

Metro Conservation Network Mid-Year 2021 Meeting Summary

June 2, 2021, 8:30-10:30, Virtual

Meeting Purpose:

- Share information and conservation successes
- “Affinity Group” conversations about projects
- Update on MCN “behind the scenes” activities

Participants: Approximately 60 people from throughout the Greater Twin Cities Metro region, affiliated with government, non-profit, for-profit sectors.

General Session

Welcome and MCN Organizational Update

Steering Team Activities

- Serving now: Gina Bonsignore (DNR), Patty Freeman (Scott County), Karen Galles (Hennepin County), Harland Hiemstra (DNR), Jessica Lee (Metropolitan Council), Chris Lord (Anoka SWCD), Jami Markle (Three Rivers) – joined 5/15/21, June Mathiowetz (Washington County), Al Singer (Dakota County)
- December 9, 2020 – 85 people met, discussed, reviewed and made comments on the Scoping Documents.
- January-March – Steering team analyzed results
- April-May – Revised document: Strategic Vision, planned this gathering

MLCCS Project Team Update

- January – presented MLCCS update to Metro GIS Consortium
- April/May – drafted project definition, now refining a proposal to submit to Metro GIS

Brown Bags

- June 12: Golden Clams (Megan Weber)
- Climate Change and Land Acquisition – DNR’s new criteria (TBD)
- Physically accessible and welcoming Natural Areas (TBD)

Organization models being considered

- Models – Gathering info on bylaws and financial structure of other networks
- Developing an interim and long-term MCN governance structure
 - Steering Team
 - “The List” – receive emails (all)
 - Affinity Groups – expressed interest in a topic
 - Project Teams – working on a strategy or action

Conservation Story Lightning Round

- Sharing conservation successes, struggles, information request on a problem/issue or other. See separate slide deck file.

Pollinator Corridor Mapping - Dan Shaw, BWSR

- Overview of Washington County pilot project and other BWSR initiatives
 - GIS-based project
 - Identifying areas with pollinator potential to find focus areas
 - Identifying gaps within those areas for targeted projects
 - Required good MLCCS data layer, ground-truthing and the project benefited from the work of a graduate student/intern
 - Contact Dan for more information on the layers used, if you have interested in pursuing this mapping for your area. Dan.shaw@state.mn.us

Karner Blue Restoration Project, Crow-Hassan Prairie, John Moriarty, Three Rivers Park District

- Potential Karner Blue Butterfly introduction to Crow-Hassan Park Reserve
 - Native populations have existed relatively near (within the north metro)
 - While no there is no record of an existing population at this location, this restored prairie has the habitat, particularly a substantial population of wild lupine that the Karner Blue requires
 - The proposal: move butterflies from Fort McCoy in Wisconsin, releasing them to the prairie and monitoring the results – daily transects on release and during second flight
 - The proposal not yet finalized and is being vetted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and MN DNR
 - For follow-up questions, contact John.Moriarty@threeriversparks.org

Affinity Group Discussions

Participant had the opportunity to join two different Affinity Group discussions that were facilitated by a Steering Team member. Affinity Groups = self-selected groups of people with an interest in the following topics:

- Communications and Engagement
- Data and Technology
- Land and Water Protection
- Restoration and Stewardship
- Social Dimensions

At each discussion:

- Brief presentation on topic
- Discussion of strategies/action in the topic area as described in the Strategic Vision
- Prioritize and pick at least one item to begin working on 2021
- Find out who is interested and able to join a project team working on that item in 2021

Communications and Engagements Notes Pages Combined

Priority 1: Develop a communications plan.

- Make sure to not reinvent the wheel. The communications plan is foundational, then there can be a timeline and list out targets for action.
- Starting point: Engaging who? General public or each other; audience matters. It's a foundational piece to know when starting a communications plan.
- Dakota County just completed their communications plan. It's a concise, 4-page document. Could use Dakota County's as a starting point. Audiences, messages, formats, mechanisms. Might not take that long. We need the so what - the MLCCS and the network. Focus on MLCCS as a sub-plan. Impacts of data.
- Accommodate multiple languages and media outlet tools - Instagram, FB, NextDoor, local newspapers, PBS, Etc.

Priority 2: Create an MCN online presence for internal and external audiences.

- What's different or new about this MCN group? Keep thinking how we can do this better as a group.
- Maybe a phased plan that builds with internal and external audiences over time.
- Capacity

Priority 3: Create and distribute an electronic newsletter or provide content to existing newsletters.

- There's lots of noise - competing newsletters. Make it the one newsletter always read. Make it a must read. Short!!!!

Who is interested and able to work on the first priority?

- Karl Hakanson, Ryan Gustafson, Gina Quiram (tentative), Ariana Porcello, Lisa West - Communications Plan. Kelsey Walfoort, J

Data and Technology Notes Pages Combined:

Priority 1: Support upgrades to the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System and mapping.

- Make application to Metro GIS? Make application for next cycle.
- First priority
- One Watershed, One Plan - MLCCS important to do prioritization, etc. for this.
- Hennepin County/University Partnership as potential contracting mechanism

Priority 2: Explore the feasibility and utility of developing a user-friendly Greater Metro Region Conservation Map

- Leverage GeoPlanner and Data Portal initiated by Hennepin County as starting place
- Shows where public lands are. Need to combine layers and maps.

Priority 3: Update the Regionally Significant Ecological Areas Model (RSEA).

- Utilizes MLCCS data

Who is interested and able to work on the first priority?

- Kristine Maurer, Jim Drake, Adriana Atcheson, Mike Goodnature, Carrie Taylor, Quinn Palar

Land and Water Protection Notes Pages Combined

Priority 1: Develop a list of prioritized plant communities, habitats, and natural resource areas in the most critical need of protection to inform local land protection efforts.

- Will be able to use Minnesota Atlas to help develop the list and map it out [Minnesota Natural Resource Atlas \(mnatlas.org\)](https://mnatlas.org)
- A priority lists provides a drive on what we want to do

Priority 2: Assess gaps and opportunities to plan and implement conservation projects across jurisdictional and ownership boundaries to protect and improve functional natural systems.

Priority 3 or 4: Develop an effective case statement for local land and water planning and protection and management.

Priority 3 or 4: Develop a compelling case statement for more expansive state and local government natural resource planning that includes the need for more significant commitment and investment in long-term stewardship.

Who is interested and able to work on the first priority?

- Jennifer Teegarden, Jami Markle, Kristina Geiger, Curt Courdron, Lisa West, Renay Leone, Brian Vlach, Al Singer, Kelsey Walfoort, Carrie Taylor, Kristine Maurer, Jim Drake, Stephen Thomforde, Doug Mensing , Jen Vieth, John Stelzner Mike Lynn, Adam Muilenburg

Restoration and Stewardship Notes Pages Combined

Priority 1 Develop a case statement for long-term maintenance provisions.

(Individual priority votes 1111111112223333333)

- Influence OHF to include long term maintenance in funding in their program.
- Reframe conversation to define 'restoration' time frame to get to a higher level of function.
- CCM - or other means to tackle maintenance
- One of big priorities from initial MCN meeting was need for landowners (especially public) to be better stewards of their natural areas...how to accomplish this? Increased planning (other group focus) and funding...using practices in above twostrategies.
- Extremely important! In the end, the only thing we can restore are the long-term processes
- Sam Wegner / Lower Phalen Creek Project is interested in working with a non-state info hub in our capacity to represent and explore the implementation of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in relation to existing BMPs
- Include restoration of landscape ecological processes and historical natural disturbance regimes
- Interested in working on this Jen Vieth, Carpenter Nature Center, Carrie Taylor, Mike Lynn

Priority 2 Serve as an information hub to share lessons learned and training opportunities for both professionals and landowners.

(Individual priority votes 11111222223333333)

- Most valuable for our entity and the homeowners we encounter
- Annual conference?

- I know BWSR has a “What’s Working” hub, but I think it would be good to have an independent source, not associated with an agency, non-profit or any other.
- Tours of projects led by project leads (Mary Hammes happy to help organize and lead). I second the tour idea. Well worth the travel time to see what other people are doing.
- Share information on best practices when you have a big budget, and for when you don’t.
- Existing: BWSR What’s working, MN Prairie Landowner Network, Others? How to bring together and make useful for professionals and landowners?
- Review what’s out there and enhance those but also have something separate that isn’t agency affiliated. Would need to be hosted by a non-agency.
- BWSR’s What’s Working webpage can fill some of this need. Dan Shaw can help further this discussion

Develop and promote a stewardship plan template

(Individual priority votes 11112222222222333333)

- Dakota County and Dakota SWCD has developed a template and can serve in this group. I like John’s ideas on coming to some consensus on elements.
- As was mentioned, different entities have different needs (and budgets) to accomplish such plans, so flexibility seems necessary (with “strongly encouraged” elements identified). The key element is metrics of success.

Who’s interested in working on priorities?

- Chris Lord, Mike Goodnature, Stephen Thomforde, John Stelzner, John Moriarty - Tour, Carrie Taylor, Mike Lynn, Jen Vieth

Social Dimensions Notes Pages Combined

Priority 1: Improve relationship building with underrepresented communities to increase awareness and use of public natural areas.

- Urban Roots-teaching or doing outreach with HS students from lower income families on the east side of St. Paul. Start more local and teach about something that they have direct access to. Giving back to their community. As a woman of color, nice to see other women of color in the field. A lot of community work is about building relationships-talking to people vs. handing out a flyer.
- TPL-Totally agree with relationship building
- This is the crux, from my standpoint (Paul K). The question I have is how do we do this?
- I agree, Paul. I also feel like this frame might not be quite right. Is it about increasing awareness or maybe more important to meet people where they are and what’s important to them?*(Mary H)
- Probably also have to acknowledge and deal with the fact that this work takes a LONNNNG time (Mary H)
- Re-think cost share funding for incentive projects

Priority 2: Recruit and sustain the involvement of people from under-represented communities in MCN leadership and activities.

- Pay a living wage for entry level positions (Mary H), I second that! (David) When reaching out to under-represented communities, show them different jobs they could realistically do, and the path they could go down if they stayed in the field. If college is necessary, if degrees are necessary, have different ways in which we can reach out to college students of all colleges, not just the private institutions, but community colleges as well. Also, some form of a support for students yearlong that’s accessible. (Kat F.)
- Develop land acknowledgement

Priority 3: Amplify the efforts of each MCN organization and member to diversify the conservation profession.

- Find ways to link seasonal positions so individuals could be working year-round while transferring between seasonal positions - ladders to success?
- Decolonize conservation practices (this extends from methods to the language we use to describe “invasive” species and the way we prioritize human intervention in ecosystems). (+1 from Mary H)

Who’s interested in working on priorities?

- Susan, May, Dan Shaw, BWSR, May Vang - Urban Roots, Lower Phalen Creek Project would be eager to see these efforts expanded w/in and beyond the MCN. Expanding staff capacity would allow us to be involved in this effort. Urban Roots is interested in working on this project. Mississippi Park Connection too! Three Rivers (Paul Kortebein) also interested.

10:25 Wrap up and Looking Forward

- Steering Team members will be reaching out to people who signed up to work on priority projects.
- Field tours for this summer – John Moriarty would like to take the lead.
- Bring along young professionals. They participate as intern and get passionate, but once done with program they lose touch. Incorporate college students into the field. Twenty hour a week job. Recruit alum from a youth conservation job program like that of Urban Roots. Link with Urban Roots and high schools.
 - Environmental Stewardship Institute. Rising seniors. 10 interns hired. Each will have a mentor.
 - Hennepin county – outreach group to have paid internship. Need to be paid. Kristine Mauer.
 - Connector – get connected. More paid internships.
 - Metro watershed partners group. Green Career Pathways. Young adults featured in a recent meeting.
 - Mississippi River Fellows
 - MN Green Corps
 - Mississippi Park Connection.
- Look for Brown Bags on topics of interest to this group.
 - Golden Clams Discovery and research on Briggs Lake – Megan Weber, 6/21/21.