



## Give communities some regulatory certainty

Approve a creative strategy that can remove regulatory uncertainty for wastewater treatment plants.

### What's the issue?

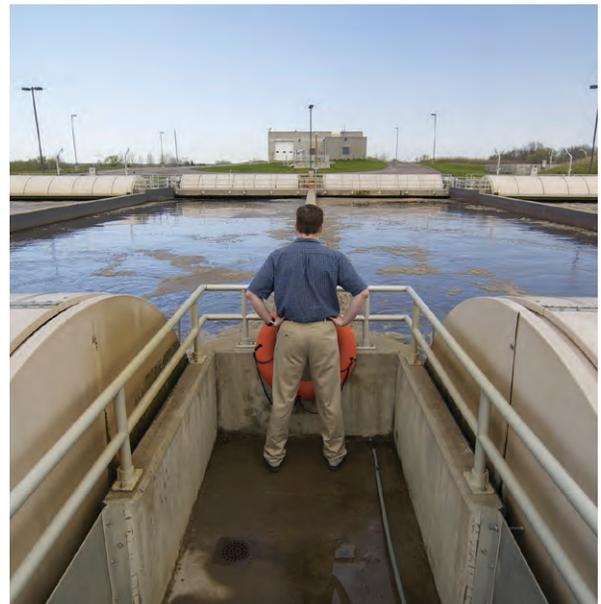
Communities around the state are concerned about the cost of replacing old wastewater infrastructure and upgrading treatment processes to meet new water quality standards. New requirements that require wastewater facilities to reduce phosphorus in their discharges — and anticipated new nitrogen-reduction requirements — may necessitate new wastewater systems in some communities. At the same time, reducing the amount of phosphorus and nitrogen leaving wastewater treatment plants is necessary to achieve water quality goals for Minnesota lakes, rivers, and streams, including preventing harmful algal blooms and protecting aquatic life.

### What local officials are saying

In the 2015 Water Infrastructure Listening Sessions, many attendees expressed concerns about the cost of replacing old water infrastructure and upgrading the level of treatment to meet new water quality standards. One prominent theme was a desire for more certainty about the timing of new water quality standards, particularly standards that are likely to require facility upgrades, and how new standards would be enforced in facility permits.

### What we're proposing

In response to listening session comments, a proposed, voluntary option — part of the Governor's Community Water Infrastructure bonding investment package — could provide up to 20 years of regulatory certainty for wastewater treatment facilities that are willing to design, construct, and fully operate a biological nutrient removal (BNR) treatment system. BNR systems remove both phosphorous and nitrogen, and are considered the best available technology for wastewater treatment. Indeed, BNR is the only known cost-effective wastewater removal technology for nitrogen.



City of Buffalo Wastewater Treatment Facility

The proposal would provide regulatory certainty for facilities that use public funds for BNR installation to meet and exceed existing water quality standards. Once the BNR system is in place, the facility would not be required to comply with any new phosphorous or nitrogen limits, beyond those in their discharge permit, for the estimated useful life of new BNR system. The proposal is linked to a bonding request for water infrastructure grants, and is intended to incentivize facility upgrades to BNR systems.

## How will it help

Communities that volunteer to participate by installing BNR systems would no longer have to speculate what future nitrogen water quality standards might mean for them. Rather than needing to upgrade to meet phosphorus limits now and potentially upgrade again to meet nitrogen limits in five or ten years, communities that install a BNR system would comprehensively address all nutrients for up to 20 years and obtain regulatory certainty. Over time, communities could also save money by reducing both energy usage and the purchase of chemicals for phosphorus removal.

Water quality in Minnesota lakes and rivers would also benefit from more treatment plants converting to the best available technology. Notably, we could get a jump on reducing nitrogen in state waters, years ahead of when we can institute a new nitrogen standard. And because Minnesota is home to the headwaters of the Mississippi River, the Great Lakes, and the Red River of the North, the impact of reducing phosphorus and nitrogen in the state will be felt in all our downstream waters, including the Hudson Bay, the Gulf of Mexico, and all the Great Lakes.

## Contact

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