

# Root River Watershed: Pioneering a new era in water management

June 2015 Snapshots

In April 2014, Fillmore, Houston, Mower, Winona, Olmsted, and Dodge Counties and their Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), along with the Crooked Creek Watershed District, submitted a nomination to be a part of a new era in water management in Minnesota: One Watershed, One Plan. The new program represents a shift in local planning from largely political boundaries to planning that follows watersheds.

One Watershed, One Plan has foundations in the Local Government Water Roundtable, in which the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASCWD), and the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD) committed to collaboration. The One Watershed, One Plan program, developed in 2013 and funded by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, offers grants and assistance to local governments charged with water management responsibility to help them make the transition to water planning on a watershed scale.

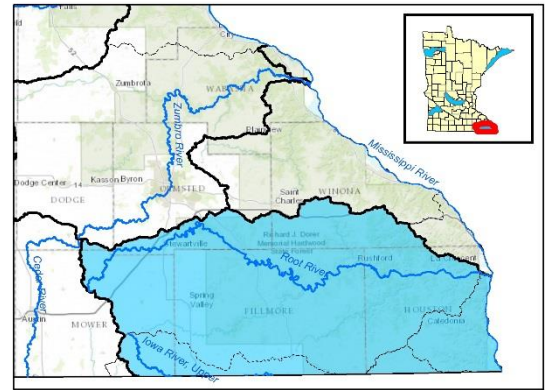
In June 2014, the BWSR Board approved the Root River Watershed 1W1P nomination, and the hardworking folks in the Root River Planning Boundary hit the ground running. In the last nine months, the group has worked collaboratively to identify priority concerns and finalize the project plan.

“They’ve still got work ahead of them,” said BWSR Board Conservationist Tom Gile, who is working with the group on their plan. “However, this collective group of local government staff and officials has already done a fantastic job of showing how a large group of diverse backgrounds and interests can come together for a common cause.”

Root River Watershed hosted an official public kickoff and open house at the Fountain Community Center on April 8, 2015. Close to 100 engaged citizens attended the kickoff event, which was widely publicized in local and regional news outlets. Donna Rasmussen, the Fillmore SWCD Administrator, says the event generated some great discussion and the opportunity to help community members understand the benefits of this shift in approach.

“The timing was right for the counties in this watershed to come together and tackle this type of planning,” Rasmussen said. “We’re optimistic that by working together we’ll be able to better coordinate and prioritize our work so that conservation practices on one end of the watershed complement work being done on the other end. Ultimately, that’s a more efficient use of our resources and better for water management throughout the watershed.”

More and more Minnesotans are starting to recognize the need to talk about water quality, quantity, and management. The Root River One Watershed, One Plan pilot project is pioneering Minnesota’s water future, setting the groundwork to permanently improve water quality across Minnesota.



*Residents sign-in at the April public kick-off.*