Meeting Minutes: Vermillion River Watershed Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

Date: November 19, 2025

Prepared by: Brita Moore-Kutz, Communications and Outreach Specialist for the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization (VRWJPO)

Location: In-person at the Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center, Farmington, MN, and virtual via Microsoft Teams

Attendees

CAC Members

- Brad Blackett
- Josh Borton
- Kevin Chamberlain
- Steve Hamrick
- Jim Kotz
- Andy Riesgraf (attended virtually due to work schedule)
- John Nicolai

VRWJPO Staff

- Travis Thiel, Administrator
- Kelly Perrine, Senior Watershed Specialist
- Jeff Dunn, Water Resources Engineer
- Brita Moore-Kutz, Communications and Outreach Specialist

Others

- Curt Coudron, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Project Management Supervisor

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Chair Josh Borton.

2. Roll Call

All members were present except for Sandy Weber.

3. Audience Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

None.

4. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Kevin Chamberlain to approve the agenda, seconded by Jim Kotz. Motion carried on a 7-0 roll call vote.

5. Approval of Minutes from the August 13, 2025, Meeting

Motion by Brad Blackett to approve the minutes, seconded by Steve Hamrick. Motion carried on a 7-0 roll call vote.

6. Business Items

a. Recommend Adoption of the Final Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization 2026 Budget and Watershed Management Tax District Levy

Travis Thiel presented the final 2026 budget and levy for the VRWJPO, noting that Scott County had a change in their budget items due to a project that was supposed to be finished in 2025 being carried over to 2026. He then reviewed changes in budgeted amounts since the draft budget and levy were approved in August 2025.

Josh Borton asked if it was possible to learn the difference in tax impact on the various types of properties subject to the watershed management tax district levy carried out by Dakota and Scott counties. Travis replied that the county taxation authorities did not provide information that specific.

Motion by Kevin Chamberlain to recommend adoption of the budget and levy, seconded by Andy Riesgraf. Motion carried on a 7-0 roll call vote.

b. Approval of 2026 Vermillion River Watershed Community Advisory Committee Meeting Dates

Travis presented the 2026 CAC meeting dates of February 11, May 13, August 12, and November 18, reminding members of the changes in Minnesota Open Meeting Law allowing participation via interactive technology, such as Microsoft Teams. CAC members should communicate with staff and each other to ensure at least one member is at the meeting in person and that staff can post public notice of virtual participation as required by law.

Motion by Brad Blackett to approve the dates, seconded by Jim Kotz. Motion carried on a 7-0 roll call vote.

c. Update on the Terms of Vermillion River Watershed Community Advisory Committee Members

With Josh Borton's eligibility ending as of Dec. 31, 2025, and one pre-existing vacancy on the CAC, staff are actively recruiting new members. One person had submitted an application as of this meeting, which will be reviewed by the Joint Powers Board at their January meeting.

Brita Moore-Kutz noted that she'd emailed the CAC members a graphic to promote the opportunity on social media. She also pointed out that three members are set to roll off at the end of 2026 – Steve Hamrick, Jim Kotz, and Andy Riesgraf.

Information only.

d. Summary of Comments Received During the 60-Day Review of the Draft 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan

Kelly Perrine shared that the VRWJPO received 186 comments on the draft 2026-2035 Vermillion River Watershed Management Plan (WMP) during the 60-day review and comment period required by state statute. The draft WMP was sent to Dakota and Scott counties, the Metropolitan Council, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Dakota and Scott SWCDs, required state review agencies, and all city and township governments in the VRWJPO's jurisdiction.

Ten organizations submitted comments on the WMP. Members were provided a color-coded spreadsheet breaking down which comments were submitted by which organization. Kelly explained that staff must respond in writing to each comment and that the responses must be approved by the JPB before sending.

Brad Blackett noticed the myriad groundwater-related comments submitted and was surprised, since VRWJPO usually takes a supporting role in groundwater protection projects. Kelly responded that the Minnesota Department of Health had submitted most of those groundwater comments, as they are taking a more active role in reviewing watershed plans. Most of the VRWJPO is in Dakota County, which has an approved Groundwater Plan for 2020-2030, putting the VRWJPO in a unique situation compared to other watersheds. Staff worked to clarify that in the draft WMP by referring to the Dakota County Groundwater Plan directly.

Travis added that there were a few tactics that could have been made clearer as supporting groundwater protection. Soil health practices such as cover crops are promoted for their benefit to groundwater, as they reduce nutrient leaching from the soil, but they also benefit surface water. The VRWJPO provides cost-share to both counties' SWCDs for landowner soil health practices within the watershed, and the draft WMP could have been clearer about how VRWJPO is supporting groundwater efforts through that avenue.

Information only.

7. Updates

a. Chairperson's Report

This meeting was the final CAC meeting for Chair Josh Borton, who reached the end of his consecutive term eligibility. He shared how he'd learned about the VRWJPO while active in the Southern Dakota County Sportsmen's Club. That group completed a Stewardship Grant-funded project several years ago. The committee and staff members thanked Josh for his eight years of valuable service to the watershed and presented him with a VRWJPO-branded rain gauge.

b. Staff Updates

Travis Thiel

- Staff haven't seen any new proposals for new data centers in the watershed in a while. Travis had heard that two proposals had been more or less scrapped. The Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy has been filing lawsuits against proposed data center projects, including one within the VRWJPO.
- The VRWJPO is selling wetland bank credits from the Braun wetland bank and has six credits available. Two projects are inquiring about credits for 2026, one possibly using four acres of credits. The organization is due for some release of more credits from the federal government, as banks can get more credits incrementally as they meet performance standards. With the credits sold so far, the VRWJPO and partners who restored the Braun wetland have recouped more than the original cost of the restoration project.

Brita Moore-Kutz

- The Stewardship Grant program will be brought back into the watershed's budget with the new WMP, with the goal of increasing community engagement.
- Brita is working with Dakota County and Dakota SWCD staff to create a new interactive display about wetland health and macroinvertebrates, using macroinvertebrate samples from the Vermillion River.

Curt Coudron

- The Dakota SWCD is wrapping up project installations for the year before the weather gets too cold. Curt said there were many more cover crop contracts in the VRWJPO than he had ever seen before – about 7,400 acres in total.

8. Adjournment

Motion by Jim Kotz to adjourn, seconded by Brad Blackett. Motion carried on a 7-0 roll call vote.

Next Meeting

Date: February 11, 2026

Time: 4:30 p.m.

Location: In-person at the Dakota County Extension and Conservation Center and virtually via Microsoft Teams