

One Watershed, One Plan

Plan Content Requirements

From the Board of Water and Soil Resources, State of Minnesota

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Policy Statement

These are the minimum requirements for contents of a comprehensive watershed management plan developed through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) One Watershed, One Plan program. The One Watershed, One Plan vision is to align local water planning on major watershed boundaries with state strategies towards prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation plans. These procedures are based on the *One Watershed, One Plan Guiding Principles* adopted by BWSR on December 18, 2013.

[Minnesota Statutes §103B.101 Subd. 14](#) permits BWSR to adopt methods to allow comprehensive plans, local water management plans, or watershed management plans to serve as substitutes for one another, or to be replaced with one comprehensive watershed management plan and requires BWSR to establish a suggested watershed boundary framework for these plans. [Minnesota Statutes §103B.801](#) outlines the purpose of and requirements for comprehensive watershed management plans and directs BWSR to establish content requirements for plans.

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I. Introduction

This document contains specific content requirements for drafting a comprehensive watershed management plan through the Board of Water and Soil Resources' One Watershed, One Plan program. The *One Watershed, One Plan Guidebook* provides more information on selected requirements for developing a quality plan that serves the needs of watershed resources and planning partners. Overall organization and format of the plan is a local decision.

The most effective and useful comprehensive watershed management plans are based on the best available data, models, and other science, especially making use of Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS) where they are available. They are action-oriented, focusing on the *what* and the *how* of watershed management. Finally, they are succinct and readable, providing watershed managers with a tool to explain to the public and funders what needs to happen and the anticipated results of actions that appear in the plan. Where possible, partnerships are encouraged to make use of existing documents and incorporate them into the final plan document by reference. The *One Watershed, One Plan Guiding Principles* provide sideboards and direction in the plan content requirements outlined in this document.

Note: *One Watershed, One Plan Operating Procedures* are in a separate document.

II. Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans

The requirements in this document are supported by the vision of the Minnesota Local Government Roundtable that future watershed-based plans will have **sufficient detail that local government units can, with certainty, identify pollutant(s) of concern in - or risks to - a water body, identify the source(s) of the pollutant, and provide detailed projects that address identified sources or risks.** This vision also includes a future of limited wholesale updates to watershed-based plans, with a streamlined process to incorporate collected data, trend analysis, changes in land use, and prioritization of resource concerns into the watershed-based plan, and an emphasis on watershed management and implementation through shorter-term work plans and budgeting. This vision includes acknowledging and building off of existing plans and data (including local and state plans and data), as well as existing local government services and capacity.

A. Issues That Must Be Addressed

According to Minnesota Statutes, Section 103B.801, subdivision 4, the following issues must be addressed in the plan.

- Surface water and ground water quality protection, restoration, and improvement, including prevention of erosion and soil transport into surface water systems
- Restoration, protection, and preservation of drinking water sources and natural surface water and groundwater storage and retention systems
- Promotion of groundwater recharge
- Minimization of public capital expenditures needed to correct flooding and water quality problems
- Wetland enhancement, restoration, and establishment
- Identification of priority areas for riparian zone management and buffers
- Protection and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and water recreational facilities

B. Other Topics

The following topics, and others identified by planning partnerships, may also be addressed in the plan.

- Soil health
- Altered hydrology
- Climate impacts on water resources (see II.C)
- Land cover changes
- Ecosystem health and resilience
- Water supply (protect, provide, and conserve)
- Drinking water supply
- Drainage system management
- Wastewater management
- Storm water management
- Drought mitigation
- Chlorides
- Contaminants of emerging concern
- Emerging issues
- Invasive species prevention and/or management
- Public outreach
- Equity and environmental justice
- Maintenance of core services; understanding of local capacity
- Administrative priorities (e.g., establishment of uniform local policies and controls in the watershed)
- Fiscal challenges (e.g., minimizing public capital expenditures in resolving problems in areas such as flood control or water quality protection)

C. Special Consideration: Minnesota Climate Action Framework

Local water planning and implementation can play a key role in achieving adaptation and mitigation goals in Minnesota's Climate Action Framework, especially the goals specific to climate-smart natural and working lands and resilient communities. The framework identifies the following measure of progress for Natural and Working Lands: *By 2030, all state funded or sponsored land, water, and species management plans identify actions to increase adaptation.*

In addition, watershed planning provides an opportunity for BWSR and partners to work together to address Minnesota Statutes §103B.101 subd. 16 (a)(5) related to climate adaptation, resiliency, or mitigation.

Counties may also have an All-Hazard Mitigation Plan that could inform watershed planning. Partnerships are encouraged to make linkages between these plan types.

D. Mission or Vision Statement

Although not required, planning partnerships are encouraged to develop an overarching mission and/or vision statement for the watershed, as well as higher-level guiding principles for planning and implementation, which provides direction for the plan and serves as a touchstone for participants in the process.

III. Plan Content Requirements

Each comprehensive watershed management plan will contain the elements outlined in the following sections.

A. Executive Summary

Each plan will have a section entitled Executive Summary. The purpose of the executive summary is to provide a condensed and concise plain language summary of the contents of the overall plan. A well-written executive summary is beneficial for current and future elected officials, staff, citizens, and stakeholders to achieve an understanding of the plan and its intent. The executive summary must contain:

1. Purpose, mission, or vision statement if developed
2. A general map or description of the planning boundary and smaller planning or management units if used
3. A summary of the priority issues and goals that are addressed in the plan
4. A summary of the implementation actions and programs
5. A brief description of the process used to identify the measurable goals and targeted implementation actions
6. An outline of the responsibilities of participating local governments

In addition to the Executive Summary, the plan may need a table of acronyms and a definitions section; however, these are not required and may be included in the appendices.

B. Land and Water Resources Narrative

The plan must contain a brief (e.g., 2-3 page) narrative summary of land and water resources information to inform the planning process and support actions in the plan. The narrative must make use of typical and available land and water resource information and synthesize that information to allow for a shared understanding of watershed characteristics and issues. The narrative must acknowledge the watershed's context regarding the influence it has on downstream waters, and it may discuss impacts from upstream watersheds if applicable. This information should include, but is not limited to:

1. Topography, soils, general geology
2. Precipitation
3. Water resources
 - a. Surface water resources, including streams, lakes, wetlands, public waters, and public ditches
 - b. Groundwater resources, including groundwater and surface water connections if known
 - c. Water quality and quantity, including trends of key locations and 100-year flood levels and discharges, regulated pollutant sources and permitted wastewater discharges
4. Stormwater systems, drainage systems, and control structures
5. Water-based recreation areas
6. Fish and wildlife habitat, rare and endangered species

7. Existing land uses and anticipated land use changes
8. Relevant socio-economic information
9. Acknowledgement of Minnesota Tribal Nations in the planning boundary

Land and water resources information critical to supporting the priorities and actions of the plan may need to be more thoroughly described in the sections of the plan where those priorities are discussed. For example, a trend analysis may need more in-depth description to support a priority issue in the plan; however, the data behind the analysis can be contained elsewhere and referenced.

If gaps in information are identified through the plan development process, consider implementation action(s) to fill the gap rather than delaying the planning process to generate new data.

Sources of information used to develop the Land and Water Resources Narrative should be referenced in the plan appendix. Please consult the *One Watershed, One Plan Guidebook* for more information on this requirement.

C. Priority Resources and Issues

The plan must contain:

1. A summary of the issues and resource concerns identified from all sources for consideration in this section
2. The steps used to consider and prioritize the identified resources and issues
3. A list of the agreed upon priority resources and issues for the watershed and a brief issue statement that describes the relevance of the issue for the planning area

Priority issues can be articulated in the plan through both a list/description(s) and map(s). The format and exact planning terminology used in the plan for presenting priority issues may vary as long as the plan covers the three requirements above and the terminology used is defined in the plan (the summary and steps are suggested to be included as appendices). The plan is not expected to address all identified issues; however, it should include a brief explanation as to why certain issues were rejected as priorities for this planning cycle.

In the event that conflicts exist in the interpretation of issues and/or selection of priority issues, consider whether the conflict can be addressed by defining both watershed-wide priorities as well as individual priorities of the participating local governments.

Plans that do not demonstrate a thorough analysis of issues, and that do not use available science and data, will not be approved. Please consult the *One Watershed, One Plan Guidebook* for more information on this requirement.

D. Measurable Goals

Each priority issue must have associated measurable goals for addressing the issue. Some goals will be watershed-wide; however, the majority should be focused on a specific subwatershed, natural resource, or local government where specific outcomes will be achieved. Goals for prevention of future water management problems should also be considered.

Plans that do not contain sufficient measurable goals to indicate an intended pace of progress for addressing the priority issues will not be approved.

BWSR will consider Minnesota Statutes §103B.801, Subd. 4 (2), the balance of broad versus focused goals and shorter-term versus longer-term goals, and detail in the targeted implementation schedule to assess whether goals are sufficient. Additionally, the pace of progress towards achieving goals will be used in determinations of the extent or depth of future ten-year plan revisions. BWSR may consider issuing findings when a plan and associated implementation is sufficient that a complete revision will not be required.

Specific Goal Requirement: Consistent with the Clean Water Council policy, plans must establish water storage goals, expressed in acre-feet, and standards for water storage, retention, and infiltration.

Please consult the *One Watershed, One Plan Guidebook* for more information on this requirement.

E. Targeted Implementation Schedule

Each plan must have a targeted implementation schedule with:

1. A brief description of each action
2. Location targeting where the action will occur
3. Identification of roles and the responsible government unit for the action
4. An estimate of cost for implementing the action
5. An estimate of when the implementation will occur within the ten-year timeframe of the plan in increments of two years or less
6. A description of how the outcomes of the action will be measured

These requirements can be articulated in a table and/or narrative form. The schedule must clearly identify the actions the planning partners will undertake with available local funds versus the actions that will be implemented only if other sources of funds become available and should be supported by maps indicating the location(s) of the targeted activities.

Specific (field scale) locations for individual practice types are not required, but the plan must identify approaches that will be used to locate different types of BMPs or focus programs during implementation.

Specific actions, such as capital improvement projects that are local priorities (but not priorities for the watershed plan) or initiatives that are unique to a particular LGU (but that have not been identified as priorities for the partnership) may be included in the plan but must be clearly indicated as local priorities.

Please consult the *One Watershed, One Plan Guidebook* for more information on this requirement.

F. Plan Implementation Programs

The implementation programs described below support the targeted implementation schedule by describing the overarching program(s) that will be used to implement actions identified in the schedule and how these programs will be coordinated between the local water management responsibilities. All programs described in this section must be included in the plan, including feasibility studies. Please consult the *One Watershed, One Plan Guidebook* for more information on selected requirements in this section.

1. **Financial Assistance Programs.** Describe local voluntary financial assistance programs necessary to achieve the goals, including the general purpose and scope, criteria that will be used to select projects/disperse funds, actions to work with landowners in these critical areas to tailor conservation practices, and how the program(s) will be implemented across the watershed to provide consistency and achieve goals. Financial assistance programs may be targeted to specific issues, e.g., grants for sealing abandoned wells, or specific areas, e.g., a watershed of priority lakes.
2. **Capital Improvements.** Describe opportunities for watershed-wide collaboration (e.g., sharing of specialized services and/or lessons learned on these large-scale projects) on capital improvements (physical/structural improvement with an extended life) identified in the targeted implementation schedule. Consider including opportunities for improved water management associated with county and township roads and within drainage systems managed through Drainage Law.
 - a. **Drainage:** Describe opportunities for enabling large-scale, multi-purpose projects on a watershed basis and for engaging drainage authorities and drainage inspectors in implementation of the watershed plan. Describe local procedures for ensuring future drainage projects are not inconsistent with the goals of the plan.
 - b. **Capital Improvement Programs (CIPs) for Watershed Districts:** CIPs are required in the plan when a watershed district is included, consistent with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes §103B and 103D. A CIP is an itemized program for at least a five-year prospective period. A CIP sets forth the schedule, timing, and details of specific contemplated capital improvements by year. CIPs also describe estimated costs, the need for each improvement, financial sources, and the financial effect that the improvements will have on the local government unit or watershed management organization. This requirement can be incorporated into the targeted implementation schedule if the specific requirements of Minnesota statutes §103B and §103D are clearly met. Amendments are subject to at least biennial review.
 - c. **Permanent Protection:** Describe opportunities for permanent land protection necessary to meet the resource needs and achieve the goals for the watershed.
3. **Operation and Maintenance.** Include a description of who is responsible for inspection, operation, and maintenance of capital projects, stormwater infrastructure, public works, facilities, and natural and artificial watercourses, and legal drainage systems. Specify any new programs or revisions to existing programs needed to accomplish the goals or that may benefit from watershed-wide collaboration.
4. **Regulation and Enforcement.** Describe existing regulations, controls, and authorities relevant to water management for the purposes of highlighting areas of duplication, information gaps, and opportunities. Use this analysis to identify areas to maximize effectiveness and build efficiencies through improved coordination and consistent application of regulations, and/or to develop new regulation or enforcement in support of meeting plan goals. Regulatory areas to consider include, but are not limited to: shoreland, floodplain, septic, Wetland Conservation Act, Protected Waters Inventory, erosion control, municipal wastewater, Minimum Impact Design Standards (MIDS), land use, aggregate mining, feedlots, hazard mitigation, buffers, and prescription drug drop off locations.
 - a. **Regulation and Enforcement for Watershed Districts:** Describe the rules and associated permit programs of watershed districts in the watershed, consistent with and as necessary to meet the requirements of Minnesota statutes §103D.337-103D.345.

- b. **Comprehensive or land use plans:** List the date of the last Comprehensive Plan adoption for each LGU. Describe the land use authorities within the watershed as well as potential opportunities to achieve goals through, or potential conflicts with, comprehensive land use plans.
- 5. **Data Collection and Monitoring.** Describe how data collection and monitoring activities will be used to reasonably evaluate progress toward plan goals and describe additional data collection activities needed to fill gaps that have been identified during the planning process. Include commitments to periodically analyze data, collect data consistent with state compatibility guidelines, and submit locally collected data to the appropriate state agency for entry into public databases.
 - a. **Monitoring Summary:** Summarize the locations, frequency, and parameters of existing water quality, quantity, and other monitoring in the watershed. The summary should include local, state, and other ongoing monitoring programs and the scale (e.g., field, subwatershed, major watershed) they are designed to evaluate. State agencies are available to help summarize state monitoring activities.
 - b. **Use of Data:** Describe if these established monitoring programs are capable of producing an evaluation of the progress being made toward the goals (e.g., monitoring stations properly located relative to priority subwatersheds) and how the data will be used in the evaluation, including improved model calibration.
 - c. **Additional Data Collection:** Identify any new data collection needed to improve understanding of the watershed condition, assess particular resources, or address any gaps in the land and water resources inventory that support actions in the targeted implementation schedule. Identify the purpose and lead organization for new data collection initiatives.
- 6. **Public Participation and Engagement.** The plan must describe approaches to public participation and engagement for implementing the plan, including information and outreach program(s). Specifically, opportunities where there are benefits from watershed-wide collaborations and areas where focused or targeted actions will support the priority issues and goals of the plan. At a minimum, include: an analysis of the need for public participation and engagement in meeting plan goals, identification of strategies addressing the needs, and an estimate of the financial and technical support needed by the partnership for carrying out the strategies.

G. Plan Administration and Coordination

Partners must decide what organizational structures are best suited to administer the various programs and how the partnership will carry out the plan. In some cases, new arrangements may be needed or desired. All items described in this section must be addressed in the plan. Please consult the *One Watershed, One Plan Guidebook* for more information on selected requirements in this section.

- 1. **Decision-making and Staffing.** Describe the roles of planning participants in implementation.
 - a. **Policy Committee** (decision-making): Describe if the policy committee created to develop the plan will continue through plan implementation. If the policy committee will not continue, clearly outline an alternative method to provide oversight and maintain accountability throughout plan implementation. Describe the anticipated role of the policy committee or alternative in plan implementation and its relationship to plan participants.

- b. **Advisory Committee** (advising): Describe if the advisory committee(s) created for plan development will continue through plan implementation and/or describe alternative methods to ensure a dependable forum to exchange information and knowledge about the watershed and implementation of the plan, and to meet the statutory requirements for ongoing advisory committees of counties (Minnesota Statutes §103B.301-103B.3355) and watershed districts (Minnesota Statutes §103D.331-103D.337). Also, identify opportunities to coordinate with federal partners to convene Local Working Groups to fulfill federal Farm Bill requirements.

The plan should establish procedures for engaging state agencies and describe the ongoing roles and commitments of the state agencies for plan implementation.

- c. **Identification and Coordination of Shared Services** (staffing): Describe specialized and shared service areas that may be used in the watershed to implement the actions identified in the schedule and achieve greater efficiencies in service delivery. This may include shared services for program management or for project management.

The watershed plan and associated formal agreements should describe how the service will be shared and/or the need met. Shared services may also include partnership with non-governmental organizations.

- 2. **Collaboration with other Units of Government.** Describe relationships with other units of government not part of the formal agreement for plan development, including the drainage authorities within the planning boundary. For example, cities and townships are not required participants, but they may contribute to improved watershed management in the areas of wastewater treatment plants, source water and wellhead protection for population centers, MS4s, and culvert and road maintenance. Additionally, federal government partners are not required participants. However, federal programs and partnerships are very important resources in watershed management.
- 3. **Funding.** Describe how actions in the implementation schedule will be funded. Both the state and local governments have responsibility for funding water management. All funding methods currently available to participants remain available to the participants and/or to the organization as a whole through the participants.
 - a. **Local:** Describe the funding sources used to generate local funds for plan implementation and clearly outline the participants' local commitments to implementing the plan.
 - b. **State:** Describe state funding needed for implementation of the plan. This can be achieved through separation in the targeted implementation schedule of locally funded projects versus projects that will proceed only with state funds.
 - c. **Collaborative Grants:** Describe the intended approach to coordinated submittal of collaborative grant applications.
 - d. **Federal:** The plan should describe what type of federal funding resources may be pursued to implement the plan.
 - e. **Other Sources:** The plan should describe what other types of funding may be pursued to implement the plan.

4. **Work Planning.** Describe a frequency and method for developing and approving work plans based on: plan priorities, the targeted implementation schedule, and the implementation programs. The work plan can consist of a collaborative work plan for the watershed, elements of individual work plans for each local government participant, or some combination. Describe how the work plan will be finalized and approved.
 - a. **Local Work Plan:** Describe an annual commitment to implementing the plan via local budgeting and staffing decisions. Describe an approach to additional collaborative work planning based on the extent of collaboration intended in the implementation schedule, programs, and subsequent agreements, as well as the extent of collaborative grant-making intended.
 - b. **Funding Request:** Describe a biennial commitment to collaboratively review and submit a funding request to BWSR.
5. **Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting.** Describe approaches and decision-making for periodic assessment, evaluation, and reporting of plan implementation. Evaluation should measure progress and performance, drive the work plan, and provide accountability.
 - a. **Accomplishment Assessment:** Describe a method for tracking implementation consistently across the watershed. Describe the frequency and methods for compiling and reviewing implementation accomplishments under the targeted implementation schedule and implementation programs described in the plan. This assessment should support future work plan development, progress evaluation, and reporting. Suggested frequency is annual.
 - b. **Partnership Assessment:** Describe the frequency and methods for assessing the partnership with regards to the items listed in 1 – 3 above (fulfillment of committee purposes and roles, efficiencies in service delivery, collaboration with other units of government, and success in securing funding).
 - c. **Mid-Point Evaluation:** Include a schedule for a thorough mid-point evaluation and potential revision to the implementation schedule. The purpose of this evaluation is to determine progress and consider whether staying the course or resetting direction is necessary. It may also include revisions to models and considerations of new monitoring data. If a WRAPS has been completed or revised since the plan was originally adopted, this evaluation must include an assessment of any changes to the plan necessary due to new information.
 - d. **Reporting:** Describe collaborative approaches to provide accountability to stakeholders and to meet annual reporting requirements of local governments, grant reporting requirements, and specific program and financial reporting requirements. Information on required annual reporting can be found on the BWSR website. Consider a periodic ‘state of the watershed report,’ individualized ‘waterbody report cards,’ or other methods to provide accountability and demonstrate outcomes locally.
6. **Plan Amendments.** Describe procedures for considering plan amendments, who can propose amendments, what criteria will be used in considering amendments, and who makes the decision to proceed with amendments.
7. **Organizational Structures or Formal Agreements.** List and briefly describe the organizational structures or entities that will be used to implement the plan’s projects and programs. Indicate whether these are existing entities or new ones. In either case, indicate any formal agreements between local governments

that are needed and whether these will be modifications of existing agreements or new agreements. For example, prior to completion of the plan, the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between partners for planning purposes could be revised for on-going coordination among entities responsible for plan implementation. Consultation with Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust (MCIT) and legal counsel is recommended. MCIT may recommend revising the planning agreement, establishing separate agreements or contracts for specific services or actions, and/or developing a broader, watershed-wide agreement for ongoing partnership.

History

Version	Description	Date
3.0	■ Modified “Other Topics” list (II.B) ■ Changed “extreme weather” to “Minnesota Climate Adaptation Framework” and modified description (II.C) ■ Added tribal acknowledgement to Land and Water Resources Narrative (III.B.9) ■ Added of language clarifying targeting requirement (III.E) ■ Changed “cost share” to “financial assistance” (III.F.1) ■ Fixed a typographical error in a statute reference (III.F.4.2.a) ■ Removed “education” (III.F.6)	August 24, 2023
2.2	■ Changed “Five Year” to “Mid-point” (III.G.5.c)	December 15, 2022
2.1	■ Added “drinking water sources” to the list of issues that must be addressed (II.A)	August 29, 2019
2.0	■ Formatted with new policy template and logo; edited to improve clarity and readability ■ Removed background information not directly relevant to the policy; Introduction and Overview sections reorganized and some content removed (I and II), background and contextual information for requirements removed (III A-E) ■ Updated list of issues that must be in the plan to reflect statute (II) ■ Land and Water Resources Inventory changed to <i>Narrative</i> and moved from appendix to plan; added requirement for discussion of watershed context (III.A). ■ Removed “potential sources of funding” from, and added requirement for two year time increments to, Targeted Implementation Schedule requirement (III.E.4) ■ Modified Targeted Implementation Schedule requirement to clarify inclusion of local priorities (III.E)	March 28, 2018

- Added “legal drainage systems” to Operations and Maintenance requirement (III.F.3)
- Removed reference to the buffer law from Regulation and Enforcement requirement (III.F.4). Added inclusion of comprehensive plan dates (III.F.4.b)
- Modified Data Collection and Monitoring requirement to clarify program intent (III.F.5)
- Added needs assessment and strategy development; changed heading to Public Participation and Engagement (formerly *Information, Education, and Outreach*) (III.F.6)
- Added policy committee role and federal coordination to Decision-making and Staffing (III.G.1.a,b)
- Modified Work Planning requirement to clarify program intent (III.G.2)
- Modified Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting to clarify program intent (III.G.3)

1.00	■ Pilot Plan Content Requirements modified to reflect transition to program	March 23, 2016
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0.00	■ Pilot Plan Content Requirements	June 25, 2014
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