

# Koochiching County

## Priority Concerns Scoping Document

for the

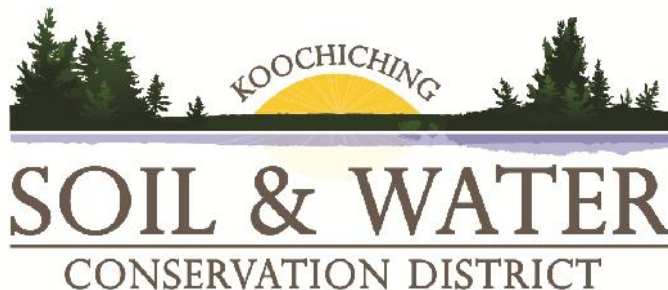
2017 Koochiching County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan Update



Photo by Jeff Kantor

Prepared by:

Koochiching Soil and Water Conservation District, Koochiching Environmental Services Department, and Koochiching County Water Plan Advisory Committee



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*The following Priority Concerns Scoping Document (PCSD), as defined in Minnesota Statutes §103B.305, was developed to identify resource priority concerns in Koochiching County and will serve as the foundation for the 2017 Koochiching County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan update. The PCSD was developed by the Koochiching Soil and Water Conservation District, the Koochiching County Environmental Services Department, and the Koochiching County Water Plan Advisory Committee; it contains a detailed account of the identification and selection process for chosen priority concerns.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 County Overview

#### County Name and County Seat

Koochiching County is located on the northern border of Minnesota. The City of International Falls is the county seat and is located on the international border between the United States and Canada.

Koochiching County is home to seven (7) major watersheds including the Rapid River, Lower Rainy, Rainy Lake, Rainy Headwaters, Upper/Lower Red Lakes, Big Fork River, and Little Fork River. Within these major watersheds are 157 minor watersheds.

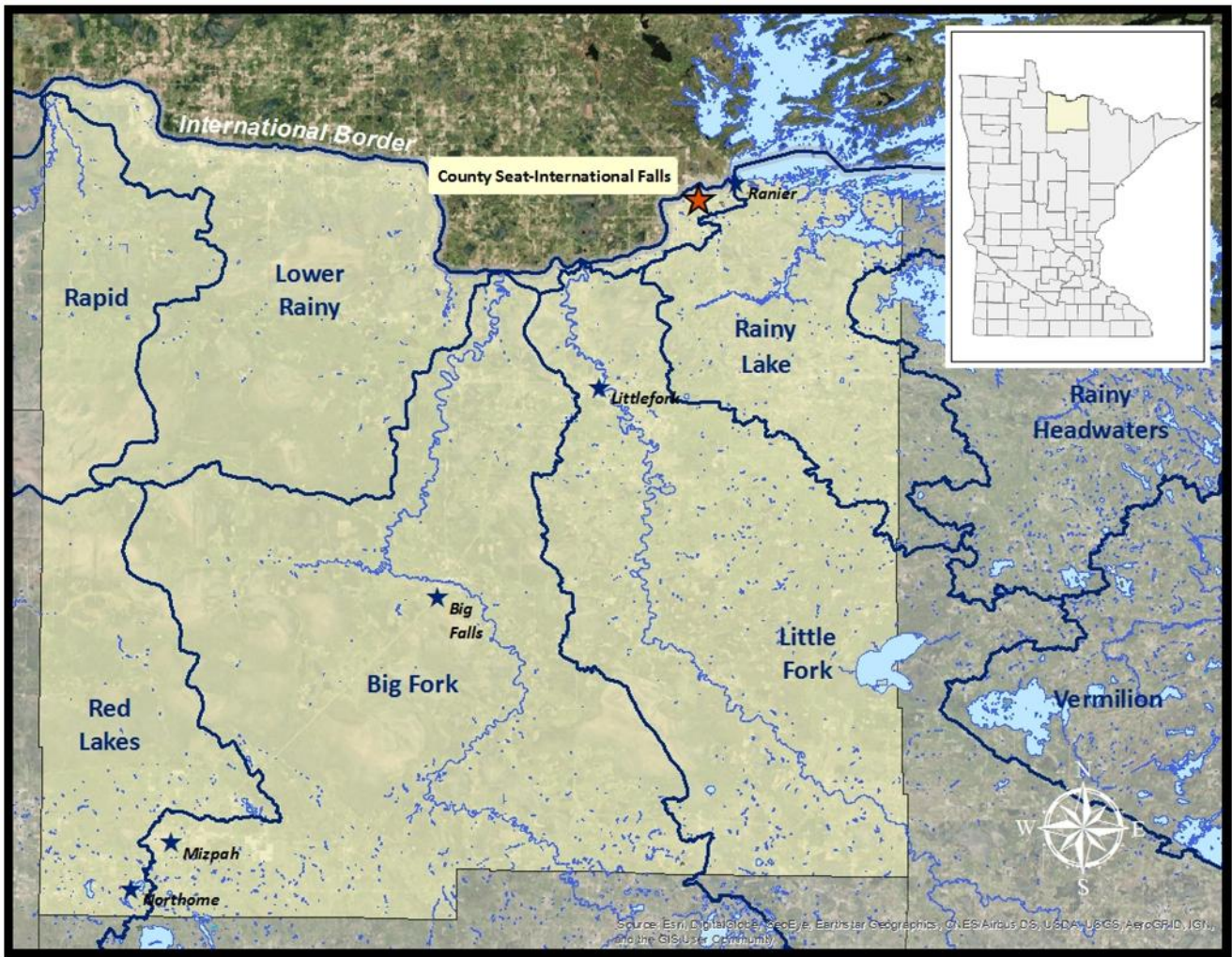


Figure 1: Koochiching County Seat and Boundaries

#### County Population and Trend Projections

Koochiching County's population has undergone a consistent decline since the 1980's. Over a 30-year span, there was a 24% decrease in population from 17,571 in 1980 to 13,311 in 2010. According to the US Census Bureau, this decline has continued as illustrated in Table 1 below.

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**Table 1: Koochiching County Population (Source: US Census Bureau)**

Koochiching County, Minnesota	Population Estimate (as of July 1)						
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	13,307	13,245	13,190	13,121	12,880	12,829	12,628

As illustrated in Table 2 below, the State of Minnesota projects that the population of Koochiching County will continue to decline well into the future.

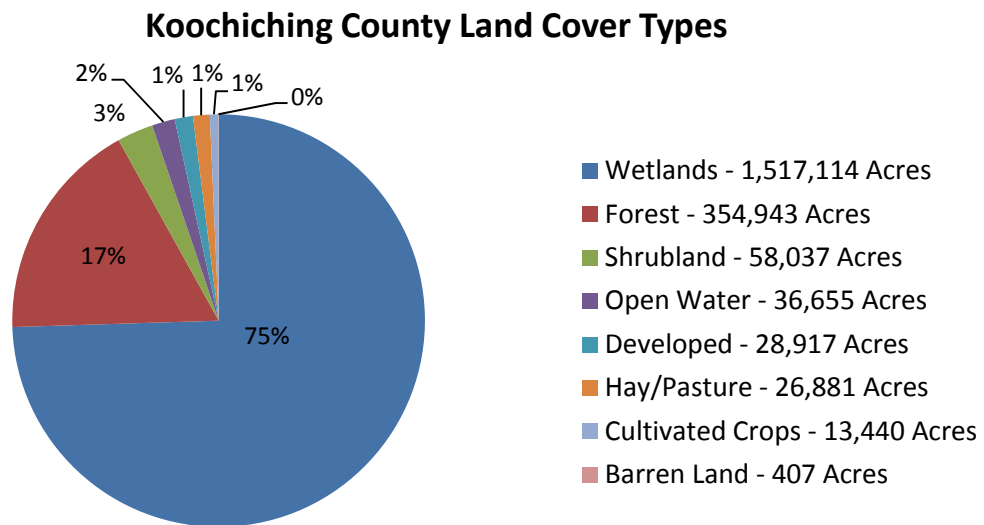
**Table 2: Koochiching County Population Projections (Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center)**

Koochiching County, Minnesota	Population Projections from Years 2020 - 2050						
	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050
	11,931	11,205	10,570	9,995	9,489	9,035	8,597

## County Land Use and Trend Projections

Koochiching County is the second largest county in the State of Minnesota with a land area totaling over 2,000,000 acres or approximately 3,182 square miles. The dominant land use continues to be sustainable forests which are managed for both the local economy and environmental values including water quality.

Figure 2 below highlights the landscape cover types, of which approximately 77% is open water or wetland. According to the National Land Cover Dataset, land cover conversion was less than 1% from 2001 to 2006. Since 2006, land use has seen the same minimal change as in the previous five years. Given Koochiching County’s unique landscape, ownership and small population, change in land use over the next 10 years is expected to be negligible.



**Figure 2: Koochiching County Land Cover Types (Source: National Land Cover Dataset, 2011)**

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## County Ownership

As shown in Figure 3 below, the State of Minnesota is the largest landowner in Koochiching County with over one million acres or approximately 55%. Privately owned lands account for 495,608 acres, or 25% of land in Koochiching County, with approximately 224,510 acres being professionally managed forest/timber land and 271,098 acres under individual private ownership.

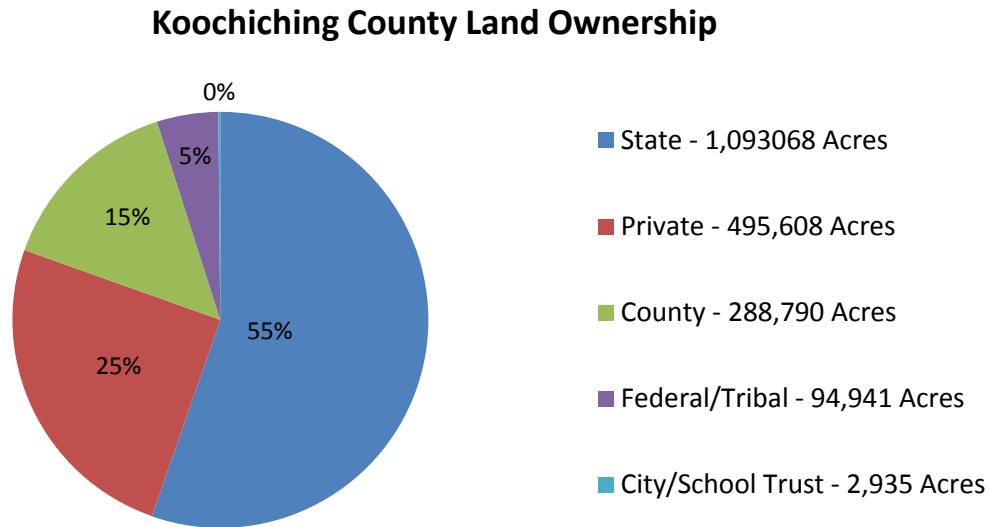


Figure 3: Koochiching County Land Ownership (Source: Koochiching County Parcel Data)

## 1.2 Plan Information

### Local Government Unit (LGU) Delegation

The Koochiching County Board of Commissioners has delegated the Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan (CLWMP) update responsibility to the Environmental Services Department (ESD) and the Koochiching Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). As the LGUs responsible for the development and implementation of the CLWMP, the ESD and SWCD are committed to protecting, preserving and improving water resources in Koochiching County.

### Plan History

The first resolution by Koochiching County to develop a Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan was in 1990, with the original plan being completed and adopted in 1995. Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes §103B.305, the CLWMP has been revised three times in the following years: 2000, 2007, and 2012.

The current Koochiching County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan is set to expire on December 31, 2017.

Six priority concerns were identified in the current CLWMP with the intention of protecting the surface water, ground water and related resources within Koochiching County. These priority concerns were reviewed and amended as needed based on input from the public, WPAC, and state and local agencies.

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## 2007 - 2017 Priority Concerns

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. Erosion                             | 4. Monitoring                  |
| 2. Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems | 5. Protection of Water Quality |
| 3. Education/Collaboration             | 6. Forestry                    |

## **2 PRIORITY CONCERNS ADDRESSED BY THE PLAN**

Eight priority concerns have been identified for the 2017 Koochiching County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan are (listed in no specific order – prioritization will be established according to watershed in the CLWMP)

- |                            |                                    |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Surface Water Quality   | 5. Invasive Species                |
| 2. Ground Water Protection | 6. Wetland Management              |
| 3. Forest Management       | 7. Education and Outreach          |
| 4. Shoreline Management    | 8. Commercial / Industrial Impacts |

## **3 PRIORITY CONCERNS IDENTIFICATION PROCESS**

The five-step priority concerns identification process began on 1/10/17 with a *Notice of Decision to Revise and Update the Koochiching County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan* sent from Koochiching County to state and local agencies.

Next, input was solicited in the form of a “request for input” letter mailed to stakeholders from the Koochiching County Environmental Services Department (ESD). Respondents were invited to provide input on the following via written letter, survey link, or email:

*The county invites everyone to submit input on water management issues they feel the Plan should address. For each issue submitted, please consider including the following information:*

- 1. Why is it important that the plan focus on this issue or concern (include or cite relevant data if available)?*
- 2. What actions do you think are needed to address the concern?*
- 3. What resources are available to accomplish the actions (names, funding sources, partnerships, etc.)?*
- 4. What specific areas of the county are the highest priorities in regards to this issue?*

Third, input was sought via an online survey that was posted on the Koochiching County and SWCD websites, shared through social media, announced on the local radio station, and emailed to the same stakeholder list as the letter. In addition to the questions in the original survey letter, the online survey also collected demographic information, areas of concern, and a list of 10 possible priority concerns that they were asked to rank against each other. A section that allowed respondents to add additional priority concerns and comments was also included.

The next step was to hold a public meeting to gather input regarding priority concerns and provide information regarding the water plan history and planning process.

Finally, a Water Plan Advisory Committee (WPAC) was appointed by the Koochiching County Board on 2/28/17 made up of resource professionals and engaged citizens throughout the County. The WPAC met on 3/29/17 and 4/12/17 to review priority concerns and comments provided by stakeholders as well as to provide additional input.

### **3.1 Public and Internal Forums**

The following provides a time table outlining the initiatives to collect public and internal input on priority concerns.

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- 1/10/17 Koochiching County Board of Commissioners adopted resolution to update plan.
- 1/18/17 Public input request letter sent via email and mail.
- 1/18 – 4/3/17 Public input survey posted to Koochiching SWCD and Koochiching County websites and shared on local social media pages (public comment period end date extended from March 10, 2017 to April 3, 2017).
- 1/18 – 3/10/17 Public input announcement aired on local radio stations KGHS/KSDM.
- 2/28/17 Koochiching County Board appointed the Water Plan Advisory Committee (WPAC).
- 3/3/17 Reminder sent out to all original request participants to complete public input.
- 3/22/17 Koochiching County ESD and Koochiching SWCD hosted a public input meeting to assist in determining priority concerns.
- 3/29/17 Koochiching ESD and Koochiching SWCD hosted an initial WPAC committee meeting to review public comments and assist in determining priority concerns.
- 4/12/17 Koochiching ESD and Koochiching SWCD hosted a second WPAC committee meeting to review the draft PCSD, assist in selecting priority concerns to be addressed in the CLWMP, and provide input on revisions to the draft PCSD.
- 4/17/17 Draft PCSD sent for state agency review and comment.

## List of Participants and Affiliated Organizations

On January 18, 2017 a request for input letter with online survey link was sent to city offices in Koochiching County, Koochiching SWCD volunteers, local landowners, local industries, local river boards, resource organizations including the Department of Natural Resources, Bois Forte Band Tribal Government, Board of Soil and Water Resources, MN Department of Agriculture, MN Department of Health, Rainy Lake Sportfishing Club, Red Lake Watershed District, USDA-NRCS, Koochiching County and adjacent county officials, International Joint Commission, the Environmental Quality Board, and the Northern Landscape Committee.

On February 28, 2017 the Koochiching County Board appointed an 18-member Water Plan Advisory Committee (WPAC). Members appointed included:

Dale Olson – Koochiching County ESD	Kevin Adee – Koochiching County Commissioner
Stephen Blair – Koochiching County ESD	Kelly Voigt – NRCS District Conservationist
Eldon Voigt – Koochiching SWCD Supervisor	Kevin Peterson – DNR Fisheries Supervisor
Pam Tomevi – Koochiching SWCD Staff	Marc Windsnes – Former WPAC Member
Eric Olson – Koochiching SWCD Staff	Shawn Pritchard – Interested Landowner
Sam Soderman – Koochiching SWCD Staff	Tom Crompton – Private Forester
James Aasen – Koochiching SWCD Staff	Tom Worth – Rainy Lake Sportfishing Club
Chad Severts – BWSR Board Conservationist	Brian Dreher – Local Resident
Mike Kennedy – MPCA Project Manager	Cyndy Strand – N. Koochiching Area Sanitary District

On March 22, 2017 the Koochiching ESD and SWCD hosted a *Koochiching County Water Plan Priority Concerns Public Meeting* in Littlefork, MN. Participants included:

Ralph Lewis – Koochiching SWCD  
Kelly Meyers –Int’l Falls City Council  
Dale Olson – Koochiching County ESD  
Jolen Simon – Koochiching SWCD  
Eric Olson – Koochiching SWCD  
Sam Soderman – Koochiching SWCD  
Richard Dreher – Koochiching SWCD  
James Aasen – Koochiching SWCD  
Brian Dreher – WPAC Member  
Mitch Brinks – Water Protection Specialist

Sandy Heem–Littlefork City Council Member  
Al Linder – Koochiching SWCD  
Kevin Sather –Littlefork City Council Member  
George Aitchison – Koochiching SWCD  
Eldon Voigt – Koochiching SWCD  
Gary Saunders – Koochiching County Resident  
Larry Aasen – Koochiching County Resident  
Wayne Skoe – Koochiching County Commissioner  
Kevin Adee – Koochiching County Commissioner

On March 29, 2017 the Koochiching ESD and SWCD met with the WPAC. Participants included:

Dale Olson – Koochiching County ESD  
Stephen Blair – Koochiching County ESD  
Pam Tomevi – Koochiching SWCD  
Jolen Simon – Koochiching SWCD  
Eric Olson – Koochiching SWCD  
Sam Soderman – Koochiching SWCD  
James Aasen – Koochiching SWCD

Kevin Peterson – DNR Fisheries  
Chad Severts – BWSR Board Conservationist  
Kevin Adee – Koochiching County Commissioner  
Brian Dreher – WPAC Member  
Cyndy Strand – N. Koochiching Area Sanitary District  
Marc Windsnes – Former WPAC Member

On April 12, 2017 the Koochiching ESD and SWCD met with the WPAC. Participants included:

Dale Olson – Koochiching County ESD  
Eldon Voigt – Koochiching SWCD  
Pam Tomevi – Koochiching SWCD  
Jolen Simon – Koochiching SWCD  
Sam Soderman – Koochiching SWCD  
James Aasen – Koochiching SWCD

Kevin Adee – Koochiching County Commissioner  
Kevin Peterson – DNR Fisheries Supervisor  
Marc Windsnes – Former WPAC Member  
Cyndy Strand – N. Koochiching Area Sanitary District  
Rian Reed – DNR Area Hydrologist

### Summary of Proceedings and Supporting Data

From the “request for input” letter mailed to stakeholders, two written responses were received: one from the MN Department of Health and one from the Red Lake Watershed District (summarized below):

Summary of response submitted by the **Minnesota Department of Health:**

- **Priority Concern 1: Source Water Protection for the City of International Falls and resorts located on Rainy Lake** - The public drinking water supply for International Falls (PWS ID 1360002) is exclusively from Rainy Lake and its adjacent watersheds. International Falls’ protection area includes portions of the Rainy River – Rainy Lake major watershed and the Black Bay Catchment Area. These surface water-based drinking water systems are highly susceptible to potential contaminants entering the public water supply at a level that may result in an adverse human health impact. Protecting the drinking water for the residents of, and visitors to, Koochiching County is a wise and relatively inexpensive investment in the future.
- **Priority Concern 2: Protect groundwater-based drinking water sources within Koochiching County** - In addition to the 5 public water suppliers, there are another 23 public water suppliers that utilize groundwater appropriation for their domestic use. The balance of Koochiching County’s residents depend on groundwater for their drinking water supply. Wellhead protection efforts will result in public water suppliers developing and implementing Wellhead Protection Plans. All public water suppliers within the county should be identified in the Local Water Plan



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(see the above referenced web address for a complete listing of public water suppliers in Koochiching County). Residents who utilize private wells also need protection from potential contaminant sources. This can be accomplished by maintaining proper setbacks to potential contaminant sources and implementing proper well management efforts, including appropriate land use decision-making.

- **Priority Concern 3: Sealing of unused, unsealed wells** - Proper well abandonment is an effective means of protecting groundwater from potential contaminants that may be carried into an aquifer. Also, unused, unsealed wells can pose a safety hazard to children or animals and a potential liability to the well owner.

## Summary of response submitted by the **Red Lake Watershed District**:

- The Upper/Lower Red Lakes Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) project is in progress. The Red Lake DNR has taken the lead on that project. The watershed was assessed in 2016 and some impairments were identified. Fish index of biological integrity (F-IBI) impairments were found in the Lost River and the Tamarac River. The North Cormorant River was found to be impaired by high total suspended solids, low dissolved oxygen, and high E. coli bacteria. Bartlett Lake will be listed as impaired by eutrophication in 2018 List of Impaired Waters.
- Our office has only sampled as far north as the North Cormorant River in the Upper/Lower Red Lakes watershed in recent years. Based upon the high E. coli concentrations that we've found there, livestock operations along streams would be a primary water quality concern.
- Bartlett Lake, in Northome, has been the subject of water quality studies. Some paleolimnology work was recently conducted in the lake. I have attached the work plan for that study.

From the online surveys, eleven completed responses were received. Results from total responses are shown in Table 3 below. Note: Six additional surveys were returned with incomplete data that could not be scored. Written comments contained in those six surveys have been incorporated into Table 5 in section 3.3.

**Table 3: Online Survey Priority Concerns Ranking (1=High / 10=Low)**

<b>Preliminary Priority Concerns Public Input Online Survey Results</b>										
	Failing Septic Systems	Shoreline Erosion	Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)	Lack of Shoreline Vegetative Buffers	Sensitive Shoreline Zoning	Flooding Risk	Natural Habitat Destruction	Development Pressure/Issues	Water Resource Education	Adjacent Agricultural Pressure
Survey1	3	7	10	5	4	1	8	6	9	2
Survey2	5	3	1	4	7	9	8	6	2	10
Survey3	1	4	3	5	7	2	8	9	6	10
Survey4	1	7	2	8	5	9	3	4	6	10
Survey5	6	5	8	4	1	10	3	2	9	7
Survey6	1	3	6	5	9	10	2	8	4	7
Survey7	1	6	3	4	9	2	8	5	7	10
Survey8	4	1	10	3	6	2	9	8	7	5
Survey9	5	4	8	9	2	7	10	6	3	1
Survey10	9	1	3	8	5	2	4	6	10	7
Survey11	1	3	2	5	8	10	4	7	9	6
<b>Average:</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>5.09</b>	<b>5.45</b>	<b>5.73</b>	<b>5.82</b>	<b>6.09</b>	<b>6.09</b>	<b>6.55</b>	<b>6.82</b>
<b>Priority Ranking</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>

Additional comments received from online surveys included concerns over shoreline erosion and property values affected by high water on Rainy River.

During the public meeting, attendees were invited to provide input on priority concerns. Main comments received included concerns about septic systems, aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, water quality

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monitoring, forestry practices, buffers, and flooding. These concerns have been incorporated into Table 5 in section 3.3.

During the WPAC meeting, members reviewed the issues/concerns relayed via written comment and surveys. Additional concerns raised included mining practices and mineral leases and the possible effect on water quality. These concerns have been incorporated into Table 5 in section 3.3.

These collective responses were used to help identify priority concerns to be addressed in the 2017 Koochiching County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan.

## 3.2 Written Comments Received at Public Meetings

During the public meeting on 3/22/17, verbal comments were recorded in the meeting minutes and are included in sections 3.1 *Summary of Proceedings and Supporting Data* and 3.3 *Concerns Identified by Stakeholders*. Only two written comments were received as shown:

<p><b>What is the Issue?</b> EROSION</p> <p><b>Sticker #(s)</b> 16</p> <p><b>Where is the Location?</b> Judicial Ditch on corner of County 98 and UT 443</p> <p><b>Do you have any project ideas in mind for this location/issue?</b> — stabilize the bank to save the ditch grade for snowmobiles and 4-wheelers and loggers in winter</p>	<p><b>What is the Issue?</b> EROSION</p> <p><b>Sticker #(s)</b> 17</p> <p><b>Where is the Location?</b> ON L.I.F. RIVER ACCESS FROM THE CITY OF L.I.F.</p> <p><b>Do you have any project ideas in mind for this location/issue?</b></p>
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## 3.3 Concerns Identified by Stakeholders

Table 5 is a compilation of issues and concerns brought forth by stakeholders during public meetings and submitted via written response, verbal input, email, and online/paper surveys:

**Table 4: Stakeholder Issues / Concerns**

Issue / Concerns	Description of Concern
Adjacent Agricultural Pressure	Agricultural practices adjacent to waterbodies and waterways can create a risk if not managed properly.
Algal Blooms on Rainy Lake	Harmful algal blooms (including blue-green algae) can have severe impacts on human health, aquatic ecosystems and the economy.
Aquatic Invasive Species	The presence/spread of aquatic invasive species has potential to alter native ecosystems and negatively impact fisheries, recreational activities and tourism.
Bartlett Lake Water Quality	Bartlett Lake does not meet the current total phosphorous standards (30 ppb) for lakes in the Northern Lakes Forested (NLF) ecoregion.
Coliform	High levels of fecal coliform and/or E. coli in waterbodies can have severe impacts on human health, aquatic ecosystems and the economy.
Development Pressure/Issues	Development and/or land use changes can negatively affect high value resources in Koochiching County.

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Failing Septic Systems	Failing septic systems can leak and cause contamination of ground and surface water, threatening human and environmental health.
Flooding Risk	Flood events pose a risk for property damage, structural damage and/or erosion. Flood water can become contaminated with effluent and runoff, leading to health risks.
Forestry Best Management Practices	Protection of forest hydrology through BMPs and designation of riparian zones, training and education program, community involvement, and retention of county ownership of water accesses can have a positive effect on water quality.
Terrestrial Invasive Species	The presence/spread of terrestrial invasive species has potential to alter native ecosystems, reduce biodiversity and negatively impact wildlife habitat, water quality and recreational activities.
Lack of Shoreline Vegetative Buffers	Areas of land that border creeks, rivers and lakes need perennial vegetation to help stabilize shorelines and prevent erosion.
Mining	Mining poses a potential environmental impact that could negatively affect Koochiching County resources. There are 36 State mineral leases in Koochiching County as of January 1, 2017.
Natural Habitat Destruction	Habitats are no longer able to support the native biodiversity.
Parcelization	Forestland sold and divided into smaller parcels increases the likelihood of development, making landscape level forest management difficult.
Protect Groundwater-based Drinking Water Sources in the County	Land use practices have the potential to adversely impact groundwater quantity and quality resulting in reduced groundwater recharge and impacts to receiving water and drinking water supplies.
Rail Crossings	Rail crossing accidents can potentially threaten surface and ground water quality.
Sealing of Unused, Unsealed Wells	Unsealed, unused wells provide a direct pathway for contaminants to quickly enter groundwater.
Sensitive Shoreline Zoning	Zoning regulations in place to protect sensitive shoreline from erosion.
Shoreline Erosion	Gradual (although sometimes rapid), removal of sediments from the shoreline contributes to sedimentation and increased phosphorous levels in a waterbody.
Source Water Protection for International Falls and Resorts on Rainy Lake	International Falls is the most populated city in the county and protecting the drinking water for the city and resort communities located on Rainy Lake is critical.
Education and Outreach	Public education is essential to sustain high water quality and good land management practices in Koochiching County.

## **4 PRIORITY CONCERN SELECTION PROCESS**

### **4.1 Priority Concerns Selected**

Stakeholders were asked to consider what resources they felt were most threatened and to prioritize corresponding resource concerns. Local ordinances, local and regional water management plans, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plans and Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy Reports (WRAPS) were also reviewed to ensure consistency.

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Based on available data, local expertise, survey responses, and public input ten main priority concerns were selected for inclusion in the CLWMP. Of the specific concerns in Table 5 above, all were incorporated into one or more of the main priority concerns selected.

Priority concerns selected for inclusion in the 2017 Koochiching County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan are described below (priority order will be established per watershed):

## **1 Surface Water Quality**

- Agriculture
- Drinking Water Source Protection
- Flood Events
- Impaired / At Risk Waters
- Septic Systems
- Stormwater Management

## **2 Ground Water Protection**

- Septic Systems
- Solid & Hazardous Waste Disposal
- Wellhead & Drinking Water Source Protection

## **3 Forest Management**

- Sustainable Forestry
- Parcelization
- Private Forest Management
- Riparian Zone Management

## **4 Shoreline Management**

- Development Pressure/Issues
- Septic Systems
- Shoreline Buffers
- Shoreline Erosion

## **5 Invasive Species**

- Aquatic Invasive Species
- Terrestrial Invasive Species

## **6 Wetland Management**

- Implement the Wetland Conservation Act
- Update the Koochiching County Wetland Flexibility Plan

## **7 Education and Outreach**

- Water Quality Education & Collaboration

## **8 Commercial / Industrial Impacts**

- Mining
- Transportation

## **4.2 Priority Concerns Relative to Other Plans**

While determining priority concerns, existing state, local, and regional management plans were reviewed including the Northern Landscape Management Plan, Big Fork River Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS) draft document, Little Fork River WRAPS draft document, Little Fork River Watershed Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) draft document, Little Fork/Rat Root River Management Plan, Big Fork River Management Plan, “A Long Range Plan for the Management of Tax Forfeited Land and Forest Resources of Koochiching County”, 2014 Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, Koochiching County Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) Ordinance, Voyageur’s National Park General Management Plan (2002), 2007 Koochiching County Priority Concerns Document from the Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan, and the 2015 “A Water Quality Plan of Study for the Lake of the Woods Basin”. This review confirmed that all priority concerns selected are supported by these existing resource management plans. The review of other plans also highlighted additional issues for consideration including stormwater reduction, feedlot permits and rules, and preservation of historical and archeological sites.

## **5 PRIORITY CONCERNS NOT ADDRESSED BY THE PLAN**

The main priority concerns selected allowed for considerable flexibility to address all issues identified by stakeholders listed in section 3.3 (see Table 4).