

DNR Update for the Straight River Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) Project

GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY

Minnesota's use of groundwater has increased over the last two decades. In the Straight River area alone, there has been an 84% increase in total gallons of groundwater used. Our continued reliance on groundwater may not be sustainable for continued economic growth and development.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is establishing a GWMA to enhance its ability to make better decisions on groundwater appropriation permits, and help Park Rapids and the surrounding area better understand how to ensure their current and future groundwater use is sustainable. 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.

DNR HOLDS PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM MEETING

The Straight River GWMA Project Advisory Team met for the second time on Thursday, March 20, 2014. The meeting kicked off with a check-in from all the Project Advisory Team members. The group welcomed Charlie Parsons as the new representative for the Headwaters Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

Since this was the first meeting for several team members, DNR Hydrogeologist Michele Walker quickly went through the Working Boundary Analysis presentation from the February 21st meeting.

Discussion ensued about the draft *Initial Analysis of the Working Boundary* document. Some Team members expressed concerns that it focuses on agricultural irrigation as the main source of groundwater contamination. Luke Stuewe, MN Department of Agriculture, stressed that within the geologic setting of the Straight River area, irrigated land is not the sole source of groundwater contamination. He felt the document inaccurately implies irrigated farming of row crops results in more groundwater contamination than dry land farming. It was also pointed out that there are other sources of groundwater contamination besides agriculture fertilizers (e.g. feedlots, on-site sewage treatment systems, etc.).

The Team agreed that portions of the Analysis of the Working Boundary document would be re-written to clarify the possible sources of groundwater contamination. Luke, Michele and Tim will work on the suggested revisions. The Team was asked to review the Working Boundary document again and provide any additional comments to the project manager.

DNR Hydrogeologist Michele Walker discussed the status of the following objectives that will guide DNR actions within the GWMA:

- A. By 2020, all aquifers in this GWMA are within sustainability thresholds for water levels.
- B. By 2020, all appropriators of groundwater in this GWMA have the required permits.
- C. By 2020, all permitted groundwater users in this GWMA employ water conservation practices.
- D. By 2020, all aquifers in this GWMA are without water use conflicts and well interferences.
- E. By 2020, no permitted groundwater appropriations in the GWMA are adversely impacting trout streams, calcareous fens, other groundwater-dependent surface water features, or other groundwater-dependent biological communities.
- F. By 2020, no permitted groundwater appropriations in this GWMA are adversely impacting water quality.

Objectives A, C, E and F are currently under investigation and B and D are close if not already met.

NEXT MEETING OF THE PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM (PAT)

The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 17th, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., at the same location. Topics for the tentative agenda include the following:

- Updates to the Draft Analysis of the Working Boundary document
 - Follow-up on changes relating to sources of groundwater contamination
 - Final check-in for any additional comments from the team on the document.
- Discussion about the following strategies:
 - Strategy 1. Heighten the priority given to groundwater management within DNR.
 - Strategy 5. Improve communication and education about groundwater importance and challenges.

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 our webpage by clicking on the following link: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/gwmp/area-sr.html>