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Root River 1W1P submitted for state review

Pilot watershed-based plan involving 6 counties in SE Minn. nearing completion

June 28, 2016, Preston, Minn. – After nearly two years of work, the Root River One Watershed, One Plan pilot project is entering the final phase of its planning process.

State officials are conducting a 60-day review for the draft water management plan for the Root River One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) that involves a planning area covering more than 1.3 million acres in parts of six counties – Dodge, Fillmore, Houston, Mower, Olmsted and Winona. This includes the entire Root River Watershed; the Minnesota portion of the Upper Iowa River Watershed; and the Mississippi-Reno Watershed in Houston County.

One of five 1W1P pilot projects in Minnesota, the Root River 1W1P process has involved planning partners representing a broad range of stakeholders, including local governments, state agencies, community members and organizations.

“This unique plan will enable all of us in the Root River Watershed to get outside of our political boundaries and work together for the greater good,” said Donna Rasmussen, district manager for Fillmore SWCD, which has led the 1W1P process and hosted meetings in Preston.

Root River 1W1P’s local government units include Dodge, Fillmore, Mower, Olmsted, Houston and Winona counties along with their respective Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), with Root River SWCD representing Houston County. Crooked Creek Watershed District in Caledonia also is among them.

Under 1W1P, the goal is to create a plan based on watershed boundaries rather than smaller, political boundaries. This will ensure that the most significant threats to a watershed’s water resources are addressed with practices providing the greatest environmental benefits.

It intends to provide a framework for consistency and cooperation on a watershed basis, allowing local governments to work together to implement projects with the highest return on investment for improving issues related to water quality and water quantity. Root River 1W1P also has a draft agreement under review that details how the watershed’s partners will implement the plan and work cooperatively. The plan will not add a new layer of government.

The Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR) has led the statewide 1W1P program that aims to reduce the more than 200 water plans statewide to less than 100. Watershed-based plans have the potential to allow for streamlined funding and administration to maximize efficiency, minimize redundancy and prevent duplication of efforts both on the local and state levels.

In early 2014, local-government partners in the Root River Watershed began working together to submit a nomination to BWSR to be selected as one of Minnesota’s One Watershed, One Plan pilot projects. Later that year, Root River was selected as one of five major watersheds for 1W1P.

A planning process then began involving many meetings by three Root River 1W1P committees: a planning work group; policy committee; and advisory committee. The Root River 1W1P policy committee includes a representative from each local government unit in the watershed to provide direction and review throughout the process.

Houston Engineering Inc., based in Maple Grove, Minn., was hired to lead the creation of the Root River 1W1P planning document now under review and available to the public.

Following the state’s 60-day review, two public hearings are expected to be offered in September in Caledonia and Stewartville on the draft plan. Public comment also will be accepted outside of those meetings.

After the hearings, the Root River 1W1P planning document will be submitted to BWSR for final approval within 90 days. Local government units then will need to vote within 120 days to adopt the plan locally.

Implementation of the Root River 1W1P planning document could happen as early as January 2017. The plan will be scheduled for a five-year evaluation and 10-year revision.

The Root River 1W1P draft planning document – along with other related materials, such as meeting minutes – is available on the Fillmore SWCD website at: www.fillmoreswcd.org/rootRiverWatershed.html

Root River One Watershed, One Plan

Online links

Root River 1W1P

<http://fillmoreswcd.org/rootRiverWatershed.html>

Root River 1W1P final draft plan

http://fillmoreswcd.org/documents/RootRiver1W1P_PublicReviewDraft_05272016_001.pdf

One Watershed, One Plan (BWSR)

<http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/planning/1W1P/index.html>