

Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act
Excerpt from Board of Water and Soil Resources Website
www.bwsr.state.mn.us

Purpose:

To protect surface water resources through the adoption and implementation of local water management plans based on watershed district (WD) and watershed management organization (WMO) priorities.

- [Map Showing Status of Metro Watershed Management Plans](#)

Overview:

WDs and WMOS have many similarities, including the requirement to conduct their activities according to an approved watershed management plan. In addition to plan requirements in statute, metro area WDs and WMOs must also abide by [Minnesota Rules Chapter 8410](#), which spells out detailed plan requirements. Watershed management organizations differ from watershed districts in a number of ways:

- WMOs are mandatory, not voluntary;
- WMOs deal only with surface water, whereas watershed districts manage surface water and groundwater (metro area counties handle groundwater planning);
- WMOs do not have individual taxing authority, unless their joint powers agreement specifically grants this authority, and most are funded by the municipalities that make up their membership; and
- WMOs are governed by a board appointed by the member municipalities and townships.

More information about WDs and WMOs:

- [WD / WMO Overview](#)
- [Citizens Advisory Committees in Joint Powers Agreement Watershed Management Organizations](#)
- [Comparisons of Watershed Districts and Watershed Management Organizations](#)
- [Fiscal Authority Summary](#) (103B and 103D Revenue Streams for WMOs - Posted Oct. 17, 2014)
- [Funding Alternatives for Capital Improvement Projects within Metro WDs](#) (Posted Oct. 27, 2009)

History:

The Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act was enacted in 1982. The act was originally included in chapter 509 (and was commonly referred to as "509" planning) and was later recodified as M.S. 1. [See Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103B](#)

Since passage of the act, all local units of government in the seven-county metropolitan area have been involved in the preparation and implementation of comprehensive surface water management plans through membership in a watershed management organization or a watershed district.

The former Water Resources Board oversaw implementation of the program. That board was merged with two other boards to form the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources in 1987, which continues to administer the program. Forty-six watershed management organizations (36 joint powers WMOs and 10 WDs) were originally responsible for preparing plans to:

- protect, preserve, and use natural surface and groundwater storage and retention systems;
- minimize public capital expenditures needed to correct flooding and water quality problems;
- identify and plan for means to effectively protect and improve surface and groundwater quality;
- establish more uniform local policies and official controls for surface and groundwater management;
- prevent erosion of soil into surface water systems;
- promote groundwater recharge;
- protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitat and water recreational facilities; and
- secure the other benefits associated with the proper management of surface and groundwater.

After review at the local level, a number of state agencies and the Metropolitan Council reviewed the plans. After plan approval by the Board of Water and Soil Resources, the WMO/WD formally adopted the plan and required each city or township within the WMO/WD to create and implement their own local water management plan consistent with the WMO/WD plan.

These first plans resulted in two key advances in comprehensive surface water resource management. First, the plans required the adoption, amendment or update of a variety of local controls to reduce erosion and sedimentation, establish storm water design standards, and protect wetlands. Second, during the planning and implementation of the plans, communities within the watersheds developed stronger working relationships.

In 1992, the Board of Water and Soil Resources developed rules (Minnesota Rules Chapter 8410) for plan content. WMOs/WDs used these rules in plan revisions, which are required every 5 to 10 years. The rules require, among other items, more specificity in citizen participation, control of erosion and sedimentation, wetland assessment, and the design of new storm water conveyance, ponding, and treatment systems. The rules also require that WMOs establish the necessary authorities to ensure implementation of their programs.