

Technical Memorandum



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

From: Suzy Lindberg, Communications Manager
Della Schall Young, CTF, CPESC, PMP, Principal Scientist

Date: January 14, 2025

Re: Public Listening Session—Executive Summary and Next Steps

Executive Summary

Following the critical flooding in 2024 in the Minnesota River Valley, the LMRWD Board of Managers proposed a public listening session to convene partners to build a shared legislative agenda, inform the next Watershed Management Plan Update, and highlight key projects and programs to prioritize.

In fall 2024, the LMRWD released an invitation to submit testimony, putting out a broad call for science-based information to be used to build a collective vision. The LMRWD received written testimony from partners, several of whom presented at the January 8, 2025, event. During the public event, several participants shared comments, including members of the LMRWD Citizen Advisory Committee and partner organizations.

The following memo summarizes highlights from the Public Listening Session with the intent of informing the Board's next steps. **Attachment A** includes additional information on the planning and execution of the event.

Next Steps

Following the information received, the Board of Managers will discuss the testimony given during the January 15, 2025, meeting. The Minnesota Legislative Session opens on January 14, 2025, creating urgency for the LMRWD's legislative advisor to quickly mobilize efforts on one to two key priorities. The testimony will also be instrumental to the next Watershed Management Plan update and will serve as a timely kick off for 2025 to inform priorities for funding, projects, and programs. It may also inform LMRWD policy or rule changes.

Table 1 summarizes the testimony from the Public Listening Session, with key takeaways noted to inform the Board's next steps.

Public Listening Session Resources

We include the following resources to support ongoing discussion:

- **Public Listening Session Video:** The full video of the session is available on the LMRWD [Facebook page](#).
- **Slide Deck:** The full slide deck from the session is included as **Attachment B**.
- **Written Testimony:** All testimony received has been compiled and included as **Attachment C**.

Board Reaction and Summary

The managers thanked the speakers for making the event a positive experience. The January 15 Board meeting will take all of this information into consideration. Initial takeaways from the Board's closing remarks included the following key points:

- A desire to learn more from soil and water conservation districts about challenges they have and how we might partner (Note: [Freshwater Society's Farm to Stream](#) project may inform future development.)
- Sincere gratitude for the eye-opening input that gives managers a lot to think about and potentially act on.
- The importance of understanding water storage efforts from functionality to financing.
- The essential need for the Board to play a different role in advocacy outside of its traditional geographic footprint.
- A holistic understanding of the large-scale financing needed to make LMRWD projects and partner projects a reality.
- A raised awareness of long-term efforts made to provide for basin-wide governance that could potentially address the persistent upstream versus downstream dynamics.

Recommendations

As the Board discusses the next steps, we recommend arranging takeaways into a prioritized list. You may categorize testimony into the following groups: (A) Definite Yes/Immediate, (B) Develop Further in 2025, and (C) Consider for Next Plan and Future Opportunities.

Table I. Testimony Delivered—January 8, 2025

Time Slot	Speaker Name/Role	Organization	Testimony	Themes	Speaker Position	Discussion with Board	Key Takeaways for Board Discussion and Decision
1:15pm–1:30pm	Holly Bushman, Watershed Coordinator	Lower Minnesota River East Watershed Partnership	Altered Hydrology, Flooding, and Funding Watershed Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific Causes of Flooding • Climate Change • Financial Costs of Flooding • Costs and Benefits of Proposed Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sediment is a major issue; it will end up downstream. • Because of climate change, there is 10% more precipitation, which is amplifying the problem. • Solutions are expensive and funding is limited, especially outside of the Twin Cities metro. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Besides financial contributions, staffing is an issue. • Even if the One Watershed, One Plan was fully funded, it would not be enough to fully offset the implications of altered hydrology. It’s a basin-wide problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partnership needs additional resources—staff and funding—to achieve shared goals. • The Partnership needs large-scale solutions that will address basin-wide challenges. • Current rules and regulations are not doing enough to clearly address the changing conditions.
1:30pm–1:45pm	Norm Senjem	Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance	Minnesota River Flooding Causes, Impacts, and Amelioration through Water Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific Causes of Flooding • Climate Change • Water Storage Along Minnesota River • Natural Mitigation Strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reduction identified in the total maximum daily load is difficult to achieve in reality. • Focusing on ravines is a way to focus on an alternative water storage without taking land out of production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To prioritize ravines, look at counties who have successfully implemented and focus on priority-based incentives. • LMRWD has decreased funding on its own ravine projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider funding ravine projects through a basin-wide strategic lens. • Explore joint programs and focus on partners with experience. • Study land use in more depth.
1:45pm–2:00pm	Scott Sparlin, Coordinator and Facilitator	Minnesota River Congress	Tools for Minnesota River Health: Water Quality and Storage Program and Minnesota River Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Storage Along Minnesota River • Natural Mitigation Strategies • Financial Costs of Flooding • Cost and Benefits of Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Minnesota River needs money and agencies that are accountable to each other. • The Minnesota River issue will not be solved in the metro, a broader approach is needed. • The state’s Water Quality and Storage Program is receiving a high level of interest from landowners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have a highly functional Minnesota River Commission, the size and structure would need to be studied and finalized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore a joint approach to watershed management and build legislative momentum to fund a Minnesota River Commission.
2:15pm–2:30pm	Tom Crawford, River Watch Program Coordinator	Friends of the Minnesota Valley	Solutions for Clean Water Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Mitigation Strategies • Cost and Benefits of Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drainage is a large concern. • LMRWD can serve as a downstream advocate. • Regulation is not effectively being applied to upstream communities by responsible agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The identified role of the LMRWD as holding “legal responsibility” would involve advocacy to formally vocalize downstream effects from upstream activities and projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a role in advocacy or convener between entities and partners across the basin. • Lead messaging that current land use is detrimental to many parties and changing this will help both rural and urban partners find shared solutions.

Time Slot	Speaker Name/Role	Organization	Testimony	Themes	Speaker Position	Discussion with Board	Key Takeaways for Board Discussion and Decision
2:30pm– 2:45pm	Tom Worthington and Vicki Sherry	Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge	Solutions for Ike’s Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Change • Costs and Benefits of Proposed Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ike’s Creek is a unique natural resource in the heart of the Twin Cities, as the only known trout stream in Hennepin County. • Because of its need for cold water, this resource is threatened by a changing climate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This project is a demonstration of what can be achieved collectively through multi-partner projects. • There is a need to balance the sensitivity of the resource with education and outreach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider funding the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Ike’s Creek project (funded through June 2025). • Find additional opportunities to work with the Refuge on shared priorities.
2:45pm	Greg Genz	LMRWD CAC Member	Historic Changes in the Minnesota River and Implications of Rapidan Dam Failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific Causes of Flooding • Climate Change • Financial Costs of Flooding • Costs and Benefits of Proposed Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surging water from floods now reach the downstream community much faster. • This is a problem shared by upstream farmers and impervious areas within the Twin Cities. • Who is going to pay for the impact of the Rapidan Dam failure? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerning the issue of negligence, there needs to be messaging about a shared responsibility for the management. • There is a need to discuss legal ramifications and regulations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to promote education and explore opportunities to share the costs of downstream impacts.
2:55pm	Judy Berglund	LMRWD CAC Member	Education and Outreach for Stormwater Runoff, Flooding, and Erosion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific Causes of Flooding • Natural Mitigation Strategies • Financial Costs of Flooding • Costs and Benefits of Proposed Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is Imperative to educate neighbors to help keep stormwater on their property, creating water storage in urban areas. • Solicit more public feedback to collectively create a positive impact. 	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to invest in education and outreach and promote citizen-led stormwater management for water storage.
3:05pm	Victoria Ranua	Resident near Dean’s Lake	Dean’s Lake Water Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Costs of Flooding • Costs and Benefits of Proposed Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinary High Water (OHW) mark consistently has a high range on the lake and one foot of storage has been lost since the 1980s outlet channel change. • To be good stewards of the land, all communities must focus on keeping the water in place and not moving downstream. 	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reevaluate outlet structure to create more storage near Dean’s Lake. • Explore relationships with the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community who are showcasing best practices in water storage.

Time Slot	Speaker Name/Role	Organization	Testimony	Themes	Speaker Position	Discussion with Board	Key Takeaways for Board Discussion and Decision
3:10pm	Lee Peterson	LMRWD CAC Member	Downstream Impacts on the Minnesota River (LMRWD and Lake Pepin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Costs of Flooding • Costs and Benefits of Proposed Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have the technology and science to fix this. We need to convene partners to resolve issues. • It is important to meet as partners and not as adversaries. 	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a voice in upstream projects to highlight the downstream cumulative impacts more directly.
3:15pm	Len Kramer	Retired Water Resources Engineer	Advocate for Drainage Authorities to Decrease Sediment and Nutrient Loads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Storage Along Minnesota River • Natural Mitigation Strategies • Costs and Benefits of Solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan reviews for drainage authorities to allow advocacy for a decrease of sediment and nutrient loads. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended the LMRWD join with the collaborative to investigate upstream impacts of the river. • There is a perception that this is an adversarial relationship, but this should be more collaborative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as an advocate for upstream projects to communicate downstream effects while maintaining a positive relationship. • Discussion can lead to mitigation solutions.
3:25pm	Ted Suss	Friends of the Minnesota Valley, MN Valley Chapter of the Izaak Walton League	Minnesota River Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Storage Along Minnesota River • Natural Mitigation Strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minnesota River is muddy compared to the clean water of the Mississippi River. • Request that the Board uses legal authority to protect water resources in the basin and upstream. • Join with partners to create a basin-wide entity with planning and guidance authority. 	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a cooperative to review upstream projects, communicate costs and impacts to the downstream community, and advocate for environmental review of project impacts.
3:35pm	Mike Schultz	LeSueur County	Manipulating OHW to Look at Water Storage to Reduce Downstream Flooding Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Storage Along Minnesota River 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water storage may be funded in LeSueur County; however, a barrier is Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Public Waters that have been historically drained. • OHW elevation may be a hindrance to water storage upstream 	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review OHW requirements and potential opportunities to identify additional water storage opportunities.

Time Slot	Speaker Name/Role	Organization	Testimony	Themes	Speaker Position	Discussion with Board	Key Takeaways for Board Discussion and Decision
Written Testimony	Kirby Templin	City of Shakopee	Water Quality Impairments of the Minnesota River and Policy Needs for Flood Storage Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific Causes of Flooding • Climate Change • Water Storage Along Minnesota River • Natural Mitigation Strategies 	Stabilizing streambanks along the Minnesota River can reduce erosion during high flows and flooding. Water quality studies are important tools to reduce impairments. Discuss the opportunity to reduce regional flooding issues through flood storage projects and policy changes.	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to prioritize joint projects to achieve shared goals.
Written Testimony	Jenna Olson	City of Eagan	Railroad Coordination	n/a	The testimony noted that the LMRWD could facilitate a better working relationship with the railroad (Union Pacific) and communities that border it within the District.	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position the LMRWD as an advocate or bridge to communicate needs and improve working relationships as an objective party.