

Dakota place names near Haha Wakpádaŋ. From Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission, 2025

## Water Kin

*Water is Life.*

*We walk as the water flows.*

*We remember what was, what has been done, and what can be restored.*

We acknowledge and honor Haha Wakpádaŋ, Bassett Creek, as a living system connected to us all and Haha Wakpa / Mississippi River, our Mother river.



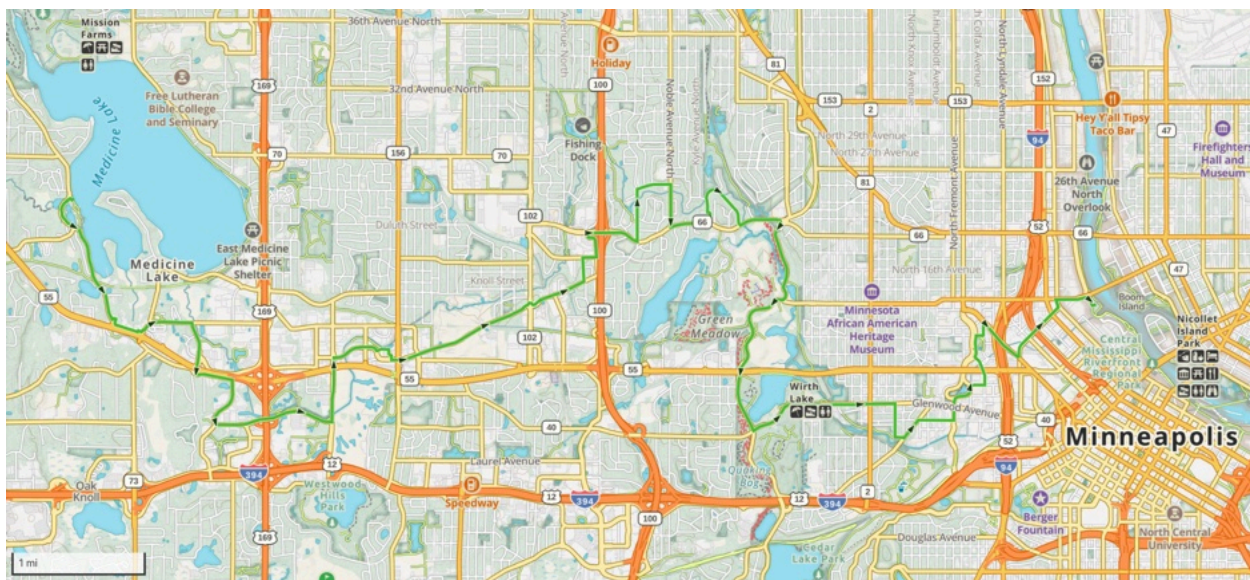
## Purpose and Contents:

This report was created after studying, mapping and walking strategic points along Wąkpádaŋ / Bassett Creek in personal preparation for the Haha Wąkpádaŋ Nibi Walk. This report utilizes techniques and strategies from our work flow in our company Ecological Design. It is a voluntary offering from our viewpoint. This report is a brief overview, and leaves a trail of seeds for those who are wanting to work more deeply on the healing and restoration efforts. We offer in hope it encourages others to look into this watershed, to learn and build right relationship with Bassett Creek and the Mississippi River.

This report is written in honor of Sharon Day for a life legacy of Indigenous leadership, advocacy and healing work. Miigwich in gratitude for Sharon's organizing of Nibi Walks and bringing light to Haha Wąkpádaŋ.

We acknowledge Artist Seitu Jones for creating artwork that shows the path of the underground tunneled Haha Wąkpádaŋ. Thank you for sharing your personal story growing up at Sumner Field and the African American history of ecological, economic and social injustice of this Creek.

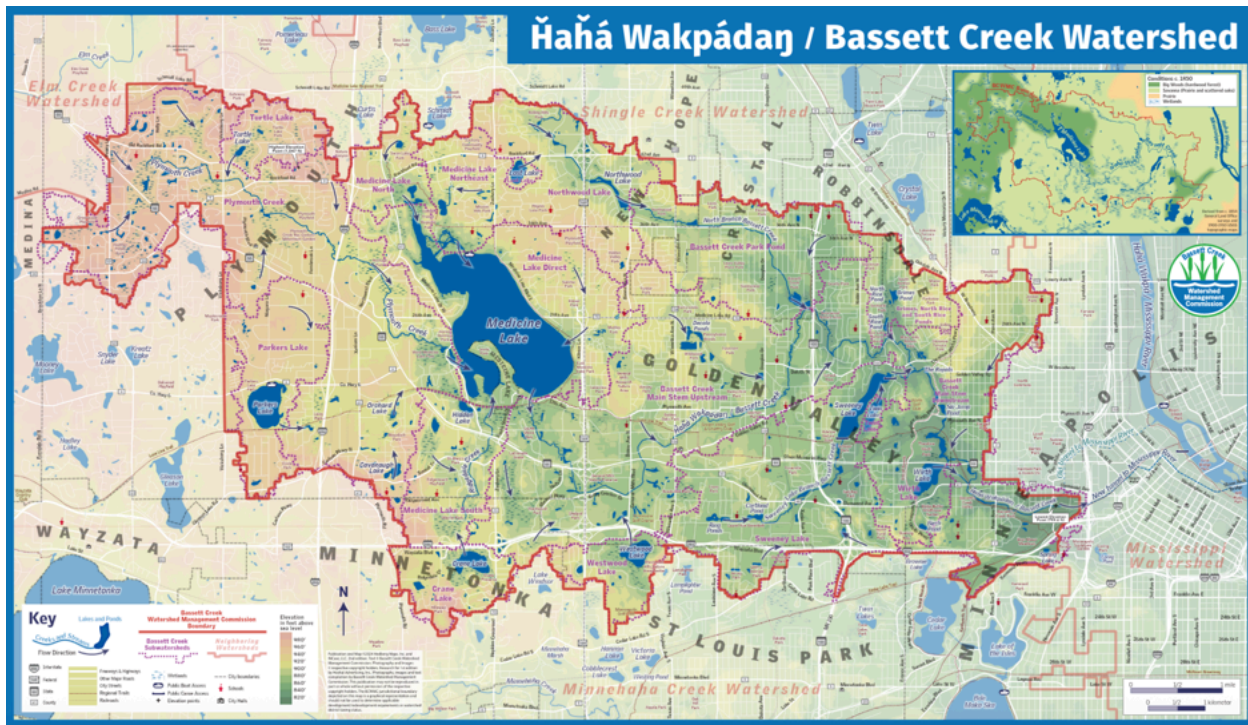
## Route of the April 2026 Nibi Walk



## Eco Report Contents:

1. Watershed Overview
2. Cultural + Historical Context
3. Pain points + Opportunity Mapping
4. Towards a Water Commons
5. References

## Watershed Overview



Source:

[https://www.bassetcreekwmo.org/application/files/4017/3739/3834/2025\\_watershed\\_map\\_FINAL\\_for\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.bassetcreekwmo.org/application/files/4017/3739/3834/2025_watershed_map_FINAL_for_WEB.pdf)



## Bassett Creek Orientation:

### Core Hydrology

- **Headwaters:** Medicine Lake
- **Outlet:** Mississippi River below St. Anthony Falls
- **Length:** ~13.5 miles
- **Watershed Area:** ~39 square miles (~25,000 acres)
- **Primary Flow Direction:** West → East

### Watershed Characteristics

- **Land Use:**  
Predominantly urbanized
- **Communities:** ~9 municipalities (Plymouth → Minneapolis corridor)
- **Major Lakes Connected:** Medicine, Sweeney, Twin, Wirth
- **Dakota Name Meaning:** “Falls Creek” (Háñá Wakpádaŋ)



### Channel Condition

- **Total Stream Length:** ~13.5 miles
- **Buried / Piped / Tunneled:** ~6+ miles (estimated, including major storm tunnels)
- **Final Tunnel Section:** ~1.7 miles into the Mississippi
- **Daylighted / Naturalized Sections:** Increasing
- **Classification:** Urban impaired tributary (MPCA 303d listings referenced in watershed plans)

A 13-mile urban tributary, more than half buried, carrying the memory of water through one of the most altered corridors in Minneapolis.



## Cultural and Historical Context:

"Our first home and first medicine is water as we grew in our mother's womb. For Dakota's people mni/water is the life blood of Maka Ina/ Mother Earth, the sacred sustenance of life. You often hear Dakota people say "Mni Wiconi/ Water is life." In this place we pay homage to the one who protects the water, Unktehi, the great horned serpent who travels the aquifers to protect the water."

~ Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould, professor emeritus of Indigenous and environment studies. Roxanne lives in Golden Valley near Haha Wakpádaŋ

Reference: <https://www.bassettcreekwmo.org/haha-wakpadan-indigenous-culture>

Haha Wakpádaŋ / Bassett Creek is a vital Dakota cultural site in Minneapolis long used for gathering wild rice, berries, chokecherries, plums, medicines, and hunting. This area features a historic, ceremonial solstice path between Medicine Lake and the Mississippi River.

From the Minnesota Historical Society:

*“Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ begins at Medicine Lake in Plymouth and flows for about 13.5 miles before connecting with the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. The watershed surrounding the creek includes tributaries and parts of nine cities: Crystal, Golden Valley, Medicine Lake, Minneapolis, Minnetonka, New Hope, Plymouth, Robbinsdale, and St. Louis Park. Its drainage area covers thirty-nine square miles.*

*The main stem of the creek travels through glacial outwash plains and a deep valley that was cut in the bedrock by the interglacial Mississippi River. Soils near the creek are often spongy and water-soaked, especially in the eastern section known as Bassett Creek Valley.*

*By 5,000 years ago, the watershed was covered with deciduous forests and prairie openings, including [oak savanna](#) and elm, ironwood, and basswood trees. Abundant wildlife lived nearby, including wolves, deer, otters, and eagles.*

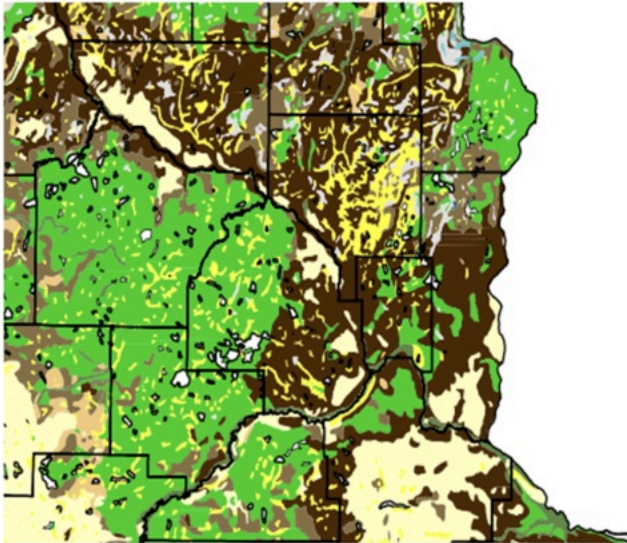
*The watershed is part of the homelands of the [Dakota people](#). For millennia it supported sustainable uses like seasonal hunting, fishing, and gathering. Dakota people walked footpaths that connected the creek with Bde Maka Ska and Ĥaĥá Wakpá. They also used the creek to [transport furs by canoe](#). Dakota children played and swam at the mouth of the creek, and a*



Dakota woman named *Háza Ínyanĵke Wíŋ* operated a canoe ferry above the falls in the mid-1800s.

Many names have been used to describe the creek: first, *Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ* (Dakota), and then *Petite Riviere des Chutes* (French). The Dakota phrase shows *Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ*'s relationship

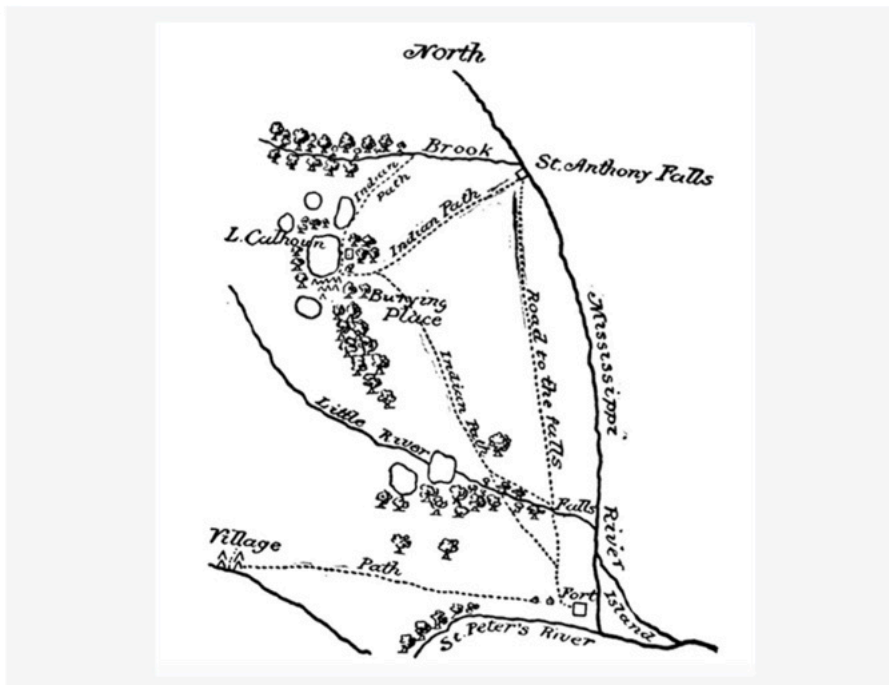
to both *Ĥaĥá*



Based on "The Original Vegetation of Minnesota," a map compiled in 1930 by F. J. Marschner using U.S. General Land Office survey notes.

*Wakpá* (Falls River; the Mississippi) and *Owámniyomni* (Turbulent Waters; St. Anthony Falls).

Early maps simply labeled it Brook, Fall Creek, or Nine Mile Creek.



### Region near Bde Maka Ska, ca. 1835

A map of the region near Bde Maka Ska created by Samuel or Gideon Pond that shows the location of *Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ*, labeled as "Brook," ca. 1835. From *Two Volunteer Missionaries Among the Dakotas*



White settlers staked claims near the creek before the 1851 treaties of [Mendota](#) and [Traverse des Sioux](#). Squatters lived on the [Fort Snelling Military Reservation](#) until 1855, when an act of Congress granted pre-emption rights. Businessman Joel Bean Bassett squatted illegally at the mouth of the creek in the early 1850s, leading schoolteacher



A meandering Bassett Creek outlined on an 1861 plat map by R. & F. Cook.

Mary Augusta (Scofield) Kissell to name the creek after him at about the same time. Bassett became Hennepin County's first probate judge in 1852 and the Indian Agent at Crow Wing in 1866.

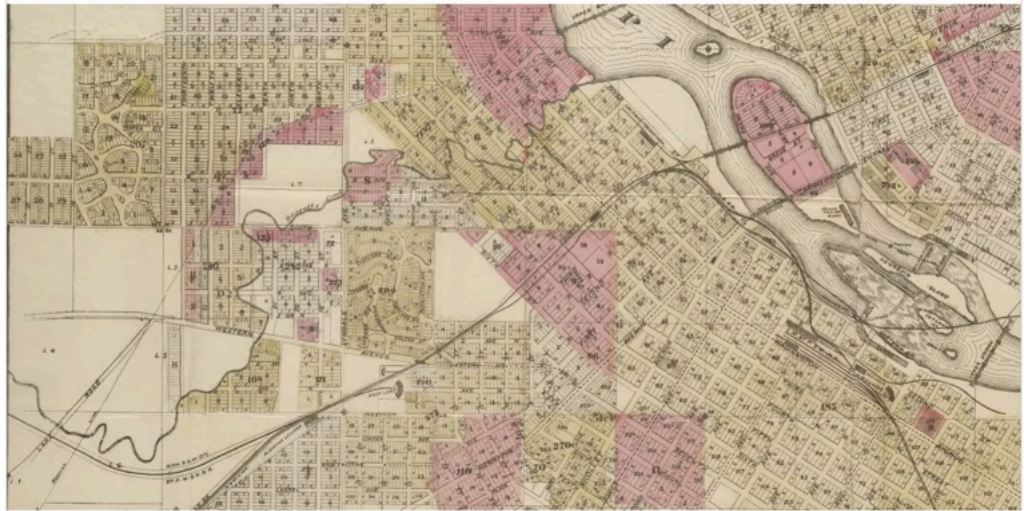


A detail from a map of the eastern portion of Bassett Creek Valley, 1880. From Neil F. Gustafson's *Bassett's Creek : a case study of the changing concepts in urban land use*, 1959 Credit: MNopedia

The health of Bassett Creek deteriorated rapidly after the area was opened to settlers, who used it as a dumping ground as they industrialized Minneapolis. Raw sewage was piped into the waterway in the 1870s, and the creek was considered an open sewer by the late 1800s. Due to frequent flooding, the eastern portion of the creek was covered and tunneled underground in 1923.



*The Works Progress Administration attempted to restore parts of the creek during the 1930s, but new approaches to watershed health began in earnest during the late 1960s. The Bassett Creek Flood Control*



Bassett Creek's meandering path through Minneapolis, 1882.

*Commission, established in 1969, adopted its first management plan in 1972. Citizens became interested in more holistic improvements, and the flood control commission reorganized as the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission in 1984. Flooding remained an issue, and \$28 million of federal funds supported developing a new tunnel through three phases in 1979, 1990, and 1992. Starting in 1992, the creek began flowing under downtown Minneapolis and discharged into the Mississippi River downstream of St. Anthony Falls.*

*In the 1930s, public housing like Sumner Field Homes was built in the eastern portion of the watershed in [Near North Minneapolis](#), where soggy soils caused building foundations to crack and sink. People experiencing poverty lived there because the unstable ground made housing less expensive. In 1998, after the settlement of a 1992 lawsuit, the Sumner Field Homes were demolished. The city was ordered to redevelop the area, and wetlands were restored in the creek's original basin.*

*In 2014, a Superfund site was designated along the creek in Minneapolis, where a metal plating facility had polluted the soil and groundwater. That same year, the City of Golden Valley drafted a feasibility report for improvements to the creek's main stem.*

*Later efforts recognized the creek as a Dakota landscape. In 2021, the Háhá Wakpádaŋ / Bassett Creek Oral History Project began working with cultural advisors to raise awareness of the creek's Dakota name, and in 2025, the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission published a map celebrating Dakota culture and language.”*

Reference: <https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/place/haha-wakpadan-bassett-creek>



## Building Relationship Framework:

These four steps build relationship with land and water. An overall holistic view of the watershed and land is required - before ever recommending or intervening. This process involves land listening, oral stories, research, scientific lab data and multi stakeholder land planning efforts integration. This process must be community driven.

### Paradigm

*Heal water, heal ourselves.*

*Water is not infrastructure - She is a living relative.*

### Baseline & Benchmark

Assess watershed conditions using integrated assessment methods:

- Physical: flow, temperature, turbidity, total dissolved solids (TDS)
- Chemical: pH, nutrients, heavy metals, PFAS and contaminant zones
- Biological: microorganisms, macroinvertebrates, and plant health
- Energetic: flow patterns, landscape coherence, and field-based sensing
- Relational: cultural history, land use, and human–water relationships

### Remediation - “Heal the Hurts”

Identify contamination and disruption points. Install site-specific remediation systems.

- Major pollution sites clean up
- Filtration, bioremediation, and green infrastructure to improve water quality and restore function.

### Optimize

After basic remediation this step amplifies ecosystem resilience.

- Daylighting buried segments
- Stagnant and dislocated sections activated, meandering, vortexing
- Habitat, pollinator + riparian restoration
- Dam removal vision at St. Anthony Falls
- Community stewardship + Water Commons



## Pain Points + Opportunity Points

Here we outline some areas of importance for this stakeholder process in the future.

### Key Sites Along Bassett Creek

Condition: Highly altered, partially buried urban watershed. Highly contaminated watershed.

#### Primary Hurts:

Burial • Contamination • Disconnection • Velocity

#### Primary Opportunities:

Water quality improvement • Daylighting • Testing + transparency • Cultural restoration • Hydrologic healing

### Medicine Lake

Watershed headwaters

- **Pain**
  - Contamination
  - Loss of cultural/medicinal relationship
  - Hydrologic alteration
- **Opportunity**
  - Remembrance + story restoration
  - Testing, Monitoring
  - Ecological Filtration and Restoration Site



The headwaters of Bassett Creek at Medicine Lake. When water levels are high, the creek spills over the concrete weir.

Reference: <https://friendsofeloisebutler.org/pages/history/gardenspringdetail.html>

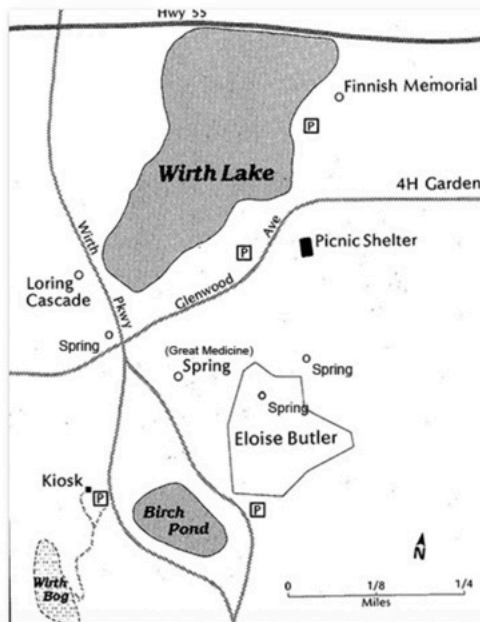


## Medicine Spring (Lost/Altered)

Location: Theodore Wirth Regional Park

- **Pain**
  - Sacred Springs lost in development
  - Loss of cultural/medicinal relationship
  - Hydrologic alteration
- **Opportunity**
  - Remembrance + story restoration
  - Potential hydrology healing / marking site
  - Healing Ceremony
  - Springs Restoration

**Below:** Map of South Wirth Park around the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden showing the locations of four springs mentioned in the text. Map from 1987 Garden Guide, updated by G D Bebeau



Reference: <https://friendsofeloisebutler.org/pages/history/gardenspringdetail.html>

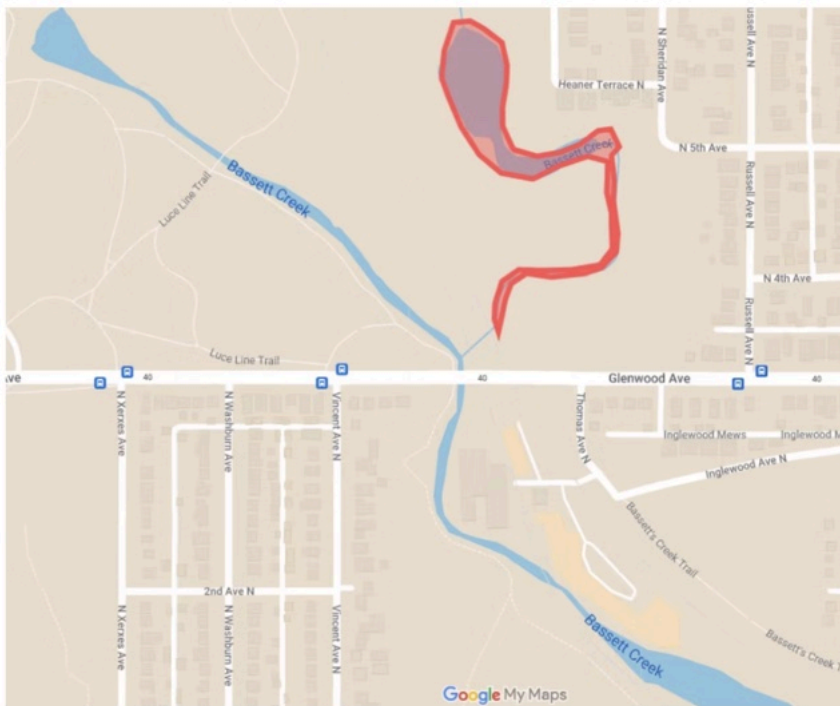
Reference: Spring Valley Friends, Medicine Spring 1939-1954



## Dislocated Sections / Buried Creek Segments:

Including Sumner Field housing history (African American / Jewish Federal segregated housing Hmong communities)

- **Pain**
  - Creek buried, flow straightened, disconnected from people
  - Pollution
  - Environmental injustice + displacement
- **Opportunity**
  - Testing Site
  - Daylighting potential
  - Story mapping + Environmental Justice visibility
  - Community-led restoration



The stagnant portion of Bassett Creek from the 1934 public works project.

Reference: <https://www.minnesotahistory.org/post/the-sick-creek-in-the-city-of-lakes>

Reference: Bassett Creek Valley Master Plan



## Fruen Mill / Contamination Site

Former water powered grain mill and Glenwood Inglewood Water Company bottling site. Most recent owner ConAgra. Referred to as one of the most dangerous MN abandoned buildings.

- **Pain**
  - Contamination legacy
  - Toxic runoff into watershed
- **Opportunity**
  - Targeted testing (heavy metals, Polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), PFAS)
  - Public awareness + Advocacy + remediation funding
  - Historic Preservation

### The Bassett's Creek area in 1937

The aerial photo below of July 1937 shows some of the landmarks of the area. The Wildflower Garden is just to the west. Photo - University of Minnesota.



Reference: <https://www.abandoned.photo/portfolio/fruen-mill/>



## Superfund / Industrial Zone

Near Minneapolis Impound Lot

- **Pain**
  - Contamination legacy
  - Toxic runoff into watershed
- **Opportunity**
  - Targeted testing (metals, nuclear hydrocarbons, PFAS)
  - Advocacy + remediation funding
  - Public awareness



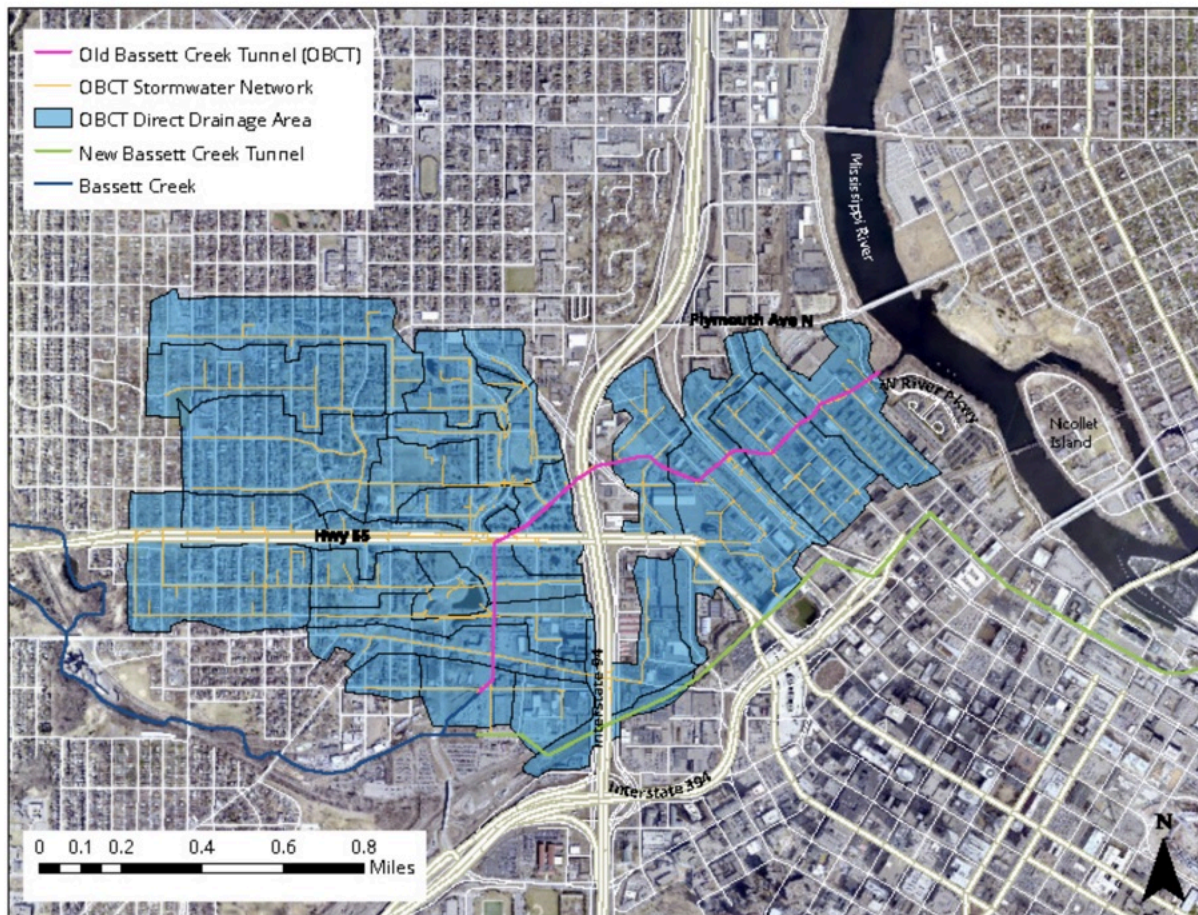
*The Bassett Creek/Irving Avenue Dump Superfund Site is on the Minnesota Permanent List of Priorities due to its elevated concentrations of lead, polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Map published by MPCA (2013).*



## Tunnel System (Old + New)

Buried Creek Infrastructures, Stormwater diversion infrastructure

- **Pain**
  - Water removed from natural system
  - Increased velocity, reduced infiltration
- **Opportunity**
  - Rethinking stormwater design
  - Rehydration strategies upstream



The Old Bassett Creek Tunnel drains 870 acres of North Minneapolis. It also conveys flows from Bassett Creek under high flow conditions.

Reference: Mississippi River Management Organization

<https://www.mwmo.org/projects/old-bassett-creek-tunnel/>





Old Tunnel Outlet



April 2026



## Confluence + Dam System

At St. Anthony Falls / Owámniyomni

- **Pain**
  - Altered natural river system
  - Sediment + ecological disruption
  - Stagnation
  - Pollution
- **Opportunity**
  - Outlet Pollution clean up
  - Vortex water movement design
  - Long-term dam removal vision
  - Regional restoration leadership
  - Cultural + ecological healing



Bassett Creek New Tunnel Outlet April 2026



## Towards a Water Commons

*From Source to Sip.  
From Buried to Breathing.  
From Extraction to Relationship.*

We encourage people to learn more about their watershed's herstory and current ways to support the restoration of Haha Wakpádaŋ Bassett Creek.

This report offers a high-level view of Ĥaĥá Wakpádaŋ / Bassett Creek as both an ecological system and a living relative. While significantly altered, the watershed holds clear opportunities for restoration, reconnection, and improved water quality. Continued efforts - grounded in community, cultural knowledge, and scientific data can support the transition from a buried and impaired system to one that is visible, healthy, and in right relationship with people and place.

We support large-scale water coalition building grounded in shared purpose. Water connects us all across place, people, and time. A Twin Cities Water Commons is possible. Inspired by Seitu Jones, and the engraving stone left blank at the Sumner Field Fair Housing Memorial, we look toward the next story for Bassett Creek shaped by restoration, relationship, and collective care. May the sound of flowing water bring peace. As above, so below.

### Take Action:

- Bless Water, Speak to Water, Pray for Water - learn the [Nibi song](#)
- Join a Water Walk <https://www.nibiwalk.org>
- Test Your Water
- Bring this to your watershed
- Join a Watershed Clean Up
- Join a Watershed Restoration Project

Report by:  
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April 2026  
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## References & Additional Reading:

Nibi Walk Gaia GPS Map:

<https://www.gaiagps.com/map/?loc=10.7/-93.3529/44.9907&pubLink=16L5c8dy1lcuf3YUmN88zvvV&trackId=1d96fc3f2655e3ecf366fa1d07e545be>

Bassett Creek Watershed Map :

[https://www.bassettcreekwmo.org/application/files/4017/3739/3834/2025\\_watershed\\_map\\_FINAL\\_for\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.bassettcreekwmo.org/application/files/4017/3739/3834/2025_watershed_map_FINAL_for_WEB.pdf)

MN Historical Society:

<https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/place/haha-wakpadan-bassett-creek>

Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place and Community, Issue Eighteen : Spring 2021 / Feature

Hidden Waterways: Bassett Creek, by Trinity Ek

<https://openrivers.lib.umn.edu/article/hidden-waterways-bassett-creek/>

Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission:

<https://www.bassettcreekwmo.org/haha-wakpadan-indigenous-culture>

Bassett Creek Valley Master Plan 2007;

<https://minneapolis2040.com/media/1502/bassett-creek-valley-master-plan.pdf>

<https://racketmn.com/bassett-creek-minneapolis-north-loop-history>

Bassett Creek Timeline:

<https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/place/haha-wakpadan-bassett-creek>

Bassett Creek Valley Study:

[https://bassettcreekwmo.org/application/files/5017/1285/9678/Item\\_5D\\_Bassett\\_Cr\\_Valley\\_Update\\_and\\_Rec.pdf](https://bassettcreekwmo.org/application/files/5017/1285/9678/Item_5D_Bassett_Cr_Valley_Update_and_Rec.pdf)

Hennepin HistoryForgotten History

<https://hennepinhistory.org/the-forgotten-history-of-bassett-creek/>



Minneapolis Park History; Myth of Bassett's Creek

<https://minneapolisparkhistory.com/2011/11/27/the-myth-of-bassetts-creek/>

Mississippi River Drawdown Reveals Bassett Creek

<https://ccxmedia.org/news/mississippi-river-drawdown-reveals-bassett-creek-tunnel/#:~:text=4:08%20PM%20%7C%20Tuesday%2C,on%20the%20third%20base%20side.>

Open Rivers Superfund Site Image

[https://openrivers.lib.umn.edu/article/hidden-waterways-bassett-creek/bassettcreek\\_irvingave\\_superfund-site/](https://openrivers.lib.umn.edu/article/hidden-waterways-bassett-creek/bassettcreek_irvingave_superfund-site/)

MPCA Minneapolis Precision Plating Superfund Site

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/local-sites-and-projects/minneapolis-former-precision-plating-superfund-site>

Lines on the Land: How Dakota Homeland Became Private Property:

[https://www.bloomingtonmn.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/South%20Loop%20History%20Report\\_Creative%20Placemaking.pdf](https://www.bloomingtonmn.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/South%20Loop%20History%20Report_Creative%20Placemaking.pdf)

