



# Agenda

## Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission

February 14, 2024 – 4:30 p.m., In-person and Teleconference via MS Teams

1. Call to Order
2. Election of Watershed Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair
3. Roll Call
4. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda  
*(please limit audience comments to five minutes)*
5. Approval of Agenda Action
6. Approval of Minutes November 15, 2023, Meeting Action
7. Business Items
  - a) Approval of Revised 2024 Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting Dates Action
  - b) Review and Discuss Results from the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission's 2026-2035 Watershed Plan Stakeholder Issues Prioritization Survey Information
  - c) Presentation of Draft Vermillion River Watershed Brand Awareness Plan Information
  - d) Presentation and Discussion of Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2024 Budget-Identified Capital Improvement Projects Information
8. Updates
  - a) Chairperson's Report
  - b) Staff Updates
9. Adjourn Action

**Please note**, the February 14, 2024, Watershed Planning Commission meeting will take place **in-person** in Conference Room A at the Extension and Conservation Center, 4100 220<sup>th</sup> Street West, Farmington Minnesota **and via teleconference** on the web-based application, Microsoft Teams.

## Microsoft Teams meeting

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Phone Conference ID: 564 431 891#

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#### Other Information

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Next Meeting Date: **May 8, 2024**, at 4:30 p.m.

Please confirm your attendance by contacting Travis Thiel at [travis.thiel@co.dakota.mn.us](mailto:travis.thiel@co.dakota.mn.us) by 12 p.m. on the day before. You will be notified if the meeting is cancelled due to an anticipated lack of quorum.



# Minutes

## Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) Meeting

November 15, 2023 – 4:30 p.m.

In-person and Microsoft Teams Videoconference

### WPC Members in Attendance

Jim Kotz      Brad Blackett  
Josh Borton    Andy Riesgraf  
Steve Hamrick   Sandra Weber  
Linda Larson  
Kevin Chamberlain

### VRWJPO Staff in Attendance

Travis Thiel, Watershed Administrator  
Brita Moore-Kutz, Communications & Outreach Specialist  
Jeff Dunn, Water Resources Engineer

### Others in Attendance

Ashley Gallagher, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District, Resource Conservationist  
Mark Henry, Castle Rock Township resident and former WPC member  
Nikki Stewart, Dakota County, Environmental Resources Department Director (virtual)  
Valerie Neppel, Dakota County, Groundwater Protection Unit Supervisor (virtual)  
Paul Beaumaster, Dakota County, Assistant County Attorney & Legal Counsel to VRWJPO (virtual)  
Henry Stelten, Prairie Island Indian Community (virtual)

### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Josh Borton at 4:30 p.m.

### 2. Roll Call

All members were in attendance.

### 3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

Travis Thiel introduced Jeff Dunn, the new Water Resources Engineer for the VRWJPO.

### 4. Approval of Agenda

*Motion by Commissioner Larson to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Weber. Motion carried on an 8-0 vote.*

## **5. Approval of Minutes from the September 13, 2023 Meeting**

*Motion by Commissioner Chamberlain to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Blackett.  
Motion carried on an 8-0 vote.*

## **6. Business Items**

### **a. Presentation on Agricultural Best Management Practices for Nitrate Reduction**

Ashley Gallagher shared a presentation on programs and practices to reduce nitrate levels in local water resources, as well as funding available to support Best Management Practice (BMP) adoption. These included the Minnesota Groundwater Protection Rule and Dakota County Agricultural Chemical Reduction Effort (ACRE). She highlighted the Hastings Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA) as an area particularly affected by nitrogen, which includes much of the Vermillion River and many tributaries. Also, she mentioned that Dakota County is second in the state for irrigated crop land.

Commissioners received a copy of Ashley's presentation following the meeting.

*Information only.*

### **b. Approval of 2024 Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting Dates**

Commissioners approved the following dates:

- January 10
- February 14
- March 13
- April 10
- May 8
- June 12
- July 10
- August 14
- September 11
- October 9
- November 20

*Motion by Commissioner Riesgraf to approve the meeting dates, seconded by Commissioner Weber.  
Motion carried on an 8-0 vote.*

### **c. Recommend Adoption of the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2024 Final Draft Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy**

Travis Thiel reviewed the proposed budget and levy. The proposed levy is for \$1 million across both Dakota and Scott County portions of the watershed. Changes since the draft budget was published in August include funds set aside for Dakota County Planning staff to write the Watershed Plan and an urban water conservation digital marketing campaign with the City of Lakeville. Some of the Capital

Improvement Project line items were also changed due to grant fund distribution from the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources.

*Motion by Commissioner Chamberlain to approve the budget, seconded by Commissioner Blackett.  
Motion carried on an 8-0 vote.*

**d. Update on Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Member Terms and Status**

Travis shared the current status of WPC member terms. Commissioners Riesgraf, Kotz, and Hamrick have terms expiring at the end of 2023. Travis asked them to email him with their intentions to serve another term or not.

Travis also brought up the per diem available to WPC members of \$50 per meeting. Any Commissioner who wants a per diem should contact him.

**e. Discussion of Watershed Planning Commission Engagement Improvements**

The WPC has had some ongoing discussions about engagement over the past year, such as the idea of allowing virtual participation in meetings. Citizen advisory committees such as the WPC are required by state law for watershed organizations, but the content and frequency of meetings is up to each individual committee. Travis posed the following questions to the group:

- What types of information should be provided in order to feel engaged?
  - WPC members may not need to review all joint-powers agreements with other local government units – staff are experts in day-to-day activities - Riesgraf
  - What are they advising?
  - Greater understanding of what, exactly, the WPC is looking at. For instance, what are the concrete results of funding the line items in the budgets? - Kotz
- How often should you meet to feel adequately engaged?
  - Subcommittees to bring in more people from the communities? – Blackett
  - Putting on meetings every month is resource-intensive for staff.
  - Quarterly – Larson, seconded by Weber, and consider monthly optional informal meetings “offline” (slightly complicated because WPC is beholden to open meeting law, though that could be changed through JPA)
  - Every other month – Borton
- What meeting times work best to accommodate meeting participation by WPC members?
  - 4:30-6:30 is ok
- Of the various business the VRWJPO conducts, what business is most critical for the WPC to provide recommendations on?
  - Messages and tools to help communities understand what the watershed is
  - Accountability and transparency for the actions of the VRWJPO
  - Budget
- What do you currently dislike about current efforts to present information and engage the WPC?

- Still not clear to new members what the purpose of the WPC is. Feels like they are just a “rubber stamp.” They were hoping to learn new information and provide outreach to their communities, like a “liaison” role. - Blackett
- Feels like a city planning commission – no one cares until something controversial goes on - Blackett

Travis polled other watershed organizations in the Twin Cities Metro Area and heard a wide variety of responses about what their citizen advisory committees were covering. At present, the Vermillion River WPC makes recommendations to the Joint Powers Board (JPB).

Other comments that fell outside of these questions:

- The watershed should have some kind of discussion series about why water is important to community members. This would also help inform them about the WPC and advise which entity people should go to about various concerns regarding water. And the value of being a good steward. - Larson
- Getting to younger people somehow – what can WPC do? - Weber
- Fears about other states poaching MN water - Weber
- More direction for local MN Water Stewards to get into the communities and spread the word – Blackett
- Talk about the information they are learning

*Information only.*

#### **f. Update on Watershed Plan Stakeholder Engagement Plan**

Brita Moore-Kutz presented an overview of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan. She highlighted objectives and approaches, the timeline, who is included in the stakeholder list, and different ways VRWJPO is engaging with the various stakeholders (public meetings, electronic media, activities, print surveys, and such). She also demonstrated the Social PinPoint map tool hosted on the VRWJPO website and the electronic survey.

Brita encouraged WPC members to communicate about the Plan with their communities’ elected officials. She announced the Phase 1 Community Conversations coming up on January 16 and 24, 2024, in Lakeville and Hastings, respectively.

*Information only.*

### **7. Updates**

#### **a. Chairperson’s Report**

No updates.

#### **b. Staff Updates**

**Travis Thiel**

Reported on the recent proposal for a data center in Castle Rock Township, which would require annexation of an area of the township by the City of Farmington. The water needs are unknown at this point.

Commissioner Weber, who is an officer for Castle Rock Township, added that Farmington has asked for a decision from the Township within a month. The township was not given the company's name, just that it's a proposal for a data center. The company would have to go through an AUAR to lay out impacts on water and traffic, which they may not want to do until they have the site secured. The community members want to know the impacts before committing.

**Ashley Gallagher**

SWCD is working on their work plan for their services to the VRWJPO in 2024. They have about 1,500 acres of cover crops certified and are helping with on-farm construction projects. Monitoring for 2023 is coming to a close, and preparations for 2024 Landscaping for Clean Water workshops are ongoing.

**Brita Moore-Kutz**

Brita shared about the Rural Healthy Living Newsletter from the Environmental Resources Department mailed to all rural households in Dakota County. It included a blurb about the Watershed Plan update.

**8. Adjourn**

*Motion by Commissioner Hamrick, second by Commissioner Riesgraf. Motion carried on an 8-0 vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:14 p.m.*

**7a. Approval of Revised 2024 Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting Dates**

Meeting Date: 2/14/2024  
Item Type: Regular-Action  
Contact: Travis Thiel  
Telephone: 952-891-7546  
Prepared by: Travis Thiel  
Reviewed by: N/A

N/A



**PURPOSE/ACTION REQUESTED**

- Approval of Revised 2024 Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) meeting dates

**SUMMARY**

At the November 15, 2023 WPC meeting, a 2024 meeting date schedule was adopted by the WPC. At the same meeting, staff discussed with WPC members how to ensure members feel engaged in Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization activities and sought feedback on a revised schedule for future WPC meetings to ensure the outcomes match the WPC’s expectations. As a result of that discussion, staff proposed a revised meeting schedule to WPC members. In past years, WPC meetings have been held the second Wednesday of the scheduled month at 4:30 p.m. in Room A of the Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center in Farmington. It is proposed that the 2024 WPC meetings happen quarterly throughout the year, with meetings occurring in February, May, August, and November. Due to the Thanksgiving Holiday, and because the Joint Powers Board (JPB) meets on December 7, 2024, the November meeting is scheduled for the third Wednesday of the month. Traditionally, there is no December meeting of the WPC.

The revised 2024 VRWPC proposed meeting schedule is as follows:

- February 14
- May 8
- August 14
- November 20

**EXPLANATION OF FISCAL/FTE IMPACT**

None

**RESOLUTION**

**7a. Approval of Revised 2024 Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission Meeting Dates**

**WHEREAS**, the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (VRWPC) is required by its Bylaws to hold regular meetings; and

**WHEREAS**, regularly scheduled meetings of the VRWPC are required to complete its business in a timely and responsible manner.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that in calendar year 2024, the VRWPC will meet at 4:30 p.m. according to the following schedule:



- February 14
- May 8
- August 14
- November 20

**7b. Review and Discuss Results from the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission’s 2026-2035 Watershed Plan Stakeholder Issues Prioritization Survey**

Meeting Date: 2/14/2024  
Item Type: Regular-Information  
Contact: Jeff Dunn  
Telephone: 952-891-7140  
Prepared by: Travis Thiel  
Reviewed by: N/A N/A



**PURPOSE/ACTION REQUESTED**

- Information only.

**SUMMARY**

A survey was sent to the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) to help prioritize the issues identified during the stakeholder engagement process for the 2026-2035 Watershed Plan (Plan) development. Staff will present the overall results of that survey with the WPC and can discuss any questions that WPC members have regarding the results or specific issues identified in the survey.

**RESOLUTION**

**Information only.**

Attachment A: 2026-2035 Watershed Plan Survey Questions for WPC

The Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO) received authorization from the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board (JPB) in March 2023 to begin updating its Watershed Management Plan (Plan). We are at the end of Phase 1, Issue Identification, as part of the Plan development process.

Staff has compiled a listing of recurring themes and issues that were generated from comments by watershed stakeholders through a series of virtual and community meetings and surveys conducted during the fall and winter of 2023-24. During that time, the JPB directed staff to provide a concise overview of these outcomes that they will use to provide direction on prioritizing goals and objectives that are essential or core to the Watershed’s vision for the Plan. This will allow staff to focus their efforts on incorporating these goals and objectives into the framework of the Plan and complete Phase 1.

To legitimize the essential outcomes of the stakeholder input, staff requests assistance with prioritizing these issues into what you think are essential to meeting the watershed’s core mission. For each recommendation in the following table, please:

1. Choose either the “Essential To JPO” or “Good For JPO To Do” or “Not JPO’s Work” for each recommendation.
2. For those that are “Essential to JPO” or “Good for JPO To Do”, rate your Priority Level (High/Medium/Low) for the listed recommendations.

Recommendation	Essential To JPO	Good For JPO To Do	Not JPO’s Work	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
1. Evaluate and collaborate on groundwater sustainability						
2. Continue efforts and collaborate on initiatives for chloride reduction (re: smart salting techniques)						
3. Evaluate PFAS and other contaminants of emerging concern and their potential impacts to groundwater						
4. Evaluate wastewater biosolids agricultural application impacts to surface water and groundwater						
5. Continue efforts to evaluate, collaborate, and initiate projects that address nitrate levels in surface water and groundwater						
6. Continue efforts to evaluate, collaborate, and initiate projects that address phosphate levels in surface water						
7. Collaborate on efforts to restore and protect soil health						
8. Continue to evaluate, collaborate, and initiate projects that promote stream stability and natural channel restoration.						
9. Collaborate on initiatives that assess water resource impacts from riparian land						

Recommendation	Essential To JPO	Good For JPO To Do	Not JPO's Work	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
changes/uses that aren't addressed by existing regulatory requirements to restore and protect soil health						
10. Evaluate methods to minimize impacts of aggregate mining						
11. Reevaluate floodplains and impacts in flood-prone areas						
12. Continue to promote effective stormwater management.						
13. Continue efforts to evaluate, collaborate, and initiate projects that address stormwater reuse						
14. Continue to evaluate, collaborate, and initiate projects that address invasive species						
15. Continue to evaluate, collaborate, and initiate studies that address vegetative management						
16. Continue to evaluate, collaborate, and initiate projects that mitigate loss and preserve wetlands						
17. Monitor effectiveness of JPO's watershed strategies and activities						
18. Continue to collaborate with other entities on climate change and climate resiliency efforts						
19. Improve collaboration and monitor effectiveness with LGU's on shared policies/standards, collaboration on beneficial projects, programs, and practices						
20. Continue to evaluate, collaborate, and initiate projects that improve recreational opportunities						
21. Continue to collaborate with others on projects related to trash and debris clean up along the river						
22. Continue to monitor changing demographics and engage under-represented communities						
23. Develop broader environmental education and engagement using earned and paid media						
24. Increase levy funding to support VRWJPO efforts						
25. Review current regulations and make adjustments that are reasonable and enforceable by rural LGUs						

Please List any other actions that are not listed but should be considered for prioritization:

**7c. Watershed Brand Awareness Plan**

Meeting Date: 2/14/2024  
Item Type: Regular-Information  
Contact: Brita Moore-Kutz  
Telephone: 952-891-7967  
Prepared by: Brita Moore-Kutz  
Reviewed by: N/A

N/A



**PURPOSE/ACTION REQUESTED**

- Informational update on strategies and goals for expanding awareness of the watershed.

**SUMMARY**

In the public engagement process for the 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Plan, staff noticed that some stakeholders lack awareness of the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO) and its work. This prompted discussion on how to increase popular recognition of the watershed.

Staff created an outline of methods to make the watershed more visible and its mission clearer. This will create a stronger basis for civic engagement and citizen-led stewardship in the watershed.

**EXPLANATION OF FISCAL/FTE IMPACT**

Expenses could be incurred if paid media is sought.

**RESOLUTION**

Information only.

Attachment A: Campaign Timeline

## VRWJPO “Brand” Awareness Campaign Timeline

Action item	People	Details	Budget impact	Deadline	Progress
Social media post series	Brita Moore-Kutz	Highlight facts, features, and history of the watershed and the VRWJPO.	Cost of boosting posts, if we choose to pursue that	Ongoing	In progress
Dot board	Brita Moore-Kutz, Paula Liepold, Jason Menard (GIS)	Map of the watershed to bring to local events, with a sheet of dot stickers. Include QR codes to VRW web links.		2/23/2024 (to bring to Master Gardeners event). Get easel and stickers from WSC.	Not started
Short video	Brita Moore-Kutz	15-30 second video about the watershed for website and social media.		TBD	Not started
Media relationships	Brita Moore-Kutz	Connect with local media outlets and other publications our target audience reads to encourage them to check out VRWJPO activities in stories.	n/a	Ongoing	In progress

Action item	People	Details	Budget impact	Deadline	Progress
Community events	Brita Moore-Kutz, with support from WPC and MWS	Secure opportunities for community event presence.	Event costs (Rosemount Expo cost \$200, unsure about others), costs for materials such as tablecloths, swag	Ongoing	In progress
Partner promotion	VRWJPO partners – cities, counties, SWCDs, citizen groups	Ask partners to commit to explicitly mentioning VRWJPO, including our logo, in publications and events discussing collaborative work.	n/a	Ongoing, during project partnerships	
Annual report & measurable outcomes	Brita Moore-Kutz with support from staff	In addition to statistical reporting, produce a “snapshot” of the reports to present VRWJPO’s progress concisely. See inspirations from other watersheds.	n/a	April 30 (BWSR deadline)	In progress
Signage	Jeff Dunn	Get VRWJPO- logo signage up at project sites.	Cost of signs	Ongoing	

**7d. Presentation and Discussion of Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2024 Budget-Identified Capital Improvement Projects**

Meeting Date: 2/14/2024  
Item Type: Regular-Information  
Contact: Jeff Dunn  
Telephone: 952-891-7140  
Prepared by: Travis Thiel  
Reviewed by: N/A

N/A



**PURPOSE/ACTION REQUESTED**

- Presentation and discussion of Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) projects identified in the 2024 Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO) Budget

**SUMMARY**

Some of the CIP projects listed in the 2024 Budget were underway in 2023 and may be completed in 2024, and some have not yet started. Staff will present information regarding the CIP projects identified in the 2024 Budget with the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission and will provide an update of what the projects are and their intended benefit, where they are located, the water resource of interest, and a timeline for project completion.

**EXPLANATION OF FISCAL/FTE IMPACT**

Expenses and revenues have already been identified in the 2024 Budget for the CIP projects.

**RESOLUTION**

Information only.