



## Legislative Water Commission

Barb Huberty, Director

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March 16, 2015  
Room 5, State Office Building  
Meeting Minutes

Members Present:

Sen. Scalze – Chair  
Rep. Torkelson – Co-Chair  
Rep. Bly  
Sen. Chamberlain  
Sen. Dahms  
Rep. Fischer  
Rep. Johnson  
Sen. Ruud  
Sen. Wiger

Members Excused:

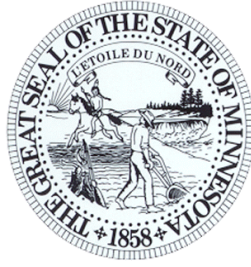
Rep. Dean  
Rep. Hamilton  
Sen. Schmit

Senator Bev Scalze called the meeting of the Legislative Water Commission (LWC) to order at 6:05 pm on Monday, March 16, 2015 in Room 5 of the State Office Building. A quorum was present.

Senator Ruud moved approval of the minutes for the February 9, 2015 meeting. THE MOTION PREVAILED.

Senator David Bly, District 20B, was introduced as a new LWC member. His District includes parts of Rice and LeSeur counties and the City of Northfield.

Warren Formo, Executive Director of the Minnesota Agricultural Water Resources Coalition (MAWRC), explained that MAWRC is made of up 24 agricultural organizations, some of which



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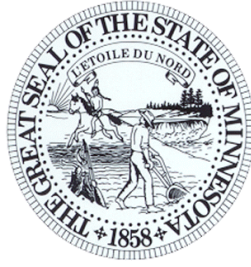
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the LWC has already heard from. These organizations represent 50,000 farms and agricultural professionals. MAWRC hosts educational outreach activities for farmers and their members sponsor research so that farmers can have relevant and useful information upon which to make their decisions. MAWRC administers the Discovery Farms program that demonstrates state-of-the-art practices as outdoor classrooms. MAWRC started the Green Star Farms Initiative and collaborates with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) for Best Management Practice (BMP) implementation. Their monitoring efforts focus on nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment. They reference the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's (MDA's) annual pesticide reports, since that is a more expensive parameter to analyze. Recommendations to the LWC from MAWRC:

- Visit some Discovery Farms
- Solicit specialists for in-depth presentations on crop insurance and conservation programs
- Find opportunities for farmers and cities to learn from each other and work together (e.g., Root River Field to Stream Project or Seven-Mile Creek Project, near St. Peter)
- Review MAWRC activities at [www.mawrc.org](http://www.mawrc.org)

Ray Bohn, Administrator of the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD) explained that watershed districts were authorized by statute, starting in 1955. There are now 47 watershed districts throughout the state. In 1985, the surface water statute (103B) provided for Watershed Management Organizations (WMOs) in the metro area. By statute, Watershed Districts can be established for many reasons, including: flood control, stream channel improvement, reclaiming or filling wetlands, water supply management, regulating stream flow, diverting water courses, sanitation, using water courses for waste discharge, establishing and managing drainage systems, addressing erosion and siltation of ditches, making riparian improvements, producing hydroelectric power, and protecting groundwater. Usually, watershed districts form via petition for a particular reason. Watershed districts have taxing authority, with the levy amount based on land value and utilizing a county's property tax process. They coordinate with each other, SWCDs, and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).

LeAnn Buck, Executive Director of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) made a presentation about their organization's role. Kurt Beckstrom, Mille



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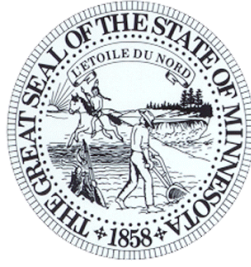
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Lacs County SWCD Supervisor for 30 years and Vice Chair of MASWCD was present to answer questions. LWC members were reminded that state agencies have limited ability to conduct activities at the local level, particularly on private lands. SWCD authorization comes from MN Stat 103C. They develop ten-year comprehensive plans (on a staggered schedule) to construct and implement conservation practices, share in the cost of projects with landowners, and conduct demonstration projects. Their operational funding comes from counties, they can charge fees for services and obtain grant funding for projects. They are staffed by resource professionals, are governed by an elected board of supervisors, and partner with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Farm Services Agency (FSA), and BWSR. LeAnn confirmed that SWCDs have an elected board and no taxing authority and that WDs have taxing authority without an elected board. Not all SWCDs have equal access to funding, staffing, and technological resources. The human relationship, boots-on-the-ground part of their job is most important. Key points to the LWC from MASWCD:

- It is not desirable to have any districts to be at a resource disadvantage
- Budgets are very challenging, leading to entry level staff, inadequate staffing levels, lack of staff continuity, staff time being diverted to obtain grants for funding; SWCDs need stable funding
- Districts would like to be able to fund their plans with their priorities, not just chase after grants; local priorities may not be the same as the biennial state priorities.

Ray and LeAnn spoke briefly about One Watershed-One Plan, which took 2 years to develop the plan for 4 pilot projects where SWCDs, WDs, and counties are collectively planning, each focusing on their area of expertise in a way that provides more cohesiveness and eliminates competitiveness.

Matt Wohlman, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture (MDA), described the MN Agriculture Water Quality Certification Program, which was created in statute in 2013 and appropriated \$3M from the Clean Water Fund. Jared and Kelsey Nordick, whose Discovery Farm near Rothsay was the first MAWQCP certified farm, were present to answer questions. MDA and its partners developed a certification process that includes an application, assessment, field verification and certification. It involves a contract between the certified producer and the State of MN that outlines the duties needed to retain certification and that



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defines the regulatory certainty to which they are entitled. Since the program was launched in 4 pilot watersheds in July 2014, 31 farms were certified representing 12,800 acres and 84 new conservation practices. If MN can find a match, they will receive \$9M from the NRCS to continue the program at a larger scale; likely in west-central MN. The conservation practices used on the Nordick farm were described and Jared explained how conservation is an important family legacy. They liked the assessment tool, which helped them see how their conservation practices measured up and they like the legal certainty provision.

Barb Huberty, LWC Director, shared 3 MDA handouts at the recent Nitrogen Conference in St Cloud that were included in member packets explaining: the Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Plan, the Proposed Rule on Nitrogen Fertilizer Use, and the Byron Township Forest-to-Field Water Quality Study. She also provided an update on the tally and evaluation of water bills introduced as of 3/11/15.

The next meeting date was set as Monday, April 13 at 6 pm, with the understanding that there may be a need to cancel if attendance is poor due to standing committee conflicts. There will be no May meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 pm.