

**Clean Water Council
Budget and Outcomes Committee (BOC) Meeting Agenda
Friday, August 1, 2025, 10:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**

Webex Only

2025 BOC Members: Steve Besser (BOC Chair), Dick Brainerd (BOC Vice-Chair), Steve Christensen, Warren Formo, Brad Gausman, Holly Hatlewick, Annie Knight, Fran Miron

10:45 Regular Business

- Introductions
- Approve agenda & May meeting minutes
- Chair and Staff update

10:55 Public Comment

Any member of the public wishing to address the Council regarding something not on the agenda is invited to do so as a part of this agenda item.

11:10 (DISCUSSION ITEM) Beta-test outcomes and discussion

Members will have tested the rubric between 9:30 and 10:30. At this time, we will be evaluating the rubric as a tool (not the programs reviewed) and discussing changes to both it and the process for its use.

12:00 Adjourn

Budget and Outcomes Committee Meeting Summary
Clean Water Council (Council)
July 11, 2025, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Committee Members present: Steve Besser (Committee Chair), Dick Brainerd (Committee Vice Chair), Steve Christenson, Warren Formo, Brad Gausman, Fran Miron, and Annie Knight.

Members absent: Holly Hatlewick.

To watch the Webex video recording of this meeting, please go to <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/clean-water-council/policy-ad-hoc-committee>, or contact [Brianna Frisch](#).

Regular Business

- Introductions
- Approval of the July 11th meeting agenda and May 2nd meeting minutes, motion to approve both by Dick Brainerd, seconded by Fran Miron. Motion carries unanimously.
- Chair and Staff update
 - There are field tour items being worked on, looking at protection specifically. Looking at how the Clean Water Funds (CWFs) are being used, and the role of the Council. It will be September 15th - 16th. It will start in the Park Rapids area.
 - Calendar invites will be sent out from Jen Kader for the remainder of the 2025 year.

Public Comment (*Webex 00:08:00*)

Any member of the public wishing to address the Council regarding something not on the agenda is invited to do so as a part of this agenda item.

- No comments provided.

Finalize Draft Evaluation Documents (aka Scoring Rubric) (*Webex 00:11:00*)

The May BOC Meeting included thoughtful discussion of the draft rubric. This will provide an opportunity to review the changes made to the rubric and begin discussing the process for its use. Members are asked to consider advancing this to Full Council for review prior to beta testing.

- The orange text indicates edits from the last BOC meeting.
- There was a special considerations component at the bottom of the rubric. It was moved to the top of the rubric and included in the purpose and prioritization text. The score is a helpful tool, but Council members still have the flexibility to prioritize programs regardless of the score.
- On the second page are options for rolling out the rubric. These were previously discussed at BOC meetings, so this is an outline.
- On the third page is a scoring rubric guide for Council members.
- Discussion:
 - Steve Christenson: I was not present at the last meeting. I think this looks great, and I am prepared to approve it, and move it to the full Council for review and approval there.
 - Steve Christenson: I wonder if there should be more points towards outreach and communication, as it is one of our four goals in the Council's Strategic Plan. We should be prioritizing programs that are strong on outreach. *Response from Annie Knight:* We weighted it early on, but we can make changes to it. This is a rough draft. We could elect to have them be equal points. We could have it out of 100 points instead of 50 points. I am open to having the outreach and education having more points.
 - Regarding, water quantity, should it have equal consideration to quality?
 - *Answer from Annie Knight:* We do call out water quantity in the water quality area.
 - Steve Christenson: It could say "water quality and quantity is the top priority". Strike the "may also have co-benefits to water quantity part. However, I am okay leaving it as is too, if others have strong feelings about it.
 - Annie Knight: I believe it was Tannie that brought forward the concern for quantity.

- Tannie Eshenaur, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH): I think the Council has wrestled with this over the whole life of the Council. Water quantity is not as clear for the Council in the statute, for its inclusion. So, that is why there is always this question. The science is that water quality and quantity are so interconnected; it is a system. One of the key state agencies are the Minnesota Department of Nature Resources (DNR), and they are the guardians of water quantity. They have the sustainability statute, which all the agencies support. When they talk about sustainability, it is in quality and quantity.
- Steve Besser: We can go back to water quality as the top priority. It is both, but water quality is the top, per the statute.
- Jen Kader: Refinements can be made at the full Council meeting.
- Brad Gausman: If water quantity is a quality benefit built into a program application, then I would think the description of the program would include quantity as a part of the water quality improvement. Therefore, quantity is built into quality, as it is addressed by certain projects. We can leave it as originally “water quality” only. If quantity is a part of the water quality effort, that is described in the application and will be considered as we consider the quality improvement of the project/program.
- Jason Moeckel, DNR: It could be captured as a footnote as well. So, you don’t lose that thought, but it does not need to be in the rubric language directly. You are adding context that matters.
- Jen Kader: The next step is application. We can ask that directly too.
- Margaret Wagner, MDA: Does adding those co-benefits add to the points that are available? Or is it more important to note that, and describe it so people understand the value of the different programs? When you look at the rubric, will more points be awarded for the programs that do have water quantity, or articular climate resiliency connection? Or is it just context for the Council to understand the program, to make those connections? So, I think describing it in a footnote would be helpful. *Response from Annie Knight:* We can add a footnote. Something that notes define and highlight importance of water quality. Regarding points, I think it will be subject to each Council member. I think it would be important to have the Council be consistent in their scoring across programs, because in the end things will balance out.
- Annie Knight: How do people feel about the weight of the scores?
 - Steve Besser: I think it is good.
 - Brad Gausman: For measurable, progress, and feasibility, should we include something about if this program creates change that will extend beyond potential ending of legacy funds? If we stop putting funding in it, will it stay, does the inertia stay? Are we creating something self-sustaining for post legacy. Or are we funding best management practices so once the funding stops, the program loses steam.
 - Jen Kader: I think that would go under the next criteria, sustainability.
 - Brad Gausman: Was the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification program around before legacy fund dollars?
 - Answer: No.
 - Brad Gausman: Do we expect it to be funded if it goes away?
 - Jen Kader: You can ask that for each program.
 - Brad Gausman: Is a program being built to self-sustain after an initial surge of legacy funds? I would rank a program highly if it did.
 - Tannie Eshenaur, MDH: There is whether the program would be sustained, but also a question of whether the changes it produces will also endure. Changes in the system.
 - Brad Gausman: That is equally valuable.
 - Steve Besser: Add language on the enduring impact.
- Jen Kader: A valuable piece of this missing now, in terms of an engagement versus just outreach. If we are engaging folks and pulling them in, if under community value, we add in a

sentence that says, “interested parties have specifically requested support for this in previous or current budget cycles”. maybe it is coming from the community, or there is a deeper community partnership. That can come from the community saying it has value.

- Annie Knight: Interested parties could be citizens, but they are not the ones seeking CWFs. However, if there is a letter of support from community members, it highlights the direct local support?
- Jen Kader: Yes. Perhaps a letter, or listed as part of the project or local partners.
- Annie Knight: I can build these edits more, not in real time. Then, it can be sent electronically. Perhaps we can approve the rubric assuming the edits talked about at this meeting will be included. Then, we do not need to bring it up for another review next BOC meeting.
- *Motion by Steve Besser to move the scoring rubric, with edits from Annie Knight, the next version would be presented to the full Council for review and approval. Second by Fran Miron.*

Discussion:

- Brad Gausman: We have different people on the Council representing different constituents, that was purposeful so folks could weigh in on that different work. I think we should talk about moving all decisions about the BOC budget recommendations to the full Council. We could focus on outcomes. I just think as we move forward with this rubric, making the decision-making more Council-wide, and move all final budget recommendations to the full Council.
- Steve Besser: They are right now.
- Brad Gausman: In BOC meetings, we decided what funds to cut where, to meet targets, and presented it back to the full Council. I think all cuts should be made in front of the full Council.
- Steve Christenson: I don't see what you are saying. It is so big and cumbersome to make these decisions as a large group. I think we would struggle to come to decisions. I think it is better to have a smaller group, the BOC, do its job. To sift and screen and make a recommendation. Those decisions can be overruled by the full Council. They can be modified by the full Council. The role of the BOC is to do some of that budgetary work.
- Brad Gausman: I respect the conversation here. However, the most important role of the Council is to make recommendations for the use of legacy funds. If that took every meeting for the two years it would be worth the effort. That is our number one priority as a Council. It is important to integrate, and it would be longer conversations, but everyone is here for an important reason and should all be a part of those decisions.
- Steve Besser: When we provide the recommendations, we bring it to the Council. We present the budget. We could make that the entire meeting instead of different subjects that day. We could open it up, if the whole Council would agree. That is the reason folks are on the BOC, representing some areas, and doing the heavy lifting.
- Brad Gausman: I appreciate the conversation. I still think Council members should be included on the discussions of the funds. I was a little surprised to find that those discussions were happening in the BOC, and not at the full Council level. If I wanted to leverage the strength of my position as a Council member, I think I would be more effective attending only BOC meetings than full Council meetings. I don't think that should be the case, given the importance of our work, and the breadth of our experience the different seats on the Council bring to these decisions. I will stand on my opinion here. We should have those discussions with the full Council.
- John Barten: We are trying to improve an existing process with the scoring rubric. We have not had a rubric in the past. We, together, look at the recommendations that are important to our constituents. We recognize it is not a hard and fast way to fund the programs with the highest point total. Instead, this is a tool, to help us with our recommendations, and the direction they ought to go. I look at this as a guideline, and a way for everyone on the Council to submit their points. If we have budget constraints, it would be nice to have a mechanism, to help focus the existing funds we have. It is more desirable to do the fine tuning. Historically, the BOC has seen its role to simply make recommendations. There are a lot of programs to get through. It takes time. When you have a group of seventeen voting members, and it gets tough when you have different groups. The process of using the BOC to make those initial cuts, has worked well for us. I think we need to maintain it. When those recommendations come to the Council, we do have some folks on the Council who do not speak up.

We need to do another job of eliciting feedback from those folks. As a Chair, I need to do better in that, and strive to moving forward. I hesitate to endorse this, because it would reduce the time, we have to look at the bigger picture items, threats emerging, and we can determine where things fit in the Councils recommendations. The scoring rubric is good, but we still need to be cautious. However, if we keep it consistent, as Council members, it can be used as a good tool.

- Annie Knight: Using the scoring rubric brings all Council members into the decision-making process, instead of just the louder voices in the room. The scoring rubric is a gateway of tapping into that expertise. Having the weight of the decision-making process in all of the Council's hands, it opens the door to bring everyone into that fold. I would like to spend time on rolling out the rubric. It may address some of Brad's concerns.
- Fran Miron: This committee just provides recommendations. There are sometimes powers for committees to act, and the Council does not have that here. That still lies with the full Council. We have the scoring rubric. These are public meetings. If more members of the Council would like to attend to provide input, they can attend. In order to accomplish what we need to; we need to be smart about our time. Looking at the calendar, we really only have a year of time. It is best done in a committee format, with the structure where the committee makes a decision is a good one, with it going to the full Council to make the final decisions, it is a good setup.
- Jen Kader: Something that came up in the last cycle, if you don't take good notes during the process at the meetings, after seventy presentations on overlapping and interconnection programs, you can forget. The scoring rubric can be a good tool to help digest and remember your reactions when you get into the budget discussions. Additionally, this can help with the input coming from the full Council. Also, when I've done proposal review for other grant programs in the past, we had an extra five points available to give based on our areas of expertise. This would bump it up higher, and it might be something for the Council to consider to give context to the scores. If/when the BOC gets to those cutting discussions, those cuts will impact different stakeholder groups.
- Steve Besser: *I would like to make an amendment to the motion: I motion that we vote to submit this draft from Annie Knight, pages 1-2, but do not include the options for the rollout.* I think it is important to approve the scoring rubric only. We can discuss the rubric later. We should include the full Council in the rollout. We have also talked about a beta run.
 - Motion carries.
- *Reminder of the motion by Steve Besser: Motion to approve the updated draft from Annie Knight, for review and approval at the next full Council meeting. Motion carries unanimously.*

Impacts to Funds Leveraged by the Clean Water Fund (Webex 01:33:15)

The May BOC Meeting introduced this topic, and this meeting will build on it with a discussion of how a changing landscape for Federal funding could impact funding priorities, program viability, or leveraging opportunities. This is an initial discussion.

- Looking forward at the budget, the Council will potentially be looking at cuts this budget cycle. It is worth starting these discussions. Are there any thoughts or questions regarding that uncertainty?

Questions/Comments:

- Marcey Westrick, MDA: As we talk about funding, it is unknown. Federal agencies are scrambling for staff capacity. That is the first impact, along with how to cover tasks. What we are seeing is it is hard to get straight answers sometimes, and there is a lot of uncertainty there. Federal programs are subject to additional DOGE review, and we do not know what will happen there. We have heard that some USDA grants are now unfrozen, so that is important. We provide match for other people to provide those funds, so that can help. Specifically, we have heard of losses of recently hired folks at districts. So, those are frozen now. EQUIP funding is affecting. That is the leveraging we are looking at, with our ability to support our local partners right now. We are grateful but feeling the impact other areas. We are trying to listen closely to our local partners, thinking about how we can adjust.
- Justin Hanson, the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR): The new chief for NRCS is open to leveraging the staff that are in the field and trying to lean on the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). We are fortunate in Minnesota because we have strong SWCDs, a model training program, and it is a shared effort between NRCS and SWCDs. We are in good shape with supporting that, whereas

other states will have struggles. We do not know what the future will hold for the NRCs. We have some things to look forward. The CREP agreements commit to acres versus funding, and those can be halted. In perspective there are a lot of unknowns.

- Jason Moeckel, DNR: The DNR had to go through the reconciliation bill. There are increases in funding around flood protection, and we do not know how much might go to Minnesota, because it is at a national level. We do not have the details yet. Our DNR programs are largely unaffected. The state agencies bill will not be known yet. Some programs will be funded long term, but others are up in the air. It seems like some of the funding received to do surveys like where rare plants or animals are in Minnesota may be reduced or cut. It will be monitored for some time. It is great for this Council to check in periodically as we move forward.
- Steve Christenson: In the last budget cycle in 2024, if there was leveraging funds, I wanted to maximize them. I increased my advocacy for programs that received federal matching. I think that holds true moving forward, we should prioritize those programs. I wonder, is there some change?
 - Steve Besser: We depend on the state agencies a lot to know what leveraging opportunities are out there. When we must make budget cuts, we looked at if we were making cuts to programs that had leveraged funds. We tried to avoid those. So, we take that into consideration in the budget process.
 - Dick Brainerd: I don't think anything changed. It is just in preparation if federal matching funds go away, we need to think about the impacts to the CWF programs that leverage funds. Unless it is a critical program, where the Council may want to fund it more. These conversations are important to talk about, in case funding disappears. We need to think about having a plan in place.
 - Jason Moeckel, DNR: Regarding the funding, for the last few budget recommendation cycles, we have often expressed the funding needs as steady funding, increase in funding needs, or decrease in funding needs (which is rare). Usually, we try to figure out what is going to work for all sides of the perspectives, so everyone walks away feeling like we came together with the decision. Keeping things going, and accounting for things moving forward. The Council could right now, look back at all the investments in each supported program, and decide if they want to keep investing in them. I am reflecting on it because, the Council now has a rubric, and you could start that anytime you wanted. Regarding the different options to move forward with applying the rubric, the program presentations happen in January. They are typically good. They help people learn about the programs and provide opportunities for questions. Those presentations do not change a lot from cycle to cycle, at least the essence does not change a lot, but we do update them with current information. Every year there are new proposals for the Council to hear, so that is a different sequence for the Council to consider. We try to align the Council's and the state agencies funding. We have done well the last few cycles. You can pick up your recommendations any time and start making these decisions as well.
 - Brad Gausman: Thinking about legacy funding as a whole, how do the DNR programs that apply for Outdoor Heritage Funds, meet that realization of a different system? There are certainly programs that are longer term implemented program that use Outdoor Heritage Funds. How does the DNR approach that differently? *Answer from Jason Moeckel, DNR:* We maintain a collaboratively developed list that we call our stream restoration priorities. We solicit input from all of our field offices, and the information to know more about it, to know if it has merit. We have a rubric, and we score them. We have a long list of these projects. We go to Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and present the next few highest ranked projects on our list. They let us know what they would like to give for funding these, and we adjust it for that many projects. The difference is that the CWFs include paying for staff to go out and do the monitoring and analysis work, which then informs us about projects. If the Council downsizes the funds, the DNR needs to adjust, and we inform you of those impacts. That expertise walks out the door, and it takes more time to ramp up that staffing. LSOHC is mostly funding projects. Projects that are designed, engineered, and then it goes out on contracts, and so it operates differently.
- Jen Kader: In order to capture our conversations here, I would like to review your questions at this time:
 - As funds change that would impact CWF investments, what is the impact to the program that it was connected to? Is it the end of the program? Or reduced contracts, staffing, implementation?
 - How is that program connected to others?
 - What is the history of that program? What may be impacts to those past investments?

- What are those future needs, and what would we do about that gap?
- Annie Knight: It would be good to have how the program is connected to other programs on the application form. Perhaps, they can add it on their own, or it can be asked directly on the form. If that can be updated for the next round of budget recommendations. Also, included in the presentations.
- Dick Brainerd: Perhaps there should be a request to the Council members, like a feedback mechanism, of what members are hearing, of what will have an impact of water in Minnesota. Items that should be raised regarding funding. We don't need to wait for a Council meeting. We should be aware.
- Tannie Eshenaur, MDH: I can talk about the MDH's issue with funding. It is different than other state agencies right now. We do not get any federal dollars for the private well work. Except \$100,000 dollar grant from the CDC. This disappeared in January 2025. We typically receive those dollars in advance. We also just received a jarring email saying, "they are no longer the project manager, and they cannot answer any questions", and then last week, this person came back! The National Center for Health also disappeared and may be coming back, but we are not sure. On the public water side, the MDH does receive dollars from US EPA, for the state drinking water revolving fund, and there are matching dollars that come through the bonding bill, which goes to public facilities authority. They also receive something called "set asides", which are small grants from the EPA to do public water supply supervision. There is an even smaller grant for source water protection as well. It is quickly gone. We do receive dependable funding from the service connection fees, so everyone who is connected to a public water supply or community water supply. It is currently \$9 but will go to \$15 sometime next year, and these funds basically go to staffing. So, the source water protection funding comes from the CWFs, except for that small set aside. We do not have these other options like the LSOHF. We recently gained a staff member from BWSR, and she is going to be helping with some private well work in the central sands area, and she was shocked at how poor local public health is in the state. She is comparing it to the situation with SWCDs. The way that relates to federal funding, is that there has been a recognition that local public health is poorly funded for years, and during Covid-19 it became very apparent, so there was an outpouring of federal dollars to build up health systems. Some of it was directly related to Covid-19, but some was just basic people infrastructure at the local level. So, our 52 community health boards were able to increase staffing. That went away on March 25, 2025, where the federal government said we must stop work, and these were reimbursement kind of dollars. Because of that federal lawsuit, up until now, we have been submitting our invoices every other Friday and just waiting to see if money shows up in the bank for us. So far it has, but it can be appealed, and the window to appeal it is July 15, 2025. We are hoping because it has not been appealed yet, that the federal government will not appeal that injunction. The MDH's partnership relies a lot on public health. One of our principles has been building local capacity for protecting private well users, and it is an uncertain future. The appropriations we receive through CWFs have made a huge contribution.

Motion to adjourn by Dick Brainerd, seconded by Fran Miron. Motion carries unanimously.

Adjournment (Webex 02:21:10)

Clean Water Council Scoring Rubric (7/16/2025)

Purpose and Prioritization: The Clean Water Council’s scoring rubric is a tool to help the Council formally and consistently evaluate proposals using clear, shared criteria. While the rubric provides a structured evaluation framework, the Clean Water Council may prioritize proposals for funding based on its collective judgment, regardless of score.

Criteria	Updated Evaluation Statement as of 6/24/2025	Points Available
Water Quality Impact	Water quality is the top priority , with a focus on measurable improvements to surface water, groundwater, or drinking water . Prioritizes implementation of proven or innovative practices, with research included if it directly supports implementation. May also provide co-benefits that address other environmental concerns, including water quantity.*	0-15 _____
Strategic Alignment	Aligns with Clean Water Council Strategic Plan and state-approved water plans ; coordinates effectively across local, state, and federal initiatives.	0-10 _____
Measurable Progress & Feasibility	Defines clear, outcome-based goals and measurable indicators ; shows historical progress or a feasible path to long-term systems change . May include research, monitoring, or planning activities that support measurable outcomes.	0-10 _____
Financial Leverage & Sustainability	Supplements vs supplants; potential for leveraging local or partner support; if partially funded, project is scalable	0-5 _____
Community Value	Engages landowners, local communities, and underserved groups ; addresses environmental justice and equity considerations; direct community support is evident.	0-5 _____
Outreach & Communications	Communicates outcomes clearly ; includes outreach strategies; acknowledges Clean Water Fund use in public materials (e.g., Logo displayed, CWF mentioned)	0-5 _____

Scoring Rubric Guide for Council Members

The scoring rubric provides a clear, consistent framework for evaluating proposals in alignment with the Clean Water Council's strategic priorities. Here are a few guiding steps to help with the scoring process:

1. **Review Each Proposal Thoroughly**

Read each proposal carefully and assess how it addresses each rubric criterion.

2. **Score Each Section Independently**

Assign a score within the specified range for each section, based on how strongly the proposal meets that criteria.

3. **Be Consistent**

Use a consistent scoring approach across all proposals you review. For example, if you tend to score conservatively, apply that same approach for each project.

4. **Provide Comments and Questions**

Where possible, include comments or questions for each section. These notes are valuable for agencies and the Interagency Coordination Team to address during or after presentations. This is especially helpful when reviewing multiple proposals over time, as it provides context for Council discussion and follow-up.

5. **Maintain Flexibility**

The rubric is a decision-making tool, not an automatic approval or denial mechanism. Final funding recommendations reflect both rubric scores and the Council's collective judgment.

* Key Considerations for Water Quality Impact:

- **Water Quantity:** While water quality is the top priority, proposals may provide co-benefits for water quantity, such as improving water availability, storage, or flow conditions within a watershed.
- **Other Environmental Concerns:** Additional environmental co-benefits may include habitat restoration, biodiversity, climate resiliency, or protection of natural resources that directly support water quality and quantity goals.