

Whitewater Joint Powers Board Minutes
February 20, 2025 at 8:30AM
Whitewater State Park Visitor's Center

1. Call to Order: Chair Josh Elsing called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

Board Members Present: Josh Elsing, Ross Greden, James Rentz, Bob Walkes and Lynn Zabel

Board Members Absent: Dave Senjem

Others Present: Sheila Harmes, Coordinator Whitewater Watershed; Dave Copeland, BWSR

2. Public Comments

No comments.

3. Election of Officers

- **Chair** On motion by Lynn Zabel and seconded by Bob Walkes, the WWJPB voted on the nomination of Josh Elsing for 2025 Chair. Vote: Yes – All.
- **Vice Chair** On motion by Bob Walkes and seconded by Ross Greden, the WWJPB voted on the nomination of Lynn Zabel for 2025 Vice Chair. Vote: Yes – All.
- **Secretary** On motion by Lynn Zabel and seconded by Ross Greden, the WWJPB voted on the nomination of Bob Walkes for 2025 Secretary. Vote: Yes – All.
- **Alternate Secretary** On motion by Ross Greden and seconded by Lynn Zabel, the WWJPB voted on the nomination of James Rentz for alternate secretary. Vote: Yes – All.

4. Approve Minutes of December 20, 2024, Meeting

A motion was made by Bob Walkes and seconded by James Rentz to approve the minutes.

Vote: Yes – All.

5. Approve Agenda

On motion by Ross Greden and seconded by Bob Walkes, the WWJPB voted to approve the agenda.

Vote: Yes – All.

6. Approve Consent Items

Sheila Harmes explained the bills payable, highlighting an additional \$900 was owed to Wabasha SWCD, paid by end of 2024. Additionally, the MCIT premium was paid and was slightly lower than in previous years.

A motion was made by Bob Walkes and seconded by Lynn Zabel to approve the consent items.

Vote: Yes – All (6).

7. Board Reports

James Rentz – The SWCD has two new board members. Cheryl Winters was elected Chair and Paul Uecker elected Vice Chair.

Lynn Zabel – Lynn Zabel mentioned open position but are waiting to see how the job market goes with the recent changes in the government. Lynn Zabel and Dave Copeland discussed the SWCD cost-share program and the discretion of the SWCD Board. Each month, the Wabasha SWCD hosts a coffee and conversation event, providing landowners with an opportunity for open discussions, each centered around a specific topic. The next coffee and conversation event is on grazing at the Plainview Legion.

Ross Greden – Shared that a finalist for the Winona County Feedlot Officer position attended the Winona County SWCD meeting. Sheila Harmes mentioned she heard he was offered the job with a start date in March. The SWCD Board was impressed that he attended and spoke at the

meeting. The WWJPB discussed strategies for onboarding new employees and opportunities for gaining experience.

Bob Walkes – Wabasha County approved wage comp study and have negotiations with the unions this year.

Josh Elsing – Discussed taxing authority and the effect it could have on SWCDs. Some upcoming topics for Winona County are dog kennels and the possibility of a LEC remodel. In the ag industry, Josh was glad to see that nitrogen and fertilizer management is still an important topic with landowners.

Board members also discussed implications of Family Medical Leave Act that will be in effect In January 2026 and impact on SWCD budgets. Small businesses are at a disadvantage.

8. Board Discussion and Action Items

a. Financial Update – *Sheila Harmes*

2024 Audit Proposal Letter (Peterson Company LTD)

Sheila Harmes gave an update on the checking and money market accounts. Additionally, the WWJPB discussed the Peterson Company LTD proposal letter. Due to concerns over cost listed in the letter, Sheila Harmes was directed to verify the audit cost before the engagement letter is signed.

b. Whitewater Drinking Water Protection Grant Update

1) Final eLink Report

Sheila Harmes went through the eLink Report, as included in the agenda packet. The grant is now in the reconciliation phase, which typically occurs after spending 50% of the grant.

2) Grant Reconciliation (pending)

Sheila Harmes explained the documentation requested for reconciliation.

c. Local Advisory Team Grant Update

Sheila Harmes shared that a LAT meeting in Elgin took place January 15th and the February 6th Altura meeting was postponed until March 6th. The Whitewater grant will end in June. Sheila has been discussing potential grant extension with Dawn Bernau and a new grant agreement will be coming to the Whitewater JPB for approval. Per Dawn Bernau, farmers in DWSMAs have been taking advantage of the nitrogen management financial assistance program. The WWJPB discussed the program.

d. Spongy Moth Proposal (Minnesota Department of Ag Update)

Sheila Harmes shared that the MN Dept of Ag presented to the County Board in March and met with Sheila Harmes following the meeting. Sheila shared handouts with the WWJPB and explained the proposal, as a couple blocks of land will be in the Whitewater area. Due to budget constraints, the number of acres to be sprayed was reduced.

8. Agency Reports

Dave Copeland – Discussed a BWSR Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) that was applied for with NRCS for soil health practices. An agreement was made with NRCS and a request for interest was sent out to SWCDs. Any county with at least 30% agriculture land base is eligible for these grants. Base grant would be \$180,000 - \$150,000 for financial assistance to producers and remaining \$30,000 could be used for reimbursement to SWCDs for staff technical assistance. For the RCPP, BWSR requested \$25 million, to be partnered with \$21 million state funds. Half has already gone out for soil health staffing grants and soil health delivery grants. Once 80% of the base grant has been encumbered, the SWCD can apply for an additional \$120,000 with similar parameters. This program is set to go for 4 years.

BWSR recently submitted another RCPP grant proposal for water storage practices, requesting \$21 million in federal funding. While no agreement has been signed with NRCS, the proposal has been

approved. Additionally, a request for proposals (RFP) has been issued for \$2 million in state funds to serve as a matching contribution. Dave Copeland reviewed potential projects that could qualify for this grant.

9. Adjourn; Next scheduled meeting April 17, 2025

WWJPB discussed the frequency of WWJPB meetings.

Bob Walkes moved that the WWJPB meet quarterly, with Lynn Zabel seconding the motion. Following further discussion, Ross Greden proposed an amendment for the WWJPB to meet on the fourth Tuesday of every third month at 8:30 AM, which was seconded by Bob Walkes.

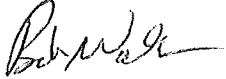
Vote on amended motion: YES – 4; NO – 1 (JR). Motion passed.

Next meeting to be Tuesday May 27, 2025, at 8:30AM. Remaining 2025 WWJPB meeting dates: Tuesday August 26 at 8:30am and Tuesday November 25 at 8:30am.

NOTE: After the February meeting, it was discovered that the Whitewater State Park is not available on May 27th; this meeting will instead be held at the St Charles City Hall Community Room (830 Whitewater Avenue, St Charles, MN)

On motion by Bob Walkes and seconded by Ross Greden, the WWJPB voted to adjourn at 10:30 a.m.
Vote: Yes – All.

Respectfully submitted by:
Anne Schwertel, PL&ES Administrative Specialist

Signed: 

WWJPB Secretary/Treasurer

