



2021 Nomination Form for Outstanding Watershed Administrator of the Year

Name: Mike Kinney

Title: District Administrator

Watershed District: Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

Briefly describe how this Administrator has made an impact both in their local watershed and at a State level:

By contributing visionary thinking with an emphasis on cost-benefit, Mike Kinney has made an impact on the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District (CLFLWD), the Lower St. Croix River Basin, and the state of MN.

Mike has been the District Administrator for the CLFLWD since 2014. Mike grew up on a dairy farm where he learned the importance of using cost-benefit analysis, and he spent 6 years serving in the US Navy. Today he lives on a farm of his own and utilizes the cost-benefit approach to manage resources in the CLFLWD.

As a big-picture thinker, Mike has brought a perspective to the CLFLWD necessary to grow its staff from a single Administrator in 2014 to a team of 11 full-time permanent staff members in 2021 while maintaining active partnerships and open lines of interagency communication. Transitioning District work that was previously outsourced to being performed in-house is resulting in cost savings for the District. Mike has a keen insight when it comes to hiring new staff members, seeing candidates' useful skills and potential contributions to the team that others may not see. Under the direction of the CLFLWD Board of Managers, Mike assembled a team that works well together, collaborates actively with numerous state and local partners, and is fully capable of implementing the District's newly adopted 2022-2031 Watershed Management Plan.

In an age when the prioritized, targeted and measurable (PTM) approach is coming into greater focus for organizations across the State, Mike is at the forefront of PTM utilization and promotion among partners. A decade ago, it was believed that District lakes wouldn't achieve state standards and long-term water quality goals (which in some cases go beyond state standards) until 2040. Since that time, the District implemented a PTM-focused approach to cleaning up its lakes and now estimates it will achieve long-term water quality goals by 2025 – 15 years earlier than previously thought possible. Mike's cost-benefit emphasis paired with the CLFLWD Board's dedication and a commitment to a scientific targeting methodology has resulted in rapid improvement to local lakes. The CLFLWD can be used as a case study of why a targeted strategy, utilizing a combination of on-the-ground tributary monitoring data, historic aerial photography, and resident communications, in addition to traditional desktop analyses, is so critical to making measurable progress toward water quality goals.

By participating in the Lower St. Croix River Basin One Watershed One Plan Partnership, Mike has helped move the needle toward a more cost-benefit, results-focused approach. Mike and the CLFLWD as a whole have

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continually stressed the importance of focusing efforts at the target waterbody and quantifying reductions not only at the “edge-of-field” or “edge-of-project” but at the receiving waterbody itself.

Mike’s focus on accountability has also made an impact not only on the CLFLWD, but regionally as well. Under Mike’s oversight, CLFLWD staff have implemented a continual improvement process of measuring progress toward goals. The District generates a detailed Progress Report every year detailing how progress is being made and brings those same principles to the Lower St. Croix 1W1P Partnership.

Brief description of outstanding initiatives and accomplishments for 2021 and prior:

- Oversaw and coordinated implementation of 12 water quality improvement projects resulting in a cumulative 2,200 lbs/yr phosphorus removal as measured at receiving waterbodies since 2014.
- Oversaw implementation of watershed load reduction projects and alum treatments on Moody Lake and Shields Lake, bringing both lakes from pre-project phosphorus concentrations of 100-200+ µg/L, down to 37 and 54 µg/L, respectively, in 2020.
- Continued to monitor a pattern of improving water quality (phosphorus concentration, Chlorophyll-a, Secchi disk) for most District lakes.
- Since 2014 grew the CLFLWD staff from one to eleven full time permanent employees while promoting interagency communications and partnerships.

Brief description of how this Administrator has demonstrated excellence:

- Being one of the driving forces behind re-thinking how project targeting is done and promoting PTM, the Pareto Principle (80/20 Rule), lean six sigma, and project targeting principles by speaking/presenting at numerous conferences and 1W1P meetings.
- Fostered a culture of progress measurement and continual improvement to push the District toward achieving long-term goals faster than previously thought possible.
- Used his own big-picture visioning skills to lead the assembly a staff with diverse skillsets, whose strengths and weaknesses complement each other’s to be greater than the sum of its parts.