Minnesota's Environmental Review Program

EQB Environmental Review Program Administrators

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MINNESOTA
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY BOARD

Overview

- Minnesota's Environmental Review Program
- Projects update
- Continuous Improvement
- This year's workplan

Who is the Environmental Quality Board?

- EQB is an 18-member board made up of state agency commissioners and public members
- Staff provides coordination and support
- Key staff role: Technical assistance for environmental review

Promotes strategic interaction of multiple state agencies

Serves as forum for public to engage in environmental decision-making

Stewards Minnesota environmental review process

Minnesota's Environmental Review Program

Types of review

Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW)

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Alternative Urban Areawide Review (AUAR)

Minnesota Rules chapter 4410

- Defined purpose and objectives
- When review is required
- Exemptions
- Types of review
- Procedures for review
- Decision criteria

Minnesota's Environmental Review Program

Minnesota Statute 116C	Created the Environmental Quality Board
Minnesota Statute 116D	Minnesota Environmental Policy Act gives the Board authority to adopt rules
Minnesota Rules Chapter 4410	Implements the Environmental Review (ER) Program established by statute

Roles

EQB

- Monitor program effectiveness
- Help understand the rules
- Create guidance

Project Proposer

- Provide project details

Responsible Governmental Unit

- Implement procedures
- Prepare environmental documents
- Decision maker

Public

- Review environmental documents
- Provide comments

Why we do Environmental Review

- Regulatory program that implements federal and/or state policy
- Applies to certain future projects
- Public disclosure of all potential environmental effects in one document
- Informs government approvals

General Environmental Review characteristics

- Required public process
- Broader in scope than permitting (includes all potential environmental effects in one document)
- Alternative review option
- Appeals directly to courts
- Moratorium on final approvals and construction
- Projects do not pass or fail environmental review – it's not an approval process

Examples of benefits

Provides information…

- during project design phase
- beyond individual permit compliance
- for public participation in project approvals

When is review required? – Mandatory Categories

Mandatory Category

Discretionary Review

Agriculture

Commercial

Electric Generation

Forestry, Land Use

Industrial

Residential

Transportation

Waste Management

Public request for review: Petition process

- Formalized process to request preparation of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet
  - Requires material evidence of potential environmental effects
  - Must be signed by at least 100 individuals who live or own property in Minnesota
- Petition submitted to EQB
- EQB designates RGU

Types of review

Environmental Assessment Worksheet
(EAW)

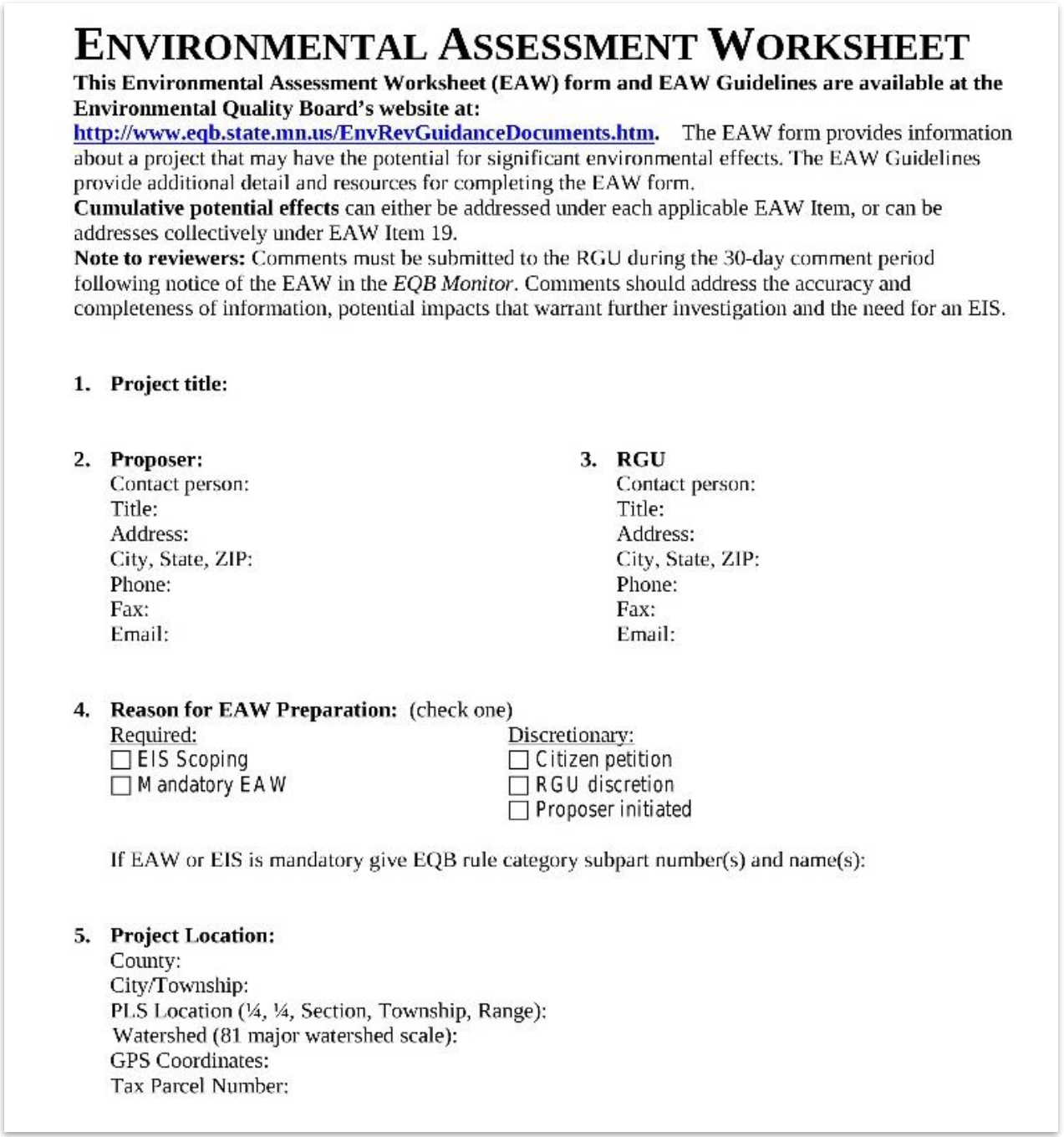
Environmental Impact Statement
(EIS)

Alternative Urban Areawide Review
(AUAR)

EAW Content:

- 13-page worksheet
- 22 standardized questions
- Discloses information necessary to determine the need for an EIS/the potential for significant environmental effects

https://www.eqb.state.mn.us/content/eaw-process



ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

This Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) form and EAW Guidelines are available at the Environmental Quality Board's website at:
http://www.eqb.state.mn.us/EnvRevGuidanceDocuments.htm. The EAW form provides information about a project that may have the potential for significant environmental effects. The EAW Guidelines provide additional detail and resources for completing the EAW form.
Cumulative potential effects can either be addressed under each applicable EAW Item, or can be addresses collectively under EAW Item 19.
Note to reviewers: Comments must be submitted to the RGU during the 30-day comment period following notice of the EAW in the *EQB Monitor*. Comments should address the accuracy and completeness of information, potential impacts that warrant further investigation and the need for an EIS.

1. **Project title:**

2. **Proposer:**
Contact person:
Title:
Address:
City, State, ZIP:
Phone:
Fax:
Email:

3. **RGU**
Contact person:
Title:
Address:
City, State, ZIP:
Phone:
Fax:
Email:

4. **Reason for EAW Preparation:** (check one)

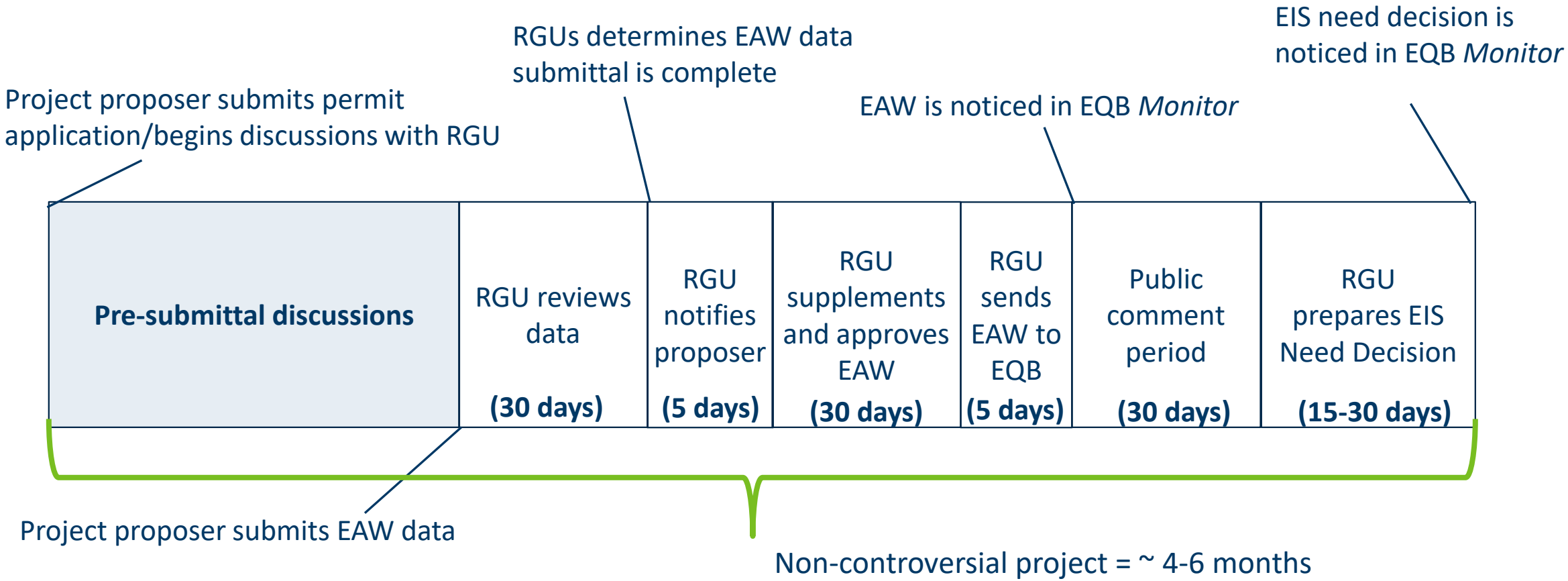
Required:
☐ EIS Scoping
☐ Mandatory EAW

Discretionary:
☐ Citizen petition
☐ RGU discretion
☐ Proposer initiated

If EAW or EIS is mandatory give EQB rule category subpart number(s) and name(s):

5. **Project Location:**
County:
City/Township:
PLS Location (¼, ¼, Section, Township, Range):
Watershed (81 major watershed scale):
GPS Coordinates:
Tax Parcel Number:

EAW process timeline



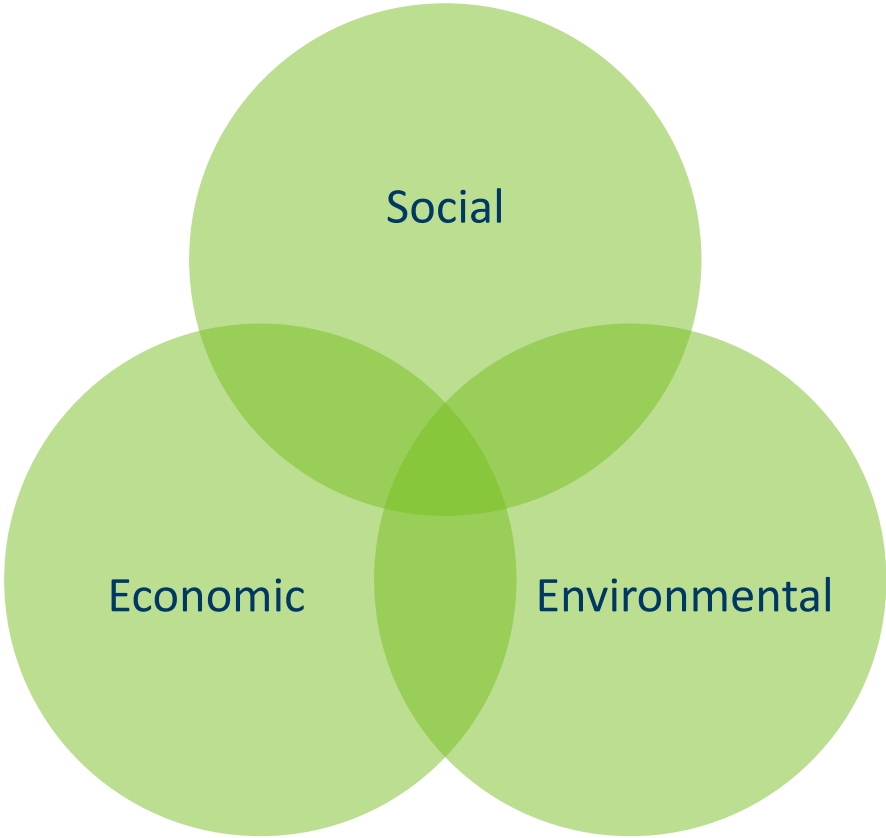
* **<u>"Day" – 15 days or less = business day (excludes weekends and holidays when counting)</u>** *

An EAW determines if an EIS is needed: “EIS need decision”

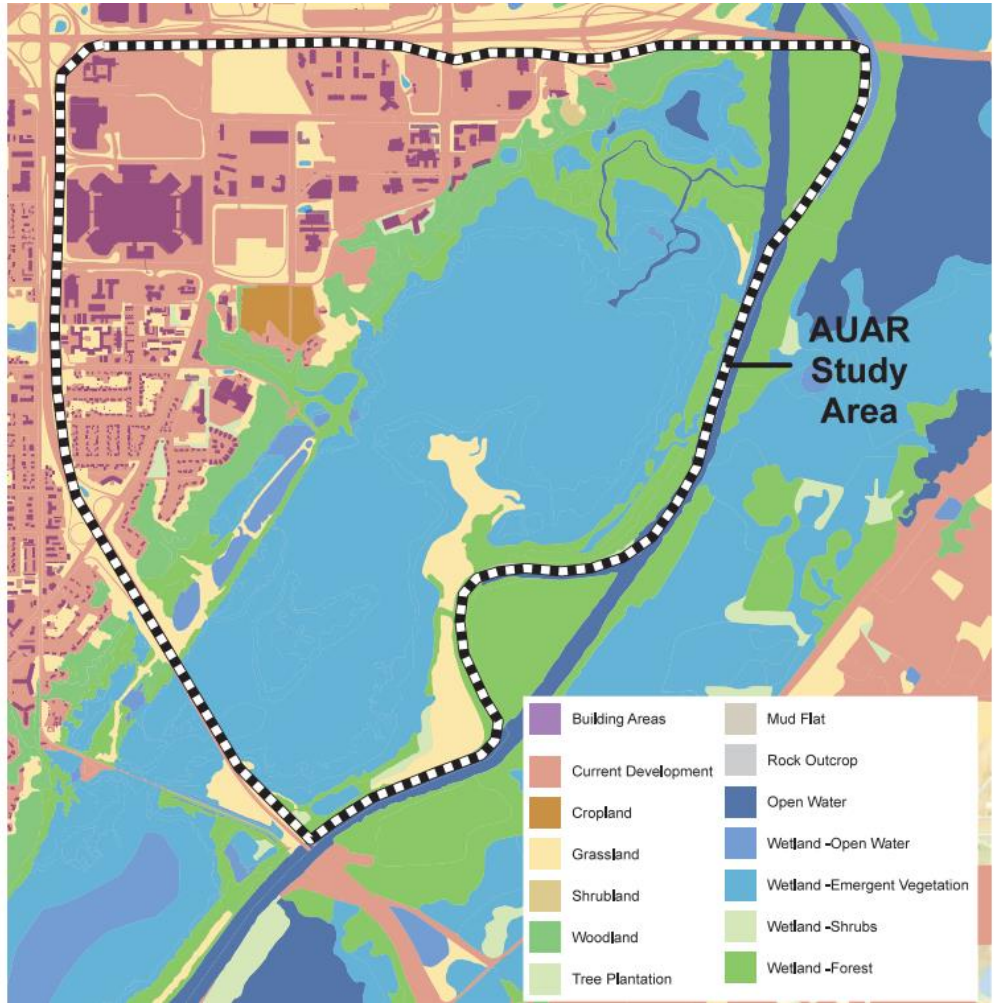
- Type, extent, and reversibility
- Cumulative potential effects
- The extent to which the environmental effects are subject to mitigation
- The extent to which environmental effects can be anticipated and controlled

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

- More in-depth
- Includes alternatives
- Environmental, economic & social
- Mitigation of impacts



Alternative Urban Areawide Review (AUAR)



- Used instead of an individual project EAW or EIS
- Defined geographic area
- 5-year expiration; can be updated
- Limited to residential, commercial, warehousing, and light industrial development and associated infrastructure

Project updates

Active Environmental Review Projects

EQB Monitor

- Environmental review notices
- Public comment periods
- Public meetings
- Records of decisions

EQB Website

- **NEW:** Online services
- Database
- Climate guidance and information and GHG emission calculations in EAW form

To sign up: https://bit.ly/3efNFIp

EQB Monitor submission service

- Need an account
- Project description
- Authorized users/verify internal processes are complete
- Active projects
- Work in progress

Updated in May of 2023 for publishing all required ER notices

Projects noticed in the Monitor now will create project pages within the ER database

EQB Monitor submission service

MPCA Online Services

MPCA Online Services / **Work in Progress**

Filter Items per page: 25 1 – 13 of 13

Transaction ID	Service Name	Name	ID	Last Modified	Status	Share	Detail	Edit Service	Cancel Service
79524	EIS>Draft EIS	Wabasha Barge Facility		Sep 26, 2023	In Progress				
77969	CPR>Purchase Request	Hotel stay for 1 night 3 separate people	EQB Acquisitions	Sep 1, 2023	In Progress				
76324	AUAR>Revised AUAR	Prudential Campus Redevelopment		Aug 2, 2023	In Progress				
75155	EIS>EIS preparation notice	Wabasha Barge Facility		Jul 14, 2023	In Progress				
75047	Large AUAR>Final order for review	Xcel Energy - City of Northfield AUAR		Jul 12, 2023	In Progress				
74929	EAW>EIS need decision	Mineral Springs Development		Jul 11, 2023	In Progress				

New submission notice types

- EAW
- EIS
- General notices
- Supplemental EIS
- Alternative review
- AUAR
- Large AUAR
- AUAR update

Your active projects

Alternative review

Lake Wilson Solar Energy Center Alternative Review

	Submitted	Publication date
Lake Wilson Solar Energy Center-Notice Of Public Information And Environmental Assessment	May 10, 2023	May 2, 2023
Notice of Environmental Assessment Scoping Decision Availability	Aug 2, 2023	Aug 8, 2023
Notice		

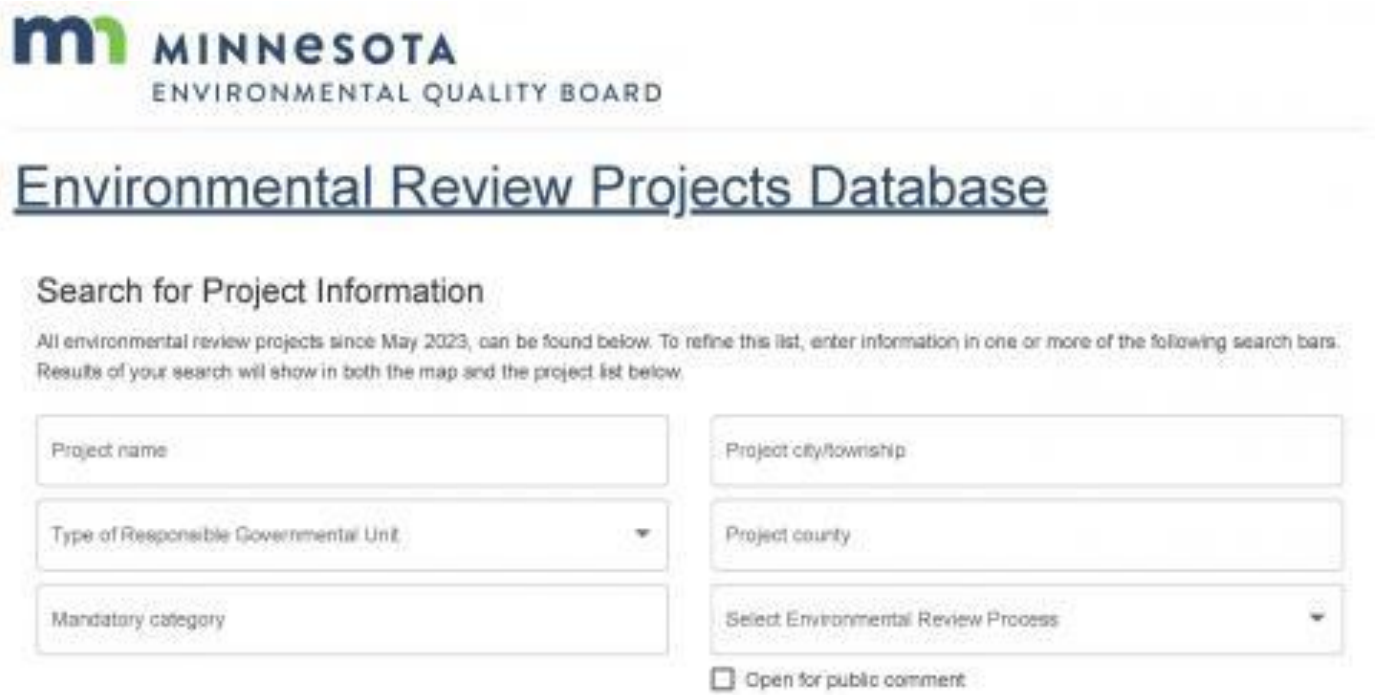
EAW

Ebersole Residential Subdivision

	Submitted	Publication date
Step 1 EAW available	Jun 6, 2023	Jun 13, 2023
Additional public meetings		
Step 2 EIS need decision		

Environmental Review Database

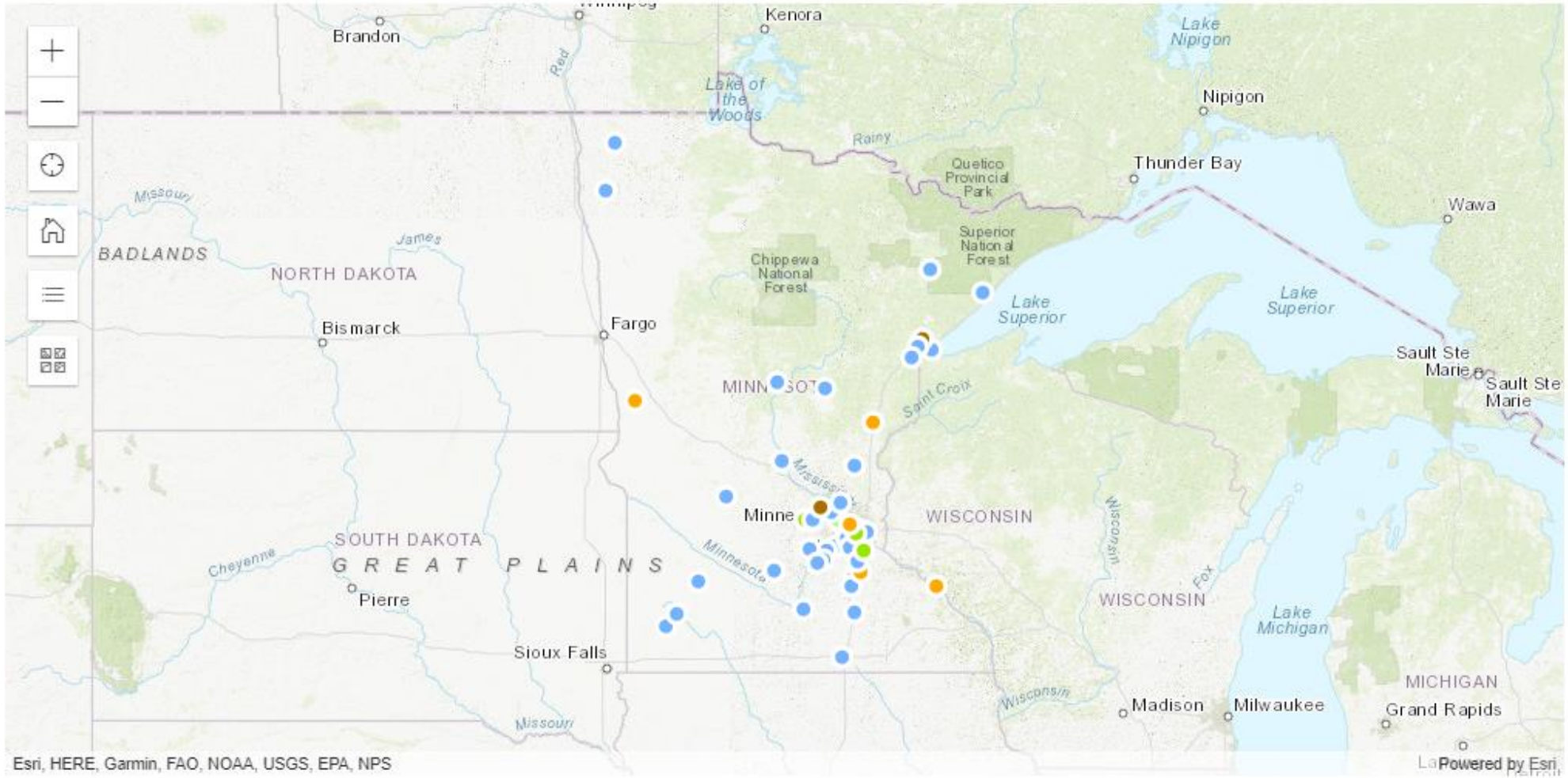
- https://www.eqb.state.mn.us/content/environmental-review-projects-database
- Database will house all environmental review projects and associated ER documents from May 2023 onward (currently does not include petitions)



Project results 52

Environmental Review Database

Map

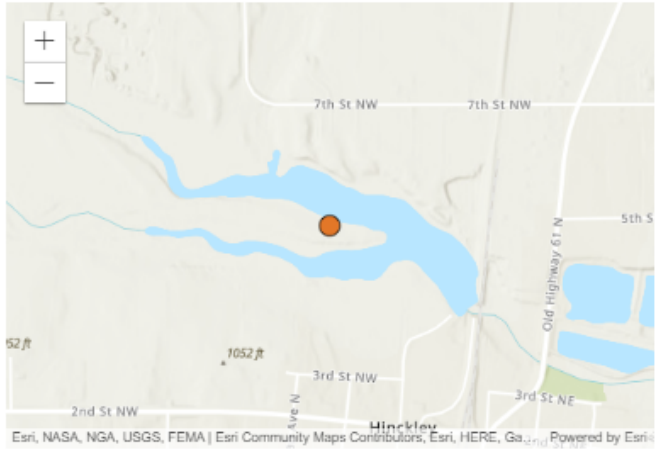


Show list of sites in this area

Environmental Review Database

Grindstone Dam Removal Project

County Located in:	Pine
Latitude:	46.02272
Longitude:	-92.94771
Responsible Governmental Unit:	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



Project description

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking public comments on the scoping documents for a State Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS will describe the potential environmental effects of a proposed dam removal project in the Hinckley area. The scoping documents provide information about the topics that are proposed to be included in the State EIS for the proposed project. The DNR proposes to remove the dam on the Grindstone River in Hinckley and restore connectivity to the river channel. This would result in the permanent removal of the 26.6-acre Grindstone Reservoir, which is a public water basin. The removal is proposed because the dam is in poor condition, it presents a safety hazard, and it is a barrier to passage of fish and other aquatic wildlife on the river. The dam also does not allow for natural sediment transport and natural stream features or habitat diversity.

Environmental review process	Process step	Final ER decision	Download document	Read *EQB monitor notice*
EIS	EIS Scoping EAW and Draft Scoping Decision			Monitor publication date: Oct 12, 2020
EIS	EIS preparation notice			Monitor publication date: Dec 14, 2020
EIS	Draft EIS			Monitor publication date: Jun 20, 2023
EIS	Final EIS			Monitor publication date: Sep 26, 2023

Meeting date	Time	Location	Virtual meeting link
Thursday, November 5, 2020	6:00 p.m.		

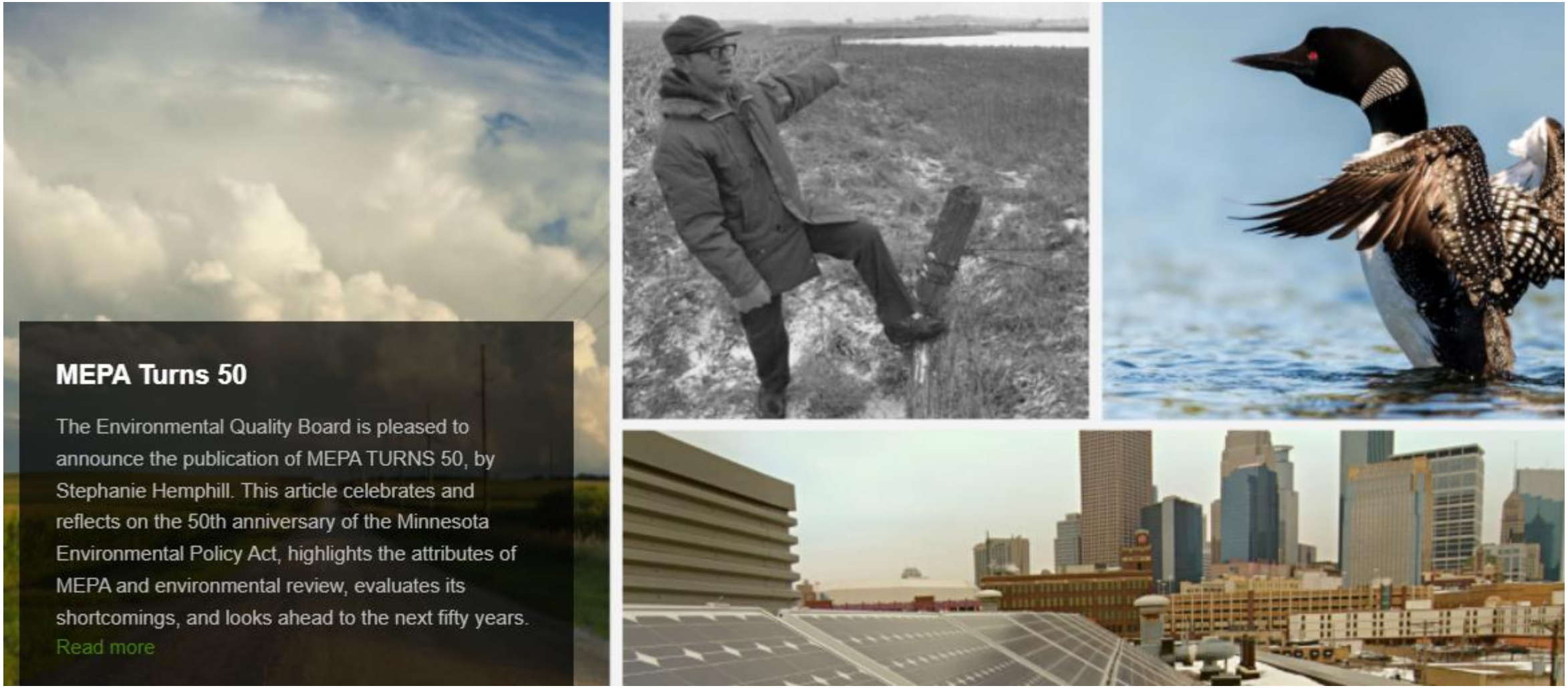
Continuous
improvement effort

Overview

- Minnesota's Environmental Review Program
- Projects update
- Continuous Improvement
- This year's workplan

MEPA Turns 50

https://www.eqb.state.mn.us/content/mepa-turns-50-0



Why Continuous Improvement?

By providing a framework for continuous improvement, the Environmental Review Program will be able to responsively adapt to the changing needs of our environment.

Methodology

Research

Engagement

Board and Interagency Team Meetings

List of Improvements

Criteria for Effectiveness

An Effective ER Program should have:

Continuous improvement process

- Solicit ideas for improvements
- Review ideas
- Evaluate ideas based on program effectiveness
- Implementation planning
- Subcommittee review
- Board directs staff to implement selected projects.

Key projects

Evaluate decision criteria: type, extent, reversibility

New BMPs and training

Work plan goals

Decision criteria

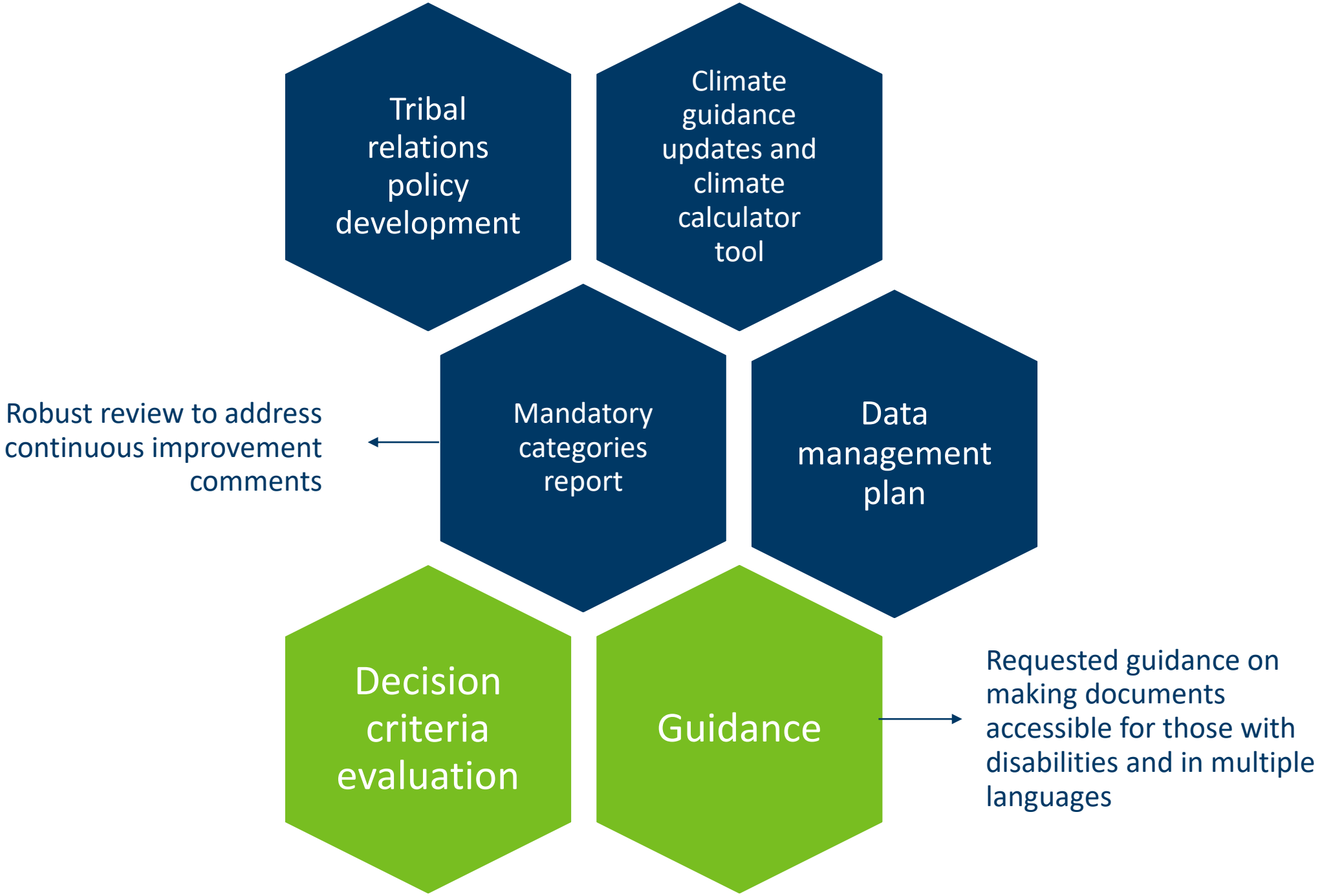
Type, extent, and reversibility

Cumulative potential effects

The extent to which the environmental effects are subject to mitigation

The extent to which environmental effects can be anticipated and controlled

This year’s workplan


Tribal relations policy development
Climate guidance updates and climate calculator tool
Robust review to address continuous improvement comments
Mandatory categories report
Data management plan
Decision criteria evaluation
Guidance
Requested guidance on making documents accessible for those with disabilities and in multiple languages

Mandatory Categories Report

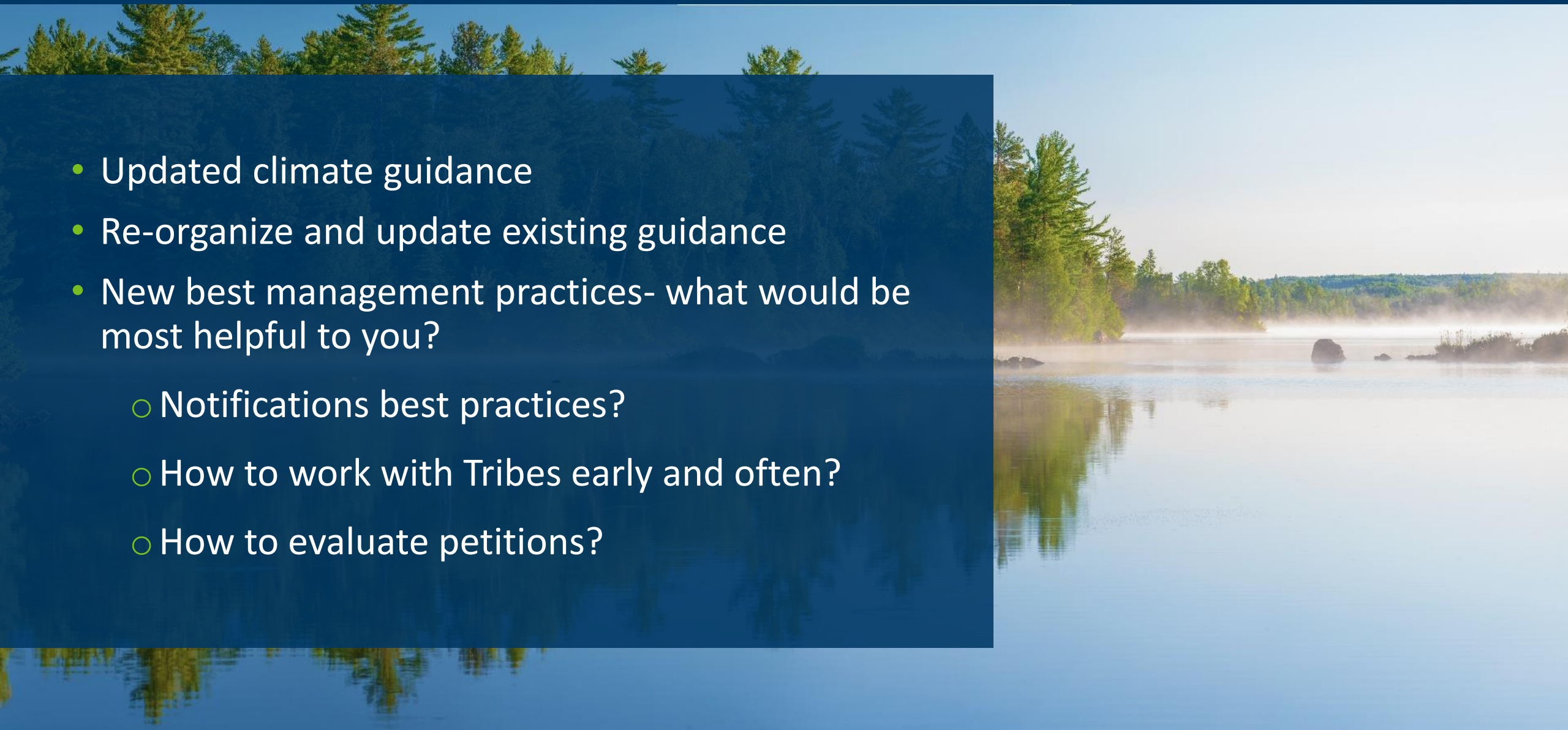
- Assess history of categories and their thresholds
- Engagement and white papers on certain categories
- Opportunity to incorporate life cycle and cumulative impacts
- Recommend changes to individual categories or broader re-structuring
- High Priority (legislative mandate)
- RGU and Tech Rep help; subject matter experts per mandatory category
- Publish draft report December 2024

Upcoming engagement opportunities

Decision criteria evaluation & Mandatory Categories Report

- Online feedback via engagement HQ coming in early 2024.
- Think about experiences in using decision criteria and using thresholds in any mandatory categories.

Guidance



- Updated climate guidance
- Re-organize and update existing guidance
- New best management practices- what would be most helpful to you?
  - Notifications best practices?
  - How to work with Tribes early and often?
  - How to evaluate petitions?

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ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY BOARD

Questions?