



FOREST TOPIC MEETING DATA

Introduction

The Upper Mississippi - Grand Rapids Watershed flows from Laurentian Continental divide to where it empties into the Mississippi River near Palisade. It drains over 1.3 million acres and contains almost 2,000 miles of streams and 625 lakes greater than 10 acres. It includes the cities of Grand Rapids, Nashwauk, Coleraine, Hill City, McGregor, Remer, and Cromwell. This watershed has an abundance of beautiful lakes that make it an important recreational destination. It is also home to unique plant and animal species such as wild rice and trout, along with an abundance of healthy forests.

The Upper Mississippi - Grand Rapids One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) is a planning partnership between Aitkin County, Aitkin SWCD, Carlton County, Carlton SWCD, Cass SWCD, Itasca County, Itasca SWCD, Logan Township, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and Salo Township. The goal of this partnership is to prioritize restoration and protection opportunities and target valuable resources. The result will be the development of a comprehensive watershed management plan with actions that make progress towards measurable goals.

The general 1W1P process is outlined in Figure 1. For the first step, which is to gather and prioritize opportunities/issues in the watershed, a series of five topic meetings will be held. The meeting topics include: 1) lakes, 2) forests, 3) wetlands & ditching 4) rivers & streams 5) stormwater and 5) farms & groundwater.

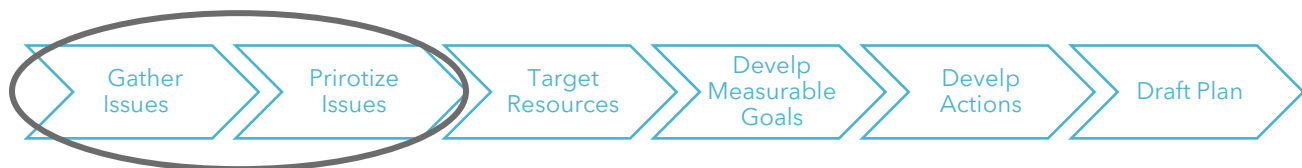


Figure 1. The 1W1P process is divided into six main steps. The topic meetings are the first step in the process (circled).

The 1W1P process is driven by local units of government, guided by an Advisory Committee made up of local stakeholders and state agencies. The decision-making body for the plan is a Policy Committee made up of elected officials from each County, SWCD Tribal Government or Township.

To gather diverse viewpoints, topic experts were invited to attend the forest meeting. In addition to state agencies and local and tribal government staff, topic experts included representation from forest landowners, Izaak Walton League, Itasca Waters, Mississippi Headwater Board, Aitkin County Lakes and Rivers Association and Minnesota Deer Hunters Association. Attendees are listed later in this report.

Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Watershed Forests

Forests are an important resource for the Upper Mississippi – Grand Rapids Watershed. Forests not only provide valuable habitat for a variety of species, but they also help protect lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater. Forests help filter and slow the flow of rainwater, allowing it to soak into the ground water rather than run off the land. This prevents pollutants from being washed into lakes, rivers, and streams. Greater than 50% of the watershed is forested.



Figure 2. A fall forest near the Mississippi River.

There is a variety of forest ownership in the watershed including state and federal forests, state parks, county land, private industrial land and private ownership. Of these, most forests are privately owned. Forests are considered protected when they are managed for forest health and are protected from conversion to other land use types. Generally, publicly owned forests are considered protected. Privately owned forests can also be protected by conservation easements and the Sustainable Forests Incentives Act (SFIA) which is a covenant on the land for a set number of years. Landowners can be encouraged to keep their land forested by a 2C tax designation if the landowner has a woodland stewardship plan. Generally, wetland forests are considered protected because they are less likely to be converted due to their soil types.

Upper Mississippi Grand Rapids Watershed Forest Issues

To illustrate the diversity of viewpoints, at the beginning of the forest meeting, we asked the experts and Advisory Committee members to tell us what comes to mind when they think about the watershed's forests. The responses were assembled to create a word cloud.



Figure 3. Word cloud depicting the diversity of responses to the question, “when you think of the Upper Mississippi Grand Rapids Watershed’s forests, what comes to mind?”

To help us understand what issues and opportunities surround forests in the watershed, issues listed in previous plans, reports, state agency comment letters and public input were gathered and compiled into common themes, becoming the basis of creating the priority forests issues for the Upper Mississippi Grand Rapids Watershed.

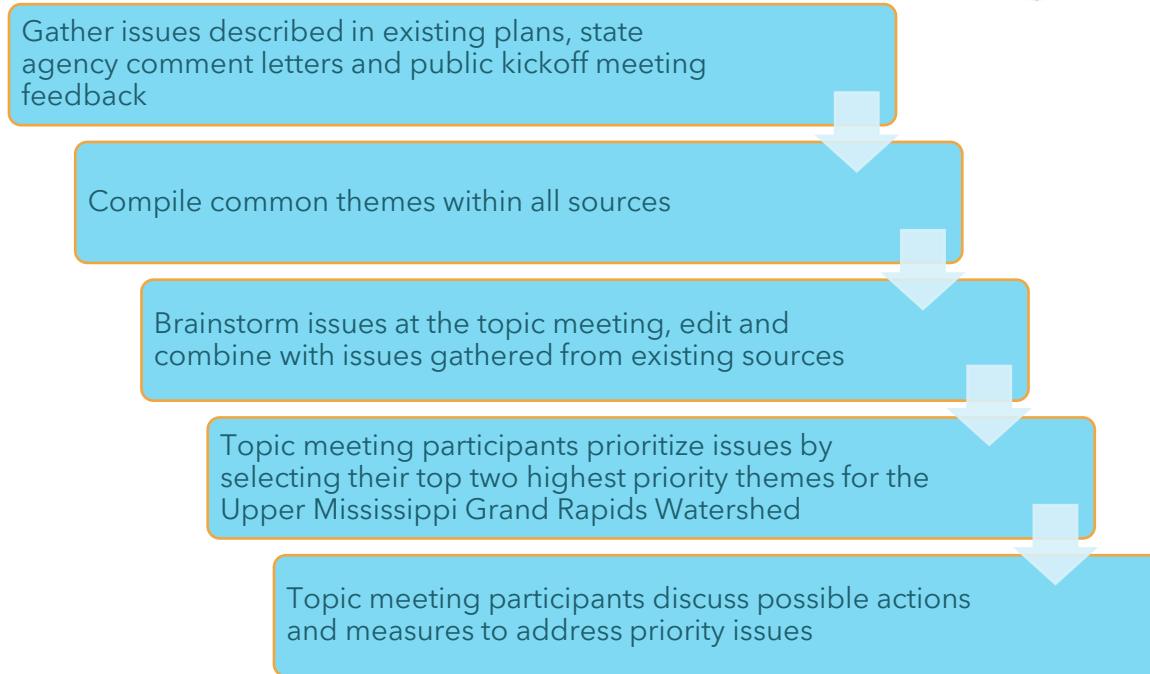


Figure 4. Issue statement development process

A diverse group of forest experts plus the Upper Mississippi Grand Rapids Watershed Advisory Committee gathered to brainstorm issues for lakes in the watershed. The brainstormed list was either grouped with the compiled themes or new themes were created. The group then agreed on a final list of four themes (Table 1).

Table 1. Forest issue statements developed at the Forest Topic Meeting

#	Draft Issue Statement	References
1	Forests that protect water quality for lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and drinking water are at risk of conversion to other land use types such as agriculture or development.	WRAPS, Aitkin, Carlton and Itasca County Water Plan, Public Kickoff Meeting, BWSR and DNR Letters, Topic Meeting
2	Forest health is vulnerable to climate variability, pests, and invasive species which can affect forest diversity and productivity.	Public Kickoff Meeting, DNR Letter, Topic Meeting
3	Best management practices are needed to protect forests and water quality before, during and following harvests.	WRAPS, Carlton County Water Plan, Public Kickoff Meeting, DNR Letter
4	Patchwork forest ownership makes coordinated forest management and protection difficult	Topic Meeting

Each participant ranked their top two issues for lakes, and the top two priorities overall were:

- ❖ Forests that protect water quality for lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and drinking water are at **risk of conversion** to other land use types such as agriculture or development. (19)
- ❖ **Forest health** is vulnerable to climate variability, pests, and invasive species which can affect forest diversity and productivity. (16)

The group felt that best management practices and coordinated forest management could be incorporated as actions in the plan.

Protection and restoration of peatlands and riparian forests will be discussed in future wetland and river meetings.

The group brainstormed a list of possible actions to address the priority issues along with ways success might be measured.

Forest Actions and Measures

- ❖ Work towards removal of invasive species in the forest understory
 - Acres of invasive species treated
- ❖ Timber Stand Improvement Projects to improve forest diversity
 - Acres timber stand improvement
- ❖ Forest management plans for lakeshores, working with lake associations
 - Acres of forest planned / # of lakes with plans
- ❖ Forest management plans for acres smaller than 20 acres
 - Acres of forest planned / # of plans
- ❖ Increase forest land in easements and SFIA
 - Acres of forest protected, feet of shoreline protected, % of land protected
- ❖ Provide education & outreach to forest landowners (example Itasca Master Woodlands Owners class) that includes
 - Education on invasive species
 - Healthy vs not healthy forests
 - Trainings for service providers
 - Number of people attend
- ❖ Provide cost share for forest health projects
 - Number of projects
- ❖ Determine areas that are at highest risk for forest conversion; new addresses/911 locates or county well index could be used

- Number of studies completed
- ❖ Reforestation
 - Acres of trees planted
- ❖ Protect areas at risk of deforestation
 - Acres of forest protected
- ❖ Increase recreation opportunities within forests
 - surveys to determine numbers
 - sensors for ATV traffic
 - people counters
 - QR code survey - that includes education
- ❖ Review forest road system and determine if some could be closed
 - Number of studies completed
- ❖ Use drone to survey forest health & project opportunities
 - Number of studies completed
- ❖ Sharing information between existing programs
 - Number of meetings
- ❖ Coordination for invasive species management between counties, road authorities
 - Number of meetings
- ❖ Certify gravel pits that are invasive species free
 - Number of pits certified
- ❖ Climate assisted migration of tree species
 - Number of acres planted
- ❖ Outreach to recreation groups to increase stewardship
 - Number of people reached
- ❖ Use existing organizations for outreach (clubs, COLA)
 - Number of organizations reached
- ❖ Provide forest health resources to small parcels
 - Number of parcels, number of people
- ❖ Protect forests to protect downstream drinking water supplies & groundwater

- Acres protected
- ❖ Educate realtors regarding forest programs
 - Number of workshops / number of realtors reached
- ❖ Increase urban forest management
 - Acres managed
- ❖ Continue to enforce logging rules and regulations
 - Continue local program
- ❖ Promote the Fire Wise Program / manage brush
 - Number of properties assessed / number of brush management projects
- ❖ Manage forest roads for invasive species
 - Miles of roads treated
- ❖ Provide cost share for forest management plans
 - Number of plans
- ❖ Implement forest management plans
 - Number of plans implemented
- ❖ Reduce herbicide use for forest management
 - Number of projects with mechanical management
- ❖ Plant fruit bearing shrubs and mast producing trees
 - Acres planted
- ❖ Protect streams and wetlands during logging
 - Best management practices implemented
- ❖ Increase diversity of forests (species, age)
 - Acres of forest managed

Meeting Attendees

- ❖ Andy Arens, Itasca SWCD
- ❖ Rick Blake, Isaak Walton League
- ❖ Melanie Bomier, Carlton SWCD
- ❖ Mitch Brinks, Technical Service Area 8
- ❖ Perry Bunting, Mille Lacs Band
- ❖ Barb Dahl, Carlton County SWCD
- ❖ Karola Dalen, Carlton County

- ❖ Tom Fasteland, Aitkin SWCD
- ❖ Austin Fischer, MN DNR
- ❖ Kyle Fredrickson, Aitkin SWCD
- ❖ Bonnie Goshey, MPCA
- ❖ Cameron Gustafson, Carlton SWCD
- ❖ Dana Gutzmann, Cass SWCD
- ❖ Matt Gutzmann, Itasca SWCD
- ❖ Michael Kearney, Aitkin County Commissioner
- ❖ Jeff Hrubes, BWSR
- ❖ Perry Loegering, Isaak Walton League, Itasca Waters
- ❖ Kaysie Maleski, Aitkin SWCD
- ❖ Darren Mayers, BWSR
- ❖ Jared Mazurek, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
- ❖ Pat, Murphy, Aitkin County Lakes and Rivers Association
- ❖ Tom Nelson, Itasca SWCD
- ❖ Chris Parthun, MN Department of Health
- ❖ Dave Peterson, Cass County SWCD
- ❖ Dawn Plattner, MN DNR
- ❖ Rian Reed, MN DNR
- ❖ Moriya Rufer, HEI (facilitator)
- ❖ Cal Saari, Itasca SWCD
- ❖ Austin Steere, Itasca SWCD
- ❖ Tim Terrill, Mississippi Headwater Board

