

2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan Update

Community Engagement & Outreach Summary – Phase 1

The first phase of community engagement took place from October 2023 to February 2024. Phase One focused on introducing the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO) to the public, working to educate about their mission and goals, helping them to understand the types of projects that the VRWJPO conducts within their communities, and seeking their input on the issues or priorities they’d like the VRWJPO to work on in the Plan update. A combination of both digital and in-person outreach methods was used to collect feedback.



Engagement Methods

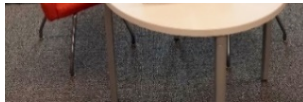
Initial Planning Meeting: 29 people attended. VRWJPO formally kicked off its public engagement process with an October 12 initial planning meeting at the VRWJPO office in Farmington. The meeting included a brief presentation from Watershed Administrator, Travis Thiel, about the watershed and issues identified in the spring 2023 opening comment period. This was followed by time for attendees to share their feedback in multiple ways (display boards, paper surveys, and QR codes to the online survey and Social Pinpoint map). Attendees included representatives from: the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board (Dakota County Commissioners Mike Slavik, Mary Hamann-Roland, and Bill Droste; Scott County Commissioner Tom Wolf), the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (Jim Kotz and Linda Larson), Dakota County, Dakota County Soil & Water Conservation District, Minnesota Department of Health, Metropolitan Council, Twin Cities Trout Unlimited, City of Farmington, City of Empire, Apple Valley Eco-Advocates, and Minnesota Water Stewards.

Online and In-Person Surveys: A total of 163 surveys were collected (135 online surveys, 28 printed surveys). The printed survey was offered in both English and Spanish. Questions asked ranged from opinions on the existing mission statement to personal views on goals, issues,

and concerns. Demographic questions helped capture a snapshot of who was able to be reached. *An infographic summary of feedback received can be found on pages 6-8 of this document.*



Library Display



Display Boards:

- **Four public libraries** – in Farmington, Lakeville, Hastings, and Elko New Market - across the watershed hosted month-long (or longer) displays of printed materials that informed the public about the plan process, directed them to online resources, and collected in-person surveys.
- **Two parks** – Lebanon Hills Regional Park Visitor Center (Apple Valley/Rosemount) and Whitetail Woods Regional Park (Empire) hosted similar displays with links to digital feedback methods. Lebanon Hills offered in-person survey materials.

Social Pinpoint: 13 total comments. This interactive mapping tool allowed visitors to voice their thoughts and opinions on geographically specific projects, features, and areas of concern within the watershed.

Virtual Stakeholder Meetings: 31 people attended in total. Six virtual meetings were held with specific

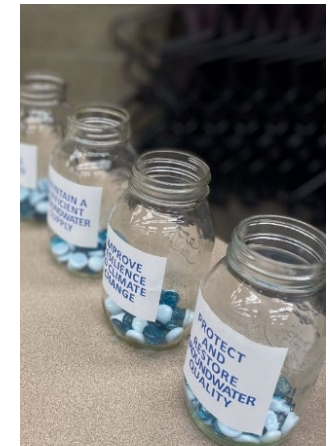
stakeholder groups (cities, townships, state agencies, nonprofits, citizen groups) in the watershed to discuss the existing watershed management plan goals and what issues or priorities were important in the new plan. Conversation centered around what is working well, what needs improvement, and possible solutions/resources moving forward. *Detailed information on attendance can be found on page 3.*

Pop-up Events: About 60 people engaged. VRWJPO staff and consultants tabled at two community events – a farm market at Brand Farms (Empire) and an indoor farmers’ market in Apple Valley - to gather input from the public. Board displays, activities, and surveys were used to draw-in conversation, educate about the watershed’s role and upcoming plan update, and collect feedback on existing concerns. Coloring sheets were provided as a children’s activity.

Community Conversations: 26 total attendees. Two in-person Community Conversations were held in Lakeville and Hastings in January 2024. Open to the public, these meetings consisted of a short presentation followed by informational displays,



Brand Farms Pop-up



Community Conversations Boards and Activities

conversation, and activities. Attendees could fill out paper surveys and spin for prizes. Attendees included Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board members (Dakota County Commissioners Mike Slavik, Bill Droste and Mary Liz Holberg, and Scott County Commissioner Tom Wolf), Hastings Mayor Mary Fassbender, and concerned citizens.

Key Takeaways

The following were noted as top priorities by participants:

Protecting Water Quality and Quantity

Stakeholders voiced a desire to maintain or improve water quality in the watershed and expressed concerns about groundwater. Contaminants such as nitrates, phosphorus, and chlorides were frequently mentioned. They also want to ensure that groundwater production will remain sustainable, and that aquifers will not be at risk for excessive pumping or drawdown. Proposed ideas ranged from best management practices (such as new water treatment facilities and water reuse) to public education around these topics.

Monitoring and Mitigating Impacts from New Developments

With a growing population, the impacts of development on habitat, biodiversity, wetlands, and shorelines within the watershed are concerning. Stakeholders want to know what rules developers must abide by, and if there's any way to monitor their impacts on the watershed. Education about authority, collaboration on rules/regulations, and strategies about enforcement were proposed.

Desire for more Education/Outreach

Participants suggested ways to reach out to community members, connect with agricultural groups, and highlighted opportunities to become more involved with stakeholder groups (e.g., Master Gardeners, Trout Unlimited, Minnesota Lakes & Rivers) to publicize existing programs and funding opportunities.

Support for More Investment

One of the questions posed throughout the process aimed to determine the level of financial support for future watershed improvement projects that are expected to be more expensive than some of the VRWJPOs earlier endeavors. Stakeholders expressed a desire to maintain the

Virtual Stakeholder Meeting Attendees

- Doug Moran (Rosemount Resident & member of Twin Cities Trout Unlimited – TCTU)
- Joe Beattie (Hastings Environmental Protectors)
- Renee Christianson (City of Elko New Market)
- Miranda Etienne (Bolton & Menk)
- Travis Hirman (MDA)
- April Londo (MN DNR)
- Taylor Huinker (MN DNR)
- Jane Byron (City of Rosemount)
- John Caven (City of Hastings)
- Linda Larson (Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission)
- Valerie Neppi (Dakota County)
- Curt Coudron (Dakota SWCD)
- Jessica Schaum (City of Apple Valley)
- Caleb Ashling (City of Burnsville)
- Mac Cafferty (City of Lakeville)
- Amy Timm (MPCA)
- Jeff Berg (MDA)
- Anne Sawyer (BWSR)
- Caroline Spurgeon (Ravenna Township)
- Daryl Jacobson (City of Burnsville)
- Samantha Berger (City of Apple Valley)
- Matt Saam (City of Apple Valley)
- Kristen Meyer (Freshwater)
- Cynthia Ladzun (Vermillion Township)
- James Sipe (Hampton Township)
- Edward Rutledge (City of Farmington)
- John Powell (City of Farmington)
- Kellee Omlid (City of Farmington)
- Mark Nemeth (MN DNR Fisheries)
- Jessamyn Foley (MN DNR Watercraft Inspection)
- Henry Stelten (Prairie Island Indian Community)

watershed's assets and a willingness to increase funding to ensure its protection, so long as there is continued education and information about where those dollars are being spent. **62% of respondents said they supported additional financial investment in the watershed, with 88% of that group indicating they'd be willing to pay \$20-100 more.**

Concerns about Trout Populations and Stream Health

66% of survey respondents stated that they currently fish rivers and creeks within the watershed, and citizen groups such as Twin Cities Trout Unlimited attended virtual meetings and Community Conversations to express concern for the Vermillion River and its tributaries. Solutions offered included stream temperature monitoring and additional stocking and protecting spawning habitat.

Climate Change

Climate change was a widely mentioned and discussed topic in all forms of engagement, from the effects it has on fish populations and stream temperatures to droughts and rainfall amounts. Stakeholders are interested in more ways to help mitigate the impacts.

Assistance, Programs, and Funding

In many different forms, stakeholders wanted to learn more about what programs and funding were available both to and through the VRWJPO. Example topics range from existing programs that help farmers implement cover crop methods, to wondering what outside grants might be available for large scale watershed projects.

Role in the Region – Regulations and Enforcement

The first phase of engagement was widely centered around educating the public and stakeholder groups about the VRWJPO, what it does for the community, and what role it plays in their day-to-day lives. During conversations, it was made clear that there is some confusion about what rules and regulations the VRWJPO can and cannot enforce. More education, public outreach, and clear messaging are needed to bring the VRWJPO's role to the forefront.

Participation Summary

The following table summarizes total participation among stakeholder groups and what themes they were most concerned with:

**Non-residents in the survey were counted as environmental organization members due to their overwhelming focus on trout populations. Some individuals/groups may be double-counted (i.e. an individual who participated in the survey and attended a community conversation, or someone who participated in the online survey and is an under-represented group member)*

Audience	Number of Participants	Feedback Themes							
		Water Quality and Quantity	Impacts of Development	Education /Outreach	Investment	Trout Population/ Stream Health	Climate Change	Programs and Funding	Role/ Regulations
Technical Advisory Group (TAG)	3 (SMonkey) 35 (VSM)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Watershed Residents	26 (CC) 63 (SMonkey) 9 (PSurvey) 2 (ESurvey)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cities	11 (VSM)	X	X	X	X			X	X
Townships	3 (VSM)	X	X		X			X	X
VRWJPO Boards, County (Met Council, Dakota County, Dakota SWCD, VRW Planning Commission, etc.)	7 (VSM) 11 (SMonkey)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Under-represented Groups (Spanish surveys, Non-White, Low-income, Prairie Island Indian Community)	1 (VSM) 0 Spanish 6 Non-white 5 Low-income	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Stakeholders (businesses, industry, agriculture, non-profits) (Bolton & Menk, MDA, Freshwater, Hastings EP, PIIC)	4 (VSM) 59 (SMonkey)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Partner Agencies (MDA, DNR, MPCA, BWSR, Met Council, etc.)	13 (VSM) 6 (SMonkey)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Environmental Organization (Hastings Environmental Protectors, Fisheries, Freshwater, Trout Unlimited, etc.)	72 (SMonkey) 8 (VSM)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Total number of participants	344								

Abbreviations:

SMonkey = Online Survey Monkey Results

PSurvey = Paper Survey Results

ESM = Emailed Survey Results

VSM = Virtual Stakeholder Meetings

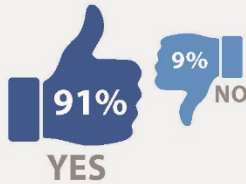
CC = Community Conversations

Survey Summary

1 Existing Mission Statement:

"To collaboratively provide education, science, and support to restore and protect the Vermillion River Watershed's natural resources for all who live, work, and play within its boundaries."

Do you feel this mission adequately describes the focus of the VRWJPO?

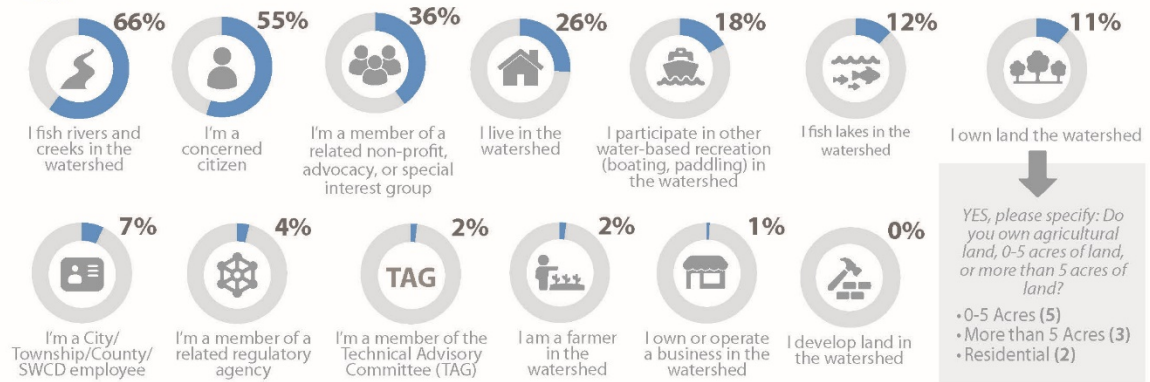


Other suggestions received in comments included:

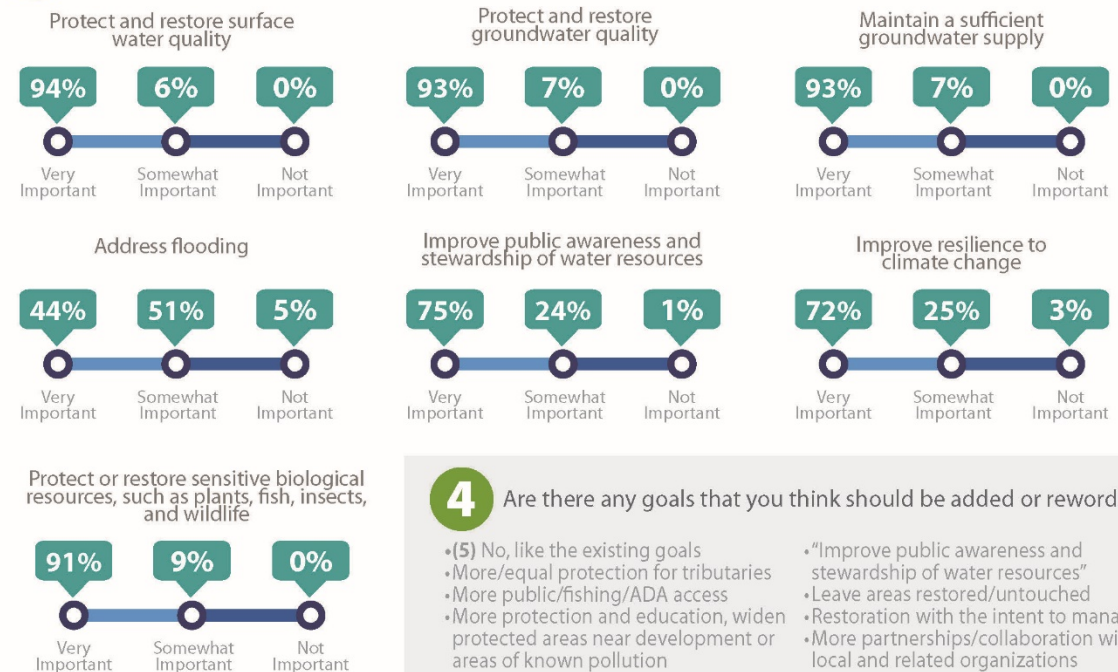
- Make the mission shorter, easier to remember
- Add more action statements, more info about what will be done
- State more specific goals/deliverables
- Not just for people within the watershed boundary
- More "teeth" - what will be done to hold those who harm the watershed accountable?



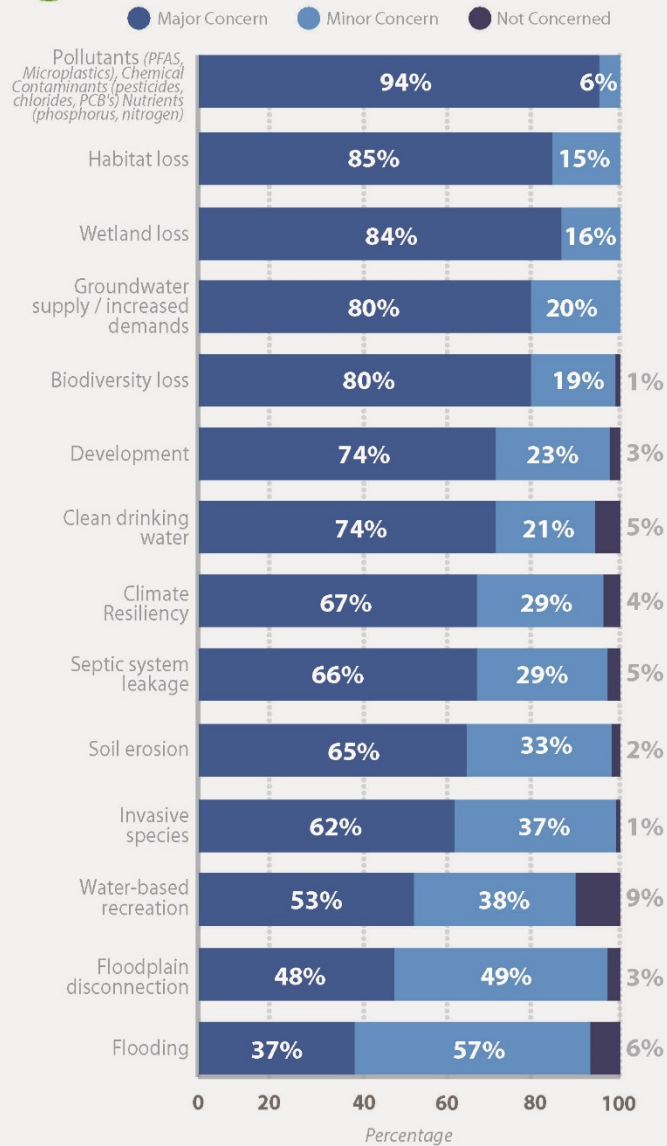
2 What is your relationship with the watershed? (Select all that apply to you)



3 Please read the following list of goals and identify whether you think they are very important, somewhat important, or not important to include in the plan update.



5 Which issues in the Vermillion River Watershed concern you, and what is your level of concern?



6 What other watershed issues are concerning to you? Use this comment box to provide additional detail on the issues above, or add new issues.

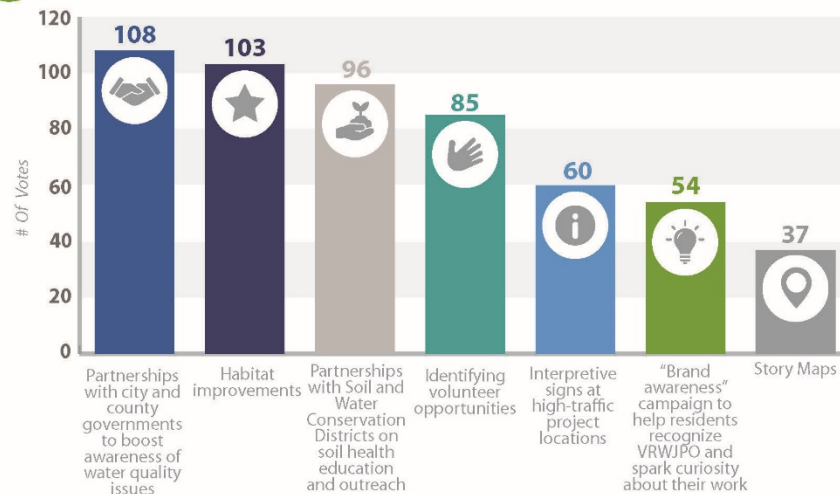
Top Themes Heard:

- Impacts of Mining
- Impacts of development
- More public involvement/ access/Citizen representation
- Trout populations and trout streams
- Maintenance of long-term coordination
- Encourage expanded monitoring of environmental quality
- Identification of hazardous materials sites (informal dump sites)
- More regular public reporting
- Monitoring and management of invasive species (plant and animal)
- Lack of water quality
- Water contaminants

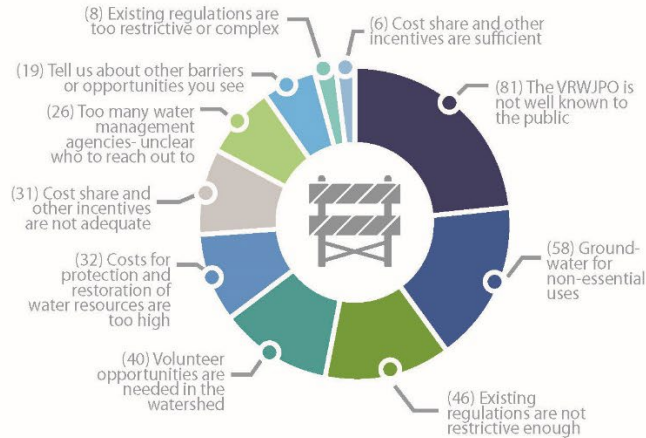
8 Do you see any new opportunities for collaboration and coordination?

- Twin Cities and Minnesota Trout Unlimited
- County and the DNR working together
- Other watershed based organizations, MN Lakes and Rivers, and MNCOLA
- Public awareness campaigns
- NGO's that have expertise in habitat, water and land issues
- MN Forestry Association
- Non profits with water quality concerns
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency/ U of M
- More aggressive action - current approach seems too passive
- Education in middle and high schools
- Adjacent landowners, "Friends of" groups

7 What strategies could address challenges, overcome identified barriers, and support work toward goals?



9 What barriers and opportunities do you see to protect groundwater and surface water quality and quantity (policy, legal, technical, operations, etc.)? What tradeoffs are willing to be made?



10 This question is geared toward those who have interacted with local ordinances and codes related to protection of water resources within the watershed.

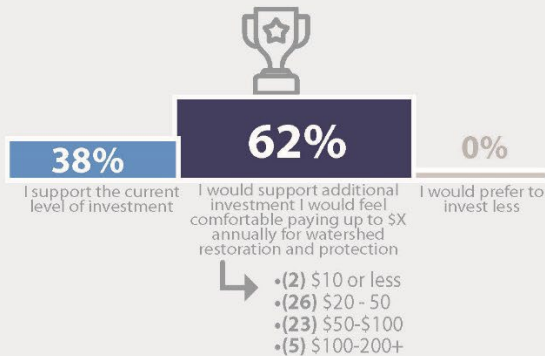
VRWJPO Standards are intended to be understandable, consistent, achievable, adaptable, and enforceable, while protecting the health, safety, welfare, and natural resources of the watershed and its residents. Have you experienced any challenges with existing official controls (local ordinances and codes) and Standards? if yes, please select from the list below and use the comment box to provide recommendations on changes:



80% Not Applicable

- Recommendation Received Included:*
- Enforcement
 - Input from MPCA and MnDNR for applicable standards
 - Keep an eye on future developments
 - Decisions based on data
 - Political transparency

11 VRWJPO has levied \$1 million dollars each year over the past 5 years. On average, a typical homeowner pays \$10-12 annually to support watershed restoration and protection. Over the next decade, the VRWJPO anticipates needing to take on projects that are larger and more complex than projects in previous years. What is your level of support of these investments moving forward?



Demographics:

