



# LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

## Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting

Wednesday, September 16, 2020

### Agenda Item

#### Item 6. A. - Request from Friends of the Minnesota Valley

#### Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

#### Summary

At the February meeting of the LMRWD Board of Managers, Ted Suss, Executive Director of the Friends of the Minnesota asked the Board to consider funding two projects. The first project was to set up educational booths at County Fairs throughout the MN River Basin. County Fairs were cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, so this project did not move forward. The second project was for the LMRWD to contribute funding for a Minnesota River [River Watch program](#). The Board asked for additional information before making a decision whether or not to fund the program.

The District has received additional information about the program which is attached. The request is for the LMRWD provide \$10,000 to fund the program. This project can provide another way for the LMRWD Education and Outreach coordinator to connect with local schools.

River Watch was not included in the 2020 Budget, however a project was identified with the MN River Congress. This project was to hold an educational event in each county in the MN River Basin regarding soil health and regenerative agriculture. The MN River Congress did not proceed with this project and has instead focused on increasing the amount of upland water storage. The LMRWD 2020 and the 2021 Education budgets included \$5,000 each year for a project with the MN River Congress. This could be used for the River Watch Program and still stay within the budget.

#### Attachments

Email message from Ted Suss dated September 9, 2020  
Minutes from February 2020, LMRWD Board meeting (excerpt)  
Friends of the Minnesota Valley Fall 2020 River Watch Program

#### Recommended Action

Motion to authorize funding for the Friends of the Minnesota River Valley River Watch Program



Linda Loomis <naiadconsulting@gmail.com>

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## Invoice from Friends of the Minnesota Valley

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Ted Suss <tedsuss@gmail.com>

Wed, Sep 9, 2020 at 12:06 PM

To: Linda Loomis <naiadconsulting@gmail.com>, Carolyn Rindahl <mnvalleyfriends@gmail.com>

Linda

Sorry for the delay in responding to you with detailed answers to your questions.

Due to cancelling our summer county fair project; Carol Rindahl, our River Watch Coordinator, was off for the summer and returned to work last week.

First, YES, the program will definitely be offered this year in spite of Covid. I am attaching a program plan that Carol developed last week which outlines for schools how River Watch will operate this school year using a virtual classroom model. Carol's model will work whether the students are actually in a classroom or attending school online from home. This document is being sent to each participating school this week. Carol has been in contact with teachers at several schools as she developed this model.

At present we have preliminary commitments to participate this year from the following schools.

In the Lower Minnesota River  
Bloomington Kennedy  
Shakopee

All of our new team recruiting this year will focus on the Lower Minnesota River including the schools listed after the participating schools.

### Other Participating Schools

Sleepy Eye Public  
Sleepy Eye St Mary's  
Mankato East  
Mankato West  
Lesueur  
Belle Plaine  
St Peter  
New Ulm Public  
Waseca  
Lac Qui Parle Valley  
Yellow Medicine East in Granite Falls  
Redwood Area  
Cedar Mountain in Morton  
Faribault Area Learning Center (Not in the MN River Watershed and will begin this fall)

Recruiting targets  
Bloomington Jefferson  
Burnsville  
Prior Lake Savage  
School of Environmental Studies at the Minnesota Zoo  
Chaska  
Jordan

It is my firm belief that by offering the virtual option, all of the schools will participate this year and recruiting will be easier than asking them to start with monitoring field trips.

Our budget for the 2020-2021 school year is \$52,000

Salary and Benefits	\$45,000
Travel	\$3,000

Materials and supplies	\$3,000
Printing, mailing, misc	\$1,000
Total	\$52,000

Funds committed to date

LCCMR Carry over	\$25,000
Speilman Family	\$10,000
LMRWD	\$10,000
Friends Board	\$5,000
New Ulm Ikes	\$3000
New Ulm Lions	\$500
Total	\$52,500

All of the above except LMRWD funds are received.

We have begun to solicit grants and donations for the 2021-2022 program year.

I am copying Carol on this as I would like to put the two of you in touch.

Thanks again so much

Ted

On Tue, Jul 21, 2020 at 9:29 AM Friends MNValley <[friendsmnvalley@gmail.com](mailto:friendsmnvalley@gmail.com)> wrote:

[Quoted text hidden]

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 **RiverWatch2020.pdf**  
125K

President Hartmann asked if Spring Creek is part of this project. Heather Nelson explained the flooding that the City experiences and that some levee improvements will be along Spring Creek

Administrator Loomis commented on two properties cited by the LMRWD that are experiencing loss of property through erosion. Todd Humber said erosion control upstream is not part of this project and funds received from the State would not be eligible to fix erosion.

Mayor Johnson said the \$11.2 would be to make improvements, not tearing down and starting from scratch. Mr. Hubmer said that under the State program the local match is capped. Currently the City's contribution is capped at \$2.1 million.

Attorney Kolb commented on the process the LMRWD would need to go through to be able to contribute. It would likely require a plan amendment to add the project to the CIP.

Administrator Loomis pointed out that the LMRWD plan was adopted in 2018 and this project was not identified by the City through the Plan amendment process.

President Hartmann asked some questions about the project and Ms. Nelson responded.

Ms. Young asked what the timeline for the project was. Mayor Johnson said sooner rather than later. She asked what is realistic for the LMRWD. Ms. Young said LMRWD staff will have to go through a process similar to what was done for the Amazon project in Shakopee.

Next steps will be for city staff to get in touch with the LMRWD. Administrator Loomis asked about the status of legislation. Mr. Hubmer said language is being drafted and that he would share it with the LMRWD once it is drafted.

**B. Proposal from Friends of the Minnesota Valley**

Administrator Loomis said she was approached by Ted Suss, Executive Director for Friends of the Minnesota Valley (FMV), for two projects. The first project, FMV is looking for \$10,000 to help fund a River Watch Program. Administrator Loomis explained what River Watch is.

The second project is to set up booths at County fairs within the MN River Basin, similar to the project the LMRWD did with Friends in 2017.

President Hartmann asked about other proposals the Mr. Suss had presented to the Board. Administrator Loomis said that Mr. Suss had come to the LMRWD in 2018 to ask for a proposal to hold education events in each county in the MN River basin to improve soil health. She also spoke about a project proposed by Scott Sparlin, from the MN River Congress. Mr. Sparlin had requested the LMRWD's help to pass legislation that would fund water storage within the MN River basin in an effort to reduce water flow and erosion. She said right now she is only asking if the Board is interested in having her meet with Mr. Suss to gather more information about his proposals.

**President Hartmann made a motion to direct staff to bring back further information on these programs. The motion was seconded by Manager Frey. The motion carried unanimously.**

**C. Sponsorship of 2020 Salt Symposium**

Administrator Loomis talked about a request the LMRWD received to sponsor a salt symposium. She explained that in the past the LMRWD has sponsored a Road Salt Symposium that has been a project of the Freshwater Society. The Road Salt Symposium has been a joint effort between Freshwater, the MPCA, and Fortin Consulting and was aimed at cities and others that maintain Minnesota roadways. Recently, winter maintenance contractors have also been invited to attend.

# Friends of the Minnesota Valley Fall 2020 River Watch Program



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## Minnesota Valley River Watch Program Covid-19 Update:

The Minnesota Valley River Watch program seeks to create a hands on learning experience for teams of high school students, that enables the monitoring and improvement of water quality throughout the Minnesota River Basin. While our objectives have not changed, we understand that the Covid-19 global pandemic has impacted the ways in which schools and classrooms are able to gather. To meet this unique situation and the needs of the students, the Friends of the Minnesota Valley has created an innovative new approach to the Minnesota Valley River Watch Program for the 2020/2021 school year.

## 2020/2021 River Watch Program Overview:

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and updated school requirements around social distancing and virtual learning, The Friends of the Minnesota Valley River Watch Program will offer two options for participation in the River Watch Program this school year.

1. **In person sampling:** The first option is, at the request of the teacher and the approval of the school, to take the students out to the testing sites as normal. This option will essentially function as it has in all years past, with a few additional measures that are listed out below:
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- All schools participating in in-person sampling agree to assume all risk to teacher and student health and safety particularly associated with Covid-19 that comes with gathering in large groups.
  - Friends of the Minnesota Valley will lead the sampling at the request of the teacher/school, but our standard field-trip waiver will be adjusted to include risk of contracting/spreading Covid-19. These must be signed and returned before sampling begins.
  - Each member participating in the in-person programming will be required to wear a mask during the sampling.

2. **Distance Learning/Discussion:** The second option available will be for the students to participate in a distance learning version of the program. I have outlined the components of this below:

- Friends of the Minnesota Valley (FMV) staff will conduct water quality sampling on each site across the Minnesota River Basin, and record the sampling as it is being done.
- FMV staff will send each teacher the video recording for their class's water quality assessment at their specific location where they would normally conduct in-person monitoring.
- Teachers will sign up on the schedule for a time-slot where their class can watch the video, have a discussion with the FMV staff, and then record the data shown on the video onto the MPCA data sheets (if teachers wish this can be the "homework" for the class).
- During the video FMV staff will be present on zoom or another video-conferencing service to explain what is happening and answer questions.
- After the video, FMV staff will lead a discussion with the students around topics of water quality, ecological impacts and other correlating areas of science (teachers and FMV staff can work together if there are specific areas to focus on.)

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- After the class, students &/or teachers will work to send the data they gathered from the video to the MPCA.
  - FMV staff have developed innovative ideas to keep the students engaged. Throughout the videos, we will be including hidden “easter eggs” for the students to find. This will require the students to be paying attention to what is physically happening and verbally being said. The first student to find the easter egg in their class's video, can notify their teacher or FMV staff and they will receive a prize.
  - The hope of FMV staff is to use this method to teach at least two classes in the fall and two in the spring to students.
  - With FMV staff gathering the data in video format, there allows for flexibility for these video/discussion classes to be held even after the weather turns cold.

We understand that these are trying times, and that each of the teachers and schools in our program are working hard to continue educating students. We hope that the options outlined above can meet the needs of all of our schools, while still allowing us to engage the students in important ecological issues and gather valuable data.

If you have any questions on the options above please reach out to Program Director Carolyn Rindahl at: [carolyn@friendsmnvalley.org](mailto:carolyn@friendsmnvalley.org)

Thank you all for your continued support of the Minnesota Valley River Watch Program, we hope to see you all this fall!

