

Water and Natural Resources Policy Analysis

For the Cities of Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena

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Region Five Photos at <http://s1184.photobucket.com/home/mnregionfive>

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Introduction

The following document analyzes Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena city policies relating to water and natural resources. This document is one piece of a larger analysis that addresses the five cities' policies regarding topics of land use, transportation, housing, economic development, parks, trails, open space, and recreation, water and natural resources, intergovernmental coordination, and healthcare. To ensure clarity, each topic is analyzed separately in its own document. Research and analysis was undertaken to provide the Region Five Development Consortium with a clearer understanding of how current policies relate and differ from each other across the cities. The following analysis will be helpful for workgroups to develop regional policies and recommendations, which will be adopted by the full consortium to guide the future growth and development of Region Five in a sustainable manner.

Methodology

The following policies were taken from the most recent comprehensive plans from the cities of Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena. This document addresses the similarities, differences, and potential conflicts between city policies regarding water and natural resources. Due to the uniqueness of each plan, not all cities addressed similar issues around the topic at hand. For this reason, policies were only included if at least two of the five cities addressed the issue. Additionally, each city's policies are written at a different level of specificity making it difficult to compare/contrast a detailed policy with a vague policy. For the purpose of this analysis, policies were considered similar to each other even when they differ on the level of detail.

For this analysis, sub-topics were created to guide the reader throughout the document. For example, this document contains sub-topics of protection of natural resources, water resources, groundwater, and so forth. Under each sub-topic, similarities, differences, and conflicts between city policies on an issue were analyzed and grouped into categories. Categories are listed as follows: Very Similar, Similar, Somewhat Similar, Unique/Potentially Conflicting, and Unique. Policies in the Very Similar category are ones that relate to each other at a clear level of specificity; policies under the Similar category are ones that relate in vision but not in detail; policies under the Somewhat Similar category relate to each other more similarly than uniquely; policies under Unique/Potentially Conflicting category are in potential disagreement with other policies pertaining to the same issue; and policies that are considered unique have some relationship to the issue at hand but are not similar to each other. Due to policies relating to more than one sub-topic, it is possible that the same policy will be included across sub-topics and categories. It is also possible that not all categories were used in this document, depending on how city policies relate to each other.

To make it clear to understand, each policy has been assigned a color that corresponds with a city. The county color code can be seen in the footer of each page. Additionally, text that is bolded and highlighted signifies the relationship between policies under a category. Furthermore, a sources list is included below in this methodology section to provide readers with links to each county's most updated comprehensive plan.

Sources

1) Long Prairie 1999 Comprehensive Plan:

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/100569548/Long%20Prairie%20Comprehensive%20Plan.pdf>

2) Little Falls Comprehensive Plan 2006-2020

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/101701381/Little%20Falls%20Comp%20Plan0001.pdf>

3) Walker Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2010)

http://www.communitygrowth.com/_asset/ldkjz5/Walker-Plan_Final_050310.pdf

4) Brainerd Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2004)

<http://www.ci.brainerd.mn.us/planning/docs/compplan.pdf>

5) City of Wadena Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1986)

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/101701382/Wadena%20Comp%20Plan.pdf>

Findings

I. Protection of Natural Resources

Long Prairie and Brainerd continue the trend of incorporating very similar policy wording in the topic of Protection of Natural Resources. Both communities seek to protect worthwhile natural resources as a means to preserve the area's character and heritage. Little Falls includes a similar policy which states that the community should protect and enhance its natural amenities.

Additionally, Long Prairie's policy of converting floodplain areas into passive open space areas is repeated in the Water and Natural Resources policy analysis and categorized as unique, as this policy aims to preserve natural features and provide exposure to environmentally sensitive areas.

Brainerd also includes a unique policy, as it is the only comprehensive plan to mention the development of a Community Resources Master Plan, which would include identifying and establishing preservation guidelines for natural resources.

The sub-topic of natural resources and development was included to address three unique policies. Brainerd includes two unique policies, one which seeks to buffer environmentally sensitive areas from industrial and commercial development and another which seeks to identify areas of significant natural resource benefit and protect them from premature or incompatible development. Wadena's only policy relating to natural resources is included, as the city seeks to regulate development consistent with environmental protection standards to protect the natural resources in the community.

II. Water Resources

Little Falls and Brainerd are the only communities to include policies focused specifically on water resources. Little Falls continues to stress the importance of its connection to the Mississippi River, as it incorporates a unique policy regarding the protection and preservation of water resources seeking to preserve, protect, and enhance the Mississippi River and adjacent lands. Brainerd's policy is broader, as it seeks to prioritize valuable water resources for preservation. Little Falls is also the only city to mention conserving water to achieve efficiency in its comprehensive.

On a more specific level, Little Falls and Brainerd include somewhat similar policies concerning the idea of downtown development and water resources. Little Falls' policy looks at improving the downtown area by enhancing its connection to the Mississippi River while using and protecting the valuable water resource. Brainerd, somewhat similarly, wants to re-focus development efforts to take advantage of the river to improve the downtown character.

III. Wetlands

Long Prairie, Little Falls, and Brainerd each approach the protection of wetlands in a unique manner. Long Prairie's motivation for buffering wetlands is to improve groundwater quality. Little Falls simply includes wetlands as a natural amenity which it seeks to protect. Finally, Brainerd includes two policies which mention the protection or preservation of wetlands. First, Brainerd includes wetlands in a list of valuable water resources which it seeks to prioritize for preservation in parks and open space. The second policy relates to the construction of the transportation system, seeking to avoid wetlands or other environmentally sensitive areas.

IV. Groundwater

Both Long Prairie and Little Falls include specific, unique policies addressing the protection and improvement of groundwater quality. Long Prairie wants to work with County and State officials (see VIA1) to improve groundwater quality. The policy also discusses several possible methods to achieve this goal, including stormwater management (see VA1), buffering wetlands (see IIIA1) and additional ponding requirements in developed areas.

Little Falls' policy focuses on promoting the proper abandonment of wells within the city. The policy claims that because the area has a high water table and widespread use of shallow wells, promoting proper abandonment will protect the groundwater quality.

V. Stormwater Management

Long Prairie and Brainerd are the only cities to mention stormwater management in the goals or policies portion of their comprehensive plans. Long Prairie's policy relates to improving groundwater quality, mentioning the inclusion of standards on stormwater discharge as a possible method for improving groundwater quality. Brainerd's policy focuses on requiring compliance with all City Codes, including stormwater codes.

VI. Intergovernmental Coordination

Long Prairie includes three unique intergovernmental coordination policies relating to water and natural resources. The policies include working with County and State officials to improve groundwater quality, maintaining an open dialogue with state agencies that have an effect on local environmental features (including the MPCA, EPA, and DNR), and supporting the Tree Board to encourage the planting of trees within the city.

Policy Analysis

I. Protection of Natural Resources

A. Protection and Preservation of Natural Resources

1. Very Similar

- a) **Protect worthwhile** historical, cultural and **natural resources as a means to maintain the area's essential character and heritage**
- b) **Protect and enhance important** historical, cultural and **natural resources as a means to maintain the integrity, heritage and local character of Brainerd's natural and built environment.**

2. Similar to Above (IA1)

- a) **Protect and enhance the natural amenities of Little Falls** including the bluffs, wetlands, Mississippi River, Little Elk River, Swan River, Pike Creek, streams, parks and open spaces

3. Unique

- a) **Convert floodplain areas to active and passive open space areas suitable for walking and biking trails, preserving natural features, and provide exposure to Long Prairie’s sensitive environmental areas**
- b) **Encourage the retention of the natural vegetation and wildlife in park and open space areas**
- c) **Develop a “Community Resources Master Plan” that identifies unique environmental, cultural and architectural sites within the community. Establish preservation guidelines that allow for adaptive re-use, or redevelopment.**

B. Development and Natural Resources

1. Unique

- a) **Buffer commercial and industrial developments from environmentally sensitive areas and residential areas within the community**
- b) **Identify areas of significant natural resource benefit and protect these areas from premature or incompatible development**
- c) **The City of Wadena will regulate development consistent with accepted environmental protection standards to protect the natural environment and resources in the community**

II. Water Resources

A. Protection and Preservation of Water Resources

1. Unique

- a) **Preserve, protect and enhance the Mississippi River and adjacent lands for year-round recreational activities and for the scenic vistas it provides. (Uses could include picnicking, camping, fishing, boating/canoeing, landing facilities, jogging, biking, nature observation/interpreting and scenic viewing.)**

- b) **Prioritize valuable water resources -- streams, lakes, and wetlands** – native prairie remnants and woodlands **for preservation** in public and private parks and open space.

B. Conservation of Water

1. Unique

- a) Promote conservation in water use to achieve efficiency

C. Water Resources and Downtown Development

1. Somewhat Similar

- a) **Make downtown more viable, significant and attractive by** securing more diverse uses, retaining its historic character, **enhancing its connection to the Mississippi River, while continuing to use and protect this water resource**
- b) **Re-focus development efforts to take advantage of the River** and the regional Trails **to improve the character and access to the Downtown area**

III. Wetlands

A. Protection of Wetlands

1. Unique

- a) **Work with County and State officials to improve the groundwater in the Long Prairie area. This may include** standards on the discharge of stormwater runoff, additional ponding requirements in newly developed areas and **buffering of wetland areas**
- b) **Protect and enhance the natural amenities of Little Falls including the bluffs, wetlands, Mississippi River, Little Elk River, Swan River, Pike Creek, streams, parks and open spaces**
- c) **Prioritize valuable water resources -- streams, lakes, and wetlands** – native prairie remnants and woodlands **for preservation** in public and private parks and open space
- d) **Design transportation systems to avoid, where possible, wetlands** or other environmentally sensitive areas

IV. Groundwater

A. Protecting and Improving Groundwater Quality

1. Unique

- a) **Work with County and State officials to improve the groundwater in the Long Prairie area. This may include standards on the discharge of stormwater runoff, additional ponding requirements in newly developed areas and buffering of wetland areas**
- b) **Because of the area's high ground water table and the widespread use of shallow wells, the City needs to promote proper abandonment of wells within the City and especially in newly annexed areas to protect the ground water supply**

V. Stormwater Management

A. Stormwater Management

1. Unique

- a) **Work with County and State officials to improve the groundwater in the Long Prairie area. This may include standards on the discharge of stormwater runoff, additional ponding requirements in newly developed areas and buffering of wetland areas**
- b) **Require compliance with all City Codes including the building, storm water and landscaping codes**

VI. Intergovernmental Coordination

A. Intergovernmental Coordination

1. Unique

- a) **Work with County and State officials to improve the groundwater in the Long Prairie area. This may include standards on the discharge of stormwater runoff, additional ponding requirements in newly developed areas and buffering of wetland areas**

- b) **Continue to maintain an open dialogue with state agencies that have an impact on Long Prairie's environmental features including the MPCA, EPA, DNR**
- c) **Support the Tree Board and tree planting programs** and encourage private interests to plant trees within the community