

Project Update: Bonanza Valley Project Advisory Team meeting – March 25

The Project Advisory Team for the Bonanza Valley Groundwater Management Area met Wednesday, March 25, at the Central Square Cultural and Civic Center in Glenwood.

Project Background: Groundwater is vital to Minnesota's health and prosperity. Groundwater use in the Bonanza Valley has increased 175 percent over the past 25 years. Increasing groundwater use increases the risk of overuse and contamination. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is establishing a Groundwater Management Area in the Bonanza Valley area in central Minnesota to ensure sustainable use of groundwater. The first step was to form a Project Advisory Team to advise the DNR's development of a plan. The purpose of the plan is to guide DNR actions in managing the appropriation and use of groundwater within the Groundwater Management Area over the next five years.

Agenda Topics

The team reviewed comments and proposed changes to Section 5 of the plan. DNR will solicit continued feedback on Sections 1-4 of the plan.

Meeting participants received a copy of the DNR actions in the plan (section 5) with the Project Advisory Team's comments and suggestions included. The DNR's response to the comments and suggestions were also included. The PAT also received the first four sections of the plan, which includes an introduction (section 1), the description of the Groundwater Management Area boundary (section 2), the description of the goals and objectives that will guide DNR action in the (section 3) and the status of the GWMA in terms of the objectives (section 4). Though review of both documents was on the agenda, the team decided to spend the meeting discussing Section 5.

Advisory Team Discussion

Jason Moeckel, DNR Section Manager led a discussion of Section 5 of the plan. A question and answer period included:

Q: The team supported the establishment of a robust Bonanza Valley web page, but wondered how it would be maintained?

A: The DNR has hired both a communication specialist and a web development specialist, a portion of both of their positions are dedicated to groundwater management areas.

Q: Will the DNR author / influence water quality recommendations like BMPs for nitrogen?

A: Water quality authorities already exist in other state agencies. The DNR's role will be to work with MDA / MDH and MPCA.

Q: Who will control content and enforcement in conservation plan requirements in water appropriation permits?

A: The DNR will work closely with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and others to work out these details.

Q: Does the DNR have enough funding for this?

A: For now, yes. Among other things, the DNR is investing in monitoring in the Bonanza Valley with the funds now available.

Q: Is there a written plan on how / what data to collect and compile and can the team be involved?

A: The draft plan describes the type of information we collect and the Advisory Team will be involved in the implementation of the plan over the 5-year plan and as recommendations are developed.

Q: Would the DNR be open to establishing a technical committee to help inform standards / thresholds?

A: Yes, we are open to exploring the idea.

Q: How will the DNR deal with the next drought?

A: Natural variation in water levels will happen through time. The DNR anticipates managing water in this range of natural variation. The DNR has also established a Statewide Drought Plan consistent with statute requirements under 103G.293. A statewide drought task force is also identified under this framework.

Moeckel then described two legislative initiatives that relate to groundwater. One would set up a fund to pay for well interference investigations. Another would shift all aquifer tests and monitoring wells that may be required for new water appropriation permit applications, to be paid for by the state. It is uncertain whether legislative action will be taken on these initiatives this session. **Update:** As of May 6 neither of these proposals was moving forward at the legislature.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Wednesday, June 3, 9:00 a.m. to noon, at the American Legion Club, 770 W State Highway 23 in Paynesville.

Contact Information

Questions about this project may be directed to Mark Hauck, DNR project manager at 320-223-7846 or at mark.hauck@state.mn.us. For more information on all Groundwater Management Areas, visit www.mndnr.gov/gwmp/index.html.