

Minnesota River Update:

September 7, 2005

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Past issues of the Minnesota River Weekly Update are available on the Internet at <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/basins/mnriver/>

DRAFT TMDL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW: The Draft Lower Minnesota River Dissolved Oxygen TMDL Implementation Plan is available for public review and comment through Monday, October 3, 2005. The draft plan lays out the strategies to meet the goals of the TMDL. The four sectors involved and a brief description of the strategies include:

Wastewater treatment facilities

Discharges into the Minnesota River and tributaries from point sources, such as municipal and industrial wastewater treatment facilities, are regulated by National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System and State Disposal System permits. A new, basin-wide permit establishes targets for the reduction of phosphorus levels in treated wastewater. The goal is to achieve a combined 35 percent reduction in phosphorus discharged from 40 of the largest facilities by 2010. The ten-year goal is a 51 percent reduction in phosphorus discharged from the facilities by 2015. The facilities will be required to meet a phosphorus effluent mass limit or engage in pollutant trading to meet their limit. The smaller wastewater treatment facilities will not be subject to a phosphorus limit under this permit unless they expand.

Stormwater

Permitted entities such as communities, industry, or construction sites will submit Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans as part of their permit requirements. Minnesota River Basin permittees will add measures to their plans to reduce phosphorus. Reductions from nonpermitted communities will rely on education and voluntary measures.

Direct discharges of sewage

Directly discharging systems are those that are discharging untreated or undertreated sewage at the surface or via a pipe to a ditch or stream. Unsewered communities are included. Increasing compliance in this sector will involve locating direct discharges of sewage and fixing them, enhancing assistance for small unsewered communities, and promoting loan funding for homeowners.

Agriculture

Agricultural practices that reduce phosphorus will have a limited impact because runoff is minimal during low flow conditions. Agricultural practices promoted as a part of this TMDL reduce runoff during higher flow times, therefore increasing the amount of ground water recharge during dry periods. This temporarily stored ground water seeps back into the river and increases the flow during medium and low flow periods. Two main practices are crop residue and protection of open tile intakes. Equivalent practices should be used in cases where these practices are not options.

An implementation timeframe of 10 years is provided for most activities. The exception to this is urban stormwater retrofits, which were provided 20 years due to complications in replacing already developed areas (e.g. streets and roads).

The draft plan follows the Lower Minnesota River Dissolved Oxygen TMDL Report, which was approved by the EPA in September of 2004. To submit comments or ask questions, contact Larry Gunderson, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, 520 Lafayette Rd., St. Paul, MN 55155, larry.gunderson@state.mn.us, 651-297-3825.

CHANNEL CATFISH DIE-OFF BEING INVESTIGATED: An investigation is underway into a die-off of channel catfish that has been occurring in both the Blue Earth and Watonwan rivers near the Rapidan Dam in Blue Earth County.

Hugh Valiant, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) fisheries supervisor at Waterville, said neither the cause nor the extent of the die-off has yet been determined. "The die-off apparently began in early August but it was not reported until a couple of weeks later," Valiant said. "We were first notified on August 15."

That time lag, Valiant said, has made it difficult to obtain viable fish specimens for pathology testing. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has since collected water and tissue samples and DNR had staff out this week to conduct a fish population assessment by electrofishing.

"An immediate notification of the event would clearly have been of value in documenting the extent of the kill and in collecting a good sample of the fish," Valiant stated. Valiant said it is impossible to know how many fish have died but the number is "probably in the hundreds or more."

Efforts to collect usable fish specimens to test for the cause of death are continuing, Valiant stated. In the meantime, the Minnesota Department of Health suggests using caution when deciding whether to enter the water or eat fish caught from the rivers.

GREAT MINNESOTA RIVER BIRDING DAY SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 17:

Bob Williams sent this the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance Bulletin Board - On September 17th, Audubon Minnesota, Friends of the Minnesota Valley and CURE will be sponsoring the 6th Annual Great Minnesota River Birding Day. Join us as we identify as many species of birds in the Minnesota River Valley Watershed as we can. This event helps to raise awareness of the beauty and significance of the Minnesota River Valley and of the importance of the river to our quality of life. It is also a great opportunity to enjoy the richness and diversity of bird life that can be found throughout the watershed.

You can bird all or part of the day, anywhere in the watershed. To find out where the best locations are, go to the website for the Great Minnesota River Valley

Birding Trail at www.birdingtrail.org. To sign up for a team or an area contact Bob Williams at 612-728-2232 or bxwilliams@cbburnet.com.

Rallies will be held at three locations in the valley on the afternoon of the 17th where you can go and share your sightings of the day with each other, enjoy refreshments and make new friends. You can participate in the birding, the rallies or both; and all is free and open to the public. The rallies will be held in Shakopee at Memorial Park starting at 1PM, in Mankato at the Elks Nature Center in Rasmussen Woods starting at 2PM and in Watson at the Historic Watson Town Hall starting at 4PM. Last year over 100 birders identified 186 species in the watershed. Join us for this great day and help us find even more species this year and demonstrate how important the natural habitats in this area are for the birds residing in and migrating through the Minnesota River Valley.

GROUND WATER SUSTAINABILITY TOPIC OF DNR REPORT: Ground water is the source of drinking water for more than 75% of Minnesotans. Therefore, long-term ground water supply is a continuing concern. In response to a legislative query, DNR Waters has completed the brief report "Sustainability of Minnesota's Ground Water: A Statement of Issues and Needs," which is now available to the public on the DNR Waters web site at www.dnr.state.mn.us/waters/index.html

This report summarizes research and discussions by DNR staff during the 2004-05 biennium as to how the concept of sustainability might be defined and applied to water supply management in Minnesota. The report is further supported by information contained in a series of fact sheets that will be accessible on the web at the same site. Several of the fact sheets are available now and others will be added as they are readied for publication. While there is a large and growing body of knowledge about the water resources in Minnesota, a great deal more work will be needed to adequately answer the question "Will there be enough water for my grandchildren?" everywhere in the state.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: "The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken." - Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

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