



Meeting Minutes: Attorney General's Advisory Task Force on Future of Minnesota's Water

Meeting Date and Time: August 13th, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Minutes Prepared By: Abdulaziz Mohamed

Location: Winona State University, and Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Members Present

Representative Kristi Pursell (Ex-Officio)
Representative Isaac Schultz (Ex-Officio)
Senator Ann Johnson Stewart (Ex-Officio)
Senator Keri Heintzeman (Ex-Officio)
Assistant Commissioner Jess Richards (Ex-Officio)
Brad Jordahl Redlin (Ex-Officio)
Assistant Commissioner Myra Kunas (Ex-Officio)
Proxy for Assistant Commissioner Dana Vanderbosch (Ex-Officio)
Kelly Applegate
Will Bement
Darin Broton
Erick Francis
Peg Furshong
Caroline Griffith
David Leuthe
Angela M. Lipelt
Julie Lucas
Neva Maxwell
Jeff Pagel
Tessa Parks
Nancy Schuldt
Lienne Sethna
Harvey Thorleifson

Attorney General's Office (AGO) Staff Present

Attorney General Keith Ellison
Carin Mrotz
Oliver Larson
Abdulaziz Mohamed



Agenda Items

1. Call to order and roll call

Attorney General Keith Ellison called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm, welcoming task force members to Winona and reiterating the task force's mission. A quorum was present.

2. Approval of meeting agenda

A motion was made and seconded to approve the agenda as presented. A vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Approval of June 11th minutes

A motion was made and seconded to approve the June 11th minutes. A vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Remarks by Co-Chair Nancy Schuldt

Nancy Schuldt acquainted the task force with a collection of member-provided studies, reports and resources, encompassing past efforts and state agency responsibilities. She discussed buckets including pollution, hydrologic disruption, policy enforcement, and the necessity for research/monitoring, education/communication/advocacy, and caretaking/stewardship. Paraphrasing remarks from Joseph Barisonzie to the 17th Minnesota River Congress, Nancy also brought up collective decision making, enforceable standards and practices by agencies, reimagining governance, and funding the future creatively and fairly.

A discussion after Nancy's remarks took place:

- Senator Ann Johnson Stewart made clear that Minnesota is at a water inflection point, wanting a strong values or policy statement coming out of the task force process.
- David Leuthe shared that this work is not just about surface water, but also groundwater and aquifers, which there's a lack of monitoring and adaptive management for.
- Having 30 years of experience in her profession, Angie Lepelt feels a sense of disconnect within the current system, facing an uphill battle in enforcement in part because the community underestimates its cumulative impact on water quality, and an underfunding in local resources for water programming. She suggested lawmakers focus on coming up with policies that are statewide.
- Neva Maxwell mentioned the difficulty in addressing nonpoint source pollution (like private property on lakes and their mowing practices) and the difficulty for counties to deny variances for certain land use, impacting water protection.



The Office of
Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity and respect • www.ag.state.mn.us

- Harvey Thorleifson thanked previous presenters, particularly David who mentioned groundwater, given that much of the state's drinking water is groundwater, and that groundwater discharge sustains surface water features. Additionally, he challenged the assertion that Minnesota is water rich, since all water is already in use in some form or fashion.

5. Imagine Deliver Presentation

A presentation on The Water Project for task force members was provided by Monica Cruz Zorilla, Principal Strategist at Imagine Deliver. The presentation slides are available at: https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Taskforce/Water/Meetings/20250813/Growth_AG%20Water%20Taskforce%20Meeting_V1_081225.pdf.

The Imagine Deliver presentation was followed by a task force member comment:

- Referring to rural convening work she participated in, as well as a set of CURE-created posters she brought for the task force, Peg Furshong stated that a water ethic is not possible without a land ethic, energy ethic, or food ethic, as they are all interconnected.

6. Southeast Minnesota Nitrate Strategies Collaborative Work Group Reflections

Olmsted County native Martin Larsen reflected on his involvement with nitrate issues, and particularly the work of the Southeast Minnesota Nitrate Strategies Collaborative Work Group. Comprising Southeast Minnesota farmers, advocates, and relevant agency personnel, the work group dealt with issues such as the need to incentivize farmers to positively change their farming practices, further progress the oat market, given it has a low nitrate footprint, and promote the promotion of better soil health and water quality methods more generally. A set of recommendations were developed by the work group that can ideally be implemented at both the state and federal levels.

A discussion followed Martin's reflections:

- Attorney General Ellison asked about the present challenges faced by the oat market. Martin Larsen identified the challenge as established supply chains coming out of Canada, whom Minnesota imports oat from. It's possible that the market can be impacted by tariffs.
- Senator Ann Johnson Stewart asked how she and the task force can help educate around farm practices and water use. Martin Larsen said everyone needs to learn more (farmers, well owners, and leaders alike), and people should keep things simple by focusing on simple steps, like growing better crops and offering local support. Jeff Pagel added that the Olmsted County Groundwater Protection Program offers funding to farmers for educational purposes.



The Office of
Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity and respect • www.ag.state.mn.us

- Representative Isaac Schultz shared that local farm tours in his community are a great way to incentivize and teach farmers success in areas like soil health, and younger farmers are especially open to these practices.
- Caroline Griffith mentioned the updated State nutrient reduction strategy, noting its connection to local and downstream water issues, and asked Martin Larsen whether the work group reached any consensus on improving fertilizer use data, especially below the aggregate county level, which is how it's currently collected. Martin Larsen shared that it was one of the places the work group found consensus eventually, that there is a need to gather higher resolution data on where fertilizer is going.
- Representative Kristi Pursell praised the Olmsted County program as the gold standard for water and land use work and how it should be replicated across southeastern Minnesota.
- Brad Jordahl Redlin shared that the water quality certification program is unlike any other in that it checks every single farm that opts in for nitrogen rates, pesticide use, tillage, and other farming practices. It has not fixed the water problem in the state, but it's a proven program that brings different agencies together under a shared model, making it worth building on. Martin Larsen responded that the work group recommended adding a groundwater certification to the mix.
- Peg Furshong raised issues with inconsistent local manure land management rules, especially in areas where unmanaged manure jeopardizes water, calling for more consensus on best management practices and enforcement. Martin Larsen and Angela Lipelt pointed out that stockpiling is governed by Minnesota Rule Chapter 7020 (Feedlot Rule), which also provides for more local restrictive ordinances.
- Closing off the discussion, Darin Broton underscored that the food and ag economy is complicated and there's no easy solution that fits the entire industry. He believes innovation and technology will save the agriculture and food system, so there should be a level of flexibility to make that happen.

7. Public Testimony

The following individuals provided public testimony:

- Former Governor Arne Carlson
- Bonnie Haugen
- Randy Neprash
- Carolin Van Schaik
- Cherie Hales
- Mark Reisetter
- Kelly Stanage
- Dan Wilson
- Janelle Kuznia



The Office of
Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity and respect • www.ag.state.mn.us

Public comments can be viewed in the task force meeting recording at:
<https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Taskforce/Water/Meetings/20250813/Meeting-20250813.mp4>.

8. Task Force Business

Task force business, including field trip updates, previewing the October 7th meeting in Bemidji, and topic proposals:

- Carin Mrotz shared that some task force members have suggested potential field trips to her. The intent is to garner task force input and prioritize submissions over email and do some logistical planning once they've been selected.
 - Neva Maxwell suggested a wild rice harvesting field trip for the future.
- Nancy Schuldt hopes that the October 7th meeting in Bemidji will feature a framework for task or issue-oriented work to be conducted by task force members outside of the scheduled meetings, and to hear from members of the public in the community.
- Attorney General Ellison suggested that data center water usage be a topic for discussion in the future. Senator Ann Johnson Stewart referenced ongoing work being done by the data center legislative working group.
- Attorney General Ellison recommended a presentation on the health impacts of prolonged nitrate and other water-related contaminant exposure at a future meeting.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:18 pm.