

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Record of Decision

In the Matter of the Determination of the Need FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS, AND ORDER
for an Environmental Impact Statement for the
Skandia WMA Stream and Wetland Restoration
Project, in Murray County, Minnesota

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Minnesota DNR proposes to restore a channelized stream and create and restore wetland habitat within the Skandia Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The channel within this segment of the WMA was historically straightened (channelized) to accommodate agricultural activities. The proposed project will restore stream sinuosity via re-meandering to improve water quality, habitat, and floodplain connectivity.
2. The purpose of the proposed project is to restore stream sinuosity via re-meandering to improve water quality, habitat, and floodplain connectivity. The goals of the re-meandered stream are to raise the water table, increase watershed capacity, and prevent upstream calcareous fens from draining.
3. The proposed project requires preparation of a State Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) according to Minnesota Rules (Minn. R.) 4410.4300, subpart 27.A. Public waters, public water wetlands and wetlands.
4. Pursuant to Minnesota R. 4410.4300, subpart 27.A., the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) is either the local governmental unit (LGU) or the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Further, according to Minn. R. 4410.0500, subpart 1, when the project is carried out by a state agency, then the state agency shall be the RGU. Since the DNR is the project proposer, the DNR has taken on the role of the RGU.
5. The DNR is the RGU in the preparation and review of environmental documents related to the Skandia WMA Stream and Wetland Restoration project. See Minn. R. 4410.0500, subp. 1.
6. The DNR prepared an EAW for the proposed project. See Minn. R. 4410.1400 to 4410.1700.
7. The DNR filed the EAW with the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB), and a notice of its availability was published in the *EQB Monitor* on June 30, 2026. A copy of the EAW was sent to all persons on the EQB Distribution List, to those persons known by the DNR to be interested in the proposed project, and to those persons requesting a copy. A statewide news release announcing the availability of the EAW was sent to newspapers, radio, and television stations. If requested, paper copies of the EAW were also available for public review and inspection at the Balaton Public Library and the DNR Central Office Library. The EAW was also made available to the public via posting on the DNR's website. See Minn. R. 4410.1500.

Public Comment Period and Response to Comments

8. The 30-day EAW public review and comment period began July 1, 2026, and ended July 30, 2026. Written comments on the EAW could be submitted to the DNR via online commenting on the DNR's website or by U.S. mail. See Minn. R. 4410.1600.
9. During the 30-day EAW public review and comment period, the DNR received seven written comments on the EAW. The agencies and individuals who submitted comments are listed below.
 - A. Lynn Glesne
 - B. Tyler Schiffler
 - C. Perry Loegering
 - D. Ron Schwartau
 - E. Sarah Soderholm
 - F. Tracy Schnell, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)
 - G. Kelly Gragg-Johnson, State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO)
10. The DNR has addressed comments concerned with the accuracy and completeness of the material contained in the EAW, potential impacts that might warrant further investigation before the project commences, and the need for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the proposed project. See Minn. R. 4410.1600. Many of the comments received did not address these issues, but rather asked questions for clarity, provided thoughts or suggestions, or provided more insight on permitting authority and requirements. Comment letters are summarized below (See ¶¶ 11 through 17) with the RGU's response following. Copies of all comments will be provided to the project proposer and to permitting and/or approval entities and/or authorities for their consideration as part of the permitting, approval, and/or implementation processes.
11. Letters A, B, and E expressed support for the proposed project.

Response: Thank you for your comment. These comments did not address the accuracy or completeness of the material contained in the EAW or environmental impacts that might warrant further investigation prior to the final Record of Decision.
12. Letter B asked how they could propose projects that the state could implement to improve wildlife habitat and stated a site that they thought would be a good project.

Response: Thank you for your comment. To propose projects that will improve water quality and habitat in Pope County, please contact the Glenwood Wildlife Office (320) 634-7337 or Mike Kelly, Region 1 Clean Water Legacy Specialist (218) 608-0557.
13. Letter C stated that Sand Bar Willow is important in habitat restorations and urged for the species to be included in the restoration habitat for its many benefits.

Response: Thank you for your comment. This restoration would include a diverse mix of native grasses and forbs to help with streambank stability. The sandbar willow is expected to encroach over time and beavers will utilize the restoration; however, the goal is for the channel to mature prior to being actively flooded by beavers.

14. Letter D stated that the location of the proposed project was in a different section than stated in the EAW.

Response: Thank you for your comment. The EAW stated that the proposed project is located in Section 12 of the Lake Sarah Township. After further review, the proposed project is located in Section 30 of the Lake Sarah Township. The error has been acknowledged and corrected.

15. Letters A, B, and E commented on the ecological benefits of the project such as improved habitat, wildlife, water quality, river flow, ecosystem function and restoration.

Response: Thank you for your comment. These comments did not address the accuracy or completeness of the material contained in the EAW or environmental impacts that might warrant further investigation prior to the final Record of Decision.

16. Letter F is from MnDOT and stated that they had reviewed the EAW and had no concerns or comments.

Response: Thank you for your comment. Comment acknowledged. The information will be shared with the proposer.

17. Letter G is from SHPO and stated that they determined that no significant archaeological sites would be affected by this project and that there are no properties listed in the National or State Registers of Historic Places, or within the Historic Sites Network, that would be affected by this project.

Response: Thank you for your comment. Comment acknowledged. The information will be shared with the proposer.

Record of Decision Preparation

18. Pursuant to Minn. R. 4410.1700, subpart 2b, the decision on the need for an EIS shall be made no later than 15 days after the close of the 30-day review period. This 15-day period shall be extended by the EQB chair by no more than 15 additional days upon request of the RGU. See Minn. R. 4410.1700, subp. 2b.

19. On August 11, 2026, the DNR requested a 15-day extension for making a decision on the need for an EIS for the proposed project. The same day, the DNR was granted the extension by EQB. See Minn. R. 4410.1700, subp. 2b.

Environmental Effects

20. Based upon the information contained in the EAW and received as public comments, the DNR

has identified the following potential environmental effects associated with the project.

- a. Project Construction and Design
- b. Cover Type Conversion
- c. Geology, soils and topography/landforms
- d. Water Resources (Surface Water, Hydrology, and Water Quality)
- e. Contamination/Hazardous Materials/Wastes
- f. Fish, Wildlife, Plant Communities, and Sensitive Ecological Resources
- g. Cultural Resources
- h. Visual
- i. Air
- j. Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- k. Noise
- l. Transportation
- m. Cumulative Potential Effects

- a. **Project Construction and Design:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 6. The project consists of restoration of a historically channelized stream and adjacent floodplain wetlands within the Skandia Wildlife Management Area. Construction activities include channel excavation, culvert replacement, grading, streambank stabilization, wetland restoration, erosion and sediment control and revegetation. Construction will be phased to minimize disturbance and maintain water quality, and disturbed areas will be restored following completion of construction. Because the project is principally an ecological restoration project and does not establish a long-term source of environmental impacts, construction-related effects will be temporary and localized, and the project will not result in significant environmental effects.
- b. **Cover Type Conversion:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 8. The project will convert portions of existing grassland and channelized stream to restored stream channel, wetlands and native riparian habitat. Approximately 3.28 acres of wetland habitat and additional stream length will be created while maintaining the site's long-term use as Wildlife Management Area land. Disturbed areas will be restored using native seed mixes appropriate to site conditions. The proposed cover type conversion is consistent with the ecological restoration objectives of the project and will not result in significant adverse environmental effects.
- c. **Geology, Soils and Topography/Landforms:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 11. Project construction will involve excavation of approximately 22,000 cubic yards of native soils and grading associated with stream restoration. Excavated materials will be reused onsite, and no imported fill is anticipated. Temporary soil disturbance and erosion potential during construction will be minimized through implementation of erosion and sediment control best management practices, temporary stabilization measures and final revegetation. The project area does not contain karst or other geologic features that would be adversely affected by the project. The effects on geology, soils and topography will be temporary, localized and reversible and will not constitute significant environmental effects.
- d. **Water Resources (Surface Water, Hydrology and Water Quality):** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 12. The project restores a historically channelized stream by re-establishing natural channel geometry and reconnecting the stream with its floodplain, thereby improving hydrologic function, aquatic habitat, flood storage and water quality. Temporary water quality impacts may occur during construction due to in-water work and soil disturbance; however, these impacts will be minimized through implementation of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), erosion and sediment control best management practices, staged construction

sequencing, turbidity control measures and applicable permit conditions. Existing wetlands will not be filled or drained, and no compensatory wetland mitigation is required. The temporary construction-related water quality impacts will be localized, limited in duration and adequately minimized through permit conditions and best management practices, and the project will provide long-term improvements to stream function and water quality without resulting in significant adverse environmental effects.

- e. **Contamination/Hazardous Materials/Wastes:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 13. No known contaminated sites occur within the project area. Construction activities will utilize limited quantities of fuels, lubricants and other construction-related materials, which will be managed in accordance with applicable federal, state and local regulations. In the event previously unidentified contaminated materials are encountered during construction, work will cease in the affected area until appropriate regulatory agencies are consulted. Construction debris, including removal of an existing culvert, will be properly managed and disposed of or recycled where practicable. Due to the implementation of standard construction practices and applicable regulatory requirements, the project will not result in significant environmental effects related to contamination, hazardous materials or hazardous wastes.
- f. **Fish, Wildlife, Plant Communities, and Rare Ecological Resources:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 14. The project is intended to restore aquatic, wetland and prairie habitat within the Skandia Wildlife Management Area. Temporary construction-related disturbance will occur; however, impacts will be minimized through phased construction, sediment control measures, invasive species prevention practices, protection of the nearby calcareous fen and restoration using native vegetation. The project was designed in consultation with DNR resource specialists to avoid adverse impacts to sensitive ecological resources and improve aquatic organism passage and habitat connectivity. The project will avoid or minimize impacts to wildlife resources and will provide long-term habitat benefits without resulting in significant adverse environmental effects.
- g. **Cultural Resources:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 15. Review of available archaeological and historic records identified no known archaeological sites, historic properties, State Historic Sites or properties listed on the State or National Registers of Historic Places within the project's area of potential effect. Construction activities are confined primarily to previously disturbed areas within the existing floodplain. If previously unknown cultural resources are encountered during construction, appropriate procedures will be followed to protect those resources. The environmental effects on cultural resources are expected to be limited and will not result in significant environmental effects.
- h. **Visual:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 16. The project will permanently alter the visual character of the project area by replacing a straightened drainage channel with a naturally meandering stream, restored floodplain and wetland habitat. Temporary visual impacts associated with construction equipment, exposed soils, stockpiled materials, dust and construction lighting will occur during construction and will cease upon project completion. Disturbed areas will be restored and revegetated with native vegetation. The temporary construction-related visual impacts will be limited in duration and extent, while the long-term visual changes reflect the ecological restoration purpose of the project and do not constitute significant adverse environmental effects.
- i. **Air:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 17. Temporary air emissions will occur during construction from operation of construction equipment, worker vehicles and material handling activities. Fugitive dust will be controlled through implementation of construction best management practices including dust suppression measures, reduced vehicle speeds and compliance with the project's SWPPP. The project will not create stationary emission sources or increase long-term traffic volumes. The temporary construction-related air emissions will be

localized, limited in duration and reversible and will not result in significant environmental effects.

- j. **Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG):** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 18. Greenhouse gas emissions associated with the project are limited primarily to temporary construction equipment operation, transportation and material production. The EAW estimates total project emissions of approximately 90.3 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, which annualizes to approximately 0.9 tons of CO₂-equivalent per year over the anticipated project life. Mitigation measures including minimizing equipment idling, sourcing materials locally where practicable and reducing transportation-related emissions were identified. Because the project does not create a substantial long-term source of greenhouse gas emissions and supports restoration of natural ecosystem functions, the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the project do not have the potential for significant environmental effects.
- k. **Noise:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 19. Temporary increases in noise will occur during construction from operation of heavy equipment and construction vehicles. Construction activities will occur over a limited period and primarily during daytime hours. Upon completion of construction, the project will not create a continuing source of operational noise. The construction-related noise will be temporary, localized and reversible and will not result in significant environmental effects.
- l. **Transportation:** This topic was addressed in EAW Item 20. Construction activities will generate temporary construction traffic associated with equipment mobilization, material delivery and worker access. Temporary roadway modifications will occur during culvert replacement but are expected to be of limited duration and managed through standard traffic control measures. Following construction, the project will not increase traffic volumes or alter the long-term transportation network. The project will not result in significant adverse transportation impacts.
- m. **Cumulative Potential Impacts:** This topic was addressed under EAW Item 21. The potential environmental effects related to this proposed project could combine with environmental effects from other past, present or reasonably foreseeable future projects for which a basis of expectation has been laid. The proposed project has been identified to have temporary, limited and minor negative environmental effects to water resources, aquatic habitat plant communities, dust and noise. Any potential negative effects due to the proposed project are temporary and limited to the duration of active construction activities. No other projects were identified as part of the cumulative potential effects analysis that would result in cumulative potential effects.

Permits and Approvals

21. The following permits and approvals are, or may be, needed for the project:

Unit of Government	Type of Application	Status
Lake Sarah Township	Grading Permit	In Process
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	Construction Stormwater Permit	In Process
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Public Waters Work Permit	In Process
United States Army Corps of Engineers	Section 404 Permit	In Process

Murray County SWCD	Wetlands Conservation Act	In Process
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	Section 401 Water Quality Certification	In Process
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Calcareous Fen No Effect Concurrence	In Process

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Minnesota Environmental Review Program Rules, Minn. R. 4410.1700, subparts 6 and 7, set forth the following standards and criteria to compare the impacts that may be reasonably expected to occur from the project in order to determine whether it has the potential for significant environmental effects.

In deciding whether a project has the potential for significant environmental effects, the following factors shall be considered:

- a. *type, extent, and reversibility of environmental effects;*
- b. *cumulative potential effects. The RGU shall consider the following factors: whether the cumulative potential effect is significant; whether the contribution from the project is significant when viewed in connection with other contributions to the cumulative potential effect; the degree to which the project complies with approved mitigation measures specifically designed to address the cumulative potential effect; and the efforts of the Proposer to minimize the contributions from the project;*
- c. *the extent to which the environmental effects are subject to mitigation by ongoing public regulatory authority. The RGU may rely only on mitigation measures that are specific and that can be reasonably expected to effectively mitigate the identified environmental impacts of the project; and*
- d. *the extent to which environmental effects can be anticipated and controlled as result of other available environmental studies undertaken by public agencies or the project proposer, including other EISs.*

2. **Type, extent, and reversibility of environmental effects**

Based on Findings of Fact above in ¶ 20, the DNR concludes that the following types of potential environmental effects, as described in the Findings of Fact, would be limited in extent, temporary, or reversible:

- a. Project Construction and Design
- b. Cover Type Conversion

- c. Geology, Soils and Topography/Landforms
- d. Water Resources (Surface Water, Hydrology, and Water Quality)
- e. Contamination/Hazardous Materials/Wastes
- f. Fish, Wildlife, Plant Communities, and Rare Ecological Resources
- g. Cultural Resources
- h. Visual
- i. Air
- j. Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- k. Noise
- l. Transportation
- m. Cumulative Potential Effects

3. **Cumulative potential effects**

Based on information contained in the EAW, the DNR is unaware of any past, present or reasonably foreseeable projects, for which a basis of expectation has been laid, that combined with environmental effects of the proposed project may result in significant potential for environmental effects.

4. **Extent to which environmental effects are subject to mitigation by ongoing public regulatory authority**

Based on the Findings of Fact set forth above and the information contained in the EAW, the DNR concludes that there is sufficient ongoing public regulatory authority and specific measures identified that can be expected to effectively address the following environmental impacts:

- Physical impacts on water resources are subject to regulatory authority by the DNR Public Waters Work Permit and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 Permit.
- Erosion, sedimentation, and water quality impacts from construction-related activity are subject to regulatory authority by the MPCA NPDES/SDS Construction Stormwater Permit, the CWA 401 Water Quality Certification, and the Sarah Lake Township Grading Permit.
- Impacts to rare wildlife resources and habitat are subject to the DNR's Natural Heritage Review, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Endangered Species Act Consultation and Approval, and DNR Calcareous Fen No Effect Concurrence.
- Impacts to wetland resources are subject to the Wetland Conservation Act, DNR's No-Loss Assessment, and Murray County SWCD's Letter of Concurrence of No-Loss

Permits and Approvals: Prior to initiation of this project, the permits and approvals identified in Finding ¶ 21 would be required. When applying the standards and criteria used in the determination of the need for an EIS, the DNR finds that the project is subject to these regulatory authorities to an extent sufficient to mitigate potential environmental effects through measures identified in the EAW and Record of Decision.

5. **Extent to which environmental effects can be anticipated and controlled as a result of other environmental studies undertaken by public agencies or the project proposer, or other EISs**

No other environmental studies were undertaken.

6. As set forth in ¶¶ 1 – 20, the DNR has fulfilled all the procedural requirements of law and rule applicable to determining the need for an EIS on the proposed Skandia WMA Stream and Wetland Restoration project, in Murray County, Minnesota.
7. Based on consideration of the criteria and factors specified in the Minnesota Environmental Review Program Rules (Minn. R. part 4410.1700, subparts 6 and 7) to determine whether a project has the potential for significant environmental effects, and on the Findings and Record in this matter, the DNR determines that the proposed Skandia WMA Stream and Wetland Restoration project does not have the potential for significant environmental effects.

ORDER

Based on the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions:

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources determines that an Environmental Impact Statement is **not** required for the Skandia WMA Stream and Wetland Restoration project, located in Murray County, Minnesota.

Any Findings that might be properly termed Conclusions and any Conclusions that might be properly termed Findings are hereby adopted as such.

Dated this 10th day of **September 2026**

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Katie Smith
Assistant Commissioner

