



Title: Functional Assessment of Wetlands Discussion

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Purpose:

At the August 22, 2022 Board Meeting Manager Miller requested that Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) staff provide an overview of the Functional Assessment of Wetlands (FAW) study, why it was developed, and how the FAW has been used over the past 20 years. The purpose of this overview and discussion is to ensure that all MCWD Board of Managers and Staff understand the contents of the FAW, how it has been used to support decision-making, how wetland data fits into MCWD's natural resource management, and how wetland data could be better incorporated into other MCWD tools used for watershed management.

Background:

In 2020, MCWD began a retrospective analysis to document 1) where we have been, 2) where we are now, and 3) what challenges we will face in the future. The purpose of this process was to use the past to help characterize MCWD's organizational principles and provide a structure to have forward-facing policy discussions. A key principle discovered during this process was that sound science and results-based decisions are key to building trust in the community.

A time that highlighted the importance of MCWD developing sound science fell between 2000 and 2009. This time period saw MCWD invested in watershed-wide projects that created a foundational scientific understanding of our streams, wetlands, and water budget that have guided the past 20 years of project implementation and policy development. The three projects that provided the foundation of our understanding of the watershed include:

- The Hydrologic, Hydraulic, and Pollutant Study characterizes the total amount of runoff and pollutant loading to lakes and streams in the watershed
- The MCWD Functional Assessment of Wetlands drives policy and management decisions surrounding wetlands
- The MCWD Stream Assessment creates a comprehensive assessment of stream conditions throughout the watershed

Functional Assessment of Wetlands:

The primary purpose of developing the Functional Assessment of Wetlands (FAW) in the early 2000s was to create a comprehensive wetland data resource to improve the District's ability to manage wetlands. At the time, wetland data was not as readily available as it is today due to advances in statewide databases and satellite remote sensing data, which made managing wetlands difficult for municipalities and the MCWD. Therefore, MCWD developed a comprehensive approach to inventory and characterize all wetlands greater than 0.25 acres in order to support wetland restoration and protection strategies District-wide. A few of the outcomes of the FAW included:

- A comprehensive understanding of the wetland health of all wetlands within MCWD's boundaries
- A wetland assessment methodology (Minnehaha Creek Routine Assessment Method for Evaluating Wetland Functions), which influenced the development of the State of Minnesota's wetland evaluation method
- The creation of management classes (Preserve, Class 1, Class 2, and Class 3) to support wetland protection and restoration
- The development of wetland buffer widths based on the management class

November 3, 2022 OPC Meeting:

The goal of the November 3, 2022 meeting is to focus on the Functional Assessment of Wetlands study developed in 2003. MCWD staff will provide perspectives on:

- The Functional Assessment of Wetlands study, why it was developed, and how it has been used over the past 20 years
- The project and policy questions the FAW cannot answer based on the issues MCWD faces today
- How existing wetland information could be served on MCWD's website for MCWD Board Members, MCWD Staff, and Public Partners to help inform decision making
- How wetland data will be incorporated into the upcoming 2D model to help MCWD Board Members, Staff, and Public Partners make decisions about volume and rate management