

The One Watershed One Plan process presents a remarkable opportunity for Minnesota's Lake Associations

by Jeff Forester, Executive Director, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates

In 2008 Minnesotans voted overwhelmingly (+60%) for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment which created a three-eighths of one cent sales tax for twenty five years. This was a remarkable achievement for Minnesotans in a year when anti-tax politics were in ascendance. Minnesotans voted our shared values and created a remarkable opportunity for our state.

One-third of revenues raised will fund the arts and state parks. One-third will fund grants to permanently protect wildlife habitat, most typically through Conservation Easements. The final one-third will fund projects to protect and rehabilitate our public waters. This "clean water" portion of the Legacy Fund is directed by the Clean Water Council, a group of citizens and legislators.



Their work began with an almost complete survey of Minnesota's lakes and rivers to see which were impaired and which were still relatively pristine. The results were alarming. Fifty six percent of Minnesota's surface waters were listed as impaired by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, MPCA.

Aquatic systems are far more complex and difficult to restore than terrestrial environments. In fact, many push back on the idea that "restoration" of an aquatic ecosystem is even possible, and point to goals like rehabilitation, or resilience.

Two facts further complicate rehabilitation and resilience efforts; all waters are connected, and water flows across political boundaries. One source of pollution will contaminate all the waters downstream. In Minnesota that is a big deal. Minnesota is one of only two places *in the world* where three continental-sized water basins originate; the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico, the Red River flowing north through the vast Canadian wetlands to the Arctic Sea, and down the face of the Laurentian Divide into the Great Lakes and east to the North Atlantic.

In order to address the fifty-six percent impairment of our surface water, the Clean Water Council created the One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) process through the Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR). 1W1P supports partnerships of local governments in developing prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation plans for each of the fifty-four watersheds

in the state. These watersheds include multiple political entities, townships, counties, watershed districts, and cities.

The 1W1P process requires all of these disparate groups to partner, identify areas of concern, pool resources, coordinate efforts and work together towards solutions. The Clean Water Council funds an initial planning process. Once the plan is approved by BWSR, the Clean Water Council makes funding available for implementation.

During the initial planning phase the Clean Water Council encourages significant outreach, engagement and involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. Lake Association leaders are intimately familiar with water issues in their jurisdiction. By committing to this process, they can help ensure that the focus of the final Comprehensive Plan includes their issues.

During the implementation phase, there is also a significant role for lake associations. Over the course of the 1W1P process hundreds of millions of dollars will go towards water projects. It is an unprecedented opportunity to protect, rehabilitate or increase the resiliency of our shared water resources.

Last year, the Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates hosted a webinar with Julie Westerlund, Executive Director of 1W1P. Ms. Westerlund outlined how lake associations can get involved in developing these ten-year plans to protect local water resources, and have a real jurisdiction in the implementation. Lake associations and local communities have an important role to play in providing input and in helping implement the plans once they are approved.

View the Recording HERE:

<http://www.anymeeting.com/PI>

More information about One Watershed, One Plan is available at:

<http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/one-watershed-one-plan>.

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