

## Addressing mercury in the St. Louis River Watershed

More work is needed to reduce mercury in fish tissue

### Challenge

The St. Louis and Cloquet Rivers are home to high mercury concentrations. Mercury is a neurotoxin. Exposure can damage the brain and central nervous system. Children and fetuses are most vulnerable because their nervous systems are still developing. Mercury bio-accumulates up the food chain in fish tissue. Humans eat the larger fish that have higher mercury levels.

Under state and federal law, the MPCA works with partners to address mercury contamination of lakes and streams. When mercury levels exceed water quality standards, lakes and streams are put on the state's impaired waters list. Under the federal Clean Water Act, an impaired water requires a total maximum daily load (TMDL) study. A TMDL study uses all available information to determine how much of a specific pollutant, in this case mercury, the water body can receive and still meet the water quality standard.



### Proposal

The Governor recommends a one-time appropriation of \$350,000 in FY 2022 from the Environmental Fund to conduct water quality modeling needed to complete the St. Louis River Mercury Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study. Preliminary work for this study has already been done.

The project is expected to begin in FY 2022 and continue for three years. The \$350,000 requested will be used in FY22 to contract for one-time modeling expertise and resources to fill critical technical gaps and advance the TMDL. After this initial work is completed, remaining work will be completed with existing resources. The MPCA will engage citizens and stakeholders and will partner with local governments, Tribal governments, Wisconsin DNR and US EPA Region 5 to complete this work.

Due to community and Tribal interests and because of the quantity of mercury data already acquired in this watershed, the MPCA is focusing on the St. Louis River watershed, as opposed to other waters in Minnesota. . The MPCA will leverage and collaborate with other water quality work underway in watershed, including local planning efforts. The results of a completed TMDL process will help local governments effectively integrate local actions and projects that are important for reducing mercury pollution.

## Why it's important

Reducing mercury in fish tissue will benefit everyone who consumes fish caught in the waterbodies of the St. Louis River watershed. Children and those who consume higher levels of fish will benefit the most. This proposal will lead to watershed planning and management that can be targeted towards reduction of mercury levels in fish tissue. This is significant because fish consumption is generally higher among members of Minnesota's Tribal Nations. These Tribal Nations have treaty fishing rights in the St. Louis River.



## For more information

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