

Strategic Plan



Approved

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HISTORY OF THE RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD: The Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB) is an organization initially created to address chronic flooding problems and other water management issues within the drainage basin of the Red River of the North. It is widely recognized that flooding occurs frequently along the mainstem of the Red River and its tributaries. Flooding has been and is the principal water problem in the Minnesota Portion of the Red River of the North Basin. The basin is particularly susceptible to severe flooding for two reasons: (1) Its flat topography, and; (2) The northward flow of the Red River. Spring thaws generally begin in the southern reaches, sending water to streams and rivers, restricted with ice in its northern reaches.

The majority of recorded and observed flood events originate from spring runoff. However, major summer flooding does occur with basin-wide impact (i.e., 1950, 1975 and 1993). Large historic floods were recorded in the basin in 1826, 1852, 1861, 1882, and 1897. Floods in 1950, 1966, 1969, 1975, 1978, 1979, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2019 have caused enormous economic and environmental disruptions.

Major basin-wide flooding causes extensive and costly damage to crop land, roads, bridges, towns, cities, and farmsteads along and adjacent to the mainstem and its tributaries. Various types of organizations have been created to address the flooding problems of the valley, however, most of these entities had only local jurisdiction. Until 1976, no Minnesota water management organization existed with a Red River basin-wide perspective. The Lower Red River Watershed Management Board (LRRWMB), later renamed the RRWMB, was created by an act of the Minnesota legislature in 1976 to provide an organization with a basin-wide perspective concerning flooding. Historically, the activities of the RRWMB have centered on flood control. Previous efforts in dealing with the flooding problem within the Red River Basin (RRB) consisted of single projects within a localized area, planned with primary regard to local benefits.

The RRWMB actively promotes a basin-wide perspective for water management. To date, the RRWMB has participated in over 40 floodwater retention projects in the RRB. Several more projects are under consideration by the RRWMB for financial support. Hydrologic water management studies have been undertaken by the RRWMB and others to provide an understanding of the characteristic flooding mechanisms of the basin, and to serve as a management tool for the purpose of assisting in making wise funding decisions. In 1980, the RRWMB commissioned a study that would ultimately have great impact on the Board's policy with respect to prioritizing flood control projects for financial support. This study, completed in 1984, established the concept of flood wave timing as a unique characteristic of RRB floods.

The premise of this concept is that the severity of flooding on the Red River mainstem is directly related to the time of travel of flood waves within the headwaters of individual contributing tributaries to the mainstem. The timing concept is used by the RRWMB to establish priorities in financing flood control projects with the most local and mainstem flood reduction benefits. The RRWMB policy for evaluating flood control projects was first articulated in its Project Evaluation Manual, dated November 16, 1976. This document was later updated under the title Application Procedures for Funding Flood Damage Reduction Projects and Related Programs and adopted by the RRWMB on January 15, 1991.

In addition to the name change in 1991, legislation expanded RRWMB authority to include projects and programs of benefit to the RRB. Some of these RRWMB initiatives have included the promotion of basin planning, water quality studies, data acquisition and educational programs and examples include but are not limited to:

- Developing a functional Geographic Information System (GIS) for the RRB to use as a tool for basin planning.
- Developing programs and materials intended to inform the public about natural resource management within the RRB.
- Funding and promoting planning on a watershed and basin-wide basis; funding water quality studies with the intent of understanding the relationship between land use and water quality.

- Cost sharing with the United States Geological Survey in the maintenance and operation of stream gaging stations
- Assisting other units of local government with an inventory of possible wetland restoration locations.
- Water supply.
- Funding for the initial development of the Red River Basin Board (RRBB).
- Funding and promotion of the River Watch program in conjunction with schools throughout the RRB.
- Supporting the mediation process.
- Developing broad-based LiDAR tools including the Project Planning Tool (PPT).

The RRWMB continues to provide a basin-wide perspective to water management in the RRB.

AUTHORITY UNDER LAW: In 1976, the Minnesota legislature passed legislation which enabled existing watershed districts within the Minnesota portion of the RRB to join together in a common effort under a Joint Powers Agreement to form the LRRWMB. This organization was created for the purpose of instituting, coordinating, and financing projects and programs to alleviate flooding and to assure the beneficial use of water in the watershed of the Red River of the North and its tributaries. The 1976 legislation gave the LRRWMB authority for "construction and maintenance of projects of common benefit," and also allowed member watershed districts to levy up to two mills ad valorem tax to be utilized for flood water retention projects.

One-half of the tax collected is retained by the individual member watershed district for projects within the district while the other half is transferred to the LRRWMB. Additional 1991 legislation changed the name of the LRRWMB to the RRWMB and redefined the authority of the Board to "...development, construction, and maintenance of projects and programs of benefit to the RRB." To conform with Minnesota Statutes Section 471.59 as amended in 1992, the current levy limitation is 0.04836 percent of the taxable market value of all property within the district.

As originally formed in 1976, the LRRWMB consisted of seven-member watershed districts (WD): Joe River WD, The Two Rivers WD, Roseau River WD, Middle River-Snake River WD, Red Lake WD, Sand Hill River WD, and the Wild Rice WD. In 1980, the Buffalo Red River WD joined. In 1994, the Bois de Sioux Watershed in the southern end of the RRB joined bringing the number of member districts to nine. The jurisdiction of the renamed RRWMB is limited to that of its member districts. However, the RRWMB does have the power to cooperate with authorities in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Manitoba and to enter into "contracts, compacts and agreements which may be necessary to ensure integration of its projects." Two watershed districts have left membership in the RRWMB since 2002. The Buffalo Red River WD left membership in 2002 and the Sand Hill River WD left membership in 2018.

The RRWMB presently holds quarterly meetings with the Red River Retention Authority (RRRA). The RRRA was formed on May 26, 2010 through a Joint Powers Agreement and is comprised of members of the Red River Joint Water Resource District, a North Dakota political subdivision, and the Red River Watershed Management Board, a Minnesota political subdivision. The primary objective of the RRRA is to ensure joint, comprehensive, and strategic coordination of retention projects in the Red River of the North watershed and facilitating implementation and construction of retention in the RRB.

The RRWMB also participates in activities of the RRBB. The RRBB was formed in 1997 by local, regional, and state/provincial interests in North Dakota, Minnesota, Manitoba, and South Dakota to develop a comprehensive plan for the Basin. In 2002, the RRBB joined with The International Coalition (TIC) and the Red River Water Resources Council (RRWRC) to form the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC).

PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS: The RRWMB has funded several education and information efforts over the last 20 plus years. One of the RRWMB primary educational programs is the River Watch Program, which is administered by the International Water Institute and this Program is strongly supported by the RRWMB. The RRWMB developed a Communication and Outreach Strategy in 2018 to share information about RRWMB activities and initiatives and this Strategy will guide how the RRWMB communicates into the future.

BACKGROUND OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS: The RRWMB initiated a phased Strategic Planning process to restructure and to develop a strategic plan approximately three years ago. The process has resulted in the hiring of a full-time Executive Director and Executive Assistant and the establishment of a permanent co-located office with the Wild Rice Watershed District in Ada, MN (Phase I). The RRWMB commenced Phase II of this Process in March 2018 at the joint annual conference with the Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group (FDRWG). During this event, a public input session was facilitated with over 90 individuals to gain input and comments regarding the RRWMB and FDRWG missions and future activities.

In April 2018, the RRWMB held a strategic planning session to discuss the results of the facilitated input session at the annual conference. The RRWMB Managers affirmed that they were committed to continuing the development of a strategic plan at this April 2018 session. The RRWMB Managers also held a special meeting in October 2018 to discuss potential funding of non-retention Flood Damage Reduction (FDR) and water quality projects. As a result, the Managers asked member watershed districts to bring forth non-retention flood damage reduction projects for consideration by the RRWMB for funding.

The Managers also directed staff at this October 2018 special meeting to develop a questionnaire to seek input regarding RRWMB priorities from all watershed districts within the Minnesota portion of the RRB. The RRWMB also distributed a document titled “Strategic Planning Process Results to Date – November 29, 2017 to September 5, 2018” to highlight and illustrate the work that was commenced or completed by the RRWMB during this reorganizational and restructuring timeframe. The RRWMB Managers discussed priorities for the future in June 2019 and asked for final input in July and August 2019 from member watershed districts and immediate stakeholders and partners. As a result of this input process and discussions by the RRWMB Managers, the RRWMB Strategic Plan was approved on December 17, 2019.

RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD VISION STATEMENT: We believe in and value a framework that works toward and achieves economic vitality, sustained economic growth for our population base, and enhanced natural resources for the future in the RRB of the North. We will: (1) Work with our members, partners, and stakeholders to implement this vision through the mission and objectives of the RRWMB as provided by enabling legislation and our strategic plan and with a basin-wide approach, and; (2) Work with our members to fund and implement projects related to flood damage reduction, and water quality to protect public and private investments in accordance with our governing documents, the 1998 Red River Basin Flood Mediation Agreement, and the 20 percent flow reduction strategy.

RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD MISSION: To identify, coordinate, and finance projects and programs to alleviate flooding and assure the beneficial use of water in the watershed of the Red River of the North and its tributaries.

RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE: The principal objective of the RRWMB is to assist member Watershed Districts with the implementation of water related projects and programs. The purpose of these projects and programs is: (1) The reduction of local and mainstem flood damages, and; (2) To enhance environmental and water resource management.

Projects and programs must be of benefit to the RRB and its member watershed districts in order to qualify for RRWMB funding. The principal objective of the RRWMB, as stated above, is derived from legislation passed in 1976 and 1991. This objective is also in direct support of the RRWMB's Mission Statement. In addition to the RRWMB's principle objective, the Board has adopted several supporting objectives listed in the table below. Taken as a whole, the principal and supporting objectives form an overall policy for the RRWMB.

RED RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BOARD SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES:

Supporting Objective	Description	Policy Statement
Coordination	Provide leadership for the coordination of projects and programs related to water management.	The RRWMB accepts this leadership role as a matter of policy.
Financial Support	Participate in funding initiatives which include projects and related programs that encourage consideration of mainstem benefits and enhance environmental and water resources.	Participate in funding of projects initiated by a member watershed district-initiated projects meeting RRWMB established criteria for financial support and other initiatives beneficial to the basin.
Basin Planning	Assist private, local, state, interstate, federal, or international water management and natural resource activities within the RRB, through coordination and assistance with implementation.	Assist planning efforts at all levels within the RRB. Committed to supporting basin planning efforts as a matter of Board policy.
Water Quantity	Support projects and programs for the alleviation of damage by floodwater, with an additional emphasis on maintaining low flow conditions for the aquatic environment and providing water supply for public use.	Support flood control and water conservation projects.
Water Quality	Provide assistance for studies, programs, initiatives and projects to improve water quality.	Support ongoing studies, initiatives, and programs for the improvement of water quality.
Erosion and Sedimentation	Provide assistance for studies, programs, and initiatives, including cooperative efforts with other agencies, to reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.	Support studies, programs, and initiatives conducted by federal, state and local agencies for the reduction of soil erosion.
Education	Support development of informational and educational programs related to water and natural resource management concerns.	Utilize education as a tool to inform the public on issues related to the conservation of water, soil, and the preservation and enhancement of natural resources in the Basin.
Research	Provide assistance for basic and applied research related to natural resources management within the RRB.	Commit to an administrative and financial role in supporting and sponsoring relevant research related to water and natural resource management within the RRB.
Public Information	RRWMB to inform the public of water management activities and concerns.	Promote a strong public information program to educate the public regarding its operations and initiatives.

Conflict Resolution	Work toward the resolution of conflicts regarding water management. The RRWMB is committed to the resolution of conflicts and methods to reduce conflict include, but are not limited to negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or legal action.	The RRWMB will commit itself to the speedy and efficient resolution of any conflicts related to managing the Basin's water resources.
Policies, Rules, and Regulations of Other Entities	Will comply with the policies and regulations of other governmental entities. Where inconsistencies in policies and regulations exist, the RRWMB will cooperate with the appropriate governmental entities in resolving the inconsistencies.	Adopt policies and regulations which are consistent with policies and regulations of other governmental entities, and to comply with the regulatory programs of these agencies.

PRIORITIES

1. **RRWMB MEMBERSHIP:** There are eleven organized watershed districts in the RRB of Minnesota. Seven of these watershed districts are part of the RRWMB through a joint power's agreement, which was established in 1976 by the Minnesota Legislature. Two watershed districts have left the RRWMB since 2003. The RRWMB believes that a unified voice through the RRWMB for all watershed districts in the RRB is beneficial and will commence efforts to increase membership. Without unity, we are fractured in the work we do to reduce flooding, enhance water quality, and to increase fish and wildlife habitat in the RRB.

A. Why is this a priority? Retaining and expanding RRWMB membership will provide a unified voice from the RRB on several issues related to legislative, congressional, and regulatory efforts. The RRWMB provides many services and benefits to its member watershed districts, which includes but is not limited to the following:

- Project and program funding through the RRWMB levy.
- Lobbying services related to policy and funding issues.
- A unified voice at the local, state, and federal level.
- Tracking of regulatory issues at all levels.
- Legal services for issues affecting all members.
- Funding for the RRBC, River Watch, USGS stream flow monitoring, and several other programs.
- Training and informational meetings through the joint annual conference with the FDRWG.
- Access to technical resources through the RRWMB Technical Advisory Committee.
- Constant communication related to or including RRWMB activities, legislative matters, RRWMB post-meeting highlights, meeting packets, and other regular business of the RRWMB.

B. What should be the goal(s) to achieve this priority?

- Regain past members, including the Buffalo Red River and Sand Hill River Watershed Districts.
- Gain new members, including the Pelican River and Cormorant Lakes Watershed Districts.
- Encourage the creation of an organized watershed district for the Ottertail watershed area.

C. What action steps are needed to achieve this priority?

- Start preliminary discussions with non-member watershed districts on benefits of membership upon approval of this strategic plan.

- D. When should these action steps be taken and what are potential timelines to achieve the priority?** The RRWMB will commence a membership drive after January 1, 2020.
- E. Who should be the lead for each priority?** The RRWMB President and Executive Director will work together on this issue including other interested RRWMB Managers.
- F. Are there are people or organizations such as partners or stakeholder groups that can assist to achieve priorities?**
- County commissioners.
 - Member watershed districts.
 - Cities.
 - Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD).
 - The RRWMB may also consider the creation of an advisory, non-voting committee to advise the RRWMB on specific issues. The Committee would meet one or two times a year.
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2. PROTECTION OF FARMLAND: The farmers in the Minnesota RRB produce several crops including but not limited to sugar beets, potatoes, corn, soybeans, wheat, barley, oats, sunflowers, dry edible beans, alfalfa, canola, annual rye grass, and other specialty crops. Agriculture is a primary driver of local economies and contributes to overall economic vitality in the Minnesota RRB. Protection of farmland is not just a concern for spring flooding and summer flooding during the growing season and excess moisture in the soil profile during fall harvest greatly impacts soil health, water quality, crop productivity, profitability, and local/regional economic vitality.

- A. Why is this a priority?** Landowners, who are also farmers, pay taxes to local governments including counties, townships, watershed districts, and the RRWMB. The RRWMB recognizes that taxes provide funding for Flood Damage Reduction (FDR) and drainage projects so that farmers can have adequate drainage and flood protection. Proper drainage and flood protection also allow farmers and landowners to increase productivity and profitability, which affects local economic vitality. The RRWMB mission, principal objective, and supporting objective are critical in meeting the flood protection and drainage needs of farmers and landowners.
- B. What should be the goal(s) to achieve this priority?** The 1998 Flood Mediation Agreement calls for reducing damages to agricultural lands from 10-year storm events and 25-year storm events when feasible at a minimal incremental cost. The Agreement also calls for the prevention of damage to farm structures, homes and communities. The following are goals to achieve this priority:
- The RRWMB will continue to work towards protecting farmland and damages to farm structures.
 - It is a goal of the RRWMB to primarily protect farmland and pasture and grassland areas for livestock foraging in the Minnesota RRB.
 - The RRWMB will work closely with its member watershed districts to prioritize these areas for protection and will defer to local plans for priorities.
 - The RRWMB will also work with agricultural stakeholder groups to gain better insights into farmland, pasture, and grassland protection needs.
- C. What action steps are needed to achieve this priority?** The 1998 Flood Mediation Agreement, local watershed district comprehensive plans, comprehensive local water management plans, One Water One Plans (1W1P), and other plans will provide additional prioritization for member watershed districts and the RRWMB. However, the following action steps are needed for this priority:

- The RRWMB will provide input and comment on draft 1W1Ps and other local water management plans when possible. Continue the RRWMB core mission of multipurpose water management that includes distributed water retention/detention, FDR activities, water quality, habitat, soil health initiatives, and Natural Resources Enhancements (NRE).
- Promote and fund actions related to 10-year cropland flood protection in accordance with the 1998 Flood Mediation Agreement.
- Promote and fund actions related to 25-year cropland flood protection in accordance with the 1998 Flood Mediation Agreement.
- Create relationships and increase interactions and communication with agricultural groups and gain their support related to this priority.
- Map 10-year flood areas for member watershed districts.
- Map 25-year flood areas for member watershed districts.

D. When should these action steps be taken and what are potential timelines to achieve the priority? This will be an ongoing effort and will continue into the future.

E. Who should be the lead for each priority? RRWMB, member watershed districts, counties, soil and water conservation districts, and townships, can work together to work towards actions to meet this priority.

F. Are there are people or organizations such as partners or stakeholder groups that can assist to achieve priorities? Member watershed districts, counties, and soil and water conservation districts will be the primary entities to meet the goal of farmland protection.

3. FUNDING: FDR, drainage, and habitat projects in the RRB are primarily funded through the RRWMB and local watershed district taxes. Projects funds may also be received through the State of Minnesota via the Outdoor Heritage Fund, Clean Water Fund, Flood Hazard Mitigation Program, and other local, state, or federal sources. While state funding has decreased in recent years and many urban areas are now protected, there is still a demonstrated need to protect agricultural lands and other public and private infrastructure related to drainage and transportation.

The RRWMB continually works with its member watershed districts to identify funding needs for multipurpose FDR projects. Financial needs often exceed the ability of local and RRWMB funds to cover all the costs for projects. The state Flood Hazard Mitigation Program has been a primary funder of projects in the RRB. However, at the time this Strategic Plan was developed, statewide needs for the Flood Hazard Mitigation Program were approximately \$293 million, with bonding years being every other year, and the funding request generally being only \$20 million in recent years

A. Why is this a priority? The RRWMB has several projects in its funding process at various phases. The RRWMB commits funds to projects being developed by member watershed districts and the RRWMB levy cannot entirely fund all projects. State and federal funds are limited but the RRWMB will continue to look towards leveraging funds for projects from all sources. Projects can and do incorporate NREs that also meet goals and objectives of several local, state, federal, regional, and international plans. The RRWMB will also consider partnerships with other stakeholders, both public and private.

B. What should be the goal(s) to achieve this priority? The RRWMB goals are to increase funding from the State of Minnesota and federal government and to work with other public and private partners collectively on projects that meet the mission of the RRWMB. The RRWMB will work towards better defining the need and purpose for funding for the following areas:

- FDR and water quality projects.
- Programs such as River Watch and stream flow monitoring.
- Research initiated or requested by the RRWMB related to FDR, flood and NRE economics, water quality, NREs, wetlands, and technical efforts.

C. What action steps are needed to achieve this priority? The RRWMB will:

- Annually review and update a five-year capital investment plan for projects funded by the RRWMB to determine and assess funding needs.
- Consider funding project development for member watershed districts for engineering, design, permitting, environmental review, and related project activities.
- Develop a funding strategy to provide a framework for the RRWMB to secure and leverage funds for projects of its member watershed districts.
- Create communication tools and messages to meet the goals for this priority.
- Seek additional funding for the River Watch Program and other educational programs.

D. When should these action steps be taken and what are potential timelines to achieve the priority? This will be an ongoing effort.

E. Who should be the lead for each priority? RRWMB staff including the RRWMB Legislative Liaison, the RRWMB Legislative Committee, and the RRWMB Budget and Finance Committee will be primary leads for this priority.

F. Are there are people or organizations such as partners or stakeholder groups that can assist to achieve priorities? We will work with legislators, the congressional delegation, Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, Association of Minnesota Counties, League of Minnesota Cities, Minnesota Association of Townships, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, state/federal agencies, and agricultural stakeholder groups in the RRB on this priority.

4. MULTIPURPOSE DRAINAGE WATER MANAGEMENT (DWM): Watershed districts in the RRB are tasked with implemented drainage law (Minnesota Statute 103E) related to public drainage project repairs, improvements, redetermination of benefits, and associated drainage initiatives. Public drainage projects provide benefits for landowners and farmers and these projects provide adequate outlets for private drainage. As a result, soil health can be better managed, and productivity and profitability can be enhanced. The RRWMB has adopted recommended guidelines for its member watershed districts related to surface drainage and sub-surface drainage. The RRWMB is not recognized as a drainage authority under Minnesota Statutes 103E.

In addition, the Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) commissioned the Basin Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee (BTSAC) to review, study and make recommendations related to how surface drainage and sub-surface drainage affects flooding in the RRB. Also, the FDRWG has developed several Technical Papers since 1998 and Technical Paper 11 relates to culvert sizing. These technical papers provide guidance to the RRWMB, watershed districts, counties, and townships as they make decisions about public and private drainage, culverts, and related matters in a unified and consistent manner. The RRWMB also developed a model set of watershed district rules for its member watershed districts to ensure a consistent approach to water management and unmanaged private drainage in the Minnesota RRB. These technical papers and RRWMB recommended guidance can be found at the RRWMB website at the following weblink: <http://www.rrwmb.org/Drainage%20Guidance.html>

A. Why is this a priority? Landowners and farmers pay taxes to the RRWMB and watershed districts in the RRB in addition to counties, townships, and other local governmental entities. The RRWMB recognizes the current farm economy is not conducive to investments in private drainage at the present time and that higher rates of return may come from greater investments in public drainage systems.

Public drainage projects take several years to implement from inception to construction and many processes and procedures must be adhered to according to state statute. Drainage management is a priority because flooding still occurs in the spring and during the growing season. Excess water in the soil profile can also greatly affect fall harvest operations, thus impacting soil health, productivity, profitability, and economic vitality, both locally and regionally.

B. What should be the goal(s) to achieve this priority? Adequate and equitable drainage is a key to economic sustainability of the RRB. Multipurpose DWM can work towards and can address altered hydrology, water quality, and habitat issues. The following are the goals for this priority:

- The RRWMB Supports the adoption of BTSAC recommendations and Technical Paper 11 across all drainage authorities in the Minnesota RRB.
- The RRWMB will also host an annual drainage conference for drainage authorities to share current information about technical, financial, legal, and implementation issues related to public and private drainage.
- State drainage rules and regulations will need continual/future assessment to ensure that drainage authorities are not limited in implementing proactive drainage solutions at the local level. The RRWMB will continue to participate on the statewide Drainage Work Group (DWG) to represent its member watershed districts.

C. What action steps are needed to achieve this priority? The RRWMB will do the following to achieve this priority related to drainage:

- Review the model watershed district rules in relation to drainage at least once every five years.
- Continue to hold an annual drainage conference.
- Request the FDRWG review Technical Paper 11 related to culvert sizing once every five years.
- Request the RRRA to review BTSAC recommendations every five years.
- Promote and encourage all drainage authorities to adopt Multipurpose Drainage Water Management techniques including culvert sizing, two-stage ditches, side water inlet controls and other drainage best management practices to enhance water quality and reduce downstream flooding.
- Fund multipurpose DWM practices of public drainage projects.
- Monitor drainage legislation and activity participate on the Minnesota DWG.

D. When should these action steps be taken and what are potential timelines to achieve the priority? This will be an ongoing effort.

E. Who should be the lead for each priority? RRWMB Managers and staff, RRWMB member watershed districts, and all drainage authorities in the Minnesota RRB.

F. Are there are people or organizations such as partners or stakeholder groups that can assist to achieve priorities? The RRWMB may partner with other organizations as needed.

5. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: The implementation of watershed projects can take several years from inception to construction and there several factors can affect this such as duplicative or onerous permitting processes, reduced funding, and technical issues. The 1998 Flood Mediation Agreement also provides for a Project Team Handbook, which illustrates a framework for local project teams. The RRWMB believes that there is great value in the local project team process and that projects in the Red River Basin of Minnesota go through a rigorous process to develop projects and to obtain funding. Regarding NREs, the RRWMB and its members need certainty about the types of NREs that are acceptable by state agencies.

- A. Why is this a priority?** Watershed districts have limited windows of opportunity and timeframes to align funding, permitting, and engineering/design, and land purchases with local, state, and federal funding and permitting processes. Also, climactic factors often affect the ability of projects to be completed. RRWMB levy income is also affected by market valuations and the overall economy in the Minnesota RRB and there are limited funds available for projects in the RRWMB funding process. The RRWMB has a funding process in addition to the FDRWG (Project Teams, Project Readiness Form, and Project Team Handbook) and the State of Minnesota Process to obtain Flood Hazard Mitigation funds. The RRWMB and its member watershed districts are held to a higher standard than the rest of Minnesota related to project readiness, funding, and permitting.

The RRWMB funding procedures includes several components including technical review by the RRWMBs Technical Advisory Committee, commitment of funding, the Step Process, Star Valuation, and the Project Evaluation Worksheet. The 1998 Mediation Agreement augments the RRWMB procedures with local project teams and the process provided in the Project Team Handbook and technical review by the Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee of the FDRWG.

B. What should be the goal(s) to achieve this priority?

- To obtain greater certainty about state and federal funding and permitting processes given the higher standard that is applied to projects in the RRB of Minnesota.
- The 1998 Flood Mediation Agreement discusses NREs, but greater discussion needs to be held with permitting agencies about the acceptance of the level and type of NREs, for designed/engineered and incidental NRES.

C. What action steps are needed to achieve this priority? The RRWMB will work with the FDRWG and other partners and stakeholders on the following:

- Plans to retain experienced permitting staff.
- Jointly sponsor training opportunities for technical and permitting staff related to permitting and technical issues.
- Consideration the development of “Generally Accepted NREs” by permitting agencies.
- Request state and federal agencies to determine priority NREs for the RRB of Minnesota and the type, amount, and location of NREs needed to meet water quality and habitat needs.
- More transparent information about the prioritization process for Flood Hazard Mitigation Grants.
- Work with the FDRWG to ensure that Technical Paper 14 is still valid.
- Request the FDRWG to complete tasks related to NREs.
- Mine data from past studies to inform decision-making.
- Work with the FDRWG to determine monitoring priorities.
- Determine research needs.
- Continue to annually fund TRRWMB Technical Advisory Committee activities.
- Review current technical tool usage by member watershed districts and determine if existing technical tools should be updated.
- Determine if new technical tools are needed.
- Host a forum or training event on current technical tools funded by the RRWMB.

D. When should these action steps be taken and what are potential timelines to achieve the priority? This will be an ongoing and continual effort.

E. Who should be the lead for each priority? The RRWMB and its member watershed districts will work with permitting agencies at all levels.

- F. Are there are people or organizations such as partners or stakeholder groups that can assist to achieve priorities?** The RRWMB will seek out additional assistance as needed for this priority area.
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6. FLOOD CONTROL AND PROTECTION OF INFRASTRUCTURE: The 2019 flood in the RRB illustrated a continued need for flood protection of public and private infrastructure. Since the 1997 flood, several urban areas and cities have largely been protected. However, agricultural lands, public and private drainage and transportation systems at all levels outside of urban areas across the RRB remain largely unprotected. Continued flooding disrupts traffic flow, increases the risk of infrastructure failure, places high demands on key emergency management personnel, and affects the safety and welfare of the citizens of the RRB.

A. Why is this a priority? While smaller rural populations continue a generally declining trend, there has been an exponential increase in the construction of private agricultural drainage, grain handling, and on-farm infrastructure. This investment by farmers and landowners has resulted in millions of dollars being allocated for private infrastructure. In addition, several private companies have invested significant financial resources into grain elevators and storage, fertilizer storage, and associated transportation infrastructure in smaller rural communities. The 2019 flood in addition to previous years of flooding in the RRB also showed us continued vulnerabilities in public transportation and all drainage infrastructure. Government agencies at all levels continue to update transportation and drainage infrastructure.

B. What should be the goal(s) to achieve this priority?

- It is the goal of the RRWMB to continue with flood protection at all levels as a core activity and to mitigate and reduce damages. The RRWMB will focus on protecting:
 - Transportation systems at all levels.
 - Farmland.
 - On-farm infrastructure.
 - Other public and private infrastructure located outside cities.
 - Cities where unfinished FDR work is left to complete.

C. What action steps are needed to achieve this priority? The RRWMB will commence discussions with public agencies at all levels related to:

- Obtaining more accurate information about public and private flood damages.
- Assessment of flood protection of aging public infrastructure at all levels by RRWMB partners. This also includes public wildlife and natural lands related to flood impacts.
- Consult with partners on FDR priorities related to infrastructure protection for public roads, bridges, culverts, and existing levees.
- Assessment of the need for additional ring dike funding for farmsteads and rural housing developments.

D. When should these action steps be taken and what are potential timelines to achieve the priority? This will be an ongoing and continual effort.

E. Who should be the lead for each priority? RRWMB and public infrastructure partners.

F. Are there are people or organizations such as partners or stakeholder groups that can assist to achieve priorities? The RRWMB will seek out additional assistance as needed for this priority area.

7. WATER QUALITY: During the process to obtain input on the RRWMB strategic plan, all Minnesota RRB watershed districts, partners, and stakeholders provided comments on priorities. Water quality was one area receiving the most attention from all commenters and through all commenting opportunities. Several local, state, regional, federal, and international laws, rules, statutes, and plans relate to water quality and the RRWMB has an opportunity to further expand its role into water quality and to obtain alternative or new funding sources for multipurpose FDR projects.

- A. Why is this a priority?** Member watershed districts are in the process of developing 1W1Ps with various partners. Future state funding for water quality will be directed towards completed 1W1Ps and the RRWMB can potentially leverage funds and provide additional financial resources for projects meeting the RRWMB mission. These local plans include several priority areas and in addition, there are many other plans at all levels that include water quality goals and priorities for action at the international border with Canada, Lake Winnipeg, the mainstem Red River, and tributaries. There is opportunity for the RRWMB to partner with cities and industries on NRE or water quality trading and to potentially tap into new or additional funding sources for multipurpose FDR projects. There is great opportunity for the RRWMB to be a leader in water quality in the RRB.
- B. What should be the goal(s) to achieve this priority?** The goal of the RRWMB is to support local efforts as identified in 1W1Ps or other local water and resource management plans that contribute to increased or enhanced water quality.
- C. What action steps are needed to achieve this priority?** The RRWMB approved the 2020 operating budget in July 2019 with a \$3 million allocation for water quality. The RRWMB Water Quality and Monitoring Advisory Committee is working on the development of process, procedure, guidance, and criteria to fund water quality projects for 2020 and beyond at the time this strategic plan was approved. The following are action steps for this priority area:
- Consider how to partner with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture on the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, which can be used to encourage increased adoption of agricultural practices upstream of FDR projects to reduce sedimentation, pollutant loading, thus potentially reducing FDR project operational, maintenance, and repair costs.
 - Consider an annual allocation to member watershed districts for water quality projects, which will help members and their partners leverage additional funds at all levels.
 - Consider the creation of an NRE trading system for the Minnesota RRB and work with partners, stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations.
 - Consider how to meet pollution reduction needs of cities, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit holders, and other governmental and private entities related phosphorus, nitrogen, TSS, and other water quality parameters.
- D. When should these action steps be taken and what are potential timelines to achieve the priority?** This will be an ongoing and continual effort. The RRWMB directed the RRWMB Water Quality and Monitoring Advisory Committee to start developing process, procedure, criteria, and guidance for water quality projects being proposed by member watershed districts. The Committee has met once and will continue to develop recommendations with the final product being projected to be presented to the RRWMB Managers for adoption in late 2019 or early 2020.
- E. Who should be the lead for each priority?** The RRWMB will be the lead and will request assistance from partners as needed.
- F. Are there are people or organizations such as partners or stakeholder groups that can assist to achieve priorities?** The RRWMB will seek out additional assistance as needed for this priority area.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS: The RRWMB will measure progress ongoing and when this strategic plan is updated after 2025. The RRWMB Managers will adjust this plan as needed and as conditions occur that affect the goals and action steps within this document.

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