

Surface Water Planning

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Council leads regional water protection effort

Good, plentiful water is perhaps this region's greatest natural resource. It is the foundation of the region's economy and an essential part of the region's quality of life.

But the quality of some of the region's lakes, streams and rivers is threatened by pollution. Pollution of area waters comes from both point (specific) sources, like an industrial pipe, and from nonpoint (diffuse) sources, like stormwater runoff from agricultural land and urban parking lots.

A variety of federal, state, regional and local agencies are working to prevent and clean up pollution of the region's waterways. The Metropolitan Council plays several roles in these efforts.

Under state law, the Council is required to prepare a comprehensive development guide for the seven-county metropolitan area. The *Water Resources Management Policy Plan* is one chapter of that guide. The plan details principles and strategies for:

- 1) Stewardship of the region's water supply.

- 2) Providing wastewater services to the region.
- 3) Protecting the quality of area water resources.

This third responsibility is the focus of this fact sheet.

Watersheds are planning focus

The Council focuses on watersheds in its efforts to help reduce both point- and nonpoint-source pollution. The Council has undertaken significant watershed and river modeling projects to better manage water quality and provide local agencies guidance as they develop plans for water resource management.

For example, the Council is leading a cooperative effort to develop a water-quality model of the lower 40 miles of the Minnesota River. The river is plagued by low oxygen and high turbidity (suspended particles).

Five agencies have joined the Council as sponsors, and many local partners are involved. The goal is to build an assessment tool for water quality in the metro-area reach of the river. The model will be used to set appropriate pollutant limits for discharges from point sources

and establish goals for reducing pollutant loads from watersheds.

Under state law, the Council reviews and comments on the watershed plans prepared by watershed management organizations (WMOs) as well as local water management plans prepared by local units of government as a component of their local comprehensive plans. In addition, the Council provides guidance and technical assistance to counties, cities, and towns on issues relating to water resources.

Council monitors water quality

The federal Clean Water Act requires the State of Minnesota to monitor the water quality of the lakes, rivers and streams and then to assess the condition of these water bodies.

Once the water bodies are assessed, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) must prepare a list of water bodies not meeting state water quality standards and not meeting their designated beneficial use (such as aquatic life, recreation and drinking water). This list becomes the official impaired waters list.

State law requires the Council to assess water quality in the seven-county metro area, particularly for waters that have been or have a high potential to be impacted by nonpoint-source pollution. The Council supports an extensive network of water quality monitoring stations on the region's rivers, streams and lakes. This data is used by the MPCA to help determine impairment of waters.

Once a water body is listed as impaired, a study called a total maximum daily load, or TMDL study, must be conducted for each pollutant that causes a water body to fail to meet its designated use and associated state water quality standards.

The result of a TMDL study is a written plan that analyzes the problem and determines how water quality standards can be met in the future. The TMDL study establishes the maximum amount of a pollutant that a lake, river stream or wetland can receive and still meet water quality standards for the designated use.

The Council works with local partners to help them develop

the required TMDL study for impaired waters in their area. As of April 2009, the Council was working with two counties to help them complete TMDLs for impaired streams.

Council promotes best management practices

The Council engages in a continuous program of research and study concerning the control and prevention of water pollution. This research includes performance studies of various best management practices (BMPs) for storm-water treatment.

The Council published The Urban Small Sites BMP Manual to assist municipalities and WMOs in the region to guide development and redevelopment. The manual includes detailed information on 40 BMPs that are aimed at managing stormwater pollution for small urban sites in a cold-climate setting. The goal of the manual is to support the principles of accommodating growth while preserving the environment.

For more information

To learn more, go to [the water planning page on the Council's website](#).

- Related fact sheets:
 - [Environmental Services](#)
 - [Water Supply Master Planning](#)
 - [Wastewater Services](#)
 - [Inflow and Infiltration](#)

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