

Frequently Asked Questions about the Nolte EAW

What is included with the proposed Nolte project?

The project proposes to convert 303 acres of formerly privately owned and managed timberland to irrigated agriculture for livestock grazing and commodity/staple crop production. The land is currently used as non-irrigated crop and livestock grazing land. The conversion would consist of the removal of remaining standing timber and associated stumps, land cultivation and the operation of three groundwater-supplied center pivot irrigation systems.

Why did the DNR order an EAW for the Nolte project?

The DNR received a citizen petition requesting the EAW. The petition had over 100 signatures and expressed concerns over continued potato field expansion, chemical applications and water appropriations in the Pineland Sands Area. As required, we considered the petition's supporting documents and determined the Nolte project may have the potential for significant cumulative environmental effects associated with nitrate contamination of groundwater. As a result, DNR ordered an EAW. The map on page 2 includes project elements and groundwater data used in the decision.

What information does the EAW include?

All EAWs contain descriptions of how a proposed project could potentially impact a variety of resources. They contain responses to 19 required questions, including, but not limited to: potential impacts related to water, geology, air, sensitive plant or animal species, land use, or transportation. They also include a cumulative potential effects analysis.

What are cumulative potential effects?

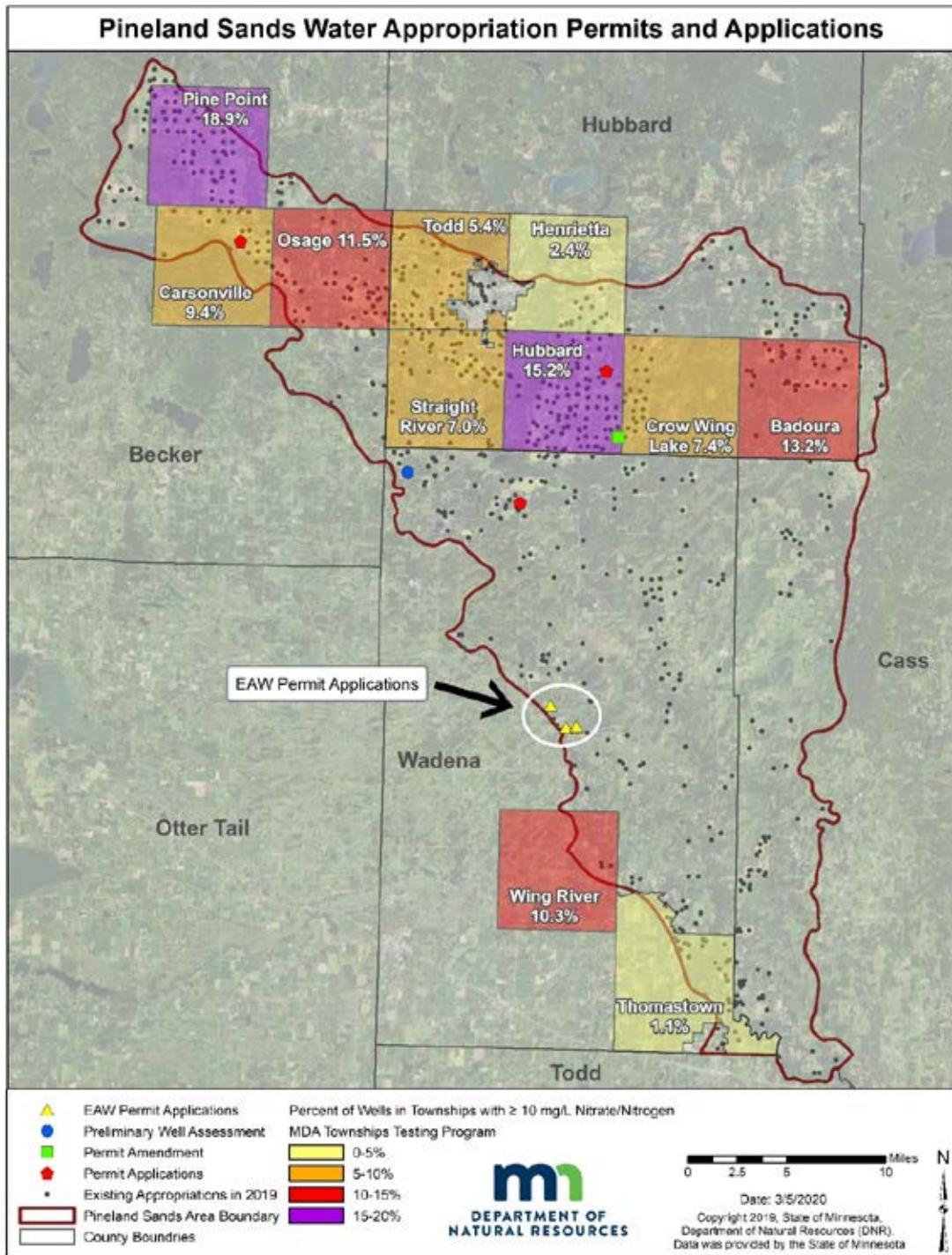
A Cumulative Potential Effects analysis is required as part of every environmental review (EAW and EIS). The analysis is defined by [Minnesota Rules](#) and involves a listing of the proposed project's environmental effects, and its contribution to the environmental effects that are currently present in the area of the project. Future projects can also be considered in this analysis if those future projects are in the process of being permitted or built. For the Nolte EAW, DNR engaged internal experts, as well as experts with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Department of Agriculture (MDA) and Department of Health (MDH) to determine the appropriate scope of this assessment.

What are the next steps of the EAW process?

DNR published the Nolte EAW on April 6, 2020. This started a 30-day public comment period, ending on May 6, 2020. On May 7, DNR will start the final step in the EAW process, which is to respond to all substantive comments received on the EAW and determine whether the proposed project has the potential for significant environmental effects. If DNR determines "yes", the Nolte project has the potential for significant environmental effects, another process starts involving preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). If DNR determines "no", the Nolte project does not have the potential for significant environmental effects, the environmental review process is complete. DNR intends to make this decision in June.

When could the Nolte project start?

The proposed project cannot start irrigating until two successive conditions are met: 1) environmental review is complete (EAW and/or EIS); and 2) the Nolte's obtain water appropriation permits from the DNR.



What is the broad concern around the Pineland Sands Area?

The DNR acknowledges that there is a larger regional area where the conversion of forested areas to irrigated agriculture is occurring, and that some members of the public are concerned about this larger geographic area. In order to provide information on this broader regional area the DNR has included companion information (EAW Attachment E) to the Nolte EAW that is not part of determining the potential significant effects of the Nolte project, but rather to acknowledge the changing landscape and provide information to assist in additional efforts to better understand and ensure sustainability of these changes.