



Title: Land Acquisition Along Painter Creek, Minnetrista

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Purpose:

At the September 25, 2025 Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) Board of Managers meeting, staff will provide an update regarding the opportunity to acquire land along Painter Creek in Minnetrista to support future restoration and capital projects. The Board may decide to enter closed session to discuss negotiation and the value of the potential acquisition.

Summary:

The Painter Creek Subwatershed is a regionally significant landscape characterized by an extensive network of large wetland complexes. These wetlands are interconnected by Painter Creek, which outlets to impaired Jennings Bay on Lake Minnetonka. Wetlands in the Subwatershed have been historically ditched, drained, or otherwise altered to support agriculture and development, resulting in disrupted hydrology, degraded habitat, and poor water quality conditions.

Minnehaha Creek Watershed District's (MCWD) focal geography approach emphasizes the benefits of concentrated and sustained efforts – including monitoring, planning, partnership development, and implementation – in priority areas with significant natural resource challenges. The Painter Creek Subwatershed has been identified as one such geography due to the scale and degree of natural resource issues and its contribution of phosphorus loading to Jennings Bay.

Painter Creek Wetland Restorations are included in MCWD's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), with project planning funds assigned in the 2026 budget. Ahead of site-specific planning efforts, the Research and Monitoring department initiated subwatershed assessment work in mid-2025 that will continue into 2026. This foundational work will support setting a comprehensive management strategy for inclusion in the 2027 Watershed Management Plan.

Recently, MCWD was made aware of a unique property acquisition opportunity along Painter Creek, prompting staff to review early findings from the ongoing subwatershed assessment work. On August 28, 2025, staff briefed the Policy and Programs Committee (PPC) on these preliminary insights, outlining how the property could align with potential project strategies and the broader implementation plan. Staff highlighted the property's (1) strategic position within the subwatershed, with early data indicating that a majority of phosphorus inputs occur upstream of the site, (2) significant upland acreage, providing flexibility for sizing and siting of any future water quality improvement projects, and (3) extensive creek frontage, offering unique restoration and conservation potential.

Following that briefing, staff further evaluated the property's potential for capital project implementation and initiated additional conversations with the City of Minnetrista to better understand its perspectives and future plans for the area. This information, along with the property appraisal, was provided at the September 11, 2025 Board of Managers meeting, where the Board convened in closed session to discuss valuation and negotiation. The September 25, 2025 meeting will continue that discussion, with staff providing the Board a status report and greater clarity on the potential timeline and next steps in the process.