

# Source Water Protection Collaborative

Scope: Statewide

Location: Minnesota

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

**Collaborative Lead:** Environmental Initiative

**Contacts:**

Britta Dornfeld, overall co-lead  
Environmental Initiative  
612-334-3388 ext. 8120  
[bdornfeld@environmental-initiative.org](mailto:bdornfeld@environmental-initiative.org)

Christina Vang-Dixon, projects co-lead  
Environmental Initiative  
612-334-3388 ext. 8126  
[cvang@environmental-initiative.org](mailto:cvang@environmental-initiative.org)

Emily Kraeske, projects co-lead  
Environmental Initiative  
612-334-3388 ext. 8104  
[ekraeske@environmental-initiative.org](mailto:ekraeske@environmental-initiative.org)

**Website:**

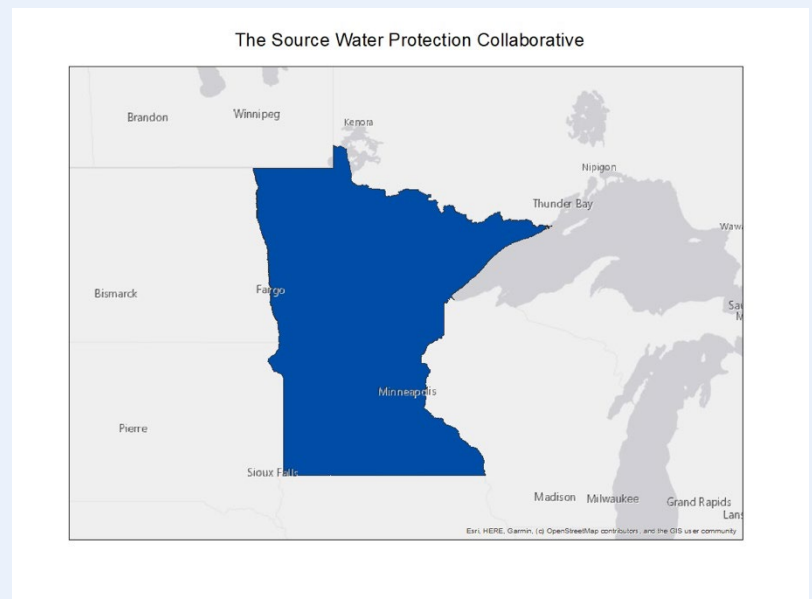
<https://environmental-initiative.org/our-work/source-water-protection-collaborative/>

## SCOPE:

- Focused on source water protection throughout the state of Minnesota.

## COLLABORATIVE FORMATION:

- The Source Water Protection Collaborative began in 2019 when Environmental Initiative, the Minnesota Department of Health, and Citizens League explored needs and opportunities for land use and land use decisions that protect drinking water supplies across the state of Minnesota.
- Broad themes from these conversations were that community members wanted to protect their drinking water but were relatively uncertain of where to start or get answers about their drinking water. A lack of trust in government officials was also a common theme, as was a lack of outreach and engagement training and capacity for government officials responsible for providing drinking water.
- In mid-2020 Environmental Initiative convened a core group of individuals involved in different aspects of source water protection to move the Collaborative forward and discuss ways to address the challenges that came out of the broad themes from the community conversations.



## STRUCTURE/FUNDING:

- The vision of the Collaborative is that we make choices on the land that ensure clean, safe drinking water for all.
- The purpose of the Collaborative is to bring together diverse groups and perspectives to advance collective action for protecting drinking water.
- The Collaborative is comprised of one main group of members, some of whom are also in project subgroups. These subgroup members work to move the two projects that came out of the full Collaborative forward.
- The Collaborative is convened by the Minneapolis-based nonprofit Environmental Initiative. It has been fully funded since its inception by a Minnesota Department of Health grant via funds from the Minnesota Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment. The grant goes through December 2023.
  - The Minnesota Department of Health grant provides seed funding for project implementation; however, the Collaborative is also working to get outside funders, such as other Minnesota state agencies.
    - Currently, the Board of Water and Soil Resources and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture have contributed small amounts of funding to support the Collaborative's creative engagement project.

## MEMBERS:

- **Sarah Berry**, Local Public Health Association and Waseca County Public Health
- **Mae Davenport**, Center for Changing Landscapes, University of Minnesota
- **Annie Felix-Gerth**, Board of Water and Soil Resources
- **Tim Gieseke**, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- **Larry Gunderson**, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Stephanie Hatzenbihler**, Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District
- **Alexander Keilty**, Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance
- **Amanda Lovelee**, Metropolitan Council
- **Aaron Meyer**, Minnesota Rural Water Association
- **Alycia Overbo**, Minnesota Department of Public Health
- **Jen Schaust**, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Dave Schulenberg**, Minnesota Water Well Association
- **Pat Shea**, American Water Works Association and Saint Paul Regional Water Services
- **Stephanie Souter**, Local Public Health Association and Washington County Department of Public Health and Environment
- **Bruce Tiffany**, farmer
- **Lisa Vollbrecht**, American Water Works Association and Saint Cloud Public Utilities Department (alternate)
- **Margaret Wagner**, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Nathan Weise**, East Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District
- **Ed Zabinski**, Itasca Waters
- **Molly Zins**, Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership

## WATER CONCERNS:


- Disconnect in public understanding between choices they are making on the land and the impact that has on drinking water
  - Nitrate pollution is a large part of this concern
- Lack of trust between local government agencies providing water and community members
- Lack of resources for local government agencies, especially outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, to do meaningful community engagement around drinking water
- Confusion from the community on where to go to learn more and engage with drinking water protection

## STRATEGIES:

- The Collaborative is currently implementing two projects to advance collective action to protect drinking water and alleviate the group's primary water concerns.
  - The first project is an online information clearinghouse of engagement resources and technical materials aimed at local water resource professionals in public health, soil and water conservation districts, and similar entities. We are working with the University of Minnesota Water Resources Center on this by helping with development and promotion of their Watershed Engagement Programming (WEP) Hub. The overarching goal is to use the WEP Hub as a nexus for collaboration, having it bridge gaps that exist in engagement and programming across the state.
  - The second project is a pilot creative engagement project that is bringing in an artist-in-residence to work on issues around drinking water engagement in the rural community of Little Falls, Minnesota with community members, Collaborative members, and agency staff. The artist will spend much of their cumulative work time from March to December in Little Falls.
    - The goal of this project is for the artist to use their varied artistic mediums and engagement skills to empower community members to better engage around protecting drinking water sources, to increase local government capacity for water engagement during and after the project, and to build relationships and trust among stakeholders, including state and local government units and the local community.

## RESULTS:

- The two collective projects the Collaborative is currently implementing came out of a year of deep conversations and consensus building around project ideas; it took another year of work to get the projects to the implementation phase. When designing projects like these, the Collaborative's goal is to shift dominant narratives, take risks, encourage mutual exchange, trust-building, and shared learning, and are rooted in belonging and relatedness.
- The clearinghouse and creative engagement projects we are currently implementing, listed in greater detail in our strategies of work section, reflect this goal.
- By bringing together stakeholders from different areas of source water protection throughout Minnesota, the Collaborative has given members a more holistic understanding of the source water issues facing different communities throughout the state, the different groups involved, and the current systems in place around source water protection.
- The creative engagement strategies we are using for the creative engagement pilot project are new to many members and have expanded their understanding of different social strategies for community engagement.



**Information current as of May 2023. Please check with the Collaborative contacts (or website if available) for the most up to date information. To find other source water collaboratives across the U.S. or to add yours to the list, visit the Source Water Collaborative's [Collaboratives Near You](#). You may also be interested in the [How To Collaborate Toolkit](#)**