

Information Item: Priority Waters Project

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Environment Committee: February 9, 2021



Presentation Outline

- Drivers and history of the Priority Waters project
- Staff approach to developing the Priority Waters List
- Current project status
- Committee feedback and questions



Specific Requests for Feedback on Project

- Is staff using the right approach to prioritize waters?
- Are we missing a significant use or benefit of lakes, rivers, and streams?
- What categories of use and benefit should be given more weight in the Priority Waters List?



Project Purpose

Establish a regional Priority Waters List to guide the Council in helping the region most effectively manage its lakes, rivers and streams.

Mandate

- Water Resources Policy Plan (WRPP) Policy on Watershed Approach
- WRPP Policy on Assessing and Protecting Regional Water Resources



Connections to Thrive 2040

Our region's lakes, rivers and streams connect to all five Thrive outcomes:

- **Stewardship:** We must responsibly manage our water resources.
- **Prosperity:** Lakes are one of the major appeals for people moving to the region.
- **Equity:** Access to water and quality of water is not equitable.
- **Livability:** High quality drinking water and recreational opportunities improve our standard of living.
- **Sustainability:** We must protect our waters for future generations.

History of Prioritizing Waters

- 1982 Water Resources Management Plan included a priority waters list.
- 2003 Aquatic Resources Assessment ranked waters of regional importance using a GIS based assessment.
- 2030 Water Resources Management Policy Plan (2005) established Priority Lakes List (based on the 2003 study).
- 2015 2040 Water Resources Policy Plan (2015) updated Priority Lakes List.



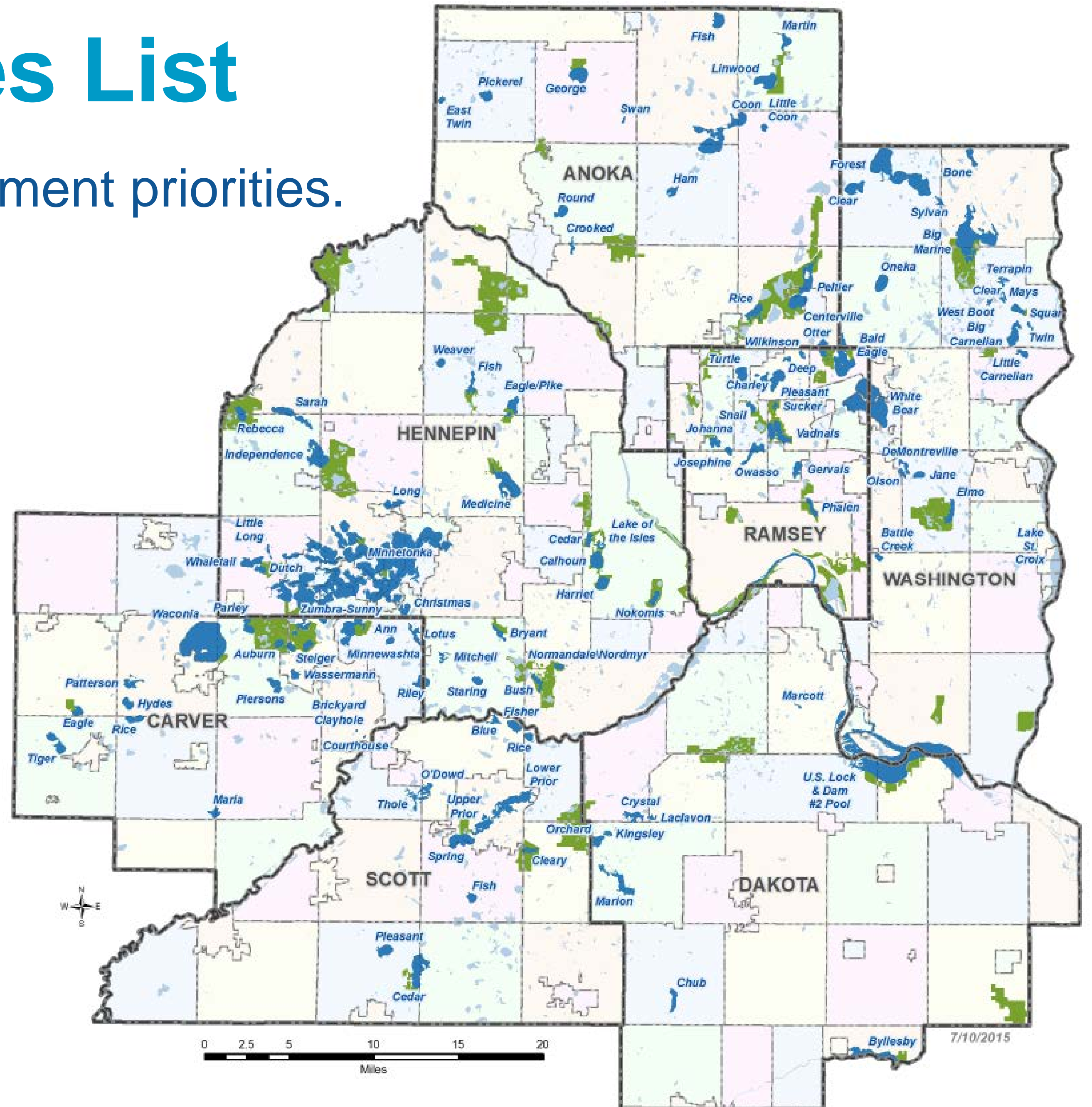
Why Do We Need to Prioritize?

- We have over 950 lakes and hundreds of miles of rivers and streams.
- Future Council initiatives may ask:
 - Which waters to focus on protecting and restoring?
 - Which waters to target for monitoring and assessment?
 - Which waters to offer technical assistance on?
 - Which waters to target grants for?
 - Which waters to protect during construction projects?
 - Which waters to focus education around?

We need priorities for plan-making and plan implementation.

Current Priority Lakes List

- Used to set monitoring and assessment priorities.
- Lakes prioritized based on:
 - High regional recreational value
 - Water supply provider
 - Good water quality
 - Wildlife significance



Goals of the New Priority Waters List

- Build on successes of the existing Priority Lakes List.
- Add priority rivers and streams.
- Be a key lens for policies and activities included in the 2050 Water Resources Policy Plan.

This list is being developed primarily for internal use.



Draft Definition and Purpose of the List

The priority waters list is those waters the Council has determined to be regionally significant based on their uses and benefits. The Council will prioritize dedicating resources to these waters to help maintain and improve their valued qualities for present and future generations.

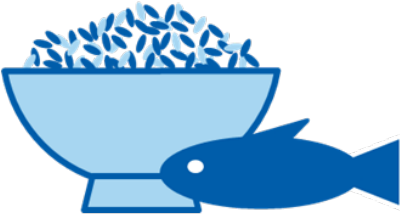
Approach focuses on use and benefit.



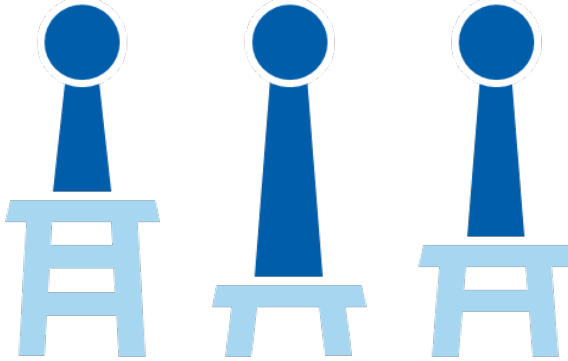
Use/Benefit Categories of the List



Drinking Water Supply



Provisioning



Equity



*Direct
Recreation*



*Adjacent
Recreation*



*Industrial
and Utility*



*Cultural and Spiritual
Significance*



*Natural and Tranquil
Connection*



Healthy Habitat



*Environmental Education
and Engagement*



Scientific Value



Project Approach

1. Select metrics for each category.
2. Determine a metric score for each waterbody.
3. Combine metric scores to create scores for each category.
4. Combine score information in an overall priority waters list.

Goal is to prioritize waters by individual category and compile an overall priority waters list.



Workplan

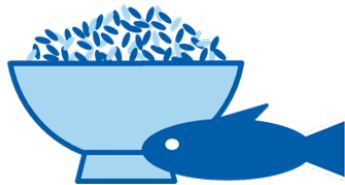
- Decide on an approach to select priority waters **DONE**
- Decide on priority waters categories and metrics **DONE**
- Metric exploration and scoring **70%**
- Category weighting **10%**
- Develop preliminary list (~March 15)
- Robust outreach to local and regional partners
- Revise and finalize list
- Publication and outreach (end of May)

Feedback and Questions

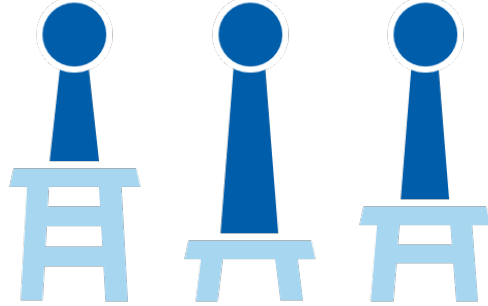
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