

# BCMWC 2026 Watershed Management Plan

## Section 1 – Introduction

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# 1.0 Introduction

The Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission (BCWMC) *Watershed Management Plan* (Plan) sets the vision, policies, programs, and projects for managing Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ/Bassett Creek and other surface waters within the boundaries of the BCWMC. This section includes the Commission's land and water acknowledgement statement and summarizes the role of watershed management organizations, the BCWMC's location, history, governance structure, and authority. It also gives an overview of past accomplishments, illustrates inter-agency coordination, and provides a summary of the plan development process.

## 1.1 Land and Water Acknowledgement

*Adopted May 2024*

The Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission acknowledges that the waterways of the Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ, located in Mnisota Makoċe, the homeland of the Dakota peoples, are living waters which are part of a larger living ecosystem.

Historically, the Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ provided material, nutritional, and spiritual sustenance to the Dakota peoples. We acknowledge the forced removal of the Dakota from the lands and waterways that nurtured them as relatives. And, we recognize the environmental degradation that continues in the watershed today.

The living waters of Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ remain significant to the Dakota and other Native peoples, including many who presently live in the watershed. The Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission seeks to identify and integrate Native wisdom by collaborating with Indigenous peoples and communities to reduce the impacts of climate change and improve the ecosystem health for all living beings in the watershed.

Acknowledging the complex past and present traumas and triumphs is a step toward healing for the land, watershed, and peoples who live in the watershed today.

## 1.2 Role of Watershed Management Organizations

The BCWMC is a special purpose unit of local government that manages water resources on a watershed basis, like all watershed management organizations (WMOs). WMO boundaries generally follow natural watershed divides, rather than political boundaries. Thus, they often include several municipalities and counties.

Recognizing that water does not follow political boundaries, the State of Minnesota established the Watershed Act (Minnesota Statutes 103D) in 1955, which allowed for the creation of watershed districts anywhere in the state. In 1982, the Minnesota Legislature enacted the Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act (Minnesota Statutes 103B.201 – 103B.255). This act required the formation of a WMO, and the development and implementation of a watershed management plan, for each of the watersheds in the seven county Twin Cities metropolitan area. WMOs can be organized as joint powers agreement

organizations among municipalities (e.g., BCWMC), as watershed districts (e.g., Minnehaha Creek Watershed District), or under county government (e.g., Scott County WMO).

The Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act states that the purposes of WMO water management programs are as follows (quoted from Minnesota Statutes 103B.201):

1. Protect, preserve, and use natural surface and groundwater storage and retention systems.
2. Minimize public capital expenditures needed to correct flooding and water quality problems.
3. Identify and plan for means to effectively protect and improve surface and groundwater quality.
4. Establish more uniform local policies and official controls for surface and groundwater management.
5. Prevent erosion of soil into surface water systems.
6. Promote groundwater recharge.
7. Protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitat and water recreational facilities.
8. Secure the other benefits associated with the proper management of surface and groundwater.

### 1.3 BCWMC Location and Boundary

The Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ/Bassett Creek watershed is located entirely within Hennepin County, in the northwestern portion of the Twin Cities. The watershed of the creek and its three main tributaries covers all or part of the nine cities:

- Crystal
- Golden Valley
- Medicine Lake
- Minneapolis
- Minnetonka
- New Hope
- Plymouth
- Robbinsdale
- St. Louis Park

Figure X shows the location of the BCWMC in relation to the other WMOs in the seven-county metropolitan area. The BCWMC is adjacent to the following WMOs:

- Mississippi WMO – along eastern boundary of BCWMC
- Minnehaha Creek Watershed District – along southern and western boundary of BCWMC
- Shingle Creek WMC – along northern boundary of BCWMC
- Elm Creek WMC – along extreme northwestern boundary of BCWMC

The downstream end of the BCWMC is a tunnel which conveys the creek under downtown Minneapolis and flows into the Mississippi River below St. Anthony Falls. The jurisdictional boundary of the BCWMC

ends at the tunnel entrance. The total drainage area of the BCWMC upstream of the tunnel is 39.7 square miles (~25,400 acres). Overall, the watershed is heavily developed (see Figure 2-1). All of the land in the BCWMC is within the 2030 Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA). Five major lakes (Medicine, Sweeney, Twin, Wirth, and Parkers) lie within the watershed, as well as numerous smaller lakes, ponds, and wetlands.

Boundaries with adjacent WMOs shift from time to time as new mapping information is available or when development changes drainage patterns. Most recently, the BCWMC officially updated its boundary with the Shingle Creek WMO which resulted in minor changes (2022). More significantly, in 2000, the BCWMC and the Mississippi WMO entered into a joint and cooperative agreement for a larger boundary change. A legal description of the revised boundary is included as part of the agreement and is also included in [Appendix X](#). This boundary change transferred 1,002 acres from the BCWMC to the Mississippi WMO to reflect the changed drainage conditions upon completion of the Bassett Creek Flood Control Project. With the project in place, the watershed area tributary to the old tunnel no longer flows to Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ / Bassett Creek.

Learn more about the BCWMC geography and natural features in Section 2.0 and Appendix A.

## 1.4 History and Governance Structure of the BCWMC

The beginnings of the BCWMC stretch back nearly 60 years when flooding along the creek was recognized as a regional issue, transcending city boundaries and requiring cooperation to address the issue. Prior to the adoption of a formal joint powers agreement, the cities in the watershed acted together as a committee, which was formed to study and plan for flood control in the watershed. The committee members were the city engineers and/or city council members. In 1968, the Bassett Creek Flood Control Commission was formed by adoption of a joint powers agreement (JPA) among the nine communities in the watershed. As required by the JPA, the BCWMC adopted the *Watershed Management Plan for Bassett Creek* in February 1972.

The BCWMC's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2019 included a booklet showcasing the organization's history and key accomplishments. Find it at [www.bassettcreekwmo.org](http://www.bassettcreekwmo.org).

In accordance with provisions of the 1982 Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act, the Bassett Creek Flood Control Commission revised its JPA in 1984 and created the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission (BCWMC). The BCWMC adopted the *Bassett Creek Water Management Plan* in 1986. The Minnesota Water Resources Board (now the Board of Water and Soil Resources – BWSR) approved the plan on July 26, 1989, and the BCWMC printed the plan in 1990 (1990 Plan).

Also in accordance with the 1982 Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act and Minnesota Rules relating to Metropolitan Area Local Water Management, the BCWMC revised its JPA in 1993. The 1993 JPA was in effect until 2014, when it was extended with a new expiration date of January 1, 2025. In 2024, the JPA was refined and reorganized for clarity and to reflect current practices. No authorities of the BCWMC nor its member cities were expanded or retracted with the updated JPA. The new JPA was approved by each of the nine member city councils and is effective January 1, 2025 - January 1, 2033 (Appendix X).

The powers and duties of the BCWMC, taken from the joint powers agreement, include, but are not limited to:

1. Prepare and adopt an "overall plan" (watershed management plan).
2. Acquire necessary personal property to accomplish its purposes.
3. Contract for space, material, and supplies.
4. Make necessary surveys or use other information and develop projects to accomplish the purposes for which the BCWMC is organized.
5. Enter into contracts or cooperate with governmental agencies, private/public organizations, or individuals to accomplish the purposes for which the BCWMC is organized.
6. Order any member city to construct, clean, repair, alter, abandon, consolidate, reclaim or change the course or terminus of any ditch, drain, storm sewer or water course, natural or artificial, within BCWMC.
7. Order any member city to carry out improvements necessary to implement the BCWMC watershed management plan.
8. Regulate, conserve and control the use of stormwater, surface water and groundwater within BCWMC.
9. Contract for or purchase insurance, as needed.
10. Establish and maintain devices for acquiring and recording hydrological and water quality data within BCWMC.
11. Enter upon lands to make surveys and investigations to accomplish the BCWMC's purposes.
12. Provide any member city with technical data or other information to assist the city in preparing its local watershed management plan.
13. Provide legal and technical assistance in connection with litigation or other proceedings between one or more of its members and any other unit of government relating to drainage or water quality within BCWMC.
14. Accumulate reserve funds and invest funds not currently needed for BCWMC operations.
15. Collect money from the BCWMC members, Hennepin County, and from any other BCWMC-approved source.
16. Make contracts, employ staff or consultants, incur expenses and make expenditures.
17. Obtain an annual audit of the BCWMC books and accounts.
18. Make its books, reports, and records available for and open to inspection by its member cities.
19. Recommend changes to the joint powers agreement to its member cities.
20. Exercise all other powers necessary and incidental to the implementation of the purposes and powers set forth in the joint powers agreement and state law.

21. Cooperate with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resource (MDNR) in obtaining protected waters permits and complying with Minnesota law regarding protected waters.
22. Member cities may conduct separate or concurrent studies on any matter under study by the BCWMC.
23. Establish a procedure for establishing citizen or technical advisory committees and to provide other means for public participation.

**Board of Commissioners**

The BCWMC is managed by a nine member board of commissioners and nine alternate commissioners. Each of the nine member cities appoints one commissioner and one alternate. Alternate commissioners are voting board members when the primary commissioner is absent. The JPA gives each member city the responsibility to determine the eligibility or qualifications of its representatives (commissioner and alternate) on the board.

The term of each commissioner and alternate is three years and until their successors are selected, staggered as shown in Table 1-1. Commissioner vacancies must be filled in accordance with the JPA. Commissioners cannot be removed from the Commission prior to their term expiration except under the conditions given in the JPA. The commissioners serve without compensation from the BCWMC. Table 1-1 lists commissioner terms. The BCWMC’s organizational year begins on February 1<sup>st</sup> with the annual organizational meeting being the monthly meeting in February of each year. At the time of this writing, regular meetings for the BCWMC are held at 8:30 AM at the Golden Valley City Hall on the third Thursday of each month.

**Table 1-1 BCWMC Commissioner Terms**

<b>Member City</b>	<b>Termination of Commissioner’s Term</b>
Crystal	February 1, 2027, 2030, 2033, 2036, etc.
Golden Valley	
Medicine Lake	
Minneapolis	February 1, 2028, 2031, 2034, 2037, etc.
Minnetonka	
New Hope	
Plymouth	February 1, 2026, 2029, 2032, 2035, etc.
Robbinsdale	
St. Louis Park	

**Funding Mechanisms**

In 2024, the BCWMC amended its bylaws to change the BCWMC’s fiscal year from February 1 – January 31 to a calendar year January 1 – December 31. There are two primary funding mechanisms for the Commission’s work – assessments from member cities and capital funds levied through Hennepin County.

City assessments are calculated using a formula based on area in the watershed and valuation of the land in the watershed. The Commission’s operating budget utilizes city assessments along with some grant funding and fees for development reviews for most non-capital expenses including planning, monitoring, technical analyses, administration, and education. The Commission utilizes Minnesota Statutes 103B.251 to collect ad valorem taxes through Hennepin County for large capital projects.

## Future Governance

Although the Commission’s existing structure and funding mechanisms are sound, they may limit the capacity of the organization to implement more robust and complex projects and programs (see **issue XX in Section XX**). Options for changing the Commission’s governance structures and/or funding mechanisms will be the focus of a comprehensive assessment in the first two years of this Plan’s implementation. Changes to the Commission’s operational structure or funding mechanisms may require changes to the JPA and/or this plan.

## 1.5 Past Accomplishments

The list of BCWMC’s accomplishments is long, stretching back nearly 60 years! Early on, the Commission (known as a Flood Control Commission) was focused solely on reducing flooding along the creek. In partnership with the nine member cities, Hennepin County, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the massive Bassett Creek Flood Control Project was completed in 1992. The project resulted in a 2.4-mile-long tunnel that carries the creek under downtown Minneapolis and into the Mississippi River. Additional flood control structures were built along the creek upstream through the watershed. Learn more about ongoing management of the Flood Control Project in **Section X.X**.

While the BCWMC continues to work on flood reduction projects, it now concentrates much of its work on improving and protecting water quality in its priority lakes and streams. The Commission began routine water monitoring in the 1970s to help identify pollution issues and target improvements. It began a robust capital improvement program (CIP) emphasizing water quality improvement in 2004 and adopted the Minnesota Minimal Impacts Design Standards (MIDS) for large development and redevelopment projects in 2015.

Accomplishments from the CIP include the construction of XX projects from 2004 to 2024 including streambank restoration projects, stormwater pond creation or expansion, flood reduction, underground stormwater storage, and in-lake treatments. A total of \$XX was levied through the county for these projects and augmented with \$XX in grant funding. The CIP has resulted in some significant outcomes including:

XX pounds of total phosphorus removed annually

XX tons of suspended solids removed annually

XX miles of streambanks restored

2 lakes removed from the list of impaired waters impaired due to high nutrients (Wirth Lake and Sweeney Lake)

This section to be updated with current figures

These and other activities and accomplishments of the BCWMC are reported in greater detail each year in the Commission’s Annual Report found at [www.bassettcreekwmo.org/document/annual-report-budget](http://www.bassettcreekwmo.org/document/annual-report-budget).

## 1.6 Coordination with Agencies and Partners

In addition to working closely with its member cities, the BCWMC works regularly with other units of state and regional governments involved in regulating water resource related activities. The roles of these agencies and partners are summarized in **Figure XX**

This graphic is from the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District Plan and will be updated for BCWMC

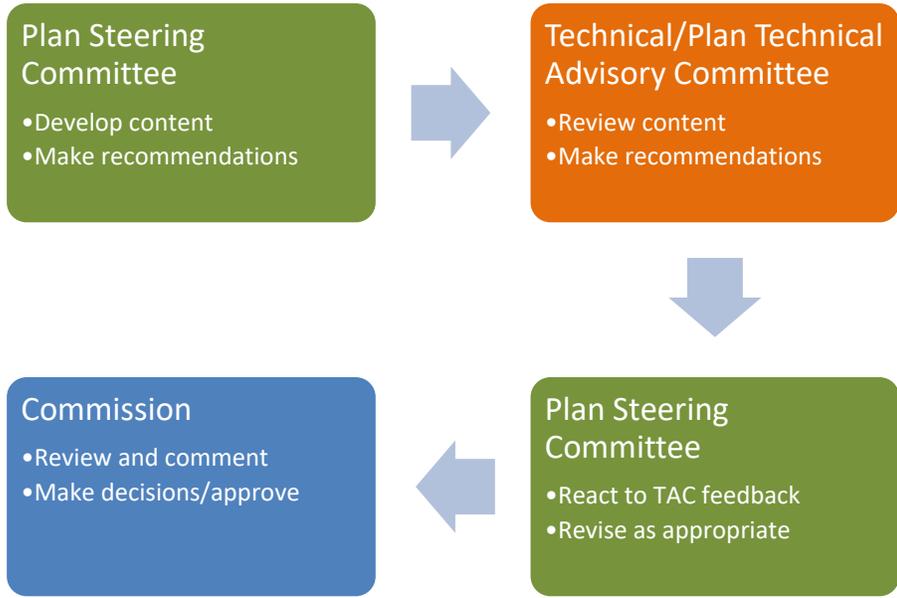


# 1.7 BCWMC Plan Development, Vision, and The Next 10 Years

The BCWMC began development of this plan in 2022 and embarked, first, on gathering input from partners, member cities, members of the public, state agencies, and regional governments. With the recognition that members of minority communities were not involved with previous planning efforts, the Commission made a concerted effort to engage with historically underserved and minority communities to help develop this plan. In April 2022, the Commission held a workshop on “equity in watershed management” to develop a shared understanding of equity principles – such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and access – and how they could be incorporated into watershed management. Staff and commissioners attended events and communicated with Minneapolis neighborhood associations and others, with the goal of gathering input from diverse voices. In February 2023, the Commission held a public open house to share information and continue gathering ideas and perspectives from audiences across the watershed. The Commission also used an online survey to collect input from partners and community members from June 2022 to January 2023. A detailed accounting of the stakeholder input process and results is found in Appendix X.

Development of this plan also included a gaps analysis to identify new or evolving issues that may need to be updated from the 2015 Watershed Plan, new Commission priorities, and changes to regulatory, political, or social environments. The gaps analysis was paired with further evaluation of several complex issues (e.g., chloride management, linear project standards, climate resiliency) to determine the appropriate role for the Commission.

Concurrently with gathering input from partners and the public, and assessing gaps and more complex issues, a Plan Steering Committee was formed (Table 1-2). This committee worked for more than 2 years leading the effort to identify and prioritize issues, establish measurable goals, and develop an implementation plan incorporating a variety of policies, activities, and tools. The Plan Steering Committee developed initial Plan content or recommendations, sought and responded to feedback from the Technical Advisory Committee or broader Plan Technical Advisory Committee, and presented material to the Commission for decision-making or as informational. Figure X.X generally shows this workflow:



**Table 1-2. List of Active Plan Steering Committee Members**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Service Period</b>
Alternate Commissioner Shaun Kennedy (Committee Chair)	May 2023 - XX
Alternate Commissioner Jodi Polzin	May 2023 - XX
Commissioner Catherine Cesnik	May 2023 - XX
Alternate Commissioner Stacy Harwell	May 2023 - XX
Commissioner Michael Welch	May 2023 – Oct 2024
Commissioner Joan Hauer	March 2024 - XX
Commissioner Paula Pentel	May 2024 - XX
Community Member Linda Loomis	May 2023 - XX
TAC Member Mark Ray	May 2023 – Nov 2023
TAC Member Ben Scharenbroich	May 2023 - XX
TAC Member Eric Eckman	Sept 2023 - XX

### **Vision**

At the beginning of their work, the Plan Steering Committee updated the BCWMC vision statement to help center and guide the Commission’s work:

*Stewardship of water resources to reduce flood risk and improve watershed ecosystem health.*

### **The Next Ten Years**

This plan provides the BCWMC with the foundation for guiding the implementation of projects and programs, and for enforcing standards and requirements. It is also a tool that ensures the BCWMC stays in tune with the issues and solutions our water resources need in the future. Throughout plan implementation, BCWMC monitoring, modeling, and assessments will continue to guide and target our work, ensuring that sound science and adaptive management are utilized at every turn and that progress toward goals is measurable and continuous. Our plan includes the following elements:

- Summary of land and water resources
- Watershed issues and goals
  - Waterbody and watershed quality
  - Flooding and climate resiliency
  - Education and engagement
  - Organizational Effectiveness
- Implementation
  - Policies, tools, activities
  - Implementation schedule
  - Funding
  - Requirements for member cities