



UPDATE: DNR HOLDS PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM MEETING

The Project Advisory Team (PAT) for the Straight River Groundwater Management Area (SR GWMA) met on Thursday, December 18, 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:

Continued Review of Section 5 (DNR actions) of the SR GWMA Plan

Review and discussion continued on the Draft Plan, Section V. Objectives 1, 2, and 3. Members were asked to respond to two questions, 1.) What is new or different for DNR? 2.) How might these actions affect you?

PAT members responded to the questions with comments and additional questions. There was a discussion on the timeframe for developing the thresholds and how thresholds would be determined; DNR authority for permit review; how to ensure that permits do not cause water use conflicts and contamination; and a review of water law and water use priority. Staff noted that the plan identifies actions needed to be better equipped to make future water use permitting decisions. The process is fluid and we are learning as we go. The plan is not the end, but a way to continue the conversation.

Presentation on Section 5 (Objective 1) of the Draft Straight River GWMA Plan

DNR Hydrologist Michele Walker presented on Objective 1 of the draft plan, *"Groundwater use in the GWMA does not harm aquifers and ecosystems, and does not negatively impact surface waters."* She provided a review of features in the SR GWMA that are potentially sensitive to groundwater appropriations, the concept of thresholds, and evaluation of use in relation to thresholds. Guidance for DNR's water resource management comes from Minnesota Administrative Rules and State Statutes.

Groundwater and surface water are connected parts of the water cycle. Withdrawals from groundwater can affect groundwater storage, surface waters and wetlands. DNR is the responsible agency for evaluating potential negative impacts. Minnesota State Statutes contain threshold calculations that provide safe yield for aquifers, diversion/depletion rate limits for streams and rivers, and volume/level reduction limits for lakes and flooded wetlands. Once thresholds are calculated, we evaluate the impacts of groundwater withdrawals in terms of the thresholds. Groundwater pumping effects can be complex; monitoring data and models provide necessary information for making decisions.

Additional Discussion

PAT members had an opportunity to provide advice on Section 5 (DNR Actions) of the Draft Plan and answered the question, “What advice or recommendation would you make to DNR as they go through Section 5?” Comments:

- The document could be strengthened with recognition of and protection of public health
- Gives direction to further develop actions and activities of what we will do in the future; if that is the goal, it has done a good job; provides flexibility to move forward
- Communication plan is the most vital component so that impacted users are informed and not caught off guard; no surprises
- With regard to timelines of actions and reactions, 5 years is a long, long time
- It will help us understand what we have to do to get there; the last section is an implementation plan to review; we will realize we can't script as much as we thought we could, but what we can do

NEXT MEETING OF THE PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM (PAT)

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, January 23, 2015 at 9:00am-12:00pm at the Northwoods Bank, Park Rapids, MN. The PAT will continue review of the Draft Straight River GWMA Plan and provide feedback to the DNR.

Advisory Team meetings are open to the public and time is provided for attendees to offer comments and ideas.

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](#).