



# LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

## Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting  
Wednesday, October 9, 2024

### **Agenda Item**

#### **Item 4. B. – LMRWD Work Plan Quarterly Report (Q3 2024)**

### **Prepared By**

Linda Loomis, Administrator

### **Summary**

In September 2023, when the Board of Managers approved the 2024 Work Plan, the Board requested quarterly updates. The 2024 Work Plan update for the third quarter of 2024 is attached for the Board's information.

Young Environmental Consulting Group will present the update to the Board at the October 9<sup>th</sup> Board of Managers meeting and answer questions from Board members.

### **Attachments**

Technical Memorandum – Lower Minnesota River Watershed District – Project and Programs Quarter 3 Progress Report

### **Recommended Action**

Motion to receive and file progress report

# Technical Memorandum

**To:** Linda Loomis, Administrator  
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD)

**From:** Della Schall Young, CPESC, PMP, Principal Scientist  
Jennifer Mocol-Johnson, Land and Natural Resources Manager

**Date:** October 2, 2024

**Re:** Lower Minnesota River Watershed District—Projects and Programs Quarter 3  
Progress Report

---

This report presents the third quarter status update of LMRWD projects and programs that Young Environmental (YE) completed in 2024. This report includes performance metrics or key performance indicators, which show the effectiveness of programs and the progress of projects against budget and timeline.

## PROGRAMS

### Individual Project Permit Program

The LMRWD reviews permit applications for individual projects in cities without their local government unit (LGU) permits, Minnesota Department of Transportation projects, and LGUs that have opted to have the LMRWD maintain specific rules through 2024. This quarter, we have 30 active permits, have issued five permits, have closed 10 projects, and have inspected 24 projects.

YE introduced a revised permit fee structure at the August 2024 board meeting, and it was approved. In addition to this approved structure, the board requested that the district administrator, Rinke Noonan (LMRWD legal counsel), and YE examine further modifications to the fee structure, including options that board president Barisonzi suggested, in an effort to recover funds spent on permit reviews. Recommendations from the team are expected to be presented at the November board meeting.

**Performance metric and assessment:** YE has two criteria for measuring its work:

- 1) finishing and suggesting the next step for permit applications that are complete within the legally mandated time frame
- 2) performing a yearly inspection of the project

We are completing reviews within the mandated time frame as well as performing inspections of project sites. Effective October 1, 2024, YE will transfer all active projects to a new system for tracking expenses by project.

### Municipal Permits

The LMRWD recognizes that LGUs are responsible for land use decisions and regulations. The LMRWD municipal permit empowers municipalities to issue permits and oversee activities as the

primary permitting authority, provided they have adopted the necessary official controls to align local water management with the LMRWD plan. The LGU must establish these official controls and request a municipal permit from the LMRWD. Municipal permits have a validity of five years from the approval date. Currently, there are three pending municipal permits: those from the Metropolitan Airport Commission (MAC) and the cities of Chanhassen and Savage. The MAC submitted an LGU permit to the LMRWD in the second quarter. The application was deemed complete on September 23, 2024, and will be presented to the Board of Managers for a vote during the October 2024 board meeting. The City of Chanhassen is updating its codes and aims to address municipal permits early in 2025, whereas the City of Savage has indicated it is in the process of updating its codes and plans to submit ordinances to the LMRWD for review within the next six months.

**Performance metric and assessment:** YE has one criterion for measuring its work: permitting all LGUs or quasi-governmental organizations. Of the ten entities eligible for LGU permits, YE has completed the permitting process for all but the two mentioned above.

### **Education and Outreach Program**

In Quarter 3, YE focused on two core initiatives:

- 1) a strategic Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) recruitment campaign
- 2) the Minnesota River Barge Tour cruise event

In addition to these initiatives, we continued to facilitate CAC meetings, including the organization of an in-person onboarding event; coordinated outreach tabling events with the CAC volunteers; finalized placement and approval of resource signs at Ike's Creek; and finalized the educator mini-grant announcement for the fall season. For this quarterly update, we've focused our reporting on the two completed primary initiatives. YE has initiated the early planning phases for the flood listening session, starting with a coordination meeting with board president Barisonzi. This session is slated for January 2025, and the majority of the project will take place in Quarter 4 and extend into the following year.

### **Minnesota River Barge Tour—Event Planning and Staffing (September 10)**

In January 2024, the board identified a public experiential event as a priority to connect with key decision-makers. To implement this vision, the Minnesota River tour has been expanded into an annual event that includes tabling organizations, music, and a curated program. Beginning in 2024, YE supported the LMRWD administrator in planning, organizing, and executing the event.

During the planning phase, YE designed a survey to capture board input to ensure development aligned with big-picture goals. Using the survey results, we worked as a staff planning committee designing an agenda, finalizing a thematic program for the event, coordinating speakers and tabling groups, and promoting the event to key stakeholders.

During event promotion, we worked with the LMRWD administrator to develop a mailing list that included both state and local government partners, elected officials, community organizations, and other priority groups. Through this research, our team sent personalized invitations to several elected representatives, resulting in representation from Senator Amy Klobuchar's office. The mailing list identified partners with decision-making and funding authority to share the LMRWD messaging about watershed challenges, ongoing needs, and partnership opportunities. The barge

tour program was provided through previous board updates, and these details are available upon request.

YE led the promotion of the event through a targeted email campaign to the mailing list. We created an Eventbrite listing to host registration and monitor the sign-ups. Throughout the lifecycle of the process, a series of eight emails were sent to promote the event, share news, and process feedback. As registration closed, the mailing list became tailored to registrants only.

**Lessons learned:** In addition to sending mass email invitations via Mailchimp, we recommend the Board of Managers send personalized invitations to their representative county commissioners to encourage attendance. We also recommend ensuring a fall date that does not coincide with the annual county commissioners' meeting. Selecting the annual date no later than the January board meeting will allow for sufficient planning time. Finally, most elected officials cannot receive mass emails, so invitations must be made through a contact form on their websites. Adequate time should be incorporated in the planning process to make these personal invitations to wish list guests.

Online registration generated a total of 150 participants representing a broad range of government, organization, and community partners. Based on responses from a post-event survey, 86 percent of guests responded that this was their first time attending an LMRWD event. From the online registrants, a total of 110 guests checked in on the barge during the day of the event for a 70 percent attendance rate.

The barge event was completed during the scheduled time frame; speakers and tabling organizations arrived seamlessly and completed an effective program that addressed key messaging. Board managers Joseph Barisonzi and Lauren Salvato represented the LMRWD during the program, with managers Apollo Lammers and Theresa Kuplic present. Several CAC members were also in attendance. Overall, the program was very well received with an average rating of 4.4 out of 5 from post-event survey responses.

**Lessons learned:** One logistical issue proved to be the transportation from the parking lot at CHS Inc. to the boat launch on the river. Guests were not allowed to walk on the road, so they needed a shuttle to get to the boat; creating a bottleneck that delayed the tour's launch time. Although the time was made up on the water and guests were returned to their cars at the advertised time, a more seamless boarding and check-in process will be necessary for future events. Following the event, LMRWD staff extended a special thank-you to CHS for their accommodation during the pre-tour loading. In future events, early coordination with CHS will be integral to mitigate this issue.

Following the event, we sent customized surveys to three groups: attendees, speakers, and tabling organizations. Full results of the survey are available upon request.

### CAC Recruitment Campaign and Onboarding of New Members

In early 2024, we identified CAC membership as a concern because membership dipped below the five-person goal identified in the Minnesota statute. Beyond the statutory requirements, the Board of Managers has identified the need for a fully staffed CAC, beyond the minimum, to complete meaningful work that promotes the LMRWD's purpose and goals. To meet this goal and drive both membership and engagement, YE implemented a proactive recruitment and engagement strategy in Quarter 3 of the year.

To actively recruit members, YE targeted residents living near key resources in the watershed. We also studied current representation from CAC members and identified areas in the LMRWD where greater representation was needed. To achieve this, we created a targeted mailing list focused on Savage, Shakopee, and Burnsville. YE designed a customized postcard focused on Dean's Lake and other resources in the area with compelling action-oriented messaging sharing the CAC's value proposition. The postcard included a QR code that led directly to a new landing page on the CAC website. This campaign resulted in several new applications, bringing the current CAC membership to 11 citizens.

In addition to the direct mail campaign, CAC members used the July 2024 meeting to brainstorm ideas for recruitment and made a targeted recruitment push during summer tabling events in communities throughout the LMRWD. This effort also led to an increase in membership.

Increasing membership gets the LMRWD one step closer to its vision of an actively engaged CAC. To continue making progress, YE will release targeted social media messages and showcase the CAC's work and activities. One final tabling event for the season will be held on October 12, where CAC members can continue to recruit. Two new members will be participating in the outreach event under the direction of experienced CAC members. The direct mail campaign can also be replicated as needed in other areas of the watershed, using geographic information systems to create targeted mailing lists and customized postcard content to highlight unique resources as an entry point to potential members.

For the October CAC meeting, YE has designed an in-person event where all members can build rapport and meet representatives from the LMRWD, including board managers and staff. The meeting will include a discussion about the CAC's future vision and areas where they can contribute to the LMRWD's work in meaningful ways. Results of this meeting will be synthesized and serve as an action plan for the CAC as it continues to evolve and grow in its self-governance and support of board initiatives.

**Performance metric and assessment:** The budget and timeline are the criteria for evaluating performance against how well the approved activities are completed after the comprehensive action plan is accepted. We have gone through three quarters of the year and used up around 70 percent of the budget. Working under the direction of the Board of Managers to focus on strategic priorities, YE made key progress on the education and outreach mission by executing CAC growth, hosting a successful river cruise with the LMRWD's core audience, and creating targeted signage. Through early planning efforts for the flood listening session, we are also establishing a public hearing process that can be replicated by the board to quickly enable a response to time-sensitive issues, creating opportunities to engage both the public and key stakeholders on critical resource needs.

## **Fen Stewardship Program**

We have completed stewardship plans for four fens and identified actions to protect and improve them: collecting more groundwater data, surveying vegetation, removing invasive plants, educating and reaching out to the public, and working with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) to acquire land around the fens. We met with MnDNR staff in March to discuss our plans and priorities. We combined the plans into one matrix that shows the priority actions for each fen.

As mentioned in the May fen workshop, staff are actively organizing a fen workgroup meeting in October to share information; discuss priorities; and collaborate with stakeholders around funding, research, and future actions. YE staff are in the process of developing the agenda for the meeting to

ensure the overall goals and intent are being met.

For fen recharge mapping, YE staff completed the memos for Nicols, Gun Club Lake, and Savage. The memos were reviewed by both MnDNR and local government staff. Included within each memo is a description of the location, site geology and hydrogeology, groundwater-shed, recharge, and groundwater use from permitted wells and dug pits. Each memo contains general recommendations as well.

For vegetation, MnDNR will start a project in Seminary Fen in late 2024 or early 2025 to remove and treat buckthorn for four to five years inside the Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) boundary. YE is working with MnDNR and the county staff to determine the best and most efficient methods to remove buckthorn in Savage Fen and in parts of the Seminary Fen High-Value Resource Area that are outside the SNA boundary.

For property acquisition, YE has spoken to MnDNR about how best to assist in acquiring properties around the fens. With the board's removal of the property acquisition item from the 2025 budget, YE is finalizing the memo providing options and prioritizing which areas to purchase when the opportunities arise for future consideration.

**Performance metric and assessment:** As mentioned earlier, we plan to do most of the work for this program in the last two quarters of 2024. We have finished about 45 percent of the project budget and tasks, leaving 55 percent for the remainder of the year.

## **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS (CIPS)**

### **Area 3 Minnesota Riverbank and Bluff Stabilization Project**

The Area 3 project received an MnDNR Public Waters Permit on August 13, 2024. To complete the subdivision of the parcel that LMRWD purchased followed by rezoning, the City of Eden Prairie requires a boundary survey, completed and signed by a professional land surveyor as part of the subdivision and rezoning process. YE assisted with contracting a professional land surveyor from the engineering pool (Bolton & Menk) to complete the boundary survey and tree survey required for rezoning and project implementation. We are waiting for approval from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for Section 404, which is dependent on the receipt of the results from the Phase 1 Archaeological Survey, which is expected to be completed at the end of October.

**Performance metric and assessment:** We have used about 36 percent of the project budget for 30 percent of the project tasks. This is mainly because of complex permitting and helping with the property acquisitions process, which we did not anticipate. The project design is on hold at 60 percent until we receive approval from the USACE for Section 404.

### **Floodplain Modeling Project**

In Quarter 3 we began updating the effective FEMA model that was originally built in 2004. Updates include using the latest data and technology to increase accuracy, recalculating the peak flows based on 20 more years of data (which resulted in higher estimates for the 100-year flood), and adjusting the geometrics of the model to reflect current land cover conditions. These updates will help us better understand flooding along the Lower Minnesota River and make more informed decisions when it comes to evaluating and regulating the cumulative impacts of floodplain development.

**Performance metric and assessment:** About 44 percent of the project budget has been spent on half of the tasks. This seems to be in line with the plan, but this project was supposed to be

finished a year ago, and it has been postponed due to working with USACE and the availability of resources.

## Gully Feasibility Study

For the 2023 Gully Inventory project, four gullies that needed further study in 2024 were evaluated to research the cause of erosion and find ways to stabilize, restore, or reduce further erosion. Three gullies are in Shakopee, and one is in Burnsville. The City of Shakopee has a planned riverbank stabilization project near Huber Park that will address two of the Shakopee gullies. Following discussions with the City of Burnsville and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the Burnsville gully, it became apparent that there was limited interest in restoration due to the gully system's size, complexity, and connection to Unnamed Creek 5/6—a designated trout stream. Further coordination with these entities is planned for Quarter 4 to clarify their intentions for future restoration efforts. While the gully ranking from the 2023 Gully Inventory was shared with municipal partners during late 2023, more focused and direct meetings with both municipal partners and landowners may be required to proceed with future gully feasibility studies. This approach will help us identify projects that have both support and a realistic chance of implementation in the future.

YE completed the following tasks in Quarter 3:

- We created maps showing the gullies that were previously labeled as inaccessible and have identified potential access routes. We listed potential barriers to accessibility on each map, such as steep slopes or fencing, and plan to contact our municipal partners to discuss the feasibility of the identified access routes.
- We began researching existing educational materials for steep slope and gully management that can be disseminated to private property owners with gullies on their land.
- We developed the outline for the feasibility report for Shakopee Gully 16 to guide the completion of the feasibility study.

**Performance metric and assessment:** In Quarter 3, the project progressed to approximately 30 percent complete, and we have spent 36 percent of the budget.

## Spring Creek Site Stabilizations

The LMRWD received the Notice of Decision from the City of Carver (the LGU for Wetland Conservation Act [WCA]) on August 5, 2024. The project is approved through the WCA Wildlife Habitat Exemption. ISG resolved all YE's comments on the 90 percent plans and finalized the 100 percent plans, specifications, and engineer's opinion of probable cost (EOPC). Rinke Noonan reviewed the project specifications and confirmed that the insurance coverage required in the specifications adequately protects structures located on the private property. This was an important confirmation due to the location of the project being entirely on private land and bank stabilization occurring adjacent to a private garage overhanging the creek bank. Additionally, Rinke Noonan provided landowner agreement templates that the LMRWD will use to obtain signatures from the landowners whose properties will be used for construction access. The EOPC was shared with the LMRWD administrator, who confirmed the LMRWD has sufficient funds to pay for the construction of the project. Advertisements for bids began on September 10, 2024, and a pre-bid meeting was hosted on September 23, 2024. Bids will be opened on October 1, 2024, and a recommendation will be brought to the October LMRWD board meeting.

**Performance metric and assessment:** The project is progressing as planned, with the goal of

starting construction in the winter. The project is approximately 90 percent complete with about 27 percent of the project budget left.

### **Trout Stream Geomorphic Assessment**

YE interns completed field work at the beginning of August. Remaining budget was spent classifying the trout streams, compiling survey data, and writing a report. The report provides background on the goals and methods used in the project and details the erosion and habitat issues at each trout stream. The interns presented their preliminary assessment results to the LMRWD Board of Managers during the July board meeting. The results from this assessment will be reviewed with the results from the previous assessment in 2019 and the Trout Streams Gaps Analysis to determine next steps. The final report was submitted to the LMRWD administrator on September 18, 2024, for review. The successful completion of this project underscores the value of the internship program. The interns gained valuable experience while contributing their fresh perspectives and expertise to the team. This collaboration not only benefits the next generation of water resource professionals but also allows the LMRWD to tackle large-scale projects that require extensive fieldwork and data analysis.

**Performance metric and assessment:** The project is 99 percent complete, pending any comments from the LMRWD administrator or Board of Managers. We have spent 97 percent of the budget.

### **Vernon Avenue Road Improvement**

The EOPC for the road improvement was submitted in September 2023. The total cost for construction of the project exceeded the amount in the LMRWD budget, and therefore, the LMRWD had to investigate alternative funding strategies to proceed with construction. Coordination regarding the funding strategy and project schedule was completed in Quarter 3. The project will be advertised for bid beginning October 3, 2024, and bids will be opened on October 24, 2024.

**Performance metric and assessment:** Because the project was on hold for funding for most of the third quarter, the project remains at 90 percent complete with 10 percent of the budget left.