

## **\*\*Draft Meeting Minutes\*\***

### **Big Fork Watershed – Policy Committee (Informational Meeting)**

**Date:** August 27, 2025

**Time:** 10:30 AM

**Location:** Hybrid (In-person + Virtual)

**Purpose:** Informational meeting only (no quorum)

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#### **1. Call to Order & Welcome**

The meeting was called to order by **Chair Cal (Itasca SWCD)**. Because the Policy Committee did not meet quorum requirements (4 members required), this session was held for information only and no action was taken.

#### **Introductions were made by:**

- **George Atchison**, SWCD Supervisor (Vice Chair)
  - **Chad Sieverts**, BWSR – Grant Manager
  - **Andy Arens**, Itasca SWCD Manager
  - **Jeff Hrubes**, BWSR Clean Water Specialist
  - **Jakob Sorensen**, Leech Lake Band, Water Program Manager – Policy Committee Member
  - **Jolene Simon**, County SWCD Program Coordinator
  - **Tom Nelson**, Itasca SWCD Supervisor
  - **Whitney Sims**, County Environmental Services
  - Additional staff and participants attending in person and via Zoom.
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#### **2. Approval of Agenda & June 11 Minutes**

- No additions to the agenda were requested.
  - June 11 minutes were available for review but could not be approved due to lack of quorum. They will be included for formal adoption at the next meeting.
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#### **3. Timeline & Process Review (Matt Gutzmann, SWCD)**

##### **Committees Overview:**

- **Policy Committee:** One representative per government entity in the MOA; makes formal decisions.

- **Steering Committee:** Staff from each partner unit; handles coordination and organization.
- **Advisory Committee:** Technical professionals and community stakeholders; develops issues, goals, and suggested actions.

#### **Budget Update:**

- Total grant budget: **~\$250,000**
- Spent to date: **~\$27,000** (~11%)
- Remaining: **~89%**
- Planning is on schedule and under budget. Some planning-related funds may be available for pre-implementation support (not construction).

#### **Planning Timeline:**

- **July 2025:** Public kickoff meeting held in Big Fork.
- **Aug–Nov 2025:** Monthly topic meetings (Lakes/Streams, Forests/Wetlands, Urban Stormwater, Farms/Groundwater).
- **Early 2026:** Consolidation of issues, goals, and priorities.
- **June 2026:** Internal draft plan review.
- **Late 2026:** Public comment, local approvals (SWCD Boards, County Boards, Tribal Council), then submission to BWSR.
- **Post-approval:** Eligibility for 10 years of WBIF implementation funding.

#### **4. Policy Committee Bylaws**

- Reviewed but **action deferred** to next meeting.
- Current bylaws include:
  - Meetings within watershed unless otherwise agreed
  - Simple majority votes with a quorum
  - 75% supermajority required for final plan adoption
- Chair: **Cal (Itasca SWCD)**
- Vice Chair: **George Atchison**
- Updated contact list will be distributed; Jakob Sorensen will be added to the Policy Committee list.

#### **5. Public Kickoff Meeting Summary (July 23, 2025 – Big Fork)**

##### **Attendance & Format:**

- Held at Big Fork Pizza Parlor
- Approx. 11 participants (public + staff)
- Posters and facilitated discussion on issues & priorities
- 14 watershed surveys completed (mix of paper & online); strong turnout from Turtle Lake residents

### **Key Themes from Public Survey:**

- **Top resource concerns:**
  - Lake and river water quality
  - Aquatic invasive species
  - Natural shoreline condition
- **Barriers to improvement:**
  - Lack of awareness of watershed issues
  - Need for more outreach and education
- **Public hopes for future:**
  - Maintaining high-quality water resources
  - Healthy forests and wetlands
  - Protection of wild rice and fisheries

## **6. Advisory Committee – Lakes & Streams Topic Meeting Summary (Aug 6, 2025 – Marcel Family Center)**

Approx. **30 participants** attended.

### **Process:**

- Overview of watershed conditions
- Sticky-note brainstorming captured digitally
- Issues grouped into major themes
- Participants prioritized themes using a voting process

### **Top Priority Themes Identified:**

1. **Lakeshore management**
2. **Forest protection**
3. **Nutrient reduction (phosphorus & nitrogen)**
4. **Septic system concerns**
5. **Wild rice health**
6. **Streambank erosion**
7. **Altered hydrology (ditches)**

( AIS was discussed but is not currently eligible for WBIF funding. )

### **Draft Actions Identified:**

Examples included:

- Shoreline restorations and natural buffers
- Forest stewardship planning
- Septic system outreach and potential cost-share
- Riverbank stabilization
- Wetland protection strategies
- Water monitoring and increased public outreach

All ideas remain open for additions; input is welcomed throughout the process.

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## **7. Public Question – Big Falls River Channel**

A participant raised concerns about a rumor regarding potential alteration or closure of a secondary river channel near Big Falls.

- Committee members were not aware of any such project.
  - Staff will look into the concern.
  - Clarified: 1W1P funding supports voluntary landowner conservation, not major channel modification.
  - Any such project would require substantial state review and is unlikely without clear ecological justification.
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## **8. Next Steps**

- Continue monthly topic meetings (Forests/Wetlands next).
  - Staff will follow up on contact list updates and any inquiries about the Big Falls river rumor.
  - Next Policy Committee meeting will include:
    - Approval of June minutes
    - Formal review and adoption of bylaws
    - Additional planning updates
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## **Adjournment**

Meeting concluded after discussion. No formal actions were taken due to lack of quorum.