MINNEHAHA CREEK
WATERSHED DISTRICT
QUALITY OF WATER, QUALITY OF LIFE

Meeting: Policy and Planning Committee
Meeting date: 4/23/2026
Agenda Item #: 4.1
Item type: Discussion

Title: 2027 Watershed Management Plan: Evaluation Framework Approach

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Purpose:
At the April 23, 2026 Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) Policy and Planning Committee (PPC) meeting, staff will introduce a proposed evaluation framework for the 2027 Watershed Management Plan (Plan) and facilitate discussion on how progress toward MCWD's strategic goals should be defined and tracked.

Background:
The 2017 Plan established a strong foundation for watershed management by adopting the Balanced Urban Ecology (BUE) vision and integrated planning approach, defining four strategic goals, and developing a targeted implementation model to deliver high-impact projects in areas of greatest need. As a data-driven organization, it is important that we continually evaluate our effectiveness in achieving our strategic goals.

MCWD tracks a wide range of information, including project implementation metrics, modeled outcomes, monitoring data, and regulatory reporting. These data provide insight into both MCWD's activities and watershed conditions; however, it can be challenging to clearly demonstrate how MCWD's actions contribute to measurable watershed progress over time. The 2027 Plan aims to build on this foundation and strengthen MCWD's ability to measure, understand, and communicate the impact of its work.

Summary:
The proposed evaluation framework is designed to connect MCWD's actions to watershed outcomes and establish a clear structure for understanding and communicating progress toward its strategic goals both within and across plan cycles. The framework is grounded in three guiding questions:

- What is MCWD seeking to achieve?
- What progress should occur during the 10-year plan cycle?
- How should MCWD assess and communicate its impact on watershed outcomes?

To address these questions, the framework is organized into five components:

- Strategic Goals – Define long-term desired outcomes under the BUE vision across MCWD's four goal areas: water quality, water quantity, ecological integrity, and thriving communities, with progress assessed over time.
- 10-Year Objectives – Define the progress expected during the plan cycle (e.g., 2028-2037), establishing what success looks like within that timeframe and communicating MCWD's top implementation priorities.
- Supporting Metrics – Track actions taken through projects, programs, and partnerships (i.e., what MCWD implements). Examples include pounds of total phosphorus reduced (modeled) and acre-feet of flood storage created.
- Core Indicators – Provide a focused set of watershed-scale signals that reflect how conditions are changing over time (i.e., how the system responds). Examples include measured in-lake total phosphorus concentrations and stream discharge rates.
- Integrated Context – Narrative interpretation that considers the impact of MCWD's work alongside external drivers such as climate variability, land use change, and partner actions.

Together, these components establish a structured approach to connect implementation with measurable changes in watershed conditions, while recognizing the influence of external factors and long-term watershed dynamics. In addition, this structure enables MCWD to evaluate progress and use that information to guide future planning, prioritization, and investment decisions.

10-Year Objectives

One key consideration of this framework is defining the scope and specificity of the 10-year objectives. Staff has considered a range of approaches and discussed them with the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) at their March meeting. Based on these discussions, staff is proposing to use a hybrid approach that would provide both specificity, where appropriate, and flexibility where outcomes are less certain. Under this approach, objectives may be expressed as:

- Numeric Targets - where sufficient data, modeling, and system understanding support a defined outcome.
    - Example: Reduce total phosphorus loading to X waterbody by X%-Z% (range)
- Measurable Progress Statements - where the direction of change is clear, but the magnitude is influenced by uncertainty or external factors.
    - Example: Achieve measurable reductions in total phosphorus loading to X waterbody

This hybrid approach will be further developed by staff through the 2027 Plan engagement process and the development of the subwatershed implementation plans. The Board of Managers and CAC will be further engaged as the 10-year objectives, along with the framework's measurable strategic goals, supporting metrics, and core indicators, are refined in late 2026 and early 2027.

April 23, 2026, PPC Meeting:

At the April 23, 2026, PPC meeting, staff will present the evaluation framework and seek input on its purpose, structure, and application. The Board of Managers will be asked to consider the following:

- What are the Board's goals for the evaluation framework? What does it need to accomplish?
- How does this framework compare to other evaluation tools you have used or seen elsewhere?
- How should we approach the 10-year objectives in terms of scope and specificity? Does the proposed hybrid approach provide the right balance of clarity and flexibility?
- What potential risks or considerations should inform the development of the framework?