

Natural Resource Coordinator Report

EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Non-Competitive Grant Application – May 6th was a great day because we finally submitted all the moving parts associated with the EPA GLRI grant application for \$900,000 in funding. It is expected the award and contract will be finalized by August 1, 2020. These funds are approved; we just need to get agreements and subawards in place now that the application has been formally submitted. Below is a table showing where the dollars will be applied:

Activity 1: \$135,000 for a Natural Resource Sustainability Guidance (Guidance) – MN Land Trust will assist with the project management through a subaward and the city will contract a consultant to work with its' inter-agency partners to develop a comprehensive guidance for the long-term health and support of the lands included in the DNAPs as well as all public lands throughout Duluth. The final product will be a Duluth Natural Resource Program Plan.

Activity 2: \$700,008 for Land Acquisition – The City will acquire tax forfeit parcels within and near the SLRNA along with a parcel known as Pontliana Woods on Minnesota Point. Depending on appraisals, the City will purchase all or as many of the 528 parcels provided in the application.

Activity 3: \$64,992 for Native Plant Community Restoration – Through a subaward, Community Action Duluth will restore native plant communities designed for bird migration and nesting habitat on at least 30 acres and up to 100 acres in the Kingsbury Creek Watershed just upstream of the St. Louis River Natural Area. This site has had extensive work done to control buckthorn and will be re-treated again this year. A good portion is now ready for tree and shrub seeding and planting.

Natural Resource Management Program Plan (NRMPP) – We have finalized the scope of work using the NRC, staff and MN Land Trust reviews and comments. Purchasing is preparing the RFP to go out in the next couple weeks. Plans are to select a contractor and prepare contracts in time to receive the EPA GLRI funds. The City also has some funds to apply to this work. The NRC will have a very important role in reviewing, advising and listening to public input during this planning effort.

In addition, to the City's natural resource planning, the St. Louis River One Watershed One Plan is underway. A 60-day comment period and invitation to submit priority concerns is now open regarding this Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan being developed for the St. Louis River Watershed Planning Area. A formal letter and Planning Area Map is shown in Attachment 1. City stormwater staff asked a few questions and I have provide them with the response below:

- The attached map includes the smaller watersheds within the Duluth area. Are they part of the Comprehensive Water Management Plan or One watershed One Plan (1W1P) for the St Louis River?
 - Yes
- If the local streams are part of the 1W1P, will 11 draft TMDLs for the Duluth area streams be included or addressed in the planning process or does the City need to submit this as a priority concern?
 - The City should submit them as a priority concern. The way that implementation actions will be prioritized during the 1W1P process may not be based solely on the impairment status of waterbodies.
- Will the 1W1P align with the WRAPS document from MPCA or do we need to request this?
 - No. The processes are intertwined. BWSR and the MPCA have worked to ensure they work together. The 1W1P process is meant to incorporate completed WRAPS as guidance and scientific support. MPCA and SWCD are trying to figure out how they can align the 1W1P Advisory Committee with the Core Team for the St. Louis River and Cloquet River WRAPS Cycle 2 processes (second round of sampling and analysis – comes every 10 years) so it is less confusing and a better use of everyone’s time.

Although this is a voluntary planning process being initiated by several LGUs and the Fond du Lac Tribe under MN Statutes Sec. 103B.801 and Cities and townships are not required to take any action, I hope you will let me know if you would like to submit priority concerns and expectations for the 1W1P. In any event, we may want to find a way to incorporate the watershed planning we will be doing with the NRMPP to link the plans and build on our partnerships.

Guidelines for Lands Protection Program – Staff is working on a final draft of guidelines to support the City’s decision-making process for selecting tax forfeit lands to be acquired from or conveyed by the County now and in the future for permanent protection of open space. We will be providing this draft to the NRC for review and advisory at the June meeting. This is designed to set up a framework for parcel decision-making in relation to protection of open space as well as clarification of those parcels important for future re-development or development.

E.coli Report for Tischer and Keene Creek – There has been some delay in receiving the final report due to lab limitations and these trying times. A draft report is being sent this week and a technical team of professionals from MPCA, Sea Grant and NRRI are helping with the review before a final report is completed. The contractor will be presenting the information to the Duluth urban Watershed Advisory Committee June. The City plans to update the NRC on the findings in July.

Attachment 1: One Watershed One Plan Information





One Watershed, One Plan

St. Louis River Watershed

Date: April 26, 2020

To: Cities and Townships in the St. Louis River Watershed, One Watershed, One Plan Planning Area

Subject: Notification of Intent to Plan for the St. Louis River One Watershed, One Plan and invitation to submit priority issues and plan expectations. 60 day comment period.

Greetings,

The St. Louis River One Watershed, One Plan Planning Partnership is pleased to announce the beginning of a Comprehensive Planning Process for the St. Louis River Watershed Planning Area through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources One Watershed, One Plan Program.

Recipients of this notice are invited to submit priority concerns that should be addressed during the planning process as well as expectations for the plan. Comments and submissions will be accepted throughout the 60-day comment period, beginning April 26, 2020 and ending June 26, 2020.

The requested information should be directed to the Fiscal Agent and Coordinator for this Planning Process, the South St. Louis Soil & Water Conservation District, at the following email address:

kate.kubiak@southstlouisswcd.org

Email responses are preferred. If you must submit a paper response, please direct them to the following address:

South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District c/o Kate Kubiak, 1W1P

215 N. 1st Ave. E. Rm. 301

Duluth, MN 55802

218-576-8068 (cell)

One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) is a program that supports local government partnerships in developing prioritized, targeted, and measurable implementation actions designed to help restore and protect the St. Louis River Watershed and its many subwatersheds over the next ten years. This process aligns comprehensive water planning with major watershed boundaries, local plans and citizen input.

All citizens and stakeholders in the watershed will be invited to virtual or in-person public information/kick-off meetings once the 60-day comment period is complete. These events will allow stakeholders and interested citizens to provide more input to the Planning Partnership as they begin developing the Plan.

A completed Plan is expected by the summer of 2022.

Information about the partnership and this planning process is available at the following website: www.southstlouisswcd.org/1W1P

A map of the Planning Area has been attached with this letter. If you have questions about this process, please contact the South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District at the email address provided above, or any of the following local contacts on the St. Louis River One Watershed, One Plan Steering Committee:

St. Louis River One Watershed, One Plan Steering Committee/Planning Partnership:

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Forester's Report

Recent activity has been slow but there are important developments that will impact our ability to move forward, for better and worse.

The biggest change happened when Park Maintenance had 4 employees laid off, effective Friday, May 8th. In addition, we are not planning on hiring any seasonal help. Our summer field staff would normally be 45-50. I would be assigned four full-time staff, two seasonals and the forestry aide. This year Park Maintenance will have 15 people for field work. Naturally plans have changed dramatically and for this forester priorities have been rearranged.

Due to obligations with grants we need to plant trees (this is a good "due to..." statement) and most of my and my two park maintenance worker's time will be spent doing that. Our time will be spent in the eastern and central hillside neighborhoods with some outliers in Lakeside, Duluth Heights and some parks.

Trying to estimate how much time it takes to plant and subsequently water trees, add in a small storm or two and that is our entire person-hour budget for the summer. Occasionally we will have support from other Park Maintenance staff, especially in the case of storms, but this will be infrequent and ever-changing. Looking at other activities we normally want to finish over the growing season it is easy to categorize the losses due to no seasonal help and full-time employee layoffs.

Seasonal help has been excellent for assisting full-time staff who have more credentials (class A license, pesticide applicator's license, etc.) but now we have to backfill with full-time staff. Watering is a great example. One person with a class A driver's license has to be driving and the other (seasonal) does the watering. Now I will have to assign both full-time staff to do that task.

Seasonal work that will not be completed includes the boulevard and park tree inventory and it is unlikely we will spend much time injecting ash trees. Seasonals also help with placing "No Parking" signs for removals, checking requests from homeowners, keeping us up to date on technology, and adding youthful vigor to our operations.

Full-time employees are able to drive our regular operations (tree planting, removals, pruning, injecting) forward while maintaining an adequate response time to our customers. Social distancing and stay at home orders scuttled our plans to remove ash trees this spring. While it is possible, I doubt we will be able to catch up this fall. Combined with a reduced number of injections will result in falling behind in our EAB plan. There isn't a timeline associated with the plan but the best course of action is to inject and remove as quickly as possible.

Aside from safety related concerns we will not be responding to citizen requests for removals or pruning.

In the good news department the ash tree removals paid for by the PEAB (Preparing for EAB in Community Forests) grant have been completed. These were ash trees that were either

compromised, had EAB or utility lines running through their canopy or a combination of those. 102 trees were removed across the city.

We will be planting these sites next year to meet the 25% match.

The GLRI grant is being used to replace trees in tree vaults along Superior Street in Lincoln Park. Normally we wouldn't use a contractor for any of our work while employees are laid off but this was deemed an exception for several reasons. The most important reason is without the grant we would not pursue this project to this extent. The grant allows this work to be completed. Also, the contract was signed several months back and we would be pulling work from a local small business.

Pine thinning update

Jim Shoberg and I have met with most of the partners that could be affected by the pine thinning project. Spirit Mountain staff have been furloughed so we are waiting on them.

Otherwise I want to present the entire project to you but would strongly prefer to do it in person. I can present it via Zoom (or other online platform) but feel for the size of the project and the many details that go into it (and will be asked about) the online platform will fall short on both ends of the user spectrum. We can talk about that at our next meeting.