



Title: 2027 Watershed Management Plan Messaging and Engagement

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Purpose:

Building on discussion introduced at the September 11, 2025, Operations and Programs Committee meeting, at the September 25, 2025, Policy and Planning Committee (PPC) meeting, staff will facilitate another conversation regarding the 2027 Watershed Management Plan (WMP or Plan). Staff will review the WMP engagement strategy, introduce WMP messaging, and solicit feedback.

Background:

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) is required to revise its Watershed Management Plan every ten years under Minnesota Rules 8410. The current 2017 Plan is due for a revision in 2027. In [December 2024](#), the Board adopted the 2027 Plan Framework, which carries forward MCWD's Balanced Urban Ecology (BUE) vision and focus on integrated planning and partnership.

The framework organizes the Plan update around four areas of work: (1) developing a flood risk management strategy, (2) expanding project implementation in focal geographies, (3) strengthening the Land & Water Partnership (LWP) program through targeted, proactive engagement in land use planning, and (4) establishing an evaluation framework to help MCWD measure its progress. It also outlined an engagement strategy and initial messaging to guide staff's soft rollout efforts in 2025.

Summary:

Since the adoption of the framework, staff have focused on preparing for the Plan kickoff in late 2025 and the two-year engagement process that will follow. As staff began to map out the engagement process and prepare kickoff materials and messaging, it became clear that the process would benefit from some additional research on the history of flood management and the effectiveness of various management strategies. This will allow MCWD to draw on a wider range of sources in developing its flood management strategy rather than relying heavily on technical modeling results that will come later in the engagement process. To ensure the Plan begins with a clear, shared foundation, staff are developing a kickoff publication and a supporting white paper that explores the topic in depth and helps make the case for integrated planning and nature-based solutions, building on MCWD's BUE philosophy.

White Paper

To support Plan messaging and engagement, staff have developed a draft white paper that accounts the history of land use and water management decisions in the Minnehaha Creek Watershed. It explains how these approaches have shaped flood risk and integrates academic literature and case studies of effective flood mitigation strategies.

The white paper draft is organized into five volumes to support this chronology, summarized below:

1. Urban Development in the Minnehaha Creek Watershed –
 - a. Much of the watershed developed before today's environmental regulations, and the planning and engineering philosophies of the time considered some natural resources "obstacles to be defeated," which led to wetland filling, stream alteration, dredging, and many natural spaces being paved over to make way for a rapidly expanding urban landscape.

- b. To support development, communities constructed stormwater conveyance systems to move water off the landscape and toward downstream waters as quickly as possible.
- 2. Water Resource Issues and Governance –
 - a. Over time, the region’s changing precipitation patterns placed growing strain on past land use decisions and water resource management practices, leaving lasting impacts on the region’s water.
 - b. Severe flooding and water quality issues in the twentieth century prompted a suite of new regulations to protect and improve water resources, including the MN Watershed District Act of 1955.
- 3. Stormwater Management in a Changing Climate –
 - a. While regulatory interventions and policy changes made significant strides in protecting natural resources, the land use and engineering decisions of the nineteenth and twentieth century were not easily “undone.” As a result, state and local actors have faced new challenges as the region experiences increasingly intense and unpredictable precipitation patterns.
 - b. The wettest seven-year period on record from 2013-2019 and severe flooding in 2014 brought renewed attention to stormwater management and flood mitigation approaches, prompting cities to consider new strategies to mitigate flooding in their communities.
- 4. The Case for Nature-Based Solutions –
 - a. Many agencies, industry leaders, and academic researchers have evaluated a myriad of flood management approaches, concluding that the most effective strategies to build long-term resilience involve nature-based solutions that slow and store water, and restore natural flows.
 - b. However, many communities have been slow to implement nature-based solutions due to space constraints, costs, and planning barriers, and have instead relied on conveyance approaches such as pipe upsizing or predictive pumping to adapt their stormwater systems to new precipitation patterns.
- 5. Integrated Planning for Long-Term Resilience –
 - a. To reduce barriers and promote the implementation of nature-based solutions, communities must integrate stormwater management with other urban planning needs, like community development, transportation, parks and open space.
 - b. Case studies within the Minnehaha Creek watershed and across the globe demonstrate that when nature-based stormwater solutions are integrated into the urban landscape, they can provide a range of co-benefits that go beyond flood resilience to support thriving, sustainable communities.

Kick Off Publication

As MCWD prepares to launch its 2027 Plan, staff are developing a kick off publication to frame the Plan scope, introduce its focus, and outline the engagement process. The kick off publication will integrate insights from the white paper to introduce stakeholders to the key questions and topics that will drive the Plan engagement process.

Staff anticipate distributing the publication to stakeholders later this fall, in advance of hosting 2027 Plan kick off meetings to initiate engagement.

September 25, 2025, PPC Meeting:

At the September 25, 2025, PPC meeting, staff will review the WMP engagement strategy, step through findings from the White Paper, and vet the draft Plan kick off publication.