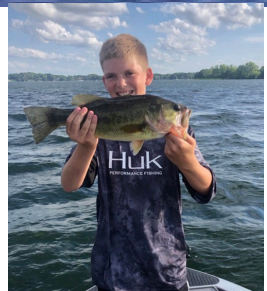
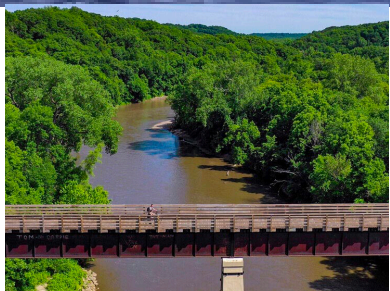
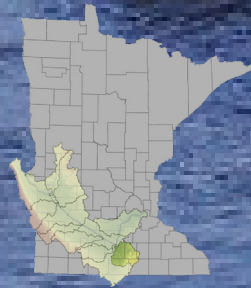


LE SUEUR RIVER WATERSHED
ONE WATERSHED, ONE PLAN

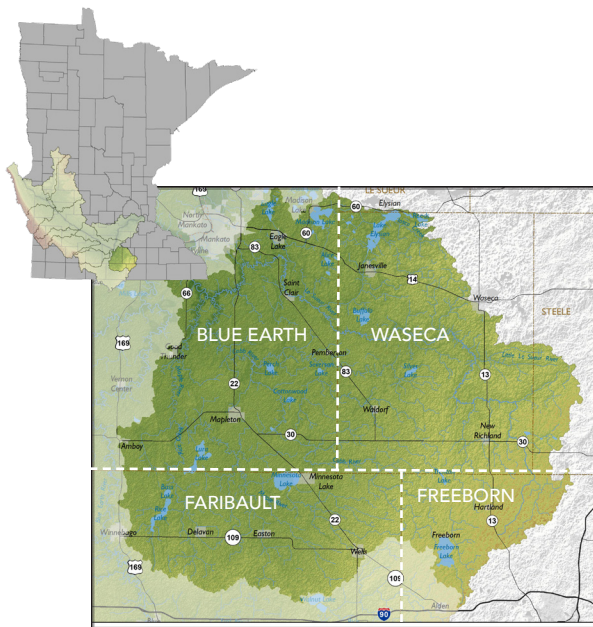
MIDPOINT MEETING

PUBLIC INPUT SUMMARY





Le Sueur River Watershed One Watershed, One Plan Midpoint Meeting in Pemberton, MN on April 4, 2022



Le Sueur River Watershed



One Watershed, One Plan

This document summarizes public engagement that is part of the comprehensive watershed planning process for Le Sueur River Watershed One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) development. Learn more about 1W1P by visiting BWSR's website:

<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/one-watershed-one-plan>

Le Sueur River Watershed One Watershed One Plan Website

Learn more and follow plan updates posted on the 1W1P website:

<https://www.co.waseca.mn.us/438/LeSueur-River-One-Watershed-One-Plan>

Le Sueur River Watershed One Watershed One Plan - Planning Partnership

The Le Sueur River Watershed One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) planning partnership includes Blue Earth County, Blue Earth Soil and Water Conservation District, Waseca County, Waseca Soil and Water Conservation District, Faribault County, Faribault Soil and Water Conservation District, Freeborn County, and Freeborn Soil and Water Conservation District.

The midpoint public engagement was planned, facilitated, and summarized by the Water Resources Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato for the 1W1P planning partnership.



For More Information

1W1P Questions?

Contact Waseca County Planning & Zoning at 507- 835-0615 or Haley.Byron@co.waseca.mn.us

Midpoint Meeting Questions?

Contact the Water Resources Center, Minnesota State University, Mankato at 507-389-5492 or Kimberly.Musser@mnsu.edu

More detailed public summary information is available upon request.

INITIAL REVIEW DRAFT
May 2022



GATHERING PUBLIC INPUT

Background

This report is a summary of a public engagement component of the Le Sueur River Watershed, One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) planning effort. An initial step in the process for developing the Le Sueur River Watershed 1W1P was to host a public kickoff meeting to listen and learn from watershed residents and stakeholders. The main objective of the public engagement effort is to give residents and stakeholders the opportunity to provide input and identify important issues and concerns related to watershed health. As part of the Le Sueur 1W1P process, project partners invited watershed residents to provide input on the plan at two public meetings—the kickoff and a midpoint meeting. A public kickoff meeting was held September 16, 2021 at St. Olaf Lake Park near New Richland, MN.

Midpoint Meeting

This document summarizes public feedback from the midpoint meeting and online survey. The public midpoint meeting was held on April 4, 2022 at at Pemberton Main Street Plaza in Pemberton, MN. The meeting was designed to update the public and allow interested parties to weigh in on the planning process to help frame issues and shape planning efforts. Citizens who provided input at the beginning of the planning process (kickoff meeting) had the opportunity to review how citizen perspectives were incorporated into and shaped plan content so far. The midpoint meeting began with a welcome by planning partners and an overview of the 1W1P process overall and the progress to date. The meeting focused on strategies to address priority resource concerns. The bulk of the meeting centered on facilitated small group conversations where participants discussed the questions listed below related to each resource concern. Approximately 75 people attended representing many different communities and diverse viewpoints from across the watershed.

Online Survey

Due to the covid pandemic, an online survey was also available to reach those who preferred to weigh in online. The survey was developed in collaboration with planning partners to gain citizen input about watershed resource concerns. The survey design conveyed the same questions asked at the midpoint meeting. The goal of The 49-question survey was to offer citizens the opportunity to weigh in on any or all of the resource concerns of interest to them. It included both open and closed-ended questions to gain general input about citizen perspectives. There were 78 survey respondents, primarily rural and city residents from Blue Earth and Waseca Counties.

RESOURCE CONCERNS

ISSUE #1: WATER QUALITY IN RIVERS AND STREAMS

ISSUE #2: WATER QUALITY IN LAKES

ISSUE #3: EROSION

ISSUE #4: WATER QUANTITY, RATE, AND FLOODING

ISSUE #5: WETLANDS

ISSUE #6: LEADERSHIP

ISSUE #7: BACTERIA

ISSUE #8: SHORELANDS & RIPARIAN AREAS

ISSUE #9: DRINKING WATER & GROUNDWATER PROTECTION

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRIORITY AREAS

Do you have any questions or concerns about the priority areas identified? This is a ten-year plan and state funding will be focused in these areas first.

Do you suggest any changes? What would you change and why?

STRATEGIES

Broadly, do you think this list of strategies make sense? Are there any missing?

What are your top 2-3 priority areas that you would like to see focused on?

SUPPORT?

Overall, would you support this content moving forward?

Do you have any questions or concerns?

If you do not support the content as is, what would you like to see changed?

QUESTIONS?

Do you have any other questions or concerns?



WATER QUALITY IN RIVERS AND STREAMS

PRIORITY AREAS

- General feedback at meeting was support for priority areas identified
- Cobb River, CD 26, CD 83, JD 27 were noted in particular
- Missing: Fishing rivers and streams should be prioritized

STRATEGIES

- Top meeting priorities: Water storage, best management practices on agricultural lands, conservation drainage
- Top survey priorities: Best management practices (BMPs) to decrease nutrients, sediment, and water storage
- Focus on soil health practice promotion and education for reduced tillage and cover crops
- Farmer-led groups are the best approach
- Work with farmer groups to support water storage
- Prioritize creative, win-win solutions
- Needs to be an emphasis on urban runoff and water storage as well

SUPPORT?

- Landowners, farmers, and residents buying in to the plan is essential to the success of these projects. Somebody needs to find, talk to, and educate them. Any that involve cooperation with private landowners will be more work and take more time because people do not like being forced into taking actions even if it the cost doesn't come out of their pockets.
- Ideally all of the listed strategies should be employed. Start on the ones that are the low-hanging fruit to start making progress.
- Concerns/Challenge: One survey respondent noted their only concern is not having enough "teeth" behind the plan to see measurable results.
- Concerns/Challenge: Try not to get bogged down with technicalities and don't increase bureaucracy.

QUESTIONS?

- What funding is needed to make a difference? Is there enough money to make a difference?
- Are there enough willing landowners?



WATER QUALITY IN LAKES

PRIORITY AREAS

- At the meeting, seemed to be general support for the priority areas identified.
- Survey respondents noted that it is a good framework and that the overall categories for the strategies are well represented, however, the example best management practices (BMPs) are a bit limiting or confusing.
- Madison Lake was noted in particular as a priority.

STRATEGIES

- Top priorities from meeting: Improving lake water quality, addressing lake weeds (curly leaf pond weed, Eurasian milfoil), address invasive species, nutrients washing into lakes
- Top priorities from survey: BMPs to decrease nutrients, lakeshore protection (easements, ordinances), and target outreach to lakeshore owners
- Discussed value of Water and Sediment Control Basins (WASCOBS) and farmable wetland areas that farmers don't take out of production but allow temporary storage.
- Education is key. There are a lot of people who don't even know there is a problem with water quality so if we want to improve lake conditions, we first have to make people aware of the issues and we then need to provide workable solutions, so people know what steps they need to take to improve things.
- Survey respondent noted their highest priority strategy for water quality in lakes would be a no-till and cover crop program targeted in the watersheds of the seven prioritized lakes. This strategy is my highest priority because it is an extremely effective way to drastically reduce the soil and phosphorus loss from farm fields, as well as improving soil health of the field which not only improves crop drought resistance, but also reduces runoff and thereby downstream flooding.
- It is imperative to get user buy-in with these goals and boots on the ground when studies are conducted.
- Concerns/Challenges: Survey respondent noted the biggest attitude change that I see as an obstacle is the "my lake" attitude. Lake property owners think they own the lake, and like with streams, you're dependent upon good-natured and well-educated landowners to do all the work and people that don't care or don't know can continue degrading a shared resource. This is not a fair deal.

SUPPORT?

- At the meeting, participants seemed to generally support the approach.



EROSION

PRIORITY AREAS

- Water storage - Store more water and reduce volume of water going into downstream areas
- Since 80 percent of the sediment comes stream bank and near channel sources, that is where the focus should be
- Ravine grade stabilization
- Ravine heads need to be targeted for erosion control measures
- Missing: Shouldn't the Maple River and the Le Sueur River be included?

STRATEGIES

- Top priorities from meeting: Water storage & sediment basins that release water slowly; Storage in public drainage systems so farm tiles don't drain so fast; Focus on cover crops and incentives for cover crops and reduced tillage; and Wetland restoration.
- Top survey priorities: (E1&E2) conservation tillage (no-till/strip till); grassed waterways; grade stabilization. (E3) Water storage in uplands; ravine grade stabilization; outreach and education; and streambank stabilization.
- Most willing to do: cover crops and conservation tillage and conservation drainage
- Missing: Suggest adding "increase water storage upstream"
- Farmer education about the costs they will experience with the change from a cash crop to a cover crop is important.
- General stewardship through best management practices (BMPs)
- Urban stormwater management. Look at stormwater treatment or storage in small towns, more stormwater education (e.g. overapplying fertilizer, impacts of pet waste)
- Streambank and river channel stabilization
- There needs to be more funding available for the grade stabilization structures and ravine stabilization. Landowners are willing to do these practices if there is cost share money available.
- Wetland banking/restoration projects should allow for more excavation for more water storage and they should be set up for a slow draw down and have more space available for the next big rain.
- Survey respondent noted that they really like the goal of getting all landowners in the planning area to buy-in to some form of soil health practice. Joining that with the extra targeting of highly erodible lands, as well as the specific areas that flow to the high priority lakes and streams.

SUPPORT?

- Keep things voluntary for landowners. No new mandates.
- I think that Issue Statement 1 is the most important part of this discussion.
- E1 and E3 are the ones I would suggest being prioritized the most.

QUESTIONS?

- What kind of financial support would landowners be provided to adopt these practices? I would like to know what the funding sources are for landowners and where we can find that specific information. We need to have concrete, specific plans and we cannot convince landowners to get on board if we don't have that information.



WATER QUANTITY, RATE, AND FLOODING

PRIORITY AREAS

- General support noted for priority areas
- New Richland and St. Clair areas, Iosco Creek Watershed (CD47, JD6, CD26, CD83, JD22) were noted in particular
- Streambank bluff, streambank erosion and flooding areas should be prioritized
- Focus on where water storage can be done to get the best bang for the buck

STRATEGIES

- Top priorities from meeting: water storage basins and ponds; restored wetlands; cover crops; community outreach and education
- Top priorities from survey: Capitol Improvement Projects (CIP) for watershed associated with storage; Conservation drainage management and early coordination with drainage projects; and increase soil moisture potential with soil health
- Most willing: water storage, ditch improvements paired with water storage
- With some of the extreme events we have observed over the last decade, it seems like we don't have the space or funding to store the volume of water in traditional ponds or embankments. Ultimately, improving the soil moisture potential will be better from many different perspectives (volume reduction, water quality, crop drought resistance, air quality, etc.)
- Would prioritize storage in soil (crop practices) over storage in ponds. Soil health practices maintain and improve the amount of farmland, while still storing the water.
- Include CREP/wetland projects designed specifically for water storage, areas that can hold water and be slowly released after a rain event.
- Permeable pavers and stormwater ponds help create immediate results. The rain gardens create good community projects.
- Use science when coming up with projections
- Concerns/Challenges: Meeting participants noted that they liked the content but didn't necessarily feel like they have a place to change anything.
- Concerns/Challenges: One of the misunderstandings I've heard from landowners is that tile water flowing into ditches/streams is clear, so it must be clean and not impactful to the stream. This disregards the chemical/microbial qualities of the water and ignores the fact that the quantity and not quality of the water is a major factor in creating sediment pollution.

QUESTIONS

- Where did the priority watersheds come from?
- Most of the farmland is not the problem. Increased rain is the problem. What were the issues last year during the drought?



WETLANDS

PRIORITY AREAS

- Bull Run, Cobb River, Rice Creek and Trenton Lake were noted in particular
- Consider temporary wetlands, hay or pasture land that can be flooded and compensated (Red River does something like this)

STRATEGIES

- Top strategies from meeting: Storage and wetland restoration; influencing policy to make it easier for partially drained wetlands to enter programs; find a way to acquire more money or make it cheaper to restore wetlands
- Top strategies from survey: restore wetlands focused on achieving storage; influence policy to address gap in existing programs; and outreach and education to consider downstream benefits
- Wetland habitat appeals to many people due to the wildlife it attracts.
- Water retention is a major hurdle to fixing MN Basin water quality. One idea is rethinking pond dimensions. Instead of trying to restore natural wetlands (which is certainly good), a bigger impact could be achieved on less land from creating deeper ponds more like urban stormwater retention ponds except on the agricultural landscape.
- Support prioritizing education to prevent further wetland loss and efforts to address gaps.
- Concerns/Challenges: Wetland restoration is expensive and wetland banks are complicated and take a long time.
- Concerns/Challenges: More landowners would do wetland banking projects but the upfront cost is too much. Also the vegetation and restoration standards can be hard to achieve.
- Concerns/Challenges: Wetlands will be a tool that will be available, but most will be hesitant to reestablish due to the rules associated with removing them if they ever wanted to.

QUESTIONS

- Cobb River - improvements are noticeable. Is this due to wetlands? Handles rain events better than the Maple River now.
- Water storage - do they have to focus on habitat too?



LEADERSHIP

PRIORITY AREAS

- Water storage is a critical issue for people to understand and the importance of getting more water storage across the watershed is the priority.
- Experts have all come in to study our watershed from across the country and they all came to one conclusion - we need to store more water on the land.
- Drainage is the central issue we need to talk about, not the erosion or water quality. Increasing flows due to drainage and climate change is the major driver.

STRATEGIES

- Top strategies from meeting: Focusing on water storage should be the number one strategy; promoting soil health practice adoption should be another central strategy; Conducting one-on-one landowner outreach is the most critical approach to make a difference. Local staff should reach out and get to know farmers and other watershed residents and build relationships.
- Top strategies from survey: Identify and support leaders in the farming community to increase farmer-led demonstrations; outreach and education to increase adoption of voluntary BMPs
- Landowner, farmer and citizen buy-in is paramount to the success.
- Educate farmers. Farmers on land should push for water storage.
- There should be funding available for it.
- Keep hosting information like the Le Sueur Network meetings to bring people together, to learn about the watershed, discuss things, and prioritize action.
- I like these strategies and think the one-on-one interaction with landowners will be critical to get adoption of these soil health practices. Utilizing the farmer-led field demonstrations will be a huge key as well, perhaps needing a one-on-one to get people to show up to the event, and a follow up to get further buy-in.
- In the future, climate should be part of the discussion. It will be major driver. We need to assess all of our actions and our impacts related to mitigating climate change.
- Concerns/Challenges: I understand that voluntary adoption is ultimately the best political way to achieve these goals but I'm afraid it hasn't been enough in the past. Not sure what the solution is but I don't see things getting better very quickly.
- Concerns/Challenges: Still a challenge to get people to be open to listening, change behavior, and invest in conservation. When farm prices are low there is no spare cash to spend on conservation, when farm prices are high they want to make money on every acre they can.

QUESTIONS

- We have been talking about this for a decade. Are we finally getting past the discussion phase? Are we past talking about it now and finally moving forward?



BACTERIA

PRIORITY AREAS

- Meeting participants discussed that the number of feedlots has decreased and that there was less manure applied, and feedlots were more spread apart.
- Participants also noted that Waseca county already is more restrictive than state rule for manure applied setbacks.
- Survey respondent reflected that livestock in this area has obviously declined a lot over the years. It seems that the pastures left tend to be small and overgrazed but the small number of them is probably not the biggest challenge the watershed is facing.

STRATEGIES

- Top strategies from meeting: source assessment; manure application
- Top strategies from survey: adhere/increase application setbacks; reduce untreated/straight pipe residential discharges; and outreach and education on maintenance on septic systems
- Meeting group discussion noted that bacteria source assessment is a good idea. Need to better assess wildlife as a source.
- Smarter, more efficient manure application is probably a worthy priority target.
- Intakes at fields with applied manure should be replaced with denser pattern tiles.
- Challenge Noted: Bacteria is one of the invisible pollutants. Mitigating it generally does not yield a financial benefit to the owner.

SUPPORT

- Overall group at meeting felt that area already has great programs. There are few straight pipes, no unsewered communities, and farmers follow manure management plans.
- Survey respondent noted that many of these items are addressed rather well already, so their prioritization is a little skewed by the importance that has been placed on them already.



SHORELANDS & RIPARIAN AREAS

PRIORITY AREAS

- Missing: Maple River and Le Sueur River should be included into map for shorelands
- Le Sueur County Road 8 was noted in particular

STRATEGIES

- Top priorities from meeting: Education, buffers, rain gardens, streambank restoration and native plants
- Top priorities from survey: Shoreland restorations; education to elected officials on importance of the near shore and riparian vegetation protection; increase knowledge of DNR Score Your Shore
- Missing: Focus on rain gardens
- Outreach and education involving lakeshore associations is very important, including smaller groups.
- Need more support for volunteer groups, like lake associations
- More riparian restorations with funding such as CRP and CREP
- More ditch or streambank re-sloping
- Pay landowners more for restoration projects.

Concerns / Challenges:

- Survey respondent commented that stream riparian width seems to be pretty good for the most part, probably less so in headwater reaches. The health of the riparian ecosystem is probably diminished because of high flow and high erosion rates (which can be addressed elsewhere).
- Survey respondent noted that lake riparian health as poor with no solution in sight. I don't see there being any protection or enforcement of a lake landowner doing whatever they want to their shoreline, whether it is good for the lake or not.
- It is difficult to get a property owner to spend money and make changes. Educating them on how to avoid increased impact would be more successful. People will only want to do things if they are not financially responsible for it.
- Lakeshore is one of the places where private landowner rights and the public resource have to have a balance. If we can get landowners and lake residents to curb any type of runoff (etc.), the state and counties will have to spend less.

SUPPORT

- Groups at meeting voiced general support for framework.



DRINKING WATER & GROUNDWATER PROTECTION

PRIORITY AREAS

- Missing: The issue statement does not address any concern about water quantity! Why are we not concerned about overuse or unnecessary wasting of our groundwater resources?
- Missing: Flowing wells are not something that has been identified directly in the plan, but that is an issue that they thought should be included.
- Survey respondent expressed concerns about water quantity and that we don't have an unlimited supply of groundwater.

STRATEGIES

- Top meeting priorities: education, private well testing and education about contaminants; groundwater monitoring
- Top survey priorities: Seal unsealed wells, repair/address leaky tank sites; repair or replace failing Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS)
- Meeting group underscored importance of drinking water education being an important strategy.
- Group talked about the importance of water well testing and education related to arsenic and other potential contaminants. Suggested targeting both to small cities and private wells.
- Group supported practice of having private well water tests conducted before people purchased properties. Need to ensure that people know where and how to have private wells tested.
- Group supported having groundwater monitoring wells for both quality and quantity.
- Identified need for long term testing of both private and public wells to better understand any potential issues.
- Missing: Importance of replacing and maintaining septic systems. Group talked about being surprised about the lack of focus on septic systems throughout the state and also southern Minnesota. The importance of maintaining septic systems was underscored.
- Discussed importance of replacing septic systems and having funds like revolving loan funds for low interest loans, particularly for low or very low-income persons.

Concerns/Challenges:

- Sealing wells – Meeting participants talked about the importance of sealing wells to protect groundwater quality.
- Leaking underground storage tanks and spills from industrial land use may pose threats to groundwater.
- Concern expressed there are limited parameters that are typically tested for and that only nitrates, bacteria and arsenic are tested for when a new well is drilled.
- Concerns with the potential for groundwater-surface water interaction as it relates to both rivers and lakes. For example, the potential for nitrates or other pollutants in rivers and lakes getting into groundwater.
- Concerns with flowing wells and the loss of groundwater with flowing wells in Faribault, Freeborn and Blue Earth County.



PUBLIC MIDPOINT MEETING LE SUEUR RIVER WATERSHED ONE WATERSHED, ONE PLAN

Monday, April 4, 2022 - 5:30-8:00 p.m. Complimentary Food
Pemberton Main Street Plaza 141 4th Street, Pemberton, MN

JOIN THE CONVERSATION HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE WATERSHED

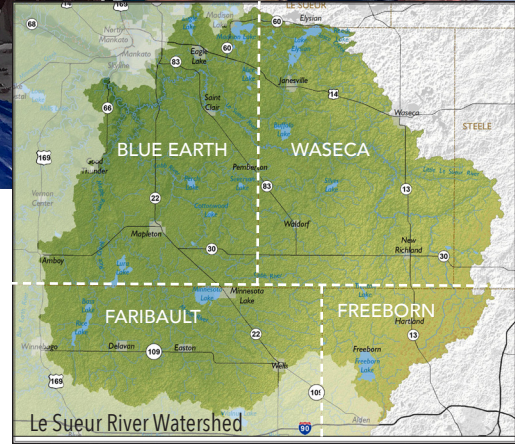
Get updated and weigh in on the planning progress for the Le Sueur River Watershed One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P). You'll have the opportunity to learn about progress on the plan and discuss resource concerns with watershed neighbors and local and state conservation partners. Citizens input at the beginning of the planning process (kickoff meeting) helped to shape plan content. You have the opportunity to review how citizen perspectives have been incorporated into the plan. The meeting will focus on strategies to address priority resource concerns. This planning effort is part of a statewide initiative to create a watershed-wide, science-based approach to water resource management. The plan will guide watershed planning and implementation over the next ten years.

YOUR INPUT IS NEEDED

Watershed partners want to learn from residents—your priorities and concerns. What river, lake and groundwater issues do you think the plan should focus on? What priority areas do you think should be focused on? What watershed improvement strategies can best address watershed challenges?

FOR MORE INFORMATION & SURVEY

There are two ways to provide input—at the meeting and online. Rather weigh in online? Visit the Le Sueur 1W1P website to fill out a [survey](https://www.co.waseca.mn.us/438/LeSueur-River-One-Watershed-One-Plan) or Learn more about the Le Sueur River Watershed 1W1P planning process: <https://www.co.waseca.mn.us/438/LeSueur-River-One-Watershed-One-Plan> What is a 1W1P? <http://bwsr.state.mn.us/one-watershed-one-plan> Le Sueur 1W1P Questions? Contact Waseca County Water Resource Specialist at 507-835-0615 or Haley.Byron@co.waseca.mn.us Midpoint Meeting Questions? Contact the Water Resources Center, Minnesota State University, Mankato at 507-389-5492 or Kimberly.Musser@mnsu.edu



AGENDA

- 5:30 pm Enjoy complimentary food and meet informally with watershed neighbors
- 6:00 1W1P–Planning Progress Update
- 6:45 Small group–Resource Concern 1
- 7:15 Small group–Resource Concern 2
- 7:45 Wrap-up
- 8:00 Adjourn

WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

The Le Sueur River Watershed planning partnership includes Blue Earth County, Blue Earth Soil and Water Conservation District, Waseca County, Waseca Soil and Water Conservation District, Faribault County, Faribault Soil and Water Conservation District, Freeborn County, and Freeborn Soil and Water Conservation District.

