
8 am - 2:30 pm	Staff Administrative Training workshop	*Gull Lake Center — Ballroom B*
11:30 am	Lunch Buffet	*Main Lodge — Heritage Room*
3:30 - 5 pm	Regional Caucuses	
	Region I Caucus	*Norway Center Boardroom*
	Region II Caucus	*Gull Lake Center — Lake Hubert*
	Region III Caucus	*Gull Lake Center — Lake Margaret*
6 - 9 pm	Trade Show Opening Night	*Gull Lake Center — Ballroom*
6 - 9 pm	Night at the Movies	*Gull Lake Center — Lake Itasca*

Thursday, Dec. 3 *Note: Shuttle Runs 6 am - 11 pm*

7 - 10 am	Breakfast Buffet	*Main Lodge — Heritage Room*
8 am - 1 pm	Visit the Trade Show	*Gull Lake Center — Ballroom*
8:30 am - 4 pm	**Concurrent Sessions**	*Gull Lake Center — Lake Margaret and Lake Itasca*
11:45 am	Lunch	*Norway Center and Main Lodge — Heritage Room*
12:45 - 1 pm	Prize Winner Announcements	*Gull Lake Center — Ballroom*
6 - 9 pm	Social Hour, Banquet and Awards	*Gull Lake Center — Ballroom*

Friday, Dec. 4

7 - 10 am	Breakfast Buffet	*Main Lodge — Heritage Room*
8 - 11 am	Business Meeting	*Norway Center*
11 am - noon	Minnesota Watersheds Board Meeting	*Norway Center Boardroom*

2026 Wednesday WORKSHOPS

The Minnesota Watersheds Drainage Workshop will focus on managing risk in drainage systems. Sessions include risk in repair petitions, risk in repairs and drainage projects, risk in contracting, and risk in real-world drainage projects. A case law update will be given. Attendees will also test their knowledge in session entitled Are You Smarter Than a Drainage Professional?

The Watershed Management Workshop will cover the purposes, powers, and governance structures of WDs and WMOs; planning, implementation, and evaluation in watershed management; transparency and statutory requirements; working relationships of boards and staff; and real-world examples of on-the-ground projects and board involvement in the process. We encourage board and staff to attend this workshop.

The Staff Administrative Training Workshop is geared toward watershed administrators and will cover stream restoration and public water permitting, self-insurance pools, document accessibility, and a session on navigating the legislative session.

The Staff Technical Training Workshop is meant for watershed staff and will focus on BWSR grants management, funding opportunities for watershed projects, AI for watershed communications, cybersecurity for watershed staff, and includes a watershed project sharing session.

Please note that the agendas for these sessions are being developed and are subject to change.

CHOOSE THE WORKSHOP that fits your focus

Wednesday

OPTION ONE

THE MINNESOTA WATERSHED DRAINAGE WORKSHOP

8 am - 3 pm **NORWAY CENTER**

7:30 am REGISTRATION AND CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

8 am WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS, *Tom Gile, Board of Water and Soil Resources*

8:05 AM **Risk in Repair Petitions** *Chris Otterness, Houston Engineering, Inc. & Chad Martini, Stearns County*
Submitting a petition to repair or redetermine benefits on a drainage system is relatively straightforward. Understanding the financial implications of a petition, however, can be much more challenging. This is especially true when system records are incomplete and assessed benefits are limited. This presentation will explore potential financial liabilities that may be triggered by a petition and discuss strategies for helping petitioners understand cost obligations before and during drainage proceedings.

8:30 am **Risk in Regulatory Requirements: Repairs** *Adam Nies, Houston Engineering, Inc. & Tom Schmidt, Rice Creek Watershed District* — Drainage system repairs can trigger a surprisingly wide range of local, state, and federal regulations. Anoka County Ditch 53-62 provides an interesting case study of a seemingly simple repair effort that required navigation of a complex web of regulatory requirements.

9:15 am **Risk in Regulatory Requirements: Drainage Projects** *Chuck Brandel, ISG*
This session will examine the differences between repair and improvement project permitting requirements, the technical information needed to support permit applications, and considerations for changing direction when project conditions differ from original assumptions.

10 am **Risk of Legal Precedent: Case Law Update** *John Kolb, Rinke Noonan*
Recent court decisions can significantly influence how drainage authorities approach their responsibilities. This session reviews key legal developments and their implications for drainage admin and project implementation.

10:30 am **Risk of Humiliation** *Chris Otterness, Houston Engineering, Inc. & Tom Gile, Board of Water and Soil Resources*
Think you know Minnesota public drainage? Test your knowledge of Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103E in this episode of Are You Smarter Than a Drainage Professional? To give you a little help, our classroom of drainage experts will even let you peek at their answers. Just hope they are right!

11:30 pm LUNCH — *Provided with Registration*

12:30 pm **Risk in Contracting: Three-Party Agreements and Roles** *Chad Engels, Moore Engineering, Inc. & Lukas Croaker*
Construction contracts define the responsibilities and protections of drainage authorities, engineers, and contractors. This session will discuss contract structures, participant roles, and key considerations for protecting each parties interests throughout the construction phase of the project.

1 pm **Risk in Contracting: Construction Administration** *Chuck Brandel, ISG*
Effective construction administration requires a clear understanding of the responsibilities of engineers, owners, contractors, and subcontractors. This session will discuss project observations, documentation, communication, and areas where risk may arise during construction.

1:30 pm **Risk in Contracting: Change Order Process** *James Guler, Moore Engineering, Inc.*
What is the change order process? This session will explain when change orders are appropriate, how they are evaluated, and the potential impacts they can have on project costs, schedules, and risk management.

1:45 pm **Risk in Contracting: BWSR Contracts** *Tom Gile, Board of Water and Soil Resource*
You may work in the world of Chapter 103E, but funding partners outside the drainage system often do not. Clear communication regarding contract authority, funding agreements, and cost-share expectations is critical. This session will highlight common questions, potential pitfalls, and best practices for ensuring all parties understand their roles and responsibilities.

2 pm **Risk in Real-World Drainage Activities** *Moderator: Jacob Rischmiller, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Panelists: Chad Engels (Moore Engineering, Inc.), Chris Otterness (Houston Engineering, Inc.), Chuck Brandel (ISG)* — Experience is often the best teacher. In this interactive consultant panel, participants will examine real-world drainage challenges and discuss solution options, associated risks, and practical considerations under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103E.

3 pm **Adjourn**

Wednesday

OPTION TWO

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

8 am - 3 pm **GULL LAKE CENTER | LAKE MARGARET**

SUBJECT: **Understanding the Purpose, Responsibilities, and Impact of Watershed Governance**

INSTRUCTORS: *Julie Westerlund, Board of Water and Soil Resources, Louis Smith, Smith Partners, PLLP, Dan Money, Two Rivers Watershed District, Michelle Overholser, Yellow Medicine River Watershed District, Mike Isensee, Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District*

7:30 am REGISTRATION

8 am **Welcome and Introductions**

To help guide the day's discussion, presenters will begin by learning more about attendees and their interests. Participants should be prepared to share the organization they represent, their role within that organization, and questions they have about watershed management. This interactive discussion will help instructors tailor the workshop to attendees' needs and interests.

8:30 am **Why Watersheds? Purposes, Powers, and Governance Structures**

Why were watershed organizations created and what legal authorities do they have? This session will explain the similarities and differences in watershed management governance structures. An overview will be given of how watershed districts throughout Minnesota operate under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103D and how metro watershed districts and watershed management organizations operate under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B.

9:45 am BREAK

10 am **Why Watershed Management? Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation**

Planning, implementation, and evaluation are the foundation of effective watershed management. This session will explore why watershed plans are important, how they guide organizational priorities, and the respective roles board members and staff play in developing, implementing, and assessing watershed projects and programs.

11:30 pm LUNCH — *Provided with Registration*

12:30 pm **Why Transparency? Statutory Requirements**

Transparency is essential to effective watershed governance and public trust. Watershed boards are subject to laws and policies that govern how meetings are conducted, how decisions are made, and how information is shared with the public. This session will provide an overview of the Open Meeting Law, the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, and other governance requirements that help ensure accountability and public access.

1:30 pm **Why Working Relationships? Watershed Boards and Staff**

Successful watershed organizations are built on strong working relationships. Effective leadership, communication, and teamwork between board members and staff are critical to achieving organizational goals. This session will examine the distinct roles and responsibilities of boards and staff and discuss strategies for productive and professional relationships.

2 pm **What's Working? Real-World Examples**

Learning from experience is one of the best ways to understand watershed governance. In this session, administrators from the Two Rivers, Yellow Medicine River, and Carnelian Marine St. Croix Watershed Districts will highlight successful projects and describe their boards' involvement throughout the process, from initial concept and planning to implementation and evaluation. Attendees will gain practical insights into how effective governance contributes to successful outcomes.

3 pm **Adjourn**

Wednesday

OPTION THREE

STAFF ADMINISTRATIVE TRAINING WORKSHOP

8 am - 3 pm **GULL LAKE CENTER | BALLROOM A**

7:30 am — REGISTRATION AND NETWORKING
Check in, connect with colleagues, and enjoy coffee before the program begins.

8 am — **Welcome and Opening Remarks** *Andy Henschel, Shell Rock River Watershed District*

8:05 am — **Stream Restoration and Public Water Permitting: Finding a Clearer Path** *Andy Henschel, Shell Rock River Watershed District; Jon Janke, Coon Creek Watershed District; Mori Maher, Middle Snake Tamarac Rivers Watershed District* — Stream restoration projects can improve water quality, reduce erosion, and restore habitat, but navigating public waters permits can add uncertainty to project design, budgets, and schedules. This session will explore the Minnesota DNR stream restoration permitting work group's efforts and Minnesota Watersheds' legislative initiative to improve permit efficiency. Participants will learn about current efforts and opportunities to help shape future improvements.

9:15 — **Self-Insurance Pool: A Health Insurance Approach to Consider?** *Joni Giese, Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District* — Due to the great work of Minnesota Watershed's lobbyist during the 2026 legislative session, watershed districts and watershed management organizations can now join with other cities, counties, and school districts to jointly insure for employee health benefits! But what are self-insurance pools and how do they work? Staff from Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District have been investigating the feasibility of joining a self-insurance pool for health benefits and will share their current understanding of how self-insurance pools are structured, along with potential benefits and drawbacks when considering whether to join a self-insurance pool.

10:15 pm — NETWORKING BREAK

10:30 pm — **Document Accessibility** *TBD*
Creating accessible documents is essential for ensuring information is available to all audiences and for meeting legal accessibility requirements. This session will provide practical guidance on creating accessible Word documents, PDFs, presentations, and digital materials. Attendees will learn common accessibility standards, how to identify and correct accessibility issues, and simple techniques to improve readability and usability for individuals using assistive technologies. Participants will leave with tools and best practices they can immediately apply to their organization's communications and public-facing documents.

11:30 pm — LUNCH — *Provided with Registration*

12:30 pm — **Navigating the Legislative Session** *Kevin Matzek, Lockridge Grindal Nauen*
With Minnesota Watersheds expanded lobbying efforts, legislative platform, and updated resolutions process, questions have emerged regarding the role of watershed administrators in legislative advocacy. This interactive question-and-answer session will provide clarity on expectations, opportunities for engagement, and effective participation during the legislative session.

2:30 - 3 pm — **Wrap Up & Next Steps** *Andy Henschel, Shell Rock River Watershed District*
Attendees will review key takeaways from each session, identify areas requiring additional information or clarification, and discuss possible follow-up actions.

3 pm — **Adjourn**

Wednesday

OPTION FOUR

STAFF TECHNICAL TRAINING WORKSHOP

8 am - 2:30 pm **GULL LAKE CENTER | BALLROOM B**

7:30 am REGISTRATION AND NETWORKING
Check in, connect with colleagues, and enjoy coffee before the program begins.

8 am **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS** *Ashlee Ricci, Ramsey-Washington-Metro Watershed District*

8:05 am **BWSR Grants Management** *Luke Olson, Board of Water and Soil Resource*
Administering a BWSR grant can be complex. This session will explore a grantee's responsibilities from award through final closeout, including project implementation requirements, financial management, record retention, reporting expectations, and post-grant assurances. Attendees will gain practical guidance on maintaining compliance and successfully managing grant-funded projects.

9 am **Funding Opportunities for Watershed Projects** *Courtney Phillips, Shell Rock River Watershed District*
This session will provide an overview of funding sources available to watershed organizations, including the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC), Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) grants, Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), state bonding opportunities, and dedicated sales tax funding. Attendees will learn strategies for identifying, pursuing, and leveraging funding opportunities to support watershed priorities.

15-MINUTE BREAK

10:15 am **AI for Watershed Communications: Create Better Content, Faster, While Maintaining Trust**
Valerie Franklin Lockhart, Executive Director, Minnesota Technology Network
Artificial intelligence can help watershed organizations create clearer, more consistent public communications while reducing the time staff spend drafting social media posts, flyers, brochures, newsletters, project updates, and educational materials.

In this practical session, participants will learn how to use AI as a communications assistant rather than simply a content generator. We'll explore real-world watershed examples, including how to turn technical information into accessible public-facing content and efficiently adapt one message for multiple audiences and formats.

Participants will also learn the CCC prompting framework — Context, Constraints, and Calibration — a simple method for getting more accurate, useful, and organization-appropriate results from AI tools.

The session will also take a practical look at AI policy and governance, including protecting sensitive information, verifying AI-generated content, maintaining human oversight, addressing copyright and imagery concerns, and establishing clear expectations for staff use. Participants will leave with practical techniques they can use immediately and a framework for using AI more responsibly and consistently within their organization.

11:30 pm LUNCH — *Provided with Registration*

12:30 pm **Cybersecurity for Watershed Staff** *Christian Torkelson, League of Minnesota Cities*
Cybersecurity threats continue to evolve and pose risks to organizations of all sizes. This session will cover common cyber threats, employee best practices, risk mitigation strategies, and practical steps watershed organizations can take to safeguard sensitive data, financial information, and operational systems.

1:30 pm **Watershed Project Sharing Session** *Kyle Axtel, South Washington Watershed District; Jon Roeschlein and Steve Zeece III, Sauk River Watershed District; Tracy Halstensgard, Roseau River Watershed Distric*
This interactive session highlights successful watershed projects and lessons learned from across the state. Presenters will share project goals, implementation strategies, challenges, outcomes, and key takeaways. Attendees will have opportunities to ask questions, exchange ideas, and discuss real-world applications that can be adapted to their own organizations.

2:30 pm Adjourn

Thursday

CHOOSE YOUR CONCURRENT SESSIONS

PICK ONE FOR EACH TIME
slot and fill up your day

GULL LAKE CENTER

8:30 - 8:50 am

OPTION 1

☐ "We Should" to "Here's How"Practical Diversity and Equity Actions for Watershed Management

What began as a call to action at the 2021 Minnesota Watersheds Conference has evolved into the Watershed Equity Alliance (WEA). While the group did not yet have a name or formal structure for the first few years, its mission was clear: to create space for watershed professionals to share experiences, expand our knowledge, and advocate for incorporating equity into watershed management. This presentation will reflect on the evolution from a small group of professionals working to create change into an established alliance supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) across Minnesota's watershed management community. Presenters will explore how members have learned from one another and translate those lessons into both small and large organizational changes. The presentation will highlight scalable DEIA actions developed through the WEA and examples of how member organizations have adapted and implemented these practices. Five years of shared learning demonstrate how collaboration can transform individual experiences into practical resources and meaningful, sustainable change.

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:
Mary Fitzgerald, Ramsey-Washington Metro WD; Elizabeth Boor, Nine Mile Creek WD; Emily Heinz, Comfort Lake-Forest Lake WD; Lindsay Schwantes, Capitol Region WD

OPTION 2

☐ We Can Have All Three: Flow, Habitat, and Beavers

The Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District and Andy Riesgraf, M.S. Certified Beaver Management Professional, will present nature-based approaches to managing the outlet of Big Marine Lake and the restoration of Mill Stream through Burris Park in Marine on St. Croix. At the lake outlet, the district is implementing nonlethal beaver flow devices to maintain flows through large wetland complexes while allowing beavers to remain part of the landscape. In another location, the district is integrating beaver dam analogs and post-assisted log structures as part of a designated trout stream restoration design for a short, ecologically degraded reach affected by low-head dams and altered channel conditions. The presentation will examine how these approaches can reduce annual maintenance costs, improve habitat and stream function, reduce heavy equipment disturbance, and respond to community priorities.

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:
Mike Isensee, Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix WD and Andy Riesgraf, Beaver Innovations

9 - 9:20 am

☐ A Tornado Hit a District Lake — Now What?

On the evening of July 6, 2026, a tornado carved a seven-mile long, half-mile wide path through Becker County, Minnesota. That path included the popular Big Floyd Lake in the Pelican River Watershed District (PRWD). Three people were injured, 100 homes damaged, numerous boats, pontoons, docks and lifts were tossed, and established oak trees and other vegetation was destroyed. Staff from the PRWD will tell the story of the immediate aftermath, coordination of local groups, and all the soggy details of the cleanup efforts in the lake.

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:
Shanna Bach, Josh Beranek, Pelican River WD

☐ From Salt to Strategy: A Watershed Approach to Chloride Reduction

Chloride management remains a persistent challenge in urban watersheds because of diffuse sources, legacy loading, and limited treatment effectiveness. Watershed districts are well positioned to advance watershed-scale reduction through monitoring, planning, outreach, and implementation. The Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District (RWMWD) is developing a Chloride Reduction Strategy (CRS) that uses modeling and monitoring to prioritize coordinated, long-term management actions.

Developed alongside RWMWD's 2027-2036 Watershed Management Plan, the CRS integrates chloride reduction into communications and engagement, monitoring, stewardship grants, regulatory programs, and projects/research. As a living strategy, it combines prevention, mitigation, and behavior change across public and private sectors and will evolve as new data and implementation options become available. This presentation will show how chloride loading analysis and priority mapping are combined with strategic implementation actions that help translate chloride assessment into action.

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:
Ashlee Ricci, Ramsey-Washington Metro WD and Tyler Olsen, Barr Engineering Co.

9:30-9:50 am

☐ What to do When FEMA Changes My Floodplain?

An explanation about the process of how and why FEMA changes floodplains along with how the Wild Rice Watershed District and the communities of Halstad, Hendrum, and Perley dealt with changes to the floodplain to address resultant mandatory floodplain insurance requirements.

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:
Tara Jensen, Wild Rice WD and Jerry Bents, Houston Engineering, Inc.

☐ The Road to Chloride Reduction: Building a Strategy for Lasting Change

Chloride reduction is a complex, multifaceted challenge that requires more than individual actions - it requires a strategy for prioritizing resources, coordinating efforts, measuring progress, and creating opportunities for innovation. The Nine Mile Creek Watershed District has been actively working to reduce chloride through projects, partnerships, education, and policy efforts. While this work has made meaningful progress, our experience has shown that strategic planning can make good work even better by helping us prioritize actions, establish accountability, and focus resources where they can have the greatest impact.

Capitol Region Watershed District and the Clean Water Council will demonstrate what strategic planning can look like in action. CRWD will share updates from its chloride action plan, including how it is prioritizing district actions, informing legislative efforts, and supporting innovative approaches such as a chloride grant program. The CWC will highlight statewide policy and guidance efforts that can create greater consistency across jurisdictional boundaries. Together, these examples show how strategic planning and policy can build existing efforts and turn individual actions into coordinated, measurable, and lasting progress.

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:
Elizabeth Boor, Nine Mile Creek WD; Sarah Wein, Capitol Region WD; and Jessica Wilson, Clean Water Council

10 -10:20 am

☐ Improving Habitat Restoration in Drainage Water Management

Most of the drainage systems within the state were constructed in the early 1900s to promote settlement and agriculture. While many of these systems were successful, there are challenges presented by the existing land use and limitations of the original ditch design. These challenges often include degraded habitat on natural landscapes, undersized capacity of entire systems, or localized drainage issues. In the Roseau River Watershed, there are multiple projects underway within the Lost River State Forest and the Roseau River WMA which serve to improve these conditions, providing benefits to private land while enhancing natural habitats affected by drainage. These projects focus on improving drainage system efficiency by restoring hydrology to natural landscapes, improving water quality, and reducing burden on drainage systems and the affected private lands. The application of these principles can be implemented statewide to improve efficiency of legal drainage systems for greater use and resiliency.

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:
Tracy Halstensgard, Roseau River WD and Torin McCormack, HDR, Inc.

☐ Wake Boat Impacts on Alum Effectiveness in a Residential Minnesota Lake

Alum treatments are used to reduce internal phosphorus (P) loading in lakes by binding sediment P and limiting release under anoxic conditions. However, the stability of alum-treated sediments in lakes with high sediment disturbance is still uncertain. Recent research has shown that wake boats may redistribute or mix sediments. Lotus Lake, a deep lake in Chanhassen, MN, has undergone two alum applications (2018 and 2024) and experiences substantial wake boat activity during peak season. These conditions provided an opportunity to evaluate impact on alum treatment effectiveness.

Sediment cores were collected across treatment zones in spring and fall 2025. Vertical sediment cores were analyzed for total aluminum distribution within the top 25 cm, sediment phosphorus fractionation, and anoxic sediment phosphorus release rates. Distinct differences were observed in the aluminum distribution between spring and fall cores. Higher aluminum concentrations were observed within surficial sediments in spring compared to fall cores though despite these differences, hypolimnetic P concentrations and anoxic release rates remained significantly reduced relative to pre-treatment conditions. While this study adds to the growing understanding of wake boat impacts using real-world evidence, more analysis is needed to quantify long-term effects on sediment inactivation treatments.

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:
Terry Jeffery, Riley-Purgatory-Bluff Creek WD and Kate Lucas, \Barr Engineering

10:30 - 10:50 am

☐ Stabilizing the Clearwater River

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:

Tammy Audette, Red Lake WD; Tony Nordby, HEI; and Michael Kelly, DNR

A collaborative effort between the Red Lake Watershed District, Houston Engineering, Inc., and Minnesota DNR identified a project to reduce severe degradation within a 2.3 river mile stretch of the Clearwater River that stems back to a channel straightening project performed in the 1950s. Although the straightening project reduced overland flooding in the area, the steeper grade line and reduction in channel length resulted in erosion eight to ten feet in depth within the channel. The collaborative team analyzed geomorphology, hydraulics, and countless alternatives to determine the final design. The final design includes the installation of five new rock riffles, one rock arch rapids, and modifying two existing riffles to enhance the severely degraded channel, reducing velocity and facilitating fish passage. The project also includes stabilizing nine locations of streambank with bioengineering practices. Construction is nearly complete and we look forward to sharing this success story.

☐ What the Plants Are Telling us: Ecological Health as a Watershed Management Lens

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:

Karen Kill, Brown's Creek WD and Jimmy Marty, Emmons and Olivier Resources, Inc.

What can rare aquatic plants reveal about the systems we manage? At Brown's Creek Watershed District (BCWD), the answer is reshaping watershed management.

BCWD's recently completed fifth-generation watershed management plan elevates ecological health from a supporting consideration to a central organizing principle. Developed with an engaged advisory community, the plan integrates restoration of water resources and natural systems, protection of the uplands that sustain them, and stormwater infrastructure designed to deliver co-benefits for water quality, habitat, carbon sequestration, and community resilience. The process produced an unexpected discovery: soft-water plant communities among the rarest in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and Minnesota. Their presence, sustained by distinctive surface-water chemistry and hydrology, revealed connections between water, landscape, and the biological communities that depend on them - and provided new insight into which resources are most important to protect.

Join BCWD and EOR to explore ecological health not simply as a management objective, but as a lens for understanding watershed function and shaping measurable, actionable priorities for long-term stewardship.

11 - 11:20 am

☐ Friends Don't Let Friends Over-Model

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:
Amber Doschadis, Upper Minnesota River WD and Lisa Odens, Houston Engineering, Inc.

Projects often face pressure for increasingly complex technical analyses, particularly when reviewing regulatory impacts. On the Whetstone River, the challenge was not whether a larger, more sophisticated model could be built, but whether the significant investment in complicated analysis would improve the decision-making process. Restoration objectives need to be balanced with downstream flood risk, dam operations, infrastructure constraints, regulatory requirements, and stakeholder concerns extending beyond the project footprint.

The Upper Minnesota River Watershed District with its consultant, Houston Engineering, Inc., worked with multiple state and federal agencies to identify the decisions that needed to be made, then selected the minimum level of analysis necessary to answer those questions. The result was a submittal that addressed regulatory concerns while avoiding unnecessary complexity, cost, and uncertainty.

Attendees will learn practical lessons for defining project objectives, working with regulators, communicating uncertainty, and matching technical analyses to project risks and decision-making needs.

☐ The Land of 10,000 Lakes and 34,000 Miles of Shoreline: Making Shoreline Protection Work for Landowners and Local Governments

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:
Tom Langer and Mike Isensee, Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix WD

Minnesota continues to lose natural shoreline despite the existence of shoreline protections, technical guidance, and permitting programs. The challenge is not simply a lack of regulation. Through the Minnesota Natural Shoreline Partnership's Shoreline Protection Subcommittee, state and local partners identified recurring barriers, including inconsistent guidance and administration, limited local technical capacity, fragmented jurisdiction, and landowners receiving assistance only after damaging alterations occurred.

This session will share those findings and the practical solutions advanced through four 2026 resolutions adopted by Minnesota Watersheds: dedicated local technical assistance, common training and evaluation standards, updated public guidance, and improved regulatory and permitting-process coordination.
Using real-world examples of local watershed permitting and shoreline management, the presentation will explore how these changes could help preserve natural shorelines and increase the use while expanding

landowner access to native shoreline restoration and bioengineered applications practices. Participants will leave with practical examples of how shoreline protection can become easier to understand, more consistently administered, and more workable for landowners, contractors, and local governments.

11:45 am - 12:45 pm Lunch and Networking

LOCATION:
Main Lodge
Dining Room

1 - 1:20 pm

☐ From Education to Celebration: Untangling Public Perception in a Dam Modification Project

Buck's Mill Dam on the Pelican River presented intertwined safety, ecological, fish-passage, and community challenges. The modification project sought to improve fish passage and dam safety while preserving seasonal lake water levels, requiring the team to address technical knowledge gaps, public concerns, and residents' attachment to the site. Construction was supported by a deliberate communication and engagement strategy. A multi-stakeholder advisory committee identified concerns early and shaped outreach while regular updates kept the public informed before, during, and after construction. The team monitored local email threads, social media groups, and newspapers, and held one-on-one and small-group conversations to explain tradeoffs in accessible language. Educational materials clarified fish-passage function and expected water-level behavior. A partnership with the Becker County Museum connected engineering, ecology, and local history through interactive exhibits. The approach aims to strengthen understanding and trust while offering a replicable model for using cultural institutions in water resource education and celebrating community ownership of project outcomes.

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:
Shanna Bach, Pelican River WD and Garrett Monson and Lauren Weller, Moore Engineering, Inc.

☐ Engaging Owners in BMP Maintenance

It's not uncommon that someone buys a new property with a permanent BMP and has no idea it's there - much less how to maintain it. Staff inspections can be helpful in identifying issues and making the owner aware of the BMP, but don't bridge the gap in understanding how it functions and what maintenance needs to be done. We'll look at some successes CLFLWD has had in engaging owners in managing their BMPs and what can be done, with a special focus on small businesses and residential homeowners.

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:
Victoria D'Amico, Comfort Lake-Forest Lake WD

1:30-1:50 pm

☐ Persistence Pays Off: Fountain Lake Dredging Moves to Completion

The Shell Rock River Watershed District's Fountain Lake Restoration Project reflects a long-term, multi-phase effort to improve one of southern Minnesota's most visible and economically important water resources. Fountain Lake, located in Albert Lea, has been impaired by nutrient enrichment, poor water clarity, sediment resuspension, and degraded aquatic habitat, with a 2012 TMDL identifying internal phosphorus loading from accumulated sediments as a major driver. Since dredging began in 2018, SRRWD has advanced the project through persistence, partnerships, state funding, and local option sales tax support. The first two phases included construction of a confined disposal facility and removal of approximately 1.2 million cubic yards of sediment. With an additional $9 million from the Minnesota Legislature, the final phase will remove about 600,000 cubic yards from Main Bay and portions of Bancroft Bay. Attendees will learn how dredging, permitting, vegetation management, and habitat enhancement support improved water quality, fisheries, and long-term lake health.

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:
Andy Henschel, Shell Rock River WD and Julie Blackburn, ISG

☐ LIDAR Analysis Targets, Near Channel Erosion Sources, and Results in Prescriptive BMP Implementation

Modeling and terrain analysis enhancements were made possible by the recent release of a second generation of Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) topographic mapping. Sand Creek has been impaired for high total suspended solids (TSS) and turbidity since 2002, and watershed monitoring data confirmed that monitored stream segments exceed the TSS standard by two to eight times. Work completed for the Sand Creek watershed used both sets of LiDAR mapping and stream monitoring data to target specific sources of near-channel erosion and prioritize exact locations for implementing improvement options. This presentation will demonstrate how GIS terrain analysis and watershed monitoring and modeling results were combined to quantify near channel erosion volumes, develop statistical relationships with TSS and prioritize specific sites that have delivered the highest levels of excess runoff and sediment load. The results were checked for agreement with past geomorphic surveys and are getting used for management plan updates.

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:
Melissa Bokman Ermer, Scott WMO and Greg Wilson, Barr Engineering Co.

2 - 2:20 pm

☐ Partnership Through Permitting: A Model for Minnesota Watersheds

An inherent challenge sits at the interface of land use and water, where development decisions shape hydrology and water quality. How the land-use community experiences watershed permitting can shape outcomes beyond the regulatory process, but when watersheds engage after land-use decisions are fixed, friction arises and opportunities for collaboration narrow.

Recurring policy proposals, including recent efforts to consolidate watershed authority, highlight the importance of an innovative regulatory approach that demonstrates how permitting can protect water resources while supporting broader community goals.

MCWD's Land & Water Partnership framework advances this approach. With permitting as a primary implementation arm, MCWD engages early, provides technical assistance, and builds relationships to achieve outcomes beyond compliance.

Drawing on interviews with developers, cities, and metro watersheds, this session will examine the inherent tensions of regulatory programs, explore partnership case studies, and offer Minnesota watersheds a practical model for building relationships, protecting water, and demonstrating public value.

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTERS:
James Wisker, Veronica Sannes, and Abigail Couture, Minnehaha Creek WD and Louis Smith, Smith Partners

☐ Finding Your Bearings: Creating a New Baseline of Project Inspection Data to Support Project Performance

Watersheds need projects to function as designed to be successful in protecting water, and functioning projects and partnerships rely on solid information and an understanding of current conditions. With over 180 stormwater projects across 24 years of partner grants in the community, in 2026 the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) began a journey to understand how built projects are functioning. Through reviewing past project BMPs and populating a geospatial database to track visual inspections, MWMO has garnered insights into the status and function of our partners' projects. This required simplification of subjective data collection, connectivity between various programs, and legwork by staff to get the job done. As MWMO continues to work to support long-term performance and understanding of project impacts, staff anticipate going deeper and further into monitoring approaches to point towards how past projects can be sustained for performance for our partners, communities, and the Mississippi River.

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTERS:

Adam Flett and Emmy Baskerville-Doeckel, Mississippi WMO

2:30 - 2:50 pm

☐ Fundamental Principles, Complaint Procedures, and Indemnification in Watershed Governance

Public administrators who serve Minnesota watershed organizations operate in a complex governance environment. They are employees or officers of a public entity, but they also work closely with an appointed Board of Managers that sets policy, approves budgets, adopts rules, and supervises the overall direction of the district. This relationship can create difficult questions when an administrator has a human resources complaint, becomes the subject of litigation for work performed on behalf of the district, or needs clarity about how internal governance policies should be applied. A well-designed governance framework should answer these questions before conflict arises. It should provide a clear complaint pathway, a fair process for response and appeal, and an accurate explanation of defense and indemnification obligations. This session will inform board members and administrators how to design and navigate this framework.

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTER:

Louis Smith, Smith Partners

☐ From Park Improvements to Climate-Resilient Community Infrastructure

The Central Park redevelopment in Hopkins demonstrates how strong local partnerships can transform a traditional park improvement project into a multifunctional investment in community resilience. Led by the City of Hopkins, the project began as an effort to upgrade park amenities. Through relationship-building and collaboration with the Nine Mile Creek Watershed District, the project expanded to integrate recreation, stormwater management, and climate resilience. The district contributed design expertise, funding, and support in securing a $5 million grant, helping the city advance a project with benefits far beyond recreation. Emerging from the District's DEIA work, the partnership intentionally focused investment in an area of the watershed more vulnerable to climate-related impacts. The resulting multi-use space provides improved recreational opportunities while reducing flood risk, improving water quality, and mitigating the urban heat island effect. Central Park illustrates how watershed districts can build trusted partnerships that leverage public investments to address environmental vulnerabilities while meeting community priorities.

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTER:

Elizabeth Boor, Nine Mile Creek WD

3 - 3:20 pm

☐ The Future of One Watershed, One Plan

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTER:

Julie Westerlund, Moriya Rufer, and Maggie Karschnia, BWSR

Very soon, Minnesota will have completed a 10-year transition to statewide watershed-based planning through the One Watershed, One Plan program. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is exploring ideas for continuous improvement of the program as plans enter their second planning and implementation cycle. In this session, BWSR staff will share what they've learned, and ideas for program improvement to strengthen partnerships, accelerate clean water results, and share success stories. This will be an interactive session that will build on a series of summer listening sessions and a survey, continuing the discussion about potential program modifications aimed at streamlining planning, cultivating consistency while maintaining flexibility, and improving how results are communicated.

☐ Revealing Opportunity: Turning Watershed Goals into Action in the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay Sub Watershed

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTER:

Michael Hayman and Kailey Cermak, Minnehaha Creek WD

MCWD has learned that effecting meaningful change for water resources, and the communities anchored by them, often require looking beyond its own area of expertise - seeking unique project opportunities on the landscape in partnership with those who transform it.

For over a decade, MCWD has cultivated relationships with its Six Mile Creek - Halsted Bay Sub watershed communities, integrating water resources and land use. By recognizing where watershed goals intersect with community aspirations for sustainable growth, MCWD and its partners unlocked a diverse project portfolio, including habitat restorations, stormwater retrofits, and corridor improvements, while continuing to plan together for the future.

Rather than focus on what watersheds can accomplish alone, this session will explore how identifying shared goals with land-use actors reveals opportunities to advance watershed priorities while achieving broader community objectives. Attendees will gain practical ideas for discovering common ground and turning opportunities into projects that generate meaningful local and downstream change.

3:30-3:50 pm

☐ Defining a Watershed's Role on Local Water Management Issues

LOCATION:
Lake Margaret

PRESENTER:

Nick Tomczik, Rice Creek WD and Chris Otterness, Houston Engineering, Inc.

A watershed organization's role and scope in managing surface water quantity is often misunderstood. Because you have "water" in your organizational name, stakeholders often understand that role extends to ALL surface water issues, when an organization's budget and authorities demand a "regional" prioritization to their mission. In short, it can be hard to say "no" to local landowners who seek relief from their localized, but deeply personal, water management issue. In this presentation, the Rice Creek Watershed District will demonstrate strategies they have used to communicate the sidebars on the district's role in water quantity management and provide secondary but useful assistance on these issues.

☐ Balancing Recreational Boating and Lake Health: Empirical Insights for Sustainable Boat Operation

LOCATION:
Lake Itasca

PRESENTER:

Andy Riesgraf, UM St. Anthony Falls Laboratory

Escalating boat sizes, engine horsepower, and modern wake-enhancing technologies are driving growing concerns over freshwater ecosystem health. In particular, wake boats and the sport of wake surfing have introduced a distinct mode of vessel operation designed to produce large, surfable waves - a practice that has sparked intense environmental and regulatory debate. This presentation synthesizes five years of field-based research evaluating different types of recreational powerboats, their typical modes of operation, and the hydrodynamics they generate. By analyzing and comparing surface wave height, energy, and power, alongside subsurface waves and turbulence, this work provides the empirical foundation needed to establish science-based operational guidance - including setback distance and water depth - to minimize impacts to the shoreline and lakebed.