

FINAL Clean Water Council Strategic Plan for 2024-2028

Adopted 26 February 2024

The Clean Water Council is a state advisory council created as part of the Clean Water Legacy Actⁱ (CWLA) in 2006. The Council's purpose is to advise on the implementation of the CWLA, and to foster coordination and cooperation among state agencies and other stakeholders and partners. In addition, in 2009, the Council was assigned the task of recommending how to use the Clean Water Fund, which is one-third of the dedicated sales tax revenue generated from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

This strategic plan is not a comprehensive plan for all water activities in Minnesota. It focuses on activities within the Council's statutorily defined roles for the Clean Water Legacy Act and the Clean Water Fund. Purposely left out of the plan are most point source activities that are governed by permits or other requirements or are supported by other major funding sources (landfills, large feedlots, manure management plans, leaking storage tanks, PFAS work funded by 3M settlement, etc.) Therefore, the strategies and actions listed under each goal in the plan below will not be the only activities in Minnesota to meet the goals.

Several previous efforts provide the foundation for this plan, including Minnesota's [Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#) (NRS), the [2014 Clean Water Road Map](#), the [2011 Minnesota Water Management Framework](#), and the [Nonpoint Priority Funding Plan](#) produced by the Board of Water and Soil Resources, and others.

Much of the plan focuses on priorities for using the Clean Water Fund (CWF). In January of odd-numbered years, the Council must submit recommendations for the use of the CWF to the Legislature.

[Statutory guidance and planning](#) since 2008 have outlined several criteria for prioritizing the use of the CWF. Primary among them is [constitutional language](#) that the CWF must *supplement* existing funding and not *supplant* it.

The Clean Water Council also requests that all agencies incorporate their stated principles for diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or environmental justice into Clean Water Fund-supported programs. In addition, the Council also requests that these programs indicate any interaction between Clean Water Fund-supported programs and the state's Climate Action Framework.

Groundwater Vision: Groundwater is clean and available to all in Minnesota.

Goal 1: Protect groundwater from degradation and support effective measures to restore degraded groundwater.

- Strategy: Develop baseline data on Minnesota’s groundwater quality, including areas of high pollution sensitivity.
 - Action: *Complete groundwater atlases for all Minnesota counties.*
 - Measure: All Part B atlases completed by 2038.
 - Action: *Monitor ambient groundwater quality throughout the state.*
 - Measure: Updates from MPCA Groundwater Monitoring Program.
 - Action: *Characterize nitrate and pesticide contamination in vulnerable aquifers.*
 - Measure: Vulnerable aquifers mapped via Township Testing Program, Central Sands Private Well Network, and Southeast Minnesota Volunteer Nitrate Monitoring Network.
 - Action: *Characterize natural and synthetic contaminants in groundwater.*
 - Measure: Locations with high concentrations of natural contaminants mapped.
 - Measure: Groundwater monitoring performed as appropriate for contaminants of emerging concern.
- Strategy: Develop and carry out strategies that will protect and restore groundwater statewide.
 - Action: *Complete plans and fund activities for protection and restoration of groundwater statewide using a major watershed scale*
 - Measure: Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategies (GRAPS) completed for all 60 One Watershed One Plan boundaries.
 - Action: *Reduce risk of bacteria in groundwater.*
 - Measure: 80 percent compliance rate maintained for subsurface septic treatment (SSTS) systems with a stretch goal of 90 percent, as recorded in MPCA’s annual SSTS report.
 - Measure: Financial assistance provided for low-income households to replace and repair individual SSTSs.
 - Measure: Demand met for under-sewered or unsewered small communities for long term solutions using Small Community Wastewater Treatment Program’s intended use plan.

- *Action: Reduce nitrate contamination of groundwater.*
 - Measure: Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Plan implemented in priority townships with vulnerable groundwater by assessing agricultural practices, forming local advisory teams, and publishing recommended practices that are adopted on 80% of row crop acres excluding soybean by year 2030, and implemented in all remaining townships by year 2034.
 - Measure: Alternative land management activities supported that protect groundwater such as easements, perennials, and market-based continuous living cover.
 - Measure: Guidelines regularly updated to understand impacts of nitrogen application.
 - Measure: Support provided for irrigation management outreach, update to state irrigation BMPs, and irrigation water management endorsement from Minnesota Agricultural Certification Program (MAWQCP).
 - Measure: No additional wells exceed maximum concentration levels.
 - Measure: Nitrate levels declining in private well testing by 2034.
 - Measure: Nitrate levels declining in 100% of public water wells by 2030.
- *Action: Reduce risk of pesticide contamination in groundwater.*
 - Measure: Ambient groundwater quality wells maintained through MDA pesticide monitoring program.
 - Measure: Outreach, demonstration sites, and technical assistance provided for recommended pesticide BMPs.
- *Action: Reduce risk of stormwater contaminants entering groundwater.*
 - Measure: Stormwater research that is protective of groundwater supported, with findings scaled to meet state needs.
 - Measure: Assistance provided to NPDES/MS4 permittees to enhance compliance.
 - Measure: Priority unused groundwater wells that present a risk to drinking water aquifers are sealed.

Goal 2: Ensure groundwater use is sustainable and avoid adverse impacts to surface water features due to groundwater use.

- Strategy: Support ongoing monitoring of groundwater quantity.
 - *Action: Maintain network of long-term groundwater monitoring wells and add wells as needed.*
 - Measure: 50 monitoring wells installed annually.
 - *Action: Identify groundwater-dependent lakes; streams; calcareous fens, and wetland complexes.*
 - Measure: Data provided to water planners for development of WRAPS, GRAPS, and comprehensive watershed management plans.

- Strategy: Develop a cumulative impact assessment and support planning efforts to achieve a sustainability standard for groundwater.
 - *Action: Prioritize areas of high water use intensity.*
 - Measure: Groundwater Management Areas (GWMA), highly sensitive areas, and areas of high water use intensity from agricultural irrigation are designated.
- Strategy: Develop and carry out strategies that promote sustainability of groundwater use
 - *Action: Implement water efficiency BMPs, water use reduction, and irrigation water management in areas of high water use intensity by agricultural irrigators, highly sensitive areas, Groundwater Management Areas (GWMAs), and highly vulnerable Drinking Water Source Management Areas (DWSMAs).*
 - Measure: DNR has tools needed to address conflicts on use of groundwater for economic and ecological purposes.
 - Measure: Monitoring wells have upward trend or no change in all six groundwater provinces.
- Strategy: Identify options that will accelerate progress to achieving a sustainable groundwater standard in line with circular water economy principles.
 - *Action: Clean Water Council Policy Committee biennial policy recommendations.*
 - *Action: Research and foster support for circular water economy practices.*

Drinking Water Source Protection Vision: Drinking water is safe for everyone, everywhere in Minnesota.

Goal 1: Public Water Systems--Ensure that users of public water systems have safe, sufficient, and equitable drinking water.

- Strategy: Identify and reduce risks to drinking water sources by investing in technical training, planning, coordination, and source water protection grants.
 - *Action: Assist public water suppliers in completing Drinking Water Source Protection Plans (DWSPPs) and support implementation projects listed in the plans.*
 - Measure: All 900+ DWSPPs complete for groundwater public water systems.

- Measure: All source water assessments for 23 surface water systems complete.
 - Measure: Source water protection plans complete for non-community public water systems.
 - Measure: Funding available for half of budget requests in DWSPPs.
 - *Action: Provide goals for drinking water protection.*
 - Measure: Statewide drinking water plan complete.
- Strategy: Support the Ground Water Protection Rule (GPR).
 - *Action: Support implementation funding and technical assistance to reduce nitrate in DWSMAs that are Level 1 and Level 2 under the GPR.*
 - Measure: Public water suppliers at Level 1 or Level 2 under the GPR do not exceed the drinking water standard for nitrate by 2034.
- Strategy: Support prevention efforts to protect groundwater in DWSMAs.
 - *Action: Fund protective actions that assist public water suppliers in meeting safe drinking water levels.*
 - Measure: Approximately 400,000 acres of vulnerable land surrounding drinking water wellhead areas statewide are protected by 2034.
 - Measure: Landowner adoption of practices that protect drinking water through technical assistance, conservation equipment support, financial assistance, easements, drinking water protection/restoration grants, targeted wellhead protection grants, market-based living cover, soil health grants, etc.
- Strategy: Support prevention and management of newly identified contaminant risks.
 - *Action: Fund Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CEC) program.*
 - Measure: At least 20 chemicals are screened each biennium.
 - *Action: Fund adequate monitoring and assessment activities to examine emerging risks.*
 - Measure: River and lake monitoring assessment, ambient groundwater and drinking water monitoring supported, with enough contingency for rapid response.
- Strategy: Identify policy options that will accelerate progress to achieving federal safe drinking water standards.
 - *Action: Clean Water Council Policy Committee will make annual policy recommendations.*

Goal 2: Private Water Supply Wells—Ensure that private well users have safe, sufficient, and equitable access to drinking water.

- Strategy: Identify risks to and fund testing of private well water.
 - *Action: Support a ten-year effort to give every private well user the opportunity to test for five major contaminants, with an initial focus on areas most vulnerable to contamination.*
 - Measure: Private well testing offered for 10 percent of private well users each year for 10 years.
- Strategy: Support selected mitigation activities for private well users.
 - *Action: Assist all well users with information on how to achieve safe drinking water.*
 - Measure: All private well users offered education on mitigation options as needed.
 - *Action: Assist qualifying low-income households and households with vulnerable populations to mitigate contaminants, such as well replacement, water treatment systems, etc.*
 - Measure: Grant program reports from MDH.
 - *Action: Provide favorable financing to qualified households to mitigate contaminants.*
 - Measure: Loan program report from Agricultural Best Management Practices Loan Program from MDA.
- Strategy: Identify policy options that will accelerate the reduction in the number of unsafe private wells.
 - *Action: Clean Water Council Policy Committee will make annual policy recommendations.*

Surface Water Protection and Restoration Vision: Minnesotans will have fishable and swimmable waters throughout the state.

Goal 1: Monitor, assess, and characterize Minnesota’s surface waters.

- Strategy: Maintain consistent funding for a statewide monitoring system.
 - *Action: Continue to monitor and assess on 10-year cycle and for emerging contaminants.*
 - Measure: Completion of second monitoring and assessment cycle.
 - Measure: Reports on contaminants of emerging concern as needed or requested.
 - *Action: Complete Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) reports as needed.*
 - Measure: Publication of TMDL reports by the MPCA.

Goal 2: Protect and restore surface waters to achieve 70% swimmable and 67% fishable waters by 2034ⁱⁱ via by prioritizing and targeting resources by major watershed.

- Strategy: Identify and refine strategies required to meet water quality standards in each HUC-8 watershed.
 - *Action: Review and revise previously completed Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS)*
 - Measure: Completion of second generation of WRAPS.
 - Action: Quantify water storage needs and opportunities within each HUC 8 watershed.
 - Measure: Acre feet storage goals are set for each watershed by 2026.
 - Measure: Storage opportunities and hydrograph estimates are complete by 2028.
- Strategy: Prioritize waters for protection and restoration using comprehensive watershed management plans (One Watershed One Plan or other approved plans)ⁱⁱⁱ updated every ten years.
 - *Action: Support local efforts to support those impaired waters that are closest to meeting state water quality standards.*
 - Measure: Lists of “barely impaired” waters shared with local watersheds as they prepare comprehensive watershed management plans or other approved plans.
 - Measure: List of “barely impaired” waters that show improving trends on an annual basis.
 - Measure: Percentage of lakes meeting goal for recreation activities reaches 70 percent by 2034.
 - Measure: Percentage of rivers and streams meeting healthy fish community values reach 67 percent by 2034.
 - *Action: Use the Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) model to fund protection and restoration in watersheds that have an approved comprehensive watershed management plan or other approved plan.*
 - Measure: Annual BWSR WBIF grant cycle.
 - Measure: Occasional review of allocation formula.
 - *Action: Support efforts to protect those high-quality unimpaired waters at greatest risk of becoming impaired.*
 - Measure: Comparison of “nearly impaired” waters from across the state identified by WRAPS.
 - Measure: Comparison of “nearly impaired” waters list with prioritized waters in comprehensive watershed management plans or other approved plans.
 - Measure: List of “nearly impaired waters” as well as healthy waters that see no change or no degradation on an annual basis.
 - *Action: Restore and protect water resources for public use and public health, including drinking water.*
 - Measure: List of waters with high public use that show improving trends or no degradation over time.
 - Measure: List of projects that show connection to Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs).

- *Action: Track completion of activities for priorities in each comprehensive watershed management plan*
 - Measure: Pilot tracker tool developed to show implementation progress against goals, followed by regional and then statewide deployment.

Goal 3: Protect and restore surface waters to achieve 70% swimmable and 67% fishable waters by 2034 via through statewide, regional, or issue-specific programs that help meet water quality goals but are not necessarily prioritized and targeted according to geography.

- Strategy: Enhance compliance for regulatory programs to accelerate progress
 - *Action: Maintain compliance rates for subsurface sewage treatment systems (SSTS) at 80 percent with a stretch goal of 90 percent.*
 - Measure: MPCA Annual SSTS Report.
 - *Action: Reduce risk of stormwater contaminants entering surface water.*
 - Measure: Point source discharge permits incorporate gains from stormwater pollutant reductions.
 - Measure: Minnesota Stormwater Manual updated regularly.
 - *Action: Support small unsewered or under-sewered communities for long-term wastewater solutions.*
 - Measure: Small or no backlog for Small Community Wastewater Treatment.
 - *Action: Support wastewater treatment plants and stormwater projects seeking to meet tighter Total Maximum Daily Load requirements.*
 - Measure: Adequate support of Point Source Implementation Grant (PSIG) program.
 - Action: Ensure adequate monitoring of NPDES permits.
- Strategy: Support competitive grants for protection and restoration activities.
 - *Action: Provide opportunities for competitive grants that meet statewide priorities.*
 - Measure: Annual grant funding round by BWSR for competitive grants to address statewide priorities.
- Strategy: Identify policy options that will accelerate the protection and restoration of surface waters.
 - *Action: Clean Water Council Policy Committee will make annual policy recommendations.*
 - Measure: Biennial policy recommendations.

Vision: All Minnesotans value water and take actions to sustain and protect it.

Goal 1: Build capacity of local communities to protect and sustain water resources.

Goal 2:

- Strategy: Maintain and increase capacity of Minnesotans to improve water quality.
 - *Action: Support local efforts to engage farmers in water quality efforts.*
 - Measure: Number of farmers and acres enrolled in Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, with a target of 5,100 farms and 6.5 million acres by 2030.
 - Measure: Number of acres with continuous living cover, with a target of five million acres by 2034.
 - Measure: Targets for nutrients in the state's Nutrient Reduction Strategy.
 - Measure: Number of acres enrolled in permanent easements.
 - Measure: Increasing number of renters and non-operating landowners participating in water quality efforts.
 - Measure: Net increase in number of structural conservation practices.
 - Action: Engage private well users to test their wells for five major contaminants.
 - Measure: Higher percentage of private well users choose to test their wells and mitigate any issues.
 - *Action: Engage non-traditional audiences with water planning and implementation.*
 - Measure: Collaborations with state agencies and their equity efforts.
 - Measure: Evaluation of We Are Water exhibit and its outreach.
 - Measure: Non-state or local government interested parties participating in local water management planning and watershed implementation funding requests.
 - *Action: Support local efforts to engage lakeshore property owners and private landowners.*
 - Measure: Number of property owners enrolled in Lake Steward program.
 - Measure: We Are Water annual report.
 - Measure: Additional in-lake treatment and restoration projects proposed and funded for competitive grants.
 - Measure: Protection of 100,000 acres and restoration of 100,000 acres in the Upper Mississippi River headwaters basin by 2034.
 - Measure: Council recommends shoreline protection policy.

- *Action: Engage chloride users.*
 - Measure: Number of snow removal contractors and public works departments who are Smart Salting certified and make measurable reductions in chloride use.
 - Measure: Number of communities educating their residents about inefficient water softeners increases.
 - Measure: No increase in chloride concentration in metro rivers and streams over time.
- *Action: Engage water managers statewide.*
 - Measure: SWCDs, WDs, WMOs, drainage authorities, highway departments, municipalities, and counties have the skills necessary to carry out programs to meet water quality goals.
- *Action: Support innovative efforts that accelerate progress toward clean water goals.*
 - Measure: Acres of income-generating continuous living cover planted.
 - Measure: Stormwater research identifies scalable solutions for pollutant reduction to assist MS4 permittees.
- *Action: Plan for funding resilience after expiration of Legacy Amendment in 2034.*
 - Measure: New funding sources (e.g., fees, bonding, general fund) identified that would be required to maintain support of critical programs.

ⁱ Minn. Stat. 114D.30.

ⁱⁱ The 2014 Clean Water Road Map is the source of these targets. This report uses the Trophic State Index as a proxy for “swimmable” waters. According to the Road Map, “The Trophic State Index (TSI) summarizes a lake’s overall water quality. TSI is made up of three individual measures: nutrients, algae, and water clarity. TSI allows for any combination of the three measures to be used, so that incomplete data can still provide an estimate of a lake’s condition. Lakes with lower TSI values are clearer and are better for swimming and other recreational uses.” This report also uses the Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) as a proxy for “fishable” waters. “An Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) identifies water pollution problems based on the type and number of species found in a given location. Stressors such as low dissolved oxygen, excess sedimentation, nutrients, or toxics (pesticides, metals) result in more pollutiontolerant (and fewer sensitive) species. This makes IBI a good indicator of stream health.” In addition, the MPCA’s Impaired Waters List includes useful water quality standards for aquatic recreation and aquatic consumption that are good indicators.

ⁱⁱⁱ While most watersheds in the state now use One Watershed One Plan, there are also approved plans used under previous statutes, especially in the metro area. "Comprehensive local water management plan," "comprehensive water plan," "local water plan," and "local water management plan" mean the plan adopted by a county under sections 103B.311 and 103B.315. “Watershed management plan” is defined in sections 103D.401.