UPPER MISSISSIPPI – GRAND RAPIDS ONE WATERSHED ONE PLAN UPDATE

Watershed Planning Update

Timeline

The planning process for the Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Watershed planning process officially began in February 2023 to maintain, improve, and protect water quality in this watershed. Since then, a number of local planning partners have been meeting regularly to brainstorm issues and concerns, collaborate on setting goals to address these issues, and work together on potential actions that can be used to reach those goals.

Just over one year into the planning process, the plan is right on track with the initial timeline of having a draft plan ready early summer, open for public comment this fall, and submitting to BWSR for approval near the end of 2024.

Issue Statements

Between July and December 2023, the Technical Advisory Committee met monthly with community member experts and local professionals to discuss issues and concerns in the Upper Mississippi- Grand Rapids watershed. These discussions were broken into seven topics: **Lakes, Forests, Wetland & Ditching, Rivers & Streams, Stormwater, Agriculture, and Drinking Water**.

At each meeting, these groups gathered to brainstorm issues for lakes in the watershed. The brainstormed list was either grouped with the compiled themes of new themes were created The group then agreed on a final list of themes which were ranked and prioritized for each topic.

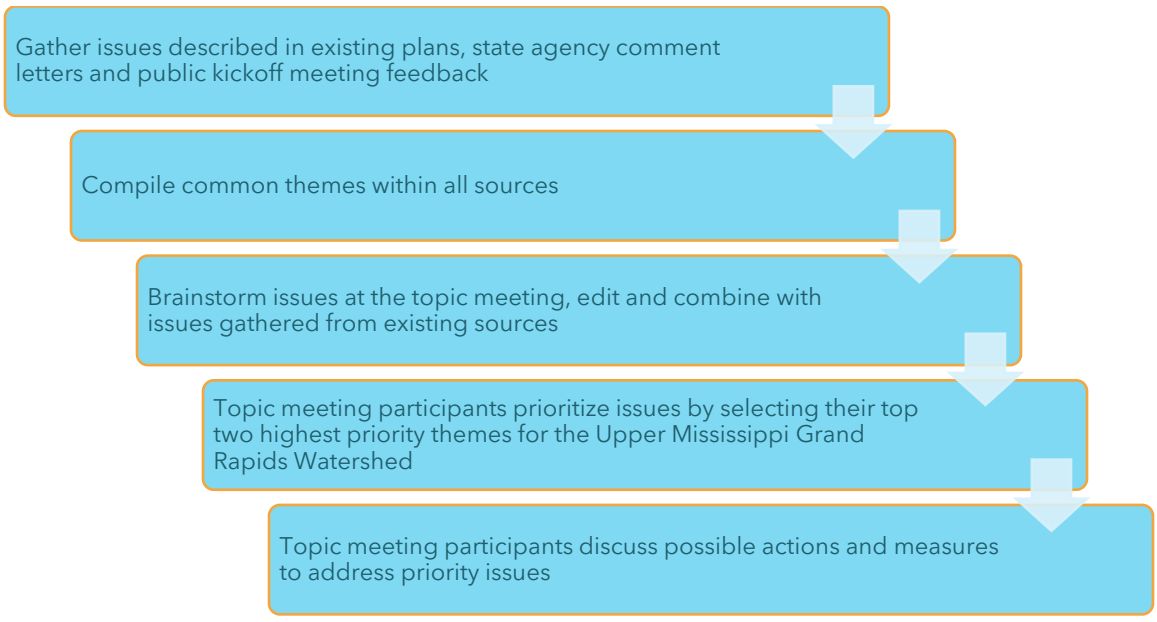

Figure 1. Issue statement development process

The following draft list of priority issue statements was created based on the brainstorming and discussions that came from these meetings. Concerns with protection of resources was a common theme with most topics and were combined into a single statement. The actions and goals of this watershed plan will address these issues and concerns. This is the draft issue statement list that has been approved by the watershed Policy Committee Board:

Resource Topic	Issue Statement
	Sufficient protection is needed for outstanding resources and sensitive species (i.e., trout, cisco, wild rice, forests) to maintain water quality, native species, wildlife, and plant communities.
Lakes	**Lakeshore alteration** from development, conversion of cabins to year-round homes, removal of native vegetation and wake boats impact water quality and shoreline habitat.
Lakes	**Nutrients** from lakeshore development, septic systems, internal loading, and land use changes contribute to algal growth along with recreational impairments.
Forests	**Forest health** is vulnerable to climate variability, pests, and invasive species which can affect forest diversity and productivity.
Streams	**Riparian alteration and loss of connectivity,** from development and land use change increases streambank erosion and temperature of streams in the watershed.
Wetlands	**Wetland health and function** is impacted by invasive species, ditching, recreation, and beavers.
Wetlands	Historic **straightening of natural watercourses** impacts water quality, aquatic life, and flooding.
Stormwater	**Stormwater runoff** from developed areas delivers sediment, nutrients, chloride, and bacteria to lakes, streams, and wetlands.
Farms	**Agricultural runoff and livestock access** increases erosion, nutrients, sediment, and bacteria in streams and groundwater.
Groundwater	**Groundwater quality and quantity needs protection** from contamination due to activities on the land and environmental conditions.
Groundwater	More **testing and screening** are needed to track groundwater and drinking water safety and quality.

Figure 2. Draft priority issue statement list

Goals

Goals are important and needed for maintaining and improving the water quality in this watershed. The goals also need to be measurable so progress can be tracked (i.e. *acres* of forest management, *miles* of lake shoreline restoration, etc.). This watershed plan is a 10-year plan that is tracked annually and will be reassessed in five years. The targeted locations were also identified in the topic meetings which help conservation staff focus water quality resources on areas that are most at risk. Progress towards the goals are made by the voluntary actions in the watershed, there are no regulations or mandates in this watershed plan.

The list of goals were developed by looking at the total number/area of the resource in the watershed (i.e. total miles of impaired streams, total acres of agricultural land, etc.) and looking at the average amount of current practices being implemented in the watershed. Then discussing with local conservation staff how to make progress with additional resources to maintain, improve, and protect water quality. This is the draft goals list that has been approved by the watershed Policy Committee Board:

	DRAFT GOAL NAME	METRIC	ISSUES ADDRESSED	DATA/ MEASURING	10-YEAR GOAL
	**1. Farms**	Acres of Ag BMPs (also give pollutant reductions) Cover crops, no till, nutrient mgmt.	• Livestock access • Agricultural runoff	% of all ag lands	**Implement 3,659 acres of agricultural BMPs**
	**2. Forests/ Protection**	Acres of Forest Stewardship Plans, SFIA, easements, acquisitions	• Risk of conversion • Forest health	Landscape Stewardship Plan	**Implement 8,162 acres of protection and 36,000 acres of forest management**
	**3. Streams**	Length riparian enhancement or protection, cattle fencing	• Riparian alteration • Livestock access	Local data	**Protect or enhance 1 mile of priority stream**
	**4. Lakes**	Pounds of phosphorus, Ag BMPs, Septic Systems, stormwater mgmt near lakes and streams Separate lakeshore restoration length goal	• Lakeshore alteration • Nutrients	Lakes of Phosphorus Sensitivity Significance	**Restore 3 linear miles of shoreline on Priority Lakes** **Reduce phosphorus in Priority, Enhance, and Restore lakes by 40 lbs**
	**5. Drinking Water Protection**	Wells sealed, DWSMA protection	• Drinking Water Quality	E-link	**Seal 50 unused drinking water wells**
	**6. Wetlands**	Acres of peatland exploration Implement WCA Encourage wetland banking credits	• Wetland health and function • Straightening of natural watercourses • Inadequate drainage	Degraded wetlands enhancements	**Maintain and enhance wetland & peatlands at current rate**
	**7. Stormwater**	Stormwater Mgmt Plans and studies Secondary: Pollutant reductions and water storage	• Stormwater runoff • Nutrients	Local data Need retrofit for Remer, Warba, and Pengilly.	**Complete stormwater retrofit analysis for 3 communities and implement 5 stormwater projects**

Figure 3. Draft goals list

Next Steps

Looking forward, there are some tight timelines to keep this planning process on schedule. Fortunately, there has been a great group of collaborative planners that have been keeping things moving forward and intend to keep it that way. In the coming months, a list of voluntary actions (projects, best management practices, conservation plans, etc.) that were brainstormed at the topic meetings will be reviewed and incorporated into the draft plan. Then, ironing out some administrative and program planning before the draft plan is complete later this spring.

Following a round of internal review, the draft plan will then be open for public comment sometime around July or August before it's open for a final public hearing this fall. Exact updates on this timeline will be available at www.ItascaSWCD.org/1W1P.

Any questions about the One Watershed One Plan process can be sent to matt.gutzmann@itascaswcd.org or any of your local Soil and Water Conservation District offices.

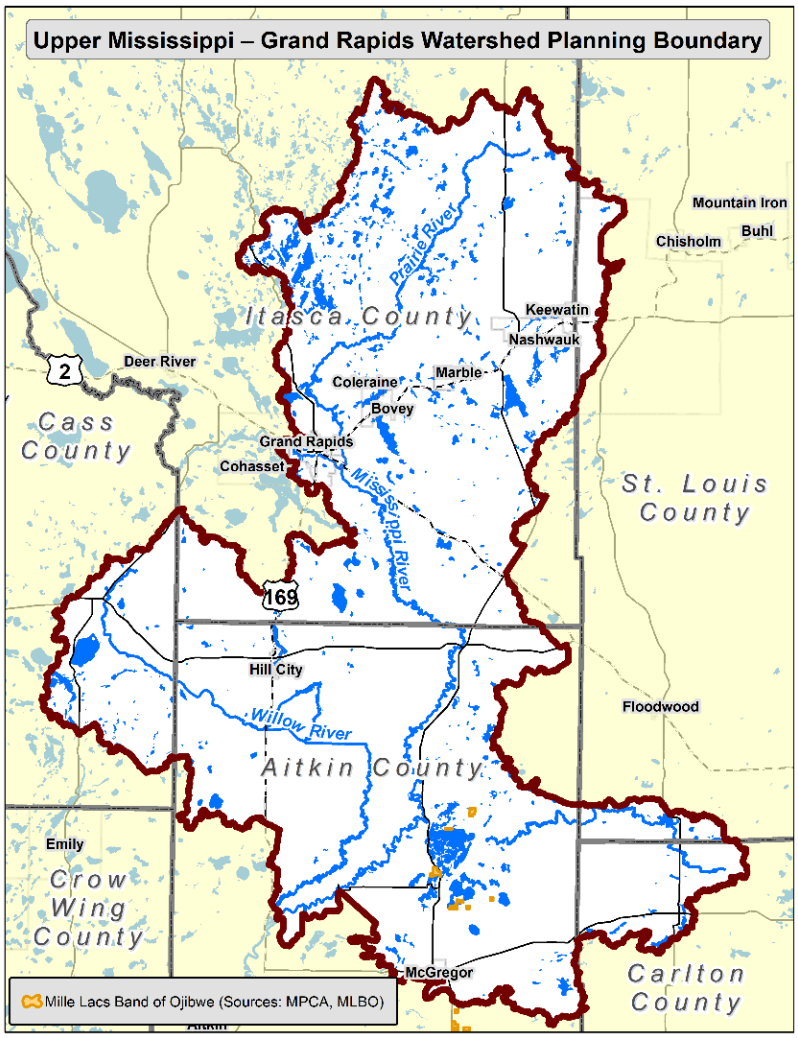

Figure 4. Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids watershed planning area