

# January 2025 Environmental Quality Board meeting

**Wednesday, January 15 from 1 – 4:00 p.m.**

## Join online via Teams

- Online: For the meeting link and more information, visit the [board meeting webpage](#)
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## Participating in board meetings

### Attending virtually

Members of the public may join the meeting virtually using the Teams link at the board meeting webpage link above. Please review the [Guide to Teams Participation](#) for additional information.

### Joining the virtual meeting at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency office

Members of the public are welcome to attend the virtual meeting from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's St. Paul office (520 Lafayette Rd, St. Paul, MN 55155) lower level conference rooms. All visitors must sign in at the front desk.

Transportation options:

- Bicycle: Visit the [Saint Paul Bike Map](#) webpage for route information. Outdoor bicycle parking is available to the left of the front doors near the loading dock.
- Transit: Use [Metro Transit's Trip Planner](#) to determine the best routes and times.
- Car: You may park in a Visitor Parking space in the parking lot just outside the front door, or park in one of the visitor lots. The visitor lots are the Blue Lot (Olive St. and University Ave.) and the Jupiter Lot (on Grove St. across from the Ramsey County Law Enforcement Center); please see the [parking map](#). Parking in these lots is free of charge. You must register your vehicle at the front desk upon arrival.

### Accessibility

Please contact Environmental Quality Board (EQB) staff at least one week prior to the event at [info.EQB@state.mn.us](mailto:info.EQB@state.mn.us) to arrange an accommodation. Meeting materials can be provided in different forms, such as large print, braille, or on a recording.

### Public engagement opportunities at EQB meetings

EQB encourages public input and appreciates the opportunity to build shared understanding with members of the public. The opportunities for public engagement for this meeting are below.

## Oral public comment

In this meeting, the board will accept oral public comment at multiple points on the agenda.

Procedure and guidelines for giving oral public comment:

- If you wish to speak:
  - Virtual: when prompted, use the “raise hand” feature in Teams, located at the top of your screen.
  - In person: sign up at the welcome table before the meeting starts.
- Your remarks will be limited to two (2) minutes. When necessary, the chairperson may limit commenters’ time for remarks to ensure there is equal opportunity for the public to comment.
- When the chairperson calls on you to speak:
  - Introduce yourself before beginning your comment.
  - Please keep your remarks to those facts which are relevant and specific, as determined by the chairperson, to the agenda item at hand.
  - Please be respectful of board members, staff, and other meeting participants. Avoid questioning motives. The chair, vice-chair, or other presiding officer will not tolerate personal attacks.
  - Please note that the chair will use their discretion for directing public comment to ensure the board’s ability to effectively conduct business.

## Written public comment

You may submit written comment to EQB by emailing your letter to [info.EQB@state.mn.us](mailto:info.EQB@state.mn.us) or mailing to: Environmental Quality Board, 520 Lafayette Road, Saint Paul, MN 55155. Comments must be received by EQB staff **by noon the day before the meeting**.

Staff will compile letters, make them available to members and the public online, and attach them to the public record. Any written comments received after this deadline will be included in the next meeting packet.

All comments will be made available to the public. Please only submit information that you wish to make available publicly. EQB does not edit or delete submissions that include personal information. We reserve the right to not publish any comments we deem offensive, intimidating, belligerent, harassing, bullying, or that contain any other inappropriate or aggressive behavior.

# Agenda

*Note that all listed times are estimates and are advisory only.*

## 1. Welcome and roll call (1:00 pm)

Nancy Daubenberger – Chair, EQB; Commissioner, Department of Transportation

## 2. Approval of consent agenda (1:10 pm)

- Meeting minutes from the December 18, 2024, Environmental Quality Board meeting on packet page 5
- Preliminary agenda for the January 15, 2024, Environmental Quality Board meeting

## 3. Executive Director’s report (1:15 pm)

Catherine Neuschler – Executive Director, EQB

## 4. Environmental Congress Report out (1:25 pm)

**Type of item:** Informational

**Summary:** The Environmental Congress has been a long-standing EQB collaboration and engagement opportunity. MMB’s Management Analysis Division provided a summary of the conversations at each of the four meetings and can be found on packet page 12. EQB staff have provided a summary on packet page 9 that focuses on what we learned from the Congress and how it can help us better meet our goals around collaboration and engagement.

**Outcome:** The Board will hear about and have a chance to discuss engagement and next steps to continue to improve EQB’s engagement with the public.

**Presenters:** Priscilla Villa-Watt, Communications and Engagement Coordinator, EQB

## 5. Environmental Review Projects List (1:55 pm)

**Type of item:** Informational

**Summary:** Over the last few months, EQB staff have been developing an environmental review “projects list” to enhance our environmental review program continuous improvement (CI) process. The purpose of the projects list is to support the staff, ERIS, and the Board in discussing and planning for projects to address the multiple ideas for program improvement that EQB has received from many sources. The memo on packet page 27 provides an overview of the purpose and audience for that list, as well as how we will develop the final list and integrate it into our program work planning.

Staff will discuss the purpose and goal for the project list, how it integrates with the CI process, and how we intend to use it for workplanning moving forward. Staff will also present a potential layout and format for the list.

**Public comment:** EQB will take public comment specifically on this item. Comments about how the projects list can support transparent communication to the public are especially solicited.

**Outcome:** The Board will provide feedback on the projects list concept, purpose and goals, and format. In particular, the Board is being asked to consider what is needed to ensure that the list accomplishes the stated goals and is helpful for future workplanning.

**Presenters:** Catherine Neuschler – Executive Director, EQB; Kayla Walsh – Environmental Review Program Administrator, EQB

## Break (2:45)

## 6. Initial review of by-laws (2:50 pm)

**Type of item:** Informational

**Summary:** Many boards have by-laws that help direct their governance and operations. EQB has not previously had by-laws, but recent discussions indicate that providing clarity about roles and responsibilities might be helpful. Staff will present preliminary draft by-laws, which are included on packet page 31.

**Outcome:** The Board provides input on the draft by-laws and identifies any additional needs.

**Presenter:** Catherine Neuschler – Executive Director, EQB

## 7. Public comment (3:15 pm)

The board welcomes any additional oral public comment. Please see guidance and procedures on packet page 2.

## 8. Closing and adjournment

## December 2024 Environmental Quality Board meeting

Wednesday, December 18, 2024 | 1:00-4:00 p.m. | 520 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155, lower level conference rooms and online via Teams.

### Minutes

#### 1. Welcome and roll call

Chair Nancy Daubenberger called to order the regular meeting of the Environmental Quality Board.

Members present: Grace Arnold, Peter Bakken, Joseph Bauerkemper, Ed Brands, Nancy Daubenberger, Tamar Gronvall, Rylee Hince, Todd Holman, Daniel Katzenberger, Nicholas Martin, Paul Nelson, Thom Petersen, Angie Smith, Sarah Strommen

Members excused: Brooke Cunningham, Katrina Kessler, Matt Varilek, Charles Zelle

Proxies present: Dana Vanderbosch (for Kessler)

EQB staff present: Catherine Neuschler, Stephanie Aho, Rebeca Gutierrez-Moreno, Colleen Hetzel, Hazel Houle, Jesse Krzenski, Sarah Lerohl, Kayla Walsh

Approval of consent agenda

- Meeting minutes from November 20, 2024, Environmental Quality Board meeting
- Proposed agenda for December 18, 2024, Environmental Quality Board meeting

**Motion:** Board member Hince moved to amend the agenda to add discussion of an EQB subcommittee focused on public collaboration, after completion of Item 4. Board member Petersen seconded.

In favor: Arnold, Bakken, Bauerkemper, Brands, Daubenberger, Hince, Holman, Katzenberger, Petersen, Smith, Strommen.

Opposed: none.

Excused: Cunningham, Gronvall, Kessler, Martin, Nelson, Varilek

November 20, 2024 minutes were noted as being revised.

**Motion:** Board Member Arnold moved to approve the revised November 20, 2024 minutes; Board Member Katzenberger seconded. Motion carries with a unanimous vote.

## 2. Executive Director's report

Catherine Neuschler – Executive Director, EQB

- Staff recently received the annual Agricultural Chemical Response and Reimbursement Account (ACRRA) Report from MDA. The ACCRA provide financial assistance to parties cleaning up agricultural chemical contamination, and the report details revenues and spending. The report is required by Minn. Stat. 18E.06 to be sent to multiple agencies including EQB. Board members can inform staff if they would like a copy.
- Project updates
  - Working with the Attorney General's office to draft some potential by-laws for the Board, since most Boards operate under bylaws. Plan to bring a draft next month for discussion and the Board can consider what is needed to move them forward.
  - Launched the new ER Dashboard – the goal of the dashboard is to make the information staff has shared in past ER performance reports more accessible on a more real-time basis.
  - GHG Calculator – Development is proceeding; a user group has been formed that includes environmental review practitioners. They have been meeting regularly and giving helpful feedback. EQB's contractor will help with early user training when the calculator is rolled out this spring and summer.
  - Gas Resources Technical Advisory Committee (GTAC) – The work to develop a temporary framework for gas production is ongoing; the initial proposal has been released and there have been two public meetings over the last week. The comment period goes through December 23. About 10 comments have been received so far, including from some Tribal governments. The Tribal comments in particular suggested that an EIS be required for gas production, rather than the proposed EAW. The GTAC will be considering all the comments prior to submitting the final recommendations for a temporary framework on January 15. Staff are also starting to prepare for rulemaking for a more permanent framework, and will be reaching out to commenters. Staff will report more on this in 2025.

## 3. Feedlot EAW Form Recommendation

**Presenters:** Kayla Walsh – Environmental Review Program Administrator, EQB; Megen Kabele, Environmental Review Project Manager, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

**Type of item:** Informational

**Summary:** The Environmental Quality Board (EQB) chair has the authority to develop the form for environmental assessment worksheets (EAWs) and to approve alternative EAW forms if a responsible government unit (RGU) can demonstrate that the alternative form meets several criteria laid out in rule. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, as the RGU for the majority of feedlot projects, requested that the chair approve a new alternative EAW form for feedlots. MPCA first presented on this topic to the Environmental Review Implementation Subcommittee in March 2024.

The chair requested discussion and feedback from Board members. EQB staff provided information on the history of the alternative EAW form for feedlots and the intent and criteria for assessing alternative EAW forms. MPCA provided information on their reasons for the new form, what is included in the proposed alternative EAW form for animal feedlots, and their process for preparing the form. MPCA particularly discussed what additional work has been done since the ERIS review of the draft form.

**Discussion:**

- This EAW form should make the environmental review process more efficient, with less administrative time spent between stakeholders.
- EQB staff is considering anaerobic digestion for the climate calculator tool.
- MPCA will update the guidance document as needed, e.g. adding specific examples for the greenhouse gas section 18.

**Public comment:**

- Amelia Vohs, Climate Program Director and attorney at Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy: Suggests adding the enteric fermentation and manure storage and application emissions as examples to the table that's on question 18 for the greenhouse gas emission calculation.

**Outcome:** The Chair approved the alternative EAW form for animal feedlots. The Chair also revoked approval of the 2000 version of the form.

#### 4. Discussion of an EQB subcommittee focused on public collaboration

**Summary:** This item followed up on comments made at the November meeting. The key question is how can EQB do a better job being active in public discourse? Creation of a subcommittee on public collaboration is one possibility.

**Discussion:**

- Want feedback from the public who have taken time to submit comments and ask questions of those individuals too.
- A subcommittee would work well for engaging with some members of the public, but there's broad section of of views and perspectives that get left out of that process. Would like to also be able to engage with members of the public in other ways to bring more perspectives from those who don't normally engage at board or subcommittee meetings.
- EQB wants to meet the promise on public engagement that is in the strategic plan. There are multiple ways to achieve that.
- EQB bylaws could be useful in figuring out what a subcommittee would entail and outlining roles and responsibilities.

**Outcome:** EQB staff will compile a list of potential options for public discourse and collaboration and will present their ideas to the Board at a future meeting for further discussion.

## **5. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

## **6. Closing and adjournment**

Board Member Katzenberger motioned to adjourn. Board Member Petersen seconded. All in favor; meeting adjourned.

DRAFT



## Memo

**Date:** January 3, 2025

**To:** EQB Board

**From:** Priscilla Villa-Watt

### RE: 2024 Environmental Congress Summary

The 2024 Environmental Congress aimed to create collaborative spaces where state leaders, local governments, and the public could come together to address cross-programmatic and interdisciplinary environmental challenges. These events gathered diverse perspectives, insights, and ideas that will inform our work and future engagement opportunities.

EQB hosted across four events in cities across the state in collaboration with five state agencies. The events covered critical topics such as wildlife habitats with the Department of Natural Resources, green economies with the Department of Employment and Economic Development and the Department of Commerce, the Climate Action Framework with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), and agriculture-related sustainability issues with the Department of Agriculture.

Each event was co-hosted by EQB Board members and had a similar agenda. They featured short presentations followed by facilitated small group discussions, ensuring a broad range of perspectives was shared to help inform how we approach our work. Participants reflected on the ever-evolving landscape around them, acknowledging that environmental changes shape various aspects of their work and lives. The dialogue encouraged individuals to consider how they can adapt and respond to the challenges and opportunities that arise in this dynamic environment.

### Three key takeaways

The intention for the 2024 Congress was to discuss and identify shared goals and collective needs for key elements of the state's ongoing efforts to address the topics at hand, and to gather input for our member agencies to consider as they move forward with their work.

In addition to comments on the specific work being presented, EQB heard feedback on how we – as a coordinating body - can be better stewards of information, foster relationships, and consider more opportunities for public engagement. We want to continue to improve engagement experiences and relationships between the Board, Board staff, and the public. Below are some of our key takeaways and how we plan to implement some of those ideas in the future.

#### Relationship building

The 2024 Environmental Congress events gave staff and Board members the opportunity to travel across the state, meet new people interested in our role and our work, and reconnect with those already familiar with what we do. In the five years since the last Congress event EQB hired new staff and in-person meetings came to a standstill due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the staff turnover, EQB lost contact with previously held relationships and partners, presumably influencing some of the low turnout we experienced at the Congress this year.

EQB plans to work on deepening existing relationships and establishing new ones, especially with youth, those disproportionately impacted, and communities in Greater Minnesota. Some of these efforts are already a part of our 2024-2025 workplan and our [five-year strategic plan](#). Additionally, EQB is working on creating more opportunities to coordinate with Tribes, especially after the Board approval of the new [Tribal relations policy](#). EQB values collaboration and engagement and will continue to explore ways to improve how we build and deepen relationships.

### Engagement opportunities

EQB hosts monthly board meetings in-person and virtually. However, because of feedback and input from the Congress, we are considering the idea of doing more in-person meetings, especially when there are major updates on projects or report releases. We heard a desire to see EQB travel to areas of the state where we have relevant projects so that people have the opportunity to connect with the Board and staff on their perspectives, concerns, and get up to date information from the Board.

For future events, we intend to use a similar format that we used for the Congress events. Meetings will be planned around specific topics that need review or feedback from interested parties and small group conversations will garner diverse feedback and help meet the following goals:

- Share ideas and cross-cultural knowledge
- Hear new perspectives
- Meet people from their community
- Talk directly to agency staff and leaders

### Improved communication

Another key takeaway we heard from Congress attendees was an interest in and need for better communication of the important work and projects we're doing, in a way that feels relevant and consistent. We want to make sure we're doing our part to gather data and do better storytelling; reporting out on important work needs to include metrics and success stories (related to specific goals).

Examples of EQB work products that offer clear opportunities to communicate out include:

- Pollinator report and scorecards
- Environmental and Energy Report
- Groundwater Policy Report and State Water Plan
- Environmental Review program information and updates
  - EQB staff are currently working on a projects list that will create better transparency and accountability on the ongoing work EQB needs to improve, change, and consider with the environmental review program.

Examples of indicators or sections to consider including in future reports and publications that would help Minnesotans get a better understanding of our work.

- **Effort indicators**
  - What actions need to be taken?
  - What's needed around funding to make the work successful?
  - What important collaborations and partnerships should we consider?
- **Progress indicators**
  - Consider new ways of tracking progress, like benchmarks that note specific demographics or geographic areas related to the project or work.
  - How is the work or action meeting the intended goals and outcomes over time?

- **Impact indicators**
  - Note the long-term results.
  - Emphasize impacts to rural communities and those disproportionately impacted.
- **Know our audience:**
  - Consider what audiences are missing.
  - Ask who the work is impacting and create intentional communications' plans that reach those interested parties.

## Next steps

Key takeaways from the Congress are relevant to ongoing work we have planned for this year and help inform us on areas that need more intentional planning to integrate feedback. As a result of the Congress, and other forms of feedback we've received at Board meetings and through surveys, we also hope to share when we've acted on items and changes that came directly from the feedback from the public. Our hope is to improve accountability, transparency, and communication in the coming year to better establish trust and partnerships with Minnesotans interested in protecting our environment.

Lastly, we want to thank MAD, agency staff from MPCA, Department of Commerce, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Employment and Economic Development, and the Department of Agriculture for helping us plan, share important work, and collaborate on the 2024 Environmental Congress.

## Internal memo

**Date:** 10/31/2024

**To:** Catherine Neuschler, Executive Director, Environmental Quality Board

Priscilla Villa-Watt, Communications and Engagement Coordinator, Environmental Quality Board

**From:** Management Analysis and Development

### RE: Summary of 2024 Environmental Congress

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The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) convened the 2024 Environmental Congress, a series of events held at different locations across Minnesota. The purpose of the Environmental Congresses is to create space for state leaders and local governments, and the public to come together and discuss cross-programmatic and interdisciplinary environmental challenges. Through these discussions, the EQB aims to gather perspectives, insights, and ideas from participants to inform state agency goals and strategies related to environmental quality and sustainability. This year, events were held in Mankato, St. Cloud, St. Paul, and Brainerd. Each event had a unique topic for participants to engage in.

Participants included representatives from state agencies, local government, environmental experts, and the public. Discussions were structured to foster collaboration and dialogue. Sessions began with introductory conversations, where participants shared their regional connections and observations on environmental changes. Next, representatives from state agencies presented on specific environmental challenges relevant to the region and how their agencies are responding. Participants then engaged in facilitated small-group conversations about the presentation and discussed suggestions for measuring success and identifying missing goals and visions. Notetakers embedded in each small group recorded key points during discussions.

While sessions focused on specific topics, several common themes emerged through the compilation and analysis of discussion notes. Participants consistently emphasized the need for greater responsiveness to climate change, with calls for more aggressive action and long-term, data-driven strategies to address environmental impacts. Another recurring theme across all sessions was the importance of building coalitions and expanding inclusion, particularly engaging rural communities, underrepresented groups, and younger generations. There was also a strong focus on balancing environmental stewardship with economic well-being, particularly in rural areas, where participants stressed the need for systems that support both ecological health and economic viability. Suggestions around improving communication, fostering grassroots involvement, and reducing bureaucratic barriers were echoed across most sessions, along with the recognition that more metrics are needed to track not only effort but also tangible progress and impact.

This summary provides a detailed account of the discussions that took place at each congress location and highlights the overarching themes that emerged. Representative examples used throughout are from the notes taken during group conversations.

### **Brainerd session: “Climate Resiliency and Adaptation in Key Habitats”**

The first Environmental Congress was held on September 23, 2024, in Brainerd, Minnesota. Ten participants joined two representatives from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to discuss changes in the region due to climate change and DNR’s work on making fish and wildlife habitats more resilient.

Participants described their connections to this particular location as where they live or as the location where they work. Additionally, other participants described their connections as being rooted in specific jobs or professional roles related to the region, even though they do not live or work there.

Most participants described why they were compelled to attend as an interest in a topic that is connected to climate change, such as ice fishing. A few noted that they felt compelled to attend because their professional roles and responsibilities are connected to the presentation topic, such as working in climate change studies or in the forest industry.

Participants then shared their observations on environmental changes over the past twenty years, discussing both human (e.g., development, infrastructure, culture) and natural systems (e.g., climate, wildlife, landscapes).

Specific to the Brainerd session, discussion of changes focused primarily on increases in housing development, increases in transportation infrastructure, and broader changes related to population increases (more houses, more cars, more people). Additionally, discussion among participants included observations related to culture and economics, such as observing a loss of community connections along with the loss of a rural/small-town feel in communities. A few participants shared their observations that making ends meet is more difficult and that it is harder to integrate environmental stewardship with economic well-being.

Observed changes to human activities included not being able to engage in winter sports such as ice sail boating and Nordic skiing due to lack of ice and snow. Discussions concerning natural systems primarily highlighted shifts in plants and wildlife, including changes in moose, deer, and bear populations, alongside the decline of birch trees and wild rice.

After a presentation where representatives from the DNR described strategies being implemented to help make fish and wildlife habitats more resilient to climate change, participants were invited to reflect on the changes the DNR is trying to make and to discuss the following questions at their tables:

- How do these changes support our goals around climate resiliency? What would you change?
- How would you measure success in supporting fish and wildlife habitats?
- What should be the goal for climate resiliency and adaptation in fish and wildlife habitats?

For the first prompt, the majority of the discussion centered on what participants would recommend doing differently. One of the most common suggestions was to utilize communication and engagement related to the DNR’s efforts in a more strategic fashion, such as engaging rural communities in ways that are meaningful to them, or helping people see how their lives are being impacted in tangible ways. This is related to other suggestions regarding what participants believed the DNR should start doing, such as a perception that the DNR should prioritize making personal connections or to celebrate successes of the activities and tangible results through education and outreach. Still others shared their perception that the DNR could do more to increase

social connections to the environment and increase engagement with younger generations. Finally, a few participants shared suggestions related to the need for long-range, data driven, comprehensive planning that attends to all levels, from individuals to field boundaries to entire regions.

In discussing how to measure the success of the DNR's efforts, participants shared suggestions that generally fell within five categories: indicators relating to effort, progress, impact, change processes in meeting a strategic goal, and long-term/ongoing metrics. The following excerpts from discussion notes are representative examples of these categories.

- Indicators relating to effort: suggestions describing things to do or what ought to be done. Does not describe what actions will lead to.
  - Planting grass and wildlife
  - Messaging with a related experience that people are impacted by directly
  - Partnerships (private/public and interstate/intrastate)
- Indicators relating to progress: suggestions describing ways to know things are happening that will result in desired changes.
  - Account for extreme events that can accelerate or impede changes
- Indicators relating to impact: suggestions describing how we might observe the long-term results of change.
  - More people outdoors
  - More youth outdoors
  - Increased usage of cover crops and conservation tillage
- Indicators relating to change processes: suggestions describing ways to know how effectively the state is engaging in change management.
  - Prioritizing based on overall strategy—resist, accept, direct. Success is looking ahead and planning according to the broad purpose and vision. These three buckets are helpful and all three will need to be pursued.
  - How are we going to pay for it all? Prioritize preservation of what is clean, prioritize the low-hanging fruit and “making the juice worth the squeeze.” Strategic resource deployment, letting go of “lost causes” even though it hurts. Visionary, courageous leadership requires giving bad news.
  - Working to ensure, if we are intervening in structural ways, we consider how “natural” are the habitats.
- Indicators relating to long-term/ongoing metrics: suggestions describing ways to gauge change based on indicators that pre-exist change efforts.
  - Population of critters as an indicator of health
  - Water quality is a measure of success, impacts all—support fish and wildlife with healthy waterways.

- What makes a habitat good? Obvious plus [is] nutrient cycling, nutrient and carbon storage. Scoring for DNR purchasing property, for example, are changing to take these into account. There are priority areas that can add value holistically.

In discussing potential goals for climate resiliency and adaptation in fish and wildlife habitats, participants offered suggestions that fell into five broad categories of goals: increasing responsiveness, building coalitions, changing behaviors, mitigating impact of climate change, and specific outputs as goals. The following discussion notes excerpts are representative examples of these categories.

- Goals relating to increasing responsiveness to climate change:
  - Stop kicking the can—be more aggressive. This is happening fast so we need to act. What is the trajectory and how is it bounded by probability? Start talking it through.
  - Focus on R3: recruitment, retention, and reactivation more broadly.
- Goals relating to building coalitions and expanding inclusion:
  - Think about the partners—Canada, Great Lakes basin, the whole geography as well as the habitat of the region. Better together—our neighboring states are key partners in economic and environmental concerns. Leverage one another's work for federal grants. The Great Lakes is an asset of global significance and the DNR can acknowledge that.
  - Know your audience—where you are at in MN, issues are different in different areas. People's personal values, personal economic issues, personal economic issues. Communication and messaging needs a lot of work—you are engaging the privileged right now; who are absent? Engage them as well.
  - Instead of the focus being the declining hunter population, instead build a general demographic of environmentally literate people through all kinds of activities and throughout their lifespans.
- Goals relating to changing behaviors:
  - Changing current sense of entitlement to past practices: just because a practice is currently allowed, should it be? (e.g., dewatering/disturbing wetlands, draining farmland).
  - Number one indicator in producing a stewardship ethic is a utilitarian relationship with the land.
- Goals relating to mitigating impact of climate change:
  - Focus on co-benefits of human and wildlife restoration projects in reducing climate impacts like floods, etc.
  - Knowledge about what climate impacts will have around the state from a scientific perspective and develop a comprehensive plan on how we will resist or adapt to those impacts.
- Goals relating to a specific output:
  - [Having a] values statement

## St. Cloud session: “Developing Minnesota’s Green Economy”

The second Environmental Congress was held on September 24, 2024, in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Fifteen participants joined two representatives from the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and Department of Commerce to discuss how Minnesota is working to attract key businesses and industries, support our climate goals, transition to a greener economy, and support sustainable economic vitality.

In their introductory conversation, participants described their connections to this particular location as primarily where they live or as the location where they work. Several participants also described their connection to the area as related to professional responsibilities and opportunities, with a couple participants noting that rural and non-urban counties are important parts of a sustainable transition to a green economy. Relatedly, most participants described a desire to help further components related to a green economy transition as the primary reason they felt compelled to attend.

After participants were given an opportunity to get to know other participants at their tables, they were asked to consider what is different about the environment today when compared to twenty years ago and share their observations with others at their tables. Similar to the other sessions, participants described a wide range of observations relating to both changes in human systems (development/infrastructure, political/economic/cultural, and activities) as well as changes to natural systems (weather/climate, wildlife/plants, landscapes).

Specific to the St. Cloud session, discussion of changes focused primarily on changes within political, economic, and cultural domains. For example, participants noted that environmental issues are more mainstream, describing how we didn’t used to discuss bees or losing key species and that there is an increased acceptance in doing “greener” things. Others described the whole field of “green jobs” as being a change, coinciding with changes to economic and workforce development as well as what types of industries and programs are being supported by government agencies. Finally, participants discussed noticeable changes regarding technologies, such as more visible wind and solar energy infrastructure in the region and changes to agricultural practices driven by technologies such as water management technologies and drone mapping.

After presentations from DEED and Commerce describing what they are prioritizing to develop Minnesota’s green economy, participants were invited to reflect on the changes the state is trying to make and to discuss the following questions at their tables:

- What would you change? Are they the right changes? Are they doing enough? What’s missing or needed to address any barriers to moving forward?
- How will you know if the state is successful?
- What should our goals be for the green economy?

For the first prompt, the discussion was split fairly evenly among general observations about what is presently being done, things the participants would do more of, and what they would do differently. Participants observed that this is a unique moment with strong funding and encouraged/incentivized clean technologies. However, participants also noted this window of opportunity presents challenges relating to the alignment of timelines and goals across multiple layers and levels of government. Participants also noted that the economics of



transitioning to green energy remain a work in progress. For example, rental properties differ fundamentally from private homes and require different incentives. Additionally, the high startup costs for solar units remain a significant barrier..

Participants suggested the state should put renewable energy projects on rental and commercial properties more often in order to provide a net financial gain so as to level the field with homeowners. Other participants observed that bureaucratic red tape increases frustration and leads to some projects faltering as something they believe should be done differently.

In discussing how to measure the success of the state's efforts, participants shared suggestions that generally fell within five categories: indicators relating to effort, progress, impact, change processes in meeting a strategic goal, and long-term/ongoing metrics. Indicators related to impact and to change processes were the most discussed at this session. The following excerpts from discussion notes are representative examples of these categories.

- Indicators relating to effort: suggestions describing things to do or what ought to be done. Does not describe what actions will lead to.
  - Cutting pollution
  - Benefitting equitably (defined as getting MN's share) from Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding
- Indicators relating to progress: suggestions describing ways to know things are happening that will result in desired changes.
  - Sharing "wins" or successes when each little hurdle is overcome
- Indicators relating to impact: suggestions describing how we might observe the long-term results of change
  - That the green economy is not being forced but becomes internalized in processes, is socially acceptable, and supported at all levels (residential, planning and zoning, etc.)
  - When clean energy becomes a part of everyday living
  - When people are able to see the difference it makes in their lives
  - When the Feds call out Minnesota as a model
- Indicators relating to change processes: suggestions describing ways to know how effectively the state is engaging in change management.
  - If utilities can keep up and stay profitable with so much changing in the economy at an unprecedented speed
  - If we reach the 2040 law while maintaining electric reliability
  - Seeing alignment across the board—alignment in the ecosystem—regulatory, supply chain, that we are working as a state in sync. Correcting the misalignment in different places.
  - Community engagement and empowerment—giving over power to the community
  - If it is equitable
- Indicators relating to long-term/ongoing metrics: suggestions describing ways to gauge change based on indicators that pre-exist change efforts
  - 100,000 energy jobs by 2030

In discussing potential goals for the green economy, participants were invited to share what they would change as well as what considerations they believe should be included in setting goals and long-term visions. The discussion of what participants would change about the goals fell within two categories: suggestions of specific outputs and suggestions related to who should be involved. The following excerpts from discussion notes are representative examples of these categories.

- Goals relating to a specific output:
  - Storytelling in government communications
  - Showing benefits to all communities and individuals in the communities
  - Community benefit statements that federal agencies are asking for
  - Metrics describing what we are doing, by when, and by whom
- Goals relating to building coalitions and expanding inclusion:
  - Affordable housing and energy folks need to work closely together
  - Model where we want to be at the state level and then bring counties along
  - Communication styles and considering those that aren't in the room. Being creative because the "choir" is growing to include low and moderate income folks.
  - Have the state out there and present in local decision-making bodies
  - Following instinct to contribute to the conversation in rural communities in helping evaluate tradeoffs in green energy

In the conversation regarding what considerations should be included in setting goals and long-term visions, participants shared additional suggestions related to specific outputs and building coalitions and expanding participation, while also suggesting goals relating to social and economic change. The following excerpts from discussion notes are representative examples of these categories.

- Additional goals relating to a specific output:
  - Following and enforcing laws that have been made and enacting
  - Planning for solutions designed to address more than carbon molecules—climate, ecosystem/biodiversity, and pollution crises
  - Stopping food waste in order to decrease pressure from agriculture and losing land
  - Making charging cars, capturing rainwater, and similar actions easy to do in everyday lives
  - Communicating in a way that isn't demotivating for people to help in the sustainability movement
  - Decrease misinformation in rural communities where they are making decisions based on that misinformation
- Additional goals relating to building coalitions and expanding participation
  - Embedding strategies for accomplishing goals and bringing people along into everyone's lives. Include everyone in the state in the benefits and understanding that it is critical so that when politics change, efforts are not shut down.
  - Get everybody interested in the circular economy for green energy with wind turbines and solar panels.

- Change is hard for people, especially when rural areas perceive that urbanites are ruining their livelihood. Figure out how we can work together to reduce the fear, especially with county commissioners that have great influence.
- Goals relating to social and economic change:
  - Improve residents' health in lockstep with cheaper energy and economic growth.
  - Consider whose lifestyles are impacted and if cheaper bills for homeowners can get pumped back into the community in other ways, resulting in better financial outcomes for families.
  - Adapting to other new economy nuances like working from home and flexible work schedules. Promote business model shifts.

### **St. Paul session: “Supporting Local Actions Through the Climate Action Framework”**

The third Environmental Congress was held on September 25, 2024, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Thirty-two participants joined representatives from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to discuss their work in leading the revision to Minnesota’s Climate Action Framework (CAF).

In their introductory conversation, participants described their connections to this particular location as primarily where they live or as the location where they work, including numerous participants who work in local, county, and state governments. Several participants also described their connection to the area as related to professional responsibilities and opportunities, such as conservation and community outreach with a local climate nonprofit and environmental consulting. Many participants shared that they were connected to the location through their general interest in the topic and a desire to connect with others with a similar interest.

Participants shared a variety of reasons as to why they felt compelled to participate in the congress, including topical interests in the CAF and the health of the ecosystem, a desire to connect with people doing similar work and to share experiences/ideas/solutions, and a desire to increase their involvement in the community side of climate resiliency. Others spoke of a desire to advocate or speak for a particular viewpoint such as bringing a small-city perspective and to represent their own organization, a desire to get answers to specific concerns, and a general moral imperative related to the impact of this work on their communities and families.

After participants were given an opportunity to get to know other participants at their tables, they were asked to consider what is different about the environment today when compared to twenty years ago and share their observations with others at their tables. Similar to the other sessions, participants described a wide range of observations relating to both changes in human systems (development/infrastructure, political/economic/cultural, and activities) as well as changes to natural systems (weather/climate, wildlife/plants, landscapes).

Specific to the St. Paul session, discussion of changes focused primarily on changes to activities, changes to weather and climate, and changes within political, economic, and cultural domains. For example, participants remarked on how winter sports, including skiing/Nordic skiing and ice fishing, are increasingly uncertain due to warmer winters. Others observed increased changes within the energy industry as well as positive changes in the use of science and effective communication frames. Many participants shared observations of an increase in extreme weather, erratic weather patterns, and warmer winters. Finally, participants shared many observations related to changes in politics, economics, and culture, such as the increased prevalence of climate change discourse in society and government as well as changes in what people are taught regarding environmental issues.

Of note in the St. Paul session was a far greater depth of discussion regarding changes to air, soil, and water quality. For examples, many participants observed an increase in wildfire smoke and related haziness and smells, while also noting that industrial and transportation-related pollution has decreased.

After the presentation about the CAF from the MPCA, participants were invited to reflect on the changes the state is trying to make so that local government and communities can better implement the framework. Participants were asked to discuss the following questions at their tables:

- Are these the right changes to support local community action? What would you change?

- Sub-question: Are we doing enough?
- Sub-question: What are some barriers to local action and what's needed to address them?
- How will you know if the state is successful?
- What should our goals be for climate action at the local level?

In discussing the first prompt, participants shared that they were largely positive about changes to support local community action while acknowledging critical barriers and a need to do more in certain areas. In considering barriers, the most common theme in discussions had to do with lack of resources, whether it is funding for programs, availability of programs to assist people in purchasing new appliances or weatherizing housing stock, or even staff capacity within local governments to fully engage in the work. Other barriers discussed related to a lack of awareness of programs, competing demands and priorities of different government entities, and cultural/political barriers.

Suggestions regarding what the state should be doing more of included scaling up current efforts, taking advantage of the state's current assets (e.g., land), implementing more incentives for industry and corporations, increasing the priority of community engagement efforts, and accelerating infrastructure transitions. Participants shared a variety of suggestions regarding what they would change in order to better support local community action, including being more clear about responsibilities and accountabilities within efforts, placing resources at optimal points in the process (e.g., providing planning money before implementation money), increasing outreach and engagement efforts with communities and other levels of government, and decreasing top-down decision-making.

In discussing how to measure the success of the state's efforts, the majority of discussions centered around suggestions relating to efforts. Similar to the other sessions, the remainder of suggestions generally fell within the following four categories: indicators relating to progress, indicators relating to impact, indicators relating to change processes in meeting a strategic goal, and indicators related to long-term/ongoing metrics. The following excerpts from discussion notes are representative examples of these categories.

- Indicators relating to effort: suggestions describing things to do or what ought to be done. Does not describe what actions will lead to.
  - Getting the current funding out to everyone
  - Having resilient community centers in towns
  - Incorporating more Tribal voices
  - Communications/sharing success and making connections
  - Look at emissions other than carbon: nitrous oxide, methane, etc.
  - Create faster permit process for projects that support the CAF
- Indicators relating to progress: suggestions describing ways to know things are happening that will result in desired changes.
  - Statutes and goals with benchmarks. Reporting on meeting benchmarks
  - Seeing people incorporate climate action in their daily lives
- Indicators relating to impact: suggestions describing how we might observe the long-term results of change

- Infrastructure doesn't fail as often
- The climate will stop changing
- Greater diversity of uses of the landscape and revitalization of rural communities
- Indicators relating to change processes: suggestions describing ways to know how effectively the state is engaging in change management.
  - Not just focused on the metric, but also the process so that we are not further entrenching things
  - Seeing young people active
  - Inclusivity—whose voices are being heard. It will take a lot of people
  - Need to keep readjusting as we go. May need to shift goals.
- Indicators relating to long-term/ongoing metrics: suggestions describing ways to gauge change based on indicators that pre-exist change efforts.
  - On the adaptation side—we can think about public health intersections to track this information. We need to think about proxies of measurements.
  - Have an annual meeting in Hennepin County to look at how all the cities are doing. Dashboards/meetings for every county/area annually so you know progress is being made
  - Show emissions avoided and emissions sequestered and put a dollar amount on it.
  - Not giving the average temperature increase as a measure

In discussing potential goals for climate action at the local level, the most common category of suggestions dealt with building coalitions and expanding inclusion and participation across communities. Additional suggestions fell into three other broad categories of goals: goals related to increasing responsiveness, goals related to social and economic change, and specific outputs as goals. The following excerpts from discussion notes are representative examples of these categories.

- Goals relating to building coalitions and expanding inclusion:
  - Top-down action from state connecting with grassroots organizations at local level. Rotary, Eagles, VFWs, American Legions. Also faith communities and organizations. Can be instrumental in communities.
  - How do we help local governments that haven't committed to this work? Local governments need their own plan and their own champions.
  - Motivated and educated local leaders and staff. Expose leaders to these ideas through tours and examples.
  - All municipalities and residents see themselves as having a role in mitigating climate change through climate action.
  - Engaged conversation around the topic; have local planning and get people to the table—not necessarily at a local government level, but grassroots and people to people.
- Goals relating to increasing responsiveness to climate change:
  - Local and regional climate coordinators—one is not enough. By topic area and to help support communications, grants, admin, etc.

- Identify what makes a difference and what doesn't.
- State needs to help de-complicate the funding to meet the actions. Provide a funding guide.
- Staffing up. Local governments need to be able to take advantage of the money.
- Goals relating to social and economic change:
  - Rebuilding local economies to reduce dependence on imports, accounting for carbon emissions from goods and resources that originate from outside the state.
  - Circular economy—tying together local government and private facilities to reduce waste and energy use. Work with Chambers of Commerce to bring ideas together.
  - Don't shift the financial burden to individuals (e.g., providing backup power at a central public location rather than expecting individuals to invest).
  - Climate justice intertwined with social and economic justice
- Goals relating to a specific output:
  - Improved air and water quality. Easy for people to see.
  - Focus on resilience. Even if we meet net-zero statewide, we won't mitigate impacts locally.
  - Have larger conversations locally. More literacy around the issues locally.
  - Funding/rebates for individuals to purchase items like electric appliances, vehicles, electrical panel upgrades
  - For Tribal Nations—key areas that need improvements of addiction/mental health, food security, daycare, transportation
  - Local climate action plans

### **Mankato session: “Managing Water Pollution on Agricultural Lands”**

The final Environmental Congress of this round was held on September 26, 2024, in Mankato, Minnesota. Twenty-five participants joined representatives from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to discuss how the agency is supporting agricultural best management practices (BMPs) as part of revising Minnesota’s Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

In their introductory conversation, participants described their connections to this particular location as primarily where they live or as the location where they work/farm. Several participants also described their connection to the area as related to their connection to agriculture and farming, as well as a few who worked in climate occupations and in government agencies.

Participants shared a variety of reasons as to why they felt compelled to participate in the congress, but most discussions centered around a desire to share their perspectives as people deeply connected to agriculture. Additional reasons participants shared regarding why they attended the session included a desire to connect with others in agriculture-related pursuits as well as wanting to learn more about BMPs and the impact energy transitions will have on agriculture.

After participants were given an opportunity to get to know other participants at their tables, they were asked to consider what is different about the environment today when compared to twenty years ago and share their observations with others at their tables. Many discussion topics were similar to the other sessions regarding a wide range of observations relating to both changes in human systems (development/infrastructure, political/economic/cultural, and activities) as well as changes to natural systems (weather/climate, wildlife/plants, landscapes).

However, discussion of changes at the Mankato session focused almost exclusively on changes related to agriculture and farming practices. Many shared observations about the evolution of farming itself, including technologies utilized in farming, changes to crop production, and changes to animal husbandry practices. Additionally, participants discussed changes to cultural conversations as they related to agriculture, noting that people seem increasingly disconnected from food chain information, as well as divisions felt between farmers/non-farmers, rural/urban people, and how an increase in polarization has led to a decrease in the ability to find common solutions. Participants also shared many observations related to increasingly extreme weather events such as warmer winters and frequent large rainfall events.

After the presentation about MDA’s work in supporting and scaling up BMPs as part of the state’s Nutrient Reduction Strategy, participants were invited to reflect on the changes the state is trying to make. Participants were asked to discuss the following questions at their tables:

- Are these the right actions to support agricultural BMPs? What would you change?
  - Sub-question: What’s been successful for you in the past? What have been some of the barriers to implementation? What’s needed to address those barriers?
  - Sub-question: What would help get more/better BMPs in place where you live?
- How will you know if the state is successful?
- What should our goals be for agricultural BMPs?



In discussing the first prompt, most of the conversation focused on identifying and overcoming barriers. Of the barriers discussed, cost was the most frequently mentioned. Relatedly, suggestions for how to address the barriers mostly focused on directly covering costs, modifying payments and incentive structures, and changing systems so that costs are shared or more easily reallocated. Other discussions of potential solutions to the cost barrier include finding farmers willing to take risks so long as they are financially supported, alleviating administrative burdens related to certifications, tying funding to changes in practice, and helping farmers see how adopting changes can be cost effective.

Additionally, participants offered many questions related to overall effectiveness and impact of the changes being made, including questions about how the reduction of risk is being monitored, if the current measures of success (number of people or acres) is appropriate for what is trying to be addressed, if full adoption of BMPs would be enough to meet Nutrient Reduction goals, and even if the AWQCP is large enough in terms of acres to have meaningful impact.

In discussing how to measure the success of the state's efforts, the majority of discussions centered around suggestions relating to efforts. Similar to the other sessions, the remainder of suggestions generally fell within the following four categories: indicators relating to progress, indicators relating to impact, indicators relating to change processes in meeting a strategic goal, and indicators related to long-term/ongoing metrics. The following excerpts from discussion notes are representative examples of these categories.

- Indicators relating to effort: suggestions describing things to do or what ought to be done. Does not describe what actions will lead to.
  - Grazing in animal agriculture as a way to minimize/address manure management challenges
  - Incentivizing adoption of BMPs in landlord/tenant situations where tenants may not see long-term benefit
  - More storage of water on land (more wetlands)
  - Add flow meters to agriculture and industry wells, charge industry same as residents for usage, and create consequences for overdrawing permits.
- Indicators relating to progress: suggestions describing ways to know things are happening that will result in desired changes.
  - Seeing success in waterways
  - If small-scale experiments are becoming scaled up
  - Focusing on improvement of main stem of river in scientific measurements instead of enrollment numbers
- Indicators relating to impact: suggestions describing how we might observe the long-term results of change
  - Clean Mississippi
  - Where we can manage water on the landscape without having to rebuild in terms of water quality (e.g., flooding)
  - If we get to the point where we aren't asking for money for soil health equipment (or for any grant program). Where the return on investment is high enough that the free market drives those practices and state/federal funds aren't needed

- Success is thriving rural communities. If the environment is healthy and producers are successful, those are thriving communities that are good places to live and recreate.
- Indicators relating to change processes: suggestions describing ways to know how effectively the state is engaging in change management.
  - Appropriate timelines: it took many decades for problems to become apparent, it will take similar length of time for changes in practices to become apparent.
  - Better communication on successes
  - Finding the right metrics for adoption
  - Demonstration of efficiency with resources we have; measuring outcomes and what we are getting for public/private money (e.g., buffers)
  - Changing the system instead of working in a system that cannot allow for success
- Indicators relating to long-term/ongoing metrics: suggestions describing ways to gauge change based on indicators that pre-exist change efforts.
  - 50 percent less corn
  - Statewide survey data of farmers (crops, equipment, number of farmers adopting BMPs, etc.)
  - Improvement in water quality of streams and tributaries, macro-invertebrates, and rate-flow.

In discussing potential goals for agriculture BMPs, the most common category of suggestions focused on specific outcomes as goals. Additional suggestions fell into two other broad categories of goals: goals related to increasing responsiveness, and goals related to social and economic change. The following excerpts from discussion notes are representative examples of these categories.

- Goals relating to a specific output:
  - Integration of renewable energy production in the agriculture landscape
  - Being able to see improvements in your local body of water, the one that you know and understand, and impact
  - A more diversified model, build expertise in other crops (including hemp)
  - Focusing on BMPs that reduce costs since the system is built on low margins
  - Modernizing to the projected climate conditions—more climate driven BMPs
- Goals relating to increasing responsiveness to climate change
  - Continuous improvement, not just getting everyone to hit a certain benchmark. Not leaving people behind and having the gap get wider and wider between people
  - Understanding that not all things work for everyone, but that we leave room for options, changes, and possibility
  - Goals should not be rigid but responsive to data and evolutions, and they should be holistic and not just focused on one contaminant or quality/quantity.
- Goals relating to social and economic change
  - Balance of clean water and profit
  - Profitability of land stewardship
  - Farmers want to farm; farmers don't necessarily want to make ethanol

## Memo

**Date:** January 3, 2025

**To:** EQB Board

**From:** Catherine Neuschler, Executive Director and Kayla Walsh, ER program administrator

### RE: Environmental Review Projects List

Over the last few months, EQB staff have been developing an environmental review projects list to enhance our environmental review program continuous improvement (CI) process. This memo provides an overview of the purpose and audience for that list, as well as how we will develop the final list and integrate it into our program work planning.

### Background

As laid out in 2023, the EQB's environmental review CI process includes the following steps:

1. EQB staff solicit ideas for program improvements. *The process will begin with a call for suggestions for programmatic improvements from governmental partners, stakeholders, and the public. Ideas for improvements will be collected through multiple channels.*
2. EQB staff review the scope of the improvements. *All improvements must pertain to EQB's purview or represent ideas that could reasonably fit under EQB purview. Ideas that pertain solely to the authority of other agencies would not move forward in the process.*
3. EQB staff evaluate and score improvements using a program effectiveness prioritization matrix. *EQB staff will run scoped-in improvements through the prioritization matrix, scoring improvement ideas based on how they meet the criteria for program effectiveness. Improvements will be ordered based on how they contribute to overall program effectiveness.*
4. EQB staff plan for implementation of improvements. *EQB staff will consider logistics and resource needs for undertaking the improvements that met the most criteria for program effectiveness. Staff will present this information to the Environmental Review Implementations Subcommittee (ERIS) and make a recommendation for which improvements to act upon.*
5. ERIS completes review of implementation planning. *ERIS will review the improvement ideas, their matrix scoring, and the implementation considerations. ERIS will make a recommendation to the board on which improvement projects the EQB should implement.*
6. Board completes review and directs staff to implement selected projects. *The board will review ERIS's recommendation and reach a consensus on which improvements EQB would like to focus on for a time period as determined by the board.*

In the initial run of the CI process, done in the first part of 2023, the staff evaluated and scored improvement ideas as they were given. The suggested improvements ranged widely in their format, specificity, and topic.

As we moved into step four of the process – planning for implementation – the staff proposed projects for the EQB’s workplan that encompassed multiple improvement ideas. For example, in the FY24 workplan, ongoing work on the climate calculator and data management were noted as addressing some improvement ideas, and projects around the decision criteria and guidance documents were added to address multiple improvement ideas. These projects were carried forward on the FY25 workplan.

When discussing the FY25 workplan, ERIS noted that the plan to solicit, review, and score improvement ideas biennially could result in a continual adding of ideas for program changes without allowing adequate time for the implementation of chosen improvements. The FY25 workplan approved by the Board does not include re-running the full CI process (steps 1-6 above); staff anticipate the CI process running on a four-year cycle moving forward.

## What is the purpose of the projects list?

The purpose of the projects list is to support the staff, ERIS, and the Board in discussing and planning for projects to address the multiple ideas for program improvement that EQB has received from many sources – primarily the solicitation for ideas during the CI process, but also including the ideas shared during development of the mandatory category report, EQB staff experience and technical assistance calls, conversations with Tribal staff, and stakeholder meetings.

Currently, improvement ideas from all of these sources are not being tracked in one spot. Many of the improvement ideas on the projects list were documented in the continuous improvement report or during the development of the mandatory categories report. The projects list synthesizes these ideas to support a comprehensive understanding of the majority of suggestions that have been made to EQB.

In addition, the improvements as they were given to EQB contain several similar, overlapping, or connected ideas. For instance, multiple ideas reference the inclusion of human health impacts in environmental review but have different suggestions on how to accomplish this; multiple ideas contain suggestions for better training and support for RGUs, but different specific recommendations. These ideas need to be considered holistically under the larger umbrella theme or topic so that EQB staff may contextualize them, identify pathways forward, and resources needed for implementation.

Finally, many of the ideas EQB heard recommend a fairly specific change to part of the program that may or may not represent the views of all of EQB’s partners and stakeholders. EQB may find that the suggestion is an indication to consider improvements to a certain program area, but in many cases we do not have the data and information or the broader input of all the program’s partners and stakeholders to agree that the suggested improvement idea represents the best path forward. Many of the improvement ideas would need additional researching, definition, scoping, and evaluation before moving forward to develop and engage on potential solutions. That work represents a significant investment of staff resources and capacity that needs to be clearly laid out for the Board’s consideration.

These factors led EQB staff to conclude that to effectively plan for the implementation of improvements, we need to review the multiplicity of ideas and gather them together into projects that we can effectively **define, scope, and plan**. It seems helpful for transparency and planning to do this for a larger set of ideas than just the one or two that might be able to be carried forward in any given workplan.

The projects list is intended to provide clear documentation of this review, refining the way we present and consider the long list of potential program improvements.

The projects list will:

- Be the centralized, easily accessible (likely web-based) list of recommended environmental review program improvement projects;

- Provide clear documentation of how EQB will approach implementing programmatic improvements, including whether an improvement is ready to go or if significant additional work is needed to “ground truth” the need for and direction of any program changes;
- Better convey the span and scope of potential projects to the Director and the Board to support prioritization and work planning that makes best use of EQB’s limited capacity;
- Better support future solicitation of ideas for program improvements in step one of the CI process.

## Who is the projects list for?

The projects list is intended primarily to support the Executive Director and the Board in understanding the path forward for implementing various improvement ideas through a project-based framework. It will organize the potential work in a format that is more compatible with workplan development. Grouping the ideas into discrete projects will help us understand the processes that need to be completed (such as data and information gathering, problem statement refinement or scoping, solution evaluation and discussion, etc.), project phases and decision points, and the resources needed. This should provide improved clarity, planning, and accountability.

Another important goal is for the projects list to provide transparency and accountability to the public on how EQB anticipates working through the improvement ideas they have suggested. In addition, the project grouping will help support the next solicitation of ideas (anticipated to occur in FY27) by ensuring the public can see what items have already been put on the list, to comment on the prioritization of those projects, and perhaps to better present their own improvement ideas through a project-based lens.

## How are we going to use the projects list?

The projects list will be a key document supporting the continuous improvement process moving forward. It will be especially important for implementation and workplanning each year, but will also support the solicitation of program improvement ideas (step one of the CI process) every four years.

This month, we are asking the Board to consider the purpose, audience, and use of the projects list as laid out in this memo. We would like the Board to review the concept for the projects list and give feedback on whether the proposed content and layout will accomplish the stated goals.

For example, the board may discuss the following:

- Does the current list provide enough information for EQB staff to score projects using the CI Matrix (step 3)?
- Does the proposed layout help synthesize the many concerns and ideas into more actionable projects or work areas?
- Will the proposed layout help you understand what would be needed to take on any particular projects or area of work that is of interest to you?
- Is it clear how the projects list will be used?

Staff will adjust the contents and layout as appropriate to ensure the document can fulfill its purpose, and then populate the “projects lists” with all the relevant ideas. Certain ideas that were suggested to EQB will not be on the projects list because they are outside the scope of the environmental review program. Other items will not be included if they are unnecessary (perhaps asking for an authority that EQB cannot grant, or that EQB already has) or are unclear (ideas that lack relevant context, are not factual or verifiable, or are too vague to properly evaluate or format into an actionable project.)

As we move into workplanning for the environmental review program in FY26, we will work with ERIS to review the complete list. The staff will make a recommendation on the work to be carried out in FY26.

Although we do envision that the projects list will be a living list with changes over time, we expect that most changes prior to the next full run of the CI process will be status updates or smaller revisions. A larger revision can be expected after the idea solicitation and scoping process of the next round of CI, as part of evaluation, scoring, and implementation planning.

## **BYLAWS OF THE MINNESOTA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY BOARD**

### **ARTICLE I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Purpose. The Environmental Quality Board (EQB or Board) desires to conduct its business and perform its responsibilities and duties in an orderly, efficient, transparent, fair, and lawful manner. These bylaws are established for that purpose.
2. Application. Unless otherwise specifically indicated, these bylaws apply to the transaction of all EQB business and the conduct of all EQB meetings.
3. Compliance with applicable law. It is the specific intent of the EQB to perform its responsibilities and conduct its hearings and meetings in accordance with all applicable federal law and state statutes and regulations. In the case of a discrepancy between these bylaws and applicable law, the provisions of all such applicable law control.

### **ARTICLE II. MEMBERSHIP AND OFFICERS**

1. Membership. The Environmental Quality Board is composed of members named by statute or appointed by the governor in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 116C.03.
2. Officers. The officers of the EQB are the Chair and Vice-Chair.
  - a. The Chair is appointed by the governor from the members of the Board.
  - b. The Vice-Chair is elected by the members of the Board. The Vice-Chair is elected annually at the regularly scheduled meeting held in February.
3. Duties of the Chair. The Chair has the following responsibilities:
  - a. Supervise the affairs of the Board and communicate such affairs to all Board members.
  - b. Preside at all Board meetings.
  - c. Schedule regular meetings.
  - d. Call special meetings when deemed necessary and desirable.
  - e. Propose Board meeting agendas.
  - f. Sign on behalf of the Board any actions or documents necessary to record the Board's decisions after the Board's consideration of the same.
  - g. Work with the EQB Executive Director and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to acquire appropriate staff and consultant support (per Minn. Stat. § 116C.03, subd 4).
  - h. Work with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to ensure completion of an annual performance evaluation for the EQB Executive Director.
  - i. Carry out duties assigned to the Chair for operation of the EQB's environmental review program under Minn. Stat. ch. 116D and Minn. R. ch. 4410.

- j. Carry out duties assigned to the Chair under Minn. Stat. ch. 116C and any other rules promulgated by EQB.
- 4. Duties of the Vice-Chair. The Vice-Chair has the following responsibilities:
  - a. To perform those duties delegated by the Chair.
  - b. To act as Chair in the event of the Chair's illness, disability, absence from a meeting or not being readily able to function as Chair.
  - c. To call special meetings when deemed necessary and desirable.
- 5. Duties of all Board members. All Board members have the following responsibilities:
  - a. To regularly attend Board meetings and carry out the Board's powers and duties provided in law and executive order.
  - b. Individual members shall not act or speak to represent the Board on any subject unless the Board's position has been officially determined.
  - c. Individual members of the Board shall not disclose any not public data as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37, except as required by law.
  - d. Individual members of the Board (i) may not discuss attorney-client privileged information outside of the Board and the Board's legal counsel, and (ii) may not waive attorney-client privilege on behalf of the Board.

### ARTICLE III. COMMITTEES

- 1. As required to carry out the Board's responsibilities, duties, and initiatives, the Board may establish subcommittees and task forces and appoint members and chairpersons to the same.
- 2. Unless otherwise prescribed by statute or rule, subcommittees shall consist of more than three members but fewer than a quorum of the Board for the purpose of gathering information, making findings, and bringing recommendations to the Board.
- 3. The membership of all committees shall be posted on the EQB website and made available in alternate formats upon request.

### ARTICLE IV. MEETINGS

- 1. Notice. Notices of all EQB meetings shall be made in a manner in accordance with Minn. Stat. ch. 13D (Open Meeting Law) and Minn. R. ch. 4405.
- 2. Open Meetings and Records. All meetings of the Board shall be open to the public as provided by law. The votes of the members shall be recorded by voice vote or by roll call if so called. The minutes shall be available to the public upon request made to the Executive Director. Minutes of Board meetings and other records, including recordings, shall be preserved in compliance with EQB's record retention schedule.
- 3. Closed Meetings. The Chair may call a closed meeting or close a meeting if the closure is authorized by statute or permitted by attorney-client privilege. In all cases where a meeting is closed, the Board shall abide by the requirements for closed meetings in Minn. Stat. ch. 13D. Closed meeting minutes and recordings may not be available to the public, even upon request.
- 4. Presiding Officer. The Chair or, in the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair, presides at all meetings. If at a Board meeting, neither the Chair nor Vice-Chair are present but a quorum exists, the members shall elect from within the membership an acting Chair to run the meeting.



5. **Quorum.** A quorum of the full Board means a majority of the permanent members of the Board as established under Minn. Stat. § 116C.03, subd. 2, excluding vacancies. A majority of an established subcommittee is a quorum.
6. **Voting.** Each member shall have one (1) vote in the transaction of business of the Board. Members of the Board may not delegate their powers and responsibilities as Board members, including voting, to any other person. A vote will be recorded by voice vote unless a roll call vote is requested. A roll call vote may be requested by any member and a roll call vote will be used for meetings where any Board member is participating virtually via teleconference or interactive technology, per Minn. Stat. ch. 13D.
7. **Meeting Arrangements.** The Board shall normally meet at a regularly scheduled time and place designated by the chair from 1:00 pm until 4:00 pm, or as the agenda dictates. The Chair may call for recess for appropriate breaks or for purposes of furthering the agenda. The chair of the Board shall select a meeting location that is convenient and suitable for the members, staff, and general public. Meetings may be in-person, virtual, or hybrid.
8. **Parliamentary Procedure.** The most current version of Robert’s Rules of Order, Revised, shall govern the conduct of the meeting except when state statute, policies, and these bylaws state otherwise. The Chair shall make all parliamentary rulings. The Board’s assigned Assistant Attorney General or the Attorney General, the Executive Director, or a designee of the Executive Director shall serve as the parliamentarian advisor.
9. **Board Meeting Agenda Development.** All matters for preliminary agenda consideration with pertinent information included shall be submitted to the Executive Director. The Executive Director shall develop an agenda to be reviewed and proposed by the Chair prior to the Board meeting. Placement of items on the proposed agenda will be at the discretion of the Chair.
10. **Conflicts of Interest.** Each Board member is obligated to determine whether they have a perceived, potential, or actual conflict of interest with respect to any matter before the EQB and to comply with all requirements of law regarding any potential conflict.

## ARTICLE V. STAFF

1. **Staff.** As described in Minn. Stat. § 116C.03, staff and consultant support for EQB activities is provided by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA); the MPCA also provides administrative services (personnel, budget, payroll, and contract administration).
2. **Executive Director.** The EQB shall employ an Executive Director. The Executive Director shall be responsible to the Board and communicate and report regularly to the Chair. The Executive Director or designee shall attend all Board meetings but shall not vote. All staff report to the Executive Director.
3. **Duties of Staff**
  - a. The Executive Director shall have authority to conduct the administrative and general operations of the Environmental Quality Board, including the following responsibilities:
    - i. Managing staff resources, including hiring, discipline, performance evaluation, work-planning, other human resource-related transactions, and making requests for staff support from other agencies of state government.
    - ii. Managing budget resources, including preparing and submitting EQB budgets through the processes established by the Governor’s office or Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB), and keeping the Board fully advised as to its financial condition.
    - iii. Entering into contracts and interagency agreements for regular operational services and the implementation of the approved annual workplan.

- iv. Recommending an annual workplan for Board approval, overseeing implementation of the Board-approved workplan, and ensuring the staff work aligns with the broad powers and authorities of the Board's mission, vision and plan direction.
  - v. Representing and implementing the Board's orders, resolutions, and policies.
  - vi. Presenting to the Board program plans, studies and reports prepared for Board purposes and action and recommending to the Board for adoption those measures deemed necessary and prudent to carry out the programs and duties of the Board or for the efficient administration of the affairs of the Board.
  - vii. Ensuring that all resolutions, rules, regulations, and orders of the Board are carried out.
  - viii. Implementing legislative appropriations, policy, and statute.
  - ix. Communicating and interacting with the Governor's office, state and federal agencies, local governments, special districts, joint powers authorities, and the legislature; and participating in relevant meetings.
  - x. Ensuring appropriate implementation of the Board meeting procedures under Minn. R. ch. 4405
  - xi. Recording and maintaining a record and minutes of the meetings and process and information relating to Board business.
  - xii. Participating in an annual performance evaluation as determined by the Chair and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.
  - xiii. Making regular reports to the Board regarding operations and other relevant information necessary for the Board to properly oversee the activities of the organization.
- b. The Environmental Review program staff, under the direction of the Executive Director, shall have authority to conduct certain administrative and general responsibilities of the environmental review program, including:
- i. Providing technical assistance to project proposers, government units, and the public.
  - ii. Collecting and evaluating data to monitor statewide environmental review activities and measure the effectiveness of the program.
  - iii. Producing the *EQB Monitor*.
  - iv. Receiving and reviewing information and taking actions related to the administration of the environmental review program as described in Minn. Stat. ch. 116D and Minn. R. ch. 4410, and as designated by the Board or the Chair.

## ARTICLE VI. ADOPTION AND AMENDMENT

1. Effective Date. These bylaws shall be effective as of the date of approval and adoption by the Board.
2. Amendments. These Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the Board members. All proposed amendments shall be presented in writing. The Board shall review the proposed changes at least one meeting prior to adoption.

The Board approved and adopted these bylaws on [month] [day], [year].

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Nancy Daubenberger, Chair  
Minnesota Environmental Quality Board

Date: \_\_\_\_\_