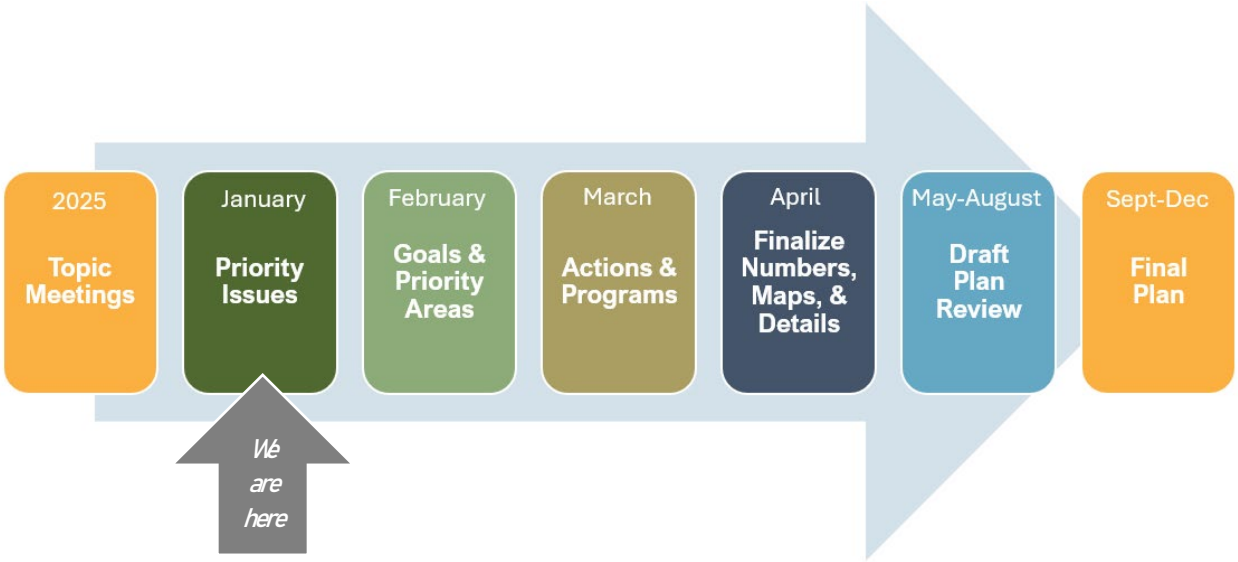
Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

January 8, 2026

Introduction

The Advisory Committee met virtually to review issue statements, brainstorm emerging concerns, and draft a vision statement. The plan timeline is shown below with our current status.



Issues

The first topic of the meeting was discussing issue statements that had been compiled in the topic meetings. During this process, issues were refined and the specifics of each issue were discussed. A full list of the issue statements following the meeting can be found in **Table 1**, below. The table outlines the resource topics, the issue theme, an issue statement that briefly describes the issue, and any notes from the meeting are also listed. The group decided against lumping issue statements together (a common example is stormwater can often be paired together with nutrients to form a water quality contaminants issue). Instead, the group decided to keep commonly paired issues separate, as they decided that each requires its own statement to address the unique landscape in this watershed.

Table 1 Draft issue statements for lakes and streams in the BFRW.

Resources(s)	Issue Statement	Notes
Lakes	**Lakeshore alteration** impacts water quality and shoreland habitat.	
Lakes, Stream	**Nutrients** have the potential to decrease water quality and impact aquatic recreation and aquatic life.	• Sturgeon Chain of lakes protection priority (whitefish and cisco disappearing) • Mention in plan that the cisco and whitefish are impacted by climate
Streams, Stormwater	**Stormwater runoff** in developed areas contributes pollutants to streams and lakes.	• Includes developed lakeshore • Congressional funds for stormwater
Lakes, Streams, Groundwater	**Agricultural runoff and livestock access** increases erosion, nutrients, sediment, and bacteria in streams and groundwater.	• *E.coli* issues in the farming area around Cook
Lakes, Stream	**Wild rice health** faces risks from development, climate, pollution, and invasive species.	• In WRAPS report, 1854 Treaty • There are sulfate impairments: Dark Lake, Sturgeon River (downstream of the lakes) • Important habitat resource for migratory waterfowl
Forests	Managing **forest health** is vital to sustaining economic, ecological, and recreational benefits.	• Example actions: climate assisted migration, forest stewardship plans, etc. • Coordination of forest management between different levels - federal, state, county, private • Reference the Northern Region Landscape Plan
Forests, Lakes, Streams	**Maintaining a forested landscape** prevents conversion, and safeguards sensitive species, water quality, and habitat.	• Example actions: Sustainable Forest Incentive Act, easements • Landscape Stewardship Plan goals - protection to 75% • Combined language about preventing conversion and protecting sensitive species
Stormwater, Forests	**Forest and Recreational Infrastructure** affect hydrology, runoff, and erosion.	
Wetlands, Streams	**Altered hydrology** from culverts, ditching, and channelization has impacted stream flow and aquatic habitat.	• Includes fish passage • Add the word connectivity (relates to fish and sediment)
Streams	**Eroding gullies and streambanks** contribute to turbidity impairments and reduced habitat quality.	• Effects from historical logging and geological setting (Lake Agassiz soils). • Geological system is young and still getting to an equilibrium
Streams, Stormwater	**Flooding** along rivers can threaten economic and natural resources.	• Actions: flood protection in Cook, floodplain mapping • Flood damage reduction and water quality (put different funding sources together)
Wetlands	**Wetland and peatland health** is impacted by invasive species, climate, ditching, and wildfire effects.	
Groundwater	**Groundwater** quality and sustainability need assessment and protection.	• In the narrative - explain drinking water and groundwater. Everyone in the watershed uses groundwater for drinking water. • Canadian cities and First Nations use Rainy River as drinking water source. • If we are the audience for the plan, groundwater = drinking water. But if general public, maybe specifying drinking water needs protection to connect with issue prioritizing exercises.

Emerging Concerns

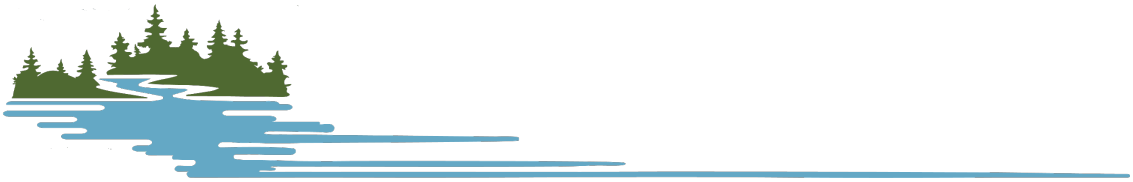
Additionally, emerging concerns were brainstormed during the meeting. Emerging concerns are concerns that will be mentioned in the plan, but cannot have their progress directly measured, or cannot be directly addressed with local projects. The emerging concerns brainstormed during the meeting are listed below:

- Invasive species
    - Emerald Ash Borer
    - Eastern Larch Beetle
    - Impact on hydrology, particularly in floodplains
- Contaminants of emerging concern
    - Chloride/salting
    - Radioactive radium
    - Manganese
    - Arsenic
    - PFAS
    - Pharmaceuticals
    - Estrogenic Compounds
- Mining
    - Groundwater flow
    - Sulfate impairments
- Recreation
    - ATV trains
    - Boardwalks

Vision Statement

The last section of the meeting was dedicated to brainstorming for the vision statement for the watershed. Each watershed plan has a vision statement. A vision statement is an inspirational statement of an idealistic emotional future of the watershed. Participants of the meeting brainstormed ideas to be included in the vision statement by exploring the unique aspects of the LFRW, as well as identifying what an ideal future looks like in the watershed. Here are the initial ideas explored:

- Flows north
- Intense logging industry
- Low development density
- Extensive public land and government that will protect resources
- Designing activities that are a good fit for maintaining guardian/habitat as well
- Enjoyment of the river
- Big woods country
- Semi-wilderness
- Lots of forests



- Logging/forest industry – economically important for jobs/industry and recreation
- Big watershed, small town feel
- Turbid water, but healthy biology
- Younger river, still cutting

Meeting Attendees

- Andy Arens – Itasca SWCD
- Austin Steere - Itasca SWCD
- Austin Vinar - Koochiching SWCD
- Austin Wallin – Koochiching SWCD
- Cal Saari – Itasca SWCD
- Chad Severts - BWSR
- Christopher Lintula - St. Louis County
- Dan Disrud- MDH
- Dave Skurla – St. Louis Land and Minerals
- James Aasen – Koochiching SWCD
- James Hansen - DNR
- Jeff Hrubes- BWSR
- Jody Peek - NRCS
- Jólen Simon – Koochiching SWCD
- Lily Carr - Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates
- Matt Gouin – Koochiching County
- Matt Gutzmann - Itasca SWCD
- Mitch Brinks, GIS
- Nathaniel Anderson – St. Louis Land and Minerals
- Pam Tomevi - Koochiching SWCD
- Phil Norvich – North St. Louis SWCD
- Phil Talmage – DNR
- Skyler Webb – St. Louis County
- Whitney Sims - Koochiching County
- Moriya Rufer - Houston Engineering
- Aaron Frankl - Houston Engineering

References

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), 2015. Watershed Health Assessment Framework.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), 2017a. Little Fork River Watershed Sediment Reduction Project (Total Maximum Daily Load).

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), 2017b. Little Fork River Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy Report.