

HENNEPIN COUNTY

MINNESOTA

June 13, 2022

Attn: Laura Jester
Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission
Administrator
c/o 16145 Hillcrest Lane
Eden Prairie, MN 55346

RE: BCWMC Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan Update

Dear Laura,

On behalf of Hennepin County, and specifically our Department of Environment and Energy, I'd like to thank you for the invitation to participate in the update of the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission's (BCWMC) Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP). The County views BCWMC as a critical partner in our shared work to improve water quality and improve and protect natural and water resources throughout our area.

On April 14th, 2022, we received notice of your intent to update your CWMP, along with a request to provide information on our organization's water related issues, water management goals, official controls, and programs. Below is a summary of our current management plans and efforts which we felt directly aligned with the goals and objectives of your CWMP.

- **Climate Action Plan**
 - In accordance with Earth Day 2021, Hennepin County approved its first [Climate Action Plan](#). This plan includes aggressive goals, such as to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Several of the strategies and actions in the plan have relevancy to the mission of BCWMC, and to this CWMP. Some of these are listed in **Table 1** below. These will also be reflected in the County's [updated Natural Resources Strategic Plan](#).
- **Natural Resources Strategic Plan**
 - In 2016, the Hennepin County Board adopted our first [Natural Resources Strategic Plan](#), effective for 2015-2020. We are in the process of [updating this plan](#), which will be the first to reflect recent county initiatives to build resiliency to, and mitigate impacts to, climate change, as well as incorporate initiatives to [reduce disparities](#). Several of the goals, actions, and metrics listed below will be incorporated into the strategic plan. Others from the current Natural Resources Strategic Plan are listed in **Table 2**.

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- **Ditch Management**

- The County still has jurisdictional authority under Minnesota Statute 103E over three public ditches in Bassett Creek:
 - [County Ditch 25](#), encompassing an unnamed stream (DNR ID 108901) from Brunswick Avenue to confluence with Bassett Creek, and Bassett Creek from Highway 100 to Noble Avenue North, in the cities of Crystal and Golden Valley.
 - [County Ditch 30](#), or Bassett Creek, from Medicine Lake to Pennsylvania Avenue North, in the cities of Plymouth and Golden Valley.
 - [County Ditch J-6](#), now part of city stormwater sewer infrastructure between Highway 55, Interstate 169, the Minneapolis Golf Club, and Pennsylvania Avenue South in the cities of St. Louis Park and Golden Valley.

These ditches are now surrounded by fully developed residential and commercial lands and no longer serve the agricultural purposes for which they were constructed. Hennepin County no longer sees a need for these to be considered agricultural ditches and wishes to see these abandoned and placed under MNDNR jurisdiction as public watercourses.

- **Roadways and Facilities**

- Hennepin County owns and operates several facilities and a transportation system within the jurisdictional boundaries of the BCWMC. [As an MS4 permittee](#), Hennepin County has an obligation to make progress toward assigned Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) goals and views our ongoing partnership with BCWMC and its participating cities as great prospects for collaboration. In addition, as a public entity without land use controls our facilities and our roadways represent some of our best opportunities to make progress on the goals of our Climate Action Plan and we are eager to work with our partners to explore opportunities to do that in conjunction with our capital plan.

- **Natural Resource Grants**

- BCWMC, and its partners, have been very successful in securing and implementing Natural Resource Grants within their jurisdiction. Since 2017, three Natural Resource Opportunity Grants have been awarded within BCWMC. These include installations of [stormwater management features in several North Minneapolis neighborhoods](#), a partnership with Metro Blooms, the county, and BCWMC and neighborhood community groups to implement green infrastructure projects in a historically underinvested area. BCWMC has directly received two recent Opportunity Grants, including dollars for the [restoration of Plymouth Creek](#) in 2017 and for the upcoming [Main Stem Lagoon Dredging Project](#) along Bassett Creek in Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis. We hope to continue and build from these partnerships in the future.

- **Conservation Services**

- Following the dissolution of Hennepin Conservation District, Hennepin County's Environment and Energy Department assumed responsibility for the District's services, including the unique role Conservation Districts can play in working with private landowners to implement conservation projects on their property. A good example of this is [our partnership with the City of Brooklyn Park](#) to work with private residents along the Mississippi River to address severe bank erosion that is endangering their properties and polluting the river. The county conducted site visits and [developed the comprehensive plan](#) to address bank erosion, while the City coordinated these efforts and developed a program to allow for property assessments of required bank restoration costs. We look forward to completing this work (pending receiving our Clean Water Fund grant) and expanding this program and those like it to nearby communities and jurisdictions like BCWMC.

- **Additional Funding Sources**

- Beyond Natural Resource Grants, Hennepin County has other opportunities to assist in planning and implementation, which includes grants for environmental education, aquatic invasive species prevention, tree planting, among many others. [A full list of these opportunities can be found on our website.](#)

Our staff looks forward to supporting this effort as you best see fit. Kris Guentzel (kristopher.guentzel@hennepin.us; 612-596-1171) will be our appointed representative for these efforts. Please don't hesitate to reach out to Kris for any assistance he can provide.

Sincerely,



Karen Galles
Land and Water Unit Supervisor
612-348-2027 (office) | 612-235-0712 (mobile)
Karen.Galles@hennepin.us

Table 1: Goals, actions, and metrics as listed in Hennepin County's Climate Action Plan, which are relevant to the BCWMC CWMP.

Goal	Action	Metric (if available)
Protect and engage people, especially vulnerable communities	Mitigate the heat island effect, especially in areas with people most vulnerable to extreme heat, by supporting increased access to air conditioning, increasing the tree canopy, and converting hardscape where possible to green infrastructure.	<i>Plant 1 million more trees by 2030 through partnerships with cities, TRPD, and other community partners.</i>
	Address flooding in housing, especially where people most vulnerable to flooding impacts live, by promoting and providing financial support for preventative measures such as sump-pumps and landscaping to redirect water away from structures.	<i>Identify the structures and properties most at risk for flood damage in Hennepin County and develop partnerships that will help reduce or eliminate flood damages and disruption by 2025.</i>
Enhance public safety	Identify areas at risk for all types of flooding, including flowing surface water (fluvial), standing surface water (pluvial) and subsurface water (groundwater flooding) and coordinate with public entity partners to create strategies for reducing risk, especially for vulnerable populations.	<i>Develop a mapping tool to comprehensively identify the sites most at risk for flooding of all types (fluvial, pluvial, and groundwater) to guide effective mitigation and response actions by 2022.</i>
Protect building sites, roads, infrastructure, and natural resources	Update stormwater design standards that will serve as a standard across Hennepin County lines of business to account for increased rainfall intensities.	<i>Develop stormwater design standards for mid-century precipitation projection and develop policies and practices for green infrastructure to manage precipitation projections by 2023.</i>
	Protect and restore streams, wetlands, floodplains, and uplands.	<i>Acquire 6,000 acres of additional conservation easements by 2040.</i>
	Reduce barriers to regional stormwater management by investing in partnerships, empowering staff to work beyond property line boundaries, and creating a policy for financial contributions to such projects.	
	Develop a groundwater plan that considers the impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events and wet/dry cycles, on groundwater resources and drinking water availability.	<i>Develop a groundwater plan by 2025 and an integrated water management plan by 2026</i>



Goal	Action	Metric (if available)
	Protect and restore natural areas, including streams, wetlands, floodplains, prairies, savannas, and forests, with a focus on supporting biodiversity and providing habitat for species that alter their range in response to climate change.	
Reduce emissions in ways that align with core county functions and priorities	Develop goals, prioritization frameworks, outreach, and marketing strategies to promote carbon sequestration projects in the most impactful places around the county.	
	Provide assistance to landowners wishing to adjust land management practices to increase the carbon storage of soils and sequester carbon in trees and plants. Examples of the types of projects the county will provide assistance for include: Agricultural soil health practices; Improved grazing and pasture management; Diversification of agricultural landscapes and crop types; Habitat restoration and protection; Expanded shoreline and buffer plantings.	
	Incorporate carbon sequestration potential into evaluation and planning of other natural resource and water resource projects and partnerships.	
	Track carbon sequestration and other benefits accrued from soil health efforts, land management improvement, habitat restoration and protection projects, and other related work on private lands.	

Table 2: Objectives, strategies, and actions listed in Hennepin County's Natural Resources Strategic Plan, which are relevant to the BCWMC CWMP.

Objective	Strategy	Action
Protect and restore lakes, rivers, and streams	Track the quality of the county's water resources	Use available data to track annual conditions on 50 reference lakes , monitor the state's impaired waters list and resulting Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) studies. Info will be shared with county board, partners and public.
	Protect and restore lakes, rivers, and streams	Participating on technical advisory committees to review watershed management plans, rule updates and environmental studies.
		Reviewing site and project plans.
		Participating in project pre-design and pre-construction processes.
	Reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff through the implementation of best management practices	Conducting area-wide assessments regarding water quality, wetlands, erosion, and floodplain issues.
		Promote the implementation of low-impact development and green infrastructure for newly developed and redeveloped properties, agricultural best practices, wetland restorations and innovative stormwater management practices where applicable
Protect groundwater resources	Support planning and education efforts to protect groundwater resources.	Identify additional data needs, and assess the susceptibility of our surface and groundwater resources to current and projected levels of groundwater withdrawal, contamination, and other threats
		Provide a forum for partner engagement in groundwater issues to improve related decision-making processes
		Work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Metropolitan Council to assist local communities in identifying groundwater protection needs and integrating groundwater issues with other local planning efforts
	Advocate for the cleanup of contaminated sites with the potential to significantly impact groundwater resources.	Work with state regulatory agency staff, municipalities, and, where necessary, landowners to advocate for the cleanup of sites that pose a high risk to the environment and/or human health.
	Seal abandoned wells to reduce the potential for groundwater contamination.	Provide cost-share grants to landowners, using a combination of county and state funding as available, to seal high-priority abandoned wells

Objective	Strategy	Action
Protect and restore wetlands	Identify the highest-quality wetlands to ensure their protection and determine impacted wetlands suitable for restoration.	Work with partners to conduct a thorough analysis of the function and environmental benefits of the wetlands in the county.
	Ensure the protection and preservation of wetlands through enforcement of Minnesota's Wetland Conservation Act.	County staff work with landowners who have wetland violations on their properties to restore the wetland to its pre-existing condition or to create a wetland of equal or greater value
		Participates on Technical Evaluation Panels, which provide a forum to discuss site-specific interpretations of WCA laws, rules, and technical data in order to avoid, reduce or mitigate wetland impact
		Track how well county-led projects are fulfilling WCA goals.
	Pursue creation and restoration of wetlands to establish wetland banking credits, mitigate losses and remediate impaired waters within the county.	Identify, evaluate, and pursue wetland restoration and funding opportunities on county-owned properties and tax-forfeited lands.
		Assist the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in locating willing county landowners with potential wetland restoration sites that may qualify for BWSR funds to restore their wetlands through BWSR's wetland bank road program.
		Evaluate identified wetland restoration opportunities on county properties, tax-forfeited lands, and other available sites to determine those that should be prioritized