



Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2024 Activity Report and Financial Statement

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.

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April 2025

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Cover photo: Aerial image of a barge treating Alimagnet Lake with aluminum sulfate (alum) in October 2024 to reduce internal phosphorus load in the lake, a collaborative project between VRWJPO and the Cities of Apple Valley and Burnsville, supported by a Clean Water Fund grant from the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources, one of the four funds established by the Minnesota Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment.

This report fulfills the annual activity report requirement for watersheds under Minnesota Rule 8410.0150.



1. Watershed Overview

The indigenous Dakota people called the Vermillion River Wa Se Sa Wa Kpa, meaning Red Paint River, after the bright red and orange ocher in outcrops of St. Peter sandstone near the Vermillion River (such as Chimney Rock in Marshan Township). The color vermilion is a rich shade of red-orange, hence the present name.

The Vermillion River Watershed, the geographic area that drains to the river and connected water bodies, encompasses 335 square miles and 20 cities and townships in southeastern Scott County and central Dakota County. Geographically, it is the largest watershed in the seven-county Twin Cities metro area. The river flows from its headwaters in New Market Township, Scott County, across Dakota County, and meets the Mississippi River near Red Wing. The Prairie Island Indian Community resides in the furthest downstream part of the river.

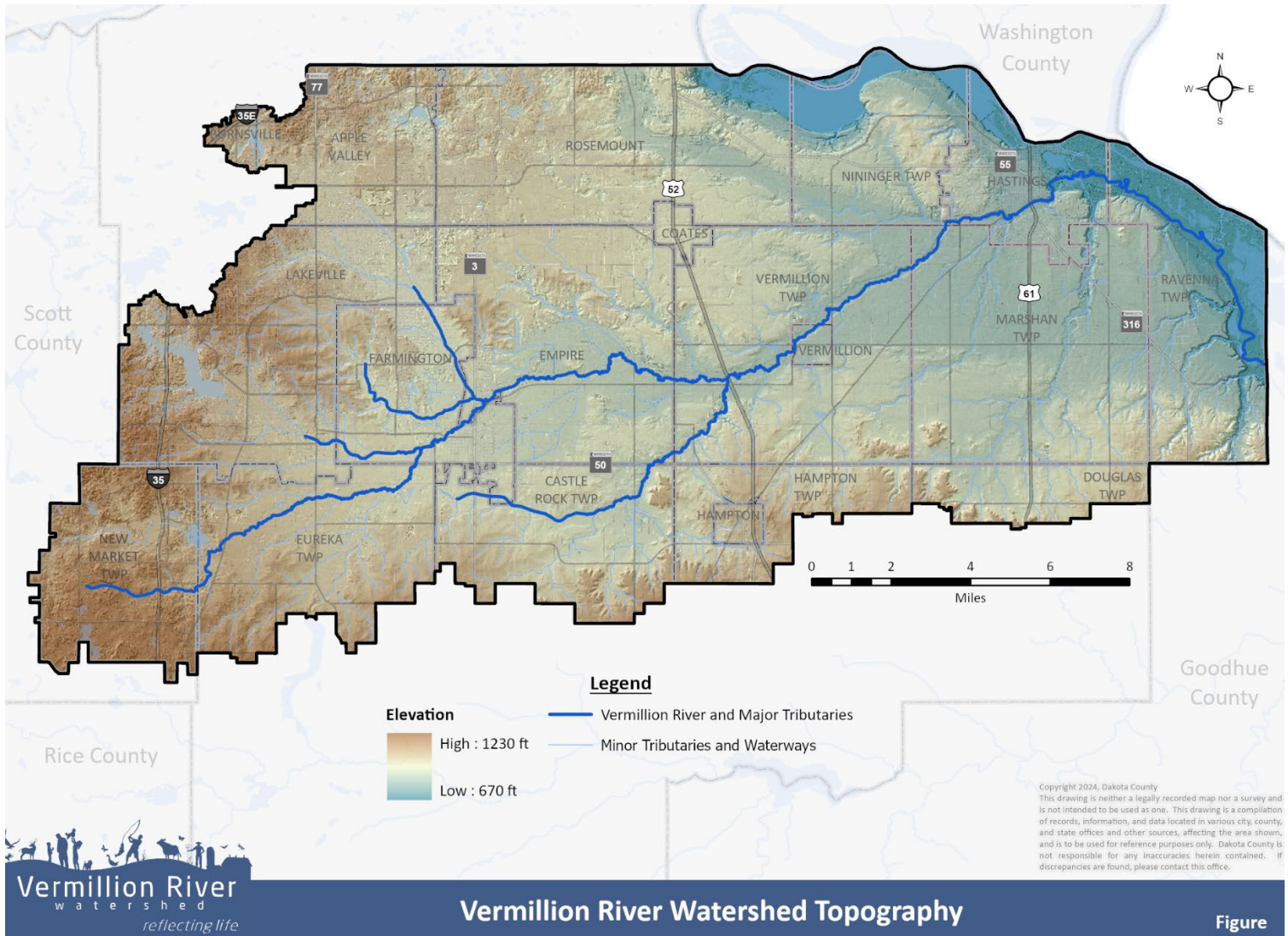


Figure 1. Map of Vermillion River Watershed topography within its political boundaries.

About 45.5 stream miles of the Vermillion River and tributaries are designated trout streams by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, a rarity in a major metropolitan area. The river's major tributaries are the South Branch, North Creek, Middle Creek, and South Creek. The watershed supports several recreational lakes, including Lake Marion, East Lake, Long Lake, Farquar Lake, Alimagnet Lake, Lake Rebecca, and Lake Isabelle, as well as parks and greenways. Residential and business communities within the watershed are experiencing rapid growth and development; however, the majority land use in the watershed is agriculture.

2. VRWJPO Governance & Personnel

Dakota and Scott counties signed a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) in 2002, establishing the VRWJPO to fulfill the requirements of the Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act ([MN Stat. 103B.201](#)). The counties jointly fund activities of the VRWJPO and are statutorily responsible for watershed management, with Dakota County as the fiscal agent and providing several other services. The JPA was updated in 2024 (see *section 3A*).

State rules require watershed organizations to follow 10-year Watershed Management Plans. The VRWJPO's current activities are defined in its [2016-2025 Watershed Plan](#). Staff are drafting the [2026-2035 Watershed Management Plan](#) at the time of this report and plan to complete it by spring 2026 (see *Section 3C*).

The VRWJPO has a three-member Joint Powers Board (JPB) made up of two Dakota County Commissioners and one Scott County Commissioner. A nine-member Community Advisory Committee (CAC) supports the JPB. Staff periodically consult a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for input on watershed activities.

A. Joint Powers Board

The JPB directs watershed administration, policy, budget, and implementation of the Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan (Plan). The JPB met nine times in 2024. Members included:

- Commissioner Mike Slavik, Dakota County District 1 (Chair)
- Commissioner Tom Wolf, Scott County District 2 (Vice Chair)
- Commissioner Bill Droste, Dakota County District 4 (Secretary-Treasurer)

See Appendix A for all JPB actions taken in 2024.

B. Community Advisory Committee

CAC members are appointed by the JPB to advise the Board on policy, programs, or other matters that may come before the Board. This committee was originally called the Watershed Planning Commission. However, the 2024 JPA update changed it to Community Advisory Committee to better reflect the group's roles and responsibilities.

The CAC is responsible for guiding the implementation of the Watershed Management Plan, annual work plans, and budget. In 2024, the CAC met four times. Members included:

- James Kotz, Rosemount (Chair)
- Joshua Borton, Farmington (Vice Chair)
- Brad Blackett, Apple Valley
- Kevin Chamberlain, Nininger Township
- Stephen Hamrick, Lakeville
- Andrew Riesgraf, Apple Valley
- Sandra Weber, Castle Rock Township

C. Technical Advisory Committee

The TAC consists of local, regional, state, and other partners with expertise and interest in watershed issues. The group meets as needed to discuss emerging scientific, technical, and policy impacts on the Vermillion River Watershed. In 2024, the TAC completed two surveys providing direction for priorities in the 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan (see *section 3C*). Participants included:

- Cities and townships in the watershed
- Dakota and Scott Counties

- Dakota and Scott Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)
- Prairie Island Indian Community
- Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)
- Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Metropolitan Council
- Environmental consulting firms

D. Administration & Staff

The VRWJPO is staffed with an administrator from Dakota County and a co-administrator from Scott County, with three other Dakota County employees designated to the watershed. Other County employees provide support for specific projects. The counties' SWCDs provide monitoring and technical assistance services for the VRWJPO.

E. Legal Counsel

The Dakota and Scott County Attorney's Offices provide legal services to VRWJPO as needed and by law.

F. Consultants

The VRWJPO enters into contracts with consultants to provide engineering and environmental professional services for water resources management projects. The approved consultant list for 2024-2025 includes:

Company	Address	City	State
Alliant Engineering, Inc.	733 Marquette Ave #700	Minneapolis	MN
Barr Engineering Company	4300 Market Pointe Drive, Ste. 200	Minneapolis	MN
Davey Resource Group	1196 7 th St. E.	St. Paul	MN
Emmons & Olivier Resources, Inc.	1919 University Ave W, Ste. 300	St. Paul	MN
Geosyntec Consultants	270 S. Marquette Ave, Ste. 590	Minneapolis	MN
Inter-Fluve	1539 Grand Ave, Second Floor	St. Paul	MN
Midwest Wetland Improvements, LLC	PO Box 448	Victoria	MN
Minnesota Native Landscapes, Inc.	8740 77th Street Northeast	Otsego	MN
Moore Engineering, Inc.	2 Carlson Pkwy, Ste. 110	Plymouth	MN
Native Resource Preservation	260 Wentworth Ave. E. Ste. 115	West St. Paul	MN
RES	20276 Delaware Ave.	Jordan	MN
SRF Consulting Group, Inc.	3701 Wayzata Blvd.	Minneapolis	MN
Stantec	1 Carlson Pkwy N., Ste. 100	Plymouth	MN
Stonebrooke Engineering	12279 Nicollet Ave.	Burnsville	MN

Company	Address	City	State
WSB	701 Xenia Avenue South, Suite 300	Minneapolis	MN

Awarded contracts outside of the consultant list

- **Bolton & Menk** for Smart Salting trainings
- **Solitude Lake Management** for Alimagnet Lake Alum Treatment
- **HKGi** for stakeholder engagement services for developing the 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan (*continued from 2023, see Section 3C*)
- **Tunheim** for Water Conservation and Landscaping for Clean Water Marketing Campaign
- **Carp Solutions** for the East Lake low-voltage electric fish barrier

3. 2024 VRWJPO Work Plan and Activities

A. Administration and Operations

Administrative responsibilities included:

- staff training and supervision
- coordinating and documenting VRWJPB meetings, decisions, and directions
- coordinating and documenting CAC meetings, decisions, and recommendations
- coordinating legal reviews
- revising the JPA that formed the VRWJPO (*see below subsection*)
- managing the budget
- developing work plans
- managing contracts
- reporting
- seeking funding
- development of purchase agreements for wetland bank credit sales

Joint Powers Agreement Update

The JPA between Dakota and Scott counties that formed the VRWJPO had not been updated since its inception in 2002. Procedural and operational changes led staff to pursue changes to the JPA in 2024. The revisions were completed in coordination with the Dakota and Scott County Attorney's offices and approved by the Dakota and Scott County Boards. [The current JPA is on the VRWJPO website.](#)

Changes included:

- Cleaning up outdated language and bringing the JPA into compliance with state requirements
- Recognizing changes to the assignment and terms of County Commissioners on the VRWJPB
- Requiring staffing services be provided by each county to the VRWJPO through separate service agreements
- Clarifying indemnification language and requiring the VRWJPO to carry its own insurance rather than be covered through each county
- Clarifying language on the delegated authority granted to the VRWJPO Administrator and Co-Administrator
- Changing the name of the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission (WPC) to Community Advisory Committee (CAC)
- Updating responsibilities, membership, and term requirements for the CAC

- Adding language to clarify when actions of the CAC are subject to Open Meeting Law

B. Regulation

The 20 local government units (LGUs) in the watershed have land-use planning and zoning authority. All except Eureka Township implement the [VRWJPO Standards](#) through local ordinances and apply their own permit programs. The VRWJPO manages the permit program for Eureka Township. Other communities may request assistance with project site reviews or regulatory concerns. The VRWJPO also provides comments on development plans or environmental documents when relevant, such as those undergoing the Alternative Urban Areawide Review (AUAR) process or Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) applications.

- The VRWJPO issued four permits for land disturbance activities in Eureka Township in 2024 under the Standards. No variances were issued.

C. Planning

2026-2035 Watershed Management Plan

Per [Minnesota Statute](#), watershed organizations are required to update their Watershed Management Plans every ten years. VRWJPO's current Plan expires in May 2026. The work in 2024 focused on committee, public, and board engagement, using findings to create a concise, data-driven, stakeholder-informed draft Plan.

The first part of 2024 wrapped up stakeholder engagement started in late 2023 with:

- Two in-person Community Conversations in Lakeville and Hastings, open for public comment on issues and priorities to address in the Plan.
- A pop-up engagement table at an Apple Valley farmers market to receive community input.
- A public survey and Social Pinpoint map to gain feedback on issues and priorities.
- A separate survey to the CAC and TAC after the public survey was closed to weigh the top issues from the public and direct staff on what to prioritize in the Plan.
- A strategic planning meeting with the JPB, presenting the CAC-TAC survey findings and receiving direction to focus on achieving high-quality projects rather than striving for quantity.
- Publication of a [StoryMap](#) to keep the public apprised of the Plan development process in the interim.

Based on this feedback and careful review of findings from other local studies and plans, staff laid out the following Plan structure:

- **Issue Categories:** Derived from the stakeholder engagement process, these present areas of focus that will be addressed in the goals and implementation sections of the Plan. Issue statements summarize items a Plan user can expect to see within the respective category.
- **Goals:** Measurable goals correspond with each issue category and are consistent with the purposes of the Metropolitan Water Management Program described in [Minnesota Statute 103B.201](#). Goals set direction for what successful Plan implementation would look like.
- **Objectives:** Objectives catalog activities required to achieve goals.
- **Topics of Importance:** Topics of importance in each issue category guide prioritization of action items. These are derived directly from stakeholder feedback.
- **Actions:** Implementation actions are specific projects, programs, and practices and corresponding targeted* geographic locations. They will be organized in the Plan by issue category in an implementation table. Actions must meet the directives of [Minnesota Rule 8410.0105](#) by falling into at least one of these programs: capital improvement; operation and maintenance; information and education; data collection; regulatory; incentives; or water restoration and protection.

***Targeting:** Targeting is informed by data such as monitoring reports, pollutant load modeling, subwatershed assessments, geomorphic assessments, waterbody impairment designations, the tiered aquatic life use framework, GIS analyses, restorable wetland assessments, TMDL studies, and demographic trends.

VRWJPO hosted a joint hybrid meeting in September 2024 with CAC and TAC members to prioritize objectives and topics of importance for each issue category. HKGi facilitated the meeting through an online live polling platform. The results of this survey, along with further review of research and assessments and direction from the JPB, led staff to designate each objective as High, Medium, or Low priority.

D. Inventory, Assessment, and Research

Regular monitoring, assessments, and studies inform the VRWJPO and partners on how to improve and restore resources in the watershed most meaningfully and cost-effectively.

Monitoring

The [Vermillion River Monitoring Network](#) (VRMN) assesses water quality, quantity, and habitat in the Vermillion River Watershed. Activities include sample collection, continuous temperature monitoring, biological monitoring, and equipment maintenance.

Chemical Monitoring

Staff with Dakota and Scott SWCDs monitor [nine sites](#) on the Vermillion River and tributaries on a biweekly basis from snowmelt (mid-March) through Nov. 1. Samples were collected at baseflow, runoff (after a major rain event), and snowmelt, and analyzed for the following:

Chemical	State Standard	Significance
Nitrate	10 milligrams/liter or lower	A form of nitrogen. High levels of nitrate in groundwater pose a human health risk and correlate with porous soils, artificial drainage, and agricultural chemical use.
Total Phosphorus (TP)	0.15 mg/L or lower	Excess phosphorus, an essential life element for plants, can lead to eutrophication and increased algae growth. High TP often correlates with areas lacking in stormwater treatment.
Dissolved Oxygen (DO)	7 mg/L and above for class 2A (coldwater) reaches; 5 mg/L and above for class 2B (warmwater) reaches	A marker of a stream's habitability for sensitive fish species.
Total Suspended Solids (TSS)	10 mg/L or lower for 2A streams; 30 mg/L and lower for 2B streams	Suspended particles in the water. Sources may include eroded soil, sediment, decaying vegetation, and algae.
Chloride	230 mg/L over a three-year period (chronic) or 860 mg/L (acute)*	Impairments can occur in surface water and groundwater due to winter de-icing salt use on concrete surfaces and water softeners, among other activities.

Chemical	State Standard	Significance
Chlorophyll-a	35 mg/L or lower	An indicator of nutrients (nitrogen or phosphorus) in surface water. This can come from algae.
Escherichia coli (<i>E. coli</i>)	No more than 10% of samples in one month exceeding 126 most probable number (MPN) of organisms per 100 mL	An indicator for the general number of disease-causing pathogens in the water. Levels are often higher after runoff events and may result from septic system discharge, agricultural runoff, livestock, urban runoff, and sediment.

*A stream, lake, or wetland is considered impaired for chloride if two or more samples exceed 230 mg/L over three years or one sample exceeds 860 mg/L.

Nitrate

- No samples collected in 2024 were above the state standard.
- The station on the South Branch Vermillion River, SB802, has had the highest nitrate concentration since 2001, and downstream stations generally have higher nitrate levels than upstream ones. This is likely related to agricultural practices and soil conditions in these subwatersheds.

TP

- Samples generally met the standard at all stations in 2024, with some higher at runoff and snowmelt.

DO

- All stations met the standards for both 2A and 2B stream sites during baseflow conditions.
- Low DO concentrations after individual runoff events were found at several sites. The median runoff DO levels fell below standard at four 2A sites.
- Historically, the two North Creek stations have had the lowest recorded DO levels during baseflow, but South Creek (SC806) had the lowest individual reading in 2024.
- VR24, near the headwaters in Scott County, had the highest DO variability of all sites during baseflow and runoff conditions.

TSS

- All stations' samples met the standards during baseflow conditions.
- As expected, TSS concentrations were much higher during runoff and snowmelt events. VR804, NC801, and NC808 showed the greatest fluctuations.

Chloride

- Monitoring was limited in 2024 with only one sample during runoff conditions and one at snowmelt.
- Sites on North Creek and South Creek, the most urbanized subwatersheds, have shown the highest levels of chloride in the watershed since monitoring began in 2020.

Chlorophyll-a

- No 2024 samples exceeded the state standard.

E. coli

- E. coli tracing monitoring continued for its eighth year in 2024 to inform potential source areas.
- VR24 has the highest concentration of E. coli of all VRMN stations. Levels peaked at VR24 in 2021, which was a drought year.
- Other sites in the watershed had low-level exceedances and a slight decrease from 2024.

Stream Gaging

The VRWJPO provides cost share for the operation of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Blaine Avenue gaging station, which has the longest continuous record of flow rates in the watershed. Real-time stage and flow data is available from the USGS station. This information can be accessed at https://waterdata.usgs.gov/mn/nwis/uv?site_no=05345000.

Temperature Monitoring

Since 2005, VRWJPO has collected continuous temperature data in 15-minute intervals from NC801 and NC808 (both on North Creek in Farmington) during June, July, and August. Temperature standards only apply to the 2A reaches. Optimal temperature for adult brown trout is <18°C, tolerance 18-20°C, resistance 20-22°C, and complete mortality at 25°C.

- The temperature data for 2024 for NC801 and NC808 (Farmington) shows temperature maxima were measured in the complete mortality range during all summer months with the highest median water temperatures observed in July.

Biological Monitoring

VRWJPO annually samples the conditions of fish, macroinvertebrates, and habitat in consultation with the Minnesota DNR and MPCA.

Fish and Macroinvertebrates

Fish and macroinvertebrate sampling occur at a few sites each year ([map](#)), so each site is monitored every two to three years. The results provide a measure of the biological health of the stream system through the index of biological integrity (IBI).

In May 2024, the Minnesota DNR stocked coldwater reaches of South Creek and the South Branch with Minnesota Driftless brook trout, named for the region in southeast Minnesota home to many coldwater trout streams. While the Vermillion is known 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. Results from the VRWJPO and partners' restoration efforts encouraged the DNR to stock brook trout again.

September 2024 fish sampling found many brook trout surviving and growing in the reaches where they were stocked. [Read the full 2024 fish monitoring report.](#)

In 2024, seven sites were monitored in various parts of the watershed for macroinvertebrate health. The macroinvertebrate IBI scoring data is not available yet as of April 2025.



Figure 2. Yearling Minnesota Driftless brook trout find their bearings in the South Branch-Vermillion River after being stocked by the DNR in spring 2024.



Figure 3. A healthy brook trout found in South Creek during fish monitoring in fall 2024.

Habitat

Habitat assessments were completed using the MPCA’s Minnesota Stream Habitat Assessment protocol to evaluate the biological integrity of stream reaches. Of the five sites monitored in 2024 (map), three sites scored “fair” and two scored “good.”

Site Name	Stream Reach	Long-Term Average (2009-2024)	2024 Score, if applicable
A01	Upper Main Stem Vermillion River	Fair	
A02	South Creek	Fair	
A03	South Creek	Fair	Good
A04	Upper Main Stem Vermillion River	Fair	Fair
A05	Middle Main Stem Vermillion River	Fair	
A06	Middle Main Stem Vermillion River	Fair	
A07	North Creek	Good	Fair
A08	Middle Main Stem Vermillion River	Good	
A09	Middle Main Stem Vermillion River	Fair	
A10	South Branch	Fair	
A12	South Branch	Fair	
A13	Lower Main Stem Vermillion River	Fair	
A14	Lower Main Stem Vermillion River	Fair	
A15	Middle Creek	Fair	
13-1	Upper Main Stem Vermillion River	Fair	

Site Name	Stream Reach	Long-Term Average (2009-2024)	2024 Score, if applicable
13-2	South Creek	Fair	Fair
13-4	North Creek	Fair	
13-5	Middle Main Stem Vermillion River	Good	Good
14-1	Middle Creek	Poor	
14-2	North Creek	Fair	

Lake Monitoring

Lake water quality monitoring uses phosphorus and Secchi transparency levels as water quality indicators. Decreasing phosphorus levels and increasing transparency levels are signs of improvement. Data is provided by the Metropolitan Council's volunteer Citizen-Assisted Monitoring Program (CAMP). In 2024, CAMP monitored Farquar, Long, Alimagnet, East, Marion, and Rebecca Lakes in the Vermillion River Watershed.

Lake	TP Trends	Secchi Transparency Trends
Alimagnet (2007-2024)	Improving	Improving
East (2007-2024)	Improving	Improving
Farquar (2007-2024)	Improving	Improving
Long (2007-2024)	Improving	Improving
Marion (2007-2024)	Improving	Improving
Rebecca (2015-2024)	Improving	Worsening

Subwatershed Assessments

The Vermillion River Watershed is divided into eight subwatersheds, which are smaller geographic areas draining to major tributaries or sections of the Vermillion River main stem. Regular subwatershed assessments analyze the conditions in each subwatershed to determine the most effective project, practice, and program implementation.

Vermillion River Headwaters Subwatershed and Stream Habitat Assessment

The Upper Mainstem Subwatershed, most of which is in Scott County, contains the headwaters of the Vermillion River. More than 50% of the subwatershed is comprised of cultivated, hayed, or pastured land. The rest is a mixture of developed land in the City of Elko New Market, herbaceous/shrub/forested land, open water, and wetlands. Due to the prevalence of cultivated land, sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus loading are common across the landscape.

In 2024, the VRWJPO directed the Scott SWCD to complete a subwatershed and stream habitat assessment to identify the most effective pollutant reduction best management practices (BMPs). The assessment, which will be finalized in 2025, includes estimated costs, pollutant reductions, and areas of implementation for projects such as:

- Water and sediment control basins

- Grassed waterways
- Filter strips
- Wetland restoration
- Native grasses

Lower Mainstem Direct Subwatershed Assessment

The Lower Mainstem Direct represents the northern half of the Lower Vermillion River Subwatershed. Historically, the area was covered by prairies and floodplain forests. However, many of the historic natural areas have been cleared, plowed, drained, and converted to agriculture. The City of Hastings is in the northeastern part of this subwatershed. Fieldwork relating to the Lower Mainstem Direct SWA was completed by Dakota SWCD staff in 2024. The report will be finalized in 2025.

E. Feasibility/Preliminary Engineering

Mork Wetland Bank

To ensure the ecological benefits of wetlands are maintained locally, the VRWJPO operates a local wetland banking program. This program uses a revolving fund to establish wetland banks within the watershed that can then be used to offset wetland impacts associated with development or agricultural impacts.

In 2024, the VRWJPO entered a new partnership with the BWSR to establish an ~80-acre wetland bank as a part of the Local Government Road Wetland Replacement Program (LGRWRP). The proposed bank is in Castle Rock Township near the South Branch-Vermillion River. Preliminary engineering was completed to define methods for successful hydrology, soil, and vegetation restoration.

Launch Park Wetland Restoration

The VRWJPO partnered with the City of Lakeville and Dakota County to develop preliminary engineering for a 14-acre wetland restoration in the City. The proposed restoration is being considered for potential TP, TSS, and volume reduction near an impaired reach of South Creek.

In 2024, the partners hired an engineering consultant to develop site plans, specifications, and cost estimates; hydraulic design; and pollutant reductions relating to the project. 30% design plans were submitted and reviewed by the partners.

North Creek Culvert Replacements

In 2024, the VRWJPO completed the preliminary engineering analysis and design for two channel improvement projects along North Creek in the Cities of Empire and Farmington. Currently, this section of North Creek has perched culverts that disconnect habitats of North Creek and are impassable for fish and other aquatic organisms. The VRWJPO submitted these designs and analyses as part of their grant application to the DNR's Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) Grant Program and was awarded \$864,155 in grant funds. CPL is funded by the Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Fund, one of four funds established by the Minnesota Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment.

F. Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Maintenance

The VRWJPO annually identifies and develops CIP projects that benefit water quality, quantity, and aquatic habitat. The CIP projects completed in 2024 are estimated to reduce, in total:

- TSS pollution by 1,914.68 tons/year
- TP pollution by 410.92 pounds/year
- Nitrate: 8,522.2 pounds/year

East Lake Invasive Fish Barrier and Removals

The VRWJPO, partnering with the City of Lakeville and Dakota County, received a Clean Water Fund (CWF) grant from BWSR in 2023 to install a low-voltage electric invasive fish barrier to block common carp and goldfish movement between East Lake and its connection with North Creek. The electric barrier began operation in spring 2024.

Partners began removing invasive carp and goldfish in the summer, netting ~2,800 pounds of fish by electrofishing and baited box nets. Carp and goldfish biomass in East Lake was reduced to approximately 90 lbs/acre. This put the lake below the established biomass threshold for negative water quality impacts (mostly phosphorus) attributed to carp. However, the invasive fish populations in the lake are dominated by goldfish. Though goldfish are a carp variant, there is no established goldfish biomass where water quality improvements can be expected. Fish removals and water quality monitoring will continue in 2025.



Figure 4. Common carp and goldfish removed from East Lake in July 2024 via a baited box net.

Alimagnet Lake Alum Treatment



Figure 5. Minnesota Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment logo.

Alimagnet Lake, split between the Cities of Apple Valley and Burnsville, is impaired for excess phosphorus. This results in algae blooms and poor water quality. The VRWJPO and cities have completed projects that address phosphorus entering the lake from external sources. Now, the focus has shifted to internal load phosphorus from lake bottom sediment.

The VRWJPO applied for and received FY23 and FY25 CWF grants from BWSR for aluminum sulfate (alum) treatments in Alimagnet Lake. Alum is scientifically accepted as a safe and effective way to treat internal phosphorus loading in lakes. When applied, it chemically binds to phosphorus in the water column, forming a heavier particulate material (floc) that sinks to the bottom and prevents the nutrient from being resuspended.

Alum is being applied via a split-dose method, with the first dose applied the week of Oct. 15, 2024, and the second planned for 2026. Soon after the first dose, monitoring showed a threefold increase in water transparency compared to immediately before the treatment, indicating a significant reduction in algae. Partners will continue to monitor lake sediment conditions to inform dosing and quantify treatment efficacy. Over time, the phosphorus reduction could lead to the lake's removal from the Impaired Waters List, as well as improve recreation in the adjacent park and experiences for lakeshore residents.

205th and Hollins Hydrodynamic Separator

The City of Lakeville reconstructed several residential streets over the course of 2024. One location provided an opportunity for some stormwater improvement. To reduce sediment loading in South Creek, the City and VRWJPO installed a hydrodynamic separator (HDS) in October 2024 at the intersection of 205th Street West and Hollins Avenue West. An HDS is a device that uses cyclonic forces to remove pollutants in stormwater

runoff, namely sediment. It is installed underneath the grassed boulevard area on the south side of 205th Street, connected to existing stormwater pipes carrying water from storm drains to South Creek.

The project included surface removals and excavation to place the structure(s), installation of the HDS and related piping and accessories, backfill, compaction, and resurfacing. The HDS should reduce sediment loading into South Creek by 1,700 lbs. per year. The system will be maintained by the City of Lakeville.

Foxborough Park TSS Reduction

Much of the North Creek subwatershed was developed before modern stormwater requirements. Hence, many neighborhoods don't have stormwater treatment practices that decrease flow rates or improve water quality draining into the creek. This was one of the reasons North Creek was placed on the MPCA's Impaired Waters list in 2022. North Creek is also the third-highest priority subwatershed (out of eight) for improvements in the 2016-2025 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan. A location in Lakeville's Foxborough Park had the highest estimated pollutant (TSS and TP) loading area of all those evaluated along this reach of North Creek.

To address impairments, the VRWJPO, Dakota County, and the City of Lakeville constructed a dry pond with a wet sedimentation forebay in Foxborough Park to reduce the amount of untreated runoff reaching North Creek. The forebay has a permanent pool to trap sand, debris, and sediment. A rock gabion wall and sand filter bench were constructed to trap smaller pollutants and remove phosphorus. The project was completed alongside North Creek channel improvements and was supported by a Clean Water Fund competitive grant from BWSR.

Middle Creek at Dodd Boulevard Channel Restoration

An ongoing issue in Middle Creek is streambank and channel erosion. As a result, local aquatic organisms struggle to stay healthy and thrive, and the water is turbid (cloudy). The creek has been historically ditched for agricultural use, which altered the channel's natural form. A feasibility study by the City of Lakeville identified several recommendations for improving the creek, including a streambank and channel stabilization project. The City, in partnership with the VRWJPO, was awarded a Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) grant from BWSR for this project.

Two reaches of Middle Creek between Dodd Boulevard and Highview Avenue were restored, totaling 1,700 linear feet of streambank and channel. This streambank and grade stabilization will result in much less erosion and downcutting of the creek channel, as well as providing better habitat for local wildlife.

SWCD Cost-Share Projects

VRWJPO provides cost-share funding to the Dakota and Scott SWCDs to work with private landowners in the watershed undertaking conservation projects that stabilize soil and reduce runoff pollution. These include cover crops, grassed waterways, native prairie restorations, and water and sediment control basins. [Factsheets for 2024 cost-share projects are available on the VRWJPO website.](#)

Maintenance

78-06 South Branch Nitrate Treatment Project Berm Repair

After heavy rains during the summer of 2024, a portion of the embankment in the northwest corner of the South Branch Nitrate Treatment Wetland failed. The VRWJPO developed design plans to repair the embankment and reconstruct the outlet device. The project was bid and awarded for construction in early fall with substantial construction being completed in early December.

G. Communication, Outreach, and Public Relations

Community Outreach

VRWJPO participated in the following community events in 2024:

- Apple Valley Indoor Farmers Market, January
- Dakota County Fix-It Clinic at Farmington Library, April
- Lakeville Earth Day Celebration, April
- Dakota County Take a Kid Fishing Day, June
- Hastings Party in the Park, July
- Dakota County Fair, August
- Dakota County SWCD Outdoor Education Days at the fairgrounds prairie, September
- Dakota County Fix-It Clinic at Pleasant Hill Library (Hastings), November

Staff provided promotional items such as pencils and dog waste pickup bags, and used the Pollute or Protect and Enviroscope displays to demonstrate water resource concerns. These displays are available for checkout for interested parties as well.

Landscaping for Clean Water

VRWJPO participates annually in Dakota County SWCD's Landscaping for Clean Water (LCW) program. Participants learn from conservationists how to construct raingardens, native plant gardens, and shoreline restorations. Then they can apply for grants of up to \$250 to fund their projects. Grant funds are supplied by the participant's watershed management organization (WMO). Awardees receive one-on-one technical assistance from the SWCD.

2024 Landscaping for Clean Water Projects in the VRWJPO	
Raingardens	11
Native Gardens	4
Shoreline Restorations	1
Total	16

Lawns Re-Imagined

In June 2024, VRWJPO, Dakota County, and Dakota SWCD piloted a new program called Lawns Re-Imagined. Looking to increase the use of a type of turfgrass that requires less water, fertilizer, and mowing, the partners held two workshops about the benefits of these lawn types, along with technical guidance for site preparation, seeding, and long-term maintenance. From there, landowners can apply to receive one-on-one assistance from SWCD staff and free seeds to complete a fall seeding.

Four landowners in the VRWJPO completed Lawns Re-Imagined projects in the 2024 pilot. Two more sessions are planned in 2025.



Figure 6. Lawns Re-Imagined logo.

Digital & Social Media

Online Engagement

The VRWJPO sends a quarterly email [newsletter](#) to interested people, with occasional additional emails. VRWJPO also maintains active accounts on Facebook and Instagram and a website at www.vermillionriverwatershed.org. Below are engagement numbers from 2024:

- Email newsletter: 42% open rate, five newsletters sent
- Website: 9,687 user engagements, 19,400 page views
- Facebook: 427 followers, 18,514 post impressions, 2,849 engagements (reactions, comments, shares, clicks)
- Instagram: 600 followers, 5,039 post impressions, 516 engagements (likes, comments, shares, saves)

Water Conservation and Landscaping for Clean Water Digital Marketing Campaign

In 2021, the first of three consecutive years of drought, Dakota County used nearly 10 billion more gallons of water than in 2019. Data from local government units show that the amount of water pumped during irrigation months (May-September) was up to four times the amount pumped during all other months. Additionally, the public lacks awareness of water conservation assistance offered by Dakota County, watershed management organizations (WMOs), the SWCD, and cities. Due to how social media platforms prioritize paid advertisements, organic (unpaid) posts often have limited reach.

To narrow the awareness gap, Dakota County, Dakota County SWCD, and four WMOs in the County partnered on a video marketing campaign via Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, promoting water conservation practices and LCW. Partners were inspired by a 2021 humorous video series from the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, which led to a **769% increase** in participants in that district's landscaping course. The VRWJPO received a Groundwater Protection Accelerated Implementation Grant from MDH for the campaign.

Partners hired a local integrated communications and marketing agency to create geo-targeted paid ads. The agency contracted a local video production firm to shoot two professional two-minute videos, leveraging humor to inform residents about ways to conserve water. The videos were edited into shorter versions for Facebook and Instagram, with the full versions on YouTube. [The first targeted video ad](#), focused on LCW, launched in February 2025, coinciding with the start of LCW classes. Partners plan to launch the irrigation efficiency ad, Lawn Watering Wisdom, in spring 2025 with a call to action for residents to sign a [Water Conservation Pledge](#).

Adopt-a-Drain

VRWJPO participated in the nationwide Adopt-a-Drain program for the sixth time in 2024. Volunteers sign up online to adopt storm drains, committing to keeping drains clear of trash, dirt, leaves, grass clippings, de-icing salt, and any other debris. Participants receive email reminders to clear their drains and track their impact.

Adopt-a-Drain is part of the VRWJPO's membership in Metro Watershed Partners, a coalition of Twin Cities-area watersheds, cities, and interest groups providing water stewardship messages to the public. It is led by the Hamline University Center for Global Environmental Education.

VRWJPO Adopt-a-Drain by the Numbers			
New drains adopted in 2024	Total drains adopted, 2019-2024	Reported* debris picked up in 2024	Total reported debris picked up 2019-2024
88	597	1,707 lbs.	4,740 lbs.

*These numbers are based on what participants estimated they picked up from their drains and tracked online. It is likely that there was more debris collected than noted here.

Metro Children's Water Festival

Dakota County staff have a leadership role in the Metro Children's Water Festival planning and implementation. VRWJPO provided financial support for schools to participate in the popular event. The event was in-person in 2024 for 1,822 students, with the virtual option available for everyone. Schools attending from within the watershed included:

- Lakeview Elementary in Lakeville with 4 classes, 102 students

Both in-person and virtual options are available in 2025 for fourth-grade students.

Minnesota Water Stewards

The Minnesota Water Stewards program, coordinated by the non-profit Freshwater, invites people to become community leaders for clean water. The program provides training and opportunities for Stewards to build projects in their neighborhoods, educate their communities, and volunteer their time. Certified Stewards volunteer 50 hours per year to maintain their certification.

In 2024, VRWJPO supported two Steward candidates, Brian Raney of Eagan and Michele Tyburg of Farmington. They spent the spring learning about hydrology and stormwater basics, water and environmental policy, community engagement, and best management practice planning, evaluation, and maintenance, before working on their capstone projects.

Vermillion River Watch

In 2024, the VRWJPO continued financial support of Dakota County SWCD's work with educators and students at Rosemount High School to collect macroinvertebrates and habitat data from the Vermillion River, identify macroinvertebrates, and compare species type and abundance to biological metrics. This experience interests students in scientific disciplines and engages them in improving water resources.

Dakota County Outdoor Education Days

Dakota SWCD hosts Outdoor Education Days each September on the prairie behind the Dakota County Fairgrounds, near an area of the South Branch sometimes called "Big Slough." Over four days, 789 fifth graders from Farmington, Lakeville, and Apple Valley rotated through five stations about different natural resource topics. VRWJPO staff managed the Water station, which informs students about the finite amount of freshwater on Earth, the importance of the Vermillion River, and what they can do to keep water clean.

Scott Clean Water Education Program (SCWEP)

SCWEP, led by Scott SWCD, educates Scott County residents using the theme of "Clean Water Starts with Me!" VRWJPO helps fund SCWEP, which holds educational workshops, classroom lessons for third- through eighth-graders, and Outdoor Education Days, and submits informational articles to local publications.

Trainings

The VRWJPO annually supports training for maintenance professionals on Smart Salting and turfgrass maintenance with financial contributions, event promotion, and staff time. In 2024, VRWJPO supported:

- A Turfgrass Maintenance workshop attended by 24 people
- A Smart Salting workshop attended by 14 people

4. Financial Statement

A. Governmental Fund Statement of Revenues, Expenditures, and Changes in Fund Balance and Governmental Activities – Statement of Activities for the Year Ended December 31, 2024

Revenues

Source	Amount
Taxes	\$966,828
License and permits	\$470
Intergovernmental	\$1,165,841
Investment earnings	\$90,855
Miscellaneous	\$64,528
Total Revenues	\$2,288,522

Expenditures/Expenses Current

Category	Balance
Conservation of natural resources	\$1,989,777

Fund Balance/Net Position

Category	Balance
Net Change in Fund Balance/Net Position	\$298,745
Fund Balance/Net Position – January 1, 2024	\$1,456,871
Fund Balance/Net Position – December 31, 2024	\$1,755,616

B. 2025 Budgeted Work Plan and Activities as approved by the VRWJPB on December 5, 2024

Category	Item	Budget Amount
Administration and Operations	Dakota County VRW staff	\$182,500
	Scott County VRW staff	\$15,000
	Legal support	\$25,000
	Miscellaneous Expenses (per diems, mileage, postage, insurance, etc.)	\$6,000
	Training, conferences, and certifications	\$2,000

Category	Item	Budget Amount
Research and Planning	Dakota County SWCD Incentive Program Policy Assistance	\$3,000
	Scott County Staff	\$7,000
	VRW staff	\$40,000
Monitoring and Assessment	Monitoring	\$125,000
	USGS and DNR Flow Gaging	\$18,600
	VRW Staff	\$15,000
	General GIS support (Dakota SWCD)	\$2,500
	Equipment/Supplies	\$1,000
Public Communications and Outreach	VRW staff	\$90,000
	Scott SWCD Outreach and Education	\$2,100
	Communication and Outreach Materials and Supplies	\$20,000
	Dakota County SWCD Outreach and Education	\$40,000
	MDH Grant: Water Conservation and Landscaping for Clean Water Marketing	\$22,500
	Local Standards/Ordinance and Turf/Salt Workshops	\$3,500
Regulation	Scott SWCD assistance with plan review	\$1,000
	VRW Staff – Permitting, Standards Assistance, Engineering/Environmental review	\$30,000
Coordination and Collaboration	VRW Staff Coordination with Other Organizations	\$30,000
	Metro Children’s Water Festival support	\$600
	Metro Watershed Partners membership	\$5,000
Land & Water Treatment: General Capital Projects Cost Share	Cost-share programs in Dakota County (SWCD)	\$110,000
	Cost-share programs in Scott County (SWCD)	\$71,000
	VRW general cost-share or misc. grant match	\$50,000
	VRW staff construction oversight and grant development and administration	\$40,000
	Past project maintenance/repair	\$50,000
	Preliminary design, technical assistance, and marketing for capital improvements (Dakota County SWCD)	\$55,000

Category	Item	Budget Amount
Land & Water Treatment: Feasibility/Preliminary Studies	Preliminary design, technical assistance, and marketing for capital improvements	\$110,000
Land & Water Treatment: FY23 CWF East Lake Fish Barrier	East Lake Fish Barrier grant pass-through	-
	VRWJPO cash match	\$15,000
Land & Water Treatment: Mork Wetland Bank	Mork Wetland Bank Easement and Construction	\$1,000,000
Land & Water Treatment: FY24 CWF Alimagnet Lake Alum Treatment	Alimagnet Lake Alum Treatment	-
	VRWJPO cash match	\$15,230
Land & Water Treatment: Wetland Bank Credit Sales	Braun Wetland Bank Credit Sales	\$50,000
Land & Water Treatment: FY24-25 WBIF Lakeville Firelight Way TSS	Firelight Way TSS Reduction grant pass-through	\$184,300
	VRWJPO cash match	\$10,000
Land & Water Treatment: FY24-25 WBIF Hastings 15th and Bailey TSS	15 th & Bailey TSS Reduction grant pass-through	-
	VRWJPO cash match	\$26,250
Land & Water Treatment: FY24-25 WBIF Farmington 4th and Willow TSS	4 th & Willow TSS Reduction grant pass-through	-
	VRWJPO cash match	-
Land & Water Treatment: Cedar Ave/Launch Park Wetland Restoration	VRWJPO cost-share	\$50,000
	Subtotal of Expenditures	\$2,524,080
	Cash Reserve	\$94,786
	TOTAL Annual Expenses	\$2,618,866

Appendix A: 2024 Resolutions of the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board

January 25, 2024

VRW 24-01

Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of Agenda with addition of an item discussing a strategic planning session meeting date
- b. Approval of Minutes from the December 7, 2023, meeting
- c. Acceptance of Treasurer's Reports
- d. Delegation of a Limited Authority for Contracts and Purchase Agreements to the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization Administrator and Co-Administrator
- e. Authorization to Release a Request for Qualification for Professional Services in 2024-2025

VRW 24-02

Approval of Expenses

- a. Approval of Expenses between November 15-December 11, 2023, totaling \$401,426.46
- b. Approval of Expenses between December 12-31, 2023, totaling \$596,700.88

VRW 24-03

Authorization to Execute a Grant Agreement with the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR) for a FY24 Clean Water Fund Grant for the Alimagnet Lake Alum Treatment Project

VRW 24-04

Authorization to Approve Kasprzyk Agricultural Buildings

March 21, 2024

VRW 24-05

Approval of Agenda

VRW 24-06

Approval of Minutes from the January 25, 2024, meeting

VRW 24-07

Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Reports

VRW 24-08

Approval of Expenses

- a. Approval of Revised Expenses from December 12-31, 2023, totaling \$952,301.38

- b. Approval of Expenses from January 1-February 12, 2024, totaling \$54,885.62
- c. Approval of Expenses from February 13-March 11, 2024, totaling \$41,894.95

April 25, 2024

VRW 24-09

Approval of Agenda

VRW 24-10

Approval of Minutes from the March 21, 2024, meeting

VRW 24-11

Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Report
- b. Approval of Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization Consultant List for 2024-2025

VRW 24-12

Approval of Expenses submitted between March 12-April 11, 2024, totaling \$80,789.35

VRW 24-13

Authorization to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) with the City of Lakeville for City Projects 24-02 and 24-20

VRW 24-14

Approval of Proposed Amendments to the VRWJPO 2024 Budget

VRW 24-15

Authorization to Execute a Grant Agreement with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) for Water Conservation and Landscaping for Clean Water Marketing Accelerated Implementation Grant

VRW 24-16

Authorization to Submit the 2023 VRWJPO Annual Activity Report and Financial Statement to the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR)

May 23, 2024

VRW 24-17

Approval of Agenda

VRW 24-18

Approval of Minutes from the April 25, 2024, Meeting

VRW 24-19

Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Report

VRW 24-20

Approval of Expenses submitted between April 11 and May 13, 2024, totaling \$72,054.47

VRW 24-21

Authorization to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with Partners for Water Conservation Marketing and Landscaping for Clean Water Marketing

VRW 24-22

Authorization to Execute a Master Services Agreement with Tunheim for Water Conservation and Landscaping for Clean Water Marketing

June 27, 2024

VRW 24-23

Approval of Agenda

VRW 24-24

Approval of Minutes from the May 24, 2024, meeting

VRW 24-25

Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Report

VRW 24-26

Approval of Expenses submitted between May 14 and May 31, 2024, totaling \$61,732.11

VRW 24-27

Adoption of Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization Wetland Banking Policy (Revised 5-24-2024)

VRW 24-28

Motion to Recommend Approval and Authorization to Execute the Revised Joint Powers Agreement that formed the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization to the Dakota County Board of Commissioners and Scott County Board of Commissioners

July 25, 2024

VRW 24-29

Approval of Agenda

VRW 24-30

Approval of Minutes from the June 27, 2024, Meeting

VRW 24-31

Acceptance of Treasurer's Report

VRW 24-32

Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Schedule a Public Hearing to Receive Comments on the Draft Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2025 Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy

VRW 24-33

Approval of Expenses submitted between June 1 and June 30, 2024, totaling \$46,678.92

August 22, 2024

VRW 24-34

Approval of Agenda

VRW 24-35

Approval of Minutes from the July 25, 2024, Meeting

VRW 24-36

Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Report

VRW 24-37

Approval of Expenses submitted between July 1 and July 31, 2024, totaling \$110,989.55

VRW 24-38

Closure of Public Hearing on the VRWJPO 2025 Draft Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy

VRW 24-39

Adoption of VRWJPO 2025 Draft Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy

VRW 24-40

Authorization to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Lakeville and Dakota County for the Launch Park Wetland Restoration Preliminary Engineering Design and Permitting Coordination

VRW 24-41

Authorization to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Lakeville for Dakota County 50-19 Lake Marion Phosphorus Treatment Project and South Creek Temperature Reduction Project Maintenance and Performance Improvement Engineering

VRW 24-42

Authorization to Execute Contract with Solitude Lake Management for the Alimagnet Lake Alum Treatment Project

October 24, 2024

VRW 24-43

Approval of Agenda with modification adding Item E to the Consent Agenda

VRW 24-44

Approval of Minutes from the August 22, 2024, Meeting

VRW 24-45

Approval of Consent Agenda

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Reports
- b. Authorization to Execute a Grant Agreement with the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Watershed-Based Implementation Funding for Vermillion River – City of Farmington, 4th and Willow TSS Reduction Project
- c. Authorization to Execute a Grant Agreement with the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Watershed-Based Implementation Funding for Vermillion River – City of Hastings, 15th and Bailey TSS Reduction Project
- d. Authorization to Execute a Grant Agreement with the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Watershed-Based Implementation Funding for North Creek – City of Lakeville, Firelight Way TSS Reduction Project
- e. Authorization to Execute a Contract with Sunram Construction, Inc., for the 78-06 South Branch Nitrate Reduction Project Berm Repair (This item was originally a business item on the agenda and was added to Consent at the request of the Board)

VRW 24-46

- a. Approval of Expenses submitted between August 1 and August 31, 2024, totaling \$128,319.21
- b. Approval of Expenses submitted between September 1 and September 30, 2024, totaling \$55,526.71

VRW 24-47

Authorization to Execute a Wetland Bank Credit Partnership Agreement with the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources

December 5, 2024

VRW 24-48

Approval of Agenda, amended to add items F and G to the Consent Agenda from regular business items

VRW 24-49

Approval of Minutes from the October 24, 2024, meeting

VRW 24-50

Approval of Consent Agenda as modified

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Report
- b. Approval of 2025 Meeting Dates
- c. Authorization to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Lakeville for the Firelight Way TSS Reduction Project
- d. Authorization to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Farmington for the 4th and Willow TSS Reduction Project
- e. Authorization to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with the City of Hastings for the 15th and Bailey TSS Reduction Project
- f. Authorization to Execute a Five-Year Joint Powers Agreement with Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District for Services in 2025-2029 (This item was originally a business item on the agenda and was added to Consent at the request of the Board)
- g. Authorization to Execute a Joint Powers Agreement with Scott Soil and Water Conservation District for Services in 2025 (This item was originally a business item on the agenda and was added to Consent at the request of the Board)

VRW 24-51

Approval of Expenses submitted between October 1 and October 31, 2024, totaling \$435,340.93

VRW 24-52

Adoption of the Final 2025 VRWJPO Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy

VRW 24-53

Motion to Recommend Approval of the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization Joint Powers Agreement to the Dakota and Scott County Boards of Commissioners