

Watershed Planning – Introduction to Metropolitan Water Planning

Q. What is a watershed?

A. A watershed may be defined as an area of land above (upstream of) a specific point or feature (the watershed outlet) that includes all of the area that could contribute surface water runoff to the outlet.

Q. What is watershed management?

A. Watershed management is based on the concept that the watershed is the key geographic unit for managing surface water resources. Using watersheds as the principal management unit provides a more comprehensive and holistic solution to water resource problems because a watershed includes all the land area that could contribute runoff to a particular water resource. A watershed management approach supports scientific investigations and management efforts on issues such as non-point and point source contaminant loading, ecosystem function, and coordinated partnerships among stakeholders whose interests are joined by a concern for surface-water resources.

Q. What is a watershed district?

A. In Minnesota, a watershed district (WD) is a special governmental unit that may be created through a petition process to address any number of possible issues including; flood control, stream channel improvements, water conservation, drainage system management, sediment control, riparian area management, water quality protection and enhancement, and more. The boundaries of a watershed district generally follow that of the natural watershed drainage basin. The functions of a watershed district may include, but are not limited to, preparing, adopting, and implementing a watershed management plan, reviewing and approval of local water management plans, regulate the use and development of land (under certain circumstances), and to construct, repair, improve, and manage drainage systems.

Q. What is a watershed management organization?

A. A watershed management organization (WMO) is, at the same time, a more general term than watershed district because it may include watershed districts, and a more specific term because it only applies to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area (TCMA). Under the Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act, a watershed management organization is defined as watershed district wholly within the metropolitan area or a joint powers entity established wholly or partly in the metropolitan area by special law or agreement to perform some or all of the functions of a watershed district. The TCMA is unique in the sense that it is the only metropolitan area in the country where WMOs are required by law for the entire region.

Q. What's in a typical watershed management plan?

A. A watershed management plan for a WMO generally includes an executive summary, a land and water resource inventory, an assessment of watershed problems, watershed goals and policies, an implementation program, an assessment of the impacts on other units of government, amendments to the plan, and annual reporting requirements. Details about the plan contents can be found in Minnesota Rules, Chapter 8410.

Q. What is a local surface water management plan?

A. Local stormwater or surface water management plans are crucial in helping the region meet the challenge of cost effective management of water quality.

Local TCMA governments (cities and townships) are required to prepare plans to address water quality issues within their borders. These plans are prepared in support of the watershed management plans for the WMOs within which the city or township lies. More information about local surface water management plans can be found in the Council's Local Planning Handbook and in Minnesota Rules, Chapter 8410.