



Grants: Volunteers assess health of waters

MPCA awards seven Surface Water Assessment Grants for 2012-13

Volunteers play a crucial role in assessing the health of lakes and streams in Minnesota. Through Surface Water Assessment Grants (SWAG), hundreds of volunteers have participated in projects with local partners to provide water quality data for 1,133 lakes and 1,009 stream sites. To date, the MPCA has awarded 147 Surface Water Assessment Grants totaling \$7.4 million, providing funding for training, equipment, and lab analysis of water samples.



Background of grant program

First funded in 2006, SWAGs provide local organizations and citizen volunteers with funds to gauge the health of lakes and streams. The MPCA uses the data collected to see if water bodies support designated uses such as swimming and fishing. Assessing the water quality of lakes and streams is usually the first step in protecting or restoring surface waters. The MPCA is the agency responsible for administering the grant program. Local government units and non-profit groups recruit the volunteers (where possible) and coordinate the monitoring and sampling efforts.

In this way, the MPCA works with citizens on the local level to identify healthy lakes and streams that need protection. They also identify waters that fail to meet state standards and need restoration. The data collected help set priorities for the agency and funding sources like the Clean Water Legacy Amendment.

Statewide schedule for assessing watershed health

Over the past few years, the MPCA has moved toward a watershed approach (www.pca.state.mn.us/irypabf) for assessing the health of lakes and streams, adapting the Clean Water Council 10-year Intensive Water Monitoring Plan. With this Plan, the MPCA assigned a year to each of the 81 major watersheds in the state for sampling/assessment during the 10-year cycle. Within each watershed, MPCA staff will identify lakes and streams where they will partner with local government units for assistance in surface water sampling. For SWAG grants, this means that local government units can only apply for funding to assess these predetermined lakes and streams. This approach guarantees that all watersheds are included in the 10-year cycle under the SWAG program.

Starting in 2012, the SWAG program adhered to selecting lakes and streams located within the pre-determined watersheds. For 2012 – 2013 these watersheds included Grand Marais Creek, Red Lake River, Lake of the Woods, Leech Lake River, Pine River, South Fork of the Crow River, and the Zumbro River.

Grants awarded for 2012-13

For 2012-13, the MPCA awarded seven SWAGs for a total of \$523,000 to the following grantees:

- Cass County Environmental Services;
- Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation District;
- Crow River Organization of Water (CROW);
- Headwaters Science Center;
- Red Lake Watershed District;
- Roseau County Soil and Water Conservation District; and
- Zumbro Watershed Partnership.

For more information

For more information about SWAG:

- Visit the program page on the MPCA website at <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/veizafa>.
- Contact Ron Schwartz of the MPCA at 651-757-2708, 800-657-3864 or ron.schwartz@state.mn.us.