



# Meeting Minutes

## Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board (JPB) Meeting

Thursday, May 22, 2025, 1 p.m., in-person at the Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center, Farmington, MN, and virtual via Microsoft Teams

### JPB Commissioners in Attendance

- Dakota County Commissioner Bill Droste
- Dakota County Commissioner Mary Liz Holberg
- Scott County Commissioner Tom Wolf

### Vermillion River Watershed Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Members in Attendance

- John Nicolai
- Sandy Weber

### Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO) Staff in Attendance

- Travis Thiel, VRWJPO Administrator, Dakota County
- Jeff Dunn, VRWJPO Water Resources Engineer, Dakota County
- Brita Moore-Kutz, Communications and Outreach Specialist, Dakota County
- Kelly Perrine, Senior Watershed Specialist, Dakota County

### Others in Attendance

- Nikki Stewart, Environmental Resources Department Director, Dakota County
- Joe Barten, Senior Resource Conservationist, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) (virtual)
- Drea Doffing, Castle Rock Township resident and Planning Commission member
- Bruce Johnson, Board member, Dakota County SWCD
- Lucie O'Neill, Dakota County Attorney's Office (virtual)

#### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1 p.m.



## **2. Roll Call**

Commissioners Droste, Holberg, and Wolf were present.

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

Drea Doffing, a member of the Castle Rock Township Planning Commission, raised questions about a proposed solar energy farm in the township. She had seen the VRWJPO's submitted comments about the project, which mentioned mitigating wetland impacts in accordance with the requirements of the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). She asked if that meant that the developers would have to come before the VRWJPO regarding the WCA application. Travis Thiel responded that the Dakota County SWCD is the administrator of the WCA for Castle Rock Township and it is the township's responsibility to ensure that wetlands are not impacted at the project site.

Drea asked if the VRWJPO had any regulations surrounding potential carcinogenic metals that she thought might be found in solar panels. Travis responded that VRWJPO Standards cover stormwater, floodplain, or buffer requirements, but not toxic chemicals. He said that if any potential issues in that arena would arise the recommendation would be to call the Minnesota Duty Officer.

Drea asked whether the agricultural producers who are committing to sell or lease their land to the solar farm project and there are wetlands on their property, will they lose United States Department of Agriculture benefits for those properties. Travis wasn't sure about that.

Lastly, Drea asked whether the VRWJPO thought an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) should be done for this project. Staff responded that an environmental assessment was being already done for the project and the township could decide whether it was in their interest to request an EIS that might provide a more thorough review of potential environmental impacts.

## **4. Approval of Agenda**

*Res. No. VRW 25-16: Motion by Commissioner Holberg to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Droste*

## **5. Approval of Minutes from the April 24, 2025, Meeting**

*Res. No. VRW 25-17: Motion by Commissioner Holberg to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Droste. Motion carried on a 3-0 voice vote.*

## **6. Approval of Consent Agenda**

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Reports

*Res. No. VRW 25-18: Motion by Commissioner Droste to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Commissioner Holberg. Motion carried on a 3-0 voice vote.*



## 7. Approval of Expenses

Travis Thiel presented the expenses from April 1-April 30, 2025, totaling \$52,073.94. He noted that there was an expense listed for Scott SWCD's monitoring station in the Vermillion River Monitoring Network, though the Scott SWCD employee responsible for that monitoring station has departed the agency and will not be replaced. The Dakota SWCD will take responsibility for that station for the foreseeable future. The expense from Scott SWCD in the April expense report was for the first quarter of 2025, before the employee's departure. The change will require edits to the joint powers agreements (JPAs) between the VRWJPO and the SWCDs for services.

*Res. No. VRW 25-19: Motion by Commissioner Holberg to approve the expenses, seconded by Commissioner Droste. Motion carried on a 3-0 roll call vote.*

## 8. Business Items

- a. Approval of Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization Wetland Banking Policy

Travis presented the updated Wetland Banking Policy, modified to include the Board's provided direction from the April 24, 2025, meeting. The Commissioners had indicated they'd be comfortable adjusting the wetland bank credit sale price to \$60,000 or slightly more. Staff desire to have a calculatable means of identifying credit costs. Staff reviewed average credit costs in the surrounding wetland bank service areas and proposed selling credits in the VRWJPO for the previous year's annually calculated median value of Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)-reported costs per credit for bank service areas 6, 7, and 9. VRWJPO is part of bank service area 8. This would put the credit costs at \$60,111 per acre in 2025.

*Res. No. VRW 25-20: Motion by Commissioner Holberg to approve the revised Wetland Banking Policy, seconded by Commissioner Droste. Motion carried on a 3-0 voice vote.*

- b. Presentation and Discussion of Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan Implementation Table and Summary of Approval and Adoption Timeline

The Board had received the draft Implementation Table (Table) that is being incorporated into the 2026-2035 Watershed Management Plan (Plan) and was asked for their feedback. The Table includes action items for the VRWJPO to meet the Plan's goals. It has been developed out of stakeholder input and prioritization. The Plan is still a draft and will remain so for several more months.

Kelly Perrine noted that Minnesota statutes and rules outline specific requirements for watershed plans with the understanding that it is more of a guide and that there may be deviations, depending on available funding or other unforeseen factors. However, BWSR wants watershed organizations to be as transparent as possible. Staff have organized the Table to reflect the funding they are hoping to allocate to various practices, including funds from the



VRWJPO General Fund, partner funds, and grant funds, if the action isn't solely identified within the General Fund budget category.

- Commissioner Droste asked if the Board would review the table every year or if it was strictly staff's responsibility. Travis said that once the Plan is enacted, revising the Implementation Table would require an amendment to the Plan every year if they chose to do it that way.
- In the Table, staff had proposed a 3% increase in the Watershed Tax District levy administered by Dakota and Scott counties. Commissioner Holberg asked if that meant that was going to be required. Travis responded that the Plan is a guide and is part of a budgeting plan for the next ten years. Travis noted that Dakota County Commissioner Mike Slavik, a previous member of the JPB, had asked staff to provide a five-year levy projection to help with forecasting, so the levy increase shown in the Table illustrates that projection over the next ten years. The percentage could change based on the tax capacity of each county's section of the watershed.
- Commissioner Droste noticed a street sweeping study was included as an action item and asked who was leading it. Kelly answered that the VRWJPO and Dakota County are partnering on that. Commissioner Droste said he noticed street sweepers out often near where he lives in Rosemount, which Kelly said are likely deployed as part of the construction permitting process. The study she is proposing is for municipal street sweepers to reduce pollutant loading in stormwater runoff.
- Commissioner Holberg expressed concern about the use of the term "Climate Resiliency" as one of the Issue Category titles in the Plan. With recent directives from the federal government for federal agencies not to use certain words, she wondered if the VRWJPO might be at risk of not receiving grants if they keep that term in the Plan.
  - Kelly responded that staff had chosen those words because of stakeholder input as well as state agencies' use of "climate resiliency," such as in the Minnesota Climate Action Plan.
  - Commissioner Holberg then asked about what projects would fall into the Climate Resiliency category. Kelly said that the VRWJPO's role in that arena primarily falls with stormwater infrastructure and adapting it for frequent, intense precipitation events.
  - Jeff Dunn added that the organization applies climate resiliency terminology as a reason for a number of different applications, which include applications for grant funding. The Climate Resiliency section of the Implementation Table includes floodplain and green infrastructure, in addition to stormwater actions.
- Commissioner Holberg then asked if, instead of having a whole Climate Resiliency category, the VRWJPO could add those actions into the Stormwater Management section, which she thought would more accurately reflect what the organization does without risking consequences from the current presidential administration. Staff were concerned that leaving out references to climate would in turn risk ability to procure potential state grant funds, because any grants that the VRWJPO applies to from state



agencies must be for a project named in the Watershed Plan. Some grants are specifically geared toward climate resiliency.

- Commissioner Droste added that from his perspective, he did not see the state government changing course regarding its goals and operations regarding climate resiliency.
- In the context of comments about data center water use and groundwater supply, Commissioner Droste shared that he'd toured the Flint Hills refinery recently and learned about the facility's voluntary water reuse systems, which have saved a significant amount of groundwater.

*Information only.*

## **9. Staff Reports**

### **Kelly Perrine**

- Kelly mentioned that a wetland restoration project in Castle Rock Township for the VRWJPO's wetland bank has received comments from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps requested the installation of three additional hydrology monitoring wells. This pushes back the work plan for the project and may potentially delay payment to the landowner for the easement purchase to 2026.

### **Brita Moore-Kutz**

- Brita will host a table for the VRWJPO at the Dakota County Take a Kid Fishing event on Sunday, June 8, at Thompson County Park.

### **Jeff Dunn**

- Jeff is in discussions with Eureka Township about potential changes in permitting after changes to the VRWJPO Standards with the next Plan are approved. He asked the Township Board if they would assume permitting authority for soil disturbance and stormwater projects if the proposed revisions to the VRWJPO Standards are less burdensome to enforce. VRWJPO is the permitting authority in Eureka Township, the only location in the watershed where this is the case. The township has until Nov. 1 to decide.

## **10. Adjourn**

*Motion by Commissioner Droste to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Holberg. Motion carried on a 3-0 voice vote.*



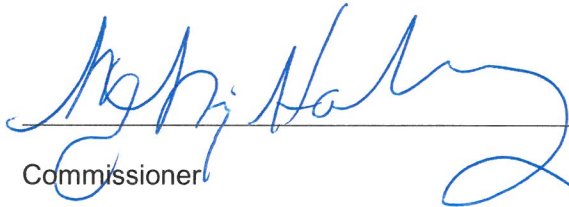
**Next Meeting Date:** Thursday, June 26, 2025, 1 p.m., at the Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center Conference Room A and via teleconference on Microsoft Teams.

*Respectfully submitted by*

Brita Moore-Kutz

Communications and Outreach Specialist, Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization

*Attest*

  
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Commissioner

  
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Secretary/ Treasurer

7-24-25  
Date