

DNR Introduces Kimley Horn and Associates, Inc, Project Engineer

Sustainable Use of Groundwater in the Little Rock Creek Area

November 19, 2024

Background

Groundwater use is vital to the people and economy in the Little Rock Creek Area. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wants individuals, communities, and businesses to continue using groundwater. However, the DNR can issue permits for groundwater use only if the use is sustainable as defined by Minnesota statute.

The DNR technical analysis indicates that a [direct relationship of groundwater and surface water exists](#) in the area around Little Rock Creek and that current amounts of groundwater use are having a [negative impact on the instream ecosystem](#) of Little Rock Creek. This means that the existing groundwater use is not sustainable as described in Minn. Statute [103G.287, Subd. 5. Sustainability Standard](#).

The [technical analysis also defines a “zone of influence”](#) that includes 95 authorized irrigation permits (106 wells) of varying quantities; 17 of those permits were issued as “time limited” and were set to expire December 31, 2022. These limited permits have been extended to December 31, 2025.

Next Stakeholder Meeting

When: February 13, 2025; 3 PM to 5 PM

Where: Old Village Hall, Rice Minnesota

What's new

- The DNR hosted a stakeholder meeting in the City of Rice on November 19, 2024. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce Kimley Horn and Associates, Inc, an engineering firm contracted by the DNR. Kimley Horn and Associates described the work they will do to gather and analyze information sufficient to evaluate all solutions proposed by irrigators and the DNR and to prepare 30% design cost estimates no later than June 30, 2025.
- The DNR will extend the time limited permits through 2027. This will provide time for a plan to be developed and implementation to begin. Permits will be extended as long as progress is being made.
- The Kimley Horn team discussed goals for the next 6 months and provided background working with similar projects.
- The Kimley Horn team described their experience with other projects that have similar challenges and issues to Little Rock Creek.
- Kimley Horn and Associates reviewed of each of the solutions that had previously been identified by stakeholders and the DNR.

- Kimley Horn described the potential solutions including Stream Augmentation, Replacement of some irrigation wells inside the zone of influence with water sourced from outside the Zone of Influence, water conservation, groundwater recharge, and do nothing. Each included a preliminary description of that option would do, and challenges associated with each option. The presentation prepared by Kimley Horn with this information can be found here: [Kimley Horn Stakeholder Meeting Presentation](#)
- Kimley Horn held small groups discussion and asked specific questions about the project to stakeholders. Feedback from each group is being reviewed by the Kimley Horn team. A summary of the comments provided by Kimley Horn can be found here: [Kimley Horn Stakeholder Meeting Summary](#)

In response to a comment regarding the Commissioners order, DNR explained that comments received for the [Commissioners Order issued April 22, 2024](#) were grouped with similar comments and those responses are in the public documents. Those comments can be found in the DNR [Response to Stakeholder Comments](#) document, which can be found on the [Little Rock Creek Website](#).

What's next

Kimley Horn and Associates will hold a Stakeholder Meeting on February 13, 2025 in Rice. Kimley Horn will be sharing more information on the project solutions based on input received from stakeholders.

Kimley Horn will develop information to guide stakeholders development of a plan to resolve the Water Use Conflict in the Little Rock Creek Area. The stakeholder plan will be presented to DNR for approval. DNR will review the plan to ensure that the proposal will meet the goals of resolving the water use conflict. An approved plan will need to reduce streamflow diversion from Little Rock Creek as outlined in the commissioner's order.

What's ahead

2025 Collaborate on solutions with permitted water users within the zone of influence.

- The DNR will provide technical assistance to support Kimley Horn and water users in developing a proposal to assure protected flow and resolve the water use conflict.
- DNR will extend Water Appropriation Permits that are presently set to expire in Dec. 2025 to expire in Dec. 2027 to allow proposed solutions to be implemented.
- DNR will review the proposed solution developed by Kimley Horn and Stakeholders
- DNR will determine if the plan meets the goals of reducing impacts to Little Rock Creek.
- DNR will approve or reject the plan based on the requirements outlined in the commissioner's order.
- Keep stakeholders informed and involved throughout the process.

2027 or before DNR Commissioner considers proposal by water users.

- notify all permittees of an approved plan and intention to modify permits within the zone of influence according to the plan.
 - Develop findings of fact to modify permits.
 - Hold public – meeting on permit modifications.
- d. Modify permits ([6115.0750, Subp. 5. B.](#)) within the zone of influence. Permittee may demand a hearing within 30 days of notice to modify permit