

March 8, 2024

Dear Governor's Council on Minnesota's Coastal Program,

It's hard to believe that it's only been less than two months since our last meeting. So much has happened! Let me update you.

- **NOAA has accepted our 2023 performance measures report. We're happy to say that we hit most of our five-year targets.** We and all the other coastal programs across the nation report annually to NOAA on how we are doing on a set of nationwide performance measures. Measures cover areas ranging from public access and coastal hazards to government coordination and coastal habitat. Back in 2018, NOAA and the program set targets on three of the measures that most closely relate to the work we do here in Minnesota. We would work to meet the targets over a five-year period. The five years is up; we underperformed with one and exceeded expectations with the other two. To recap, between 2018 and 2023, we set a goal to:
  - Assist 15 coastal communities to complete at least one project to implement a sustainable development plan or polluted runoff management plan. Between grant partners and staff, 11 communities completed such projects.
  - Complete 10 policies, plans, or projects to reduce damage from coastal hazards. Together, program staff and partners completed 11.
  - Offer 45 training events related to government coordination; public access; coastal habitat; and coastal dependent uses and community development. Again, by working together, grant partners and program staff hosted 56 trainings.

Overall, this is good news going into our formal evaluation. Speaking of...

- **NOAA has announced that they will evaluate the program sometime in 2025.** It is a requirement of the Coastal Zone Management Act that NOAA periodically evaluate participating coastal programs. Typically, these evaluations happen every five years or so. Our last was in 2018, so we are due.

What happens during an evaluation? Briefly, a lot! It starts with us preparing responses to a set of questions, mostly focused on major changes to legislation, accomplishments made and challenges that have arisen since the last evaluation. The questions touch on eight thematic areas ranging from administration and outreach to protection of natural resources and coastal water quality. NOAA also sends a survey to partners and collaborators chosen by the program to get their input on what is going well and what could be improved. Based on the information we send and the survey responses, NOAA proposes three focus areas for the evaluation. Once we agree on the three areas, we begin planning for the on-site portion. In mid- to late-2025, a team of approximately five evaluators from NOAA and other coastal programs will come to the area. We will set up opportunities for them to meet in-person with partners and collaborators related to the three focus areas. In addition, we schedule field trips to project sites. The evaluation also includes a public meeting, where evaluators solicit public comments. It wraps up with a report that highlights accomplishments and makes recommendations for the DNR. NOAA

shares these with staff and DNR leadership, including the DNR Commissioner. It can take upwards of a year for NOAA to issue their findings.

If you'd like to see the results of the last evaluation, we will have a copy available for you at our March 15 meeting. You can also download a copy from our webpage: [mndnr.gov/mlscp](https://mndnr.gov/mlscp). It's at the bottom of the page under Program Information.

- **We started preliminary planning for the program's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.** Staff looked at your suggestions (thank you!) and came up with some of our own for a year-long celebration starting in July 2024. Given the program evaluation I previously mentioned, new work on the Section 309 Assessment and Strategies, and the educational messaging at wayside project we're shepherding, we're planning a series of small events, the biggest being a reception during the public input meeting of our NOAA evaluation. We'll also be doing things like sharing written pieces with local media; presenting or tabling at events, conferences, and city/town meetings; and making direct contact with past and present grantees.
- **We're making progress on developing our cooperative agreement.** As we wait for Congress to set the appropriation that will fund our program, we are working to develop application components. Cynthia has worked with grantees and our program specialists to finalize the task descriptions for the two pass-through projects. We're in negotiations with NOAA regarding the task description for the small grants we'll offer throughout the year (i.e., STAR and capacity grants). I've been working with Clint and Julie on coming up with the task descriptions for our core team's work.

A couple of big items are still under development. The first is securing match. Due to lack of designated pass-through grants, we're short approximately \$650,000 in required match. We have a couple of promising leads we're following up on through the DNR's [Get Out MORE](#) investments. Finally, we are identifying partners and developing the task description for the project aimed at improving educational messaging at waysides.

Although it's hard to know for sure, we expect to have everything finalized in early April. Not a lot of time, but we can and will do it!

As time allows, I will go into greater detail on these topics at our meeting on March 15. If time is short and we don't get to something you'd like to know more about, please plan on staying after the meeting to chat with staff. We'll be in the room and intend to keep the virtual room open too. You can also contact me directly at [amber.westerbur@state.mn.us](mailto:amber.westerbur@state.mn.us) or 218-834-1445.

In gratitude and respect,

Amber