

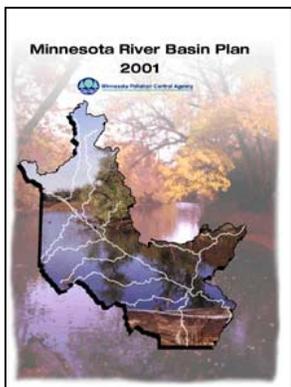


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Control  
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## Minnesota River Basin Plan

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# Minnesota River Basin Plan

Water Quality/Basins #3.01 April 2002

The Minnesota River Basin Plan addresses issues, sets goals, and lists strategies to clean up one of the nation's most polluted rivers. Runoff from the 16,000-square-mile basin in southern Minnesota, northern Iowa and eastern South Dakota carries pollutants including excess nutrients, bacteria, and sediment. This pollutes the rivers and lakes of the Minnesota River Basin and ultimately contributes to hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico. The overall goal of the basin plan is *"To restore, protect and maintain the water quality, bio-diversity and the natural beauty of the Minnesota River."*

In the late 1980s the Minnesota River attracted a lot of attention. Algal blooms, sediment, and unhealthy fish populations troubled its murky waters. In 1992 Governor Arne Carlson issued his famous proclamation of "making the Minnesota River fishable and swimmable in ten years." Consequently, scientists from agencies and organizations examined the issues. They identified many of the problems that prevent the waters in this Basin from supporting aquatic life and recreation.

The past ten years have allowed scientists time to define the problems, time for citizens' groups such as the Minnesota River Citizen's Advisory Committee and the Minnesota River Ag Team to put forth a vision, and time for local efforts to develop a watershed management infrastructure. But these efforts alone have not produced a river safe for recreation or diverse fish populations. Ten years is not enough time to solve an environmental issue as complex as the polluted Minnesota River. This basin plan is important because it takes the science and the many efforts that have been



established and offers strategies to improve water quality in the Minnesota River Basin.

The Minnesota River Basin Plan is divided into four sections:

- Recognize and address threats to Minnesota's environment.
- Prevent, limit, and clean up pollution.
- Improve government services and collaboration.
- Provide responsive services to citizens and stakeholders.

Each section includes a list of action strategies to achieve the goals.

## BASIN PLAN GOALS

**Dissolved oxygen** - Ensure that dissolved oxygen concentrations in surface waters throughout the basin are adequate to fully support designated beneficial uses.

**Nutrients - Phosphorus** - Ensure phosphorus concentrations are low enough to fully support aesthetic (recreational use) and aquatic life goals. **Nitrogen** - Protect human health and the environment from the effects of excessive concentrations of nitrate-nitrogen.

**Sediment** - Ensure that turbidity and total suspended solids levels are low enough to fully support aesthetic (recreational use) and aquatic life goals.





*GOALS CONTINUED*

**Toxics** - Protect human health and aquatic life from the effects of toxic substances.

**Bacteria** - Reduce the potential for water-borne disease transmission.

**Biology** - Improve the health of aquatic communities. Increase bio-diversity in natural systems.

**Basin Plan Priorities**

**1. Maintain progress achieved in improving water quality.**

Significant strides have been made in improving water quality since the 1970s. Most pollution problems concerning leaking storage tanks, leaking landfills, and sewage in rivers have been cleaned up. The MPCA intends to maintain this progress through efficient delivery of existing programs in these areas.

**2. Focus efforts on streams not meeting the designated uses of aquatic life and recreation.**

Most of the strategies of this plan are directed here. Although water quality has improved since the 1970s, in many locations it still does not support the uses of aquatic life and recreation. Efforts will be focused on these non-supporting streams and lakes in the Minnesota River Basin, attempting to move them toward supporting their uses.

**3. Assist local organizations in solving water quality problems important in their watershed.**

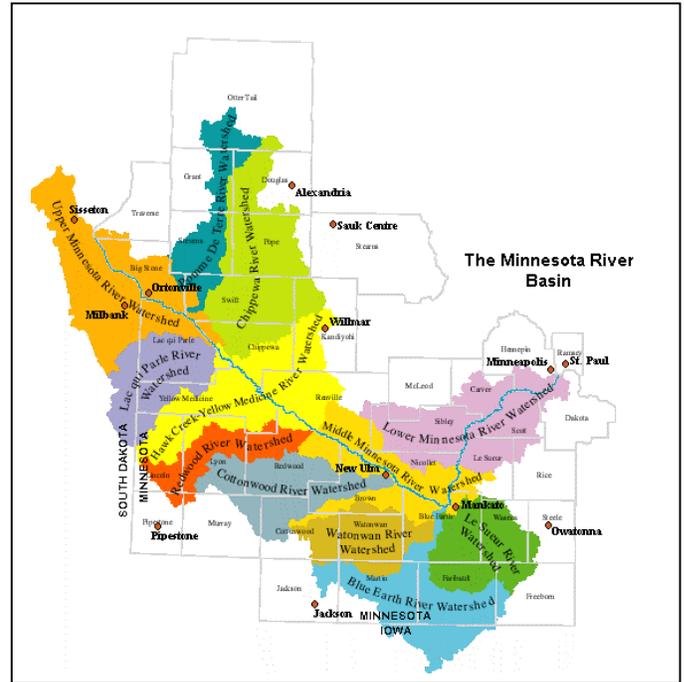
Watershed projects, local water plans, and other efforts often identify issues important to local communities. In addition to the two priorities emphasized above, the MPCA also considers the concerns of local organizations important.

**Basin Management Approach**

The Minnesota River Basin Plan uses basin management, a geographically based approach to water quality protection and restoration built around the focus on water. Rather than starting from categories of pollution sources or specific facilities, basin management focuses on the relationship of water resources with land management and its communities. The MPCA is using this approach to focus on the state's major river basins to help it:

- 1) better identify water quality problems and focus resources on them;
- 2) work with communities to establish shared goals and priorities;
- and 3) develop effective pollutant-reduction strategies.

**Minnesota River Basin**



The basin management approach is meant to complement the programs that already exist. It is an extension and combination of the many current efforts in identifying and correcting the various pollution problems that affect the Minnesota River.

**THE NEXT TEN YEARS**

The path to a cleaner Minnesota River does not end with the completion of this plan. By implementing this plan, we will find some of the goals and strategies were appropriate while others need to be improved. In the coming years, attention in the Minnesota River Basin will move toward implementation. Local planning and changes in practices will set the pace. State government will continue to provide assistance but will be looking toward local government and watershed teams for leadership.

**More information on the Minnesota River and the basin plan can be found on the Internet at [www.pca.state.mn.us/water/basins/mnriver](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/basins/mnriver), or by calling Larry Gunderson at 651-297-3825.**