

UPDATE: DNR HOLDS THIRD PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM MEETING

The Project Advisory Team (PAT) for the Straight River Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) met on Thursday, May 15, 2014 in Park Rapids.

Project Background: The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is establishing a Groundwater Management Area in the Park Rapids area to enhance its ability to make better decisions on groundwater appropriation permits. The DNR shares responsibility for managing groundwater resources with public sector partners, as well as with individuals and businesses that use groundwater. The DNR is responsible for permitting high volume groundwater users, for collecting information on groundwater resources, and for providing technical assistance that supports groundwater conservation.

AGENDA TOPICS:

Presentation on groundwater management Strategy 4—Improve compliance with groundwater appropriation regulations. Brian Stenquist, DNR Planner, and Darrin Hoverson, DNR Area Hydrologist, reviewed an example of a DNR groundwater appropriation permit with the Advisory Team. Darrin explained that the type of water use influences permit conditions, which are often different for municipal water systems, crop irrigation, golf courses, and other users. Some permits have specific requirements to address site-specific groundwater and surface water issues, for example the timing and duration of pumping or water level triggers.

Applications to appropriate water (permits) are now processed through an online system, the Minnesota Permitting and Reporting System (MPARS). An increasing amount of water use adds complexity to groundwater management; this new online system will help the DNR manage permits and water use data more efficiently, and it provides permittees with a modern, user friendly way to apply for permits and report their water use. This system can be enhanced over time with additional information and reporting options.

Presentation on groundwater management Strategy 7—Promote wise use of groundwater and the implementation of water conservation practices. Dave Luethe, DNR Water Conservation Specialist, discussed best management practices (BMPs) for water conservation and the role of water reuse. Dave told the Advisory Team that we have an opportunity to reuse and recycle water we are currently draining off the landscape, but that requires planning and implementing new conservation measures. Several industries have developed BMPs for water conservation and we can learn from them. Our challenge is changing our historical mindset of having unlimited water, to one focused on water conservation and reuse as a way of doing business.

Advisory Team Discussion on GWMA Strategies 4 and 7. The DNR Draft Strategic Plan for Groundwater Management outlines seven strategies to be addressed in the Straight River GWMA Plan. Two of these strategies were discussed by the PAT this month.

- Strategy 4—Improve compliance with groundwater appropriation regulations; and
- Strategy 7—Promote wise use of groundwater and the implementation of water conservation practices.

Participants worked in mixed groups to consider the question, “What are your concerns about these strategies?” Worries about the unknown were voiced most often. Participants want a better understanding about how DNR might change groundwater management in the future and how this might affect them. There is a desire to have ample notice of proposed changes so they can prepare and respond to them. Participants also expressed a desire to connect water quantity with water quality monitoring in order to protect sensitive areas.

PAT members shared several ideas for addressing Strategies 4 and 7. Most often mentioned was the need to increase the amount of data available to permittees for making water use decisions, in particular for irrigation purposes. Intensifying the use of meteorology monitoring to provide precipitation, humidity and evapo-transpiration data could help producers reduce water use. The idea of loading all the data into an easily accessible online tool or phone app was promoted. Such a tool would allow growers to monitor soil moisture, weather considerations and keep better records.

NEXT MEETING OF THE PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM (PAT)

The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 19, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., at the Northwoods Bank community meeting room in Park Rapids. The Advisory Team meetings are open to the public and time is provided for attendees to offer comments and ideas. The tentative agenda for the June meeting is to address Strategy 2—Improve information available for groundwater management decisions.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information on this project, please contact Tim Crocker – DNR Project Manager at 320-616-2450, ext. 232, tim.crocker@state.mn.us. You can also [visit the DNR webpage](#).