Final Evaluation Findings

Minnesota
Coastal Management Program

August 2008 to May 2018

June 2020

Office for Coastal Management
National Ocean Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
United States Department of Commerce

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Summary of Findings

The Coastal Zone Management Act requires the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to conduct periodic evaluations of the performance of states and territories with federally approved coastal management programs. This evaluation examined the operation and management of the Minnesota Coastal Management Program administered by the Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program in the Ecological and Water Resources Division of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the designated lead agency, for the period from August 2008 to May 2018. The evaluation focused on three target areas: program administration, coastal program grants, and coastal hazards.

The findings in this evaluation document will be considered by NOAA in making future financial award decisions concerning the Minnesota Coastal Program. The evaluation came to these conclusions:

Program Administration

Accomplishment: The Minnesota Coastal Management Program's technical assistance and financial support helped build a successful Minnesota Clean Marina Program with 17 certified clean marinas, two of which are in the coastal zone, and six more in the process of being certified.

Recommendation: The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Minnesota Coastal Management Program are strongly encouraged to continue to work with the governor's office to ensure the timely filling of vacancies on the Governor's Council on Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program. This could include working with the governor's office to obtain delegation of authority (either primary or back-up) for filling council vacancies in a timely manner.

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management encourages Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program to work with the Governor's Council on Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program to identify potential improvements to the council's function. Potential opportunities include revisiting the bylaws; adjusting the timing and structure of meetings to make it easier for a more diverse council to participate; and using meetings to provide additional opportunities for knowledge transfer through training and sharing success stories.

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management recommends that Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program and the Governor's Council on Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program develop a strategic plan.

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management recommends that the Minnesota Coastal Management Program pursue the development of a Section 309 assessment and strategies, coordinated with a broader strategic planning effort, to identify priorities for which 309 funding could be used.

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management recommends that the Minnesota Coastal Management Program strengthen the implementation, understanding, and visibility of its program by identifying its priority enforceable policies and submitting any changes to these policies for incorporation into its federally approved program. NOAA also encourages the program to work with the Office for Coastal Management to determine if the federally approved program's enforceable policies should be streamlined to provide useful and informative policies and functions, while also reducing the need to provide NOAA with program changes.

Coastal Program Grants

Accomplishment: The Minnesota Coastal Management Program successfully administers a large number of grants, provides high-quality technical assistance to grant recipients, adapts and implements changes to federal and state requirements, and continually strives to address grant recipient concerns and improve the grant process.

Accomplishment: The Minnesota Coastal Management Program's grant program and technical assistance provides key support to small local communities and other entities to implement projects that improve public access, protect coastal habitat and water quality, help communities manage development, coordinate and engage the public in coastal management, and address coastal hazards.

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management recommends that the Minnesota Coastal Management Program build on being the "spark that evolves into longer-term success" and provide opportunities for sharing information on best practices and research results. These opportunities could include hosting regular coastal conferences every two to three years, placing short summaries of project outcomes on its website, and encouraging sharing between grantees and the Governor's Council on Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program at meetings or on field trips.

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management recommends that the Minnesota Coastal Management Program implement identified opportunities from its recent grant process evaluation and continue to look for, and implement, improvements to the grants process to reduce staff workload and improve the process for grantees.

Coastal Hazards

Accomplishment: The Minnesota Coastal Management Program successfully combines technical assistance, geospatial data development, and financial support to improve state and local resilience to coastal hazards, for example with the update and implementation of the *Lake Superior North: One Watershed, One Plan.*

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management recommends that the Minnesota Coastal Management Program continue its successful efforts in working with partners to

address coastal hazards. The coastal program is encouraged to (a) consider conducting a vulnerability assessment of the coast to better understand hazard risks and to (b) pursue opportunities to increase program capacity through mechanisms such as applying for a Coastal Management or Digital Coast fellow, Section 309 funding, and shared positions.

This evaluation concludes that the State of Minnesota is successfully implementing and enforcing its federally approved coastal management program, adhering to the terms of the federal financial assistance awards, and addressing coastal management needs identified in section 303(2)(A) through (K) of the Coastal Zone Management Act.

Program Review Procedures

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) evaluated the Minnesota Coastal Management Program in fiscal year 2018. The evaluation team consisted of Carrie Hall, evaluation team lead; Rachael Franks Taylor, site liaison; Heather Stirratt, team lead for the Great Lakes region; and Todd Breiby, program coordinator for the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program. The support of Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program staff members was crucial in conducting the evaluation, and this support is most gratefully acknowledged.

NOAA sent a notification of the scheduled evaluation to the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, published a notice of "Intent to Evaluate" in the *Federal Register* on April 16, 2018, and notified members of Minnesota's congressional delegation. The coastal program advertised the public meeting May 17, 2018, in the *Cloquet Pine Journal*, May 18, 2018, in the *Lake County News Chronicle*, and May 21, 2018, in the *Duluth News Tribune*.

The evaluation process included a review of relevant documents and a survey of stakeholders, which helped identify three target areas for the evaluation: program administration, coastal hazards, and coastal program grants. A site visit was conducted and the evaluation team held meetings with staff members and group discussions with stakeholders and program staff members about the target areas. In addition, a public meeting was held on Tuesday, May 22, 2018, at 5:30 p.m. at the Hartley Nature Center, 3001 Woodland Avenue, Duluth, Minnesota, to provide an opportunity for members of the public to express their opinions about the implementation of the program. Stakeholders and members of the public were also given the opportunity to provide written comments. A summary of the written comments received and the NOAA Office for Coastal Management's responses are included in Appendix A. NOAA then developed draft evaluation findings, which were provided to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for review, and the department's comments were considered in drafting the final evaluation findings.

Final evaluation findings for all coastal management programs highlight the program's accomplishments in the target areas and include recommendations, which are of two types.

Necessary Actions address programmatic requirements of the Coastal Zone Management Act or its implementing regulations at 15 C.F.R. Part 923 and of the state coastal management program approved by NOAA, and the terms of any grant or cooperative agreement funded under the Coastal Zone Management Act. Necessary actions must be carried out by the date specified. Failure to address necessary actions may result in a future finding of non-adherence and the invoking of interim sanctions, as specified in the Coastal Zone Management Act § 312(c), 16 U.S.C. § 1458(c).

Recommendations are actions that the office believes would improve the program but which are not mandatory. The state is expected to have considered the recommendations by the time of the next evaluation or dates specified.

Evaluation Findings

Program Administration

Overview

The federally approved Minnesota Coastal Management Program is administered through the Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program (coastal program) and includes the Governor's Council on Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program. The coastal program provides highly valued funding, technical assistance, and geospatial data to support coastal management efforts throughout the state coastal zone. The coastal program staff is small, but program staff are very competent and strategic. The coastal program is providing leadership to further coastal management in the state, for example, by elevating the importance of and attention to Lake Superior through ongoing visioning work and the newly established Lake Superior Collaborative. Coastal program staff serve as strong connectors of information, people, and projects across the state. This critical role is further enhanced through the leveraged networks of the council members. The coastal program has strengthened the Department of Natural Resources, its parent agency, taking a leadership role in its internal climate resilience efforts and strategic planning.

The coastal program received particularly strong praise from stakeholders for its technical assistance. For example, one stakeholders when describing the program's top accomplishments stated, "I work for a small township along the coast and by far one of the most significant contributions and accomplishments is the availability of technical assistance to the town, particularly with GIS." Stakeholders also noted many other examples, including the program's mapping work and GIS technical assistance helping them make informed decisions about community development and natural resources; collecting baseline water quality data for numerous North Shore streams and making the data available; assisting local governments in planning; facilitating the development of climate adaptation solutions for Lake Superior's coastal communities and ecosystems; and providing support and coordination for post-2012 flood damage restoration along the north shore. The evaluation team also heard a number of times that small-community stakeholders wouldn't have the capacity to apply for grants without technical assistance from the coastal program.

In addition to hearing appreciation for pass-through grant funding, the evaluation team heard from partners that the technical assistance was highly valued and, for some small local governments or nonprofits, was their primary opportunity to interface with and benefit from the program, as even the STAR awards were out of reach in terms of administration and match.

Governor's Council on Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program

The Governor's Council on Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program (coastal council) has seats for 15 individuals with three members coming from each of the four eligible counties, Carlton, Cook, Lake, and St. Louis Counties, as well as three at-large members. Council members

are directly appointed by the governor. The council makes recommendations to the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources on grant priorities, projects to receive grant funding, and the program's annual administrative budget. The council also reviews the coastal program every two years.

Through the evaluation period, the governor's office struggled to fill council vacancies in a timely manner. This issue was noted in the 312 evaluation findings, dated May 2005. During the prior evaluation site visit in July 2008, only one council member position remained empty. Starting in 2011, a third to more than half of the seats were without a current appointment. The existing council members are very dedicated, and most have continued to serve until the governor names their replacements. This has been essential, as it would otherwise be hard for the council to function in accordance with its by-laws. Starting in late 2016, the Minnesota secretary of state made changes that simplified the application process that applies to councils across the state and made more information available on its website. At the time of the site visit in June 2018, though, current council appointments remained an issue. At the time of the site visit, the governor was also working to ensure that councils throughout the state represent the diversity of the population. In February 2020, 12 council members were appointed with three seats remaining vacant. The council is in a very good position for the next three years until 80 percent of the seats expire in January 2023. If the state finds that it is continually difficult to maintain a fully functioning council, the state may wish to pursue restructuring the coastal council or Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program.

The evaluation team also noted other opportunities to improve the functioning of the coastal program:

- Additional opportunities for knowledge transfer among council members, through training, sharing of grantee success, information on coastal issues, and facilitating interaction with the broader state and national coastal management community.
- The coastal council bylaws could be revisited to ensure that roles, responsibilities, and decision-making procedures were clearly communicated and easily understood.
- Recruitment of a more diverse pool of council members, which could include exploring non-traditional means for recruiting applicants from more diverse demographics, geographies, and age groups. The timing and means by which council members meet may need revisiting to ensure that meetings are equally accessible.
- The coastal council could take an even more active role in serving as ambassadors to elevate the attention to and understanding of the value of the program to local government units, elected officials, potential partners, and other constituents.
- The previous evaluation included a program suggestion to develop a mentorship program, which was never implemented. As new members join the council, the coastal program should again consider a mentorship program and/or an updated training program for new council members.

After the evaluation site visit, in January 2019, the council adopted revised bylaws and standard operating procedures. Both help to identify roles, responsibilities, and decision-making procedures. In March 2020, the coastal program launched "New Member Orientation." Each

new member receives the new "Orientation Manual" and joins staff and the chair in an orientation session to introduce members to the program, council, and grant review and scoring.

Strategic Planning

The Minnesota Coastal Management Program could benefit from developing a new strategic plan. The previous evaluation findings included a program suggestion that the Minnesota Coastal Management Program develop a strategic plan. Although a strategic plan has not yet been done, the coastal program recently assisted the division with the development of a strategic plan, which can help frame a new strategic plan for the program.

The coastal program has several milestones forthcoming, including 12 appointments to the coastal council as of February 2020, the 20th anniversary of the coastal program, and the opportunity to develop a new 309 assessment and strategies. It is a great time for the Minnesota Coastal Management Program to reflect on where the program has been and where it wants to go in the next 5 to 10 years. A strategic plan can provide guidance for the program and partners going forward. A strategic plan would ideally identify coastal priorities for project funding (identify opportunities for strategic investment), identify administration opportunities (increase programmatic efficiency, maximize program impact, and enhance staff capacity and expertise), clarify annual planning procedures (roles, responsibilities, engagement, decision-making), and identify enhancements of programmatic outreach. With the identification of clear goals and objectives, coastal program staff and council members would be empowered to work with potential applicants to identify and cultivate projects that further the strategic plan. The coastal program is encouraged to consider using a third-party facilitator and to work closely with the coastal council and engage local stakeholders in the planning process.

The strategic planning process should include a close look at grant administration and the level of effort for staff for the types of grant funding available, as well as return on investment perspectives. Some analysis of level of effort should be developed and used to guide staff time on administration of STAR grants, larger grants, technical assistance (connecting, advising, and convening roles), and overall coastal program administration and leadership. This will help with transparency of the "true" cost of doing business for the state program. It will also help the coastal program assess where efficiencies might be gained or where they might be needed. This analysis could inform a revisiting by the program and council of what program functions constitute administrative elements and which are conducted for the benefit of coastal communities and constituents.

The coastal program and coastal council should also consider the following:

- Providing noncompetitive funding to further priorities identified through the strategic planning process. These projects might be funded with additional appropriations or de-obligated funding. This can be an effective means to target funding towards emerging issues, such as impacts due to recent storm events and hazards or recently identified data gaps, and would enhance the flexibility of the coastal program to fulfill its mission.

- Whether funding could be used for an additional staff person, coastal management fellow, or a shared position to support initiatives and partners in the coastal zone.
- Exploring opportunities for Minnesota and Wisconsin to coordinate on funding regional projects that cross state boundaries, for example, working in the St. Louis Estuary.

In 2019, with the support of the coastal council, the coastal program launched a new, noncompetitive funding opportunity. Training and Conference Support grants help coastal managers and decision-makers defray the costs associated with hosting or attending critical training. The grants also help the coastal program make progress on 2018-2023 Evaluation Metric 2: Training decision-makers on timely and relevant coastal issues.

309 Assessment and Strategy

Every five years, coastal programs have the opportunity to complete a Section 309 assessment and develop strategies around nine coastal zone enhancement objectives that will lead to program changes. Coastal programs that complete a Section 309 assessment and strategies are eligible for additional base and competitive funding. Due to staffing constraints, the coastal program did not complete an assessment and strategies for 2016-2020. The coastal program is encouraged to complete a 309 assessment and strategies in the upcoming cycle 2021-2025 and use a strategic planning process to consider how Section 309 funding could be used to support priority coastal management objectives leading to program changes.

In 2009, a small group of marina owners and operators from the Midwest Marina Association began to discuss the development of a Clean Marina Program for Minnesota. A nonprofit was created, and the coastal program, along with other organizations including Minnesota Sea Grant, supported this effort over the evaluation period. The coastal program's 2011-2015 309 assessment and strategies included a strategy to support the development of a Minnesota Clean Marina Program. The coastal program's support included funding and assistance to complete a needs assessment of the eight North Shore marinas to determine what would be required to successfully obtain Clean Marina certification and to develop the *Minnesota Clean Marina Guidebook,* a comprehensive guide to marina and boatyard best management practices (BMPs) and reference federal and state laws and regulations. The first five marinas were certified in 2012 and at the end of 2017, Minnesota had 17 certified marinas and six marinas working toward certification across the state; two of the eight marinas in the coastal zone have been certified. A stakeholder described the coastal program manager's ability to write the program was "invaluable . . . to getting the program off the ground." The coastal program's role in supporting the development of the Minnesota Clean Marina Program is an excellent example of the benefits of being able to combine technical and financial assistance to further coastal management initiatives.

Federal Award Reporting

The current program manager has made a number of improvements in federal award reporting, including reformatting of performance progress reports, to provide project updates that are informative and enable readers to easily discern the specific period of performance discussed. The reports are also written with additional audiences in mind. For example, the coastal

program started to provide progress reports to the coastal council for enhanced knowledge of program progress and transparency. The improved reporting has increased efficiency in information sharing.

Permitting

In 2013, the Department of Natural Resources launched a new online permitting and reporting system (MPARS). The web-based permitting system reduces the amount of time required to submit permit applications, and department staff can easily and quickly communicate with applicants regarding the completeness and status of their application. The system provides greater transparency, has improved permitting program performance, and helps in meeting new legislative requirements in 2011 (updated in 2014 and 2017) that set review time periods of 90 days for tier-one permits and 150 days for tier-two permits.

Federal Consistency

The coastal program uses a networked approach among partnering state agencies to coordinate its consistency review to ensure that all applicable state enforceable policies are considered. This partnership relies on the ongoing working relationships between these state agencies and the federal agencies working in the Lake Superior basin. In 2018, the coastal program's federal consistency coordinator spent approximately ten percent of their time on federal consistency. This level of effort has varied somewhat across the evaluation period. Based on stakeholder feedback, the coastal program is encouraged to consider if there are opportunities to improve coordination across state and federal agencies to ensure that projects are designed to best meet the policies of the federally approved coastal program.

The 2009 evaluation findings included a necessary action that the coastal program must work with NOAA to submit for incorporation into its federally approved coastal program any changes to the coastal program's enforceable policies where appropriate, including the programs or authorities that are a part of the approved coastal nonpoint pollution control program. The coastal program submitted extensive updates to its program in 2013, which were reviewed and approved by NOAA for incorporation into Minnesota's federally approved program with a minor qualification. Since 2013, Minnesota has not submitted any updates to its federally approved coastal program. There may be opportunities to streamline the federally approved program's enforceable policies to ensure useful and informative policies and functions, while also reducing the need to provide NOAA with program changes.

Findings for Program Administration

Accomplishment: The Minnesota Coastal Management Program's technical assistance and financial support helped build a successful Minnesota Clean Marina Program with 17 certified clean marinas, two of which are in the coastal zone, and six more in the process of being certified.

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Coastal Program Grants

Key Accomplishments

The coastal program provides grants to communities, agencies, and organizations, for projects that develop innovative solutions and fill coastal resource management needs and gaps. The coastal program has done well with providing financial assistance to a diversity of projects, including projects that have leveraged other resources for related tasks or additional phases. The coastal program has also been able to leverage the provision of technical assistance and geospatial data to assist grant recipients in formulating and completing projects. Grantees discussed how instrumental funding has been to address stormwater, invasive species, data acquisition, planning, culvert assessments, public access, outreach and education, monitoring, and research in their communities. Grantees also discussed how partnerships were developed or further strengthened through projects funded by the Minnesota Coastal Management Program.

Coastal program staff run two types of competitive grant programs, and the coastal council is responsible for setting criteria, scoring applications, and recommending recipients.

- Short-Term Action Request (STAR) grants for 6-month small dollar projects that require a 20 percent match. The STAR grants may not be used for land acquisition or earth-moving projects, as these are not possible with the short grant duration. In some cases, STAR grants have been the seed funding to start or pilot a project. Projects are solicited four times a year. The coastal program often uses funding left from older awards to fund these projects.
- An Annual Grants Program for 15-month, larger projects ranging from $10,000 to $100,000, with a one-to-one match requirement.

The coastal program's grant processes are well-organized and streamlined, and staff are responsive to both applicants and grantees. Staff assistance is perceived as exceptional, from the application to project completion process. Staff are available to review scopes of work prior to submission of applications, and this assistance is greatly appreciated by applicants and partners. The Department of Natural Resources staff cited the coastal program and staff as being a model for the department in administering grant programs.

The coastal program staff strive to continually improve the grant program and have worked diligently to solicit feedback from stakeholders on the grants process. The program has used that information to improve the application format, identify and use subject matter experts to provide technical reviews, streamline application dates, and develop an excellent template for final reports. Coastal program staff have also worked with the council to streamline and standardize the application review process.

The coastal program has successfully adapted to new and changing federal and state grant guidance that has added to staff members' workload. In addition to responding to the new federal uniform grant guidance, core staff and the council have worked together to adopt and adapt to a variety of new statewide and departmental grant policies. In 2008, the Minnesota Department of Administration created a set of comprehensive grants management policies that apply to all executive branch agencies, boards, commissions, and councils, and the department adopted its own policies based on these new policies. Since 2009, the Department of Administration has revised eight of its 13 policies, and the coastal program has needed to incorporate these changes into its procedures. The coastal program has seen a significant increase in grant work as NOAA environmental compliance review needs have changed. The environmental reviews often extend the time frame for NOAA project approval. Both the state and NOAA must complete a significant amount of work to review and approve a grant for both small and large projects. The coastal program experimented with streamlining the STAR program by having three instead of four calls a year for projects, but after the site visit went back to having four calls per year for projects.

The coastal program's grants have supported a wide range of projects that have addressed coastal issues:

- In northeastern Carlton, residents and tourists enjoy scenic waterways and northern pine forests on miles of popular bike trails. Although plentiful, the trails were disconnected from main arterial trails. The City of Cloquet and the Cloquet Area Chamber of Commerce Trails Committee used coastal program grant funds to conduct a planning process that engaged stakeholders in improving the bicycle path system. The resulting *Northeast Carlton County Bicycle Route Plan* offers solutions to address bicycle trail connectivity in the region, and identifies 15 new priority connections that were proposed for inclusion in the city's comprehensive plan.
- Minnesota is estimated to have 37,000 vernal pools in the coastal area. Vernal pools are a largely unprotected resource, highly sensitive to disturbance, and their numbers are decreasing. The University of Minnesota Duluth's Natural Resources Research Institute obtained a grant to map vernal pool locations and earthworm invasions on public lands; conduct ground surveys on more than 150 vernal pools and measure and assess habitat quality, water depths, and water chemistry; train citizen volunteers and land managers to locate and assess the habitat quality of vernal pools; and create online resources for the Great Lakes Worm Watch website.
- The Cook County Historical Society has four properties of historical significance, three of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With multiple demands being placed on the organization, the historical society needed a vision for its future and a plan for successfully preserving and managing the county's historically significant sites and artifacts. The historical society used a grant to complete an evaluation of the county's historical sites and prepare a comprehensive planning framework, *Our Vision for the Future: Historical Sites Evaluation and Long Range Plan*, that incorporates input from historical society members, the broader Cook County community, and a professional design and planning team.
- Stretching 154 miles northeast along the Lake Superior shoreline from Duluth to the Canadian border is the North Shore Scenic Drive, a Federal Highway Administration designated "All American Road" with 68 public wayside pull-off areas. With people of various ages and abilities using the sites, it was important to the North Shore Scenic Drive Council that accessibility be addressed. With a coastal program grant and a grant from the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board, the North Shore Scenic Drive Council and the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission used Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards to evaluate 16 of the most visited public wayside pull-off areas for accessibility improvements. A total of 36 recommendations were made and the seven different entities that own and operate the pull-offs have since implemented a number of the recommendations.

Future Opportunities

There may be opportunities to continue to streamline the grants program and refine training. The coastal program and coastal council should continue to explore efficiencies in requesting, evaluating, and selecting proposals, especially for the STAR program. The coastal program could explore the opportunity to provide sponsorships instead of grants for small discrete projects such as printing material, workshops, trainings, or conferences. The coastal program may also want to place even more emphasis on financial management during grant training to ensure

that expectations and requirements are transparent and clear, and that grant recipients are confident they can perform the project to those standards within the allotted period of performance. It was noted during the site visit that staff spend a significant amount of time contacting grantees regarding financial details and receipts.

Grant applicants discussed the difficulty in coming up with the required match, and some applicants noted that they have almost exclusively switched to applying for STAR grants because of the difficulty in securing match and the lower match requirement under STAR. Match is an opportunity to leverage a much greater impact, as well as highlight state and local commitment, and the federal Coastal Zone Management Act funds are required to be matched with other state and local funding 1:1. Applicants should be encouraged to discuss opportunities in advance of the application process with coastal program staff to investigate opportunities for providing match. Grant applicants also noted the challenge of reporting requirements for grantees. The reporting requirements largely stem from federal and state funding requirements, although there may be some opportunities for reduced requirements on grantees.

The evaluation team heard from stakeholders about the value of the STAR program and how it fits with their capabilities and needs. Unfortunately, the grants management burden for smaller projects is not significantly less than for larger projects. The coastal program and Department of Natural Resources are encouraged to look for state or other funding sources for STAR grants to alleviate the federal grants management burden on state staff and grant recipients for very small projects.

The coastal program and council specifically set aside a large amount of federal funds for competitive grant projects. Currently, the coastal program's grant programs are undersubscribed. At the time of the site visit, the department was conducting an evaluation to better understand the decrease in applications submitted. Coastal program staff and council members have continued to promote the annual and STAR grants and identify new potential partners to increase the number of applications submitted.

To solicit and cultivate a strong set of quality applications each year, the coastal program could consider

- Reaching out to other coastal programs that run similar grants programs such as Texas, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin to discuss efforts that they have undertaken to increase the number of applications and the relevance and impact of grant projects.
- Further capitalizing on technical assistance activities to foster activities and ideas that lead to impactful projects.
- Developing a strategic plan that clearly articulates the priorities of the coastal program. Coastal program staff and council members could use the plan as a basis for outreach events and discussions with potential applicants to encourage development of projects that address the program's priorities.

- Working with key partners such as Sea Grant and other state programs that work with potential applicants. The coastal program could educate partners on the coastal program's priorities and funding opportunities so that they can assist potential applicants with identifying and developing impactful projects that address the applicant's needs and coastal program's priorities.
- Hosting a coastal conference, as discussed below, would be an opportunity to showcase existing impactful projects and spark new ideas for future projects.
- The Texas Coastal Program initiated grants workshops with potential applicants to discuss the coastal program's priorities and help solicit relevant projects. In 2020, the coastal program hosted virtual grants workshops that were even more highly attended than previous in-person events. The coastal program plans to offer both in-person and virtual events in the future.

Although grantees were very positive about the implementation of the coastal grant programs, they identified several potential areas of improvement concerning project selection. They expressed concern that the council's scoring of grant projects revealed different priorities than those listed in the published requests for proposals; perceived council members as having conflicts of interest; and noted the lack of scientific background, or access to expertise, to properly evaluate or engage in science-related project ideas.

The coastal program and council operate in compliance with the state's Conflict of Interest Policy, follow all department policies and procedures, and follow a standardized process for addressing conflicts of interest when they arise. From 2013 to 2018, the coastal program solicited comments from subject matter experts on all annual grant applications and the comments were provided to council members as part of the application review process. Although the coastal program has good grant management practices in place, grantee concerns and perceptions have the potential to impact the type and number of grant applications submitted and projects funded.

Consistency in grant priorities between staff and council members could be achieved as part of a strategic planning process and the development of the next Section 309 assessment and strategies. This can assist in building consistency and transparency for applicants, and hopefully ensure the submission of strong and diverse grant proposals. Opportunities should be explored for providing additional clarity for applicants and coastal council members about when members should and will recuse themselves from voting on a project.

Since the evaluation, the coastal program has added additional clarity into grant notices around conflict of interest for applicants and the council's Standard Operating Procedures provide additional information around conflicts of interest for council members. The coastal program is also working with grant applicants to help them speak to a general audience about scientific matters.

The coastal program serves as a connector between coastal communities and other entities conducting coastal management. The coastal program could explore additional ways to more

widely disseminate information and results from completed and ongoing projects. These opportunities could include hosting a regular coastal conference every two to three years. In 2016 the coastal program planned and hosted a popular two-day coastal conference in Two Harbors. Examples of coastal community success stories, made possible by coastal program grants and technical assistance, where highlighted. Breakout sessions focused on six priority categories identified within the Coastal Zone Management Act addressing highly relevant Minnesota topics: Keeping Communities Safe from Lake Superior Shoreline Erosion Hazards; Building and Promoting Community Assets; Our Iconic North Shore Forests; Decision Support, Training, and Useable Tools; Handling Stormwater and Sewage on the North Shore; and, Keeping Good Ideas Growing on the North Shore. The conference closed with a sharing of ideas to work toward and improve upon. Partners praised the conference and found it very informative and helpful.

The coastal program could also consider other methods of disseminating information and results, such as placing short summaries of project outcomes on its website. The Maine Coastal Program has a one-page template that could be used as a model for collecting information. The coastal program could encourage additional sharing between grantees and the coastal council at meetings or on field trips. This will increase opportunities for grantees to network, deepen the council's knowledge of coastal issues, identify opportunities for collaboration, prioritize projects, and share lessons learned. This in turn may increase proposals submitted to the program, encourage strong proposals and scopes of work, and prevent duplication of efforts.

Findings for Coastal Program Grants

Accomplishment: The Minnesota Coastal Management Program successfully administers a large number of grants, provides high-quality technical assistance to grant recipients, adapts and implements changes to federal and state requirements, and continually strives to address grant recipient concerns and improve the grant process.

Accomplishment: The Minnesota Coastal Management Program's grant program and technical assistance provides key support to small local communities and other entities to implement projects that improve public access, protect coastal habitat and water quality, help communities manage development, coordinate and engage the public in coastal management, and address coastal hazards.

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management recommends that the Minnesota Coastal Management Program build on being the "spark that evolves into longer-term success" and provide opportunities for sharing information on best practices and research results. These opportunities could include hosting regular coastal conferences every two to three years, placing short summaries of project outcomes on its website, and encouraging sharing between grantees and the Governor's Council on Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program at meetings or on field trips.

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Coastal Hazards

Key Accomplishments

The coastal program has improved the ability of the Department of Natural Resources and coastal communities to address stormwater flooding and climate-related hazards. The coastal program provided leadership for the department's efforts to assess and increase resilience through the Climate and Renewable Energy Steering Team. The coastal program has delivered trainings to local communities to enhance and maintain their knowledge base and competency, augmenting and complementing training offered by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources Academy. Through sponsorship of the Climate Conversations, a brown bag series, and facilitation of the Twin Ports Climate Coalition, the coastal program has increased public and stakeholder awareness of climate impacts on topics such as flooding and drought. In providing this technical assistance, the evaluation team heard from partners and stakeholders how critical it is to meet people where they are, both in terms of respecting different levels of understanding of climate change science and effects and providing for a progression of enhanced understanding.

Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program made significant gains in building the capacity of local governments to address coastal hazards (flooding, rip currents, and erosion) and climate resilience through strategic relationship building, collaboration, technical assistance, data development, and financial assistance. The coastal program often made critical connections among partners and data sets, serving as a catalyst to get local planning efforts and projects moving forward and to successful completion. Partners praised the coastal program's technical assistance and training and relied on coastal program staff members' expertise to incorporate geospatial data into plans and programs.

The coastal program, through its grants program and technical assistance, helps the state and local communities acquire geospatial data, develop and implement plans, and complete projects that have mitigated communities' hazards risks. The coastal program assisted local coastal communities in developing the state's landmark *North Shore Management Plan*, which guides development of Minnesota's Lake Superior shorelands and helps mitigate for risks such as erosion. The coastal program supported subsequent implementation activities, including development of a website that provides regional watershed scientific information for decision makers and the public; hosting an erosion forum for local elected officials; and completing a rain garden assessment to identify potential gaps in programming and education, with the hopes of implementing more rain garden projects in the corridor.

The coastal program is a regional leader in geospatial data development and data sharing. In addition, the coastal program's ability to provide technical assistance and training in the use of data was cited by partners as very valuable. The coastal program provided funding for the development and dissemination of updated coastal oblique photography for 2012 and 2017

(five-year update cycle). The information is available through a web-based map that also includes imagery from 2002 and 2007. The information is used by decision makers on a range of issues, from permitting and identifying hazards, to conducting environmental assessments that inform resource management evaluations and identify potential sources of cumulative and secondary impacts. The coastal program funded a North Shore Management Board project to compare land use changes between 2002 and 2007, which was used to study and update density requirements in the Lake County zoning ordinance.

The coastal program also

- Developed updated, lidar-derived stream lines for the coastal zone, setting the state standard for the department's future hydrology mapping efforts;
- Managed a multi-partner project to assess stream resilience in the face of a changing climate and land use, funded by Great Lakes Restoration Initiative support through NOAA;
- Developed topographic riparian areas for 14 coastal watersheds and a new red clay soil geospatial layer that allows communities to assess slope stability;
- Used participatory GIS as a communications vehicle to support local meetings, helping communities make decisions even when data were incomplete or uncertain; and
- Advocated for geospatial data standards that enable communities to access and integrate information from diverse sources and to disseminate data broadly through existing portals, for example, Minnesota Geospatial Commons.

The coastal program provided key support to a region-wide effort to ensure public safety and understanding concerning rip currents. The coastal program is an active partner with Minnesota Sea Grant and other Twin Ports Rip Current Workgroup participants and has supported development of a beach flag system and outreach and education to local residents and visitors. The workgroup has also worked to install signs and has placed beach rescue kits at the most popular beaches. New nearshore observations and monitoring efforts were funded through NOAA's Coastal Storms Program, although more resources continue to be needed.

In the wake of the June 2012 rainfall-induced flood, which caused more than $100 million in damages, the coastal program served as an important resource to the state and local communities, particularly the soil and water conservation districts, as they assessed damage and sought to recover. The coastal program supports communities and soil and water conservation districts in their efforts to address stormwater through diverse efforts, such as

- Support for stormwater planning in flood-prone communities;
- Design and installation of green infrastructure and other stormwater management features, such as sediment basins, to achieve multiple benefits, including managing floodwaters and improving water quality and wildlife habitat;
- Repair of key public access and recreation infrastructure, for example, a flood-damaged bridge in Jay Cooke State Park;
- Mapping and assessment of the condition of culverts so that those in need of repair can be prioritized for funding;
- Training and technical assistance on erosion-related and other geospatial data; and

- Helping communities work with landowners on shoreline management.

Future Opportunities

The coastal program has opportunities to leverage existing relationships with other regional and statewide efforts to broaden and deepen connections between its hazards and resilience work. Opportunities include the following:

- Enhance risk communication and promote risk reduction concerning flooding and erosion hazards by capitalizing on upcoming stakeholder engagement activities sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is issuing new coastal flood maps;
- Collaborate with the other Great Lakes states and other federal agencies on projects to improve Great Lakes coastal resiliency;
- Become a more active partner and contributor to updates of statewide and multijurisdictional (local) hazard mitigation plans;
- Use the historically high Lake Superior water levels to enlist state and local organizations in conducting a statewide coastal vulnerability assessment, either separately or in conjunction with hazard mitigation plan updates; and
- Increase integration of resilience principles into the Minnesota Clean Marina Program.

To meet increasing stakeholder needs related to coastal engineering and coastal hazard management, it would be very beneficial to expand the coastal program's technical competency and capacity, using non-traditional mechanisms as needed. For example, the coastal program could

- Apply for graduate- or postgraduate-level fellows such as a NOAA Coastal Management Fellow or NOAA Digital Coast Fellow;
- Use Section 309 funding to enhance capacity (i.e., training for existing staff; new staff); and
- Partner with Minnesota Sea Grant or another organization on a shared position.

In 2019, the coastal program was matched with a NOAA Coastal Management Fellow, the first fellow to join the program since 2007. The fellow is working on a project to deliver data, tools, and resources on coastal erosion.

Findings for Coastal Hazards

Accomplishment: The Minnesota Coastal Management Program successfully combines technical assistance, geospatial data development, and financial support to improve state and local resilience to coastal hazards, for example with the update and implementation of the *Lake Superior North: One Watershed, One Plan.*

Recommendation: The NOAA Office for Coastal Management recommends that the Minnesota Coastal Management Program continue its successful efforts in working with partners to address coastal hazards. The coastal program is encouraged to (a) consider conducting a vulnerability assessment of the coast to better understand hazard risks and to (b) pursue

opportunities to increase program capacity through mechanisms such as applying for a Coastal Management or Digital Coast fellow, Section 309 funding, and shared positions.

Evaluation Metrics

Beginning in 2012, state coastal management programs began tracking their success in addressing three evaluation metrics specific to their programs. The evaluation metrics include a five-year target and provide a quantitative reference for each program about how well it is meeting the goals and objectives it has identified as important to the program.

METRIC 1

Goal: Local units of government, citizens, and state and federal agencies receive information and assistance to make well-informed decisions that protect and conserve the coastal area's land and water.

Objective 1: Consistently give local units of government and state agencies timely assistance in public waters protection over the next five years.

Strategy: With 58 percent of the region's population living in the cities and towns along Lake Superior, demands are being placed on Minnesota's coastal resources. Some are at risk of being converted or degraded unless conservation becomes an integral element of local planning and implementation. On the water side, many of the coastal areas' 1,770 miles of streams and rivers and 111 lakes are impaired in some way. Currently, three total maximum daily load (TMDL) projects on Knife River, Miller Creek, and Poplar River are at varying stages of development and implementation in the coastal area, with more proposed to start over the next five years. As testing proceeds, the number of impaired waters will increase, and the challenge of restoring them while protecting the area's healthiest waters will become even greater.

Working with local governments and other partners to conserve and protect land and water is a priority of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program. The coastal program's team serves staff and elected officials in coastal towns, cities, and counties as well as landowners and state agencies, providing them with technical and informational assistance and support, as well as data and training for improving land- and water-use decisions. Financial resources are also available through Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program's grant program.

Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program has two hydrologists (state-match) who review and issue water appropriation and work in public waters permits within the coastal zone. As part of the process, they provide integrated, early coordination with project proposers to ensure that projects employ best management practices that reduce pollutant loading to water bodies and improve habitat structures. In addition to permitting, they participate in interagency teams developing watershed restoration and protection strategies; provide input on local watershed

management plans; assist in TMDL development and implementation; and offer technical assistance for funding and design of implementation projects.

Performance Measure: Number of studies or plans for rivers, streams, lakes, or watersheds that Minnesota Department of Natural Resources hydrologists provide input on between 2012 and 2017.

Target: Seven studies or plans for rivers, streams, lakes, or watersheds that Minnesota Department of Natural Resources hydrologists provide input on between 2012 and 2017.

Results:

Year 1: Input into 0 studies or plans for rivers, streams, lakes, or watersheds
Year 2: Input into 2 studies or plans for rivers, streams, lakes, or watersheds
Year 3: Input into 1 study or plan for rivers, streams, lakes, or watersheds
Year 4: Input into 1 study or plan for rivers, streams, lakes, or watersheds
Year 5: Input into 2 studies or plans for rivers, streams, lakes, or watersheds

Total: Input into 6 studies or plans for rivers, streams, lakes, or watersheds

Discussion: The coastal program came close to meeting its target of seven studies, and in some cases, the input to the studies or plans to which they did contribute was extensive. The program's two hydrologists have also been working on three additional efforts for St. Louis River, Lake Superior South, and Lake Superior North watersheds that started in 2009, 2011, and 2012, respectively. These watershed restoration and protection strategies were close to completion at the end of the 5-year period.

METRIC 2

Goal: Local units of government, citizens, and state and federal agencies receive information and assistance to make well-informed decisions that protect and conserve the coastal area's land and water.

Objective: By 2017, local governments in the coastal area will update five community or natural resource plans, policies, or ordinances, incorporating data or information from the Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program.

Strategy: The Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program has a vast reservoir of geospatial data available on the Coastal GIS website (*http://www.nrri.umn.edu/coastalGIS/*) as well as resources (e.g., databases, scientific papers, plans) from over 450 projects funded over the life of the program. In addition to the data and information, the program has staff trained in both using and applying GIS technology and tools.

Performance Measure: Number of community or natural resource plans, policies, or ordinances updated by local governments with technical support, data, and information from the Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program between 2012 and 2017.

Target: Five community or natural resource plans, policies, or ordinances updated by local governments with technical support, data, and information from Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program between 2012 and 2017.

Results:

Year 1: 0 plans, policies, or ordinances updated
Year 2: 2 plans, policies, or ordinances updated
Year 3: 0 plans, policies, or ordinances updated
Year 4: 2 plans, policies, or ordinances updated
Year 5: 1 plan, policy, or ordinance updated

Total: 5 plans, policies, or ordinances updated

Discussion: The coastal program successfully met its target, and this effort includes the *Lake Superior North: One Watershed, One Plan*.

METRIC 3

Goal: Local units of government, citizens, and state and federal agencies receive information and assistance to make well-informed decisions that protect and conserve the coastal area's land and water.

Objective: Communicate scientific and technical information to local government officials and staff, state and federal agency staff, and other coastal-decision makers at a total of 10 training events over the next five years.

Strategy: Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program staff work closely with a broad network of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and academic institutions that offer coastal decision makers science-based information and skill-building opportunities throughout the region. Methods vary from technical workshops and seminars to small-audience presentations. The definition of "training event" from the Coastal Zone Management Act Performance Measurement System will be used for this measure. Depending on needs, coastal program staff may direct training or offer technical assistance to a partner. Frequently, the coastal program provides financial assistance for training design and delivery.

Performance Measure: Between 2012 and 2017, number of coastal management training events held with assistance from Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program.

Target: Between 2012 and 2017, 10 coastal management training events held with assistance from Minnesota Lake Superior Coastal Program.

Results:

Year 1: 2 coastal management training events
Year 2: 0 coastal management training events
Year 3: 3 coastal management training events
Year 4: 2 coastal management training events
Year 5: 3 coastal management training events

Total: 10 coastal management training events

Discussion: The coastal program successfully met its target and provided trainings ranging from climate to GIS to learning about Arctic plant species on the shore.

Conclusion

For the reasons stated herein, I find that the State of Minnesota is adhering to the programmatic requirements of the Coastal Zone Management Act and its implementing regulations in the operation of its approved Minnesota Coastal Management Program.

These evaluation findings contain eight recommendations. Recommendations must be considered before the next regularly scheduled program evaluation but are not mandatory at this time. Recommendations that must be repeated in subsequent evaluations may be elevated to necessary actions.

This is a programmatic evaluation of the Minnesota Coastal Management Program, which may have implications regarding the state's financial assistance awards. However, it does not make any judgment about or replace any financial audits.

Jeffrey L. Payne, Ph.D.
Director, NOAA Office for Coastal Management

June 15, 2020
Date

Appendix A: Response to Written Comments

No written comments were received.