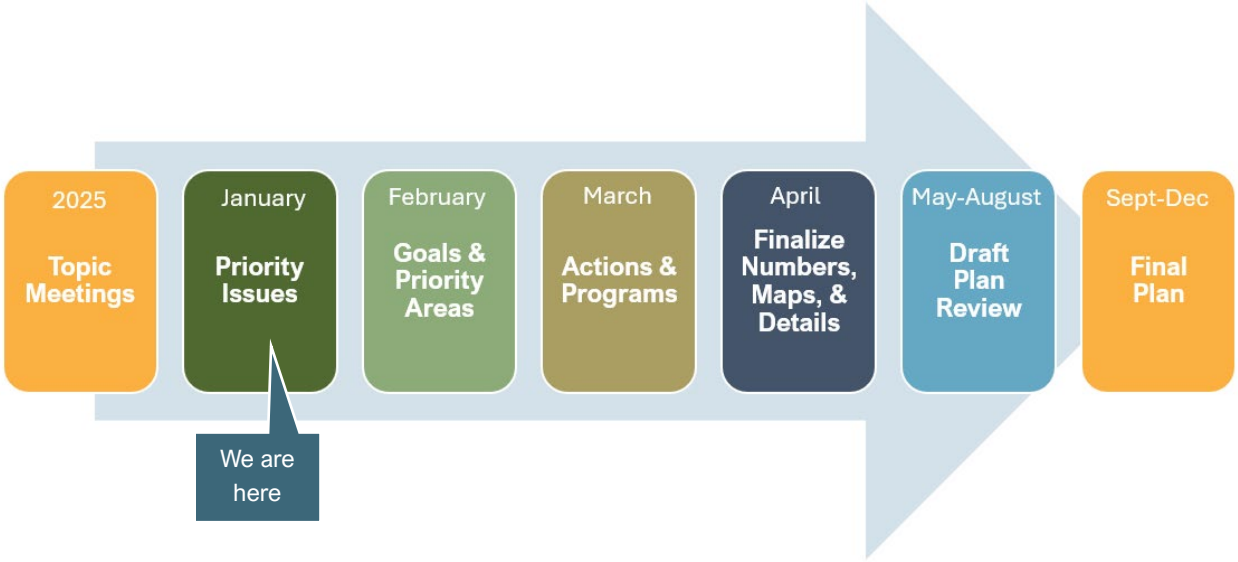
Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

January 7, 2026

Introduction

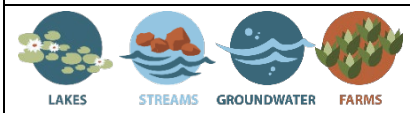
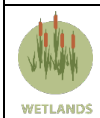
The Advisory Committee met virtually to review issue statements, brainstorm emerging concerns, and draft a vision statement. The plan timeline is shown below with our current status.



Issues

The first topic of the meeting was discussing issue statements that had been compiled in the topic meetings. During this process, issues were refined and the specifics of each issue were discussed. A full list of the issue statements following the meeting can be found in Table 1, below. The table outlines the resource topics, the issue theme, an issue statement that briefly describes the issue, and any notes from the meeting are also listed. The group decided against lumping issue statements together (a common example is stormwater can often be paired together with nutrients to form a water quality contaminants issue). Instead, the group decided to keep commonly paired issues separate, as they decided that each requires its own statement to address the unique landscape in this watershed.

Table 1. Priority issues in the Big Fork River Watershed.

Resource Topic	Concerns and Opportunities
	**Maintaining a forested landscape** prevents conversion, and safeguards sensitive species, water quality, and habitat.
	Managing **forest health** is vital to sustaining economic, ecological, and recreational benefits.
	**Forest and Recreational Infrastructure** affect hydrology, runoff, and erosion.
	**Eroding streambanks** contribute to turbidity impairments and reduced habitat quality.
	**Lakeshore alteration** impacts water quality and shoreland habitat.
	**Nutrients** have the potential to decrease water quality and impact aquatic recreation and aquatic life.
	**Agricultural runoff and livestock access** increases erosion, nutrients, sediment and bacteria in surface water and groundwater.
	**Stormwater runoff** in developed areas contributes pollutants to streams and lakes.
	**Wild rice health** faces risks from development, climate change, pollution, and invasive species.
	**Altered hydrology** from culverts, ditching, and channelization has impacted stream flow, connectivity, and aquatic habitat.
	**Wetland and peatland health** is impacted by invasive species, climate, ditching, and wildfire effects.
	**Groundwater quality and sustainability** need protection.

Emerging Concerns

Additionally, emerging concerns were brainstormed during the meeting. Emerging concerns are concerns that will be mentioned in the plan, but cannot have their progress directly measured, or cannot be directly addressed with local projects. The emerging concerns brainstormed during the meeting are listed below:

- School trust land conversion (along lakeshores and rivers too)
- Wake boat impacts on stirring up the lake bottom
- Cuts to SFIA funding (could affect reaching goals)
- Algae blooms in remote lakes
- Iron and manganese are naturally occurring in drinking water and exceeding standards
- Chloride
    - Water softeners
    - Road salts
    - Need monitoring
- Invasive species
    - Emerald Ash Borer
    - Eastern Larch Beetle
    - Impact on hydrology, particularly in floodplains
- Contaminants of emerging concern
    - Chloride/salting
    - Radioactive radium
    - Manganese
    - Arsenic
    - PFAS
    - Pharmaceuticals
    - Estrogenic Compounds

Visioning

The last section of the meeting was dedicated to brainstorming for the vision statement for the watershed. Each watershed plan has a vision statement. A vision statement is an inspirational statement of an idealistic emotional future of the watershed. Participants of the meeting brainstormed ideas to be included in the vision statement by exploring the unique aspects of the BFRW, as well as identifying what an ideal future looks like in the watershed. Here are the initial ideas explored:

- Edge of the wilderness
- Wisely preserving the heart of the wilderness
- Unique pristine places
- Contrast between lakes and wetlands
- Ancient Lake Agassiz
- Laurentian divide

- Hudson Bay headwaters
- Sustainable development – protect the water while allowing for growth
- Nurturing people as well as the land (people are part of nature, not separate)
- Health- healthy environment, people, water, forests

Meeting Attendees

- Matt Gutzmann (Itasca SWCD)
- Matt Gouin (Koochiching Environmental Services)
- Matthew Picklo (Itasca SWCD)
- Kelly Condiff (DNR)
- Cal Saari (Itasca SWCD Board)
- Moriya Rufer (HEI)
- Christina Traner (HEI)
- Dan Disrud (MDH)
- Whitney Sims (Koochiching Environmental Services)
- Lindsey Krumrie (MPCA)
- Mitch Brinks (Area 8 GIS Specialist)
- Chad Severts (BWSR)
- Jeff Hrubes (BWSR)
- Reid Christianson (MDA)
- Jolen Simon (Koochiching SWCD)
- Austin Steere (Itasca SWCD)
- Austin Vinar (Koochiching SWCD)
- Austin Wallen (Koochiching SWCD)
- Lester (Itasca County)