

Project Name | Cannon River One Watershed, One Plan

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To / Contact info | Planning Work Group

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Regarding | Advisory Work Group July 2017 Water Conversations Summary

Introduction

In 2016, several planning partners joined together to develop a One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) for the Cannon River Planning Area. The goal of 1W1P is to align local water planning on major watershed boundaries with state strategies towards prioritized, targeted and measureable implementation plans. One component of the 1W1P process is stakeholder engagement and participation. In late July of 2017, the planning partners and consultants hosted two “Water Conversations” to consult with stakeholders. The goals of these Water Conversations included:

- To share local knowledge of the Cannon River Planning Area.
- To share personal perspective about the lakes, streams, wetlands, rivers and other natural areas in the Cannon River Planning Area.
- To help identify concerns or vulnerabilities for consideration in the Cannon River 1W1P development process.
- To connect stakeholders with one another, and work together to become better stewards of the watershed.

The Water Conversations were based on a “World Café” format. This large-group discussion method uses a special café-like setting, and small-groups of four to five people. The groups are tasked with answering a set of questions; each question session lasted approximately 20 minutes. In answering the questions, each small-group recorded their ideas and discussions in a visual way, and presented the results to the other groups. Both Water Conversations posed three questions to the participants:

1. How do you interact with or use water?
2. What activities or behaviors are impacting or have the potential to impact our water resources?
3. What do you think is most important to first address?

The first question is intended to warm participants up to the conversation, notetaking format, and opens the ways for deeper contemplation of the issue. The second question challenges participants to review their own and others’ behaviors to identify both positive and negative impacts of those behaviors. The responses to the first two questions were organized around major themes by each group and presented at the conclusion of each question period. The third question allowed stakeholders to voice their personal interests and guide the Plan’s priorities and structure.

Each small group included a Table Facilitator who helped to keep the conversation on track. Notes collected from the various conversations were transcribed, analyzed, and are summarized in the following narrative. The raw data from each group (interactions, impacts, priorities) were recorded in a spreadsheet and coded into broad themes. This summary does not review every

comment made. Instead, it serves as an overview of the themes that emerged from the conversations.

Meeting Participants

As mentioned above two Water Conversations were conducted in late July of 2017. The first was held on July 20th in Owatonna, the second on July 25th in Northfield. Both meetings were led by the same experts and conducted in the manner described above. The July 20th, Owatonna meeting included 13 participants, and 11 staff from the planning Work Group and the Consultant Team. The 13 participants represented an assortment of local and state government entities, environmental advocacy groups (Trout Unlimited and Master Water Stewards), and citizens.

The July 25th meeting in Northfield included 29 participants, and 10 staff from the Planning Work Group and Consultant Team. The composition of participants was quite diverse and had very little carry-over from the first meeting. Participants were affiliated with the Metropolitan Council, the University of Minnesota, several state agencies (MDH, MDA, MPCA, DNR), and environmental advocacy groups (Trout Unlimited, Minnesota Land Trust, Master Water Stewards, and the Farm Bureau). Nine different communities (cities or townships) were represented by citizens.

Response Summary

This section presents the questions that were asked during the World Café exercise and summarizes the general themes. This summary includes select quotations, and provides examples of notable or unique responses.

Question #1: How do you interact with or use water?

Participants identified a huge range of ways water is used or interacted with. The goal of this question is to help participants recognize the role and importance of water in their lives. Moreover, it helps the Planning Work Group and the Consultant Team understand what stakeholders know and think about the Cannon River Planning Area's water resources.

In total, 200 ideas were generated by the two meetings, with over 100 distinct ideas or concepts. The responses can be categorized into four general themes (in alphabetical order): (1) Community Uses, (2) Economic Uses, (3) Natural Uses, and (4) Recreation.

Community Uses

These uses and interactions include the very human needs such as drinking, cooking, cleaning, and sanitation needs. Several responses characterized these uses as “necessity” or “needed for survival.” Many responses of this type implicitly recognized that these types of uses not only remove water from the system (i.e. “Drinking”), but in some cases temporarily remove water and then return it after significant alteration (“flushing toilet” and “failing septic systems”). Other participants noted various urban uses of water, including watering gardens and lawns, washing cars, firefighting, gardening, and aesthetic uses like fountains and bird-baths. Some mentioned water management practices of communities such as stormwater management, water towers, distribution systems, and flood control. Other responses related to water management included testing, monitoring, planning, and information sharing. One participant remarked that regulations impact how communities and

individuals use and interact with water. A few responses observed that water use can be “taken for granted” and politicized, which can cause water to be wasted and foment arguments among water users.

Economic Uses

Every group observed that water is used for some economic purpose. A majority of these responses focused on agricultural uses of water, especially irrigation and livestock management. Multiple comments discussed agricultural drainage, tiling, chemical and nutrient runoff from farming practices. Water use in food production was a common response. Industrial water use was another frequent response. Multiple groups noted water use in chemical production, manufacturing processes, and that water itself is an important commodity. Other unique responses that can be categorized as economic uses include water use to generate energy, water storage, touristic uses such as resorts, and transportation systems. One participant expressed water had investment value for homeowners. A few responses were phrased in a way that suggested economic uses often wasted or negatively impacted water resources.

Ecological Uses

Only a limited number of participants noted “ecological uses” of water. The most common responses involved aesthetic uses, for instance “views,” “beauty,” and “looking at it.” One response stated that water was used for “spiritual” purposes. Another response noted that water is a resource to be “passed on to future generations.” A few responses mentioned water is a part of natural cycles, including “hydrological cycles,” that it supports “plant and animal life” and provides “habitat” for wildlife. Wetlands were specifically mentioned as an ecological use. A few groups noted that water can be used as an educational resource. Finally, several responses stated that monitoring or testing water was an important interaction.

Recreation

Recreation was by far the most commonly listed use or interaction across all groups. Further, as a category, it typically included the largest variety of responses. Generally, these can be divided into boating, fishing, and swimming. However, there was substantial diversity in actual response. Boating included kayaking, canoeing, and paddling. Fishing and swimming were mentioned by all but one group. Other types of recreation mentioned included biking, hiking, pools and water parks, waterfowl hunting, bird watching, socializing, and “inner tubing.”

What activities or behaviors are impacting, or have the potential to impact, water resources?

Participants at both meetings provided more numerous and arguably more nuanced responses to this question than to the first question. The second question encourages participants to think about impacts to water resources, and what makes “healthy” water resources. The groups categorized their responses using similar terms as the first question. For instance, agriculture, business and industry, recreation, and urban land use and development may have been carried over from the first question. However, several new categories and sub-issues appear as well. Only one group from either meeting explicitly organized its comments according to whether the impact was a positive or negative impact. All other groups appear to primarily consider the actual or potential impacts as

negative. The headings below review frequently mentioned impacts and a consolidation of a few related categories and summarizes the responses.

Behaviors and Best Practices

One pervasive issue that crosses nearly every category—and in some groups, a category itself—is the influence of behaviors and practices. On one hand, participants appear to believe that many of the negative impacts are a result of poor or ineffective behaviors choices. Examples of behavior choices with negative impacts include car washing, invasive species transport, excessive groundwater extraction, “mowing lawns up to lakeshore,” fossil fuel use, and pouring toxic or hazardous materials down drains. On the other hand, water resource-conscious practices and behavior modification will likely have important positive impacts. For instance, several group noted the importance of education and gathering quantifiable data and other information to inform regulations and plans. Other responses emphasized the importance of awareness campaigns and watershed-scale planning. Two groups observed generational differences in desire and willingness to protect and restore water resources. Several groups also noted a basic misconception of the value of water. One group even included “ignorance” as an issue. This same group also commented on the incentives created by the convenience of tap water.

Agriculture

Impacts caused by agriculture were heavily emphasized by participants. Nearly all groups included a category titled “agriculture,” or something similar. Every group mentioned at least one actual or potential impact related to agricultural systems. Drainage tile and irrigation were most commonly mentioned. Fertilizer, chemical use, and nutrient management from livestock were also frequently mentioned. Cropping practices were mentioned by a few groups. However, the participants refer to both the positive and negative impacts of agricultural practices. For instance, comments focused on the positive included implementing cover crops, buffer strips, field strips, and no/low-till practices. Some responses appeared to focus on negative impacts of practices such as two-crop rotations, “raising livestock,” fertilizer, and animal waste. Still others were ambiguous and could be either negative or positive, for example, pasture management, and erosion control. Regardless, both meetings clearly expressed the importance of addressing impacts caused by or related to agricultural practices and uses.

Land Use

Nearly every group included comments related to land use and land use planning. Responses ranged from building and maintaining infrastructure, land use decisions, planning processes, sprawl and excessive development. One unexpected comment stated “the lack of diversity of elected officials.” It’s likely that the participants believe that more diverse leadership may result in better decisions and outcomes. “Mining” and dams were mentioned by three groups. The increased size and number of impervious surfaces is a very common comment. Lawn watering, maintenance, and fertilizing practices were also mentioned by several groups. As previously mentioned, many land use comments include an individual or group behavior component. Other responses focus on integrating various practices in land use development, such as rain gardens, septic system compliance, construction erosion control practices, green/sustainable lawns, and more aggressive

landscaping and shoreland protection requirements. A few groups noted government operations that when adopted would likely have a positive impact on the watershed. Example responses include, street sweeping, reducing the impact of politics, updating zoning practices, snow and ice control or removal, wastewater and drinking water treatment.

Other Important Categories

One unique category created by one group at the Northfield meeting was titled “Funding.” This category included responses such as the “availability of funds,” treatment costs, infrastructure operations and maintenance, and reconstruction. This group likely believes that funding may have both a positive and negative impact on water resources: when funding is available practices can be implemented and facilities can be operated and maintained properly. In contrast, when money is not available, negative outcomes are more probable and common. A few groups had categories with comments regarding economic development. For instance, “population growth,” increased groundwater appropriations, development in the floodplain, the use and impacts of hydropower, and riparian commercial uses (resorts, outfitters, etc.). Finally, several participants noted wetland restoration, shoreland restoration, “river cleanup,” and climate change as important impacts.

What do you think is most important to first address?

Each meeting developed a list of priorities. Participants were asked to identify the single most important issue they thought should be addressed in the watershed management plan. These priorities are not meant to be solutions. Rather, participants were asked to identify what they think is the most important, most immediate need, considering the complete array of uses and impacts identified when answering the first two questions. The tables below include the list of priorities created at each meeting categorized by headings identified by meeting participants. Most reflect the exact language chosen by participants. A few have been paraphrased for the sake of space.

Table 1. Priorities identified at the July 20, 2017 Water Conversation hosted in Owatonna, MN

Behaviors and Best Practices	
Need for education	Community participation and buy-in
Working together to correct more, making a plan	Public participation
Developing a plan based on objective tests/assessment of water quality	Fund the plan with local control
Improved water quality monitoring	Develop a clear idea how different systems together
Identify sources of pollution and establish BMPs while not inhibiting existing projects	
Agriculture	
Nutrient management	Farm runoff directly into lakes
Nutrient loading	
Land Use	
Surface water runoff (quantity) from agricultural and urban settings	Flooding of infrastructure
Sediment	Increased flow, increased storage
Resource Concerns	
Groundwater extraction	Preserve the quality of resources
Water quality	

Table 2. Priorities identified at the July 25, 2017 Water Conversation hosted in Northfield, MN

Behaviors and Best Practices	
Municipal regulation	Understanding the severity of water conservation
Waste discharge monitoring	Outdoor recreation and engagement
Public education	Harvest/store/infiltrate rainfall as close to where it falls as possible
How social groups/people have a role to play! Involvement, values, interest	Help divergent views work collaborative to improve water quality
Agriculture	
Crop diversity or rotation	Chemical use
Chemical overuse	Nitrogen management
Minimize agricultural runoff	Nitrogen reduction (nitrate leaching less into groundwater and lakes)
Agricultural practices	Farming practices on water quality
Practices contributing to soil loss	Siltation control in the watershed
Land Use	
Erosion control	Agricultural and urban sediment reduction
Land runoff	Peak flow reduction on agricultural and urban lands
Upland storage	
Resource Concerns	
Drinking water	Flooding
Cleaner water for personal use (drinking, home, swimming)	Aesthetics: spirituality; honoring plant and animal life
Clean water	Invasive species
Pollution and excess nutrient flow into rivers and aquifers	Water levels to go down in the summer months like it always has (15+ years ago)
Control the flow of rivers and streams to ease disasters from flooding	