



# Meeting Minutes

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

Thursday, June 26, 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
- Melissa Bokman Ermer, VRWJPO Co-Administrator, Scott County (virtual)
- 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 (virtual)
- Brian Wisdorf, Assistant County Attorney and VRWJPO Legal Counsel, Dakota County (virtual)
- Bruce Johnson, Board of Supervisors member, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- Joe Barten, Senior Resource Conservationist, Dakota County SWCD
- Anne Sawyer, Board Conservationist, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)



## **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**

None.

## **4. Approval of Agenda**

*Res. No. VRW 25-21: Motion by Commissioner Holberg to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Droste. Motion carried on a 3-0 voice vote.*

## **5. Approval of Minutes from the May 22, 2025, Meeting**

*Res. No. VRW 25-22: Motion by Commissioner Droste to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Holberg. Motion carried on a 3-0 voice vote.*

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

- a. Acceptance of Treasurer's Report
- b. Authorization to Insert Proposed Revisions to the VRWJPO Standards into the 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan

*Res. No. VRW 25-23: Motion by Commissioner Holberg to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Commissioner Droste. Motion carried on a 3-0 voice vote.*

## **7. Approval of Expenses**

Travis Thiel presented the expenses from May 1-31, 2025, totaling \$65,615.36.

*Res. No. VRW 25-24: 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. Presentation of Summarized Results from the 2024 Vermillion River Monitoring Network Report

Kelly Perrine presented the 2024 Vermillion River Monitoring Network (VRMN) report results. The report format was recently redesigned by Dakota County SWCD staff, who are contracted



to provide monitoring services to the VRWJPO for physical, chemical, and biological monitoring conditions.

Kelly noted that 2024 monitoring results showed improvements in the South Creek subwatershed particularly, which staff attribute to installation of various water quality improvement projects including stormwater treatment devices and stream restorations. Both South Creek and North Creek subwatersheds have been decreasing in levels of total suspended solids since 2016, a key goal of many VRWJPO projects.

The South Branch subwatershed has the highest levels of nitrate of any subwatershed and is getting worse, despite consistent efforts by the VRWJPO, Dakota County, and Dakota County SWCD to implement nitrate reduction practices in that area. This is concerning for municipal and private well owners downstream of the South Branch, including the City of Hastings.

Monitoring activity at the VR24 station, the only VRMN station in Scott County, has consistently shown high concentrations of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) bacteria around the Vermillion River headwaters for several years now. The Commissioners asked why this persistent issue hasn't been addressed. Melissa Bokman Ermer said her team has found difficulty identifying the exact source of the *E. coli* concentrations due to private property access restrictions. DNA sampling at VR24 from 2016-2017 found evidence of human DNA, suggesting potential septic system issues.

Melissa said that the Scott County Environmental Health Department has, in the past, sent letters to property owners asking if they can enter their property, but cannot show up unannounced unless the County receives a complaint from someone else. The team has considered walking the stream to check for a pipe that may be directly discharging into the stream, but at that time, a property owner threatened staff to the point where they could not go in the area without a sheriff's deputy. The Environmental Health Department is willing to send another letter.

Joe Barten asked if they'd considered if the problem comes from surface discharge of sewage, rather than a failing septic system discharging into groundwater that consequently upwells into the Vermillion River. The high level of *E. coli* suggested to him that the source may be a surface discharge, like someone dumping the sewage tank of a camper van. He also wondered if it may be an animal source.

Commissioner Droste asked if drones could be used to narrow down a location of a leak. Melissa replied that she is talking with her supervisor about purchasing a drone for her team.

Commissioner Wolf asked if there was any sampling that could be done to isolate a section of the stream with the most contamination. Travis said that the VRWJPO has done that with no indication of a source. To narrow down possible sources, he thought the best method would be to go on the properties of local septic owners, inspect the systems in order to rule out whether they are a source.



*Information only.*

b. Discussion of Climate Resiliency Issue Category in Draft 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan

VRWJPO staff included a Climate Resiliency Issue Category in the draft of the next generation Watershed Management Plan (WMP), which Commissioner Holberg had flagged as a potential concern due to changing federal directives. She had wondered at the May 22, 2025, JPB meeting if including Climate Resiliency would affect the VRWJPO's eligibility for federal funding.

Kelly presented an analysis of VRWJPO project funding sources over the life of the current WMP, which so far has included \$6.5M in state grant funds and no federal funds. State agencies, such as the BWSR, encourage the use of terms like "climate resiliency" in WMPs and grant applications and do not intend to change this practice. The state budget includes a Next Generation Climate Act, establishing state funding for additional climate resiliency grants administered by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) that are of interest to the VRWJPO. For example, the MPCA's Local Climate Action Grant program requires that climate terms be included in the WMP for eligibility.

Commissioner Holberg said she understood why staff had included Climate Resiliency in the draft WMP and recognized the need to do so for state grant purposes. Staff will keep Climate Resiliency in the WMP.

*Information only.*

## **9. Staff Reports**

### **Travis Thiel**

- Staff had planned to show the Commissioners the location of a planned culvert replacement and stream restoration on North Creek in Empire following adjournment. Due to rainy conditions, the Board decided to postpone the visit for a later date.

### **Nikki Stewart**

- Nikki Stewart raised some budgeting concerns between the VRWJPO and Dakota County. She explained that VRWJPO needed to ensure full reimbursement to Dakota County for staffing costs. The County is in a tight financial environment and has a relatively new financial enterprise system, leading to different reports and potential cost increases. Commissioner Holberg requested clarity on what exactly caused the shortfall and why it was being raised now. Travis said this could mean the VRWJPO will need an additional \$100,000-\$120,000 a year to cover staff costs. The draft WMP lays out projected expenses and funding sources for projects, programs, and practices for 2026-2035 and has not accounted for these increased costs. Staff had hoped to release the draft WMP for a required 60-day comment period at the end of



July, but Commissioner Holberg suggested delaying a month to give the Board time to clarify the financial situation. Anne Sawyer said that the VRWJPO would still be on track to complete the WMP on time per state rules if it pushed back the comment period.

## **10. Adjourn**

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



**Next Meeting Date:** Thursday, July 24, 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*

  
Commissioner

Secretary/ Treasurer

7-24-25  
Date