



**Minnesota Pollution
Control Agency**

520 Lafayette Road North
St. Paul, MN 55155-4194

Notice of Availability and Request for Comments on the Draft Big Fork River

Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS)
Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)

General information

Public comment period begins: May 30, 2017

Public comment period ends: 4:30 p.m. on June 29, 2017

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Draft reports for the Big Fork River WRAPS are available for review on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) draft/public noticed TMDL and WRAPS webpage at <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/tmdl/tmdl-draft.html> or at the MPCA office address listed under the MPCA contact person. Following the comments, the MPCA will revise the report(s) and submit the TMDL to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for approval. Comments, petitions, and other requests must be received at the MPCA in writing on or before the public comment period end date and time identified above.

Watershed: 09030006 Big Fork River Major Watershed

Description of the Big Fork River WRAPS

Required by the federal Clean Water Act, a TMDL is a scientific study, conducted on waters assessed to be impaired, that calculates the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive and still meet water quality standards for that pollutant. It is a process that identifies all the sources of the pollutant causing an impairment and quantifies necessary reductions among them.

The WRAPS report is required by the state Clean Water Legacy Act and uses TMDL and other information to develop strategies for addressing point and nonpoint pollution sources. The objective is to restore impaired waters and protect unimpaired waters from degradation. This report is a collaboration among the MPCA, other state agencies, local government partners, and other stakeholders.

The Big Fork River Watershed (Big Fork), located in north-central Minnesota, as part of the Rainy River - Lake of the Woods Basin covers 2,073 square miles, divided between Itasca (49%) and Koochiching Counties (51%). The Big Fork is the second largest U.S. tributary, in terms of size, in the Rainy River- Lake of the Woods system. The largest tributary to the Big Fork is the Sturgeon River, which empties into the Big Fork in the Northwestern portion of the watershed.

The Big Fork River Watershed is located in an isolated part of the state with little land disturbances and includes municipalities Bigfork (population 445), Big Falls (population 232), Effie (population 125), Mizpah (population 56), and Squaw Lake (population 108). There are many unincorporated communities in the Big Fork River Watershed that have populations as large as or larger than the incorporated communities in the watershed. There is also a large seasonal flux of community members based upon time of year, summer being busiest. The river is an outstanding recreational resource offering fishing and canoeing opportunities for people seeking a northern Minnesota wilderness experience.

The Big Fork River Watershed is divided between two ecoregions; Northern Lakes and Forests and Northern Minnesota Wetlands. The southern portion of the watershed is primarily dominated by mixed forest. The northern portion is woody wetlands and peat bogs. The Big Fork River starts at Dora Lake and meanders north 165 miles to the Rainy River at the Minnesota/Ontario border.

Procedure for public participation

As stated in Minn. R. chs. 7000 and 7001, there are four formal procedures for public participation in the MPCA's consideration of this matter. Interested persons may:

- (1) Submit written comments on the draft reports.
- (2) Petition the MPCA to hold a public informational meeting.
- (3) Petition the MPCA to hold a contested case hearing.

Submitting written comments

To submit comments or petitions to the MPCA through the mail or email must state:

- (1) Your interest in the draft TMDL or WRAPS reports.
- (2) The action you wish the MPCA to take, including specific references to the section of the draft report(s) you believe should be changed. It is important to clearly specify which of the two reports the comments pertain to since the reports will proceed along separate tracks for final approval.
- (3) The reasons supporting your position, stated with sufficient specificity as to allow the MPCA to investigate the merits of the position.

Public informational meeting

A public informational meeting is an informal meeting during which interested persons can ask questions concerning the proposed project. The MPCA staff will be present to provide information. If an interested person would like the MPCA to hold a public informational meeting, the person should include all information identified above and in addition include a statement of the reasons the person desires the MPCA to hold a public informational meeting and the issues that the person would like the agency to address at the public informational meeting.

Contested case hearing

A contested case hearing is a formal proceeding before an administrative law judge empowered to advise the MPCA regarding issues of fact. As described in Minn. R. 7000.1800, persons who submit petitions for a contested case hearing must also state the issues they propose to address in a contested case hearing, the specific relief requested or resolution of the matter, and the reasons (which may be in the form of proposed findings) supporting an MPCA decision to hold a contested case hearing. Failure to comply with these rules exactly may result in a denial of the request. To the extent known, the petitioner may also submit a list of prospective witnesses to be called at a hearing, a proposed list of publications, references, or studies to be introduced at a hearing and the approximate time required for the petitioner to present the matter at a hearing. The decision whether to hold a contested case hearing will be made under Minn. R. 7000.1900.