



# Highlights: 2024 VRWJPO Annual Activity Report

## Our Mission

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.

## Who We Are

The Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO) was founded in 2002 by a joint powers agreement between Dakota and Scott counties (*boundary map pictured to the right*). It is the geographically largest watershed in the Twin Cities Metro area at 335 square miles, with 20 cities and townships represented and 46 miles of Minnesota DNR-designated trout streams.

## What We Do

Monitoring results have shown consistent improvements and stability in local environmental resources. This reflects VRWJPO's Capital Improvement Program efforts to reduce pollutants and promote healthy habitats.

- **All six of the regularly monitored lakes in the watershed show improvements in phosphorus levels, and five of six show improvements in water transparency since 2007.**
- **Habitat conditions along the Vermillion River and major tributaries are stable, with all but one at "good" or "fair" scores.**

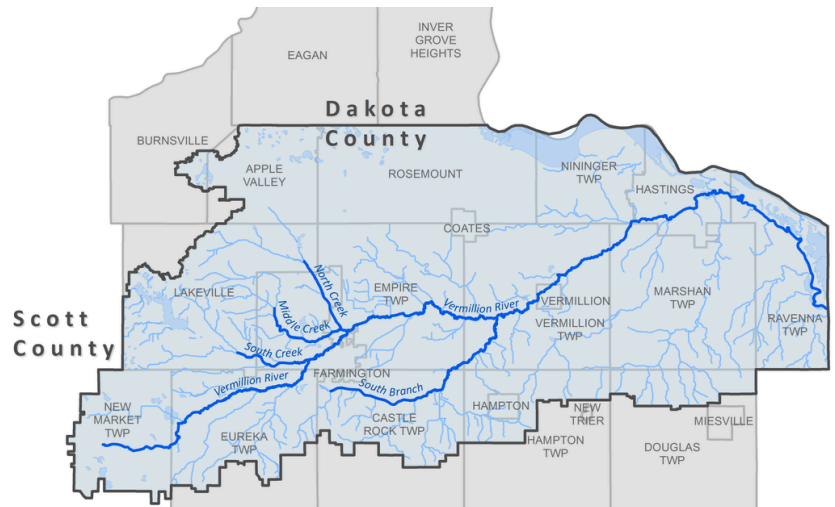
2024 projects funded by VRWJPO are estimated to reduce pollution entering waterbodies by:

- **1,915 tons per year total suspended solids**
- **411 pounds per year phosphorus**
- **8,522 pounds per year nitrate**



Grants from Minnesota Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment funds make many of these projects possible.

## Where We Are



## 2024 VRWJPO Board Members

Dakota County Commissioner Mike Slavik, Chair  
Scott County Commissioner Tom Wolf, Vice Chair  
Dakota County Commissioner Bill Droste, Secretary-Treasurer

## Project Highlights



- **East Lake Invasive Fish Barrier and Removals, with the City of Lakeville:** The low-voltage electric fish barrier is keeping invasive carp and goldfish from moving between East Lake and North Creek. Partners removed ~2,800 pounds of carp and goldfish from East Lake (*pictured above*)!
- **Alimagnet Lake Alum Treatment, with the Cities of Apple Valley and Burnsville:** Aluminum sulfate (alum) was applied in fall 2024. Preliminary monitoring results showed a three-fold improvement in water clarity from before the treatment!
- **Hydrodynamic Separator at 205<sup>th</sup> St. W. and Hollins Ave. W., with the City of Lakeville:** Partners installed this underground stormwater treatment device in conjunction with residential street reconstructions. It is estimated to reduce sediment loading in South Creek by 1,700 pounds/year!

# 2026-2035 Watershed Management Plan

After reviewing the many comments from the stakeholder engagement phase in late 2023 and early 2024 (*pictured, top right*), VRWJPO staff consulted the watershed's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Community Advisory Committee (CAC), and Joint Powers Board (JPB) to get direction on what to prioritize in the Plan. Staff then laid out the following draft Plan structure:

- **Issue Categories:** Areas of focus that will be addressed
- **Goals:** Measurable outcomes directing what successful Plan implementation would look like
- **Objectives:** Activities required to achieve goals
- **Topics of Importance:** Items that guide the priority of action items in each issue category, directly derived from public comments
- **Actions:** Projects, programs, and practices, along with corresponding targeted geographic locations, addressing each issue category, with priority levels High, Medium, or Low

The CAC and TAC were consulted again in September 2024 to prioritize draft objectives and topics of importance through an electronic survey. The JPB provided their recommended priority levels based on these survey results and further staff input about research, assessments, and VRWJPO's available resources.

The public can stay informed about Plan progress at <https://bit.ly/vrw2026> or by scanning the QR code on the bottom right.



## Brook Trout Making a Comeback?



Left: A Minnesota Driftless brook trout caught in South Creek-Vermillion River during routine fish sampling in fall 2024. The trout was found in one of the areas stocked with brook trout in spring 2024.

In May 2024, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) stocked coldwater reaches of South Creek and the South Branch of the Vermillion River with Minnesota Driftless brook trout. While the watershed is well-known to anglers for trophy brown trout, brook trout are the native stream trout species to Minnesota and are more sensitive to pollutants and other stressors than brown trout. Historical records indicate brook trout stocking in the Vermillion as early as the late 1800s, but the population could not sustain itself. Improvements in water quality and habitat from the VRWJPO and partners' restoration efforts supported the DNR's decision to stock brook trout. The goal is for brook trout to become self-sustaining, just as brown trout are today.

**September 2024 fish surveys found many brook trout surviving and growing in the reaches where they were stocked!**

## VRWJPO Staff

Travis Thiel, Administrator  
Melissa Bokman Ermer, Co-Administrator  
Kelly Perrine, Senior Watershed Specialist  
Jeff Dunn, Water Resources Engineer  
Brita Moore-Kutz, Communications & Outreach Specialist

## Contact us

Phone: (952) 891-7000

Email: [vrwjpo@co.dakota.mn.us](mailto:vrwjpo@co.dakota.mn.us)