DRAFT ISSUES PRIORITIZATION BY THE SRWMO BOARD

Draft excerpt from 2020-2029 SRWMO Watershed Management Plan Draft date: 11/15/2018

Some criteria the SRWMO considered when selecting criteria included:

- Whether the issue was supported by stakeholder and agency comments.
- Whether the SRWMO can solve the issue.
- Whether others are already addressing the issue.

Please note that even the "low priority" items are priorities. These are items that are less urgent, being addressed by others, or for other reasons will receive less energy from the SRWMO. It should not be interpreted to mean that these topics deserve no work.

1.1.1 HIGH PRIORITY ISSUES FOR THE SRWMO

Lake and stream water quality

- Good quality, near-impairment lakes and streams need to be maintained or improved to avoid more costly future restoration. Recreational waters are a top protection priority. Coon Lake is a noted priority for protection efforts.
- Impaired waters do not fully support swimming, fishing and other uses. Recreational waters are a top restoration priority. Linwood, Martin and Typo Lakes are noted priorities for restoration.
- Non-recreational waters that drain to recreational waters affect the water quality in those recreational waters, and are a management priority.
- Some tributary ditches or wetlands, such as Ditch 20, contribute high nutrient loading to downstream lakes.
- Landlocked non-recreational waters, particularly those without public access are lower priority, but the SRWMO still recognizes some responsibility.
- Implement recommendations in the Sunrise Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS), impaired waters studies, and One Watershed One Plan.
- Lakeshore stewardship should be improved for water quality and habitat.

Water monitoring

- Monitoring is needed at recreational waterbodies to provide trend analysis and inform management.
- No monitoring is currently done at non-recreational waters or those without public access. Basic monitoring of transparency or other parameters by volunteers would help guide future management.

Funding

- The amount of water resources and problems in the watershed are not commensurate with local funding. >55% of the watershed is wetland, lake, or stream, approximately 38% is public lands, and development is relatively light so tax base is small. Yet water resources are abundant and some are in poor condition. The cost to bring all SRWMO impaired waters into

compliance with State water quality standards exceeds $10.5 million (assumes $1,000/lb phosphorus reduced and 10,355 lbs of phosphorus reductions needed per completed TMDL studies; excludes mercury fish tissue impairments).
- Grants are available to funds projects, but require planning, local matching funds and active pursuit to secure the funds.
- Communicating work outcomes to funding sources, including the general public, is needed to continue or increase funding.

Communications with member communities

- The SRWMO is not well known by some local elected officials. Communication of SRWMO roles, collaboration opportunities and accomplishments need to be better communicated.
- SRWMO Board members are critical liaisons between the city and SRWMO.
- Ham Lake is the one SRWMO community that does not have a city council representative assigned to the SRWMO.
- Member community staff are a valuable resource for SRWMO projects and collaboration, and interaction should be more frequent.
- Community projects are only eligible for State Watershed Based Funding if they are included in the SRWMO Plan.
- Cost savings and efficiencies can be achieved when city and SRWMO projects are "piggybacked" on each other.

Outreach and education

- Behavioral change is needed to address some water quality issues, such as lakeshore stewardship benefitting water quality and habitat.
- Resident awareness of the SRWMO and projects is needed to garner community support, including funding support from member communities.

1.1.2 MEDIUM PRIORITY ISSUES FOR THE SRWMO

Aquatic invasive species

- Prevent new infestations.
- Control of existing infestation is important and led by lake groups with minimal SRWMO involvement.
- Native plants should viewed as beneficial.

Septic systems

- Failing septic systems have been identified as a contributor to impaired waterbodies and may also impact non-impaired waters that the SRWMO has prioritized protecting.
- Member communities have septic system regulatory programs however educational outreach and financial assistance to fix septic systems is low.

Development

- Stormwater runoff and discharge can increase during development, affecting downstream water quality and quantity.

- New development or land use conversion could fragment or remove high quality natural communities, the loss of which has incremental negative impacts on water quality and community character.
- Shoreline development affects fisheries and water quality.
- Public landowners like DNR and county parks are potential partners for managing lands for water quality and habitat.

Multi-partner coordination

- The SRWMO jurisdictional area does not follow watershed boundaries to the north and east. Watershed-level management requires working with upstream and downstream neighbors.
- The Lower St. Croix One Watershed One Plan includes the SRWMO and provides a new opportunity for regional management through partnerships.
- Many projects require multiple partners for full funding or community support. Partnerships with lake groups.

Stormwater management

- Stormwater runoff contributes pollutants to priority waterbodies. Waterbody degradation would be expected if stormwater is not minimized and treated.
- Untreated storm water discharges to some lakes are known. Stormwater retrofitting projects have been identified and ranked around Martin Lake and Coon Lake.
- Predominantly sandy soils provide good opportunities for stormwater infiltration practices.

Groundwater

- Due to soils and geology, drinking water in the SRMWO is vulnerable to contamination. Protecting clean drinking water is a priority for the SRWMO.
- Water pumping, including construction dewatering, can interfere with nearby wells.
- Groundwater management, particularly of quantities, requires regional management often beyond the scope of a single WMO, but the WMO can be a collaborator.

Administrative efficiencies

- The SRWMO has no staff except part time contracted help, so simple and efficient administration is desired. Member community staff can sometimes offer expert assistance with finance and other topics, but their available time is limited. Board members have limited time to administer the WMO.
- The SRWMO needs to ensure minimum standards it sets are being implemented by communities without creating administrative burdens.
- Regulatory consistency across the SRWMO is desired.

Chlorides

- Chlorides in lakes and streams from road deicing, water softeners and other sources is a regional concern for aquatic life. As a regional issue, the SRWMO will provide support in addressing it, but not be a lead.
- SRWMO waterbodies have not been monitored for chloride to assess the problem fully.

1.1.3 LOWER PRIORITY ISSUES FOR THE SRWMO

Ditching/drainage

- Some ditches in the watershed have been infrequently cleaned, which can generate complaints. The SRWMO's role in this topic is limited because the county is the public ditch authority and ditch maintenance programs require expenditures well beyond the SRMWO's capacity.
- The SRMWO is concerned that cleaning of ditches that have been long-neglected could unintentionally degrade water quality.

Climate change

- Stormwater facilities should be designed to accommodate storm frequencies and intensities in a changed climate.

Water quantity

- Flooding problems are not known in the SRWMO, but should be examined if they develop.

Fisheries

- Game fisheries are important and managed by the MN DNR.
- At Coon Lake the walleye program agreement between the lake group and DNR expires in 2018.

Wildlife habitat

- Wildlife habitat is important and managed by multiple authorities including the MN DNR and private landowners.