



Meeting Minutes

Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Board (JPB) Meeting

Thursday, July 24, 2025, 1 p.m., in-person at the Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center, Farmington, MN, and virtual via Microsoft Teams

JPB Members 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

- Brad Blackett
- 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, VRWJPO Communications and Outreach Specialist, Dakota County
- Kelly Perrine, VRWJPO Senior Watershed Specialist, Dakota County

Others in Attendance

- Nikki Stewart, Environmental Resources Department Director, Dakota County
- Brian Wisdorf, Assistant County Attorney and VRWJPO Legal Counsel, Dakota County
- Joe Barten, Project Supervisor, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- Bruce Johnson, Board member, Dakota County SWCD
- John Powell, Public Works Director/City Engineer, City of Farmington

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Wolf 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 25-25: 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 June 26, 2025, Meeting

Res. No. VRW 25-26: 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 Schedule a Public Hearing to Receive Comments on the Draft Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2026 Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy

Res. No. VRW 25-27: 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 June 1-30, 2025, totaling \$51,630.47.

Res. No. VRW 25-28: Motion by Commissioner Droste to approve the expenses, seconded by Commissioner Holberg. Motion carried on a 3-0 voice vote.

8. Business Items

- a. Discussion and Input Regarding Changes to Vermillion River Watershed Staff Costs, Future Levies, and Draft 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan Proposed Implementation Actions

VRWJPO staff recently learned that the organization had not been reimbursing Dakota County enough for various staff and operating costs and thus owe the County around \$120,000 per year starting in 2026. This affects the VRWJPO's budget and tax levy planning for 2026 and the 10-year implementation timeline in the draft 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan (WMP). The organization must release the draft WMP for the state-mandated 60-day review and comment period after the August 28 JPB meeting, which is also when the JPB must agree on a draft 2026 VRWJPO budget and watershed management tax district levy.

Commissioners were asked for input on raising the watershed management tax district levy and items to cut from the WMP to reduce costs and allow the VRWJPO to make up the shortfall to Dakota County. The levy is collected from property owners through Dakota and Scott Counties' annual taxation processes. Travis presented three scenarios:

1. Raise the levy by 3 percent annually starting in 2026. This would require the greatest amount of cuts from the WMP.
2. Raise the levy by 15 percent in 2026 and 3 percent each year after that throughout the life of the WMP.
3. Raise the levy by 5.15 percent each year of the WMP, starting with 2026. This would allow the VRWJPO to maintain its identified programs and projects but would require an adjustment to when those programs and projects would occur.

Kelly Perrine presented a table of potential cuts that staff could make from the WMP implementation table if Option 1 was enacted. JPB members were hesitant to raise the levy by a large amount all at once, not wanting to overwhelm taxpayers alongside other local taxes. Commissioner Droste suggested starting with Option 1 and considering Option 3 if needed. Travis noted that the levy had been basically flat for the previous five years, with dollar amounts paid by each individual taxpayer decreasing.

Kelly emphasized that cutting so many projects from the WMP would result in the VRWJPO changing the organization's focus to operational activities rather than projects. Projects such as an enhanced street sweeping study are at risk of being cut. This could also reduce grant opportunities the VRWJPO is able to apply for because those grants usually require matching funds from the applicant. It was also reiterated that the majority of projects with funding within the WMP only reflected match dollars; partner and/or grant funds would be required to fully implement the proposed projects.

Commissioner Droste asked how many of the projects the VRWJPO implements are associated with new developments. Kelly answered that if a developer wants to implement a measure such as a stream restoration as part of a new development, typically the developer has to give that parcel to the city. Travis added that most of the VRWJPO's projects are fixing historical issues rather than new development.

Commissioner Wolf asked what it would look like if the levy was raised by 3.5 percent. Travis agreed to prepare that scenario for the draft budget hearing in August. The JPB also wanted to see what the levy would look like if it was raised by 5 percent. Staff will run the 3.5 percent levy increase scenario and identify specific cuts and priorities that would need to be made, as well as the 5 percent levy scenario.

Information only.

b. Presentation and Discussion on Proposed VRWJPO 2026 Draft Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy

Travis outlined some structural changes to the budget from previous years. The Coordination and Collaboration category has been eliminated with staff time redistributed to other categories.

The main costs added outside of Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects are for a digital accessibility upgrade to meet federal requirements and for the Stewardship Grant program introduced in the draft WMP. In the CIP section, the most impactful cost is for the Mork Wetland Bank easement and construction.

The version of the budget presented at this meeting accounted for a 3 percent levy increase. Per the JPB discussion in the previous business item, staff will present the budget next month with expenses meeting a 3.5 percent increase but set the draft levy at 5 percent, with the opportunity to lower it to 3.5 percent before the counties must finalize their levies.

Commissioner Droste asked what is the recommended fund balance percentage for the watershed. Travis said he is looking to maintain a 20-25 percent fund balance.

Information only.

9. Staff Reports

Kelly Perrine

- The Mork Wetland Bank project has faced some challenges from Castle Rock Township officials and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, causing delays in the project timeline and making the landowner concerned about moving forward with it. Kelly provided him a set of documents explaining what needs to happen to proceed and gave him until the following Monday to decide what he'd like to do.

Brita Moore-Kutz

- The Vermillion River Watershed project tour for elected officials takes place on Sept. 25 starting at 9 a.m. Brita urged the Commissioners to engage their municipalities' elected officials to sign up for the tour.
- The VRWJPO will host a table at the Dakota County Fair, Aug. 4-10.

Travis Thiel

- A new requirement for state grants is that organizations must have relevant staff complete financial felony background checks. Regarding the watershed, it appears that the Administrator and Co-Administrator will have to do the background checks to be eligible for grants.
- Legal Counsel Brian Wisdorf confirmed that the Administrator and Co-Administrator are the only ones who require background checks for grant eligibility, from his review.

Jeff Dunn

- The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) recently met to discuss the developing VRWJPO Partner Project Maintenance Assistance Policy. The program would allow partners to apply for reimbursements for projects they completed with the VRWJPO.

Melissa Bokman Ermer

- The previous JPB meeting included a lengthy discussion on E. coli monitoring results in the Scott County reach of the Vermillion River. Melissa asked if the Board would like a summary of everything that's been done about the issue so far. Commissioners agreed that they would like that summary. Melissa said it would be a couple of months before the report would be ready.
- Commissioner Wolf said he'd spoken with someone who suggested that a town's weed inspector would have authority to enter someone's private property and could collect water samples. Scott County staff had indicated it was extremely difficult to enter the properties surrounding the Vermillion headwaters to find what is causing the E. coli impairment. Melissa said she'd look into that.

10. Adjourn

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



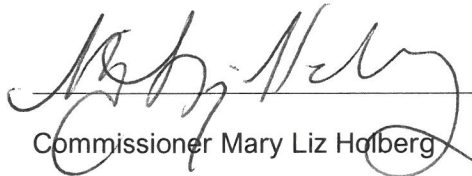
Next Meeting Date: Thursday, August 28, 2025, 1 p.m. – Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center, Conference Room A, and via teleconference on Microsoft Teams.

Respectfully submitted by:

Brita Moore-Kutz


Communications and Outreach Specialist, Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization

Attest



Commissioner Mary Liz Holberg

Secretary/ Treasurer



Date