

Kimley-Horn provides initial solutions to stakeholders

DNR facilitating sustainable groundwater use in the Little Rock Creek Area

March 13, 2025

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: Fall 2025

Where: To be determined (likely in Rice, MN)

What's new

- Kimley-Horn, in partnership with the DNR, hosted a stakeholder meeting in the city of Rice on March 13, 2025. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss several potential solutions to the Little Rock Creek Water use conflict.
- Randy Klaphake, a resident in Little Rock Creek, presented his assessment of beaver dams as a potential solution. The information Randy shared can be found here: [IAM Little Rock Creek Webpage](#).
- The Kimley-Horn team has a goal of late spring 2025 to complete an initial assessment of the solutions with cost estimates.
- Kimley-Horn is continuing to investigate additional solutions, including using beaver dams/diversions as potential contributors to solving the water use conflict.
- Kimley-Horn will also continue looking at options to enhance water conservation in the Little Rock Creek area. Any water conservation efforts that are directly part of a water use conflict solution will require a reduction in authorized permit volume.

- Kimley-Horn conducted a survey of landowners to identify what was desired in a final plan. The results suggest:
 - Most respondents want a high level of certainty in regulatory compliance.
 - Most respondents do not consider a fast timeline to be an important piece of the resolution.
 - Most respondents want a low to no cost option to be available to individual landowners.
 - Most respondents prefer individual control over implementing solutions.
- The second part of the Kimley-Horn survey asked respondents to rank whether specific solutions should be further investigated. The results suggest:
 - Respondents slightly lean towards not further investigating land use conversion.
 - Respondents have a strong desire to further investigate beaver dams as a solution.
 - Similar numbers of respondents expressed interest and no interest in further investigating crop rotation changes, indicating a mixed response
 - Some respondents expressed interest in further pursuing more aggressive water conservation efforts.
- The Kimley-Horn team described why two solutions, stream augmentation by direct pipe and deepening/shallowing wells, were not viable solutions to solve the water use conflict.
- Kimley-Horn reviewed solutions to the Little Rock Creek water use conflict which include enhanced recharge using infiltration zones, enhanced recharge using impoundments, and replacement of wells through more distant conveyance systems.
- Kimley-Horn and the DNR will hold off on another public meeting and final engineering assessment until Fall 2025, so public meetings do not interfere with the agricultural season.

What's next

Kimley-Horn has provided a follow up questionnaire to the irrigators in Little Rock Creek, asking questions similar to those asked at the March 13 meeting. Please contact lrcaprojectinfo@kimley-horn.com if you need this link.

Kimley-Horn is hosting weekly calls with stakeholders, for those interested. Please contact lrcaprojectinfo@kimley-horn.com for information about these calls.

Kimley-Horn will produce a draft of their evaluations by May 2025, but will hold off on finalizing the report until later in the year and pending further stakeholder input.

Kimley-Horn will hold a stakeholder meeting after the conclusion of the agricultural season. This will be scheduled for Fall 2025.

Kimley-Horn will continue to gather information to guide stakeholders' development of a plan to resolve the water use conflict in the Little Rock Creek Area. The stakeholder plan will need to be presented to the DNR commissioner for approval. The DNR will review the plan, to ensure that the proposal will meet the goals of resolving the water use conflict. An approved plan must demonstrate a sufficient reduction in streamflow

diversion as described in the commissioner's order.

What's ahead

2025 to 2027: Collaborate on solutions with permitted water users within the zone of influence.

- a. 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.
1. The DNR will extend water appropriation permits that are currently set to expire in Dec. 2025 to expire in Dec. 2027, to allow a plan to be developed and approved.
- b. The DNR will review the proposed solution developed by Kimley-Horn and stakeholders.
- c. The DNR will determine whether the plan meets the goals of reducing impacts to Little Rock Creek.
- d. The DNR will approve or reject the plan based on the requirements outlined in the commissioner's order.
- e. The DNR will keep stakeholders informed and involved throughout the process.

2027 or before the DNR Commissioner considers proposal by water users.

2. The DNR will notify all permittees of an approved plan and intention to modify permits within the zone of influence according to the plan.
 - a. The DNR will develop findings of fact to modify permits.
3. The DNR will hold a public meeting about permit modifications.
- b. The DNR will 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