

Lower Minnesota River South Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy Development Final Progress Report

Le Sueur County in partnership with:

Le Sueur Soil and Water Conservation District

Rice County

Rice Soil and Water Conservation District

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Table of Contents

1. Grant Project Summary
 - 1.1 Grant Funding
 - 1.2 List of Impairments within Lower Minnesota River Watershed
2. Executive Summary
 - 2.1 Problem
 - 2.2 Project Highlights
 - 2.3 Results
 - 2.4 Watershed Map
3. Section 1-Work Plan Review
 - 3.1 Summary of Changes
 - 3.2 Summary of Activities
4. Section 2-Grant Results
 - 4.1 Measurements
 - 4.2 Products
 - 4.2.1 Le Sueur County Fair
 - 4.2.2 Next Chapter Winery Meeting
 - 4.2.3 Soil and Water Conservation District Watershed Citizen Interviews
 - 4.3 Public outreach and education
 - 4.3.1 Questionnaires
 - 4.3.2 Next Chapter Winery Meeting
 - 4.3.3 Le Sueur County Fair 2017
 - 4.4 Long-term results
 - 4.4.1 Capacity Building
 - 4.4.2 Partnership and Alliances
 - 4.4.3 Lessons Learned
 - 4.4.4 Project Feedback
5. Section 3-Final Expenditures

1. Grant project summary

Project title: Lower Minnesota Watershed Wraps CE South
 Organization (Grantee): Le Sueur County Environmental Services
 Project start date: 9/20/2016 Project end date: 8/30/2018 Report submittal date: 9/18/2018
 Grantee contact name: Joshua Mankowski Title: Planning and Zoning Administrator
 Address: 515 South Maple Ave
 City: Le Center State: MN Zip: 56057
 Phone number: 507-357-8540 Fax: 507-357-8541 Email: jmankowski@co.le-sueur.mn.us
 Basin (Red, Minnesota, St. Croix, etc.)
 /Watershed & 8 digit HUC:: Minnesota 07020012 County: Le Sueur

Project type (check one):

- Clean Water Partnership
- Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)/Watershed Restoration or Protection Strategy (WRAPS) Development
- 319 Implementation
- 319 Demonstration, Education, Research
- TMDL/WRAPS Implementation

1.1 Grant funding

Final grant amount: \$32,000 Final total project costs: \$29,801.48
 Matching funds: Final cash: \$0 Final in-kind: \$0 Final Loan: \$0
 MPCA project manager: Bryan Spindler

1.2 List of Impairments within Lower Minnesota River Watershed

Reach name	Reach Description	River AUID	Affected designated use	Pollutant or stressor	TMDLStart/End Date
Buffalo Creek	Unnamed cr to High Island Cr	07020012-578	Aquatic life	Fishes Bioassessments	2014/2018
Buffalo Creek	Unnamed cr to High Island Cr	07020012-578	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Chaska Creek	Headwaters to Minnesota R	07020012-512	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
County Ditch 10	CD 3 to Raven Str	07020012-628	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
High Island Creek	Bakers Lk to Unnamed cr	07020012-654	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
High Island Creek	JD 15 to Bakers Lk	07020012-653	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
High Island Creek	Unnamed Cr to Minnesota R	07020012-589	Aquatic life	Fishes Bioassessments	2014/2018
High Island Creek	Unnamed Cr to Minnesota R	07020012-589	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
High Island Ditch 2	Unnamed cr to High Island Cr	07020012-588	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Judicial Ditch 1A	CD 40A to S Br Rush R	07020012-509	Limited Resource Value	<i>Escherichia coli</i>	2014/2018
Judicial Ditch 22	Unnamed cr to Silver Cr	07020012-629	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Minnesota River	Bevens Cr to Sand Cr	07020012-501	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Minnesota River	Bevens Cr to Sand Cr	07020012-501	Aquatic consumption	PCB in fish tissue	1998/2025
Minnesota River	Bevens Cr to Sand Cr	07020012-501	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Minnesota River	Carver Cr to RM 22	07020012-506	Aquatic consumption	PCB in fish tissue	1998/2025
Minnesota River	Carver Cr to RM 22	07020012-506	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Minnesota River	Cherry Cr to Le Sueur Cr	07020012-507	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Minnesota River	Cherry Cr to Le Sueur Cr	07020012-507	Aquatic consumption	PCB in fish tissue	1998/2025
Minnesota River	Cherry Cr to Le Sueur Cr	07020012-507	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Minnesota River	High Island Cr to Bevens Cr	07020012-502	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Minnesota River	High Island Cr to Bevens Cr	07020012-502	Aquatic consumption	PCB in fish tissue	1998/2025
Minnesota River	Le Sueur Cr to Rush R	07020012-504	Aquatic consumption	PCB in fish tissue	1998/2025

Reach name	Reach Description	River AUID	Affected designated use	Pollutant or stressor	TMDLStart/End Date
Minnesota River	RM 22 to Mississippi R	07020012-505	Aquatic consumption	PCB in fish tissue	1998/2025
Minnesota River	RM 22 to Mississippi R	07020012-505	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Minnesota River	Rush R to High Island Cr	07020012-503	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Minnesota River	Rush R to High Island Cr	07020012-503	Aquatic consumption	PCB in fish tissue	1998/2025
Minnesota River	Rush R to High Island Cr	07020012-503	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2008/2014
Minnesota River	Sand Cr to Carver Cr	07020012-532	Aquatic consumption	PCB in fish tissue	1998/2025
Ninemile Creek	Headwaters to Minnesota R	07020012-518	Aquatic life	Fishes Bioassessments	2024/2028
Porter Creek	Headwaters to Sand Cr	07020012-540	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Raven Stream	E Br Raven Str to Sand Cr	07020012-716	Aquatic Life	Chloride	2009/2015
Raven Stream, East Branch	Headwaters (Lk Pepin 40-0028-00) to Raven Str	07020012-543	Aquatic Life	Chloride	2009/2015
Raven Stream, West Branch	Headwaters (Rennenberg Lk 40-0088-00) to E Br Raven Str	07020012-715	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Riley Creek	Riley Lk to Minnesota R	07020012-511	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Rush River	M Br Rush R to S Br Rush R	07020012-548	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Rush River	S Br Rush R to Minnesota R	07020012-521	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Rush River, Middle Branch (County Ditch 23 and 24)	CD 42 to Rush R	07020012-550	Limited Resource Value	<i>Escherichia coli</i>	2014/2018
Rush River, North Branch (County Ditch 55)	Unnamed ditch to T112 R27W S17, east line	07020012-558	Limited Resource Value	<i>Escherichia coli</i>	2014/2018
Sand Creek	Porter Cr to Minnesota R	07020012-513	Aquatic life	Chloride	2009/2015
Sand Creek	Porter Cr to Minnesota R	07020012-513	Aquatic life	Fishes Bioassessments	2014/2018
Sand Creek	Porter Cr to Minnesota R	07020012-513	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Sand Creek	Raven Str to Porter Cr	07020012-538	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Sand Creek	T112 R23W S23, south line to Raven Str	07020012-662	Aquatic Life	Chloride	2009/2015
Sand Creek	T112 R23W S23, south line to Raven Str	07020012-662	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Unnamed creek	Goose Lk (10-0089-00) to Unnamed wetland	07020012-618	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Unnamed creek	Headwaters to Carver Cr	07020012-526	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Unnamed creek	Headwaters to Minnesota R	07020012-528	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Unnamed creek	Unnamed cr to Unnamed cr	07020012-579	Aquatic life	Fishes Bioassessments	2014/2018
Unnamed creek (East Creek)	Unnamed cr to Minnesota R	07020012-581	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Unnamed creek (East Creek)	Unnamed cr to Minnesota R	07020012-581	Aquatic life	Fishes Bioassessments	2014/2018
Unnamed creek (East Creek)	Unnamed cr to Minnesota R	07020012-581	Aquatic life	Turbidity	2014/2018
Unnamed creek (Lake Waconia Inlet)	Unnamed wetland to Lk Waconia	07020012-619	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Unnamed ditch	Burandt Lk to Unnamed Cr	07020012-527	Aquatic recreation	Fecal Coliform	2014/2018
Unnamed ditch	Burandt Lk to Unnamed Cr	07020012-527	Aquatic Life	Oxygen, Dissolved	2014/2018

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Problem

The Lower Minnesota River Watershed (LMRW) is the second largest watershed in the Minnesota River Basin at a size of 1,760 square miles, and encompasses the lowest reach of the Minnesota River. Eventually the Minnesota River joins with the Mississippi River in Saint Paul near the Fort Snelling historic landmark. The major tributaries that fall within the LMRW include: Rush River, High Island Creek, Bevens Creek, Carver Creek, Sand Creek, Nine Mile Creek, and the Credit River. There are numerous impairments found within the watershed. Water impairments for the Lower Minnesota River were documented as early as 1998 and still continue today in 2018. Ecoli, fecal coliform, chloride, turbidity, fishes bioassessments, PCB in fish tissue, and dissolved oxygen were listed as pollutants or stressors found within the LMRW. As part of the Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS), this report was assembled to highlight the civic engagement strategies within the watershed.

2.2 Project Highlights

Le Sueur County partnered with Le Sueur Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Rice County to collect information on civic engagement within the watershed. Meetings, interviews, conversations, and so forth were created and as a result summary reports on landowner's behaviors, beliefs, values, and participation within the watershed were produced. Outreach strategies and ideas were developed for the Lower Minnesota River Watershed as a group effort with Rice, Sibley, Nicollet, McLeod, and Le Sueur Counties.

2.3 Results

The LMRW Project is dependent on participation from landowners and citizens across the watershed as well as collaboration with local government staff in order to improve, protect, and restore the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. Conservation practices and water resource management are supported and accepted when individuals are able to discuss, reflect, and work together to solve problems. Le Sueur County and its partners that worked with the civic engagement projects during the WRAPS process will hopefully be able to provide effective guidance on future planning efforts for the LMRW.

2.4 Watershed Map

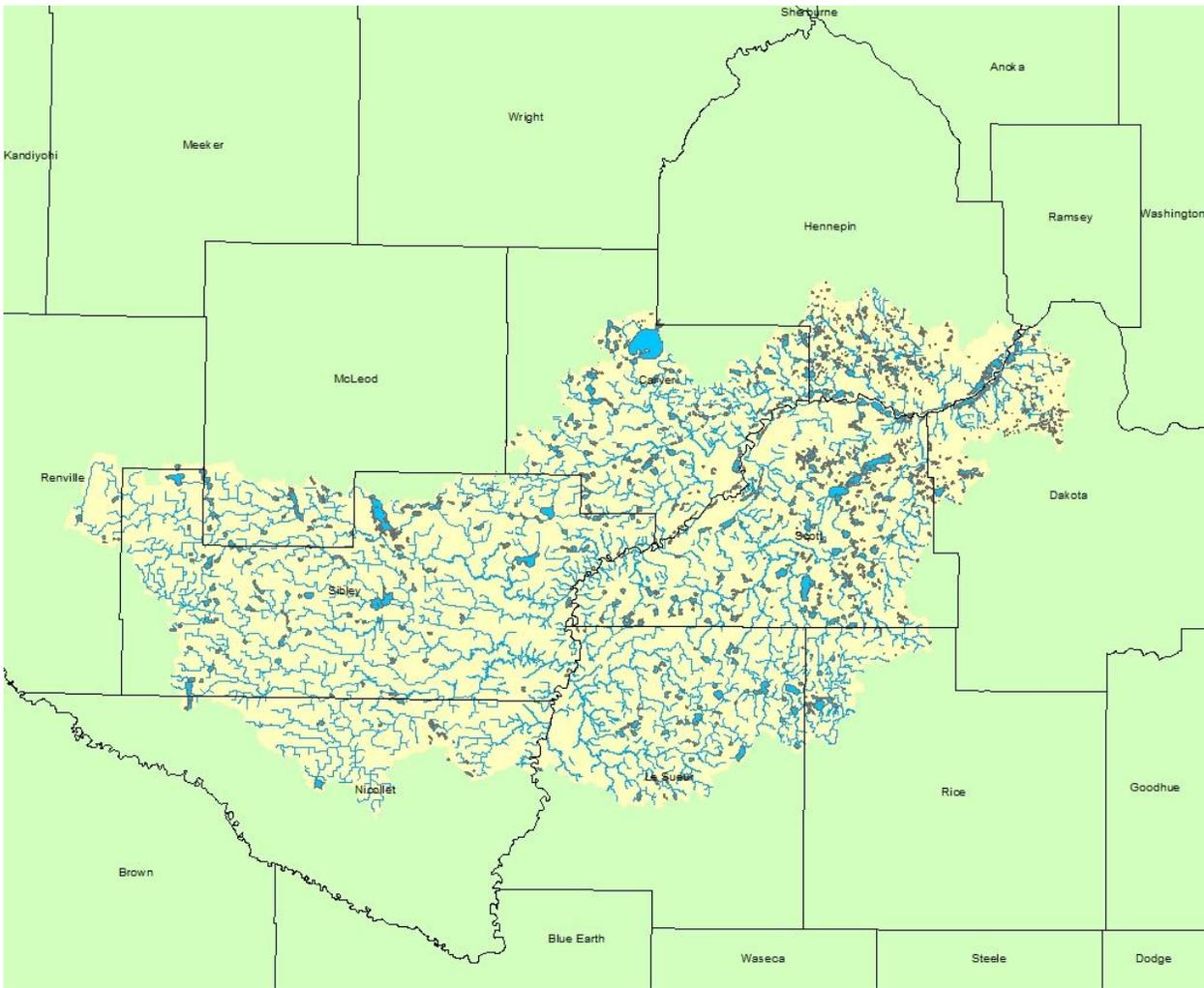


Figure 1. Lower Minnesota River Major Watershed.

3. Section 1-Work plan review

3.1 Summary of Changes

The Lower Minnesota River Watershed WRAPS South Project work plan and budget had undergone changes over the lifespan of the project. Staff turnover delayed required reporting. As a result, a two month extension was requested and approved for the submittal of the final report. In addition to changes in the work plan, the overall budget was adjusted as well. Additional funds were allocated to Le Sueur SWCD staff to complete the landowner interviews, and for the Le Sueur County Zoning Administrator to complete administrative tasks. In order to compensate for the additional funds being set aside for Le Sueur County and SWCD, a reduction in funds was completed for Rice and Le Sueur Counties mailings, printing, and postage. None of the tasks discussed in the work plan were affected due to budget alterations.

3.2 Summary of Activities-Objectives, Tasks, and Goals:

3.2.1 Objective 1: Community Engagement Team Planning.

Task A: Develop Community Engagement Activities. (Team Planning)

A few initial meetings were held with the civic engagement team in order to organize efforts and prepare timelines. During the lifespan of the project, additional meetings, phone calls, and emails were organized between Le Sueur SWCD and Rice County to discuss how to engage locals' values, beliefs, and perspectives in restoring and protecting the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. To aid with participation in the Next Chapter Winery event, mailing lists were combined with Le Sueur and Rice County. In order to have a successful interview process with landowners, Le Sueur SWCD spent time creating well thought interview questions and identified numerous candidates for interviews.

Task B: Attend Community Engagement Training

In the fall of 2016 and winter of 2017, focus group training workshops were held by the University of Minnesota Department of Forestry personnel. The main focus of these workshops was to teach LMRW partners how to collect data from focus groups. Knowledge was gained on how to utilize different survey methods as well as understand data collection. As a result, the LMRW partners were able to develop survey questions and mailing lists to be used for the WRAPS process.

Task C: Community Engagement Survey Input.

The U of M Department of Forestry staff needed assistance with developing landowner mailing lists for their survey. Staff from the LMRW (Sibley, Rice, McLeod, Nicollet, Renville, and Le Sueur) were able to help with the mailing list as well as provide input on the mail survey design and review of the survey questions.

3.2.2 Objective 2: Community Engagement Implementation.

Task A: Conduct Watershed Citizen Interview.

Le Sueur County SWCD met with 41 landowners in person to ask questions that were developed during the planning process. The six groups of questions that were discussed includes: farm and community, water resources, farm decision making, conservation practices, and background information. Many of the views that landowners shared were quite similar among the different groups of questions, but there also were differences. The results that were developed from these interviews provide important insights from the landowners and citizens within the LMRW. The knowledge,

information, and understanding that was acquired will help LMRW partners develop and create more effective planning of conservation efforts within the watershed.

Task B: Outreach Events.

The outreach events were held at the Next Chapter Winery and Le Sueur County Fair. In order to encourage attendance at the Next Chapter Winery WRAPS meeting, postcards were sent out to Le Sueur and Rice County residents that live within the watershed. In order to encourage participation at the Le Sueur County Fair, a WS model was purchased for citizens to engage in. During both of these events, questionnaires related to the LMRW were given to citizens for input.

3.2.3 Objective 3: Community Engagement Documentation.

Task A: Summarization of Community Engagement Activities.

Summaries were developed from the interviews that were conducted by Le Sueur SWCD and also for the questionnaires that were filled out from landowners that participated at the Next Chapter Winery and Le Sueur County Fair events. Reports were produced for each activity.

3.2.4 Objective 4: Project Administration.

Task A: Progress Tracking.

Public participation was measured and documented. Expenses and activities were tracked by Le Sueur County and SWCD.

Task B: Project Management.

Subcontractors filed reimbursement requests with Le Sueur County. Progress was tracked throughout the lifespan of the project.

4. Section 2-Grant Results

4.1 Measurements

Summary reports were developed on landowner participation and/ or adoption of conservation practices within the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. During the outreach and education events, questions were also asked about the behaviors, norms, beliefs, values, and future participation with water resource management and conservation practices within the Lower Minnesota Watershed. The data and results that were produced will help LMRW partners understand the reasoning behind conservation practice adoption or lack of among landowners.

4.2 Products

4.2.1 Le Sueur County Fair

For three days, Le Sueur County had a booth at the Le Sueur County Fair (August 2017). Educational materials were displayed at the table. Additionally, a questionnaire was handed out for individuals. Over 300 kids participated with the watershed model and learned about conservation and basic watershed dynamics. Approximately 150 adults were engaged in conversation about watersheds, but the majority of them chose not to participate in the survey (only 24 had filled out a survey). Important insights and information were gained.

Watershed Questioner

1. Do you live or own property in Le Sueur Co.? If not, what County/State do you Live?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other _____
2. What Watershed do you live/own property in?
 - a. Lower Minnesota River Watershed
 - b. Middle Minnesota River Watershed
 - c. Cannon River Watershed
 - d. Other _____
3. What do you believe are be the biggest factors impacting water quality where you live?
 - a. Increased, sever rain/weather events
 - b. Agricultural practices/runoff
 - c. Failing septic systems
 - d. Overdeveloped lots
 - e. Aquatic Invasive Species
 - f. Other _____
4. What, if any, conservation practices do you have in place on your property? Other Comments?

5. Are there any lakes, streams, or wetlands that you know to have problems in your area?

6. What water quality topics would you like to see discussed at future workshops and events?

Watershed Questioner (summary)

1. Do you live or own property in Le Sueur Co.? If not, what County/State do you Live?
 - a. Yes **14 (73.7%)**
 - b. No **5 (26.3%)**
 - c. Other _____
2. What Watershed do you live/own property in?
 - a. Lower Minnesota River Watershed **19**
 - b. Middle Minnesota River Watershed **5**
 - c. Cannon River Watershed **7**
 - d. Other **_3_** _____
3. What do you believe are be the biggest factors impacting water quality where you live?
 - a. Increased, sever rain/weather events **4 (21%)**
 - b. Agricultural practices/runoff **9 (47.4%)**
 - c. Failing septic systems **3 (15.8%)**
 - d. Overdeveloped lots **1 (5.3%)**
 - e. Aquatic Invasive Species **3 (15.8%)**
 - f. Other **4 (21%) Urban development, Lawn fertilizers, Flooding, Golf courses**
4. What, if any, conservation practices do you have in place on your property? Other Comments?
Slope stabilization, Restored wetlands, Conservation tillage, Organic dairy and farmland, drainage ponds, gutters to pervious surface, Water conservation, Grassed waterways, Buffers, none
Minnesota River, Mill Pond (Jordan MN), Lake Jefferson and Gorman Lake (Cannon River Watershed), and wetlands just in general.
5. Are there any lakes, streams, or wetlands that you know to have problems in your area?
6. What water quality topics would you like to see discussed at future workshops and events?
Zebra Mussels and Aquatic Invasive species in general, How to achieve clear water, Decreasing algae blooms, Improving Agricultural Practices (Buffers, Conservation tillage, Anhydrous and fertilizer application timing,

Cover crops, Flood prevention, Fertilizer reduction),
Water pollution in general, Urban lawn care, Drinking
water quality and protection. General comment - try
and incorporate this type of info in schools, especially
rural schools to help educate youth.

I attended the Le Sueur County Fair, August 17-20 and set up a table with watershed information and an Enviroscape model. The model was very popular with the youth, over 300 kids played with the model while learning about conservation and basic watershed dynamics. While most adults did not want to participate in the survey, I did speak to approximately 150 adults during the course of the fair. In general, people were interested to find out which watershed they lived in and where their water went. Most people had a very limited understanding of watersheds and found the information interesting.

General topics of concern:

- Flooding-need more water storage
- Recreational water usage-water quality
- Implementing/encouraging newer farming practices that have less impact (cover crops)
- Reducing urban impacts (lawn fertilizers, water storage)
- Increase education in schools

4.2.2 Next Chapter Winery Meeting

Another outreach event that occurred during the WRAPS process, was an informational meeting held at Next Chapter Winery. 3624 postcards were sent out to invite landowners located within Le Sueur and Rice Counties. 59 individuals had attended the meeting along with state and local staff. 10 individuals participated in the questionnaire. A presentation was created to explain the WRAPS process and why landowners were invited to the meeting. Important insights and information were gained.

Civic Engagement Questions Next Chapter Winery

1. How important are lakes and streams to you and your community?
2. Who do you think is responsible for protecting and improving water quality and why?
3. What, if any, Better Management Practices (BMPs) do you have implemented on your property? What other areas so you think would benefit from implementing different BMPs? What hurdles do you see in implementing these practices?
4. Would the following programs or conditions increase the likelihood that you would consider implementing a conservation practice?
 - a. Payments
 - b. Cost-share
 - c. Technical assistance
 - d. Success stories
 - e. Other
5. If you are interested in attending future workshops, what topic(s) would interest you the most?
 - a. Stormwater management at home
 - b. Landscaping for clean water
 - c. Clean drinking water
 - d. Ag BMPs for cleaner water
 - e. Other

Lower Minnesota River WRAPS Civic Engagement

Le Sueur and Rice Counties

11/30/2017

Next Chapter Winery

On Thursday, November 30th, an informational meeting was held at Next Chapter Winery in New Prague, MN from 3:00-5:00 pm. Please see agenda listed below. 3624 invitations were mailed to Le Sueur County (2325) and Rice County (1299) residence within the Lower Minnesota Watershed, of these 59 attended (46 from Le Sueur/13 from Rice). Also in attendance were various state and local staff.

At the conclusion of the presentations, those in attendance were asked the questions listed below. The number of each response is included. Only ten people replied to the questions.

6. How important are lakes and streams to you and your community?
Very Important (7). Somewhat important (1). Important (1).
7. Who do you think is responsible for protecting and improving water quality and why?
Landowners, LGUs (2), Homeowners, Agriculture. Everyone (8). Citizens.
8. What, if any, Better Management Practices (BMPs) do you have implemented on your property? What other areas so you think would benefit from implementing different BMPs? What hurdles do you see in implementing these practices?
Do our best with CRP, buffers, household waste, farm chemicals, burning weeds. Grassed Waterways (2) (cost is always a hurdle). Open the drainage systems, protect wetlands, buffer strips, bank stabilization projects, cost. Prevent washouts, regulation on cities and residential runoff, money. CREP (Cost and loss of productive land). CRP, SAFE (Cost). Trench tillage. CREP, Filter strips.
9. Would the following programs or conditions increase the likelihood that you would consider implementing a conservation practice?
 - a. Payments (5)
 - b. Cost-share (5)
 - c. Technical assistance (4)
 - d. Success stories (0)
 - e. Other (3. All the above)
10. If you are interested in attending future workshops, what topic(s) would interest you the most?
 - a. Stormwater management at home (2)
 - b. Landscaping for clean water (2)

- c. Clean drinking water (2)
- d. Ag BMPs for cleaner water (4)
- e. Other (2. Tips, Guides, and classes9tree planting, planting for habitat, weed control)

General Comments:

- Address erosion issues between Rice and Le Sueur Counties (Kilkenny Township).
- Need to implement a program to start testing water coming from tile lines.

LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WRAPS

Civic Engagement
Le Sueur & Rice Counties

What is a Watershed

- A watershed is the area of land where all of the water that drains off of it goes into the same place - a river, stream or lake.
- <https://youtu.be/QOrVotzBNto>

Lower Minnesota Watershed



What is a WRAPS?

- WRAPS = Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy.
- The State of Minnesota has adopted a "watershed approach" to incorporate **water quality assessment, watershed analysis, civic engagement, planning, implementation, and measurement of results** that addresses restoration and protection.
- Support local groups and jointly develop restoration and protection strategies to be used for future planning.
- Summarize watershed work that has already been completed.

What's Next

- Once the WRAPS document is completed, local Counties and SWCDs will work together to create water plans (One Watershed, One Plan) to implement the information that was collected in the WRAPS.
- Moving from water plans based on county borders to those based on hydrology.

Why are you here today

- Your input is pivotal to the WRAPS process.
 - Help determine the types of BMPs that are supported in the final plan.
 - Guide where future efforts for protection and restoration will be implemented.
 - What type of issues should be addressed in future plans (erosion, shoreland issues, hydrology, etc.).
 - Future developmental concerns.

Introductions

- Jon Lore (MN DNR)
- Mike Schultz (Le Sueur County SWCD)
- Joe Jirik (Le Sueur County SWCD)
- Jack Bushman (Le Sueur County SWCD)
- Steve Breaker (NRCS)
- Gary Kunz (FSA)
- Herman Bartsch (MDA)

4.2.3 Soil and Water Conservation District Watershed Citizen Interviews

Le Sueur County SWCD met with 41 landowners one on one to discuss questions that related to farm and community, water resources, farm decision making, conservation practices, and background information. The majority of participants, 88%, identified water resources as being important to their family, community, and themselves. Conservation practices have been adopted by 100% of the participants. The most common BMP adopted was terraces. The main driving force behind practice adoption was erosion issues. Most participants stated that the primary reason for lack of practice adoption was financially related. Overwhelmingly, it was mentioned that landowners had positive working relationships with agencies such as SWCDs, NRCS, and FSA. The information that was gathered will be used for future planning efforts in the watershed.

Lower Minnesota WRAPS Civic Engagement Le Sueur County

Landowner Interview

Interviewee: _____

Interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Your farm and your community

1. Define your community?
2. What does farming mean to you? How would you describe your farm to a friend?
3. What concerns do you have about your farm or farming in general? If you could change something about farming what would you change?
4. What do you like most about living here? What would you say are the biggest assets of your community?
5. Do you have any concerns about your community? Explain?
6. Has your community changed in the last 10 years? How so?

Broader community capacity

1. I'd like you to think of a time when your community or a group of community members came together to rally around some issues, opportunity, or problem? Please describe the situation to me. Who was involved? What was accomplished?
2. Are there certain individuals, groups, or organizations that are generally trusted by community members? What makes them trusted?

Water Resources

1. How important are local water resources such as streams and lakes to you and your family? Explain.

2. How important are local water resources such as streams and lake to quality of life in your community? Explain.
3. How would you describe water resources in this area? Do you have any concerns about water quality or access to clean water in the area? Explain.
4. Whose responsibility is it to keep water resources in this area healthy?

Farm decision making

1. How do you evaluate the success of your operation?
2. Have you changed the way that you farm in the past 5 years in attempt to make your farm more successful?
3. What are the most important decisions you have to make on your farm?
4. What are the most important considerations for you when making decisions about conservation practices on your farm? To what extent does the Farm Bill impact how you operate your farm?
5. Who are you trusted sources of information about farm management decisions? What makes them trusted?
6. Who are your trusted sources of information about conservation decisions? What makes them trusted?

Conservation Practices

1. When you think of agricultural conservation practices, what comes to mind?
2. Do you use any conservation practices on your land?
 - a. Please describe them for me?
 - b. What problems are you trying to address with them?
 - c. What first motivated you to use this practice?
 - d. How well are the practices working for you?
3. Are there other practices you've considered implementing? What has kept you from doing more implementation?
4. What do you see as the primary barriers or constraints to adopting these other practices? (List practices and corresponding barriers)
5. Would you be willing to try out any of these practices if those barriers could be addressed?
6. Would any of the following programs or conditions increase the likelihood that you would try out a new conservation practice?
 - a. Payments
 - b. Cost –share
 - c. Technical assistance
 - d. Stories from farmer who have had success with the practice
7. What has been your experience with the SWCD and/or NRCS?
8. What has been your experience with other governmental units?
9. When you want information or resources related to conservation practices, where do you go for help?

Background information

1. Do you own or rent most of your land?

2. Describe your farm operation. Acres owned/rented, tillage decisions, fertilizer/pesticide decisions, crop rotations, rollers, etc.
3. Do you treat rented and owned land differently?
4. How long do you plan to farm and who will farm after you retire?
5. Can we contact you in the future with more questions or information about upcoming events or anyone else you know?

Lower Minnesota WRAPS Civic Engagement - Le Sueur County

Summarized Landowner Interviews 8/27/2018

Description:

The Lower Minnesota River Watershed (LMRW) covers approximately 1,174,348 acres across southeast central Minnesota, spanning the terminal segment of the Minnesota River before it joins the Mississippi River, stretching 87 miles from rural Ottawa northeast to the doorstep of urban St. Paul. Counties included in the watershed include Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Le Sueur, McLeod, Nicollet, Ramsey, Renville, Rice, Scott, and Sibley counties. The LMRW in Le Sueur County (LSC) accounts for approximately 152,590 acres or 7.7% of the watershed. LSC has several watercourses in the watershed Le Sueur Creek, Forest Prairie Creek, Sand Creek, and many county ditches. The watershed is located in the north half of Le Sueur County and is part of Le Sueur, Le Center, Montgomery and New Prague and several lakes.

The Le Sueur County SWCD met with 41 landowners one on one to discuss six groups of questions ranging from farm and community, water resources, farm decision making, conservation practices and background information.

The information gathered will be used for future planning efforts in the watershed.

Findings:

Your Farm and Your Community

1. **Define your community?**

Summarized Response: Landowners, for the most part, related “community” to the city in which they are located nearest. Others defined their community as the group of

neighbors that surround them. Either way the majority defined their community as small, agricultural and rural.

2. **What does farming mean to you? How would you describe your farm to a friend?**

Summarized Response: 59% of landowners responded that farming is their livelihood and also replied their lifestyle. Many discussed the history and tradition of their farm.

3. **What concerns do you have about your farm or farming in general? If you could change something about farming what would you change?**

Summarized Response: There was not just one answer that stood out with this question and many farmers had more than a few concerns. Crop prices, government control, profit margins, small farmers declining to big businesses and land stewardship were concerns of the majority.

4. **What do you like most about living here? What would you say are the biggest assets of your community?** About one quarter of those interviewed still remain on the family farm and hope to keep the legacy alive. Others enjoy the peace and quiet of the country lifestyle.

5. **Do you have any concerns about your community?**

Summarized Response: Surprisingly 42% of landowners answered that they don't have any concerns about their community. The next most popular answer was the loss of businesses in their towns.

6. **Has your community changed in the last 10 years?**

Summarized Response: Loss of businesses was brought up but what was also interesting was the landowners concerns about having a local high school. Within the last 5 years, 3 communities combined school districts and now the high school is located in one of the towns, leaving the farmers to feel their community has nothing to offer new people to move there. Population was brought up by some but also mentioned was the feeling of strangers in the community and how the crime rate has grown.

Broader Community Capacity

1. **I'd like you to think of a time when your community or a group of community members came together to rally around some issues, opportunity, or problem? Please describe the situation to me. Who was involved? What was accomplished?**

Summarized Response: The two issues that most discussed were the combining of the schools and rallying to keep a town's local police department. A couple farmers brought up benefits held to help an injured landowner or trying to keep open the small church that their entire community worships in.

2. **Are there certain individuals, groups, or organizations that are generally trusted by community members? What makes them trusted?**

Summarized Response: One third of landowners answered that their local police force or the county sheriff's office was their most trusted groups in their communities. It may be noteworthy to learn the second most popular answer was "not applicable" which 25% of those surveyed answered.

Water Resources

1. **How important are local water resources such as streams and lakes to you and your family?**

Summarized Response: 88% of those surveyed answered very important! The others offered similar answers and only 1 landowner answered "not very".

2. **How important are local water resources such as streams and lakes to quality of life in your community?**

Summarized Response: 80% of landowners answered very and others had similar responses. There were a few remarks made that water resources were important to others and not themselves and not so important but the majority feel the importance.

3. **How would you describe water resources in this area? Do you have any concerns about water quality or access to clean water in the area?**

Summarized Response: Over half the farmers had no concerns about their quality of water while others felt measures need to be taken to secure the quality of water for the

future. These landowners talked about chemicals used in fields and on lawns and septic systems.

4. **Whose responsibility is it to keep water resources in this area healthy?**

Summarized Response: All questioned either replied everyone or their community.

Farm Decision Making

1. **How do you evaluate the success of your operation?**

Summarized Response: 71% interviewed feel their operations are successful. They all defined success in different ways. Some used the word financial success, some quality of life and their family working together meant success. One landowner said he feels successful if he makes it another year farming.

2. **Have you changed the way that you farm in the past 5 years in attempt to make your farm more successful?**

Summarized Response: The majority of landowners, 83%, have somehow changed the way they farm in the last 5 years. 44% have established conservation methods, some have reduced fertilizer or updated machinery for less tillage.

3. **What are the most important decisions you have to make on your farm?**

Summarized Response: Over half of those questioned said financial was the most important. Six mentioned selling grain and livestock as their most important which could be lumped in with financial. A few farmers said, "Everything"!

4. **What are the most important considerations for you when making decisions about conservation practices on your farm? To what extent does the Farm Bill impact how you operate your farm?**

Summarized Response: 69% of farmers said the farm bill impacts the way they farm. With financial being the majority's most important farming decision, they feel they need to comply with USDA programs and policies to ensure government payments.

Conservation decisions are based on costs and need. The farmer is much more likely to make a change towards conservation if he can see a financial benefit first.

5. **Who are your trusted sources of information about farm management decisions? What makes them trusted?**

Summarized Response: Almost all surveyed said either their local Coop, their farm management instructor or themselves as their trusted source on farm management. Many read farm magazines and listen to the farm channels for further information.

6. **Who are your trusted sources of information about conservation decisions? What makes them trusted?**

Summarized Response: 81% of landowners said that the Le Sueur County SWCD, NRCS and FSA offices are their most knowledgeable source for conservation. Others mentioned themselves, magazines and the University of Minnesota.

Conservation Practices

1. **When you think of ag conservation practices, what comes to mind?**

Summarized Response: Many farmers gave a long list of different types of practices. Terraces, CRP, buffers, waterways and no-till were the most common. Cover crop interest has grown. Windbreaks, residue management, alfalfa in rotation and organic farming were some others.

2. **Do you use any conservation practices on your land?**

Summarized Response: 100% of those surveyed replied that they use conservation practices on their land.

A: Please describe them to me?

Summarized Response: Terraces are the most common practice used by landowners in Le Sueur County due to the rolling hills in the watershed.

B: What problems are you trying to address with them?

Summarized Response: 81% replied they are addressing water erosion with their conservation practices and others said wind erosion and soil health.

C: What first motivated you to use this practice?

Summarized Response: Erosion was what first motivated the farmers to begin installing terraces. Some had poor crops and wanted to become better stewards of the land.

D: How well are the practices working for you?

Summarized Response: 96% answered that their practices are working good.

3. Are there other practices you've considered implementing? What has kept you from doing more implementation?

Summarized Response: Many of the landowners are curious about cover crops and would like to try them.

4. What do you see as the primary barriers or constraints to adopting these other practices? (List practices and corresponding barriers)

Summarized Response: Cost seemed to be the initial answer for seeding cover crops although landowners are hesitant because they would like more information on the benefits.

5. Would you be willing to try out any of these practices if those barriers could be addressed?

Summarized Response: Some of the landowners surveyed didn't respond to this question because they need more information on deciding what would benefit their land.

6. Would any of the following programs or conditions increase the likelihood that you would try out a new conservation practice?

A. Payments:

Summarized Response: 61% responded yes that payments would persuade them to try something new.

B. Cost-Share:

Summarized Response: 49% responded that a percentage of cost-share would help them with deciding on a new practice.

C. Technical Assistance:

Summarized Response: One quarter of those surveyed said they would be willing to install a new practice with just technical assistance from the SWCD.

D. Stories from farmer who had success with the practice:

Summarized Response: Interestingly more landowners responded they would try a new conservation practice if a farmer friend told them of their success than they would with technical assistance.

7. What has been your experience with the SWCD and/or NRCS?

Summarized Response: 96% have had a very good relationship with the SWCD/NRCS office and the others describe their experiences as fine.

8. What has been your experience with other government units?

Summarized Response: Half of those interviewed commented that their experiences were ok and the other half interviewed preferred not to answer this question.

9. When you want information or resources related to conservation practices, where do you go for help?

Summarized Response: 93% of farmers said they come to the Le Sueur County SWCD office for conservation related questions. Some said they will visit with their Agronomist or look in farm magazines.

Background Information

1. **Do you own or rent most of your land:**

Summarized Response: Over half of the landowners own their land, some own and rent 50/50 and a few just rent their land.

2. **Describe your farm operation. Acres owned/rented, tillage decisions, fertilizer/pesticide decisions, crop rotations, rollers, etc.**

Summarized Response: Over 76% of farmers have a corn/soybean rotation and cash crop. Very few have livestock, dairy is diminishing rapidly. Quite a few plant small grain and hay.

3. **Do you treat rented and owned land differently?**

Summarized Response: 78% of the farmers said they do not treat rented and owned land differently. The others that do treat the land differently is due to the fact that they are in rental contracts so chemical applications are the main reasons.

4. **How long do you plan to farm and who will farm after you retire?**

Summarized Response: 66% of farmers expect to have family taking over the farm, either a son/daughter or nephew. Farming is a lifestyle and many have no plans to ever leave or quit farming until they are physically incapable or pass away.

5. **Can we contact you in the future with more questions or information about upcoming events or anyone else you know?**

Summarized Response: All answered yes that they would be more than willing to visit with us.

4.3 Public outreach and education

4.3.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were created for the Next Chapter Winery Meeting and Le Sueur County Fair in order to have a better understanding of landowner involvement with water resources and conservation practices as well as their personal beliefs, values, and behaviors. Data that was collected will be included as part of the WRAPS process, and hopefully will help with future water resource management.

4.3.2 Next Chapter Winery Meeting

On November 30th, 2017 a WRAPS informational meeting was held at the Next Chapter Winery in New Prague, MN. Postcards were mailed to 3624 household located within Rice and Le Sueur Counties. During this event, 59 landowners attended. Additionally, NRCS, FSA, SWCD, MDA, MN DNR, and County staff attended the meeting. Topics that were discussed included: information about state and federal programs (CRP, CREP, EQIP, MAWQCP), cost share opportunities, basic information about the Lower MN Watershed and the WRAPS process, and why the participants were invited to the event.

4.3.3. Le Sueur County Fair 2017

From August 17-20th in 2017, Le Sueur County had educational materials (watershed model, AIS, etc.) and a questionnaire available for individuals to participate in. Information was gathered on landowner knowledge of water resources and participation with conservation practices within the LMRW.

4.4 Long-term results

4.4.1 Capacity Building

The results from the projects that were completed will help provide knowledge and understanding of how to get landowners, citizens, and others involved with practices that improve water quality within the Lower MN Watershed. Efforts were focused in both agriculture and urban settings. The public was able to provide a deeper insight on their views of water and the importance of how it impacts them. They were also able to reflect and report their struggles and reasoning behind practice adoption or lack of. The main messages that were taken from this project are listed as the following:

- Majority of landowners understand that water resources are important
- Need for more education and outreach for landowners on a variety of topics related to watersheds and conservation practices
- Lack of conservation practice adoption is due to:
 - Financial reasons
 - Need for Technical Assistance
 - Community leadership
- Cost-share and/or technical assistance is preferred when adopting BMPs
- Strong interest is expressed with landowners to implement some type of BMP (ex: cover crops)
- Many landowners have already implemented BMP's

4.4.2 Partnerships and Alliances

Le Sueur County and Soil and Water Conservation District enjoyed working with LMRW partners (Rice, Sibley, Nicollet, Renville, and McLeod counties), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and the University of Minnesota. Interactions at workshops, trainings, community activities, and so forth developed stronger professional relationships and provided noteworthy knowledge and information during the WRAPS process. As a result from this project, partners will be able to be more effective in communicating with other government entities and implementing conservation practices within the Lower MN Watershed. The activities and results that were included as part of this project will be used in the WRAPS document and will be an important resource for the One Watershed One Plan process.

4.4.3 Lessons Learned

One of the greatest lessons discovered with this project is just how much diversity occurs throughout the watershed. Differences occur by county and even within each county. These dissimilarities include things such as: farming practices that are used, types of BMPs favored/adopted, and views towards conservation and watershed management. Addressing these unique differences will be extremely important when trying to complete conservation activities, ideas, and goals that currently and/or will occur throughout the watershed. There also are similarities shared among the watershed when trying to understand the reasoning behind practice adoption or lack of.

4.4.4 Project Feedback

The civic engagement project work that was completed is important for the WRAPS process. Due to staff turnover, Le Sueur County had some delays when completing projects tasks. Using additional outreach and education tools and resources may have created better participation during the Le Sueur County Fair.

5. Section 3-Final Expenditures

Objective	Line Item	Budget	Invoice 3	Spent	Balance
Objective 1: Community Engagement Team Planning					
Objective 1A: Develop Community Engagement Activities	Personnel: LSC P&Z Admin	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 1A: Develop Community Engagement Activities	Personnel: LSC Water Resources Specialist	\$ 396.90	\$ -	\$ 396.90	\$ -
Objective 1A: Develop Community Engagement Activities	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Program Specialist	\$ 550.70	\$ -	\$ 550.70	\$ -
Objective 1A: Develop Community Engagement Activities	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Senior Tech	\$ 447.70	\$ -	\$ 447.70	\$ -
Objective 1A: Develop Community Engagement Activities	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD District Tech	\$ 321.90	\$ 321.90	\$ 321.90	\$ -
Objective 1B: Community Engagement Training	Personnel: LSC P&Z Admin	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 1B: Community Engagement Training	Personnel: LSC Water Resources Specialist	\$ 317.52	\$ -	\$ 317.52	\$ -
Objective 1B: Community Engagement Training	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Program Specialist	\$ 440.56	\$ -	\$ 440.56	\$ -
Objective 1B: Community Engagement Training	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Senior Tech	\$ 358.16	\$ -	\$ 358.16	\$ -
Objective 1B: Community Engagement Training	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD District Tech	\$ 257.52	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 257.52
Objective 1C: Community Engagement Survey Input	Personnel: LSC P&Z Admin	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 1C: Community Engagement Survey Input	Personnel: LSC Water Resources Specialist	\$ 396.90	\$ -	\$ 19.85	\$ 377.05
Objective 1C: Community Engagement Survey Input	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Program Specialist	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 1C: Community Engagement Survey Input	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Senior Tech	\$ 447.70	\$ -	\$ 447.70	\$ -
Objective 1C: Community Engagement Survey Input	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD District Tech	\$ 321.90	\$ 321.90	\$ 321.90	\$ -
Objective 2: Community Engagement Implementation					
Objective 2A: Conduct Watershed Citizen Interviews	Personnel: LSC P&Z Admin	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 2A: Conduct Watershed Citizen Interviews	Personnel: LSC Water Resources Specialist	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 2A: Conduct Watershed Citizen Interviews	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Program Specialist	\$11,895.12	\$8,040.22	\$11,895.12	\$ -
Objective 2A: Conduct Watershed Citizen Interviews	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Senior Tech	\$2,059.42	\$2,059.42	\$2,059.42	\$ -
Objective 2A: Conduct Watershed Citizen Interviews	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD District Tech	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 2B: Outreach Events	Personnel: LSC P&Z Admin	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 2B: Outreach Events	Personnel: LSC Water Resources Specialist	\$ 1,309.77		\$ 1,309.77	\$ -
Objective 2B: Outreach Events	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Program Specialist	\$ 550.70	\$ 330.42	\$ 550.70	\$ -
Objective 2B: Outreach Events	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Senior Tech	\$ 447.70		\$ 447.70	\$ -
Objective 2B: Outreach Events	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD District Tech	\$ 321.90	\$ 321.90	\$ 321.90	\$ -
Objective 2B: Rice Co Postage	750 mailings at up to \$0.50 per mailing	\$ 368.26		\$ 368.26	\$ -
Objective 2B: Le Sueur Co Postage	1320 mailings at up to \$0.50 per mailing	\$ 660.39		\$ 660.39	\$ -
Objective 2B: Rice Co Printing	750 printings at up to \$0.61	\$ 159.23		\$ 159.23	\$ -
Objective 2B: Le Sueur Co Printing	1320 printings at up to \$0.61	\$ 265.71		\$ 265.71	\$ -
Objective 2B: Supplies	Meeting Refreshments/Supplies, WS Model	\$ 930.31		\$ 930.31	\$ -
Objective 2: Mileage	Commissioner's Rate	\$ 1,026.77	\$ 367.33	\$ 566.04	\$ 460.73

Objective 3: Community Engagement Documentation					
Objective 3A: Summarization of Activities	Personnel: LSC P&Z Admin	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 3A: Summarization of Activities	Personnel: LSC Water Resources Specialist	\$ 1,786.05	\$ -	\$ 992.25	\$ 793.80
Objective 3A: Summarization of Activities	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Program Specialist	\$ 1,101.40	\$ 1,101.40	\$ 1,101.40	\$ -
Objective 3A: Summarization of Activities	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Senior Tech	\$ 895.40	\$ 895.40	\$ 895.40	\$ -
Objective 3A: Summarization of Activities	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD District Tech	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 4: Administration					
Objective 4A: Progress Tracking	Personnel: LSC P&Z Admin	\$ 360.99	\$ 154.71	\$ 154.71	\$ 206.28
Objective 4A: Progress Tracking	Personnel: LSC Water Resources Specialist	\$ 595.35	\$ 396.60	\$ 595.35	\$ -
Objective 4A: Progress Tracking	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Program Specialist	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 4A: Progress Tracking	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Senior Tech	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 4A: Progress Tracking	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD District Tech	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 4B: Project Management	Personnel: LSC P&Z Admin	\$ 825.12	\$ 721.98	\$ 721.98	\$ 103.14
Objective 4B: Project Management	Personnel: LSC Water Resources Specialist	\$ 2,182.95	\$ 1,607.45	\$ 575.50	\$ 2,182.95
Objective 4B: Project Management	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Program Specialist	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 4B: Project Management	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD Senior Tech	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Objective 4B: Project Management	Subcontracting: LSC SWCD District Tech	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total:		\$ 32,000.00	\$ 15,608.98	\$ 29,801.48	\$ 2,198.52