

DNR update for Bonanza Valley GWMA Project

Groundwater is vital to Minnesota's prosperity. Minnesota's use of groundwater has increased significantly over the last two decades. With increasing use, Minnesota runs the risk of overusing this very important resource.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has the responsibility to ensure that groundwater use remains sustainable. DNR is committed to using good science to make its groundwater permit decisions and to determine if water use in the Bonanza Valley is sustainable. DNR wants to inform and involve citizens as it manages this vital resource.

DNR has initiated a Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) project in the Bonanza Valley. The proposed project boundary extends from just south of Alexandria to the area around Paynesville and includes the cities of Paynesville, Brooten, Belgrade, Westport, Glenwood and Villard.

The Bonanza Valley GWMA project will produce a plan that will guide DNR groundwater management in the area.

DNR has formed a project advisory team (PAT) to provide advice and feedback as it develops the plan. The project advisory team includes farmers, permitted users, business people, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state agencies, and interested citizens. Project advisory team meetings are open to the public.

This update is a product of the Bonanza Valley Groundwater Management Area project. More information about the Bonanza Valley GWMA is available at www.mndnr.gov/gwmp/area-bv.html.

DNR holds Project Advisory Team meeting on June 25

The PAT met for the fifth time on Wednesday, June 25, at the Central Square Cultural & Civic Center, 105 2nd Ave. NE, Glenwood, MN. Nineteen members of the public also attended the meeting.

Topics discussed at this meeting were:

1. Update on upcoming changes to the GWMA schedule and PAT membership;
2. Improving information available for groundwater management decisions;
3. Audience perspectives and questions.

Below are highlights of these discussions.

1. Update on upcoming changes to the GWMA schedule and PAT membership;

The legislature made changes to the statute regarding groundwater management areas. One of the changes requires that a "majority of the advisory team members shall be public and private entities that currently hold water use permits for water appropriations from the affected water resources." DNR staff asked invited members of the public who had been attending meetings to submit their name and contact information to Project Manager, Mark Hauck. PAT members were also asked to consider other

individuals holding permits in the Bonanza Valley area (link to map) may be interested in offering advice to the Bonanza Valley Groundwater Management Area Plan as part of the Project Advisory Team.

The PAT was also informed that the schedule for completion of the Bonanza Valley Groundwater Management Area Plan may be extended by two months. This will give the public more time to review and comment on the plan.

2. Improving information available for groundwater management decisions;

DNR staff described locations of the 40 groundwater level monitoring wells in the Bonanza Valley, the basics of a watershed budget, information needed to make water permitting decisions and the large amount of water that is evaporated and is used by plants. PAT member Dan Langseth, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, described water quality monitoring activities of that agency in the Bonanza Valley area.

The project advisory team offered a range of ideas on improving information available for groundwater management decisions through small group discussions and feedback sheets. DNR will review and consider all advisory team ideas when drafting the Bonanza Valley GWMA plan. Below are a selection of ideas shared at the meeting.

Some of the Advisory Team ideas:

- Install more monitoring wells,
- Make water data available to water users so that they may plan their upcoming years' water use,
- Provide more 'real time' groundwater, water use, climate and sustainability thresholds,
- Consider all groundwater uses in the Bonanza Valley and their impacts,
- Develop a water budget that considers not only use, water levels and water quality, but also considers the human and natural systems that can be affected by water use,

3. Audience questions and perspectives:

Should wetlands, lakes and rivers be protected if nature affects them through drought?

Recommend that DNR expand their citizen monitoring efforts to include groundwater

Revise the water appropriation permit so the document is more clear and concise

Upcoming Project Meetings

July 23 – Project Advisory Team Meeting from 9 a.m. to noon at the American Legion Club, 770 W State Highway 23, Paynesville, MN. The public is welcome to attend. The Project Advisory Team will discuss how DNR will improve the management of groundwater appropriation permits.

Future Project Advisory Team meetings are tentatively scheduled for the following dates: Aug. 20, Sept. 24, Oct. 22 and Nov. 19. Individuals do not need to be on the Project Advisory Team to attend these meetings. Project Advisory Team meetings are open for the public to observe and time is available during the meeting to provide comments and ideas.

Contact information

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