Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Policy and Planning Division

Basin Planning and Management

An approach to managing water resources

Water/Basins #1.01 March 2002

What is basin management?

Basin management is a geographically based approach to protecting and restoring water quality that focuses on water resources. This concept is also known as watershed management, particularly when applied on a smaller scale. A basin is the area of land that drains to a particular river or lake. The map on the last page shows Minnesota's drainage basins.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is using the basin-management approach for each of the state's drainage basins to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and consistency of its water quality programs. Key elements of this approach include integration of existing programs, watershed-based permitting, identification of specific goals and priorities, and greater involvement by partners and the public in management of Minnesota's water resources.

What are the benefits of basin management?

Traditional water-protection efforts under the 1972 Clean Water Act focused on controlling specific types of pollutants and pollution sources, primarily municipal and industrial point sources. While point-source pollution issues still remain, the water-quality problems at the forefront today include nonpoint sources of pollution, toxics, habitat and drainage. As our focus on protecting and improving water quality changes, the MPCA is moving toward a more integrated, resource-based approach.

Basin planning will help us focus and coordinate our efforts based on clearly defined water-quality priorities within each of Minnesota's major basins. By involving citizens, local governments and other agencies in determining where and how program resources should be directed, basin planning will also help improve communication and coordination between the MPCA and other organizations.

How does basin planning fit with the local water-planning process?

Basin planning will not in any way replace local water plans. The local water-planning process is an essential part of effective water-quality management in Minnesota. Planning and implementation activities already under way at the local level will provide needed input for developing basin strategies. The MPCA hopes to use basin management as a means to stimulate more meaningful dialogue with local governments about our respective priorities, roles and responsibilities and to help integrate local plans that address the same water resources, watersheds and basins.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, 520 Lafayette Rd. N., Saint Paul, MN 55155-4194
(651) 296-6300, toll-free (800) 657-3864, TTY (651) 282-5332 or (800) 657-3864

What is the planning process for basin management?

Basin management begins with the compilation of information relevant to water resources management for a given basin into a basin information document (BID). BIDs are reference tools used in the basin-management process. They are comprised of objective information; they are not plans nor do they contain strategies or action steps. Next, basin teams made up of water resource managers in a given basin use the BIDs and their own knowledge and experience to develop basin and watershed goals and priorities. Based on the established goals and priorities, the teams target specific watersheds and bodies of water for action, and develop strategies and action steps to be implemented to further water resource protection, restoration and land monitoring. The sum of the products from these steps comprises a basin plan.

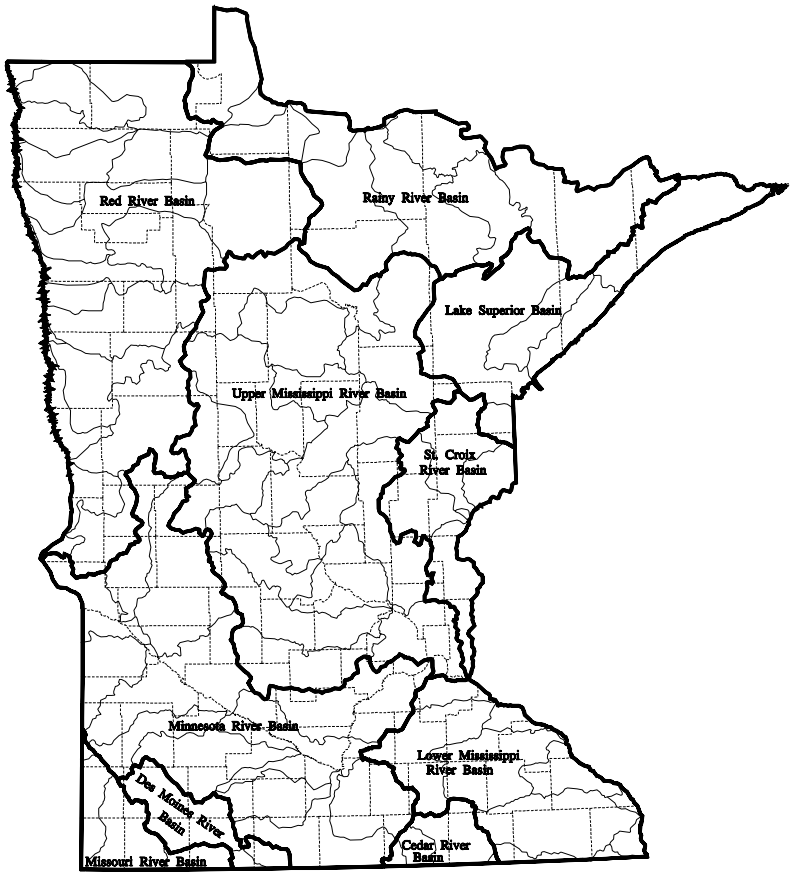
Although the MPCA is facilitating and participating as a partner in the basin-management process, basin plans are created by the basin teams and will not be MPCA plans, per se. Basin plan implementation and success will depend on partnership among all water resource managers — landowners; industry; agriculture; local, state, federal and tribal governments; advocacy groups; academia; etc. Thus, all parties must participate in the development of basin plans so they are comfortable with the implementation of the plans.

Basin plans will be revised five years after completion.

For more information about the MPCA's basin planning and management approach, contact David L. Johnson at the MPCA (call 651/296-6041 or 800/657-3864). Or, contact one of the basin coordinator contacts listed in the table below.

Schedule for Completion of Basin Information Documents and Basin Plans

Basin	BID	Basin plan	Basin-planning contact (phone)
Red River of the North (2nd round)	done	2002 Target	Molly MacGregor (218/846-0494)
Minnesota River	done	Done	Larry Gunderson (651/297-3825)
Upper Mississippi River (headwaters to St. Croix River)	done	2002 Target	Jim Hodgson (218/828-6065)
Lake Superior	done	Part 1 Done Part 2 2002 Target	Brian Fredrickson (218/723-4663)
St. Croix River	On hold	On hold	Leo Raudys (651/282-9884)
Des Moines and Missouri River	2002 Target	2003	Mark Jacobs (507/537-7132)
Lower Mississippi River (St. Croix River to Iowa border) and Cedar River	Done	Done	Norman Senjem (507/280-3592)
Rainy River	Done	2003 Target	Nolan Baratono (218/283-2240)



What is a basin?

A basin (or drainage basin) is an area of land that drains to a particular river or lake. There are 10 major drainage basins in Minnesota, from which water flows in three directions: (1) the Red River of the North and the Rainy River flow north to Hudson Bay; (2) the Lake Superior Basin drains east to the Atlantic Ocean; and (3) the remaining seven basins drain south to the Gulf of Mexico as part of the greater Mississippi River Basin. Minnesota's 10 major basins are shown on the map above. Strategies for the Des Moines River Basin and the Missouri River Basin will be combined into one plan, making a total of nine basin plans.

Each of these basins is divided into major watersheds that correspond to the drainage of a major tributary or lake system. For example, the major watersheds of the Lake Superior Basin are the St. Louis River, the Cloquet River, Lake Superior (North) and Lake Superior (South). The last two separate the North Shore and its tributaries into two watersheds. Each of these major watersheds has many minor watersheds that are the drainages of the smaller, tributary streams. The U.S. Geological Survey has identified 84 major watersheds within Minnesota. These, in turn, have been delineated by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources into some 5,600 minor watersheds.