



## 60 Day Formal Review Comments and Responses

Dates of Comment Period: November 7, 2023 – January 6, 2024

Commenter	Section	Page #	Comment	Change Made in Plan?	Response
Cook SWCD	Whole Plan	N/A	Cook County SWCD Board of Supervisors would like to commend watershed partners for their efforts in the development of the Rainy River Headwaters-Vermilion River Watershed Plan. No comments for changes to the plan are addressed at this time.	No	Comment noted with thanks.
Kathy Bogen	Whole Plan	N/A	<p>The strategies proposed in this plan are in alignment with well-researched approaches and practical ideas that I believe will be supported by a majority of residents and visitors who value the conservation of waters and shorelands in the watershed.</p> <p>The strategies proposed in this plan are in alignment with well-researched approaches and practical ideas that I believe will be supported by a majority of residents and visitors who value the conservation of waters and shorelands in the watershed.</p>	No	Comment noted with thanks.
MPCA	Whole Plan	N/A	Overall, actions that address the issues identified in the MPCA Priority Concerns Letter dated August 2, 2022, have been incorporated to the Plan. This work will ultimately lead to increased protections for priority waters within the planning boundary as well as strive to improve waters not meeting water quality standards. Additionally, the MPCA recognizes and appreciates that prior comments made on earlier drafts are largely reflected in this version of the Plan.	No	Comment noted with thanks.

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DNR	Whole Plan	N/A	The plan has directly or indirectly incorporated all of the DNR priority issues identified in our letter dated August 4, 2022 through various implementation methods as well as balancing protection of existing conditions with improvements where identified.	No	Comment noted with thanks.
DNR	Whole Plan	N/A	Additional discussion in the plan about early coordination with local partners and state and federal agencies, reiterating the importance of good working relationships, is a must in the early planning process for many of the projects listed in the plan. Please continue to foster communication, early coordination, and collaboration with all potential partners on all projects in the plan to help achieve timely outcomes.	No	Commented noted with thanks. We look forward to the DNR's continued involvement in the Advisory Committee as the plan is implemented.
MPCA	2	19	In Section 2 on page 19, the following statement is made. 'There is also an active tailings basin located in the watershed near Sandy and Little Sandy Lakes on the outskirts of Virginia, MN.' This tailings basin is located just outside the watershed but does discharge to the watershed. The MPCA suggests changing 'located in' to 'discharging to' to correctly describe the location of the tailings basin.	Yes	Revision made as noted.
MPCA	2	23	The map legend in Figure 2.5 in Section 2 on page 23, currently indicates an impaired stream for 'Fish Biology'. This should be labeled 'Fish Biology, Natural Background' as the only water indicated with this symbol on this map is a naturally occurring impairment due to wetland influences.	Yes	Revision made as noted.

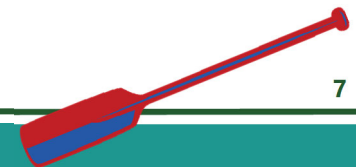
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MPCA	2	24	In Section 2 on page 24, the MPCA suggests adding clarity to following sentence: 'Additionally, eight water bodies are listed as impaired due to natural background conditions for naturally occurring levels of copper and aluminum in the water, as well as two lakes (Echo and Blueberry) that have naturally high nutrient levels.' Although there are eight natural background impairments, these are only on seven water bodies as one stream carries both a copper and an aluminum impairment.	Yes	Revised to say 7 water bodies.
DNR	2	24	The overall look of the plan is appealing. The color scheme used to show priorities is easy to understand and the maps are crisp and clear. However, in Figure 2.6 showing lake water quality trends, the labels are difficult to read, especially the bright green labels.	Yes	Map replaced with a simpler map that only shows degrading trends.
Douglas Lande	3	39	The 1W1P Draft shows the largest specific concern of the public is mining pollution. All agencies are abdicating their responsibilities if they don't make use of this plan to help address these concerns in some fair and real manner. For example some studies and publications about how best to avoid or remove sulfates from mining effluent should be appropriate.	No	Thank you for the comment. Ongoing studies and permit obligations will be used in the regulatory process controlling mining activities. This plan addresses concerns related to mining in the Local Concerns section, page 39. In addition, mining facilities were considered in the prioritization process for local resources, as discussed on page 48.

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MPCA	3	40	The MPCA supports the ongoing use of the most current Impaired Waters List (IWL) for identifying impairments while working with the Plan. The impaired waters included in the various sections of the plan correctly reflect the 2022 IWL. However, the recently released Draft 2024 IWL includes two additional draft sulfate impairments: the Dunka River (09030001-987) and Birch Lake (69-0003-00). Recognizing these waters in the plan as draft impairments to waters used for Wild Rice production is recommended. This could be added to Section 3 on page 40 alongside the already adopted sulfate impairments.	Yes	Added to Section 3 to note inclusion in 2024 IWL.
Douglas Lande	3	41	"Contaminants of Emerging Concern" - specifically the PFAS chemicals are actually an old concern going back 30 or more years. Currently all Agencies of government are complicit in the exponential rise of these unregulated toxins which are known to damage people and the environment. At the very least this plan should be used to encourage people to avoid the use of such chemicals and encourage the regulation agencies to stop the production and use of them.	Yes	CEC section revised with more information, specifically about PFAS. Used MPCA language and linked to the PCA's PFAS website.
DNR	5	N/A	Many of the implementation activities in the plan are intertwined and overlap with other benefits in the watershed. Prioritization efforts could be enhanced by drawing attention to these relationships throughout the plan and highlighting opportunities that provide multiple benefits.	No	Thank you for your comment. We recognize that WBIF policy encourages funding projects with multiple benefits. Throughout this plan, we note overlapping benefits. These can be seen in Section 5, Goals and Implementation, which identifies implementation actions that achieve multiple goals, have other benefits, or work towards achieving multiple metrics (primary, secondary metrics).

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MPCA	5	75	The Ash River culvert inventory map in Figure 5.9 in Section 5 on page 75 appears visually misleading showing the majority of culverts as 'no notes.' Many of these culverts do have data in the inventory suggesting connectivity issues, such as being undersized. The MPCA suggests adding text to better illustrate the extent of problem culverts. The 2019 Rainy River Headwaters Stressor Identification Report states: 'Local partners with the help of DNR and MPCA surveyed 66 culverts in the Ash River Watershed. Culvert size, visual erosion, alignment and perched status were evaluated, along with other variables. The survey found that 74% of culverts were potential fish barriers, 65% were undersized (<0.8 bankfull width), 26% had visible erosion, 18% were improperly aligned, and 18% were perched.' Additionally, the Stressor Identification Report contains a map of these culverts issues indicating which are perched, have erosion issues, are undersized, or have no known problems.	Yes	Added language and cited 2019 MPCA report
DNR	5	87	pg. 82, Connectivity Enhancement: This section could be improved by including language about connectivity to floodplains via correct culvert sizing and the addition of floodplain culverts when appropriate.	Yes	Added discussion of floodplain culverts.
BWSR	6	92	Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) section on page 92. Consider expanding the scope of the paragraph to include all the Federal programs	Yes	Changed to include all USDA programs.
BWSR	6	92	Manage It section on page 92. Consider adding the Minnesota DNR Cost-share for Woodland Owners program to the programs list.	Yes	Added text to Manage it section.
BWSR	6	94	Groundwater Protection Rule section on page 94. Review if this applies to this watershed. If not applicable, consider removing the paragraph.	Yes	Excluded as counties in this plan do not fall under this rule.

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DNR	6	94	Public Waters: We recommend adding a section or paragraph about 103G Public Waters regulations.	Yes	Added language about 103G.
BWSR	6	98	Consider adding this language to the wetland section on page 98. Placing wetland restoration or preservation projects in the most effective locations provides better watershed health. To determine the most effective locations, known as prioritized catchments, BWSR developed a watershed-based prioritization plan, known as a Compensation Planning Framework (CPF). The CPF is a GIS based evaluation that documents baseline conditions and scores selected prioritization criteria to identify catchments in the watershed where wetland restoration or preservation would be most effective. Landowners looking to perform wetland restoration or preservation projects, either for developing wetland credits or for other conservation programs, can reference the CPF and the maps contained within to determine if their project is within a prioritized catchment. The CPF can be accessed at this web site <a href="https://bwsr.state.mn.us/lieu-feemitigation-program">https://bwsr.state.mn.us/lieu-feemitigation-program</a>	Yes	Added language. CPF also added to acronyms.
BWSR	6	110	Examples of incentives on page 110. These examples should be associated with the management section on page 92. Consider adding incentives to the program list or mention in the cost-share program as an option.	Yes	Added language about incentives and references text in examples on page 110.
MPCA	6	104 & 105	The captions in Figures 6.5 and 6.6 in Section 6 on pages 104 and 105 suggest all the data points show location where samples were taken. However, many of these locations indicate areas where Secchi readings were taken, and no samples were collected for further analysis. This is especially true in the most remote areas. The MPCA suggests exchanging 'samples' for 'water quality data' in the caption.	Yes	Revision made as noted.

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BWSR	7	120	Plan Amendment section on pages 120 and 121. This section is intended to describe the local process for amending a plan. If that has not been determined, the plan should state that the implementation MOA or Bylaws of the partnership will define the local process. Also please consider removing any language in this section that would be covered by BWSR policy such as the types of amendments.	Yes	Edited with BWSR's suggested language.



# Public Hearing Comment Changes Incorporated

January 26, 2024



Commenter	Section	Page # .pdf	Comment	Change Made in Plan?	Response
MDH	5	66	Clarify the statement to consider additionally that the East Two River is an important drinking water supply tributary contributing to the Tower-Breitung Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA)	Yes	Added reference to the Tower-Breitung DWSMA on page 66.
MDH	5	88	Change instances of “well head protection plans” to “private well head protection plans” to eliminate confusion between the two since State Wellhead Protection is a state regulatory program for public drinking water sources.	Yes	Changed “well head protection plans” to “private well head protection plans”
MDH	5	88	Add detail about private wells: that there are more than 3,500 private wells in planning area that range between 3 to over 1,000 feet deep reflective of variable nature of bedrock and coarse textured soils. Important to note differences in variety of wells and variety of contaminants that can occur. Nitrate isn’t a big problem in this area, but they are for shallow wells less than 50 feet deep. Arsenic is a naturally occurring contaminate and is more prevalent in the watershed than in other parts of the state with 9% of the 753 samples collected in the watershed exceeding the standard for arsenic.	Yes	Added additional information on page 88.
MDH & Kathy Bogen	5	88, 90-91	Noting the distinction protecting surface water and groundwater drinking water sources through land use management especially in areas of sensitive geology, areas with highly vulnerable DWSMA, or other areas of high pollution sensitivity identified by the DNR Pollution Sensitivity of Near Surface Materials information or dataset.	Yes	Added language to page 88 and added Drinking Water Protection to Outcomes on page 78.