

Lake Pepin TMDL Forum
June 4th, 2009
Red Wing, Minnesota
Opening Remarks

Greetings,

My job today is to welcome you and set the table for today's events. So – welcome everyone to today's Lake Pepin Forum. Thank you all for joining us.

Hats off to our partners: the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Army Corps of Engineers, project consultants & contractors, our friends from Wisconsin, and all of the stakeholders who have joined us in this journey.

You and I are entrusted with a national treasure, the Mississippi River, and the decisions we make about this river will affect the lives and futures of millions of people.

Our work will be judged not in a matter of weeks or even years, but through a lens of history. If we are wise, future generations will benefit. If we are unwise, future generations will suffer. It is incumbent upon us to be wise.

Wise decisions, for us, will result in the achievement of a shared vision. A river that re-takes its rightful place as a national treasure. A river that is fishable and swimmable again. A river that inspires us to reconnect with nature. In short – a river that we can be proud of.

For me, I can tell you that my daughter turned 10 years old on Saturday. I recall that on my tenth birthday, I celebrated by going swimming with my father and grandfather in the river near our farm in Maine. I would like for my daughter to be able to swim with her children in the Mississippi River someday. Perhaps that would be a legacy worth leaving the next generation.

Challenges

In order to achieve the vision of a clean and healthy Lake Pepin watershed, we must overcome many obstacles. Achieving this vision will require us to innovate, make sacrifices, and learn to do things differently than we do today. These changes are going to touch almost every aspect of our lives.

Agriculture

We need to make changes in Agriculture. We'll need improved stream buffers and shoreland protection. We'll need to improve conservation tillage and nutrient and pesticide management. We'll need to embrace Norm Senjem's 'thin green line' – a thin layer of protected land that stands between agricultural pollutants and the water quality future generations deserve.

Energy

We'll need to make changes in our energy portfolio. Such as embracing the concept of 'energy tillage' - stream bank plantings of perennial cellulosic fuel sources that improve water quality, recreation and habitat while boosting local agricultural economies, and freeing us from our dependence on foreign oil.

Community Design

We'll need to make changes to the way we build our communities. New development will have to be designed to infiltrate water on site – stormwater runoff must become a thing of the past. While advances in municipal practices, Minimum Impact Design Standards (MIDS) and other reforms are already under way, we've got much more work to do.

Transportation

This TMDL will call on us to make changes in our transportation systems. We've got multiple parking spaces in America for every single car we own, and in many urban areas more public space is devoted to road right of way than any other land use. And it's all impervious.

We're going to have to change the way we build transportation and transit infrastructure, and start to design communities that mitigate impervious surface area and help us prevent stormwater pollution before it starts.

It's also important to remember that the changes we'll need to make go beyond creating new rules, policies and practices. There are two areas where we can make choices that protect water resources right now.

At Home

Firstly, we can make new choices at home. While many of us here today represent agencies, watershed districts, municipalities or other organizations, we're also all residents of Minnesota and Wisconsin. We've got to be willing to make changes in our own lives.

As residents, we are all going to have to learn to manage stormwater at home – with rain gardens, rain barrels, green roofs, native grasses, smaller lot footprints, lake and stream setbacks. Lawn to the lake must become a thing of the past.

Enforcement

Secondly, we're going to need to enforce existing laws as well. Shoreland ordinances, construction site erosion control, and illicit discharge detection and elimination will be essential to the achievement of a cleaner and a healthier Lake Pepin watershed.

Implementation

And all of this has to happen with two things in mind. First, we must remember that without dramatic improvement in water quality in the Minnesota River, it simply won't matter what we do elsewhere in the watershed.

Also, we must build our implementation plan on a three-legged stool of enforcement, incentives and education. We must enforce rules and regulations that allow us to achieve pollution reductions. We must provide incentives that induce actions that protect our water resources. And we must provide the educational resources that allow people in Minnesota and Wisconsin to take action to improve water quality in their own lives.

Two Questions

I have been struck by something else throughout the development of this TMDL. It's come to the surface at almost every meeting and discussion. There seems to be a pair of questions that permeate everything we've done together.

The first question is: “Can we do this?” Can we actually achieve the goals of this TMDL? Can we really succeed where others have failed to clean up our State’s waters?

The second question is: “Is it worth it?” Are the sacrifices and changes we’re all going to have to make really worth it? Is Lake Pepin really worth it?

Question 1 - Principles for Success

I’ll leave the second question aside for a moment. For the first question, the question of whether we’ll be able to achieve a vision of a clean and healthy Lake Pepin watershed - no one person can give us that answer. But I will offer some principles that I hope can help us reach a successful outcome.

1. Participation: No one can get there alone. We all have to go together. The truth is that our water needs our help. You don’t have to love it. You don’t even have to like it. But this train is leaving the station. Everyone’s got to get on board. Those who say that it just can’t be done cannot be allowed to interrupt those of use who are doing it. We’ve all got to take action.
2. Innovation: EPA Administrator Jackson spoke to the Chesapeake Executive Council Meeting last month. What she told that group, a group that is facing challenges even greater than our own, was this:

“Putting more money into the same infrastructure and the same programs is not going to get us where we need to be. If we’re going to lead the way, it’s going to take creativity, innovation and foresight.”

Achieving our vision means that we are going to have to do things differently. We can’t be afraid of that. We are going to have to innovate.

3. Cooperation. We must commit to turn to each other, not on each other. Achieving our shared vision for a clean and healthy river will ask each of us to reach out and work with one another, even, at times, beyond our comfort zones. Even if they’re from Wisconsin! It’s our very own two-state solution! Kidding aside, we must remember that no one of us can get there alone; we’re going to have to work together.
4. Accountability. We could fill stadiums with pages and pages of unfulfilled plans and unfunded solutions to our greatest challenges. Our waters are too important to let our work live on a shelf or die out from a lack of funding. And to achieve our vision we must have two kinds of accountability:
 - i. We must hold each other accountable. That means that this TMDL must have direct, achievable, and measurable outcomes.
 - ii. We must hold ourselves accountable. It’s always easy to point the finger. It’s a lot harder to do that when we’re looking in the mirror.

The solutions to our challenges will require us to not only hold each other accountable, but to hold ourselves accountable for taking action that protects and preserves this resource. We are all a part of the problem, which means that we must all be a part of the solution.

Question 2 – The Worth of Water

The second question before us is: “Is it worth it?” Are the sacrifices we’ll have to make, the challenges we’ll all have to face – are they worth it?

I began my remarks by saying that we’ll be judged through the lens of history. History can help guide us now. Like us, this question was asked a generation ago when the Clean Water Act was first passed into law.

You may recall that the 1972 Clean Water Act passed Congress, was vetoed by President Nixon, and then sent back to Congress for passage. Prior to that final vote, Senator Muskie stood before the Senate and the Nation and made his call for passage of the bill. The Senator asked this question in a similar way – he asked if the nation could afford clean water. He asked:

“Can we afford clean water? Can we afford rivers and lakes and streams and oceans which continue to make life possible on this planet? Can we afford life itself? Those questions were never asked as we destroyed the waters of our nation, and they deserve no answers as we finally move to restore and renew them. Those questions answer themselves.”

Senator Muskie

The question of whether or not this is worth it – that is a question that deserves no answer now. This is a national treasure, a vital natural resource, and the question of whether or not it is worth protecting answers itself.

We know how to do this. We know the science. We’ve got 22 years of data to point us in the right direction. We’ve got some of the best water management experts in the world working with us on this project. We’ve got the broad support of the people of Minnesota and Wisconsin. We’ve got unprecedented new funding sources to invest in implementation. And we’ve got an opportunity to make a difference for this lake and this watershed for generations to come.

With that in mind, I thank you all once again for joining us today – and now I will welcome back Norm Senjem to kick off the rest of the day’s activities.

Thank you.

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