



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting
Wednesday, August 18, 2021

Agenda Item

Item 4. G. - Approve and authorize letter to BWSR regarding Watershed Based Funding

Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

Summary

In the June 2021 Administrator's Report to the Board, letters were shared from Capitol Region and Ramsey Washington Watershed District written to the Executive Director of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), John Jaschke, regarding the distribution of Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF). The letters urged BWSR to follow the policy recommendation of the MN Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD) that funding allocations within the Metropolitan Area should be watershed based and that areas of the Metro that are covered by 1W1P should be excluded from WBIF and funded through 1W1P implementation funding.

In discussing the MAWD policy recommendations with others, some concerns surfaced, such as the need for consideration of the development of new 1W1P that cross into the Metro area and dividing watershed districts, such as the LMRWD, into different funding sources applied to different portions of the watershed.

A letter has been drafted to send to Mr. Jaschke and is ready for the Board to approve and authorize the President to sign and send the letter.

Attachments

Draft letter

Recommended Action

Authorize execution by President and sending to BWSR



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

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August 18, 2021

Mr. John Jaschke, Executive Director
MN Board of Water & Soil Resources
520 Lafayette Road North
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Metro WBIF - MAWD Policy Analysis and Recommendations

Dear Mr. Jaschke:

The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD) has received implementation grants under both rounds of the Metropolitan-area Watershed Based Implementation Funding Programs (WBIF). The District understands the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD) has adopted policy recommendations for distribution of implementation funding.

The LMRWD has some concerns with the MAWD policy recommendations. The LMRWD as you may be aware is in a somewhat unique position. Not only because of the District obligations as the local sponsor for the US Army Corp of Engineers maintenance of the 9 foot navigation channel within the Minnesota River, but also because the LMRWD must manage what is essentially the bottom of a funnel at the end of a 332 mile long river, whose watershed covers approximately 17,000 square miles, draining nearly 20% of the State of Minnesota as well as portions of North and South Dakota and Iowa.

Our main concern is that the MAWD policy argues that WBIF should be allocated along watershed boundaries and then at the same time argues to exclude watershed based boundaries because they don't fit within the political boundaries of the Metropolitan-area. The LMRWD must manage water that may originate far beyond the boundaries of the LMRWD and therefore is subject to the results of water and land management practices and policies (or lack thereof) far beyond the boundaries of the District.

Watersheds of some of the upstream sources cross boundaries of the metro-area, such as Bevens Creek, Sand Creek and the Minnesota River itself. The MAWD policy as written is not clear as to whether or not those areas would be eligible for WBIF once 1WIPs are adopted in those areas (they are currently being developed).

If the intent of MAWD policy is to exclude areas covered by 1WIP once plans are developed and adopted, it should consider that no organization is required to adopt the 1WIP. As an example, the LMRWD is currently a partner with LeSueur County, Rice County and others to develop 1WIP for the Lower Minnesota East planning area. A significant portion of the LMRWD is within the planning area, but the LMRWD does not intend to adopt the 1WIP to replace its Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan. The MAWD policy seems to have conflicting language regarding this situation, as demonstrated below:

“Funding distributed to organizations with state approved comprehensive, multi-year 103B watershed management plans that deliver on multijurisdictional priorities at a watershed scale.”

Mr. John Jaschke

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vs.

"Policy Parameters

Portions of the metro that are within a One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) should be funded through the 1W1P program and NOT through the Metro WBIF."

While the MAWD policy does call out specific 1W1P planning areas for exclusion from the WBIF; North Fork Crow River, South Fork Crow River, Rum River, Lower St. Croix River and North Cannon River, those areas are the only ones within the metro-area that currently have adopted and approved 1W1Ps. How can this be considered equitable when subsequent 1W1Ps that cross into the metro-area, such as the Lower MN River West and East are developed, adopted and approved? Will these areas be excluded once there are 1W1Ps? This quandary should be clarified.

The MAWD policy recommendations attempt to make a clear division between areas with 1W1P and areas covered under the provisions of a comprehensive multiyear 103B watershed management plan. However, the LMRWD would like to point out that while the LMRWD would be eligible for WBIF under the current MAWD policy recommendation, a portion of it will be covered in part by the Lower Minnesota River East 1W1P once approved. The LMRWD is concerned that dividing watersheds in this way make it difficult to manage the watershed holistically. Previous rounds of WBIF constrained the eligibility of projects specifically for this reason and made it difficult for the LMRWD to fund its highest priority projects. Water resources should be the highest priority not where an arbitrary line is drawn. Please take this into consideration when considering future structure and delivery of funds.

Please contact LMRWD District Administrator, Linda Loomis, if you have any questions regarding the District's position.

Yours truly,

Jesse Hartmann
President
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District