

# DRAFT Education and Engagement Plan

## Overview

This document supports the education and engagement goals of the 2026 Bassett Creek Watershed Management Plan which address issues related to (see Section X):

- resident capacity for stewardship,
- engagement with diverse communities, and
- recreational opportunities.

This plan is a guide for both 1) disseminating information to various audiences (educating) and 2) engaging with people and communities for collaborative work in improving water and natural ecosystems. Audiences and communities that are part of this work are varied but generally include watershed residents, businesses, policymakers, city staff, educators, students, neighborhood organizations, Native community members, and others. BCWMC commissioners and alternate commissioners are another audience as recognized under the “commissioner training” section of this plan.

For *education* components of this plan, the BCWMC aims to educate on a variety of topics including:

- The BCWMC as an organization including its structure, history, authorities, and funding;
- The waters of the watershed, their condition, and expectations for future conditions;
- Stormwater pollutants, their sources, and best management practices necessary to protect and improve waters within the BCWMC;
- Volunteer opportunities related to monitoring or improving waters and watersheds;
- Dakota history, culture, and place names as they relate water, land, and natural landscapes;
- Flood potential, flood risk, and flood recovery; and
- Water conservation practices.

On the *engagement* side, this plan recognizes that simply educating audiences may not result in measurable water and watershed improvements. However, authentic engagement and relationship building may help develop “communities of practice” that collectively make a difference and may enhance overall understanding and respect for nature and ecosystems. Different levels of public participation (from inform to consult to empower) may be used to gather input or collaborate with communities on various BCWMC projects and programs. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) developed a useful [guide on the spectrum of public participation](#) that can be used to develop specific engagement activities.

Funding for implementation of education and engagement activities will largely come from the BCWMC annual operating budget along with collaboration with other entities and possibly grant funding. Each year, the Commission’s Education Committee will recommend to the Commission a plan and budget for education and engagement activities. The annual plan and budget will reflect current needs relative to

Plan issues and goals, opportunities, and available funding. This Education and Engagement Plan can serve as a “menu” of options for each year’s annual education plan. The Commission’s Education Committee, volunteers, and staff will be the primary plan implementers. The BCWMC will also maintain partnerships and seek new opportunities for collaboration to help achieve the goals set out in the plan. Some of the partners include Hennepin County, Metro Blooms, West Metro Watershed Alliance, Metropolitan Council, Metro WaterShed Partners, schools, park districts, and neighborhood groups. Some of the activities will be designed to help member cities meet MS4 education & outreach and public participation goals. The BCWMC will annually provide a Letter of Understanding to member cities describing the BCWMC’s educational activities from the previous year for use in MS4 reporting, as appropriate.

## Commissioner Training

**The BCWMC will work to ensure that commissioners and alternate commissioners (collectively “commissioners” in this plan) have the knowledge they need for effective and impactful decision making critical to the success of the BCWMC.** Newly appointed commissioners, in particular, will be provided with materials and information for efficient and effective onboarding including:

- New commissioner training session through Minnesota Watersheds (typically held during the Minnesota Watershed’s annual meeting and conference)
- Minnesota Watersheds Handbook
- Watershed management education materials and training sessions from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (currently in development)
- BCWMC new commissioner orientation materials
- One-on-one welcome meeting with BCWMC Administrator, city staff, and others

Current and new commissioners will be encouraged to gain information on a variety of topics from different sources. Many of these educational opportunities will be funded by the BCWMC, including:

- Minnesota Watersheds educational sessions including the annual meeting and conference, legislative briefing, summer tour, Metro Watersheds quarterly meetings, etc.
- Conferences such as the Salt Symposium, Minnesota Water Resources Conference, Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Council Showcase, etc.
- Watershed tours hosted by BCWMC or hosted by other watersheds

The BCWMC will continue to hold watershed tours every other year for commissioners and partners. Watershed tours of projects and waterbodies are a fun and engaging way to educate and build relationships among commissioners. Tours can incorporate demonstrations, introduce city or partner staff, and provide insights on the specific topics.

Finally, if resources allow and the desire is substantial, the BCWMC may also coordinate their own trainings or workshops for commissioners on specific topics, as needed or on a regular basis.

## Public Meetings, Open Houses, and Community Conversations

Sharing information and gathering community input on BCWMC programs and projects (particularly capital projects) is a critical engagement activity. **The BCWMC will continue to host public meetings or open houses (often in collaboration with a member city) on proposed capital projects during the feasibility study and again during project design.** These events are an important step in the overall Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process to promote transparency, understand potential opposition to a project, discuss concerns, mitigate conflicts, and ultimately develop a project that is in line with community desires and values.

Similarly, conversations about BCWMC goals, priorities, and activities with various communities in the watershed is warranted. This is particularly important in historically underserved or under-represented areas. **The BCWMC will seek opportunities for engagement, building relationships, and developing avenues of communication, particularly in North Minneapolis neighborhoods.** This may include regular attendance by commissioners and/or staff at neighborhood meetings and events. Engagement with marginalized communities may also be accomplished in collaboration with partnering organizations such as Metro Blooms.

## Digital Communications

Website: The BCWMC website is a primary avenue for disseminating information on a wide variety of topics. **The BCWMC will update its website for ADA compliance and will regularly maintain the website with updated information. The website will host the following information:**

- Maps of the watershed, project locations, “find your address” function
- BCWMC information such as history, structure, meeting materials and minutes, budgets, annual report, financial audits
- Meeting and event calendar
- Latest news and/or featured projects
- Capital project webpages including project overview and outcomes, project status, announcements, and documents such as feasibility studies, designs, etc.
- Lakes and streams webpages including location, primary information, latest water quality data, links to reports and projects
- Information on Native culture, history, practices
- Educational resources
- Links to partners webpages and related resources

Social Media and Other Digital Content: **As resources allow, the BCWMC will maintain social media accounts to help disseminate information and engage with a broad audience.** Potential platforms include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc. The BCWMC may create and disseminate their own content and will share pertinent content from partners and member cities.

The BCWMC may also use short videos, online training modules, story maps, and other digital communication tools to disseminate education on specific topics. Rather than creating their own content, these resources will likely be developed by partners or agencies and shared or promoted by the BCWMC.

## Printed Materials

Although digital communication is sometimes easier to produce and can quickly reach a broad audience, printed materials continue to be an important education tool. **The BCWMC will develop, print, and disseminate (on its own or in collaboration with others) materials such as:**

- Watershed map
- Capital project fact sheets
- BCWMC annual report executive summary
- “10 Things You Can Do” brochure developed by West Metro Water Alliance (WMWA)
- Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota campaign materials or similar messaging
- Aquatic Invasive Species identification cards
- Guides for new homeowners or lakeshore owners on protecting or improving waters

## Signage, Displays, Promotional Items

Signage in key locations throughout the watershed offers an excellent opportunity to educate the public on topics unique to a specific place or project; or information extrapolated to the broader watershed.

**The BCWMC aims to incorporate educational signage at all capital project locations** (particularly if the project is in a public space with frequent visitors or foot/bike traffic).

**The BCWMC will work with road authorities to install creek identification signs at all major creek crossing locations.** Signs along the Main Stem will identify the creek as Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ-Bassett Creek.



**The BCWMC will work with partners, park districts, and businesses to install signs in key locations and points of interest.** Examples include small signs along the creek at Utepi's Brewery in Minneapolis, at kiosks along Three Rivers Park District bike trails, or at water access points or boat landings.



When appropriate, signs will include a QR code for additional information on the BCWMC website or other pertinent sites.

**The BCWMC will continue to use existing educational displays (e.g., vertical banners or bean bag toss game) and may develop additional displays, as needed or desired.**

**The BCWMC may continue to use “give-away” items to promote certain messages (e.g., dog waste bag dispensers).**



## Events, Presentations, Workshops

There is no substitute for the benefits gained from engaging with residents, public officials, and others at in person events. A robust conversation on streams or lakes, the challenges they face, and ways to improve them is an opportunity not only to inform, but to learn, understand, and build trust.

**The BCWMC will continue to participate in and/or promote events throughout the watershed to engage with residents and partners, disseminate written materials, answer questions, and learn their concerns or observations.** Examples of events for “tabling” and/or brief presentations from BCWMC staff or commissioners include farmers markets, sustainability fairs, neighborhood or community events, clean up events, invasive species pulling events, etc.

Presentations by BCWMC staff or commissioners are another way to convey information and provide an opportunity for dialogue. Examples of venues for presentations on specific topics or general watershed or BCWMC information include:

- Lake association meetings
- City council or commission meetings
- Presentations at conferences and meetings such as the MN Watersheds annual conference, MN Watersheds summer tour, Minnesota Water Resources Conference, etc.
- History museums and organizations
- Ĥaňá Wakpádaŋ Water Blessing Ceremony

Finally, workshops sponsored or promoted by the BCWMC can educate various audiences on specific topics, usually with the goal of changing behavior or encouraging an activity. Examples of workshops include:

- Shoreline restoration workshop
- Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota presentation for property managers or boards of homeowners’ associations, faith-based communities, etc.
- Raingarden or native plantings workshop
- AIS Early Detection Training
- Invasive species management workshop
- BMP maintenance workshop

## Leveraging Education through Partnerships

**The BCWMC will continue to augment its educational programming and funding through a variety of existing programs and partnerships.**

West Metro Water Alliance (WMWA) – WMWA is a partnership (currently) among four watershed organizations in the west metro including BCWMC, Shingle Creek WMC, Elm Creek WMC, and West Mississippi WMC. These watersheds pool funding to collaboratively develop and implement educational content with consistent messages. The BCWMC is a voting member of the group which meets monthly. WMWA tracks activities, produces an annual report, and has previously received grants for specific programs. Shingle Creek WMC is the fiscal and contracting agent for WMWA. Examples of products and programs of WMWA include:

- Watershed PREP 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade education program: WMWA contracts with educator(s) to deliver lessons on watersheds, water pollution, etc. that meet MN State Science Standards.
- Educational Displays and Materials: WMWA developed the “roots display” (available for use at community events), handouts/digital content for various topics such as pet waste and chlorides, and the “10 Things You Can Do” brochure.
- Coordinates Conservation Specialist: WMWA directs the WMWA-specific work of this shared position with Hennepin County (more information below).

Conservation Specialist: In 2023 Hennepin County hired a Conservation Specialist that is shared (50-50) between the county and WMWA (plus Richfield-Bloomington WMO) on outreach and implementation programming. This position is funded through a variety of sources including WMWA; Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources Watershed Based Implementation Funds (through BCWMC), Shingle Creek WMC, West Mississippi WMC, Elm Creek WMC, Richfield-Bloomington WMO; and Hennepin County. This person assists WMWA with developing and disseminating educational content, participating in educational events, promoting the Adopt-a-Drain program, delivering Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota messages, and coordinating targeted community engagement projects in each watershed.

The BCWMC shares and supports the long-term vision of WMWA to expand its ability to provide and facilitate a variety of educational activities to achieve greater levels of conservation implementation through coordinated programming. This long-term vision includes a full time Education and Outreach Coordinator to provide programming and technical services and to coordinate the efforts of many partners toward common goals. The model for this program is the East Metro Water Resource Education Program (EMWREP), a partnership of Washington County, Washington Conservation District, eight WMOs, and 15 cities and townships.

Metro WaterShed Partners Membership & Adopt a Drain: The BCWMC will continue to provide financial support to the Metro WaterShed Partners and the Adopt-a-Drain Program. Metro WaterShed Partners maintains a listserv and a website as forums for information sharing, holds monthly meetings for members to collaborate, and coordinates the Adopt-a-Drain program. As staffing and resources allow, the BCWMC may participate in monthly meetings.

Partnership with Metro Blooms: The BCWMC will continue its support and partnership with Metro Blooms on outreach, engagement, and project installation in Near North neighborhoods in Minneapolis. Metro Blooms “partners with communities to create resilient landscapes and foster clean watersheds,

embracing the values of equity and inclusion to solve environmental challenges.” The projects aim to engage residents and commercial businesses, train youth, and install water quality practices in Minneapolis’ Near North neighborhoods. The BCWMC will collaborate on grant-funded projects and offer its own financial support. These programs result in authentic and sustained engagement with Minneapolis residents and commercial/institutional property owners and help to build trust and understanding. Further, projects implemented in collaboration with residents and businesses result in actual water quality improvements.

Volunteer Monitoring Programs: The BCWMC will continue to participate in the Citizen Assisted Monitoring Program (CAMP) through an agreement with the Metropolitan Council. This program engages with volunteers to collect samples and data from BCWMC priority lakes throughout the watershed. The data are used to augment data collected by the BCWMC through its regular monitoring program. The BCWMC will consider partnering with other water or wetland monitoring programs if they become available (e.g., River Watch, Wetland Health Evaluation Program).

Friends of Bassett Creek: The BCWMC will continue to lend support and assistance, as resources allow, to Friends of Bassett Creek for events such as invasive species pulls or native plantings, development of restoration plans or projects, or other activities undertaken by the group.

## Program Evaluation

The BCWMC will evaluate the reach and relative impact of its education and engagement activities. Evaluation could take the following forms:

1. Number of commissioners attending workshops, trainings, conferences, etc.
2. Number of copies of watershed maps, brochures, or written materials that are disseminated.
3. Number of events held by BCWMC or with BCWMC participation.
4. Number of meetings or events attended by BCWMC representatives in historically under-represented or marginalized communities
5. Number of signs installed (creek crossing signs, CIP project signage, etc)
6. Number of people attending or contacted through events, tours, open houses, public meetings, etc.
7. Number of unique and total website visits
8. Number of engagements on social media
9. Surveys to test public’s awareness, knowledge, use, and perception of water resources and their use of best practices. Surveys can be implemented in conjunction with cities or other entities or done through the BCWMC.
10. Program/workshop evaluations submitted by participants
11. Number of volunteers
12. Number of storm drains adopted and pounds of material reported as removed
13. Number of students reached through WMWA Watershed PREP classroom visits